

## **Attitudes Toward Homosexuality in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean**

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### **Abstract:**

Public opinion toward gay and lesbian people and related policy issues varies widely across the Global South. Focusing on Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, this chapter examines how and why attitudes toward homosexuality differ across regions, countries, individuals, and time. We first draw on crossnational public opinion data from the Afrobarometer, AmericasBarometer, and World Values Survey to describe how attitudes vary. We then survey the existing literature, summarizing the main explanations for individual and macro-level differences in public opinion in these regions. While country-level factors such as economic development are often invoked to explain differences in attitudes, we argue that a country's colonial heritage is an important overlooked variable. Former British colonies consistently express more intolerance of homosexuality than would be expected based on their national wealth, whereas former Spanish and Portuguese countries are more tolerant. We consider two possible mechanisms for the effect of colonial heritage on present-day attitudes: the (de)criminalization of sodomy, which affects the likelihood of contact with openly gay and lesbian people, and a country's religious composition and religiosity. Future scholarship should consider the effect of colonial heritage not only on policy outcomes but also on public opinion.

## Introduction

In 2023, Uganda enacted one of the world’s most draconian anti-gay laws, stipulating life in prison for engaging in same-sex relations and the death penalty for “aggravated homosexuality,” covering a range of factors that include having sex with HIV-positive people. Meanwhile, in another corner of the Global South, Argentina made headlines in 2021 when it became the first Latin American country to allow “X” gender designations on identity documents for individuals who do not identify within the binary of “man” or “woman.” These milestones follow well-established patterns in each country: Argentina legalized same-sex marriage in 2010, whereas Uganda passed an earlier Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2014.

In keeping with these policy contrasts, public opinion data reveal vast differences in attitudes toward gay and lesbian people in each country. In the 2023 AmericasBarometer, just 28 percent of Argentines said they were more opposed to than supportive of same-sex marriage. Meanwhile, in the 2021 Afrobarometer, 95% of Ugandans said they would oppose having a gay neighbor—seemingly a much lower bar than supporting same-sex marriage.

Uganda and Argentina represent two extremes in terms of policy and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people in the Global South. Within each of their respective regions, there is much variation in public opinion. While many African countries are as intolerant as Uganda, only 18 percent of Cabo Verdeans and 28 percent of South Africans said they would oppose having a gay neighbor. Meanwhile, in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), 81 percent opposed same-sex marriage in Panama in 2023, and 87 percent did so in the Bahamas. Yet in general, one finds a clear regional pattern: Latin American populations express much more tolerant attitudes toward gay and lesbian people than those in Africa or the English-speaking Caribbean. Differences remain even when examining countries at similar levels of economic development, a common explanation for differing attitudes. In Wave 7 of the World Values Survey (WVS), 89 percent of Nigerians and 33 percent of Nicaraguans said they would oppose having a gay neighbor, despite both countries having similar levels of GDP per capita.

How do attitudes toward gay and lesbian people vary across Africa and LAC, and how have they evolved over time? How have scholars explained attitudinal differences among individuals within a country and across countries within a region? What accounts for the difference in opinions between Latin America, the part of the Global South that is most tolerant toward gay and lesbian people, and Africa, the region that is most hostile? And what plausible influences on public opinion have yet to be explored?

The present chapter addresses these questions through a literature review of existing research combined with descriptive analysis of public opinion data from the Afrobarometer, AmericasBarometer, and World Values Survey. While country-level factors such as economic development are often invoked to explain differences in attitudes, we argue that a country’s colonial heritage is an important overlooked variable. Former British colonies such as Uganda are much more likely to have a tradition of criminalizing homosexuality, which, we argue, inhibits the sort of contact with openly gay and lesbian people that often changes minds.

## Definitions and Data

Terminology used to refer to gender and sexual minorities has evolved significantly over time, with a general trend toward inclusivity, whereas the language used in most cross-national, multi-wave survey projects has remained constant for a decade or more. While the acronyms LGBTQ+ or LGBTQIA+ represent multiple distinct identities—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, others, and in the expanded version, also intersex and asexual—the vast majority of survey questions ask only about attitudes toward homosexuals, homosexuality, or same-sex marriage.<sup>1</sup> This situation reflects the goal of maintaining constant question wordings over time, in order to measure changes in attitudes that cannot be dismissed as methodological artifacts, as well as the need to translate questionnaires into multiple languages, not all of which have equivalent, non-derogatory terms for a variety of sexual and gender identities (Adamczyk and Liao 2019; Howard 2020). For accuracy, therefore, we use the terms “gay”, “lesbian,” “homosexuality,” and “same-sex marriage” when talking about empirical evidence on public opinion toward sexual minorities in Africa and LAC. When discussing theory, we sometimes use broader language, as appropriate.

Most of what we know about public opinion toward homosexuality in the Global South comes from cross-national, multi-wave survey projects. The WVS has asked whether homosexuality is justifiable since 1981–84, and whether one would oppose having homosexuals as neighbors (spontaneous mention; respondents are asked to choose groups from a list) since 1989–93. The Pew Global Attitudes Survey has asked whether homosexuality should or should not be accepted by society in five waves between 2002 and 2019. Both of these are global survey projects that include countries from all major world regions but only a handful from Latin America or Africa, some of which have only been surveyed once.

