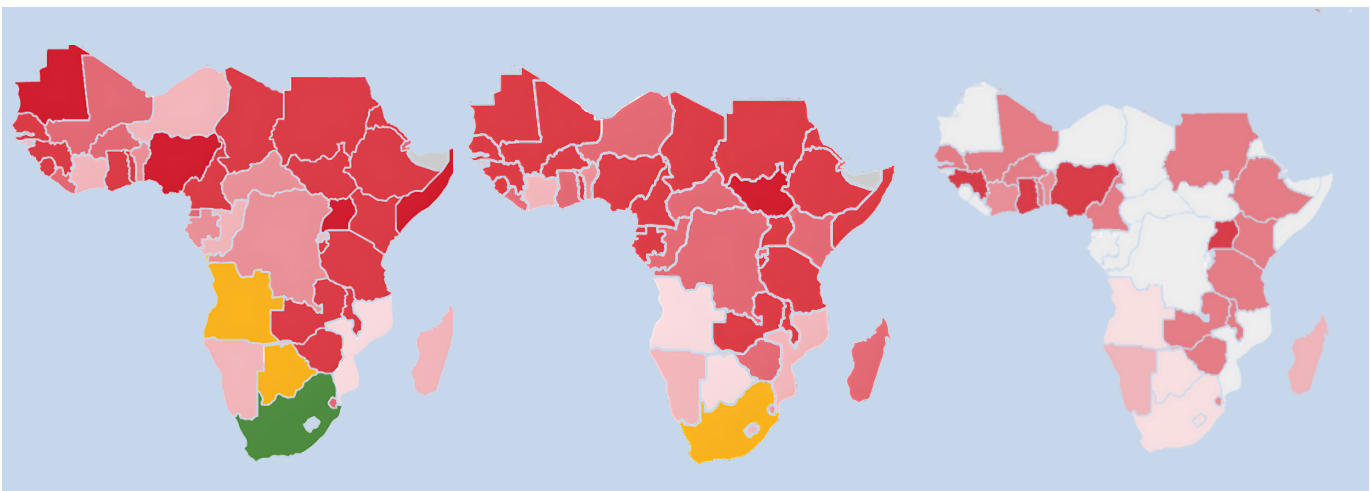


SNAPSHOT SERIES:

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

When it comes to LGBT+ human rights, Sub-Saharan Africa* may appear to be a relatively static place at first glance. As reflected in data from the F&M Global Barometers® (FMGB),** which quantify state protections, societal persecution, and lived experiences of the LGBT+ population, the majority of Sub-Saharan African countries actively persecute sexual orientation (SO) and gender identity (GI) minorities. Yet, closer analysis, using data from the F&M Global Barometer of Gay Rights® (GBGR), the F&M Global Barometer of Transgender Rights™ (GBTR) and the F&M Global Barometers LGBTQI+ Perception Index™ (GBPI) reveals diversity within each country and subregion with respect to LGBT+ rights. To learn more about the FMGB's methodology, see **page 17**.

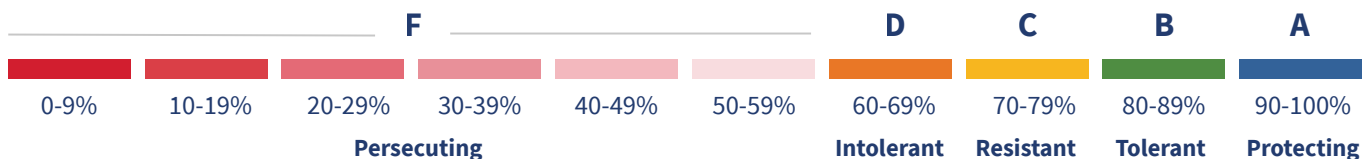


GBGR Map (2022)

GBTR Map (2022)

GBPI Map (2022)

GBGR/GBTR/GBPI Grading Scale



*Sub-Saharan Africa consists of 48 countries. Based, in part, on the UN Statistics Division classification, the region includes, in alphabetical order: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Kinshasa), Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, the Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

**All GBGR/GBTR data in this report are from version 2 (2024) of the datasets. To view the most recent datasets, visit <https://www.fandmglobalbarometers.org/>

The Legacy of Colonial Legal Systems

Sub-Saharan Africa has been greatly impacted by European colonization. Prior to colonization, the African continent held "relaxed attitudes toward sexual orientation and gender fluidity" [1]. However, Portugal, Germany, France and Britain imposed their values onto the indigenous peoples during colonization. Homophobia was one such "value" [2]. Gender fluidity and same-sex intimacy did not fit European norms and were considered "uncivilized." Consequently, some European colonizers introduced anti-sodomy laws in Sub-Saharan African countries, many of which had allowed same-sex relations for centuries [3]. Due to such laws, non-normative gender identities and sexual orientations were demonized during the long colonial rule of Africa.

