

# Media Representation of LGBTQ People in Africa



Arcus commissioned this report in the context of strategic planning of its Social Justice Program. The report was commissioned as part of an effort to learn about LGBTQ communities in Arcus' focus geographic regions and countries, where the foundation aims to increase safety, legal protections, and acceptance and inclusion. The following information reflects the opinions of its authors and not necessarily those of Arcus. Arcus uses some but not all of the findings to guide grantmaking decisions.

## Scope & Purpose

This baseline media scan includes 150 fully coded news media clips from South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Botswana, and Malawi. The clips mostly consist of online and print text stories (plus accompanying photos), with a few radio and TV stories in the mix. Most clips are reported news and feature stories, with some op-eds included. All coded media clips were published between January 1, 2017, and June 30, 2018. International news wire stories were excluded from the scan. Stories produced by progressive or LGBTQ+ community publications were excluded except when republished in mainstream news outlets (a story produced by the progressive news outlet *GroundUp* and republished in South Africa’s *Mail & Guardian* is included, for example). This scoping exercise was completed in part to establish a baseline by which to measure the [Social Justice Program](#)’s goal of increased acceptance and inclusion, with particular focus on two indicators:

- Positive or neutral media coverage of LGBTQ+ issues and communities (especially those communities that are most marginalized), including reduced instances of misgendering transgender individuals.
- Number of public statements and actions by political leaders, faith leaders, and influencers that are pro-LGBTQ+ or show recognition of power and leadership by LGBTQ+ advocates and their allies.

## MMRC Rating

For the purpose of this scoping study, MMRC Ratings are modeled on the [Taboom Media Monitoring and Response Coalition](#)’s 5-point scale. The MMRC mobilizes journalists, activists, faith leaders, lawyers, policymakers, and other community stakeholders to rapidly and collaboratively track and combat problematic media portrayals of taboo human rights topics in a unified and systematic manner. For Taboom’s coalition, a rating of 1 indicates media clips that are excellent in their ethical and professional treatment of SSOGIE issues. Media clips rated 1 trigger a low-priority two-month response deadline before which local media monitors should thank journalists for producing fair and accurate coverage and suggest additional story angles and sources for subsequent coverage. A rating of 5 indicates news media content that is imminently dangerous in its irresponsible, biased, or incendiary treatment of SSOGIE issues, triggering rapid coordinated responses from local affirming stakeholders and continent-wide coalition partners if deemed prudent.

For the purpose of this study, which focuses primarily on coverage tone and source statement tone (which includes direct quotes, op-eds, and other material attributed to a source), we can simplify the 5-point scale to mean that a clip is broadly: 1 = Excellent, 2 = Mostly Good, 3 = Fair or Mixed, 4 = Poor/Problematic, 5 = Terrible/Dangerous.

A “mixed” story might receive a rating of 3 when its coverage tone and quotes significantly and evenly diverge (one positive, the other negative). Ratings of 5 are reserved for extraordinary circumstances.

The numeric rating largely indicates the clip’s overall tone. We can also think of these numeric ratings as indicating:

1. Excellent stories we should champion and highlight
2. Stories that are generally positive but have minor problematic issues we would like to see improved in future reporting
3. Stories that may be incomplete, contain errors, feature improperly weighted negative voices, and so on. They are in the middle.
4. Stories that do more harm than good. They contain significant flaws.
5. The most dangerous or egregious stories.

The average MMRC rating for clips from each country in the study may shine some light on the general state of coverage with regard to LGBTQ+-related attitudes when we compare one country to another.

## Tone Matrices

In order to determine a clip’s overall coverage tone and source statements tone, it was necessary to identify several relevant indicators. The following two rationale frameworks were adapted from the peer-reviewed *Gender Links* paper, “A snapshot of LGBT media coverage in East, West and Southern Africa.” If a clip contained indicators from more than one column, the clip was assigned the most appropriate rating, considering the story’s overall tone, author’s presumed intent, balance of source statements, and so on. If an indicator category was irrelevant to or absent from a story (if the story had no visuals/photos, for example), the category was ignored.