The regional barometer survey projects achieve much broader country coverage within Africa and LAC, though at the cost of questions that cannot be directly compared across regions. Since 2014–15, Afrobarometer has asked a stimulated rather than spontaneous response version of the WVS question about not wanting homosexuals as neighbors.<sup>2</sup> The Latinobarometer asked whether homosexuality was considered justifiable in 2002, 2004, 2008, and 2009, and it asked the WVS neighbors question (spontaneous response) in 1998 and 2009. However, as policy issues related to LGBTQ+ rights have come on the political agenda in Latin America, the regional barometers have switched to asking about those instead. Since 2010, AmericasBarometer has asked about level of agreement or disagreement with same-sex marriage, and Latinobarometer asked that question in 2010 and 2015.<sup>3</sup> Regional barometers tend to measure attitudes toward

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<sup>1</sup> Only in the most recent (2023) wave of the AmericasBarometer do we find any questions about attitudes toward transgender people or sexual minorities in general, and these questions were in an experimental module fielded in only a subset of countries.

<sup>2</sup> This variation in question format makes a difference; in countries that were surveyed in the same or adjacent years, overall levels of opposition to having a gay neighbor are an average of 10 percentage points higher in the Afrobarometer than the WVS.

<sup>3</sup> Since 2004, AmericasBarometer has also asked about support for homosexuals running for office.

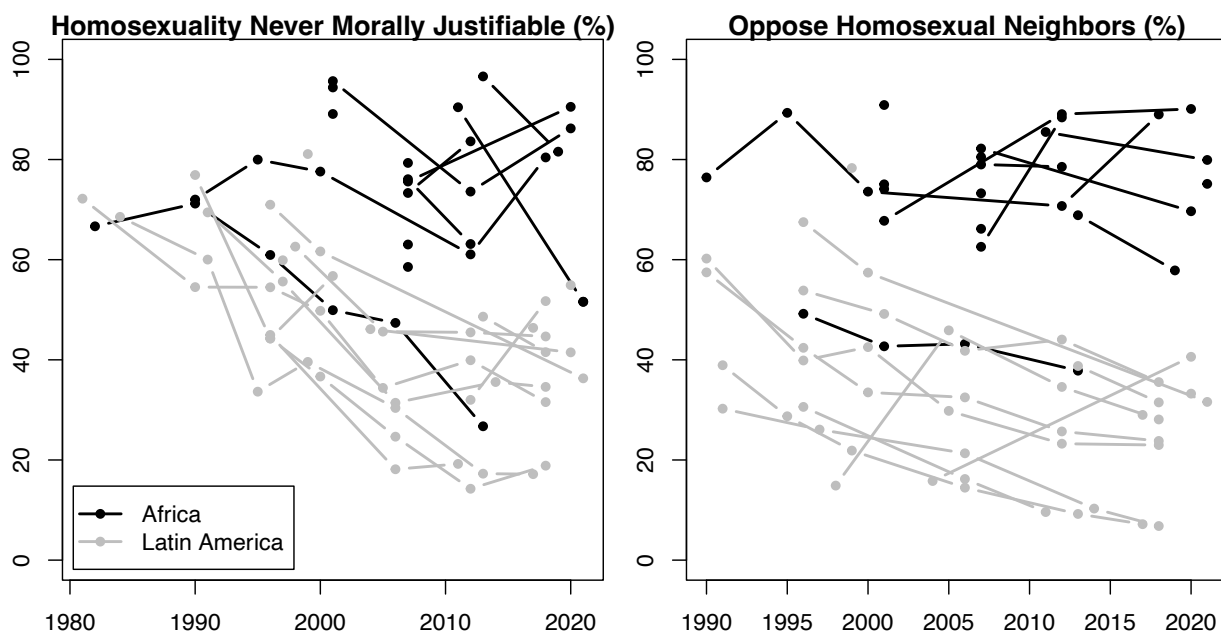
“least common denominator” policy issues—those that are topics of debate in many countries—so we have no comparative data on attitudes toward extremes like Uganda’s anti-homosexuality law or Argentina’s inclusive gender identity policies.

Given the different questions asked by the regional barometer surveys, we have limited data measuring the same attitudes at the same time across Africa and LAC. In the present chapter, we primarily analyze data from the Afrobarometer and AmericasBarometer surveys, given their broad cross-national coverage (including the non-Spanish speaking Caribbean) and regularity (every 2–3 years). This means that we focus on attitudes toward same-sex marriage in LAC and gay and lesbian neighbors in Africa. These measures are correlated, but not perfectly so; in the 2009 and 2010 Latinobarometer, the country-level correlation of the percent not wanting homosexual neighbors and opposing same-sex marriage is 0.69.

### Descriptive Statistics

In examining attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, we begin with the broad contrast between Africa and Latin America, which is best captured by the World Values Survey. Figure 1 plots the percentage in each country who say that homosexuality is never justifiable (choosing 1 on a 1–10 Likert scale) and mentioning homosexuals as a group that they would not want as neighbors. While trends vary by country, opposition to homosexuality has generally remained high and constant in Africa across several decades, whereas it is lower, and declining, in Latin America. The two regions occupy almost entirely separate sections of the plot; only South Africa, the most tolerant African country in the WVS, lies in the same range as Latin America.