Several former French colonies in the Maghreb (western and central North Africa) were exceptions to criminalizing laws since France's Penal Code of 1791 did not criminalize homosexuality [4]. Nonetheless, when some nations gained independence, anti-sodomy laws were newly introduced or remained. Some countries, such as the Seychelles, have overturned colonial laws [5]. As of 2022, 12 other Sub-Saharan African nations still have colonial-era laws criminalizing homosexuality, albeit updated: Eritrea, Eswatini, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe [6].

While colonization planted the seeds of homophobia in Africa, U.S. evangelical groups have most recently stoked homophobic fires in the region. In 2020, openDemocracy reported that 20 U.S. Christian groups "known for fighting against LGBT rights and access to safe abortion, contraceptives, and comprehensive sexuality education spent at least \$54M in Africa since 2007" [7]. These groups have poured staggering amounts of money into ensuring that their agenda, including anti-gay values, is fulfilled across Africa. For example, "[t]he Fellowship Foundation, a clandestine U.S. religious group whose Ugandan associate, David Bahati, wrote Uganda's infamous 'Kill the Gays' bill, is the biggest spender in Africa" [8].

Sub-Saharan Africa's colonial past provides some, but not all, of the reasons for the region's poor performance on the GBGR, the GBTR, and the GBPI. Ironically, leaders in countries like Ghana, Uganda and Kenya (among others) have exploited the theory that homosexuality is a Western concept in order to maintain power [9].



Top: "Colonial Presence in Africa," Facing History & Ourselves. Source: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/colonial-presence-africa>.

Bottom: "The Rhodes Colossus - Striding from Cape Town to Cairo," Edward Linley Sambourne. Source: <https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/ss:19343183>.

REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

Figure 1 shows that in 2022, 90% of the region (43 countries) actively persecuted SO minorities, while only one country (2% of the region) was tolerant toward them. No countries reached the A-Protecting range and only four countries reached the C-Resistant range.

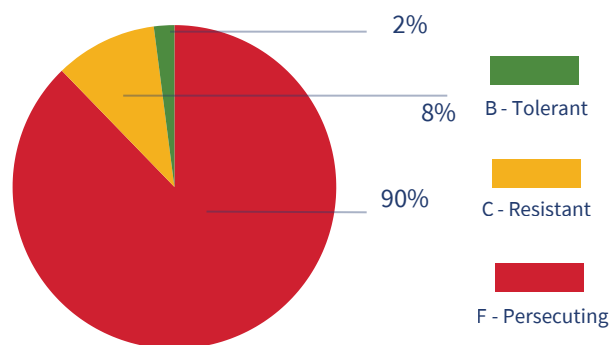


Figure 1. 2022 GBGR Score Breakdown

Figure 2 highlights the highest-scoring countries for LGB rights for the region. No country scored in the A-Protecting category; however, South Africa is the only country in the region that is even close to achieving an A.

South Africa is the region's top scorer on the GBGR; the second highest-scoring countries are former Portuguese colonies, Angola and Cabo Verde.

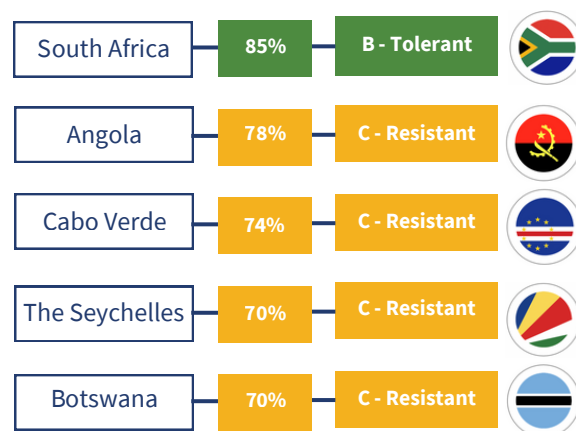


Figure 2. 2022 GBGR - Countries with the Highest Scores

Figure 3 illustrates that 98% of the region (47 countries) persecuted gender identity (GI) minorities; two percent, only one country – South Africa – was resistant toward them. South Africa allows GI minorities to serve openly in the military; allows legal gender recognition (LGR) with no psychiatric intervention; and offers GI minorities socio-economic protections.

