

# Homosexuality in Zimbabwe: How Religion, Politics, and Tradition Fuel Intolerance

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## Abstract

*Over the past two decades, countries around the world have seen an increase in public acceptance of homosexual relationships, as well as the legalization of same-sex marriages. Still, there are countries around the world, especially in Africa, where homosexuality is outlawed and punished.*

## Introduction

In Zimbabwe, society's discrimination towards homosexuality and homosexual persons is characterized by ignorance and intolerance. Religious, governmental, and traditional leaders have all supported the notion that homosexuality is un-African, unacceptable, and a case of Western cultural imperialism (Gunda, 2010). In 2006, Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe officially passed a "sexual deviancy" law that criminalized any actions perceived as homosexual. Although not outlawing homosexuality as a whole, this made performing any homosexual activity illegal and deserving of jail time. Some persons may also be subject to physical assault, including 'corrective' rape. Police reports and data do not typically support this claim because many victims rarely report such crimes to the police.

In 1995 Mugabe presented a speech at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair where he dehumanized homosexuals to be equal to farm animals. Since then, the Christian Bible has been used to justify and legalize the negative perceptions and criminalization of homosexuals (Gunda, 2010). Religion, politics, and tradition are the three most important aspects that define



Zimbabwean culture. Religious leaders, politicians, and traditional leaders have publicly rejected LGBTI people. Public attitudes generally reflect this intolerance, though there are some variations (Country Policy, 2018). Because the idea of culture is so important to Zimbabwean society, the full support against homosexuals between the three institutions has resulted in the ostracization of the LGBTI community.

### **Hypothesis**

H1: One's participation in religiosity increases intolerance of homosexuals. Most religions speak against homosexual tendencies and if one is more enthralled by their religion, their beliefs will be more closely aligned to their religion's values.

H2: Trust in the ruling political party increases intolerance of homosexuals. Zimbabwe's political views of homosexuality have been fueled by intolerance since Mugabe's rule. If one trusts the ruling political party, they are more likely to have the same views of intolerance towards homosexuals.

H3: Trust in traditional leaders increases intolerance of homosexuals. By traditional standards, homosexuality is viewed as un-African. Zimbabwe's traditional leaders support the negative accusations towards homosexuals and further compel the members of society to agree.

### **Method**

To test the hypotheses, I assembled data from a survey based study done in 2016 that was conducted by the University of Cape Town and used an ordered logistical regression. An ordered logistical regression was used due to the presence of 1-3 hypothetical questions. The dependent variable is from a single questionnaire item used to understand the respondent's

intolerance towards homosexuals. The independent variables include religiosity, political trust, and traditional trust. To determine one's religiosity, the survey measured the frequency in which, aside from weddings and funerals, how often the respondent engaged in religious practices like prayer, reading a religious book, or attending a religious service or a meeting of a religious group. To measure one's level of trust in the ruling political party, the survey measured how much trust the people report to have for their countries ruling party. To determine one's trust in tradition leaders, the survey measured how much trust the people reported to have in their traditional leaders. Control variable consisted of education level, class, employment status, age, female, member of a community group, Pentecostal, Christian, and if they received their news from tv, radio, or the internet.

### **Results**

I was able to find statistical significance in many of the variables that I ran.

- Trusting the ruling political party increased the likelihood of being intolerant towards homosexual by 1.346 times.
- Being a full-time employee increases the likelihood of being intolerant of homosexuals by 1.373 times.
- Being older increases the likelihood of being intolerant of homosexuals by 1.007 times.
- Trust in traditional leaders decreases the likelihood of being intolerant of homosexuals by 0.827 times.
- Practicing Christianity decreases the likelihood of being intolerant of homosexuals by 0.649 times.
- Using the internet to receive news decreases the likelihood of being intolerant of homosexuals by 0.822 times.

In conclusion, I found that trusting the ruling political party, having a full-time job and being older increases the likelihood of being intolerant of homosexuals. I also

found that trusting traditional leaders, being Christian and using the internet decreases the likelihood of being intolerant of homosexuals.

**Green** = increases the chance of being intolerant towards homosexuals

**Red** = decreases the chance of being intolerant towards homosexuals

Blank = outcome was statistically insignificant

Religiosity	
Political trust	1.364
Traditional trust	0.827
Education	
Class	
Full-time employee	1.373
Part-time employee	
Age	1.007
Female	
Member of a community group	
Pentecostal	
Christian	0.649
TV	
Radio	
Internet	0.822
N	2,142 (total # of survey participants)

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