**Figure 1: Attitudes toward Homosexuality in Africa and Latin America**



Source: World Values Survey, Waves 1–7.

Drawing on the regional barometers, we can examine attitudes across a much broader array of countries. Figure 2 plots attitudes toward same-sex marriage in the AmericasBarometer. The bars give the percent who express more disapproval than approval of this policy, choosing positions 1–5 on a 1–10 Likert scale with “strongly disapprove” and “strongly approve” as the labeled endpoints. A number of trends are evident. Among countries with multiple measurements, opposition has almost always declined over time; only in Panama have attitudes remained constant. There are clear correlations with policy. The seven most tolerant countries, along with Ecuador, have all legalized same-sex marriage; in Argentina and Uruguay, first and third in the region to do so, opposition is in the 20 percent range in the most recent survey wave. There are also clear groupings by subregion and colonial heritage. With the exception of Trinidad and Tobago, which looks like a Central American country on this metric, the former British colonies in the Caribbean are more intolerant than any of the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries.

Turning to the Afrobarometer, Figure 3 shows the percentage in each country who would strongly or somewhat dislike having homosexual neighbors, as opposed to strongly liking, somewhat liking, or not caring. While attitudes in LAC have almost universally grown more tolerant over time, the same is not true of Africa. In over half the countries (21 out of 37), opposition to having gay neighbors has either increased from the first to the most recent measurement or has registered no statistically significant decrease. As in LAC, we see some correlation with policy; South Africa, the only country to legalize same-sex marriage (in 2006), is the second most tolerant. Patterns of colonial heritage are also evident. Among the most tolerant third of the countries, one finds all four former Portuguese colonies surveyed in the Afrobarometer (Angola, Cabo Verde, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe) but only two of the many former British colonies.

