



A Study of the Root Causes, Manifestations, and Impact of Religious, Policy, and Culturally Based Stigma and Discrimination Towards LGBTQ+ People in Uganda

January 2026

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.¹ This perception of the LGBTQ+ community is reflected in social attitudes and policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons. However, there have been few efforts to interrogate the nexus between religion, culture, and policy as it relates to social attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community. This study is significant insofar as it fills this gap. A survey conducted in 2023 revealed that Uganda is a continental extreme in rejecting people in same-sex relationships.² In this context, this research seeks to identify and analyze the root causes, manifestations, and impact of religious, policy, and culturally-based stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in Uganda. It further interrogates the influence of religion on Uganda's culture and policies. Related, it seeks to identify the common attitudes, beliefs, and myths regarding homosexuality. This study is the first conducted in Uganda for these specific purposes. The findings will be used to guide religious, policy, and cultural advocacy to confront stigma and discrimination towards Uganda's LGBTQ+ community.

Highlight of findings

This study was conducted in an environment characterized by fear of being caught by the law that criminalizes same sex relationships, promoting homosexuality, and in a Ugandan community that largely feels that it is against their religion and culture to participate in research related to homosexuality. Religion is also the first form of identity among Ugandans, and the second is tribe. Some of the targeted respondents declined to participate in this study for these reasons, while others were keen to express their views that reject and ally with the LGBTQ+ community. The first and former groups were the majority and the latter the minority. This study found that religion, policy, and culture form the foundations on which stigma and discrimination towards LGBTQ+ persons are built. Because of the various tribes that comprise Uganda, Uganda has no homogeneous culture. There is acceptance among all tribes about the existence of LGBTQ+ persons in precolonial Uganda and variance in attitudes towards homosexuals. This contradicts the common belief that same sex relations are foreign behavior. What is commonly referred to as Ugandan culture that rejects the LGBTQ+ community is mainly religion. In this context, religions are the biggest influencers of Uganda's culture and policies. Thus, religions inform Uganda's culture and policies that ostracize the LGBTQ+ community. 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, the law, and culture 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+ individuals,

¹ Makanga Ronald Kakumba, "Uganda a continental extreme in rejection of people in same-sex relationships", Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 639, 2023.

² Ibid.

provided they do not display their sexual orientation in their presence or impose their sexual orientation on other members of the broader Ugandan Community, the neutral or unclear. We can refer to this group as the reluctantly accepting minorities. It also represents a community that is evolving towards inclusiveness. This group references religion, law, culture, and personal conviction in this grading as the basis for their persuasion. The third category is the second smallest group among the minorities, the inclusive 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. This suggests that personal convictions encourage inclusiveness and are insulated from religious, policy, and cultural influence. The main reason for ostracizing LGBTQ+ individuals is that same-sex relations do not result in procreation as ordered by religion and desired by tribes. Both religion and tribes perceive human population growth as essential for their sustenance. Same-sex relations are also an affront to the religious belief that gender is a divine allocation. Sexual orientation, tribe, and religion in this hierarchy are the three forms of identity for LGBTQ+ individuals. This suggests that tribes are more accepting of LGBTQ+ persons than religion. Uganda's LGBTQ+ community is invisible in national policies for the purposes of development, protecting rights, and access to services, to mention some of the basic needs that a State must grant to its citizens. Stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals are widespread among all the main religions and tribes of Uganda. This study found that AHA,2023, has been used to harass, intimidate, and extort money from perceived and actual LGBTQ+ persons as opposed to criminalizing this community. Religious leaders, policy makers and enforcers, cultural leaders, influencers in this order are cited as the main drivers of stigma and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community. This represents the power or influence that the institutions from which the drivers emerge wield on Uganda's community.

Root causes, manifestations, and impact of religious-based discrimination

The report of the National Population and Housing Census 2024, indicates that only 0.18 percent of Ugandans do not subscribe to any religion. Roman Catholics make up the largest religious denomination (38.2%). Anglicans/Church of Uganda (29.3%). and Muslims (13.5%). Pentecostal/Evangelicals (14.2%).³

This study found that only a few members of Uganda's LGBTQ+ community do not belong to any religion. This is largely because, like many other Ugandans, they were born into these religions. Those who do not belong to any religion have denounced it because it stigmatizes them. Inclusive Ugandans blame religious leaders for misconstruing religious teachings to stigmatize and discriminate against the LGBTQ+ community. They cannot reconcile their inclusive interpretation of religious teaching and respect for humanity with unaccepting religious teachings. For religious conservatives across the main religions in Uganda, secularism that is associated with

³ Government of Uganda "National Population and Housing Census 2024 Final Report, Volume 1", 2024".



sexual orientation is perceived as a threat to religion that calls for procreation. In this context, same-sex relationships affect the spread or growth of religion in terms of the number of believers. Related, homosexuality challenges the belief that gender identity is a divine allocation. The majority of the respondents reported that they are unaccepting of LGBTQ+ persons because of their religion. They also cited religion as the basis of their tribe's rejection of same sex relationships. It is in this context that they support policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons. Religion is the number one driver of stigma and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda.

Root causes, manifestations, and impact of policy-based discrimination

Uganda's laws do not protect the LGBTQ+ community against discrimination, nor do they allow consensual same sex relationships. Policy makers, followed by policy enforcers, were reported to be the second major drivers of stigma and discrimination. Respondents were largely in support of policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons in particular, AHA, 2023. The majority conceive such policies as aligned with and enforcing religious and tribal norms. This study found that AHA, 2023, and the Penal Code Act have been used to harass, intimidate, blackmail, and extort money from actual and perceived LGBTQ+ individuals as opposed to punishing them. This has created fear and anxiety, leading to mental health problems among the community. Critics of AHA, 2023, view the law as excessive, intrusive, and not enforceable. There are calls for further research on the plight of the LGBTQ+ community and guidance on the interpretation and enforcement of the AHA, 2023. This study found that decriminalizing same sex relations in African countries has been followed by a change in attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community in those countries. This suggests that policy reforms can respond to public opinion, or that public opinion can evolve under the influence of policy.

Root causes, manifestations, and impact of culturally-based discrimination

Tribe is the second form of identity among Ugandans, the first is religion. Uganda's population is made up of different tribes that do not have a homogeneous culture, but share a common boundary and religion. Respondents reported that religion and culture are inseparable. The majority also claimed that because their religion rejects same sex relationships, so does their tribe or culture. This may be because while cultural or tribal practices and beliefs are commonly spoken about and thus unwritten, religious teachings are documented, and they can be easily referenced. Cultural conservatives claim that homosexuality is a foreign behavior that is unacceptable in Ugandan and the broader African culture. This study found that there is denial as well as acceptance across the various tribes of Uganda of the existence of the LGBTQ+ community in pre-colonial times. This contradicts the common assumption that homosexuality is a foreign behavior. However, all tribes in modern Uganda condemn same sex relationships.

An overview of the key recommendations

To religious leaders

- 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.

To Policymakers

- 1) Instruct the Uganda Law Reform Commission (ULRC) to review AHA,2023, with a view to reconsidering its efficacy.
- 2) Repeal colonial laws that are used to stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ people.
- 3) Enact legislation to protect LGBTQ+ people against hate crime, including on the basis of sexual orientation.
- 4) 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) Support policy reforms that protect all citizens equally, regardless of orientation or identity.
- 6) Ensure meaningful consultation of the relevant stakeholders in policymaking processes.

To policy enforcers

- 1) Ensure effective and lawful policy enforcement.
- 2) The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) should develop guidelines for enforcing AHA,2023, to supplement the Decision to Charge Guidelines and make these available to stakeholders for comments before disseminating them among law enforcement agencies.
- 3) Establish channels for stakeholders to provide feedback and raise concerns about policy enforcement issues that affect the LGBTQ+ community.
- 4) Ensure that overzealous and errant policy enforcers are held accountable.

To cultural/tribal leaders

- 1) 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.
- 2) Aim to trace and understand the history of LGBTQ+ in your tribe and perceptions, as well as attitudes towards this community. Consider whether such perceptions and attitudes have evolved.
- 3) Emphasize compassion and inclusivity as important customary values.
- 4) Support policy reforms that protect all citizens equally, regardless of orientation or identity.
- 5) Uganda comprises many tribes with different customary values. Aim to ensure that your customary values align with those of the other tribes and the modern world.

To Rights Activists

- 1) Expand knowledge around existing research and identify the gaps and limitations of current research. By providing evidence-based research to policymakers, religious and cultural leaders, as well as opinion leaders, you can help dispel misconceptions that often have a negative impact on LGBTQ+ people.
- 2) Develop a database to monitor and document incidents of stigma, discrimination, and violations of the rights of LGBTQ+ persons. This database can be used for advocacy programming purposes.
- 3) Periodically disseminate factual information and raise awareness on the state of the LGBTQ+ situation, including equality and rights.
- 4) Create safe dialogue spaces where cultural and religious leaders, policymakers, and communities can engage constructively.
- 5) Promote public awareness to dispel myths and misinformation.
- 6) Maximize the momentum that has been started by UHRC to decriminalize same sex relationships to engage policymakers and enforcers, religious and cultural leaders, as well as the general community on the rights of the LGBTQ+ community.



About the Universal Coalition for Affirming Africans Uganda

This report presents the findings of Universal Coalition of Affirming Africans Uganda (UCAA-UG) from the study of 'A Study of the Root Causes, Manifestations and Impact of Religious, Policy, and Culturally Based Stigma and Discrimination Towards LGBTQ+ People in 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 and treated unfairly in our communities, using religion as a justification.

Being that, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) seem to be subjectively understood by a reasonable number of the Ugandan citizenry. There is still a lack of a deeper understanding of the concept and its applicability in day-to-day life. Ugandan society continues to be divided and eaten up by discrimination against people based on their differences. Different groups of people continue to be pushed to the margins. Consequently, this has cost our society balanced opinions and views, and inspired creativity and innovation that would have enabled a more positive and healthier human experience. It has also fueled economic crisis, human rights abuse, and violations.

To address these realities, UCAA-UG adopted its 1st five-year Strategic Plan (2019 – 2023) titled 'Putting our world to rights: Deepening our struggles, consolidating our gains'. As an overall goal, UCAA-UG aimed to contribute to creating a safe environment in faith-based and wider communities where the rights of all persons are respected, thereby fostering inclusion and acceptance. This five-year plan was based on the need for UCAA-UG to collectively deepen engagement with religious leaders, policymakers, communities, and partners from a faith-based perspective. It is this very milestone that has contributed to the development of the second Strategic Plan for 2024-2028. Under this Strategic Plan, the overall change UCAA-UG wants to achieve is "Empowered marginalized persons enjoying their human rights in an inclusive society." The ability of marginalized groups to fully enjoy their human rights is a function of their capacity to influence change in the mindsets of faith and religious leaders, duty bearers, and the community towards protecting their rights and increasing their access to services. It further depends on their financial capacity to meet the basic necessities of life, the capacity of UCAA-UG to provide evidence and direction on the use of faith-based strategies, the strength of an affirming faith movement to dismantle myths, and the capacity of UCAA-UG to support marginalized groups in achieving these.

UCAA -UG believes that if the attitudes of duty bearers and other stakeholders change positively towards marginalized persons and if marginalized persons and faith leaders have the capacity and urgency to demand their rights and have sustainable income sources, the society will be inclusive, and they will be empowered to enjoy their rights.





Our Vision:

A transformed society where religion and faith are used to promote love and inclusion for all.



Our Mission:

To advocate for the well-being and respect of human rights of marginalized communities through mindset change using religion and faith-based strategies.



Our values:

Inclusivity: We are responsive to all people's needs in their diversity, and we shall do our best to genuinely include them and treat them fairly and equally. We shall be sure to be gender responsive in our programming and particularly look out for those issues that affect the most vulnerable in our community.

Accountability, Transparency, and Integrity: We take responsibility for achieving our objectives. We do what we say we shall do. We do what is right, not merely what is expected. We act with openness, integrity, and trust.

Commitment: We are determined to ensure that our objectives and promises are fulfilled. We are steadfast in what we do, resilient, and dedicated to our cause.

Respect: We are courteous and compassionate to ourselves, partners, and donors. We seek to build collaborations that are mutually reinforcing. We treasure our target communities and seek to constantly show them how important they are as individuals. We treat each other with respect regardless of our status or diversity.

Teamwork: We value and practice working together as a team to achieve our objectives. We build and support each other. We respect and treat each other fairly.

Institutional objectives

- ✓ To conduct research in order to support advocacy and influence mindset change amongst all communities and policymakers.
- ✓ To provide pastoral care and psychosocial support to address the mental health challenges of marginalized communities.
- ✓ To strengthen the capacities of marginalized communities and other stakeholders using a holistic approach to effectively promote the rights of marginalized persons.
- ✓ To build a strong and progressive network of affirming faith leaders and organizations to further advocate for an inclusive society.
- ✓ To strengthen the capacity and system of UCAA-UG to deliver quality human rights programs in Uganda.

Our Beneficiaries



Women



Key populations



People with disabilities

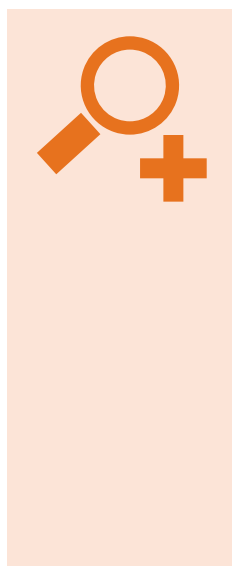
UCAA-UG is duly incorporated under the Companies Act.