*The letters of the acronym LGBTQI—referring to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex persons—appear in various forms and combinations on the following pages depending on their use by the individuals or the organizations referenced.*

Coverage Tone Matrix		
Positive/Neutral Coverage	Incomplete Coverage	Negative Coverage
Includes sufficient LGBTQI+ and ally voices	Includes insufficient LGBTQI+ and ally voices	Includes zero LGBTQI+ or ally voices
Challenges negative myths/stereotypes	Repeats myths/stereotypes without adequate interrogation	Perpetuates negative myths/stereotypes
Has a fair, balanced, and objective approach	Has an objective approach but unjust weighting of sources or information	Displays clear bias, moralizing, fearmongering, sensationalizing, prejudice, ridicule, and so on
Uses accessible language	Uses inaccurate or inadequate explanation of terms/jargon	Uses stereotypical, biased, dog-whistle language
Uses accurate and inclusive terminology	Misuses terms but with no apparent malice	Uses discriminatory or dehumanizing terms
Includes accurate factual research, history, and context	Relies on insufficient or questionable research, history, and context	Uses false or only negative research, history, and context
Takes source safety seriously (anonymity, etc.)	Inadequately addresses or acknowledges source safety.	Shows dangerous or deliberate disregard for source safety
Uses relevant affirming visuals/photos	Uses generic (rainbow flag-type) visuals/photos	Uses demonizing visuals/photos

Source Statements Tone Matrix		
Positive Statements	Neutral Statements	Negative Statements
Includes sufficient LGBTQI+ and ally voices	Includes insufficient LGBTQI+ and ally voices	Includes zero LGBTQI+ or ally voices
Challenges negative myths/stereotypes	Repeats myths/stereotypes without interrogation	Perpetuates negative myths/stereotypes
Uses accessible/affirming language	Provides clear/generic statements of situational facts	Uses stereotypical, biased, dog-whistle language
Properly uses accurate, inclusive, terms	Misuses terms but with no apparent malice	Uses discriminatory or dehumanizing terms
Cites accurate factual research, history, and context	Cites insufficient or questionable research, history, and context	Cites false or only negative research, history, and context

## Methodology for Collection and Coding

This study began with preliminary emails, phone calls, and in-person meetings with media monitoring partners and activist organizations in each priority country.

Partners were asked to send relevant media clips they had already collected from within and beyond the 18-month scoping period. These engagements were also used to determine which media outlets the study should prioritize and which relevant local-language keywords should be scanned as well as to gather partners' general impressions of existing LGBTQI+ media coverage in each country.

After determining priority news outlets (based primarily on circulation, reach, and influence), keyword media searches were conducted using Google News Search, Google Web Search (which included website-specific searches of each priority news outlet), PressReader, and Dow Jones Factiva. Advanced searches surfaced the most relevant stories based on each service's algorithm from within the period under study. Stories from international news wires, duplicate stories, and very short or unremarkable briefs were eliminated to collect the 40 most relevant clips from each country. In Botswana and Malawi, these 40 clips represent a near exhaustive survey of English LGBTQI+ reporting from within the study period. In Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa, which have larger media environments and therefore more coverage, exhaustive scans would have been infeasible given this project's time constraints. Therefore, this study necessarily depended on search-engine algorithms to surface the most relevant and representative samples and clips.

## General Observations

The tables that follow help quantify and reinforce some general observations from this scope of five countries.

South African news media coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities is by far the best, as measured by nearly every indicator below. Although 30 clips for each country is a small sample from which to draw statistically significant conclusions, the general impression of each country's coverage perfectly matches the average MMRC rating results, which place South Africa at the top in terms of positive coverage and source statement tone, followed by Botswana, Malawi, Kenya, and Uganda. Malawi's score was no doubt dragged down by its four MMRC ratings of 5, three of which resulted from dangerous coverage of the same incident involving a transgender woman (all appearing in different publications) and a comparatively poor level of journalistic professionalism. That being acknowledged, Malawi's placement in the middle (below South Africa and Botswana but above Kenya and Uganda) is accurate and appropriate by other measures, including source statements and coverage tone.

Uganda is the only country to feature a majority of source statements that are negative in tone. It also has the fewest stories (by far) that are positive or neutral in coverage tone. Together, these indicators readily explain its bottom MMRC ranking.