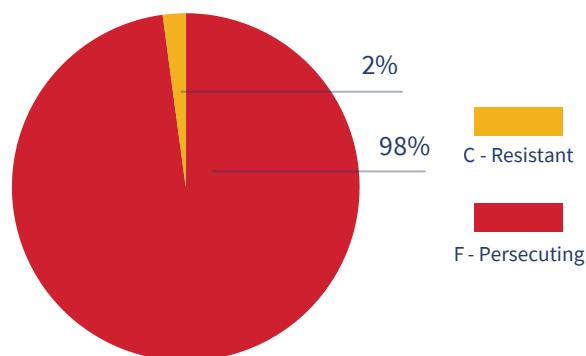


Figure 3. 2022 GBTR Score Breakdown

REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

Figure 4 shows that South Africa is the highest-scoring country in the region on the GBTR, while Cabo Verde, Botswana, and the Seychelles are each one percentage point away from the D-Intolerant category. The three latter countries do not offer socio-economic protections for GI minorities, nor do they allow GI minorities to serve openly in the military. Four of the region's top five countries remain in the F-Persecuting category, suggesting that the region has a long journey ahead in terms of protecting transgender citizens.

Figure 5 illustrates the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals in the 25 Sub-Saharan African countries with over 30 responses on the 2022 GBPI.* As illustrated in **Figure 6**, South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Mauritius and Lesotho score the highest in the region.

Notably, no country in the region scores above the F range on the GBPI. It is also evident that even if a country such as South Africa scores relatively well on the GBGR and/or on the GBTR, it does not mean that LGBTQI+ people's experiences (GBPI score) will reflect those data.

*Countries that received fewer than 30 responses on the GBPI are *omitted* from the data. The following countries *are* included in this analysis of Sub-Saharan Africa: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