This study aligns with our Strategic Direction 2024- 2028 in as far as it informs Strategic Objective No.1: 'To generate knowledge and information on the faith-related realities of marginalized communities to inform advocacy for their rights and well-being', and Strategic Objective No .2 'To build the capacity of marginalized groups and faith-based leaders to use faith-based strategies to dismantle the bias created by the different faith denominations against marginalized groups'.

Acknowledgement

This report is a publication of UCAA-UG with funding from Amplified Change. We acknowledge the support and partnerships of various stakeholders, including religious and cultural leaders, policy makers and enforcers, opinion leaders, influencers, the LGBTQ+ community, and members of civil society organizations (CSOs) for the support they provided that made it possible for us to produce this report.

Researchers



This research was conducted by a team led by Dr. Fredrick D. Sekindi. Dr Sekindi is a researcher, a human rights lawyer, and an academic with over 15 years of experience in conducting research aimed at influencing practice and policy reforms. Dr. Sekindi has published academic articles in peer-reviewed journals and authored numerous research reports, knowledge tools, and policy documents for civil society and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The other team members included: Mr. Marvin Lwanga, an advocate of the High Court of Uganda, and a researcher. The third member of the team was Mr. Rashid Bunya, a lawyer and researcher with more than 10 years of experience in conducting human rights research and advocacy.

Definitions of Commonly Used Terms

Culture: Customary beliefs or social norms, such as written and unwritten rules that guide behavior and beliefs and are considered acceptable by certain social groups. Culture is learnt and transmitted to succeeding generations.

Cultural leader: A person who holds a recognized position of leadership in their tribe, influences, and implements cultural norms of the tribe.

Discrimination: The in/action of treating a person or particular group of people differently, especially in an unfair way, from the way in which you treat other people, because of their immutable characteristics. The law in Uganda prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, color, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, social or economic standing, political opinion, or disability.⁴ It does not protect LGBTQ+ individuals against discrimination.

Gender: The female or male sex, especially when considered with reference to cultural and social differences rather than biological ones, or one of a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of female or male.

Homosexual: Sexual orientation of a person whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is towards persons of the same sex or gender.

Influencer: A person who is known to have an effect on the thoughts, character, development, or behavior of a group of people or a community.

Policy: A law, directive, or practice that defines or prescribes a course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to regulate, guide a community, and determine decisions. A policy may or may not impose sanctions for failure to comply with it.

Policy enforcer: A person who compels observance of a policy.

Policymaker: A person responsible for or involved in making policies, especially in politics or in a cultural setting.

Religion: A cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith.

Religious leader: An individual recognized within a specific religion as having authority and serving such roles, including as a teacher or administrator of religious practices.

Sexual orientation: The enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction towards individuals of the same sex or different sexes or genders. It encompasses various identities, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual etcetera.

Social factors: External factors that influence a person's behavior and thinking include level of education and income, occupation, culture, tribe, religion, and political affiliation.

Stigma: A set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people has about something. Stigma may be based on religion, culture, or policy values.

Transphobia: Prejudice directed at transgender people because of their actual or perceived gender identity or expression. Transphobia can be structural, i.e., manifested in policies, laws, and socioeconomic arrangements that discriminate against transgender people. It can also be societal, when transgender people are rejected or mistreated by others. Additionally, transphobia can be internalized when transgender people accept and reflect such prejudicial attitudes about themselves or other transgender people.

Tribe: A group of people composed chiefly of numerous families, clans, or generations that share a common ancestry and language.

⁴ Art.23 of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda (the constitution).

Acronyms

AHA, 2014: Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2014
AHA, 2023: Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023
CSO: Civil Society Organization
DEI: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
GAF CON: Global Anglican Future Conference
HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus, a virus that attacks the immune system and can lead to AIDS if left untreated.
IRCU: Inter-Religious Council of Uganda
KII: Key Informants Interview
LGBTQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning)+ represents other sexual identities, including intersex, asexual, pansexual, and Two-Spirit.
MP: Member of Parliament
NDP IV: Uganda’s Strategic Direction for the Fourth National Development Plan
ODPP: Director of Public Prosecution
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
UCAA-UG: Universal Coalition of Affirming Africans Uganda
UHRC: Uganda Human Rights Commission



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1. Introduction and Background: Understanding Uganda as a Community: religion, policy, and culture - factors that influence common values and norms

Culture

Before being declared as the Uganda Protectorate in 1894 by the British colonial government; the country now known as Uganda was made up of the five main Kingdoms of the Ankole, Buganda, Busoga, Bunyoro and Toro in the southern and western parts of the country; of which Buganda was the largest both in size and population; and other tribes including the Acholi, Langi, Lugbara, of the north and Iteso, Bagwere and Bagisu of the east; to mention some of the indigenous populations of Uganda that were placed under one territory- Uganda.⁵ The British established Uganda against the wishes of the various tribes and kingdoms that were brought together.⁶ Tribal identity influences common values and norms in Uganda. Names speak to a proud tribal identity.

Religion

The introduction of the various religions gave the many tribes and kingdoms of Uganda common social bonds.⁷ Ugandans are polarized as well as unified on tribal and religious grounds. They identify by names that display religious and tribal identities and are passionately guarded. More than being Ugandan, Ugandans treasure their religious and tribal identities. Thus, Uganda's societal attitudes and perceptions as a way of life are guided by religious and tribal lenses. Tribes and religions are forms of identity among Ugandans, the latter being the first identity. The National Population and Housing Census of 2024⁸ reported that Uganda's household population of slightly under 46,000,000 is dominated by Christians (81.7%) and the Islamic faith (13.2%). Roman Catholics make up the largest religious denomination (38.2%). Anglicans/Church of Uganda (29.3%). Pentecostal/Evangelicals (14.2%). Religious affiliation is the most

⁵ Timothy Amerit, contextualizing a Jurisprudence Cliché that Buganda was Nothing but a Protected State in the Uganda Protectorate", 2014

⁶ 4Samwiri Karugire, 'Roots of Instability in Uganda', 2003.

⁷ History Rise, 'The Role of Religion in Uganda's Political and Social History: Key Impacts and Influences', 2024.

⁸ Government of Uganda, 'National Population and Housing Census 2024 Final Report, Volume 1', 2024.

significant factor that forms common values and norms among Uganda's population, with only (0.18%) persons identifying as having no religion.

Policy

Uganda's community may also be understood through its policies, including laws. Policies generally reflect the composition and views of societies, as well as how they are regulated and function. The 1995 Constitution (the constitution) recognizes the role of cultural institutions, lists Uganda as comprising 56 tribes, protects the right to practice and choose a religion, and prohibits religious and tribal discrimination among other grounds, save for sexual orientation discrimination.⁹ The Constitution also requires that only cultural and customary values which are consistent with fundamental rights and freedoms, human dignity, and democracy may be developed and incorporated in aspects of Ugandan life, and it calls for affirmative action for marginalized groups on the basis of gender, age, disability, or any other reason created by history, tradition, or custom.¹⁰ Thus, Uganda's society protects and recognizes gender, culture, tribe, and religion as forms of identity, but it does not protect and recognize the existence of the LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, it affords no protection to this community. Uganda's Strategic Direction for the Fourth National Development Plan (NDPIV) 2025/26 - 2029/30 aims, among other issues, to deliver the Global Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹¹ NDPIV notes that While moderate performance has been made on some SDG indicators like: Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3); Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9); Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG 4); Access to basic Education (and life on land (SDG 15); Uganda is still lagging behind on majority of the indicators. Specifically, more needs to be done in areas of zero hunger (SDG 2); climate action (SDG 13); access to clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), eradicating poverty (SDG 1); fostering sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11); and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). This further necessitates the need for faster growth. Given Uganda's official policy towards the LGBTQ+ community, LGBTQ+ individuals are not reflected in Uganda's development plan. Related, the National Population and Housing Census of 2024 was a comprehensive endeavor to provide up-to-date and reliable data on the size and characteristics of Uganda's population, and housing stock type.¹² This information is indispensable for guiding planning, policies, and programs aimed at fostering socio-economic transformation, promoting equitable service delivery, and achieving Uganda's Vision 2040. This report provides statistics on the demographic, economic, and environmental characteristics of the population, as well as information about households and communities where they reside. This includes population and demographic sizes such as cultural, religious or faith, gender, literacy levels, and housing conditions, as well as the labor force of the occupants of Uganda. When

⁹ See the various provisions of the 1995 Constitution.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Government of Uganda < 'Uganda's Strategic Direction for the Fourth National Development Plan (NDPIV)' 2025/26 - 2029/3.

¹² Government of Uganda, 'National Population and Housing Census 2024 Final Report, Volume 1', 2024 religion.

analyzing the population size, the report pays specific attention to Uganda's religious, tribal, gender composition as well as marriage and birth registration. It does not consider the LGBTQ+ community.

Uganda comprises various tribes that have no common heritage. However, Ugandans across all tribes share the same religions and a common boundary. Uganda's LGBTQ+ community is not considered in national policies that protect rights, for the purposes of development, planning, including improving health and education, reducing inequality, and spurring economic growth, to mention some of the basic responsibilities that the State has towards its citizens. This is evident from laws and the National Housing and Census Report that provides a benchmark for planning Uganda's future and development.

1.1 Significance of this Study

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.¹³ This perception of the LGBTQ+ community is reflected in social attitudes and policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons. However, there have been few efforts to interrogate the nexus between religion, culture, and policy as it relates to social attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community. This study is significant insofar as it fills this gap. A survey conducted in 2023 revealed that Uganda is a continental extreme in rejecting people in same-sex relationships.¹⁴ In this context, this research seeks to identify and analyze the root causes of homophobia in Uganda, including manifestations, and the impact of religious, policy, and culturally-based stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in Uganda. It further interrogates the influence of religion on Uganda's culture and policies. Relatedly, it seeks to identify the common attitudes, beliefs, and myths regarding homosexuality. This study is the first conducted in Uganda for these specific purposes. The findings will be used to guide religious, policy, and culture-based advocacy to confront social and systemic discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people in Uganda. In this context, this study promotes social, economic, and systemic inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda.

1.2 Methodology

This research sought to objectively interrogate the root causes, manifestations, and impact of religious, policy, and culturally based stigma and discrimination on the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda. Among other key issues, this study sought to better understand the relationship between religion, culture, and policy in forming social attitudes towards same-sex relations. The role of religion in influencing Uganda's culture and policy relating to the LGBTQ+ community was also explored. This study

¹³ Makanga Ronald Kakumba, *'Uganda a continental extreme in rejection of people in same-sex relationships'*, Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 639, 2023.

¹⁴ Ibid.

similarly captured fears, beliefs, attitudes, perception and myths related to the LGBTQ+ community. To achieve these aims, this research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, but largely relied on the former. This report is a product of desk review and field research.

Approach to the Desk Review Exercise

This study involved a desk review of 30 publications, including reports, academic and media publications, policy documents such as laws and development plans, religious as well as cultural texts that relate to the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda. These publications were considered sufficient for providing a background to understanding the root causes, manifestations, and impact of religion, policy, and culturally based stigma and discrimination on the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda. They also helped to identify religious and cultural leaders, policy makers and enforcers, opinion leaders, members of civil society organizations (CSOs), and the general public, as well as influencers or opinion leaders as key informants/respondents for this study. These publications also enabled this study to enlist views of some of the members of the respondent groups that were not interviewed, because of safety reasons for the research team in the context of AHA, 2023, and the Penal Code Act; that criminalize promoting homosexuality and same sex relations. For these offences, these laws prescribe punishments that include life imprisonment and the death penalty. This study also reviewed comparable documents related to the situation of the LGBTQ+ communities in other African countries.

Approach to Field Research

Field research was conducted through key informant interviews (KII). Data collection tools, for instance, bio data forms, informed consent forms, and key informant guides were developed and used for the KII. These data collection tools were written in eight languages, that is, Iteso, Acoli, Luganda, Lusoga, Runyankole, Lutoro, Rukiga, and English. During this exercise, telephone interviews were held with 151 respondents, some of whom were identified during the desk review exercise. These included religious and cultural leaders, policy makers and enforcers, opinion leaders or influencers, as well as members of the public and CSOs. For this broad group, this study sought to understand how policy, culture, and religion influence their attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community. Individuals from the LGBTQ+ community were also among the respondents who were interviewed for this study. The aim was to understand how religious policy and culturally based stigma and discrimination impact their daily lives. All the respondents were recruited from across the country. Specific attention was paid to ensuring that the respondents represent the religious and tribal diversities of Uganda's community. Respondents were recruited through known contacts, for instance, gatekeepers within local networks, such as CSOs, government ministries, departments, and agencies, cultural and religious institutions at local and central levels, and among the LGBTQ+ community. They were identified on the basis of their membership of the target respondent groups, variety of opinions, high standing or influence in their communities, and willingness to participate in this study. This study

also employed a purposive sampling strategy that provides the opportunity to select respondents who best fit the characteristics/criteria required. This was occasionally supported by snowballing, for instance, to identify religious and cultural leaders as well as policy makers from the LGBTQ+ community and members of targeted respondents from the various religions and tribes of Uganda. The aim was to ensure diversity of views. Efforts to enlist the leadership of the institutions and groups of the targeted respondents were futile. This was mainly because the contacts used to enlist respondents for this study warned the researchers against contacting such individuals in the context of AHA,2023, and the Penal Code, and the general public's attitude towards the LGBTQ+ community. Thus, this study relied on middle-ranking members of these institutions and groups for its findings. Views of the leadership of the institutions and groups were reported in the literature review. The safety of researchers and respondents was a major consideration.