Unlike in Kenya and Uganda, where most stories focus on "homosexuality" in the abstract rather than in the context of a news story (reinforced by the lack of LGBTQI+ sources cited), most stories from South Africa and Botswana humanize LGBTQI+ people by acknowledging their existence, using their names (safely—acknowledging their awareness and consent), and amplifying their voices.

Overall Coverage Tone						
	South Africa	Kenya	Uganda	Botswana	Malawi	TOTAL
<b>Positive/Neutral</b>	24	11	5	19	13	72
<b>Incomplete</b>	6	7	14	10	8	45
<b>Negative</b>	0	12	11	1	9	33



### Overall Source Statements Tone

	South Africa	Kenya	Uganda	Botswana	Malawi	TOTAL
<b>Positive</b>	22	10	6	22	13	73
<b>Neutral</b>	7	10	6	7	9	39
<b>Negative</b>	1	10	18	1	8	38

### SSOGIE/LGBTQI+ Sources Included

	South Africa	Kenya	Uganda	Botswana	Malawi	TOTAL
<b>Yes</b>	21	9	5	23	14	72
<b>No</b>	9	21	25	7	16	78

### Story Contains Discriminatory, Stereotypical, Sensational, Moralizing, and/or Marginalizing Language

	South Africa	Kenya	Uganda	Botswana	Malawi	TOTAL
<b>Yes</b>	6	16	22	8	19	71
<b>No</b>	24	14	8	22	11	79

### Number of Stories by MMRC Rating

MMRC Rating	South Africa	Kenya	Uganda	Botswana	Malawi	TOTAL
<b>1</b>	10	2	1	3	2	18
<b>2</b>	14	12	5	18	12	61
<b>3</b>	6	4	15	7	8	40
<b>4</b>	0	11	9	2	4	26
<b>5</b>	0	1	0	0	4	5

### Average MMRC Rating

	South Africa	Kenya	Uganda	Botswana	Malawi	TOTAL
<b>Average Rating (1-5)</b>	1.87	2.9	3.07	2.67	2.87	2.68

## Country-Specific Observations

### Botswana

A communications officer at a prominent LGBTQI+ organization in Botswana said he has witnessed an increase in positive media coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities in recent years but that some negative coverage and sensational headlines persist.

Regarding the misgendering of trans individuals, he said that during one legal battle involving an individual’s efforts to change their sex from male to female on identity documents, there were instances of misgendering in headlines and article text. He attributes this not to malicious intentions but to ignorance among reporters and the general public about transgender and intersex persons.

Concerning the number of pro-LGBTQI+ public statements and actions by political leaders, faith leaders, and influencers, he said, “To some degree one can say there has been a mild increase, but many community leaders do not want to tackle the sexuality and gender issue, and when they do, it’s to condemn it. When the current president of Botswana Mokgweetsi Masisi was vice president, he said his political party was not ready or willing to make a stand on LGBTQI+ issues. During a speech in May 2018, he said everyone in Botswana deserves to have their human rights protected, but he did not explicitly mention LGBTQI+ people. Although church leaders and traditional leaders mostly shun the community, and some queer people are taken to churches to ‘pray the gay away,’ there are religious leaders that vehemently protect LGBTQI+ people.”

This media scoping of Botswana found broadly positive and professional news coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities. Given Botswana’s small population (just 2.3 million)

and news environment, this coverage was relatively scarce; therefore, the results for this country are the most exhaustive in the study.

Compared to Kenya, Uganda, or Malawi, the reporting on transgender issues in Botswana was quite good, but some instances of misgendering persist, as does general confusion among reporters. Nearly all of the reporting on the aforementioned legal case mentions “gender markers,” which a prominent local LGBTQI+ organization confirmed is inaccurate. National identity cards list sex, not gender. Similar conflation of sex and gender is unfortunately common in most media around the world, including in prominent and respected U.S. outlets.