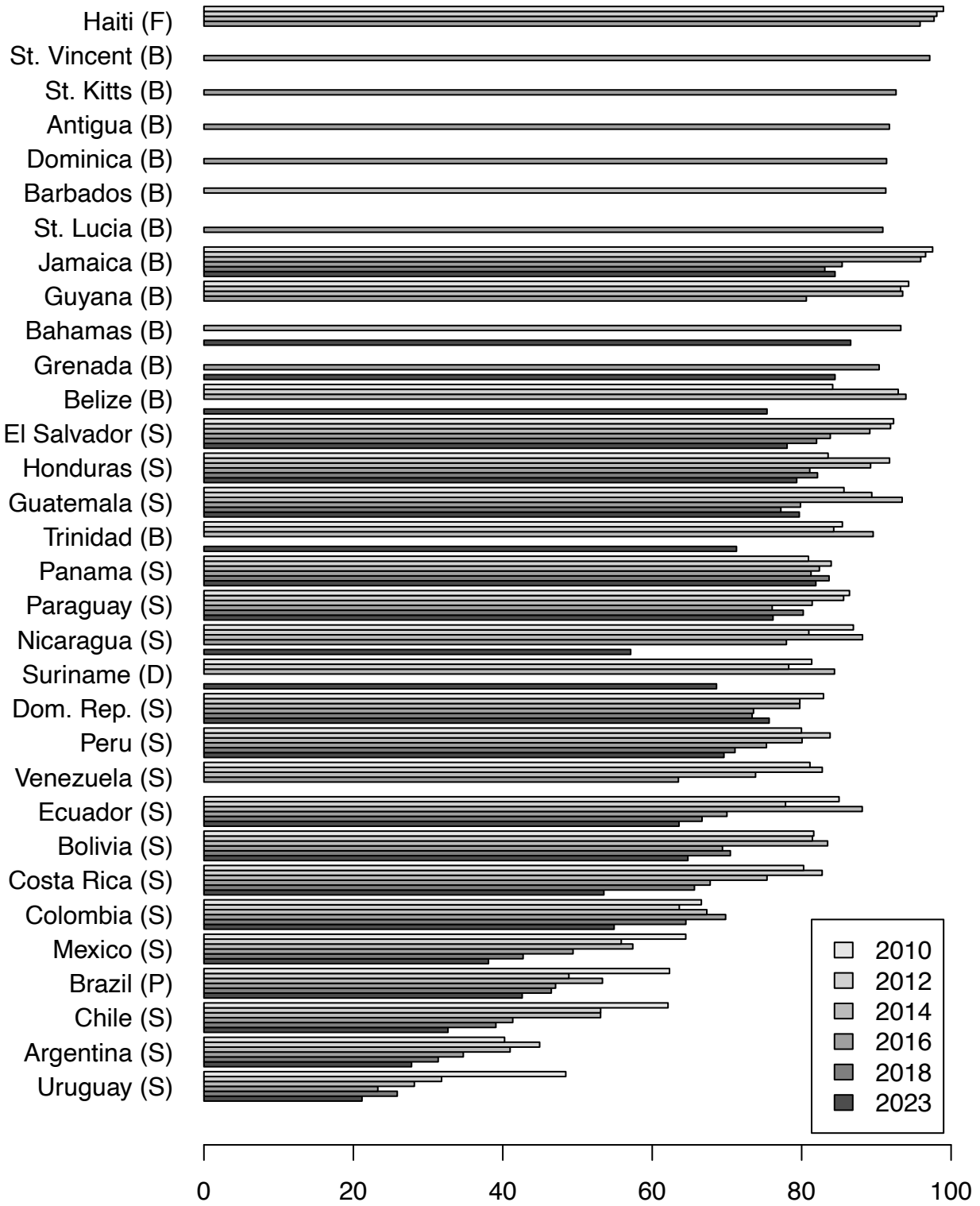
### **Existing Explanations**

In the cross-national comparative literature on attitudes toward homosexuality, both globally and region-specific, individual-level demographic predictors are strikingly consistent, though effects are larger and more significant when there is more variation to explain. Studies have found more tolerant attitudes among those who are female,<sup>4</sup> more educated, younger (or of younger age cohorts), unmarried, childless, less religiously observant, and of higher socioeconomic status (Adamczyk 2017; Adamczyk and Liao 2019; Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Alozie, Thomas, and Akpan-Obong 2016; Anderson and Fetner 2008; Ayoub and Garretson 2017; Chaux et al. 2021; de Abreu Maia, Chiu, and Desposato 2023; Díez and Dion 2018; Dion and Díez 2017, 2020; Dionne and Dulani 2020; Dreier, Long, and Winkler 2020; Dulani, Sambo, and Dionne 2016; Earle et al. 2021; Hadler 2012; Howard 2020; Jäckle and Wenzelburger 2015; Lodola and Corral 2013; Mahomed and Trangoš 2016; Navarro et al. 2019; Paradela-López, Antón, and Jima-González 2023; Roberts and Reddy 2008; Seligson, Moreno Morales, and Russo 2019; Smith, Son, and Kim 2014; Winkler 2021). Among religious groups, Evangelicals are more

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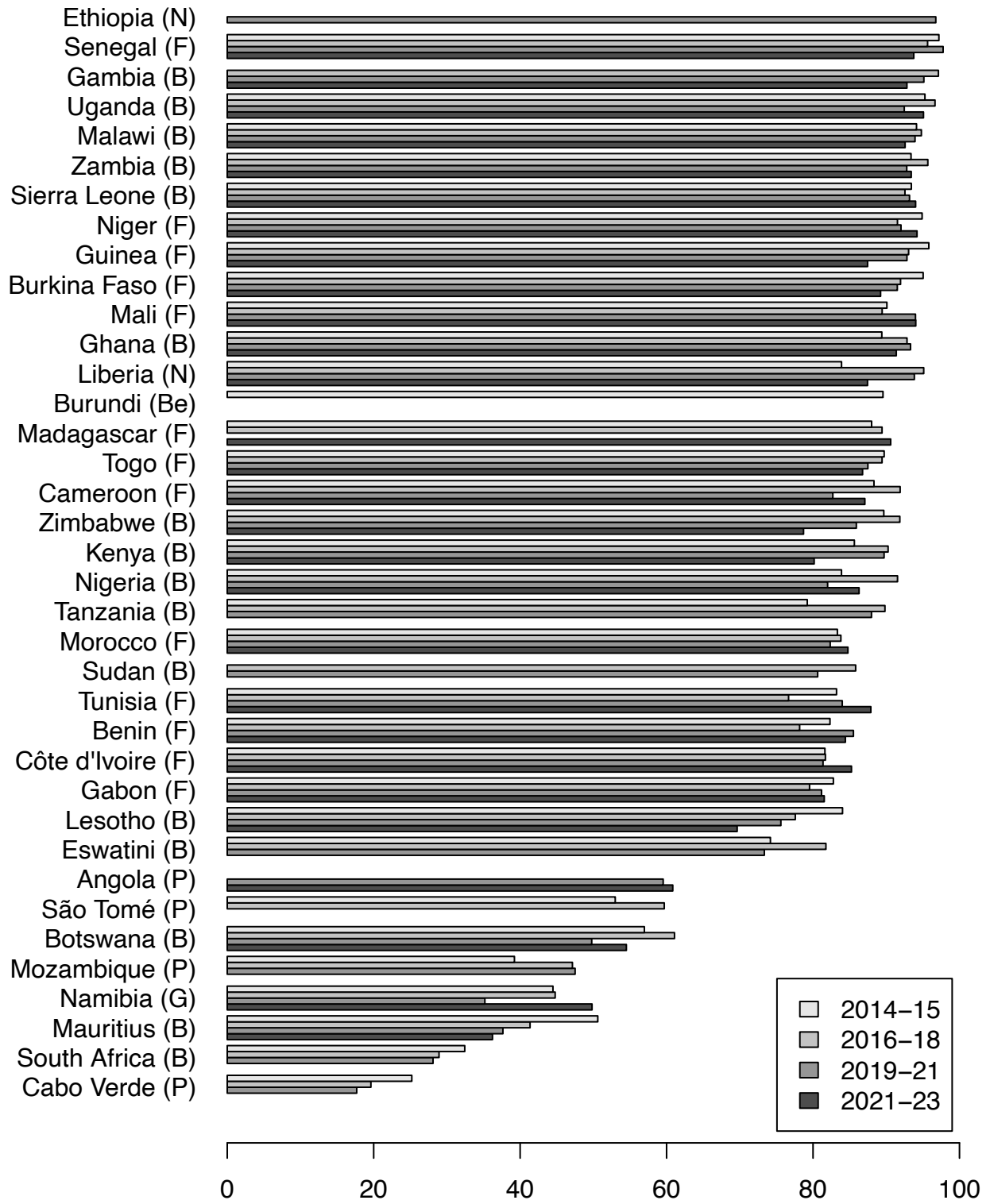
<sup>4</sup> With few exceptions (e.g., the 2023 AmericasBarometer), cross-national survey projects use a binary, interviewer-coded measure of sex or gender, so we lack data on respondents’ gender identity.

