

Where Religion Slides, Homosexuality Finds Acceptance

A survey on Tuesday shows a world divided over the acceptance of gays, with countries in Africa and the Middle East strongly opposed even as tolerance grows in Europe, the United States, Canada and parts of Latin America.

People in predominately Muslim countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Indonesia and Pakistan along with Nigeria, Senegal and other African nations overwhelming said gay men and lesbians should be rejected from society at large, the Pew Research Center survey of nearly 40 countries found.

At the same time, acceptance of homosexuality continued to grow in North America and most of Europe, according to the survey, which polled nearly 38,000 people in 39 countries.

Some nations, such as Israel, Poland and Bolivia, were split.

"Acceptance of homosexuality is particularly widespread in countries where religion is less central in people's lives. These are also among the richest countries in the world," Pew said in its summary of the findings.

"In contrast, in poorer countries with high levels of religiosity, few believe homosexuality should be accepted by society," it added.

Still, in some countries where religion tends to be less central—such as Russia and China—gays have yet to gain acceptance, Pew found. Sixteen percent of Russians and 21 percent of Chinese were supportive.

One leading indicator of gay tolerance is same-sex marriage, which is now legal in 13 countries, including France,

Argentina and South Africa, as well as parts of the United States and Mexico.

But anti-gay sentiment persists in much of the world.

In Nigeria, where sodomy is punishable by jail, the House of Representatives passed a bill last month to criminalize gay marriage, same-sex “amorous relationships” and even membership of a gay rights group.

Earlier on Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said foreign same-sex couples should be barred from adoptions, saying that he would support a bill allowing only “traditional” families to adopt Russian children.

In the Pew survey, age and gender were also important factors in respondents’ attitudes, with women and younger adults more likely to say they are tolerant of homosexuality.

Even in nations such as France and the United States where most men and women back gay rights, women are more likely to be accepting by at least 10 percentage points, according to the poll.

Younger generations were also “consistently more likely than older ones to say homosexuality should be accepted by society” even in countries that overall are more supportive of gays, Pew said.

For example, 54 percent of all Japanese polled offered support. But 83 percent of those younger than 30 said they accepted gays compared to about 40 percent of those 50 and older. In the United States, 70 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds supported gays compared with 52 percent of those ages 50 and older.

Even in Lebanon, where 80 percent of those polled said they reject homosexuality, attitudes are changing. Nearly 30 percent of Lebanese aged 29 and younger said gays should be

accepted compared to just 10 percent of those 50 or older.

The poll, which was conducted between March and May, has a margin of error of between plus-or-minus 3.1 percentage points and plus-or-minus 7.7 percentage points.

Reporting by Susan Heavey; additional reporting by Laura MacInnis; Editing by Leslie Adler

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