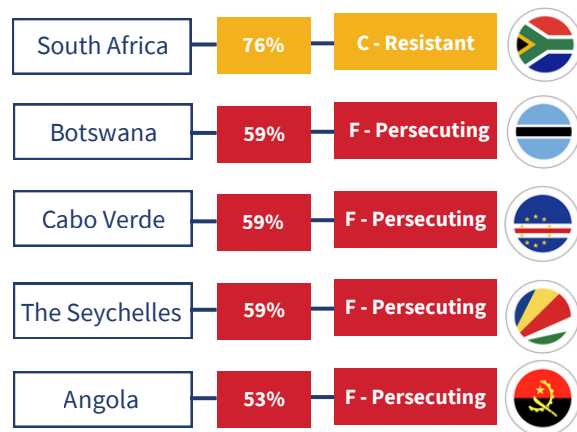


Figure 4. 2022 GBTR - Countries with the Highest Scores

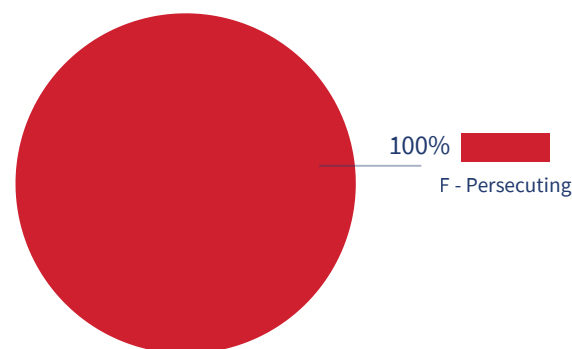


Figure 5. 2022 GBPI Score Breakdown

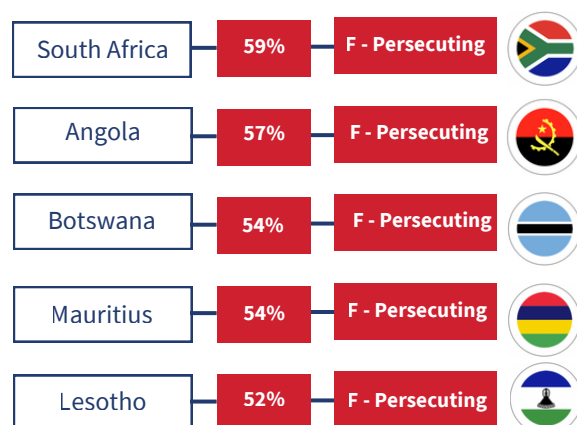


Figure 6. 2022 GBPI - Countries with the Highest Scores

SUB-REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

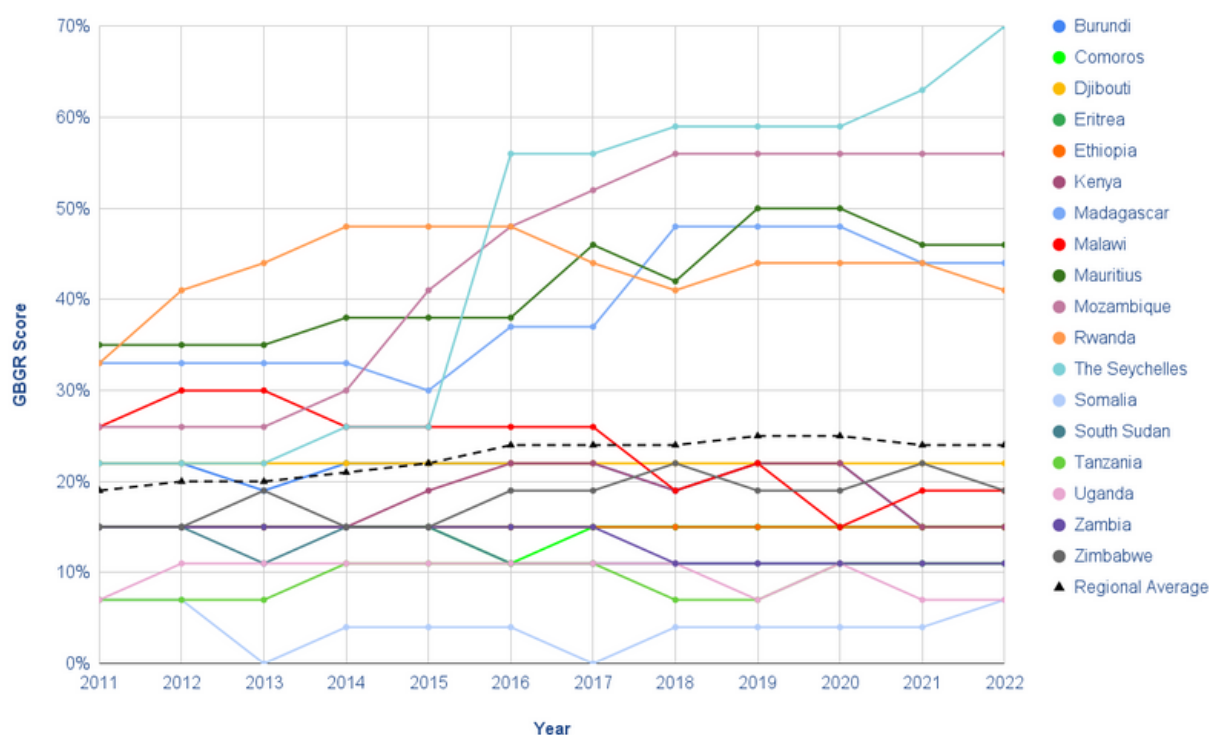
EAST AFRICA

The average GBGR scores for East Africa and the scores of each country in the subregion from 2011 to 2022 are shown in **Figure 7**, below. There is much variation within the region; countries either score well above or below the regional average.

The Seychelles stands out in the region as the highest-scoring country since 2016. The country experienced a significant increase in scores from 2015 to 2016, when amendments to the Penal Code reversed the criminalization of homosexuality [10]. This reversal removed the threat of arbitrary arrest, violations of fair trial and right to privacy, and barriers to serving openly in the military.

On the other hand, **Somalia** is the worst performer in the region, as it has scored the lowest for several years (2013-2021). In 2022, The Gambia, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Uganda all joined Somalia (seven percent). Somalia's score has fluctuated between zero and seven percent on the GBGR because it offers no protections or rights to SO minorities. Somalia's grade varies based upon whether or not murders of SO minorities are reported during a given year.