**Figure 2: Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage in Latin America and the Caribbean (Percent)**



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP. Countries are sorted by average level of opposition across waves. Colonial heritage is in parentheses: British (B), Dutch (D), French (F), Spanish (S), or Portuguese (P).

**Figure 3: Opposition to Homosexual Neighbors in Africa (Percent)**



Source: Afrobarometer. Countries are sorted by average level of opposition across waves. Colonial heritage is in parentheses: British (B), Belgian (Be), French (F), German (G), Portuguese (P), or none (N).

intolerant than Catholics in Latin America (Chaux et al. 2021; Díez and Dion 2018), and Muslims are more intolerant than Christians in Africa (Dulani, Sambo, and Dionne 2016; Howard 2020). Race has not been extensively studied, but in South Africa, Blacks have been found to be less tolerant than the white or coloured population (Mahomed and Trangoš 2016; Massoud 2003; Roberts and Reddy 2008).<sup>5</sup>

In Latin America, studies have also explored the relationship between political or economic attitudes and tolerance of homosexuality. Leftist ideology (de Abreu Maia, Chiu, and Desposato 2023; Díez and Dion 2018; Dion and Díez 2017), support for democracy (Chaux, León, Cuellar, Martínez; Díez and Dion 2018; Dion and Díez 2017), and trust in other people and institutions (Paradela-López, Antón, and Jima-González 2023) are all associated with more tolerant attitudes. More positive assessments of the national economic situation are also associated with greater tolerance (Díez and Dion 2018; Dion and Díez 2017).

Beyond demographic and attitudinal correlates, one of the major theoretical frameworks explaining individual variation in tolerance of homosexuality is contact theory (Allport 1954). To the extent that prejudice stems from inaccurate stereotypes about outgroup members, intergroup contact should counter those stereotypes, increasing tolerant attitudes toward the outgroup. Several studies have shown that interpersonal contact with LGBTQ+ people—knowing someone who is gay or lesbian, transgender, or in a same-sex marriage—increases support for LGBTQ+ rights (Dion and Díez 2020; Earle et al. 2021). Mediated or parasocial contact, via positive or neutral depictions of LGBTQ+ people in the news and in popular culture, also matters. In both Africa and Latin America, individual media use has been shown to boost tolerance of homosexuality—especially new media, which are less subject to national censorship (Díez and Dion 2018; Winkler 2021).

Individual-level factors matter greatly for attitudes toward homosexuality in the Global South, but contextual variables at the country and community level also exert a significant effect. The predominant theoretical framework explaining country-level variation in tolerance of homosexuality is post-modernization (Inglehart 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Post-modernization theory holds that as societies become more prosperous, people no longer need to focus most of their time, energy, and resources on survival. Development also brings greater education, access to information, and a proliferation of different roles that people play in society. These trends facilitate a shift from valuing conformity and community cohesion to privileging individual autonomy and self-expression. Hence, economic development is associated with greater tolerance of diversity, including gender and sexual minorities. Cross-national studies have consistently found that people in wealthier countries have more positive attitudes toward homosexuality, even after controlling for individual-level variables (Adamczyk 2017; Anderson and Fetner 2008; Ayoub and Garretson 2017; Chaux et al. 2021; Díez and Dion

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<sup>5</sup>In South Africa, “coloured” is a legal racial classification from apartheid referring to people of mixed ancestry, primarily of white Europeans and African or Asian enslaved people from Madagascar, the Malayan archipelago, Sri Lanka, or India.



2018; Dion and Díez 2017; Earle et al. 2021; Hadler 2012; Jäckle and Wenzelburger 2015; Lodola and Corral 2013; Seligson, Moreno Morales, Russo 2019; Smith, Son, and Kim 2018).

By increasing the diversity of attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, economic development also conditions the effect of individual-level variables. In poor countries where survival values predominate, conformity pressures may make condemnation of homosexuality nearly universal, leaving little space for other factors to matter (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009). As economic development increases and tolerant attitudes become more widespread in society at large, individual religion and religiosity become stronger predictors of intolerant attitudes (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Navarro et al. 2019). Economic development also increases the effect of social class (Anderson and Fetner 2008) and education (Seligson, Moreno Morales, Russo 2019) on attitudes toward gay and lesbian people.

National and local contexts that increase exposure to diversity also predict greater tolerance of homosexuality. Levels of media penetration and media freedom are associated with more tolerant attitudes (Ayoub and Garretson 2017), echoing findings about individual-level media use. Attitudes toward gay and lesbian people are more positive in urban areas, where contact is more likely, both because there are more people overall and because the concentration of openly LGBTQ+ people is likely higher (de Abreu Maia, Chiu, and Desposato 2023; Dion and Díez 2017). Dreier, Long, and Winkler (2020) argue that local religious diversity in Africa boosts tolerance of homosexuality because it leads people to question the certainty of their own beliefs and become more comfortable around those who are different. Democracy—both the current regime type and the length of time living under a democratic regime—is associated with more positive opinions of gays and lesbians because it regularly exposes citizens to a diversity of beliefs and attitudes (Adamczyk 2017; Adamczyk and Liao 2019; Seligson, Moreno Morales, and Russo 2019).