Speaking directly about trans and intersex issues, a representative from a trans and intersex organization said she has seen an increase in positive media coverage among private media this year, with social media helping to boost this trend, but that state media continue to ignore LGBTQI+ issues. She said misgendering has not decreased, but political leaders are willing to speak out positively about LGBTQI+ issues to boost their approval ahead of elections. Given that LGBTQI+ people are often demonized and scapegoated ahead of elections (as has happened in Zimbabwe, for example), this is an extremely positive development and one that should be monitored closely. She also said her organization is attracting more faith leaders as allies, which is another positive development.

Like in South Africa, many of the Botswana clips that were coded focus on legal cases that address the affirmation of LGBTQI+ people’s human rights. Botswana had the most stories with SSOGIE sources cited, leading to mostly positive statements.

### Key Botswana Clips

**21MAY2018**

**Positive/Neutral Coverage,  
Positive Source Statements**

#### [We are here!](#)

Lesego (op-ed author) lends a strong ally voice and argument for decriminalization, using dignity and rights language and challenging stereotypes. The news outlet *Mmegi* is often somewhat sensational on LGBTQI+ issues, so this op-ed placement is especially important.

**12MAR2018**

**Negative Coverage,  
Negative Source Statements**

#### [Inside the generational shift in Botswana’s attitudes to sex](#)

This article lumps same-sex sexual orientation and relations together with what the author identifies as a trend of sexual liberation among youth, without ever explaining this perceived connection. The author reductively hypersexualizes same-sex-attracted people. The author’s bias is clear, with such phrases as “having more sex, with more people and in

more outlandish ways,” “cringe with horror at the debauched youth,” “hedonic liberation of their inconsequential liaisons.” The two sources cited reinforce these perceptions. This is a negative story with zero LGBTQI+ or ally voices, which uses SSGIE minorities as a throwaway example, effectively sensationalizing and distorting their lived realities.

**3AUG2017**

**Incomplete Coverage,  
Positive Source Statements**

**Man sues for recognition as woman**

While this headline misgenders a transwoman as a “man,” which is egregious, this may not have been the author’s decision. Editors normally write headlines, and authors often do not get a chance to approve them or to even see them before their stories are published. The fact that the online version of this article, published more than a year ago, still misgenders the plaintiff in the headline is especially concerning.

**1SEP2017**

**Incomplete Coverage,  
Neutral Source Statements**

**Revealed: The dark world of male, female sex work**

The author’s intentions seem to be good, and the sourcing is good, but there are several critical problems with this story. These include an extremely sensational headline and insufficient photo blurring, potentially compromising source anonymity. There is moralizing/judgmental demonization of sex work clients (“surprise secret lives of high-profile clients who masquerade as upstanding citizens”). The phrase “guided by their lobbyists” strips activists of agency. The author errs on the side of anonymity by giving everyone pseudonyms, which is certainly better than outing people, but some who identified themselves to the room might have wished to have their names in print, and this should have been a conversation they were able to participate in. The faith leaders’ strongly anti-sex-work views should have been more thoroughly interrogated.

**Malawi**

In an interview for this study, a programs manager for a Malawian NGO that works on sexual health and human rights of minority groups said: “We are still facing negative reporting in the media due to lack of knowledge on LGBT issues. We need to do more trainings and possibly partner with media-training institutions to train upcoming journalists. The media also lacks knowledge and misreports on transgender issues. We have very few religious, traditional, and political leaders who champion or who are able to support LGBT issues. We need to train and empower more champions who can stand up openly to challenge homophobia and support the protection of LGBT persons.”

The media clips analyzed in this study support this interviewee’s assertion that news media in Malawi fall short when reporting on transgender issues. Among the five countries surveyed, Malawi’s trans reporting is consistently the worst, misgendering sources and reinforcing dangerous stereotypes that trans people are “impersonators, performing, deceptive, fake.” Three clips reviewed are about a transgender woman sex worker who was arrested, and

feature extremely unethical reporting on transgender issues, most notably with the photographs used.

Malawi’s coverage is also the most focused on religious viewpoints from among the five countries surveyed. While some sources, including the Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected with HIV and AIDS (MANERELA+), issue mostly positive statements, in other stories too much weight is given to homophobic religious leaders. Some statements are predictably problematic (same-sex marriage is a sin, etc.), but there are rare potential allies among high-ranking Malawi religious leaders, including one preaching “love, non-exclusion and non-discrimination, regardless of sexual orientation.”