Figure 7. GBGR 2011-2022 - East Africa Scores



SUB-REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

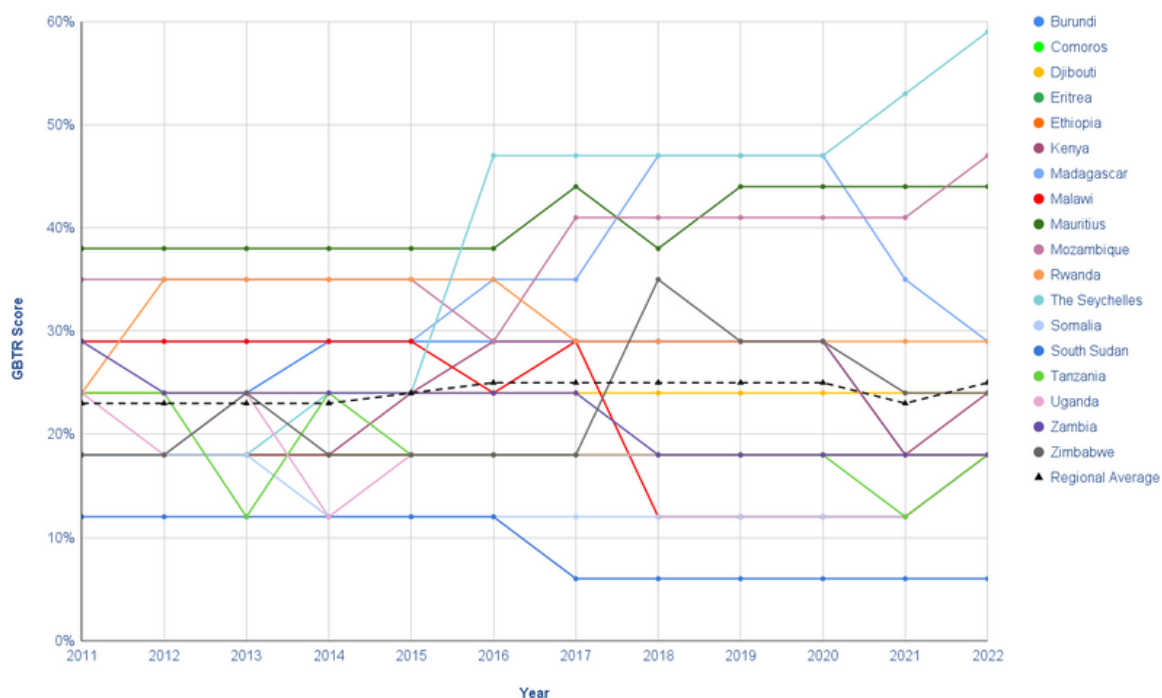
EAST AFRICA

The graph in **Figure 8**, below, displays the average GBTR scores for East Africa and the scores of each country in the subregion from 2011 to 2022. One notable observation is the significant decrease in **Malawi's** score from 2017 to 2018, which is a result of reports of transphobic violence and of the contemporaneous inability of LGBT organizations in the country to legally register or to assemble peacefully and safely, events reported in the US State Department Country Report [11] and by ILGA's 2019 State-Sponsored Homophobia Report [12].

Similarly, **Madagascar's** score decreased by 12% between 2020 and 2021 due to the state's prohibiting LGBT pride events and to reports of transphobic violence. The next year, Madagascar dropped another six percent due to further challenges to safe and peaceful assembly.

In contrast, **Zimbabwe's** score increased from 2017 to 2018 due to LGBT organizations' ability to legally register, their ability to peacefully and safely assemble, and the absence of known acts of violence against GI minorities. Zimbabwe's score then decreased between 2018 and 2022 as violent acts against GI minorities were more frequently or reliably reported.