Interviews were conducted in the language chosen by the respondents. Most of the respondents preferred English, which is one of the two official languages of Uganda, the other being Swahili. Biographical data was collected from all the respondents. Mindful of the implications of the Penal Code Act, AHA, 2023, and attentive to the general public's attitude towards the LGBTQ+ community, interviews were conducted when it was safe for the respondents and the research team. Interviews were conducted through specific themes that enabled this study to solicit the relevant information. These themes included:

- 1) Religious, policy, and culturally based perceptions or attitudes as they relate to LGBTQ+ individuals.
- 2) Root causes, manifestations, and impact of cultural, religious, and policy-based discrimination as well as stigma on the LGBTQ+ community.
- 3) General recommendations regarding cultural, religious, policy perceptions, or attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community.
- 4) General recommendations for LGBTQ+ individuals.
- 5) Recommendations to address/minimize/eradicate religious, cultural, policy-based Stigma and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ Community.
- 6) Experience/impact (positive or negative) of cultural, religious, policy - based stigma and discrimination by LGBTQ+ individuals.

The diagram and table below indicate the categories and social factors of the respondents who participated in this research.

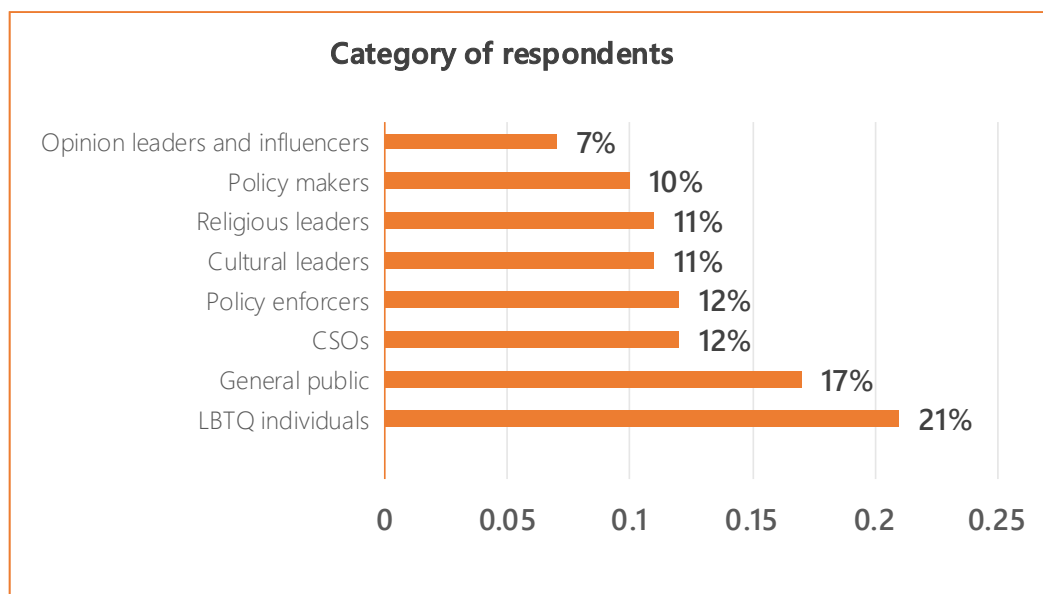


Figure 1: Categories of respondents

Detailed analysis of categories of respondents

Category of respondents	No. of respondents	Tribe of respondents	Religion of the respondent
LGBTQ+ individuals	31	Baganda (6) Banyankole (4) Iteso (3) Basoga (2) Bakiga (3) Bagisu (2) Banyarwanda/Baganda (1) Acoli (2) Banyoro (2) Batoro (4) Bahima (2)	Muslim (3) Anglican (11) Catholic (9) Born again (2) Believer (1) Atheist (2) Won't disclose/non-believer (3)

Category of respondents	No. of respondents	Tribe of respondents	Religion of the respondent
General public	26	Banyankole (2) Acoli (4) Langi (2) Iteso (3) Baganda (5) Banyoro (2) Bakiga (2) Basoga (2) Bakonjo (2) Congolese refugee (1) Bahima (1)	Anglican (9) Orthodox (1) Born again (2) Catholic (8) Muslim (3) Jehovah's Witness (1) Won't disclose/non-believer (2)
CSOs	18	Basoga (2) Baganda (6) Bakiga (2) Acoli (3) Banyankole (4) Lugbara (1)	Born again (3) Muslim (2) Catholic (7) Anglican (5) Won't disclose/non-believer (1)
Religious leaders	16	Bagisu (1) Baganda (5) Bakiga (1) Acoli (2) Banyankole (3) Iteso (1) Basoga (2) Banyoro (1)	Anglican (4) Muslim (3) Catholic (5) Born again (2) Orthodox (1) Jehovah's witness (1)

Category of respondents	No. of respondents	Tribes of respondents	Religion of the respondent
Cultural leaders	17	Bakiga (2) Acoli (2) Baganda (2) Iteso (1) Bakiga (2) Basoga (2) Lugbara (1) Bagisu (1) Jopadola (1) Langi (1) Banyoro (1) Bakonjo (1)	Anglican (5) Won't disclose non-believer (3) Catholic (7) Muslim (2)
Policy enforcers	18	Acoli (2) Banyankole (4) Banganda (3) Basoga (2) Iteso (3) Langi (1) Bakiga (3)	Anglican (6) Catholic (8) Muslim (1) Born again (2) Won't disclose/non-believer (1)
Opinion leaders and influencers	10	Iteso (1) Baganda (2) Banyakole (1) Basoga (1) Bakiga (1) Acoli (1) Banyoro (1) Langi (1) Bagisu (1)	Catholic (3) Anglican (2) Muslim (2) Born again (2) Won't disclose/non-believer (1)

Category of respondents	No. of respondents	Tribe of respondents	Religion of the respondent
Polycymakers	15	Banyoro (1) Basoga (1) Banyankole (2) Baganda (2) Acoli (2) Bahima (1) Alur (1) Iteso (2) Bakiga (2) Langi (1)	Catholic (5) Muslim (2) Anglican (4) Born again (3) Won't disclose/non-believer (1)
Total Number of Respondents	151		

Figure 2: Social factors of respondent

Approach to Analyzing Data

This research employed the paradigm to inquiry approach, which utilizes the best-suited philosophical or methodological strategy to best address the research issue at hand. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed separately, independently, but concurrently. The data collection tools for this study reflected six themes aimed at understanding the root causes, manifestations, and impact of religious, policy, and culturally based stigma and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda. To achieve this aim, these themes ought to interrogate the influence of religion on Uganda's culture and policies and the nexus between religion, culture, and policy as it relates to social attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda. They also sought to identify the impact of homophobia in Uganda and to identify the common attitudes, beliefs, and myths regarding homosexuality. The efficacy of these data collection tools for this study was assessed and confirmed by experienced independent researchers during pilot interviews and among known friendly respondents. Literature review and KII were used to collect qualitative data for this research. Views and recurrent themes from the KII and literature review were integrated into the secondary data to provide more depth and context to the information. Thematic analysis was also conducted on the harvested qualitative data. Themes were generated from an iterative process of review of the interview transcripts, and codes

were developed based on the responses provided by the respondents. These codes were then grouped into broader themes that were identified through emerging patterns related to the key research objectives and categories of respondents.

We compared and assessed for points of convergence. This enabled this study to harness the strengths of both methodologies while countering their limitations in helping collect adequate information related to the themes for this study. The data collected through the desk review and field research processes were thoroughly analyzed.

Data Management and Quality Assurance

This study entailed the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. These two research approaches were used for data management and analysis. The identities of the respondents who participated in this study are only known to the members of the research team who interviewed them. The data harvested was managed by the Principal Investigator. It was only used for this study, following which all recording of interviews was provided to UCAA-UG. Members of the research team who conducted interviews were given specific instructions not to use this data for any other purpose. Quality assurance, management, as well as day-to-day aspects were managed by the Principal Investigator and UCAA-UG.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality, informed consent, respect for religious and cultural belonging, sexual orientation, and gender equality and equity were observed during this study. All respondents were informed about the purpose, potential risks, and benefits of the study before engaging in it. The study sought to ensure diversity of the respondents. Respondents were also informed about their right to withdraw from participating at the beginning or at any point during the interview, should they choose to, without any repercussions. Only those who provided their informed consent participated in the study. All respondents were requested to agree to audio recordings of the interviews; only those who agreed were recorded. Respondents were also assured of their anonymity. Only the respondents who agreed to participate in the study are documented, and only those who were willing to disclose their identity were revealed. Researchers and respondents were briefed about the key aspects of confidentiality that govern research. Data collection tools included an informed form. All the participants (researchers and respondents) were informed of the high level of confidentiality and potential risks. The informed consent form was read to each respondent before the interview.

Risks

The security and safety of all the participants and data were major factors. This research did not expose the research team, respondents, or the data collected to any risks. Interviews were conducted when it was convenient for the respondents and the research team. Only the researchers who spoke to the respondents knew their identities. The data collected by each researcher was stored on password-protected devices and transmitted to the Principal Investigator on each day of the interview. The principal investigator stored the data on a password-protected device. Researchers deleted the data after transmitting it to the Principal Investigator. The Principal Investigator relayed all the data to UCAA-UG with this report and deleted all the data relating to this study. The research team and the respondents were briefed about attitudes of Uganda's community towards the LGBTQ+ community, the legal framework under the Penal Code Act, and the AHA, 2023. Thus, all participants in this study were aware of the potential risks. To minimize these risks, key informants and the research team were informed of the purpose of this study both during recruitment and at the beginning of interviews. Potential respondents who were deemed capable of posing a threat were not approached to participate in this study.

Limitations

Before commencing this study, a team of experienced and impartial researchers was carefully assembled. The Principal Investigator developed guidelines for conducting this study and trained the research team. The topics that were covered during the training included the do no harm principle, how to obtain informed consent, data collection and security, minimizing investigator bias, the Hawthorne effect, objectivity, impartiality, and professionalism. This study experienced several challenges; many of the potential respondents declined to participate in the study, citing their religious and cultural convictions, as well as the AHA (2023) and the Penal Code Act, for this reason. While this study would have benefited from interviews with known opponents of the LGBTQ+ community, including religious and cultural leaders, policy makers, and enforcers, as well as opinion leaders, to ensure the safety of the research team, only members of these groups who were deemed not to present a threat to the safety of the research team were interviewed. These respondents were recruited and vetted by known contacts.

This study combined data from multiple sources, that is, a desk review of the available literature and key informant interviews (KIIs) to gain a comprehensive understanding of the root causes, manifestations, and impact of religious, policy, and culturally based stigma and discrimination toward LGBTQ+ individuals in Uganda. This way, the study also engaged in meaningful discussions, drew valid conclusions, and made relevant recommendations for future actions.

Three research briefs were also developed from this study. These provide key insights and recommendations to guide policy advocacy, strategic interventions, and public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and discrimination and promote inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in Uganda.

2. Literature Review

Historical Perceptions of the LGBTQ+ Community among Uganda's Tribes

Uganda's population is made of different tribes with varying ancestral beliefs and practices that may be referred to as tribal perceptions. These are largely unwritten but mostly spoken. For instance, the Acholi saying "Coo ma yabu agulu" meaning A man who has no wife cooks for himself, and the Baganda say "Eyawukana ku mugendo efuuka kaasa" meaning those who break away from the dominant path become dangerous. Uganda's tribes however share common religions. Tensions between tribal perceptions and religion on one side and the LGBTQ+ community on the other side in Uganda can be traced back to before the establishment of Uganda as British Protectorate in 1894. It has been claimed that when King Mwanga the II of Buganda ascended to the throne in 1884, he inherited a kingdom that was sharply polarized between Catholicism and Protestantism (Anglican/the Church of England as we know it today).¹⁵ It has been reported that In 1886, Mwanga II executed 45 of his male subjects, commonly known as the Christian martyrs for resisting his homosexual advances, because their newly adopted religion of Catholicism held that homosexuality was an abomination.¹⁶ Historian Jack Driberg notes the existence of same-sex social and sexual relationships among pastoral pre-colonial tribes in Uganda, including the Langi, Iteso, Bahima, and the Banyoro.¹⁷ Other scholars suggest that the LGBTQ+ community in pre-colonial Uganda was frowned on, identified by derogatory names such as "mudoko daka"(alternative gender status) by the Langi and Ateso "Kuchu"(unnatural), and they were not of a high or equal social status like heterosexual persons.¹⁸ However, Murray Stephen argues that among the Langi tribe, known LGBTQ+ persons were free to marry.¹⁹ According to Mpagi, the Baganda, Luo, and Bagisu, among others, have always protected the minorities within their tribes, including persons from the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, Mpagi claims that the Baganda desist from speaking against their LGBTQ+ community. "Ffena tuli Baganda", which means, "We are all Baganda". Therefore, no Muganda (member of the Baganda tribe) is superior to another regardless of their sexual orientation, gender or class with the exception of the King.²⁰ Same- sex relationships are commonly referred to in Luganda (Baganda's language) as "okulya ebisiyiga". It has been argued that this term was coined after religion was

¹⁵ Kirsten Cheney, 'Locating Neocolonialism, Tradition and Human Rights in Uganda's Gay Death Penalty', *African Studies Review*, Vol.55, No.2, (2012).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Nancy Nicole, Adrian Jukko, Richard Lusimbo, et al in 'Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights: (Neo) colonialism', University of London Press, 2018.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Stephen Murray & Will Roscoe, 'Boy Wives and Female Husbands', *Studies in African Homosexuality*, 1998.