Of the five countries studied, Malawi seems to have the lowest professional standards of journalism, as evidenced by typos, errors, generally poor writing, and inadequate acknowledgment of source safety issues, such as using pseudonyms. This situation could point to a lack of resources, which may help explain why nuanced reporting of transgender and LGBTQI+ issues more broadly is also lacking.

## Key Malawi Clips

20JUL2017

**Negative Coverage,  
Neutral Source Statements**

### [MANERELA faults Malawi police over arrest of man posing as woman](#)

The shirtless “perp” photo of a transgender woman is egregious, undignified, and dangerous, considering attitudes toward LGBTQI+ people in Malawi. Listing the specific village where they are from (and perhaps still lived at the time) is also dangerous. The author deliberately misgenders the subject (“man posing as woman,” “man alleged to have been pretending to be a female prostitute”). A reference to police officers laughing at the subject’s genitals is particularly demeaning and unprofessional. This story violated serious journalism ethics and deserved immediate response from media watchdogs and other NGOs.

17NOV2017

**Positive/Neutral Coverage,  
Positive Source Statements**

### [MANERELA to build LGBTI inclusiveness among Malawi faith community](#)

This story profiles MANERELA’s then-forthcoming work to build LGBTQI+ inclusiveness among faith leaders and communities. It features the voices of many LGBTQI+ people and strong faith allies and documents some of the challenges SSOIGIE minorities face. It is riddled with typos, illustrating the types of resource and capacity constraints many newsrooms in Malawi face.

6OCT2017

**Positive/Neutral Coverage,  
Positive Source Statements**

### [New door for at-risk men](#)

This is a very humanizing story that provides voice to MSM, allowing them to express their own concerns and the challenges they face seeking health care. It includes relevant ally voices and provides the public service of informing readers who may need services about where they can find clinics. There are a few minor phrasing issues (gay, MSM, homosexual used interchangeably as synonyms despite important nuances that distinguish these terms and the “risky sex web” phrase), but on the whole, this is an excellent piece.

25APR2018

**Negative Coverage, Negative  
Source Statements**

### [Malawi police arrest man suspected of being gay in Mzuzu, charged with ‘gross indecency’](#)

This article is dangerous. The entire second half of the article gives a platform to the Muslim Association of Malawi’s view that gay people should be condemned to death and does not challenge this idea with counter opinions. While an unnamed rights activist is rightly quoted saying, “Homosexuality is not illegal in Malawi” (identity is not illegal, just same-sex sexual activity, and mostly just among men/males), insufficient voice is given to alternative affirming perspectives. This and other articles reference a “famous gay couple.” One of the people in this couple is a trans woman, so this is likely a case of misgendering.



## Uganda

The executive director of a prominent LGBTQI+ organization in Uganda says he has seen an increase in neutral and positive news media coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities in the past two years, but also an increase in negative coverage, including more misgendering of trans people. Public statements and actions by political leaders, faith leaders, and influencers increasingly recognize power and leadership among LGBTQI+ advocates and their allies. But this recognition is not necessarily a good thing, as opponents continue to weaponize the perceived Western roots of this power, denying and undermining Ugandan activists’ agency and autonomy.

From among the five countries surveyed, Uganda has the most source statements that are negative in tone, the fewest stories that are positive or neutral in coverage tone, the fewest that feature LGBTQI+ sources, and the most that contain discriminatory, stereotypical, sensational, moralizing, marginalizing, and/or misgendering language.

Ugandan media clips retrieved in this scan are unique among those of other countries in that a majority address “homosexuality” as an abstract concept or ideology rather than a sexual orientation. In most of these articles, “homosexuality” is discussed without reference to actual people, which is extremely dehumanizing.

Most of the Ugandan articles focus on government efforts to restrict or erase SSOIE issues from schools, prisons, and

public life. They focus more on HIV than do clips from other countries. Many of these clips contain false and dangerous misconceptions about homosexuality and MSM or WSW. They feature many examples of gross journalistic negligence, letting ridiculous or easily disprovable source statements go unchallenged. By failing to offer alternative voices, and failing to properly fact check or attribute sources’ dubious statements, those statements are given more credibility than they deserve.