Figure 8. GBTR 2011-2022 - East Africa Scores



SUB-REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

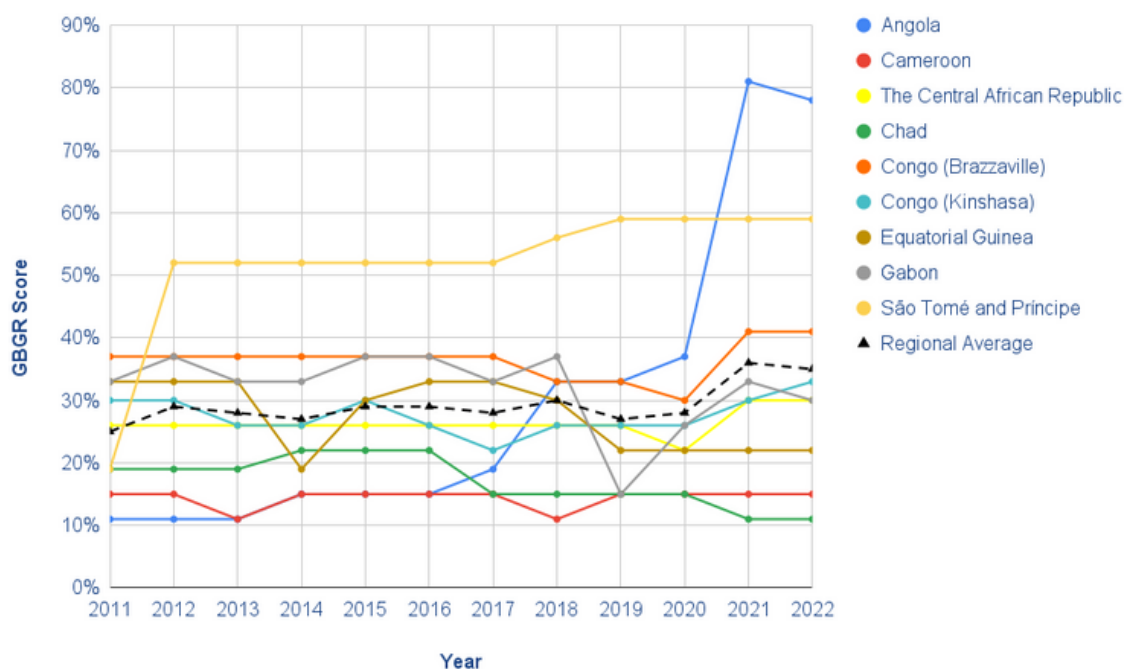
CENTRAL AFRICA

Figure 9, below, illustrates that in comparison to the GBGR country scores for East Africa, there is less variation within Central Africa, as the majority of the countries score similarly. However, Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe stand out as outliers; they are both the highest-scoring countries and also the countries with the most improved scores.

Angola's score increased from 11% in 2011 to 81% in 2021, making it the highest-scoring and most improved country in the region in terms of gay rights. This significant improvement in score tracks closely with the signing of a new penal code by Angola's president in November 2020 which decriminalized homosexuality [13].

São Tomé and Príncipe is the second highest-scoring country in the region for LGB rights. The country's score improved significantly from 2011 to 2012, also due to the decriminalization of same-sex conduct. Though São Tomé and Príncipe still scores an F-Persecuting, decriminalization in the country was followed by several positive changes between 2012 and 2022: hate crime legislation was passed in 2012; SO minorities had freedom from arbitrary arrest; the state permitted LGBT pride events starting in 2012; and a new labor code passed in 2019 allowed for employment anti-discrimination protections.