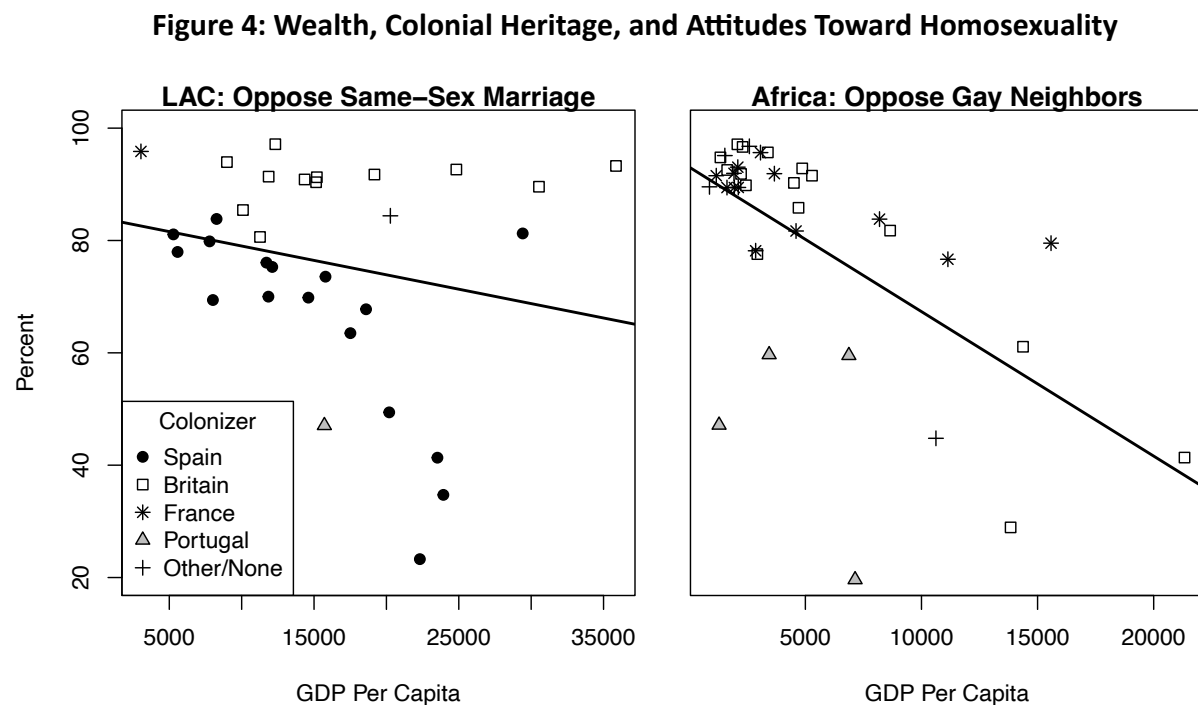
By the same token, contexts that reduce exposure to diverse ideas may decrease levels of tolerance toward gay and lesbian people. In highly devout countries, even the nonreligious or nonpracticing may be surrounded by religious people who condemn homosexuality, and they may be influenced by or feel pressured to accept dominant views. Level of religiosity in a society also influences media coverage, school curricula, and other institutions that transmit values (Adamczyk 2017; Adamczyk and Liao 2019; Adamczyk and Pitt 2009). Africa's higher levels of religiosity compared to North and South America have been used to explain its more intolerant attitudes (Alozie, Thomas, and Akpan-Obong 2016). Contextual religiosity also affects elite attitudes. González-Rostani and Morganstern (2023) show that levels of religiosity versus secularism in Latin America's national legislatures influence whether members support same-sex marriage.

As noted in the analysis of country-level attitudes in the AmericasBarometer and Afrobarometer, there is a consistent cross-national relationship between tolerance of gays and lesbians and policies that protect their rights. A similar pattern has been found in studies examining policy variation globally, across Europe, and within the United States (Aksoy et al. 2020; Earle et al. 2021; Flores and Barclay 2016; Hooghe and Meeusen 2013; Ofosu et al. 2019;

Takács and Szalma 2011; Van den Akker, van der Ploeg, and Scheepers 2013). Public opinion obviously influences policy, especially in democracies. But there is also evidence that policy liberalization can cause changes in attitudes (Aksoy et al. 2020; Ofosu et al. 2019). Legalization of something that was previously outlawed, such as gay sexual activity or same-sex marriage, can have a legitimizing effect, boosting societal acceptance of the practice and the people who engage in it. Almost all research to date has focused on the effect of same-sex marriage legalization in Europe and the United States. The one study of Latin America found a null effect of policy liberalization on attitudes toward gays and lesbians, but also no evidence of a backlash (de Abreu Maia, Chiu, and Desposato 2023). Nonetheless, this area is ripe for further research, given the extensive variation in policies toward LGBTQ+ people in the Global South.

