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Support for Homosexuals' Right to Run for Public Office in Jamaica

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Main Findings:

- Jamaica is second to last in the region on approval of the rights of homosexuals to run for public office
- 69.1 percent of respondents select the most extreme level of disapproval while only 5.3 percent respond that they “strongly approve”
- In Jamaica, support for the political rights of regime critics is much higher (41.6 degrees, on a 0-100 scale) than support for the political rights of homosexuals (16.0 degrees, on a 0-100 scale)
- Those who are more politically tolerant in general, women, and the more educated are more tolerant of the right of gay individuals to run for public office

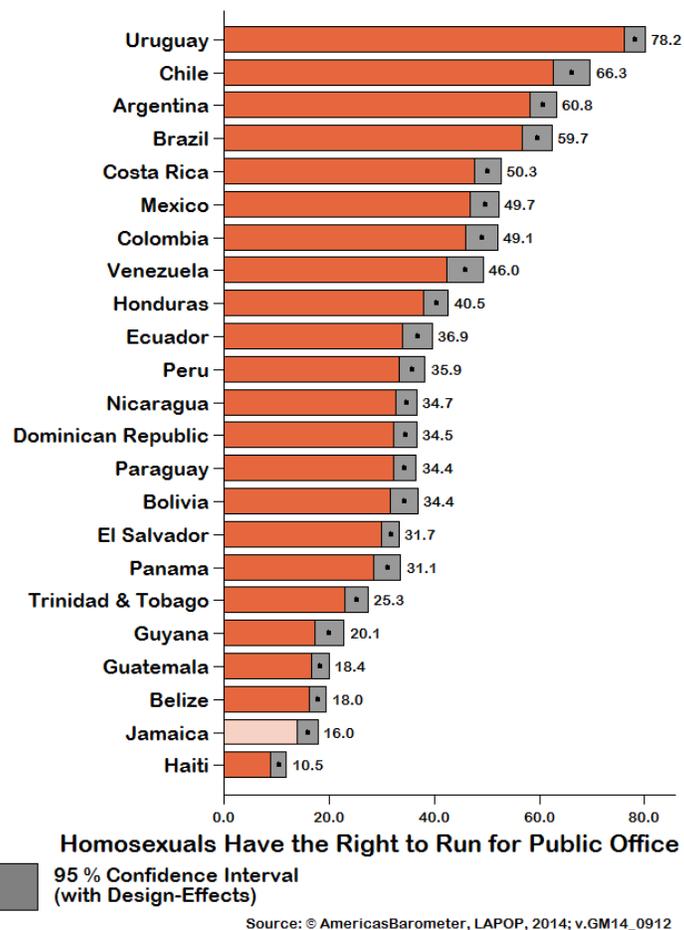
Tolerance, understood as support for the political and social rights of others, rests on the principle of respect. *Social tolerance* is civility and inclusiveness in practice (Schatz, 2003a) and relates to respect for the personal choices and lifestyles of others even when those preferences vary from one's own and/or the majority. Conversely, intolerance implies a tendency towards social exclusion and support for discrimination. One group that has been the victim of social exclusion and discrimination in Jamaica is the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, & Transgender (LGBT) Community.

Over the years, the AmericasBarometer has collected data on the level of support for granting civil and political rights to homosexuals. In this *Insights* report¹ I assess one dimension of social tolerance in Jamaica, public support for the political rights of gay individuals. I do so by analyzing responses to the following question:

D5. And now, changing the topic and thinking of homosexuals, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office?

It has been suggested that “in hugely interesting ways, states have come to see that their political power, their legitimacy, indeed their standing as global citizens, are now bound up with how they recognize and treat ‘their’ gay citizens” (Franke 2009, 4-5). This is an opportune moment to assess attitudes toward homosexuals in Jamaica as several countries in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region have been moving to offer equal

Figure 1. Average Degrees of Approval of Homosexual Rights of Running for Office, 2014



rights to same-sex couples (Forge 2011). Within the region, Jamaica has commonly been described as *intolerant* towards the political rights of homosexuals by international human rights groups and activists for homosexual rights (Strommen 2014).