Figure 9. GBGR 2011-2022 - Central Africa Scores



SUB-REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

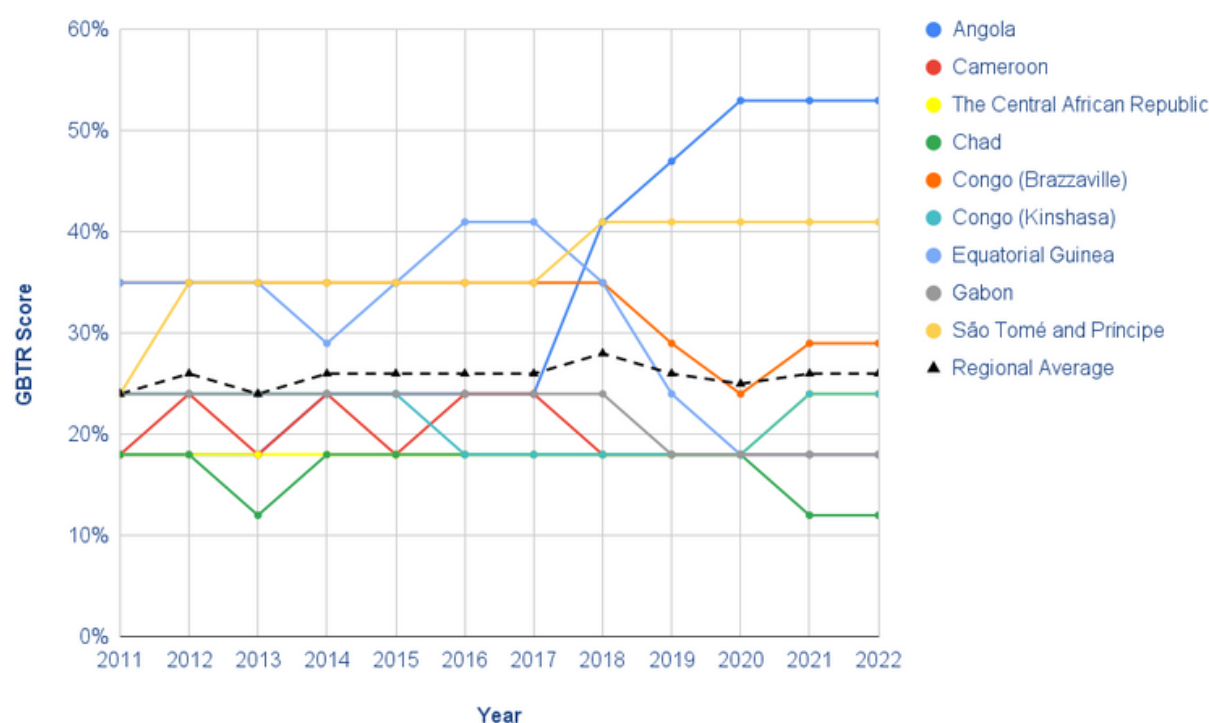
CENTRAL AFRICA

Figure 10, below, illustrates the average GBTR scores for Central Africa and the scores of each country in the subregion from 2011 to 2022. **Cameroon's** score fluctuates between 18% and 24% because of changes in reported cases of transphobic violence. Since 2018, Cameroon has consistently scored negatively in this category, resulting in its overall score stagnating at 18%.

In addition, **Equatorial Guinea** experienced a score decline from 2017 to 2020. This decline was a result of several negative changes in the country, including the inability of LGBT organizations to peacefully and safely assemble, the state's prohibiting LGBT pride during these years, and reports of transphobic violence.

Conversely, **Angola's** score increased by 29% from 2017 to 2020 due to the state's increasingly tolerant stance toward LGBT rights. Starting in 2018, LGBT organizations were legally able to register; the state permitted LGBT pride events; and transgender individuals were free from arbitrary arrest based on gender identity or expression.

Figure 10. GBTR 2011-2022 - Central Africa Scores



SUB-REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

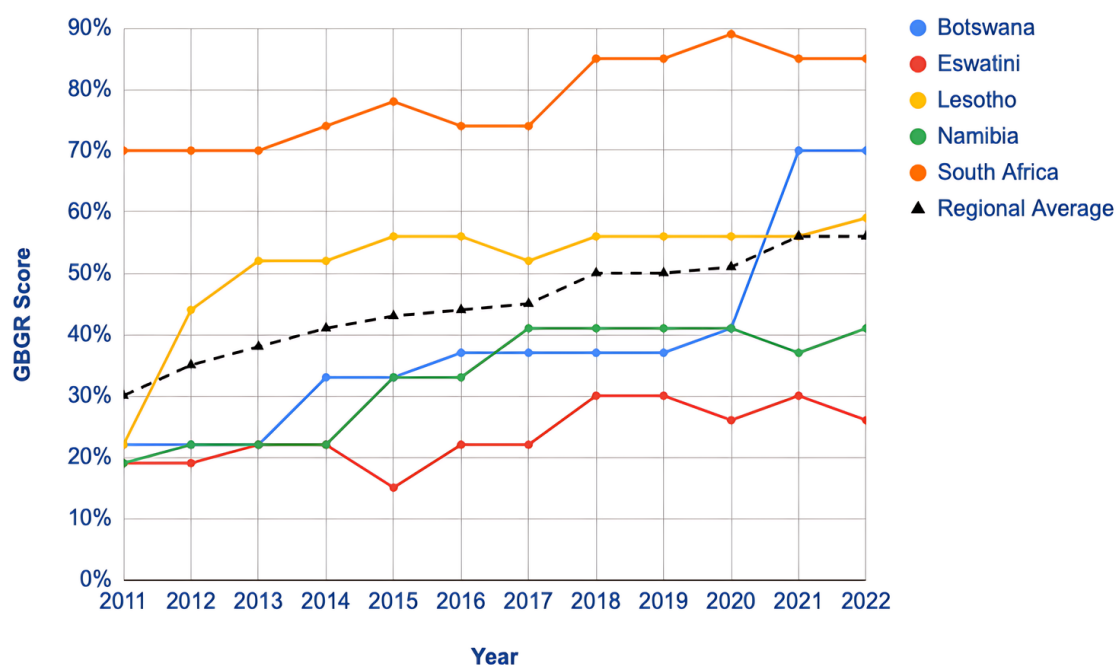
SOUTHERN AFRICA

Figure 11, below, illustrates the variation within Southern Africa from 2011 to 2022. **South Africa** has been the highest-scoring country for LGB rights in Southern Africa and in all of Sub-Saharan Africa, holding this record since 2011. As of 2022, the country is five percentage points away from being classified as A-Protecting. If South Africa reaches this milestone, it will be the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to do so.