²⁰ Derrick Mpagi, 'Decolonizing the rights of LGBTQ+ people in indigenous African communities: A case of Uganda', *Decolonial Blog Series*, 2024.

introduced in Uganda.²¹ It is not clear if the term was used in a derogatory sense or to hide same-sex relations from the disapproving British. Some historians report that same-sex relationships were introduced in Uganda by Arab slave traders.²² While others claim that it was Europeans or another African group.²³ Whatever the case may be, it is reasonable to conclude that same sex relationships existed among different tribes in pre-colonial Uganda, attitudes and perceptions towards LGBTQ+ individuals varied.

Influence of Religion on National Policies that Discriminate and Stigmatize the LGBTQ+ Community in Uganda

European words for homosexuality were derived from mythical originators and precedents— sodomy from Sodom, (catamite from Ganymede; lesbian from Lesbos).²⁴ Earlier traces of rejection of same- sex relationships in colonial Uganda indicate that such relations were grouped among other unchristian behaviors that include adultery, drunkenness, and thieving.²⁵ It is therefore not surprising that the British sought to create a Uganda founded on 'Christian purity' when they enacted the Penal Code Act in 1950 that criminalized homosexuality, insulting religion (blasphemy), abortion, and trading sex (prostitution), to mention some of the un-Christian values. This law symbolizes the first translation of tribal stigma and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community into a national culture and policy.

The Penal Code Act reinforced stigma and discrimination towards the LGBTQI+ community that existed in some pre-colonial tribes and further strengthened the culture that stigmatizes and discriminates against persons in same-sex relationships. In the last 2 decades, the Penal Code Act has been amended 5 times in 2002, 2007, 2009, 2010 and most recently in 2024 but legislators have not repealed its provisions aimed at sustaining Christianity, indicating an entrenched policy founded on Christian values.

In 1995, the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995 (the Constitution) was enacted to usher in a new democratic and human rights dispensation. During the debates on adopting the Constitution, only one member of the Constituent Assembly indicated that his constituents had proposed the protection of sexual orientation from discrimination in the Constitution.²⁶ In 2005, Article 31 of the Constitution was amended to only

²¹ Okulya Ebisiyaga Kibi? | Abavubuka Babuuzā (accessed 07.10.25).

²² Apolo Kagwa, *The customs of the Baganda* Open Library, 1934.

²³ Non-Indo-European and non-Semitic terms for homosexual roles reported early in the history of European contact make it unlikely that homosexual behavior was unknown before either Arab or European contact.

²⁴ Stephen Murray & Will Roscoe, *Boy Wives and Female Husbands*, Studies in African Homosexuality, 1998

²⁵ Tobuzaabuzibwa Magezi ga Nsi Eno'Tobuzaabuzibwa Magezi ga Nsi Eno' — LAYIBULALE EY'OKU MUKUTU GWAFFE ogwa Intaneeti (accessed 02.10.25).

²⁶ Republic of Uganda, *The Report of the Uganda Constitution Commission: Analysis and Recommendations* Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs 1992.

provide legal recognition for heterosexual marriages.²⁷ The Constitution also prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex, race, color, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, social or economic standing, political opinion, or disability.²⁸ It further requires the State to take affirmative action in favor of groups marginalized on the basis of gender, age, disability, or any other reason created by history, tradition, or custom, for the purpose of redressing imbalances. These provisions reflect the continuing national policy and culture that outlaws, stigmatizes, and discriminates against individuals in same-sex relationships.

In 2014, in yet another attempt at reinforcing national culture and policy against same-sex relationships, the Parliament of Uganda enacted the Anti Homosexuality Act, 2014(AHA,2014). Among its provisions, this law criminalized same-sex relations, prescribed a punishment of life imprisonment for LGBTQ+ persons and banned funding aimed at promoting LGBTQ+ activities. Suspected LGBTQ+ individuals were evicted from their homes by their landlords, and a tabloid newspaper published a list of suspected homosexuals in the aftermath of this law being passed.²⁹ In March 2014, the Court found the law invalid because of the way it was passed by Parliament, and it declared it null and void.

The Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, the Most Rev. Dr. Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu, is a founding member of the Anglican Future Conference (Gafcon), described as a global movement that brings together authentic Anglicans, for the purposes of guarding God's gospel, growing orthodox leaders, and generating missional resources, for the glory of God.³⁰

The third Gafcon conference was held in Jerusalem in June 2018. This event brought together one of the largest global Anglican gatherings, of 1,950 representatives from 50 countries. A letter to the Churches was issued as the Conference statement.³¹ This letter, conceived as a policy statement, sums up the aspirations of the global Anglican community. It has three main sections: 'Proclaiming God's Gospel', 'Reforming God's Church', and 'Reaching Out to God's World'. A paragraph under 'Proclaiming God's Gospel' states:

"Faithful proclamation of this gospel is under attack from without and within, as it has been from apostolic times (Acts 20:28-30). External attacks include superstitious practices of sacrifices and libations that deny the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. Some religions deny the unique person and work of Christ on the cross, and others are innately syncretistic. Secularism seeks to exclude God from all public discourse and to dismantle the Christian heritage of many nations. This has been most obvious in the redefinition of what it means to be human, especially in the areas of gender, sexuality, and marriage. The devaluing of the human person through the advocacy of abortion and euthanasia is

²⁷ Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2005.

²⁸ Art.21 of the Constitution.

²⁹ Gay Rights: Uganda 'African Research Bulletin: Political', Social and Cultural Series,51 (3) April, 2014.

³⁰ About Gafcon - GAFCON: Global Anglicans (accessed 06.10.25).

³¹ Jerusalem 2018 - GAFCON: Global Anglicans (accessed 13.06.25).



also an assault upon human life uniquely created in the image of God. Militant forms of religion and secularism are hostile to the preaching of Christ and persecute his people. Internally, the 'prosperity gospel' and theological revisionism both seek in different ways to recast God's gospel to accommodate the surrounding culture, resulting in a seductive syncretism that denies the uniqueness of Christ, the seriousness of sin, the need for repentance, and the final authority of the Bible. Tragically, there has been a failure of leadership in our churches to address these threats to the gospel of God. We repent of our failure to take the words of the apostle Paul seriously: 'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them' (Acts 20:28-30). We dedicate ourselves afresh to proclaiming Christ faithfully to the nations, working together to guard the gospel entrusted to us by our Lord and his apostles." ³²

In February 2023, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) vowed to do everything possible to return the defunct AHA, 2014, to Parliament as one of the measures to tackle homosexuality in schools.³³ In a statement that was signed by Archbishop Kaziimba Mugalu (Anglican), Sheikh Shaban Ramadan Mubajje(Mufti of Uganda), Bishop Joseph Antony Zziwa (Roman Catholic), Pastor Joseph Serwadda (Victory Centre Churches), Bishop Joshua Lwere (National Fellowship of Born Again Pentecostal Churches) and Pastor Moses Ndimukika(Seventh-day church), these religious leaders pledged to support the rehabilitation of those who have already engaged in homosexuality, and urged Ugandans to resist the temptation to engage in such acts, protect African values and the sanctity of the family institution. The religious leaders preached that Same-sex relationships are human weaknesses that should be addressed at a personal level through repentance. They referenced teachings from the holy books. The Bible, Leviticus 18;22: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." The Quran Chapter 7, verses 80 and 81: "And remember when Lot scolded the men of his people, saying, do you commit a shameful deed (homosexuality) that no man has ever done before? You lust after men instead of women! You are certainly transgressors."

In April 2023, following the fourth conference in Kigali, Rwanda, Gafcon issued another policy statement³⁴ which declared that: "Public statements by the Archbishop of Canterbury and other leaders of the Church of England in support of same-sex blessings are a betrayal of their ordination and consecration vows to banish error and to uphold and defend the truth taught in Scripture. These statements are also a repudiation of Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, which declared that 'homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture,' and advised against the 'legitimizing or blessing of same sex unions. This occurred despite the Archbishop of Canterbury having affirmed that 'the validity of the resolution passed at the Lambeth Conference 1998, I.10 is not in doubt and that the whole resolution is still in existence. The 2022 Lambeth Conference demonstrated

³² Ibid.

³³ Dorothy Nagitta & Peter Sserugo 'Religious leaders to return anti-gay Bill to Parliament' Monitor, 16 February 2023.

³⁴ The%20GAFCON%20IV%20Conference%20Statement%20– - Search (accessed 12.10.25).

the deep divisions in the Anglican Communion as many bishops chose not to attend, and some of those who did withdrew from sharing at the Lord's table."

In May 2023, the new Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023 (AHA, 2023) was enacted with similar provisions and consequences to the LGBTQ+ community like the AHA, 2014. This development came in the aftermath of a statement from the Church of Uganda in April 2023 in which its leadership stated that it plans to break away from the Church of England, following Canterbury's decision to bless same-sex marriages as well as to appoint a gay clergy.³⁵ When introducing the draft AHA,2023, in Parliament, the Speaker Rt. Hon. Anita Among called on parliamentarians to protect the children of Uganda against the vice of homosexuality and urged them to protect Uganda's culture.³⁶ In a case brought by allies of the LGBTQ+ community to nullify AHA, 2023, the court held that AHA, 2023 did not contravene fundamental rights to equality, such as freedom from discrimination, right to life, respect for human dignity, protection from inhuman treatment, right to privacy of person and home, and freedom of conscience, expression, and association. However, the court nullified and struck down provisions of AHA,2023 that violated the right to health, adequate standards of living, privacy, and freedom of religion.³⁷ The court opined that the legislature overwhelmingly enacted the law because it captures societal sentiments on the subject of homosexuality.³⁸ It further declared that the rejection of same-sex marriages, as well as the provisions in the Constitution that do not protect the LGBTQ+ community against discrimination, are reflections of Uganda's social norms and values.³⁹

After the law was passed, authorities raided and suspended nongovernmental organizations, conducted arbitrary arrests and detentions, engaged in entrapment via social media and dating apps, and extorted money from LGBTQ+ people in exchange for releasing them from police custody.⁴⁰ Opposition lawmaker Asuman Basalirwa, who proposed AHA, 2023, dismissed reports of human rights violations and harassment as distortions and fabrications.⁴¹

In April 2025, Ugandan-born Christian nurse Jennifer Melle was suspended for breach of confidentiality by her employers, St Helier Hospital in Carshalton, Surrey, in the United Kingdom, following allegations that she refused to use female pronouns for a biological male patient under her care.⁴² The patient was born male but identifies as a woman. The Christian Legal Centre supported Melle in her legal proceedings for harassment, discrimination, and breaches of her human rights against the hospital.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Parliamentary Debate (Hansard), 9 March 2023.

³⁷ Consolidated Constitutional Petitions No. 14. 15. 16 & 85 of 2023.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Human Rights 'Watch, they are Putting Our lives at Risk: How Uganda's Anti LGBTQ+ Climate Unleashes Abuse', 2025.

⁴¹ CNN "Uganda passed one of the world's harshest anti-gay laws. LGBTQ people describe living as 'hell'", 29 June 2023.

⁴² Tories demand reinstatement of NHS nurse 'betrayed after misgendering trans paedophile' | UK | News | Express.co.uk(accessed 06.10.25).



Martin Sempa self-describes as the Pastor of Makerere Community Church, with 30 years of experience in fighting HIV/AIDS, and is the most influential clergy in Uganda.⁴³ Sempa has an X following of 44.2k. He took to his X handle on 14 September, 2025, to report that the world is at the end of civilization because of the imposition of radical trans ideology that claims that a person born a male can claim to be a female and vice versa⁴⁴ Sempa refuted claims that anyone who tells the LGBTQ+ community the truth is dehumanizing them. He asserted that homosexuality is a perversion of the highest order, inherently unnatural, ridden with diseases, and ungodly. He further claimed that same-sex relations are a human vice and not a human right. He reported that he has been demonized for more than 20 years because of his fight against homosexuality and that he and similarly minded persons have faced threats to their lives. He called on the law to restrain homosexual conduct, referencing the Bible as the basis of his call. It is important to note that Sempa is a key proponent of AHA, 2023.⁴⁵ He supported the court case in favor of keeping the law on Uganda's law books.

On 3 October 2025, the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, Kaziimba Mugalu, issued a policy statement to Christians of the Church of Uganda.⁴⁶ In this statement, he expressed his profound sadness following the appointment of the Rt Rev. Dame Sarah Mullaly, Bishop of London, as the next Archbishop of Canterbury. Kaziimba Mugalu wrote that he was troubled by Mullaly's known support for positions on sexuality and same-sex marriage that deviate from the historic teachings of the Anglican faith. He described the appointment as deepening the tear in the fabric of the Anglican Communion, a divide that began in 2003 with the consecration of a divorced father of two living in a same-sex relationship. The Archbishop reaffirmed the Church of Uganda's commitment to Biblical faith and the authority of Scripture. Despite his disappointment, he expressed optimism about the continued vitality of the gospel-centered mission within the Anglican tradition.