Many of Uganda’s headlines are sensational and clearly inaccurate or at odds with the story text that follows. Such headlines include: “Gay sex-for-food rocks prisons,” “Gay sex between prisons staff shocks Byabashaija,” “School is no longer the place for innocents,” “Rights activists are agents of the devil – Papal Nuncio,” “Row erupts over purchase of Shs3b sex lubricants for homosexuals,” “I’m trapped in a woman’s body,” “Panic as 40 MPs get pro-gay magazines in mail boxes,” “Suspected homosexual activist wanted.”

Statements (both quotes and op-eds) from religious leaders are also worse in Uganda than in other countries surveyed, partly because authors rarely balance them with affirming voices that challenge their hatred. Notable examples of such statements come from Church of Uganda Archbishop Stanley Ntagali and Archbishop Michael August Blume, who was the Vatican’s representative to Uganda but is originally from the United States. Both men characterize homosexuality as un-Christian, evil, witchcraft, the work of the devil.

### Key Uganda Clips

**26APR2018**

**Negative Coverage,  
Negative Source Statements**

#### [MPs want anti-homosexuality bill re-introduced in Parliament](#)

This is a video without any journalistic narration that features several members of Parliament spewing homophobic hatred in their calls for an anti-homosexuality bill to be reintroduced. The video is wholly negative and dehumanizing, featuring no affirming voices. Discriminatory quotes from MPs include: “homosexuality is unnatural, inhuman,” “as long as you cannot give us children, remember God has given us the responsibility to be the factory,” and “it’s uncouth, unacceptable, unthinkable, unwarranted, uncalled for, unAfrican,” “we must stand firm for who we are.” A young MP says: “Our generation is against this vice of homosexuality,” and “we’ll do a roll call, we’ll see those who are going to hide, and we’ll expose them.”

**10JUL2017**

**Negative Coverage,  
Positive Source Statements**

#### [I’m trapped in a woman’s body](#)

The author of this story is blatantly transphobic and insists on misgendering her source (“‘I’m a man,’ she says softly”), yet gives that source a significant platform to express some of the many challenges he has faced. The piece is simultaneously humanizing (due to source statements) and demonizing (due to the author’s awful tone). The aftereffects of this story demonstrate the serious consequences that can follow when a source’s safety is not

respected. The author says the subject prefers not to use his full name, but the author lists it multiple times, along with the neighborhood where he lives. A representative from one organization said that, after this story was published, the subject, who identifies as a trans man, was kidnapped and later rescued by another organization and the Ugandan police. Even if the subject did consent to having his photo taken and gave the author his full name, given the climate in Uganda, a responsible journalist would have confirmed multiple times with the source that he wanted these published, explaining the context and potential dangers (practicing “informed consent”).

16JUN2017

Positive/Neutral Coverage,  
Positive Source Statements

### [Panic as 40 MPs get pro-gay magazines in mail boxes](#)

This story recounts a perfect publicity stunt orchestrated by the Ugandan LGBTQI+ community publication *Kuchu Times*. Though the piece is ostensibly about the distribution of a magazine, it essentially serves as a free press release, alerting readers that *Bombastic Magazine* exists and that a new issue is being circulated. The author’s tone is objective, providing more information about *Kuchu Times* and *Bombastic* than some writers might. It’s slightly sensational (for good reason), and describes Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera as a “pro-homosexuality activist,” which is a slightly odd mischaracterization of an LGBTQI+ activist, but is otherwise neutral/positive. The source quotes, especially the closing one, make the outraged parties look petty. Ruth’s prominent voice tips the otherwise mostly neutral story to the positive side.

## Kenya

The executive producer of a prominent LGBTQI+ media organization in Nairobi says she has seen a significant increase in positive or neutral news media coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities in recent years. She acknowledges that media misgendering of trans individuals persists but says pro-LGBTQI+ public statements and actions by political leaders, faith leaders, and influencers are increasing.

Despite this progress, too many stories in this coded sample fail to include LGBTQI+ voices. Unlike in many West African countries, where few LGBTQI+ people would go on record or make themselves available to journalists, Kenya’s activist community is generally well organized and vocal, making their absence as sources in these clips noteworthy and disappointing.