### Colonial Heritage: A Neglected Variable

To explore further the country-level determinants of attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, Figure 4 presents scatterplots of the bivariate relationship between national wealth and levels of intolerance as measured in the AmericasBarometer and Afrobarometer. We use the wave with the most complete country coverage and, for countries not covered in that wave, the most proximate earlier or later year. National wealth is measured as real GDP per capita in the year prior to each survey. We use distinct icons to plot countries according to their colonial heritage—British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, or other/none.



Note: Public opinion data are from AmericasBarometer (2016 wave) and Afrobarometer (2016–18 wave), using the most proximate valid measure for countries missing from that wave. GDP per capita (purchasing power parity, constant 2017 international dollars) is from the International Monetary Fund, using the year prior to each survey.

These plots confirm the traditional cross-national finding about tolerance of homosexuality and national wealth, but they also show distinct patterns of outliers grouped by colonial heritage. In LAC, every one of the former British colonies is above the regression line—more intolerant than would be predicted by its level of development—whereas Brazil and nearly all of the Spanish-speaking countries (all but El Salvador and Panama) are below the line. Interestingly, there is no evidence of a downward sloping wealth–intolerance relationship in the English-speaking Caribbean; the most developed countries are just as intolerant as the poorest ones. Turning to Africa, all but two of the former British colonies (South Africa and Lesotho) are above the regression line, as are all but one of the former French colonies (Benin). Meanwhile, the former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Cabo Verde, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe are much more tolerant than would be predicted by their level of development.

We argue that colonial heritage is a heretofore neglected variable in research on attitudes toward homosexuality in the Global South. A few studies have noted in passing that former British colonies are unusually intolerant of gay and lesbian people (Adamczyk and Liao 2019; Chaux et al. 2021), but none have sought to explain why or to systematically examine the impact of colonial heritage. Several quantitative studies have examined the effect of colonial heritage on the decriminalization of sodomy or the establishment of transgender rights (Asal, Sommer, and Harwood 2012; Han and O’Mahoney 2014, 2018; Ireland 2013; O’Neal 2024), but none have made the link to attitudes.

Why might colonial heritage have implications for attitudes toward homosexuality some 50–200 years after independence? A first likely mechanism concerns its implications for the legal status of same-sex relations. British colonialism had a particularly strong, uniform effect of criminalizing sodomy. Models such as the Indian Penal Code of 1860 and the Queensland Penal Code of 1899 were explicitly copied throughout the British Empire, often using identical language (Kirby 2013; Novak 2020; Han and O’Mahoney 2014, 2018; Gupta 2008). At independence, colonial-era penal codes became the law of newly sovereign states. In contrast, other European colonizers did not impose similarly uniform or durable laws against sodomy. France abolished its sodomy law in 1791, and Napoleonic conquests spread this penal code throughout Western Europe (Kirby 2013; Han and O’Mahoney 2014, 2018). Some French colonies adopted anti-sodomy laws, “possibly under the influence of their British-ruled neighbours” (Kirby 2013: 64), but not all did. Spain first decriminalized sodomy in 1822 (Sanders 2009), and a number of its former colonies followed suit in the nineteenth century. Portugal decriminalized sodomy in 1821, and newly independent Brazil did so in 1831; it then re-criminalized sodomy in 1912 but did not fully extend the prohibition to its African colonies until 1954 (Gomes da Costa Santos and Waites 2019).

Decriminalization of same-sex relations is likely to matter for attitudes toward homosexuality because of its implications for legitimacy and contact. When homosexuality is illegal, it is stigmatized and forced into the closet (Beck et al. 2017; Sanders 2009; Leslie 2000). Even if legal prohibitions on sodomy are rarely enforced, gay and lesbian people are encouraged to police themselves and remain hidden (Goodman 2001). When hardly anyone is openly queer, the sort of contact that increases tolerance is virtually impossible. In Uganda, “because homosexuality is

illegal and close to 90% disapprove, many Ugandans, especially from rural areas, may not know or meet anyone who is openly gay” (Adamczyk 2017: 75). Meanwhile, in Brazil, “because same-sex relations have long been legal, Brazil’s LGBTQ population has not been segregated from mainstream society in the same way that it has been in other countries” (Adamczyk 2017: 142). Studies of the effect of sodomy decriminalization in India and in U.S. states have found that it improves the public image of gay and lesbian people and increases their visibility (Geis, Wright, Garrett, and Wilson 1976; Jain 2013). Elites are also likely to change their rhetoric toward people whose lifestyles have been decriminalized, indirectly influencing attitudes (Dionne and Dulani 2020).