It is important to recall that Uganda's population of 45,905,417 persons is dominated by Christians (81.7%), of which Roman Catholics account for 16.6 million persons of the total household population and Anglicans/Church of Uganda at 13.3 million persons. Pentecostal/Evangelicals are 6.5 million persons in. Religious affiliation remains a central aspect of Uganda's population, with 85,559 persons identifying as having no religion.⁴⁷

Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), the constitutional body charged with protecting and promoting human rights and advising the government of its human rights responsibilities in a bold statement issued on 26 September 2025, called on the

⁴³ Martin Sempa (@martinsempa) / X (accessed 07.10.25).

⁴⁴ Martin Sempa on X: "An urgent and critical message to the Adults in the room on the Assassination of @charliekirk11. We have been shot at, spat at, vilified and economically assassinated for since 2009 when @BarackObama imposed #LGBTQ on the civilized world. cc @realDonaldTrump @SecRubio <https://t.co/pBXFwtB7ix>" / X (accessed 07.10.25).

⁴⁵ Consolidated Constitutional Petitions No. 14. 15. 16 & 85 of 2023.

⁴⁶ Kaziimba 'Deeply Saddened' by Appointment of Sarah Mullaly as Archbishop of Canterbury (accessed 03.10.25).

⁴⁷ Government of Uganda, 'National Population and Housing Census 2024 Final Report Volume 1', 2024.

government to decriminalize homosexuality, noting that it is a victimless crime.⁴⁸ According to the UHRC Chairperson Mariam Wangandya:

"Criminalizing such acts often results in unjust and disproportionate punishment, especially for vulnerable groups in our society."

An Overview of the Situation of the LGBTQ+ Community in Africa

Among 37 African countries surveyed in 2021/2022, Uganda ranks last in tolerance for people in same-sex relationships.⁴⁹ Uganda is among 64 countries in the world where same-sex conduct is illegal.⁵⁰ In Africa, more than half of all countries have LGBTQ+ discriminatory laws.⁵¹ Similar to Uganda most recently in Ghana, the Supreme Court upheld the anti-homosexuality law and dismissed the challenge to a proposed severe similar law because it had not yet been signed by the President.⁵² The proposed new law aims to criminalize lesbian relationships for the first time. In Namibia, the High Court ruled that colonial era sodomy laws were unconstitutional, striking all references to sodomy in several laws.⁵³ Proponents of criminalizing homosexuality often argue that it goes against African culture or tradition. Cabo Verde, South Africa, the Seychelles, Mauritius, and Mozambique are reported to be the most tolerant countries in Africa.⁵⁴ The tide towards decriminalizing same sex relations is also growing: South Africa (in 1998), Cabo Verde (2004), Lesotho (2012), São Tomé and Príncipe (2012), Mozambique (2015), the Seychelles (2016), Botswana (2019), and Angola (2019).⁵⁵ In South Africa: President Ramaphosa signed a hate speech and crimes law that had been passed by parliament in 2023. The law includes protections for LGBTQ+ people and people living with HIV. Interestingly, countries with tolerant majorities have decriminalized homosexuality. This may reflect policy reforms responding to public opinion⁵⁶ or public opinion responding to policy reforms or both.

⁴⁸ [s://watermarkonline.com/2024/10/02/uganda-human-rights-commission-asks-government-to-decriminalize-homosexuality/#:~:text=Uganda's%20state-funded%20human%20rights%20body%20has%20broken%20its,is%20currently%20under%20appeal%20at%20the%20Supreme%20Court.](https://watermarkonline.com/2024/10/02/uganda-human-rights-commission-asks-government-to-decriminalize-homosexuality/#:~:text=Uganda's%20state-funded%20human%20rights%20body%20has%20broken%20its,is%20currently%20under%20appeal%20at%20the%20Supreme%20Court.) (Accessed 23.10.25).

⁴⁹ Makanga Ronald Kakumba, 'Uganda a continental extreme in rejection of people in same-sex relationships', Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 639, 2023.

⁵⁰ 2024 LGBTQ rights update: Progress and reversals in Africa – Rights Africa – Equal Rights, One Voice! (accessed 02.10.25).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Makanga Ronald Kakumba, 'Uganda a continental extreme in rejection of people in same-sex relationships', Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 639, 2023.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Rhonda Gibson and Bob Hester, "Effects of Sources in Coverage of Same-Sex Marriage", Sage Journals, 2007.

A preliminary review of the literature relating to attitudes and perceptions towards the LGBTQ+ community reveals that religion and culture have been cited by policymakers as the basis of national policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons.

3. Key Informant Interviews

Root Causes, Manifestation, and Impact of Religious Policy and Culturally Based Stigma and Discrimination.

In section 3 above, this study identified religious and cultural leaders, policy makers, and influencers or opinion leaders as the main drivers of stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ+ Ugandans. Policy enforcers have overzealously implemented discriminatory policies, while other members of the general community have supported as well as challenged stigma and discrimination aimed at LGBTQ+ persons.

This section presents some of the findings from the key informant interviews (KII) with religious and cultural leaders, policy-makers, policy enforcers, opinion leaders or influencers, the LGBTQ+ community, as well as members of CSOs and the general public. The aim is to better understand the root causes, manifestations, and impact of religious, policy, and culturally based stigma on the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda. To manage the general verbiage of this report, this study could not document all the findings from 151 interviews. The findings reported in this section were purposely selected to reflect the findings across religions, tribes/cultures, policy makers and enforcers, gender, and sexual orientation as well as the wider Ugandan community.

Lived Experiences of Uganda's LGBTQ+ community

Respondent RB.16 is a lesbian, Atesot, and an open LGBTQ+ Orthodox religious leader. She states that she was shunned by family and friends when they found out about her sexual orientation. She reported that the American Orthodox church accepted her for who she is after she was expelled from the Catholic church because of her sexual orientation. She further stated that she has experienced discriminatory, segregative, and homophobic behaviors from authorities because of policies, such as the AHA 2023, that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons.

ML.70 identifies as lesbian, Muganda, an atheist, and they work as an advocate. When asked about displaying sexual orientation in public, ML.70 stated: *"Yes, I do, on social media and among my peers, but not before my parents. I know my parents would not take it lightly, but they are of an older generation and do not use social media apps. I feel free to show who I am. I use Snapchat and Instagram mostly, but even if they were to find my socials, I would simply tell them that I am simply an **Advocate of human rights.**"* Regarding their cultural identity, ML.70 described the Baganda as the most annoyingly conservative culture that they only practice when they can't opt out. ML.70 further claimed that: *"My culture is against my sexuality, but I have not faced a major problem from it so far. However, in my advocacy groupings, we have people who have been disowned by their families for being LGBTQ+."* On the subject of how policies such as the AHA, 2023 have impacted the LGBTQ+ Community, ML.70 stated that: *"I doubt that law is enforced. We had a similar crime in the Penal Code Act before a specific Act was*



enacted, but it was just redundant. Our government is a big beneficiary of LGBTQ+ funding, and it cannot risk annoying its cash cows. The law was a 2026 move for the NRM to discredit NUP and gain political mileage." When asked about the impact of religious-based stigma and discrimination on LGBTQ+ persons, ML.70 described religion as advancing a Nazi agenda toward the LGBTQ+ community that might lead to a genocide in Uganda.

ML.69, a gay person, Mugisu by tribe, and an Anglican, said that LGBTQ+ people are always attacked and insulted in his culture; as a result, he has not disclosed his sexual orientation to his family. ML.69 reported that a member of the community that he knows was disowned by their family and excommunicated from their tribe. When asked about the impact of religion on him as a LGBTQ+ individual or any other person that he knows from this community, ML.69 stated that religious leaders strongly condemn and stigmatize the LGBTQ + community in their preachings. Regarding the impact of policies on LGBTQ+ individuals, ML.69 had this to say about AHA, 2023: *"The Anti Homosexuality law (AHA,2023) is a political ideology. I have heard of people who get arrested for being homosexuals but later get released without serious repercussions, like sentencing them to death."*

ML.20 an Acholi gay man reported that: *"Recently tried to renew my national ID. The people at the registration center were especially unkind to me as they shouted insults at me."* When asked if he displays his sexual orientation in public, he stated that he doesn't but there are mannerisms he can't change, for instance the way he talks, walks, sits etc. When asked how he and other members of the community ensure their stay safe in the community where they live and work, he replied that: *"Safety is a collective effort. We use a "buddy system".* Regarding the impact of religious, policy and culturally- based stigma on his life as a gay man he exclaimed: *"I have been raped before by a member of the community. I couldn't report it to the police because that would only have made it worse!"* He further stated that his family has disowned him, he regularly receives harassing phone calls, the callers insult and threaten to report him to the police for being gay, and attempt to extort money from him.

ML.79, a lesbian, Muhima, and a born-again Christian decried the impact of stigmatizing and discriminatory policies on the LGBTQ+ community. She stated that the stigma attached to homosexuality by AHA, 2023, makes some LGBTQ+ people avoid testing and getting treatment, and thus it has increased the risk of sexually transmitted diseases spreading among the community. According to ML.79, LGBTQ+ persons are branded children of Satan. When in church, she feels like she is spying on God's children. Because her culture rejects her sexual orientation, she is considering marrying a man to hide her sexual preference.

Gay man ML.75, is a Mutooro and he described his faith as a believer. He stated that he reads his environment before he displays his sexuality. Many times, he has been called derogatory names by members of the public including 'Musiyazi,' 'sissy,' 'kuchu,' etcetera. He reported that his father disowned him because his tribe does not accept his sexuality, but he has a good relationship with his mother. He said that LGBTQ+ persons are fearful of AHA, 2023. When asked who the main perpetrators of stigma and

discrimination against the LGBTQ+ are in order of the highest, he named religious leaders, policy makers and enforcers, cultural leaders, influencers, and some members of the general public.

Queer transgender woman, and a Mukiga ML.17 says that they were dismissed from school because of their sexual orientation. They further stated that their Bakiga tribe perceives them as a curse and therefore, the family disowned them. Following the passing of the AHA,2023 ML.17 lost their job.

RB.13 is lesbian, a Munyankole, and a religious leader in the Anglican faith. She stated that: *"Christianity, especially the Anglican Church and Islam, have been so vocal in condemning us. They are hostile and always quote religious verses to show that we are doomed in society. You see, even though the Anglican church came out to speak against the newly elected Archbishop Canterbury, the Lady. The fact that she supports same sex marriage is seen as her departing from the historical teachings of the Anglican church."* As such, RB.13 has kept her sexual orientation a secret from the clergy. She expressed concern that AHA, 2023 has stigmatized, incriminated, demonized, and encouraged discrimination of LGBTQ+ persons, thus they cannot live freely in the community. She reported that her parents banished her and labelled her a disgrace to her family and tribe.

Gay man, ML.14, a Munyarwanda-Muganda by tribe, stated that he had been arrested twice following the passing of AHA,2023, was ill- treated during detention, and as a result, he is traumatized. He reported that he fears that once he is arrested again, he will face the death penalty. He claimed: *"Discriminatory cultural practices have had a negative impact on me. As I mentioned, my family has disowned me because I can't ensure continuity of lineage, and I am acting like a madman. I have been compared with animals. They asked if I had seen male animals trying to have sex with other male animals? That makes me less than an animal."*

According to ML.19, a Muganda and Muslim lesbian, religious leaders, policymakers and enforcers, cultural leaders, influencers, and some members of the general public in that order are the biggest drivers of stigma and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community.

Fears, beliefs, attitudes, and myths related to the LGBTQ+ community

Policy enforcer RA.1 is a Musoga of the Anglican faith. He called on policymakers to review the Constitution with a view to removing its discriminatory and stigmatizing provisions. He requested Uganda's community to be less condemnatory but to seek to understand and coexist with LGBTQ+ persons. On the subject of the Basoga's perceptions towards homosexuals, he stated that: *"Although it is not written anywhere, in my culture, people believe that the LGBTQ community is for cursed people and so they shouldn't belong among other people. **There is a belief that once they access services,***

especially education, they will indoctrinate their ideas into other children they study with. Therefore, total isolation is the solution." Regarding his faith, he opined that: "The Bible does not specifically mention same sex. However, it states that a man and a woman can have sex after marriage. It is therefore derived from the biblical man and woman sex for people to say that same sex is prohibited and unnatural."

RB.29 is a policymaker, a Munyankole of the Anglican faith. He stated that he does not mind LGBTQ+ individuals, provided they respect the rights of others. Regarding the use of the umbrella term LGBTQ+, he opined: *"First, the term is a combination of characters. I find the combination of lesbians and gays to be weird if persons of the same sex have an admiration for each other. For the transgender, I find these normal because of creation, that is, someone is born having two contrary sexual organs. This is not an issue of their own making since that is how one was created – sex determined at creation. It has nothing to do with individual engineering- due to factors of creation. For the Queer – identifying oneself contrary to what you are. It's an orientation of themselves and the choices made by individuals. Therefore, when one decides to make a choice, I have no issue with it as long as one is exercising their right without interfering with any other person's rights."* In relation to AHA, 2023, RB.29 stated that: *"The Act is segmented in a way that the same sex relations are criminalized. That is sections on lesbians, gays, and transgender. For transgender individuals, criminalization is a bit unfortunate because one doesn't have control over how they were born. Even when you arrest them, the question to be answered is which detention facility will they be placed in - is it the male or female section, or exclude them from the rest of the prisoners, which turns out to be discriminatory and is constitutionally prohibited? For the aspect of the gay, lesbian, and queer – these are extended expressions of their own rights. Change the course of nature. As long as the law doesn't deter someone from enjoying their right, which is not infringing on the right of the other, then the law should allow them to pace. But when they do it to inconvenience others (inconvenience not necessarily referring to public nuisance, just seeing them walking and you suspect them and arrest them immediately). It must be an overt act forced on one, and when one does it on their own without infringing on anyone's rights, then the law criminalizing them would have crossed the boundaries."* He further proffered several breakdowns of his religion's perspective of the LGBTQ+ community: *"As a Protestant – seems Transgenders are seen to be of a natural occurrence, more welcomed and easily forgiven than those who are gay, lesbian, and Queer. As the bible says, everyone is a child of God. God created everyone in his own image, that is, he created both a transgender and a non-transgender. Thus, God loves them as his children."* He added that: *"For the gay, lesbian, and queer, these are behavior choices, and they tend to be unkind to them. For example, Romans 1: 26-27. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. Leviticus 18:22 "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination."* He concluded that his culture rejects LGBTQ+ persons because it advocates for procreation, but same sex relationships do not result in human multiplication.