Figure 1 affirms this general assessment: On a 0-100 measure of degrees of support for the rights of homosexuals to run for office, Jamaica ranks second to last in the (LAC) region.

¹ This report is based on Chapter 8 of the 2014 Jamaica report which can be found here: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/jamaica/AB2014_Jamaica_Country_Report_V3_W_061115.pdf

It is safe to say that no single cause is likely to explain attitudes toward gay individuals in Jamaica; rather, what we can do is to examine levels of tolerance or acceptance of the rights of homosexuals and the factors related to those attitudes.

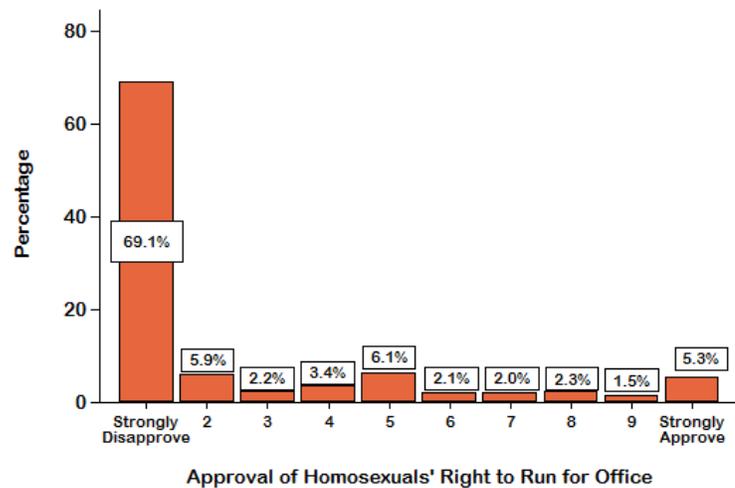
Support for the Rights of Homosexuals to Run for Public Office

Figure 2 presents the distribution of responses on the original 1 to 10 scale to the AmericasBarometer question regarding the rights of homosexuals to run for public office in Jamaica. As suggested already by Figure 1, the overwhelming majority of Jamaicans are intensely opposed to allowing homosexuals this basic democratic right. Nearly seven out of ten (69.1 percent) select the most extreme level of disapproval, while only 5.3 percent say that they “strongly approve.” Even if we combine the percentages on the approval side of the scale (6-10), that still only adds up to 11.1 percent of respondents approving of the right of homosexuals to run for public office to some degree.

To put these low levels of approval in perspective, I compare tolerance towards the rights of gay individuals to run for office with tolerance towards the rights of regime critics to participate in politics. In the AmericasBarometer survey, respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they support the rights of citizens who are critical of the regime to run for public office.² On a scale

² D3. Still thinking of those who only say bad things about the Jamaican form of government, how strongly do you

Figure 2. Approval of Homosexuals' Right to Run for Public Office



Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2014; v.GM14_0912

of 0-100, Jamaicans' level of support for regime critics' rights is 41.6 degrees as opposed to homosexuals' rights which is 16 degrees. The

Seven out of ten Jamaicans strongly disapprove of the right of homosexuals to run for public office. Only one in twenty strongly approves.

marked difference (25.6 degrees) in these levels of support illustrates a strong discriminatory tendency toward homosexuals with regards to their rights to freely participate in political processes.