Colonial heritage could also potentially matter for attitudes toward homosexuality via its implications for a country’s religious composition and religiosity. In recent decades, many Catholic-majority countries in Latin America have seen a significant decline in religiosity, or the rise of “light” (i.e., nonobservant) Catholicism, which has been favorable for attitudes toward homosexuality (Corrales 2021). Latin American Catholics also tend to be more supportive of same-sex marriage than Protestants, even at similar levels of religiosity (Smith 2019; Smith and Boas 2023). Hence, whether a country inherited Catholicism or Protestantism from its colonizer could have long-term implications for tolerance of homosexuality. Different European powers also encountered different existing religious traditions, which had implications for the extent of conversion to either form of Christianity. France’s colonial presence was concentrated in North and West Africa, where Islam had already penetrated extensively; today, former French colonies have a higher percentage of Muslims than former British and especially former Portuguese colonies. This difference in religious composition—a correlate, albeit not a product, of colonial heritage—has implications for tolerance of homosexuality because Muslims are generally the least accepting among major world religions (Adamczyk 2017; Dulani, Sambo, and Dionne 2016; Howard 2020; Jäckle and Wenzelburger 2015). Finally, colonial-era religion influenced interpretations of the “civilizing” mission of the colonizer. In their respective African colonies, British Anglicans were more concerned with transmitting moral values through the education of native populations, whereas the Portuguese Catholic view held that civilization was imposed through labor rather than schooling (Gomes da Costa Santos and Waites 2019). Hence, the Portuguese had fewer opportunities, and less impetus, to spread conservative sexual mores throughout the colonies.

We argue that colonial heritage is an important contextual variable for scholars to consider in future analyses of public opinion toward homosexuality in the Global South. Do the apparent effects of being a former British, Spanish, or Portuguese colony hold up when we control for other country- and individual-level predictors of attitudes? What is the main mechanism by which colonial heritage affects present-day public opinion: the legal status of homosexuality, the country’s religiosity and religious composition, or something else? These will be key questions for scholars to consider in future studies.

## Conclusion

The vast majority of research on public opinion toward LGBTQ+ people and issues has focused on advanced democracies, such those in North America and Western Europe—places where levels of economic development are higher, policies toward sexual and gender minorities are more progressive, and attitudes are more tolerant. But most of the world, and most LGBTQ+ people, live elsewhere. What does public opinion toward sexual and gender minorities look like in the Global South? Are the factors influencing attitudes the same as in the Global North, or are they unique?

In this analysis of Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, we have shown that there are vast differences in attitudes toward homosexuality across countries, even those within a single region. In recent waves of the WVS, respondents from Argentina and Uruguay have expressed equal or greater tolerance of homosexuality than those from the United States. Both countries legalized same-sex marriage several years before the U.S. Supreme Court did so for all 50 states. Among African countries, South Africa and Cabo Verde stand out as having relatively tolerant attitudes toward homosexuality. South Africa was also the first country in the Global South to legalize same-sex marriage, in 2006. Within each region, we also find many countries where intolerance remains the norm—especially in the English-speaking Caribbean, where, in contrast to the global pattern, greater wealth does not seem to bring more open-minded attitudes toward gays and lesbians.

In addition to significant variation within each region, we also find clear differences between them. When measuring the same attitudes (via the WVS questions on opposing gay neighbors and justifying homosexuality), Latin American countries are clearly more tolerant than almost all of those in Africa. People have also grown more tolerant over time in Latin America and in those Caribbean countries for which we have multiple measures; in most African countries, they have not. The public presence of LGBTQ+ rights as a political and social issue differs significantly between Latin America and Africa, with implications for policy and attitudes. According to Corrales (2021), “the struggle for LGBTQ rights in Latin America is no longer in the closet.” Rather, it has become a topic of debate in political campaigns, popular culture, and private conversations, which “has transformed laws, policies, and even attitudes in the direction of more acceptance and inclusion.” Meanwhile, in much of Africa, homosexuality’s presence in public discourse is mostly limited to public denunciations by political and religious elites (Dionne and Dulani 2020). Its salience in the news media is closely related to the spread of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity (Grossman 2015)—faith traditions that denounce it—whereas in Latin America, progressive social movements and legislative reform efforts are more likely to drive media coverage (Smith and Boas 2023).

Similar factors tend to drive attitudes toward homosexuality in Africa and LAC as they do elsewhere in the world. The same demographic variables that have been shown to matter in global studies also influence attitudes within each region, including age, gender, education, income, marital and family status, religion, and religiosity. Contextual variables, including national wealth and religiosity, mostly matter in a similar fashion as well (with the above-noted

exception of wealth in the English-speaking Caribbean). As in the rest of the world, contact with LGBTQ+ people, and contexts that facilitate it, predict more tolerant attitudes. Regarding differences in public opinion between Africa and Latin America, the main conclusion to be drawn from the existing literature is that similar things drive tolerance in each region, but that Latin America has more of them—more wealth, more secularism, more contact with LGBTQ+ people, higher levels of education, and so on (Alozie, Thomas, and Akpan-Obong 2016).

Finally, we highlight a heretofore neglected factor that differs significantly between Africa and LAC: colonial heritage. Former Spanish and Portuguese colonies consistently have more tolerant attitudes toward homosexuality than would be predicted by their level of national wealth, while former British and French colonies are more intolerant. Among the various mechanisms that could explain this pattern, we highlight the ramifications of colonial heritage for the legal status of same-sex relations, which has implications for the legitimacy and public presence of homosexuality and, thus, for contact between queer and straight people. Colonial heritage also matters for a country's religiosity and religious composition, which constitute alternative mechanisms of influence on public opinion. Latin America's more progressive attitudes toward gays and lesbians might be attributable not only to its higher levels of development—the traditional post-modernization argument—but also to the legacy of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism, which bequeathed to most countries a more tolerant legal stance and different religious tradition than did British colonial rule.

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