Acholi cultural leader, SL.8, a Christian, described LGBTQ+ persons as intolerable and unacceptable by his religion and tribe. He remarked, *"From the biblical point of view, God created man for recreation. We believe that God created man for woman to multiply and fill the world. I personally do not accept them (LGBTQ+ persons)." He further stated that: "I support the law (AHA, 2023) in the strongest way possible. However, people were not sensitized about the dangers or the implications of homosexuality; very few people understand it, and it was not passed down to the local levels, like villages. The law only stayed within parliament; no one knows it at our level. Our tradition did not know anything of that kind. It is only today that people hear about it; our culture is completely against it. In our local environment, it is known that this is for Western culture and not for us. How do men be with men and how do women be with women? Where have we seen that a man has given birth to a child? It is almost an abuse in our culture for the same sex to stay together as a couple, Meno bedo kii." Regarding the source of his religious conviction, SL.8 stated that: "My religion condemns it completely, our faith is in the belief that it does not exist, even the bible supports it. The woman is meant for a man for procreation." He resolved that: "If there is a way our culture and traditions or religion and politics could revive the basics of the former beliefs especially those 25 and below because they indulge in this without knowing the repercussions. They learn and copy a culture not meant for us. Address communities with their own cultures so that they appreciate their cultural norms and values."*

RB.14 is an Islamic and Buganda cultural leader. He stated that he doesn't mind LGBTQ+ persons, provided they conduct their sexuality in private. He denounced religion as misleading and aimed at ending African traditions. To RB.14, religion is a foreign tool that has been employed in Africa to exploit and subjugate Africans.

A member of the general public, RA.1 is a catholic and a Mutooro. She works as a psychotherapist. She stated that: *"My perception towards them (LGBTQ+ persons) has been changing because of the work I do. If you had asked me 20 years ago, I would have answered from a spiritual perspective that condemns them (LGBTQ+ persons). Diversity, equity, and inclusion are core to the work I do, so if 2 adult persons are LGBTQ+, it's their choice. As an individual, I am uncomfortable with their behavior, but I can't impose my values on them. If my child is involved, I would express my dissatisfaction, and my values would come into play because I have a moral responsibility to protect my children." Regarding policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons, she stated that she does not support extreme policies, but she approves of those that seek to minimize homosexuality. In relation to her culture's position regarding the LGBTQ+ community, she expounded that: "Culture treasures procreation, and with same sex, there is no procreation in the natural way. Even if you procreate artificially, it will not be accepted." In relation to her religion, she exclaimed: "My goodness! Catholics in Uganda are totally against it(homosexuality). Maybe they (Catholics) are liberal in other parts of the world. The catholic church is composed of people from different cultures in Uganda; these cultures do not tolerate vice, like the church."*

Social media influencer, ML.73, is a Muganda of the Anglican faith. He stated that homosexuality is not acceptable in his religion; however, he does not find LGBTQ+ persons distasteful. He described AHA, 2023, as aimed at enhancing some harsh

people's unlawful threats and harassment, followed by violence and slander toward the LGBTQ+ community. According to his tribe, LGBTQ+ individuals should be banished from society. He explained that: *"Baganda say that 'bwosalawo okulya embwa, lya ensava' meaning, if you have decided to eat a dog, eat a fat one. Ideally, dog meat is an unacceptable delicacy among the tribesmen; however, it is said that one has a choice to eat or leave it, but if they choose to eat it, then they must eat a good one. So, although homosexuality is unacceptable in Buganda, I believe that if one chooses a good LGBTQ+ partner, the tribesmen would be okay with the choice."* According to ML.73's religion, homosexuality is against God's plan for humanity –to produce children and fill the world. He expounded that: *"My church continues to appoint and rank reverends who publicly spread hate speech against homosexuals and also intimate that they would never preside over same-sex marriages."* In this context, he referenced Genesis 1:28: 'God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and fill the world.'

Islamic cleric, RB.4 is a Musoga by tribe. He opined that: *"They (LGBTQ+ individuals) get spoiled by society just like any other criminal. It is common knowledge that homosexuality is wrong. In Islam, we have the belief that whatever is right is clear and whatever is wrong is also clear. It is like having sex in public, though it is accepted, we all know it's wrong and shouldn't be done in public. They need guidance just like any criminal."* Regarding policies that stigmatize and criminalize LGBTQ+ persons, he expressed his approval of AHA,2023, noting that it will stop homosexual conduct among young people in schools. In relation to his tribe's position on homosexuality, he stated that he does not know of any tribe that supports or prohibits same sex relations. About Islam on the same issues, he expressed that: *"The Quran teaches us that during the lifetime of LOT (the messenger of God), a full generation was wiped out because they were practicing homosexuality. We are therefore not allowed to practice homosexuality based on that teaching."*

Policy maker RB.3 is a Musoga of the Catholic faith. He stated that he does not know of any LGBTQ+ person. He expressed that: *"My culture does not support homosexuality. In my culture, you are allowed to marry a woman. If you want to marry more, do not go to church. The church only considers one wife. In fact, if you organize a function for homosexuals in my village, even the police will arrest you because it is illegal. All Busoga kings married women. I do not know of anyone who married a fellow man. In Busoga, I hear it is called bisiyaga, but I think this was borrowed from Buganda."* He concluded that *the biblical teachings indicate that homosexual conduct was prohibited in Sodom and Gomorrah. Homosexuality is a foreign behavior aimed at ending procreation, which is why white people invest money in promoting it. It is also a disorder."*

RB.05 is a CSO lawyer, Jehovah's witness and Mukiga by tribe. In his view, LGBTQ+ persons have been caged by the devil, suffer from a mental illness and they need salvation and guidance. As an African, homosexuality is an abomination that doesn't sit well with his spirit and he will not tolerate same-sex relations in his family. As a human rights practitioner, he recognizes the right to choose sexuality as long as they don't get intimate in his presence. He condemned AHA, 2023 as discriminatory because its criminal sanctions target physical appearance and it prohibits the LGBTQ+ community from accessing other services and rights such as the right to health that everyone should be entitled to regardless of sex, sexuality, race, etcetera. RB.05 also criticized

criminalization of promoting homosexuality as vague because AHA, 2023 does not define what amounts to promoting homosexuality.

A member of the general public, RB.2 is a Mukiga and a Catholic. He summed up his views on the LGBTQ+: *"LGBTQ+ is a confusing and complex behavior. It is a natural disorder. It is not proper and contradicts nature, social norms (social teachings and values of society). I have failed to come to terms with it. I look at such people as those who need help because it is a divergent behavior that contradicts nature and nurture. People have tried to legitimize it, but I have failed to fathom it."* He claimed that homosexuals have existed for a long time among his tribe mates, and they have always been seen as a disorder, but they were not treated harshly. Regarding the Catholic church's position, he noted that: *"The Catholic church prohibits it, but the same religion has moral disorder. Homosexuality is a sin like any other. It is a contradiction that the catholic church is one of the culprits for something they preach against. The Catholic church has been one of the worst perpetrators of this behavior in the Western world. The church is a criminal church when it comes to homosexuality, especially in America. The priests would do all kinds of things to boys. They talk about it in hushed tones because they paid a lot of compensation in the West (UK, France, Italy, US). We were duped by religion. The church, for example, condemns polygamy, yet King Solomon had many wives. Jesus was prosecuted because he challenged their norms. He picked what was extremist and challenged it by preaching love. Jesus was a reformer. The bible that guides Christianity is full of intolerance and revenge. There is a selective application of the bible."* In relation to policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons, he referred to these as not value-free, and he observed that they bend toward dominant social values against minority populations. He concluded that: *"The dominant sexual behavior is heterosexual, yet there are cases of minorities with scientific evidence that they exist. It is their sexual choice. The State should get out of enforcing moral behavior. It is not in their mandate to regulate sexual behavior between 2 consenting adults."*

Acholi policymaker SL.6, and an Anglican, stated that she does not mind LGBTQ+ individuals, provided that they do not inconvenience or try to force their ideologies on others. She opined that from the perspective of religion, homosexuality is an abomination that cannot be accepted. She therefore supports AHA, 2023; however, from an open and human rights lens, the LGBTQ+ community must be heard and treated well. She added that according to her tribe, homosexuality and interclan marriages are unacceptable, and they are both referred to as 'Kii'.

ML.68, a policy enforcer of the Anglican faith and a Mugisu by tribe, described LGBTQ+ persons as intolerable, deviant, and unacceptable in his religion. When asked to refer to specific religious teaching to confirm this, he referred to the Bible in general. ML.68 was requested for a comment on policies, including laws that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals. He described such policies as good, and he called for their strict enforcement. Regarding the position of his tribe on the LGBTQ+ community, he stated that his tribe calls for the exclusion of such individuals from society because they are evil and very harmful. When requested to explain where this is written or for a common saying in his tribe, he stated that: *"The cultural norms are against it just like religion."*



Born-again religious leader and a Munyoro by tribe, ML.77 applauded: *"I support this law (AHA,2023). We have seen the homosexuality behaviors crop up in Uganda from unknown angles. If we have harsh punishments for homosexuality, we shall close the tap that brings out that behavior. For example, it is prohibited for a hotel to allow two men to sleep on the same bed. To me, that is a good move because it prevents homosexuality from tourists and citizens."* He added that the following biblical teachings resonate with AHA,2023: Leviticus 20:13, 'If a man lays with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. '; and Genesis 19:24, 'It rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.' Regarding his tribe's sentiments on the LGBTQ+ community, he stated that Banyoro believe that a woman should be married to a man and cultural ideologies define gender roles, for instance: *"A man's power is at least among others, by the number of female sexual partners he has or conquers, but not the number of same-sex sexual partners he has."*

Policy enforcer, ML.80, a born-again Christian and Iteso by tribe reported that: *"If only we had one or more conforming cultures, it would be right to call the law (AHA,203) unfair, but look, none of our cultures endorse homosexuality, so the law is very okay in its approach". Regarding his tribe's position on the LGBTQ+ community he stated that: "Because today, people of my culture are predominantly Christian. It may not be reflected entirely in terms of how we live sometimes, but we are passionately committed to certain basic Christian principles."* In relation to the source of his tribe's attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community he explained that: *"From our first names to religious dominance of my culture, you can tell that we are predominantly Christian and the guiding book of our way of life is the Bible."*

Acholi cultural leader RB.3 is an Anglican. He described sexual orientation as unusual and conditioned by social interactions. In his view, policies that exclude and criminalize homosexuality respond to the dictates of culture and religion. He explained that: *"LGBTQ+ can be perceived as a threat to natural order, a practice so unfamiliar that rejecting it has been a unifying factor for otherwise siloed groups of people. While I think some of the penalties are harsh, the general idea is to curb LGBTQ+, and I am inclined to agree with it."* RB.3 stated that both his culture and religion condemn same-sex relations. He, however, expressed his rejection of the death penalty as a punishment for homosexuality and called on the LGBTQ+ community to seek guidance from cultural and religious leaders.

ML.74, a Muganda cultural leader and a Catholic, described criminalizing of the LGBTQ+ community by AHA, 2023 as a historical phenomenon and a reflection of Uganda's democratic values and respect for human dignity. He pledged his support for all the punishments in the law. He stated that LGBTQ+ persons should not be afforded any services and rights in Uganda. When asked about his tribe's saying or writing that condemn homosexuality, he replied: *"The kingdom of Buganda is a representation of our preserved values. We have elders at different levels who teach and pass down cultural values to the young ones, for example, I am one of those elders. The hierarchy of those elders starts from the head of the family in a given household (olujja). That setting resonates with the Biblical teaching in the book of Titus 2:2-3: 'older men are to be*

temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, and in perseverance; teaching what is good'. He further explained that: "Religion and cultures in Uganda are almost similar but quite unrelated in many ways. While there is absolutely no room for homosexuality in my culture, religion condemns homosexuality but still welcomes homosexuals to church. My church continues to appoint and rank reverends who publicly spread hate speech against homosexuals and also intimate that they would never preside over same-sex marriages."