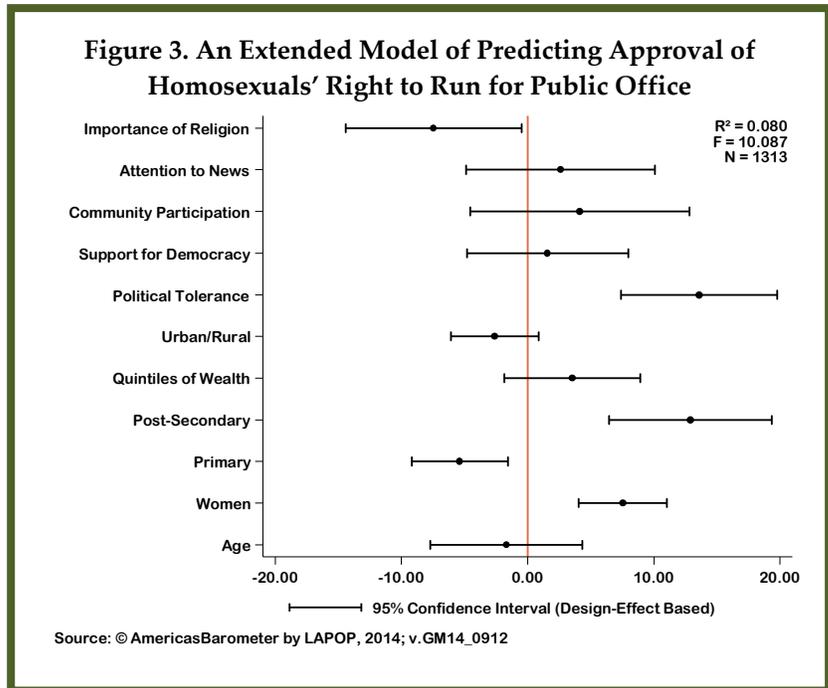
Who Supports the Political Rights of Homosexuals in Jamaica?

With such a substantial segment of the population in favor of denying homosexuals the right to seek political office, it is useful to establish the categories in society that are more likely to be tolerant of this minority group. With this objective in mind, a linear regression

approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office?

model composed of selected socio-demographic and other relevant factors is tested and the results are presented graphically in Figure 3.³

It has been argued that the churches have contributed to the marginalization of homosexuals in Jamaica by openly characterizing the lifestyle as an affront to the teachings of the Bible and as otherwise immoral. It is therefore assumed that religiosity, measured here as the importance of religion in peoples' lives, would be a relevant factor.⁴ Education⁵ has also been cited as an important indicator of tolerance (Seligson and Morales, 2010). It is assumed here, nonetheless, that given the pervasiveness of the intolerance



³ Political Tolerance is measured with an index combining the following four questions: **D1.** There are people who only say bad things about the Jamaican form of government, not just the incumbent government but the system of government. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people's right to vote? Please read me the number from the scale: [Probe: To what degree?]; **D2.** How strongly do you approve or disapprove that such people be allowed to conduct peaceful demonstrations in order to express their views? Please read me the number; **D3.** Still thinking of those who only say bad things about the Jamaican form of government, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office?; **D4.** How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches? **Urban:** Urban is a dummy variable, coded as 1 if the respondent lives in an urban region, and 0 if the respondent lives in a rural area. **Quintiles of Wealth:** The wealth measure is a five category variable that is generated using a series of items about household possessions; for more information see Córdova 2009 (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/10806en.pdf>)

Women: The gender dummy variable takes the 1 value if the respondent is female. **Age:** Age is grouped into the following categories: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-65, and 65+.

⁴ Importance of Religion: **Q5B.** Could you please tell me how important is religion in your life? [Read options] (1) Very important (2) Rather important (3) Not very important (4) Not at all important.

⁵ Education: **ED.** How many years of schooling have you completed? This variable is divided to combine "none" and "primary," and the two more categories are "secondary" and "post-secondary." For this variable, "secondary" is the baseline. (In Figure 5 "none" and "primary" are combined)

shown towards gays in Jamaica, in addition to education, an individual's exposure to what is happening elsewhere in the world or awareness of current affairs might be a factor. As a consequence, I control for "Attention to News," which is a measure of the frequency of "attention to the news whether by TV, radio, newspapers or the internet."⁶ Level of community participation⁷ may also be relevant and so the community participation index is added to the model.