As in Uganda (but to a lesser extent in Kenya), several stories focus on “homosexuality” as an abstract negative concept rather than as an integral part of people’s lives and identities. In several stories about trans and intersex issues, the authors’ and sources’ intentions seem positive and affirming, but the overall effect is negative because of terms inaccurately defined and realities of people’s lives mischaracterized, sowing confusion. Additional reporting pitfalls include misgendering and fearmongering, rampant among both authors and sources.

Kenya’s media clips are among the most sensational within the countries surveyed, as demonstrated by the following headlines: “With all these gay guys, who will marry our girls? Luo elders,” “Gay teacher held for ‘luring students,’” “Signs that your daughter is actually a lesbian living in the closet,” “Shock at Kitale school as 19 pupils engage in homosexuality,” “Gayism is slowly but surely getting tolerated at the Kenyan coast, rather grudgingly,” “Uproar as homosexuality spreads across Kisumu.”

Several sources, including President Uhuru Kenyatta and religious leaders, repeat tired tropes about LGBTQI+ issues being un-African, a Western import, nonexistent in Kenya, un-Christian, unnatural, or a mental illness, and assert that people can be “lured” or “recruited” into homosexuality. Some of these notions are reinforced by inappropriate stock photos, many of which feature unidentified white models accompanying each clip.

The clip sample includes three stories by *The Star*’s Rhoda Odhiambo, who is clearly a professional reporter committed to responsible, ethical, humanizing coverage of trans and intersex issues.

## Key Kenya Clips

20APR2018

**Negative Coverage,  
Negative Source Statements**

### [With all these gay guys, who will marry our girls? Luo elders](#)

This is one of the worst articles, from any country, in the entire media scan. The source statements are uniformly demonizing and perpetuate dangerous myths. Between the author's text and sources' statements, it ticks every negative box, providing no shortage of discriminatory language. This obsession with MSM (no mention or concern about WSW) shows how women's romantic and sexual lives are still often an afterthought (as they were when the penal code was drafted).

5MAR2018

**Positive/Neutral Coverage,  
Positive Source Statements**

### [Gay rights matter, we're all equal](#)

This is an excellent, well-argued commentary piece from a PFLAG ally (the mother of a lesbian). It dismantles stereotypes and uses affirming language to emphasize love, humanity, and equality. It is powerful and persuasive, the best piece from Kenya in this sample.

15APR2018

**Negative Coverage,  
Neutral Source Statements**

### [Uproar as homosexuality spreads across Kisumu](#)

This story presents an interesting case in that it gives ample voice to MSM/gay men, but many of the men quoted are described in ways that perpetuate dangerous myths (that sexual abuse determines sexual orientation, for example). It is a heavily sourced story but could use a stronger activist voice. The author's bias is very clear, and the story paints a picture of MSM/gay men as purely sexual and disease-ridden beings. The statement that the "number of youth being recruited into homosexuality is on the rise" is one of many dangerous and problematic phrases.

## South Africa

Considering South Africa's highly professional and developed news media landscape, relatively progressive social attitudes, and strong equal rights protections, it should come as no surprise that the country's media coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities is the most affirming and professional among those countries surveyed.

Many of the stories in this sample address equality cases brought by LGBTQI+ people against governments or individuals. Several stories follow an increasingly common pattern in South Africa, in which a mostly private citizen says something homophobic, racist, or dehumanizing on social media; news outlets pounce on it and turn it into a major national story, leading to legal action, which often ends up in court, extending the event's news cycle. While such coverage would be common in the United States were celebrities or public figures to make such statements, it's hard to imagine that a seemingly random private citizen's problematic or hateful social media post would become a national story in the United States. This regularly happens in South Africa. It could be argued that turning these social media posts into national news stories amplifies the private citizen's hateful

or dangerous speech, or alternatively that it encourages people to pause and think before spewing hate online.

Clips in this study contain statements that are dangerous (by Cape Town church leader Reverend Oscar Bougardt), affirming (by Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town Emeritus Njongonkulu Ndungane), humanizing (by transgender radio personality Lara Kruger), and negative but mostly benign (by George Mayor Melvin Naik); they come from faith leaders, government officials, and public figures.