Alur cultural leader RB.5 is of the Pentecostal faith. He described LGBTQ+ persons as misled, whose sexual exploits during adolescence are not tamed and, as such, get out of hand. She stated that she was a victim and later a perpetrator of such behavior. As a child, her cousin introduced her to same-sex relations. She testified that persons who were lesbians in her school are now married with children. She further reported that: *"Marriage in the Alur culture is between a man and woman. Anything contrary is considered deviant."* She added that policies should aim to protect young people from being recruited into same-sex relations. According to RB.5: *"Same sex relationships are a sin in the sight of God. In Genesis, the creation story begins with man and woman. God even destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of the sin of homosexuality. It is wrong and does not fit within a well-meaning society."* She concluded that: *"Culture and religion are great influencers of our beliefs and world outlook. By identifying appropriate cultural and religious approaches to addressing homosexuality, we can eliminate this vice."*

General member of the public R.B.7 is a Lugbara by tribe and of the Anglican religion. He stated that he does not accept LGBTQ+ persons and he is not aware of anything in his tribe that supports or condemns LGBTQ+ individuals, however his religion states that the purpose of humans is to procreate. He described policies against the LGBTQ+ community as benefiting Ugandans to reduce homosexuality. He advised that: *"Parents should discipline a child before he/she gets out of hand. A child who is deviant in behavior needs to be rebuked. The government should not only look at banning the act (same-sex relationships) but what it has done to address unemployment. Training of the youth to sustain themselves will alleviate poverty which in turn would address the vice. There should be no sugarcoating. Rebuke a person who is engaged in a same sex relationship."*

Policy enforcer RB.10 is a Mugisu of the Christian faith. He stated that: *"They (LGBTQ+ persons) are not born that way but rather divert from being straight. The society they live in influences them, and they get loose. They have money that converts them. They are perverts. It can be a mental illness because it doesn't conform to normality."* When asked what he would do in his capacity as a policy enforcer if a person is reported to him as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, he replied: *"The LC law (Local Court Act) does not stipulate for them to handle such cases. I would refer to the police if faced with an LGBTQ situation."* He added that: *"The Bible says, go produce, multiply, and fill the earth. Offspring are important to carry on to the next generation."*

ML.66, a cultural leader of the Lugbara tribe and a Christian, expressed that his tribe does not tolerate LGBTQ+ persons. He claimed that: *"My culture condemns them. Such people should be expelled from the community. Since time immemorial, these were norms known to the elders."* When asked for a common saying or written source to confirm this,

he replied: *"Since time immemorial, these were norms known to the elders."* When requested for his religion's views on the LGBTQ+ community, he opined that: *"The same way culture is against it is not different from what religion states."* He referred to the Bible but not to any specific scriptures.

According to policy maker RB.23, a Muganda of the Anglican faith, his religion and culture are unaccepting of LGBTQ+ persons. He added that: *"Advocating for LGBTIQ+ rights in Uganda has become increasingly dangerous. Under the recently enacted law (AHA 2023), individuals can be arrested and prosecuted for what is broadly defined as 'promoting homosexuality'. This has created a climate of fear and uncertainty among activists and community members. Many believe that the law was rushed through Parliament without adequate public consultation or consideration of its broader human rights implications. As a result, it has become extremely difficult, even risky, to speak openly about LGBTIQ+ rights, especially in public meetings or organized gatherings. We therefore need to be open and provide safe spaces for open discussions about LGBTIQ+ persons in Uganda."*

Influencer, SL.7, is an Acholi of the Anglican faith, stated that he respects people of all backgrounds and everyone deserves to be treated with respect and kindness. However, based on his faith and cultural values, he condemns same sex relationships. SL.7 reported that he disapproves of AHA, 2023, because it has increased violence and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community. He claimed that Acholi tradition tends to emphasize heterosexual marriage and childbearing as central to social life. Regarding his faith, he expressed that: *"As a Christian, I believe that marriage was designed by God for a man and a woman. However, I also believe that everyone deserves love, respect, and fair treatment regardless of their orientation. According to Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4,5, marriage is between a man and a woman, and sexual relations are meant for procreation."* SL.7 observed that: *"Many African cultures, including Acholi, value family, reproduction, and clan continuity. That's why same-sex relationships are often not accepted; they seem to threaten the traditional purpose of marriage. Churches and mosques can create programs to guide young people on sexuality from a moral and spiritual viewpoint."*

Batooro cultural leader, RB.7 is of the Christian faith. He stated that sexual orientation does not make a person a lesser human being. To him, AHA,2023; was rashly passed with little consultation and it reflects the religious biases of MPs. In relation to tribal sentiments, she reported that nothing in her tribe condemns or condones homosexuality. However, she had read that Kabaka Mwanga was a homosexual, and she knew for a fact that families close to the Buganda kingdom are homosexuals; thus, the Baganda coined the 'Okulya ebisiyaga', suggesting that homosexuality has been practiced in Uganda for a long time, and it is not a foreign practice. He cited the following scriptures as authoritative on Christianity's condemnation of same-sex relations: Genesis- the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.; Corinthians -6:16; Jude- 1:7; and Matthew- 10:15.

ML.76 is a born-again pastor and a Muganda by tribe. He denounced: *"Sodomy is prohibited in the Bible in the Book of Genesis, 19:1-8. I support the AHA, and I cannot*



think that there is any problem with the punishments for sodomy. We cannot go against what our creator planned for the world. This place is for a supernatural being called God and he created us with a purpose and with guidelines on how we should live in this life, and he does not deal with homosexuals." He further vowed that: "In my culture, we call this (homosexuality) 'okulya ebisiyaga'. It is unacceptable sexual conduct. Being called 'Musiyazzi' (homosexual) itself sounds wrong in my language. It is an insult in itself. One would take pride in being called polygamous because that has been a part of us since day one, but this immorality is foreign behavior."

ML.65 a Catholic religious leader and an Etesot described homosexuality as a sin according to his religion and tribe and he called for LGBTQ+ persons to be excommunicated from society to stop them from distorting normal traditions and misleading straight people. ML.65 was requested to cite a tribal source or saying that rejects LGBTQ+ persons. He replied that homosexuality is intolerable and a sinful act. With regard to religious text, he referenced the book of Genesis.

Baganda cultural leader and a Muslim, RB.08 dismissed claims that Kabaka Mwanga II was a LGBTQ+ person, as baseless and unfounded but he admitted that same-sex relations existed in precolonial Buganda and were practiced discreetly hence the term 'Okulya ebisiyaga.' He however claimed that Baganda culture condemns homosexuality. In relation to Islam, he stated 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."*

CSO worker RB.09 is a Mukiga by tribe and a Catholic. She condemned rigid religious and cultural interpretations that violate the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. She exclaimed that: *"The law (AHA, 2023) has created a climate of fear and exclusion. While it claims to protect culture and morality, in reality, it criminalizes people for who they are and strips them of basic protections. It has led to evictions, job losses, denial of healthcare, and even violence. The law undermines Uganda's commitments to human rights and development. Instead of protecting society, it isolates and endangers a vulnerable group. I believe laws should protect all citizens equally, not target specific groups for punishment."* She explained that religious texts are often cited to condemn same-sex relationships, but it is their interpretation that matters. Many faith leaders emphasize compassion, justice, and love as central to their teachings. Unfortunately, she contended, selective readings are used to justify exclusion. She added, *"Personally, I believe faith should not be weaponized to harm others. Religion can be a source of healing and acceptance, and I know of faith communities that are already practicing inclusive ministry. The challenge is to amplify those voices."*

RB.10, is a policy enforcer a Munyakole of the Catholic faith. He explained that: *"The law (AHA, 203) has no problem. The problem was how we were interpreting it. We used to charge people wrongly. In fact, we received a directive from the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) directing that all files with charges preferred under the Anti-Homosexuality Act should first be submitted to headquarters with a written legal opinion for further guidance before a decision to charge is made. This followed an increase in the*



number of indiscriminate prosecutions under the Act. The problem was about the definition of the term 'sexual act'. A person who is alleged or suspected of being a homosexual and who has not committed a sexual act with another person of the same sex does not commit the offence of homosexuality under the law. If you realize, the cases of homosexuality reduced after that. I think we were using a lot of emotions and charging people wrongly." He reported that he does not know of any text or saying in his tribe that condemns or condemns the LGBTQ+ community. He further stated that: "Religious leaders are the ones who miss interpreting the religious teachings. In my career I have seen murderers leading prayers in prison. Being a criminal does not stop one from being religious. The House of God should be for all and not for a few chosen individuals."

4. Interpretation of Findings

A detailed analysis of the data harvested for this study reveals the following themes:

What is Commonly Referred to as Uganda's Culture and the Foundation of Stigma and Discrimination Towards the LGBTQ+ Community?

Religion influences Uganda's culture and policy.

Detailed interpretation: Uganda's community is made up of various tribes that don't share a common custom or culture. However, Ugandans share common religions that are uniformly interpreted as unaccepting of the LGBTQ+ Community. These religions are commonly referred to as Uganda's culture. These religions influence Uganda's culture and policy.

Grouping Uganda's Community by Attitudes Towards the LGBTQ+ Community

Figure 3: Uganda's Community attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community can be divided into the unaccepting, reluctantly accepting, and the inclusive.

UNACCEPTING

The majority oppose LGBTQ+ community driven by religious beliefs, cultural norms, and legal restrictions.



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.



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+ individuals, provided they do not display their sexual orientation in their presence or impose their sexual orientation on other members of the broader Ugandan Community, the neutral or unclear. We can refer to this group as the reluctantly accepting minorities. It also represents a community that is evolving towards inclusiveness. 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 inclusive 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.

Religious views on the LGBTQ+ community

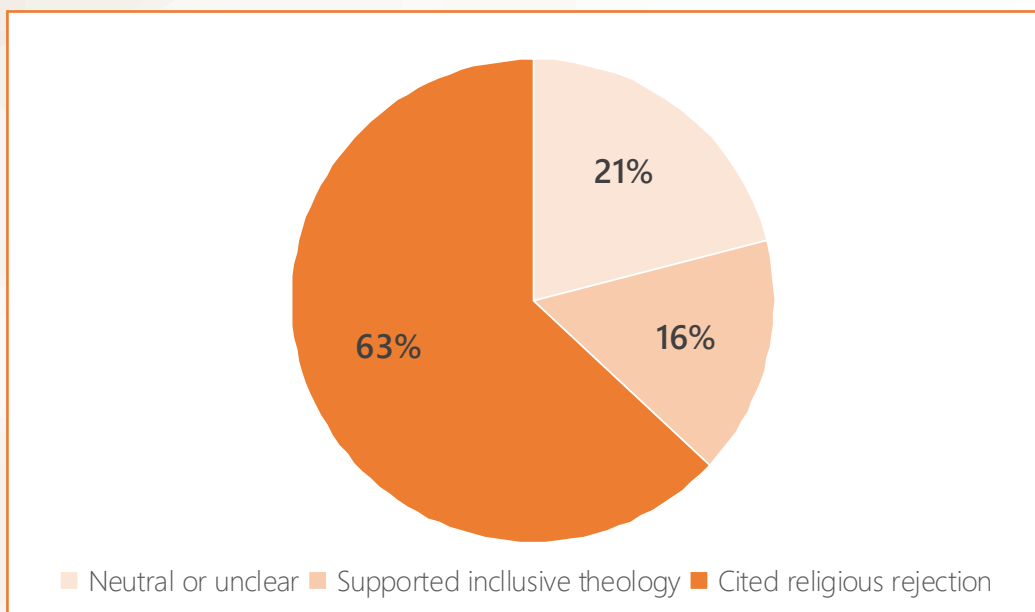


Figure 4: *The majority of respondents cited religion as their basis for not accepting the LGBTQ+ community, followed by those that were neutral or unclear (the reluctantly accepting), while the minority were inclusive.*

Detailed Interpretation and Implications: Religion is the first form of identity among Ugandans; the second is tribe. Most Ugandans identify by two names. One represents their tribe and the other their religion. The religious name is the first name. Secularism that is associated with sexual orientation is perceived as a threat to religion that calls for procreation. For Uganda’s dominant religious majority, there is no room for tolerance for the LGBTQ+ community. 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. It is not possible to tell from this study which one of Uganda's dominant religions is the most unaccepting and inclusive. Unaccepting religious leaders depict sexual orientation as a perversion of the highest order, inherently unnatural, ridden with diseases and ungodly. Same-sex relations are also against the religious order for humans to procreate. In this context, same-sex relationships affect the spread or growth of religion in terms of the numbers of believers. Related, homosexuality challenges the belief that gender identity is a divine allocation. Unaccepting religious leaders also claim that same-sex relations are a human vice and not a human right. More Ugandans endorse as opposed to disapprove of these religious views. They laud AHA, 2023 as in line with religious teachings that aim to curb homosexuality. 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 text 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 in as far as they condemn the LGBTQ+ community. These policy statements are considered as authoritative by conservatives.