It is assumed as well, that an individual's level of support for democracy⁸ might influence the

⁶ **G10.** About how often do you pay attention to the news, whether on TV, the radio, newspapers or the internet? [Read alternatives]: (1) Daily (2) A few times a week (3) A few times a month (4) Rarely (5) Never (recoded from 0-100 with higher scores indicating more attention to news)

⁷ Community Participation is based on an index of three questions: "I am going to read you a list of groups and organizations. Please tell me if you attend meetings of these organizations at least once a week, once or twice a month, once or twice a year, or never. **CP6.** Meetings of any religious organization? Do you attend them...; **CP7.** Meetings of a parents' association at school? Do you attend them...; **CP8.** Meetings of a community improvement committee or association? Do you attend them..."

⁸ Support for Democracy: **ING4.** Changing the subject again, democracy may have problems, but it is better than

level of tolerance, hence the inclusion of a variable capturing this value.

Figure 3 provides a graphical summary of the outcome of this OLS multivariate analysis. The results show that women and the more educated are more tolerant of the rights of gay individuals to run for political office than their counterparts; those who are more politically tolerant are also more supportive. Education is an interesting variable as there is a significant shift between primary and post-secondary levels. Those with post-secondary education are significantly more tolerant, and those with only a primary (or no) education are less tolerant. It seems that the threshold for tolerance for the rights of homosexuals to run for public office is at the post-secondary level when considering education.

Those who place a high level of importance on religion are less tolerant, as expected. In contrast, I do not find the hypothesized relationships for the attention to news and community participation measures, since neither of these indicators are statistically significant according to the model.

Conclusion

On the subject of social tolerance, defined as respect and accommodation for the personal choices and lifestyle preferences of others, the results point to a tendency for social (and by extension political) exclusion among Jamaicans when it comes to the LGBT community. With regard to attitudes in this realm, the overwhelming majority of Jamaicans indicate their strong opposition to the idea of affording homosexuals the basic democratic right of running for public office. When asked to express their approval or disapproval on 10-point scale, on which 1 represents "strongly disapprove" and 10 "strongly approve," 69.1 percent of respondents selected "1," the most extreme level of disapproval while only 5.3

any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

percent responded "strongly approve." When the data on this 10-point scale is converted to a 0-100 point scale, it was found that average support among Jamaicans is just 16 degrees. It is noteworthy that this is a statistically significant decline of 5 points when compared to the 2012 LAPOP AmericasBarometer results on this same question.⁹

When we break this down further, we find that those who feel that religion is important in their lives and are less educated (meaning they do not hold a post-secondary degree) are less likely to be tolerant of homosexuals' rights to run for public office. Those with a post-secondary education level, women, and those who are more politically tolerant are more likely to be approving of these rights. It may be that the general diffusion of acceptance and rising levels of education will be key to enhancing tolerance in this realm.

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⁹ "The Political Culture of Democracy in the Americas, 2012: Towards Equality of Opportunity." <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2012/AB2012-comparative-Report-V7-Final-Cover-01.25.13.pdf>

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Appendix: Predictors of Homosexuals Right to Run for Office, Jamaica 2014

	Coefficients	(t)
Age	-1.684	(-0.56)
Women	7.554*	(-4.34)
Primary	-5.363*	(-2.84)
Post-Secondary	12.891*	(-4.02)
Quintiles of Wealth	3.543	(-1.32)
Urban/Rural	-2.603	(-1.50)
Political Tolerance	13.588*	(-4.41)
Support for Democracy	1.577	(-0.5)
Community Participation	4.136	(-0.96)
Attention to News	2.616	(-0.7)
Importance of Religion	-7.445*	(-2.14)
Constant	8.084	(-1.38)
* p<0.05		
F 10.09		
No. of cases 1313		
R-Squared 0.08		