Representatives from two South African LGBTQI+ organizations confirm that media coverage and source statements concerning LGBTQI+ issues and communities are trending positive.

One said, "Over the past year, news media have covered the Film and Publication Board's classification of 'Inxeba' [The Wound] as pornographic. In my view, the fact that the media reported on the film was one of the reasons activists were able to mobilise and have the ruling changed. I think the media are also reporting more on matters of discrimination faced by LGBTIQ people. Regarding misgendering, this is still

quite a challenge, and my sense is that tabloids such as *The Daily Sun* continue to misgender trans individuals.”

In terms of positive public statements and actions by political leaders and influencers, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa’s address at the 8th annual Desmond Tutu International Peace Lecture earlier this month was remarkable. As Rebecca Davis [wrote in the Daily Maverick](#), “There were moments at which one was reminded just how different Ramaphosa is to his predecessor—when, for instance, he condemned discrimination against ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex people’ as ‘demeaning our common humanity.’”

A prominent activist interviewed for this study says Ramaphosa’s open approach to LGBTQI+ issues is likely to affect all spheres of government and already has, as seen in this [positive development from the Ministry of Home Affairs](#).

Several articles in this study were written by the *Mail & Guardian*’s Carl Collison, who provides a nuanced, thorough, and intersectional approach to his thoughtful and revelatory reporting. His coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities is consistently excellent and worth tracking.

## Key South Africa Clips

6APR2017

Positive/Neutral Coverage,  
Positive Source Statements

### [Queer people fight for fair representation in the media](#)

This story provides valuable context on queer media coverage from the people who have actually been portrayed, and a bit of context for how queer news media coverage has evolved in South Africa in recent decades. It shows some of the real harm that comes from sensationalizing SSOIGIE sources. Quotes from queer sources in this story are extremely powerful.

7SEP2017

Positive/Neutral Coverage,  
Positive Source Statements

### [Searching for new queer terms](#)

This story shines light on how a lack of respectful terminology for indigenous LGBTQI+ issues in South Africa’s many official and unofficial languages often forces people to use cumbersome literal descriptions or English terms. This reliance on English, a “Western” language, to describe SSOIGIE issues inadvertently reinforces oppositional arguments that SSOIGIE minorities are “un-African.” The story is well sourced and exposes readers to some local language terms.

4DEC2017

Positive/Neutral Coverage,  
Positive Source Statements

### [LGBT community still faces high levels of violence – report](#)

This is a good, neutral, objective summary of an important report that highlights some of the real discrimination, violence, and oppression “LGBT” people face in South Africa. By adding survey context, it dismantles the common assumption that South Africa’s strong constitution adequately protects LGBTQI+ people.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### BRIAN PELLOT

Brian Pellot is Taboom Media's co-founding director. He speaks regularly about LGBTQI+ rights at media and human rights conferences around the world. He is based in Cape Town, South Africa, where he occasionally freelances for international news outlets and NGOs. Before Taboom, Brian served as Religion News Service's director of global strategy, as Index on Censorship's digital policy advisor, and as Free Speech Debate's online editor. He is a volunteer mentor-editor at The OpEd Project. Brian graduated from the University of Missouri with dual degrees in International Convergence Journalism and International Studies. He completed a master's degree in Modern Middle Eastern Studies at Oxford University.

## ABOUT ARCUS FOUNDATION

Founded in 2000, the Arcus Foundation is dedicated to the idea that people can live in harmony with one another and the natural world. Arcus' work is based on the belief that respect for diversity among peoples and in nature is essential to a positive future for our planet and all of its inhabitants. Arcus is among the most consistent funders of social justice work pushing for the safety, acceptance, and inclusion of LGBTQ people around the world, and of conservation work to ensure the world's great apes and gibbons can thrive in their natural habitats. The Foundation works globally and has offices in New York City and Cambridge, United Kingdom. Learn more at [www.arcusfoundation.org](http://www.arcusfoundation.org).

## DESIGN

©Emerson, Wajdowicz Studios / NYC / [www.designEWS.com](http://www.designEWS.com)

## COVER PHOTO

©Courtesy of LEGABIBO