Tribal /Cultural Perceptions Towards LGBTQ+ Individuals

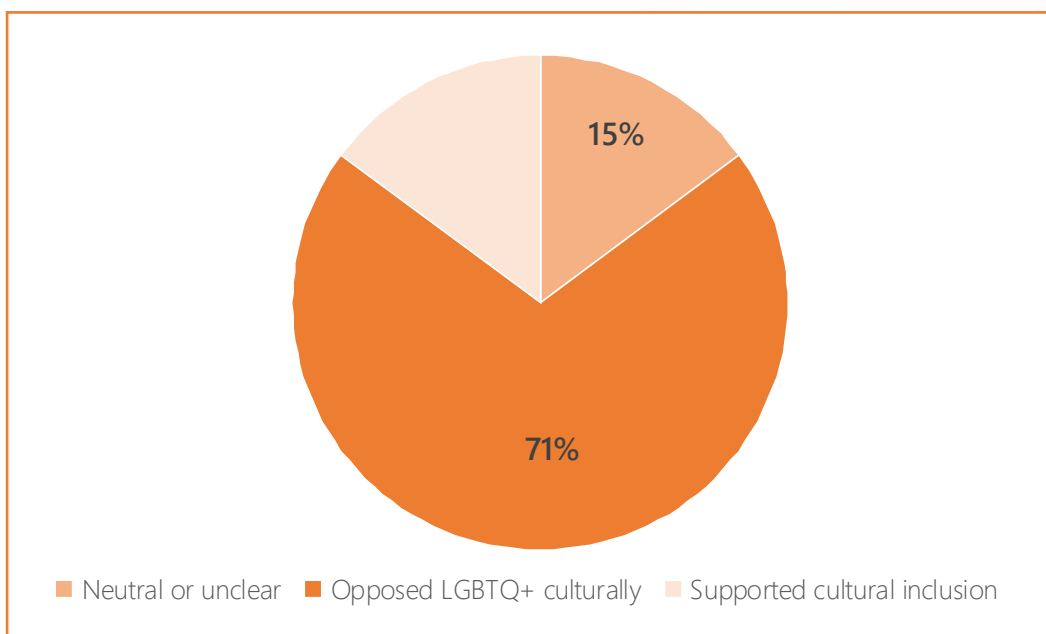


Figure 5: Tribal/cultural beliefs were overwhelmingly reported as the foundation of not accepting LGBTQ+ persons by the majority of the respondents, while those who claimed that their culture/tribe is unclear or called for cultural inclusivity are the minority.

Detailed interpretation: Uganda’s population is made up of different tribes that do not have a homogenous culture. Tribal practices and values are mostly unwritten and largely spoken. These have been handed down to new generations. Because they are largely spoken there is a likelihood that they have been distorted over time. However, questioning or going against tribal practices is unacceptable because it challenges the second form of identity among Ugandans, the first is religion. Culturalists that are unaccepting refer to religion as the basis of their refusal to accept this community. This may be because unlike tribal practices, religious views on homosexuality are documented or written in sacred publications, such as the Bible and Quran. Culturalists also claim that religion and culture are indivisible. While culturalists overwhelmingly approve of national policies that stigmatize and discriminate against the LGBTQ+ community because they uphold religious and tribal values that are inseparable, they criticize the failure of the policymakers to consult them during policymaking processes. Some culturalists (unaccepting, reluctantly accepting and the inclusive) admit that LGBTQ+ relationships existed before the introduction of religion. This contradicts the common assumption that homosexuality is a foreign behavior. For the reluctantly accepting and inclusive minorities, there is a need to understand the LGBTQ+ community better. Cultural leaders are ranked as the fourth drivers of stigma and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community after religious leaders and policymakers and enforcers. Conservative culturalists believe same-sex relations are intolerable because they do not lead to multiplication of humans which allows for tribal populations to grow as desired by tribes and ordered by religion. They equate tribal growth with numbers.

Policy Approach Towards LGBTQ+ Persons

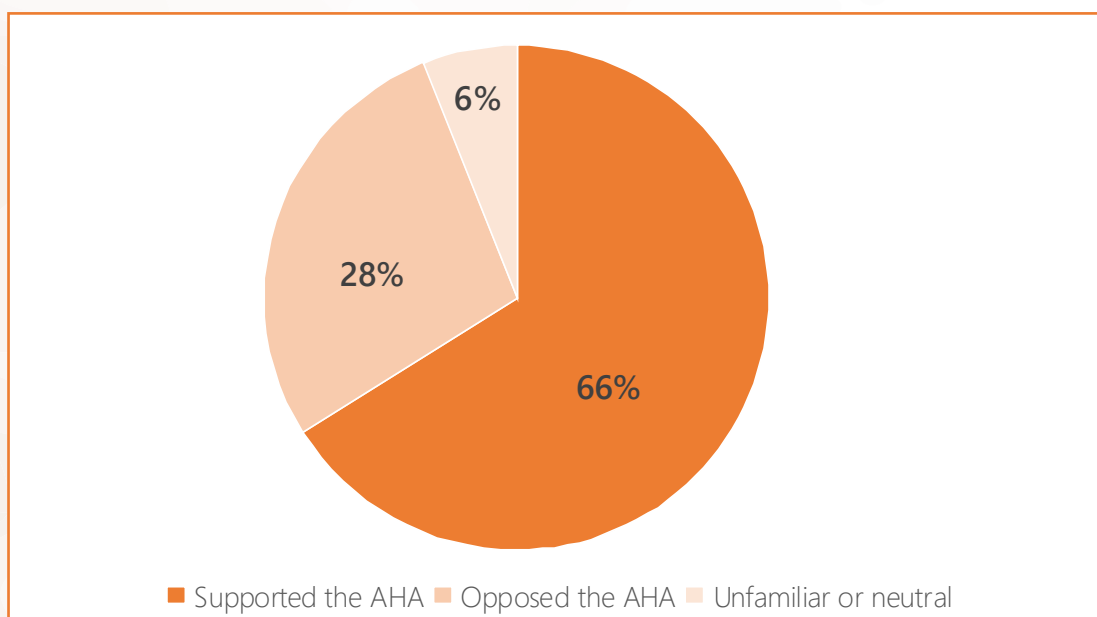


Figure 6: Respondents were broadly in support of policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons in particular, AHA, 2023.

Detailed Interpretation: Policymakers followed by policy enforcers, after religious leaders are cited as the second most driver of stigma and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community. The majority of respondents expressed their support of policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons, for instance, AHA, 2023. Only the minority of the respondents either criticized AHA,2023, are neutral or not aware of the law. There are calls among all respondent groups for interventions such as evidence-based research to inform policy as well enforcement of AHA, 2023. Policy enforcers are reported as the third most perpetrators of stigma and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ communities. Some policy enforcers claim that AHA, 2023 has been overzealously enforced to criminalize persons perceived and actual LGBTQ+ individuals. Similarly, LGBTQ+ persons reported that AHA,2023 is used to harass, intimidate, blackmail and extort money from perceived and actual members of the community as opposed to ending same-sex relationships and the numbers of actual LGBTQ+ persons that have been caught by the law are few. This puts in question the efficacy of the law in ending same-sex relationships. Unaccepting respondents conceive AHA, 2023 and the Penal Code Act as necessary coercive policies for enforcing religious and cultural values that promote procreation.

It is important to note that Penal Code Act creates an offence of intimidating or annoying, threatening to injure, assault, shoot or kill a person.⁵⁷ This law has not been enforced to protect the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda from the criminalized acts. Rather, authorities have invoked the provisions of this law that criminalize same-sex relations. Indicating a selective enforcement of the Penal Code Act. Uganda's LGBTQ+ community is invisible in national laws and policies for the purposes of development, protecting rights, planning, including improving health and education, reducing inequality, and for spurring economic growth. The National Housing and Population Census Report, 2024 considered as the basis on which Uganda's future and public services are planned and the 1995 Constitution perceived as the official policy of the country are reflective of the dominance of religion and tribe perceptions in shaping Uganda's policy in as far as they focus on the country's religious and tribal demographics such as gender, marriage, tribe and religion. Evidence from elsewhere in Africa indicates that countries with tolerant majorities have decriminalized homosexuality. This may reflect policy reforms responding to public opinion,⁵⁸ or public opinion responding to policy reforms or both. The call on the government by UHRC to decriminalize homosexuality presents an opportunity for policy makers to rethink national policies that stigmatize and discriminate against the LGBTQ+ community.

⁵⁷ Section 81.

⁵⁸ Rhonda Gibson and Bob Hester, *Effects of Sources in Coverage of Same-Sex Marriage*, Sage Journals, 2007.



Root Causes and Manifestations of Religious, Policy, and Culturally-Based Stigma and Discrimination against LGBTQ+ People

The main reason for ostracizing LGBTQ+ individuals in Uganda is because same sex relations do not result in procreation as ordered by religions and desired by tribes. Religions and tribes perceive human population growth as essential for their sustenance. Same-sex relations are also an affront to the religious belief that gender is a divine allocation. Because of the many tribes that have different traditional practices, Uganda has no homogenous culture. However, Ugandans share the same religions. The influence of religions on Uganda's community is what is commonly referred to as Uganda's broader culture. Religions also influence Uganda's policies. Similar to Uganda's broader culture, policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons such as AHA, 2023, reflect religious ideologies. LGBTQ+ persons are rejected by their families, tribes, religion, national policies and the Ugandan community. Uganda's LGBTQ+ community is invisible in national policies for the purposes of planning, legal protection and public services. This is mainly because of religion's influence on Uganda's broader culture and policy. Religion, policy and culture in this order are the main drivers of stigma and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ persons.

Impact of religious, policy and culturally-based stigma on LGBTQ+ individuals

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

1. Been disowned by their families.
2. Policies have been passed that stigmatize persons in same sex relationships.
3. Harassment, intimidation, extortion, blackmail, and imprisonment have affected their mental health
4. Been excluded from places of worship, schools, and dismissed from work.
5. Engaged in a heterosexual relationship to hide their sexual orientation.
6. Feel alienated from the broader Uganda community.
7. 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. Struggle to survive in a broader Ugandan community in which the majority demonizes and ostracizes them.
9. Some have denounced their religion and culture.
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.

5. 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. Before religion was introduced various tribes of Uganda were both unaccepting and reluctantly accepting.

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 collect, or 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 persecution.

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 neither correlates with the 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 transmission.

Myth (h): A person whose biological sex is female but feels like a man 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

6. Recommendations and Future Actions

Challenges to LGBTQ+ equality are deeply rooted in religious, policy, and culturally based stigma and discrimination. The following recommendations to the various stakeholders are aimed at addressing these challenges.

To religious leaders

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.

To Policymakers

1. Instruct the Uganda Law Reform Commission (ULRC) to review AHA,2023, with a view to reconsidering its efficacy.
2. Work with other post-colonial nations to remove language from colonial-era laws that are used to stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ people.
3. Enact legislation to protect people against hate crime including on the basis of sexual orientation.
4. Foster inclusive spaces that create opportunities for gender diverse voices to be heard and to collaborate on matters related to national policies.
5. Public opinion commonly conforms to policy reforms and vice versa. Ensure that national policies are inclusive of Uganda's gender diversity.
6. Support policy reforms that protect all citizens equally, regardless of orientation or identity.
7. Ensure meaningful consultation of the relevant stakeholders in policymaking processes.

To Influencers/Opinion Leaders

1. Use respectful language when referring to LGBTQ+ individuals.
2. Educate yourselves on issues related to diversity, equality, and inclusion. Understanding different perspectives related to social justice issues will make you better equipped when engaging in discussions around LGBTQ+ rights.
3. Don't make assumptions, be aware of your biases, do not assume that someone has a certain preference or lifestyle just because they are LGBTQ+. Also, avoid assuming everyone you know is straight. Keep conversational language inclusive (use "partner" vs. "wife" or "husband") and work on being a good listener.
4. Share positive news, too, about the LGBTQ+ community.
5. Challenge the use of inappropriate jokes and derogatory terms used to describe LGBTQ+ persons.

To Rights Activists

1. Expand knowledge around existing research and identify the gaps and limitations of current research. By providing evidence-based research to policymakers, religious and cultural leaders, as well as opinion leaders, you can help dispel misconceptions that often have a negative impact on LGBTQ+ people.
2. Research on LGBTQ+ populations is critical; it should also originate from LGBTQ+ perspectives and incorporate community assets, including both unaccepting, reluctantly accepting, and inclusive persons.
3. Develop a database to monitor and document incidents of stigma, discrimination, and violations of the rights of LGBTQ+ persons. This database can be used for advocacy programming purposes.
4. Periodically disseminate factual information and raise awareness on the state of the LGBTQ+ situation, including equality and rights.
5. Invest in youth engagement, since young people are often more open to inclusive perspectives and can drive societal change.
6. Set clear, achievable, and measurable priorities for promoting LGBTQ+ equality and awareness raising.
7. Establish small and medium-sized organizations that bring on board religious and cultural leaders, policy makers and influencers as well as creative thinkers to drive attitude and policy changes and challenge stigma and discrimination.
8. Use global human rights frameworks to challenge religious homophobia.
9. Establish community support initiatives, including safe spaces, mental health resources, and legal services to provide essential support for LGBTQ+ individuals, foster resilience, and empowerment.
10. Use social media platforms for activism, coordination, visibility, community building, and mobilization.

11. Create safe dialogue spaces where cultural and religious leaders, policymakers, and communities can engage constructively.
12. Promote public awareness to dispel myths and misinformation.
13. Maximize the momentum that has been started by the UHRC to decriminalize same sex relationships to engage policymakers and enforcers, religious and cultural leaders as well the general community on rights of the LGBTQ+ community.





To Tribal/Cultural Leaders

1. 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.
2. Aim to trace and understand the history of LGBTQ+ in your tribe and perceptions as well as attitudes towards this community. Consider whether such perceptions and attitudes have evolved.
3. Emphasize compassion and inclusivity as important values.
4. Support policy reforms that protect all citizens equally, regardless of orientation or identity.
5. Uganda comprises many tribes with different customary values. Aim to ensure that your customary values align with those of the other tribes and the modern world.

To Policy Enforcers

1. Ensure lawful policy enforcement.
2. Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) should develop guidelines for enforcing AHA,2023; to supplement the Decision to Charge Guidelines and make these available to stakeholders for comments before disseminating them among law enforcement agencies.
3. Establish channels for stakeholders to provide feedback and raise concerns about policy enforcement issues that affect the LGBTQ+ community.
4. Ensure that overzealous and errant policy enforcers are held accountable.



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