Similarly, **Botswana** is an outlier for its treatment of SO minorities as compared to its failing sub-regional counterparts. From 2011 to 2022, Botswana's score increased by 48 percentage points, making it one of the most-improved countries (and the most quickly improving country) for LGB rights in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Conversely, while 2015 was **Eswatini's** lowest-scoring year, it has also been the lowest-scoring country in the subregion since 2012. Over the years, the country's score has fluctuated quite a bit. For example, Eswatini's score decreased from 2019 to 2020 due to acts of violence committed against SO minorities. The following year, the country's score rose again because it scored positively in that same item.

Figure 11. GBGR 2011-2022 - Southern Africa Scores



SUB-REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

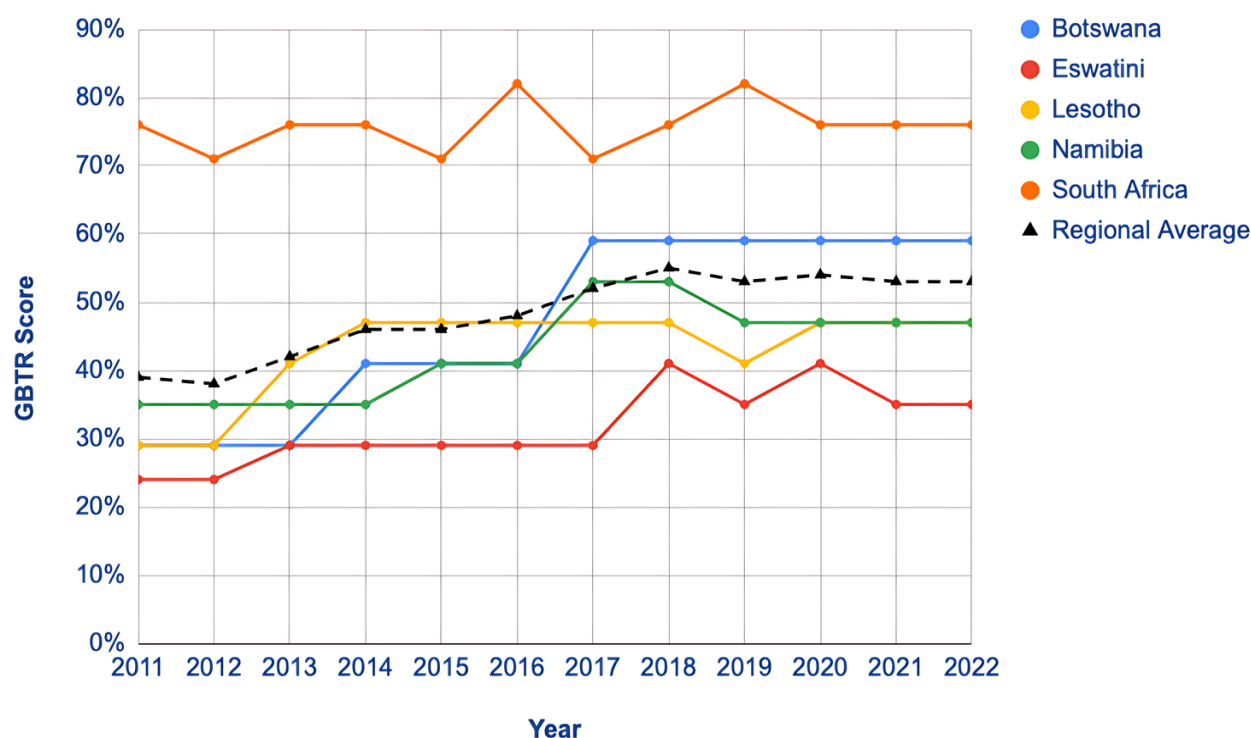
SOUTHERN AFRICA

Figure 12, below, illustrates the average GBTR scores for Southern Africa and each country in the subregion from 2011 to 2022, again highlighting the performance of **South Africa** and Botswana. In 2011, the regional average in Southern Africa for transgender rights was higher than that for LGB rights, but this is not the case in 2022. GI rights and protections have not caught up to changes in LGB rights and protections in the subregion.

Botswana's score increased by 18% from 2016 to 2017 due to improvements in transgender rights: a precedent-setting case before the High Court of Botswana allowed for legal recognition of gender identity (LGR) in 2017; this case notes that self-identification became the law of the land, dropping the requirements of physiological alteration and psychiatric diagnosis for LGR [14].

However, since 2017, Botswana has remained at 59%. If the country's score were to increase by just 1%, it would move from F-Persecuting to D-Intolerant. Furthermore, South Africa's score decreased by 11% from 2016 to 2017 due to reported violence against and murders of gender identity minorities.

Figure 12. GBTR 2011-2022 - Southern Africa Scores



SUB-REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

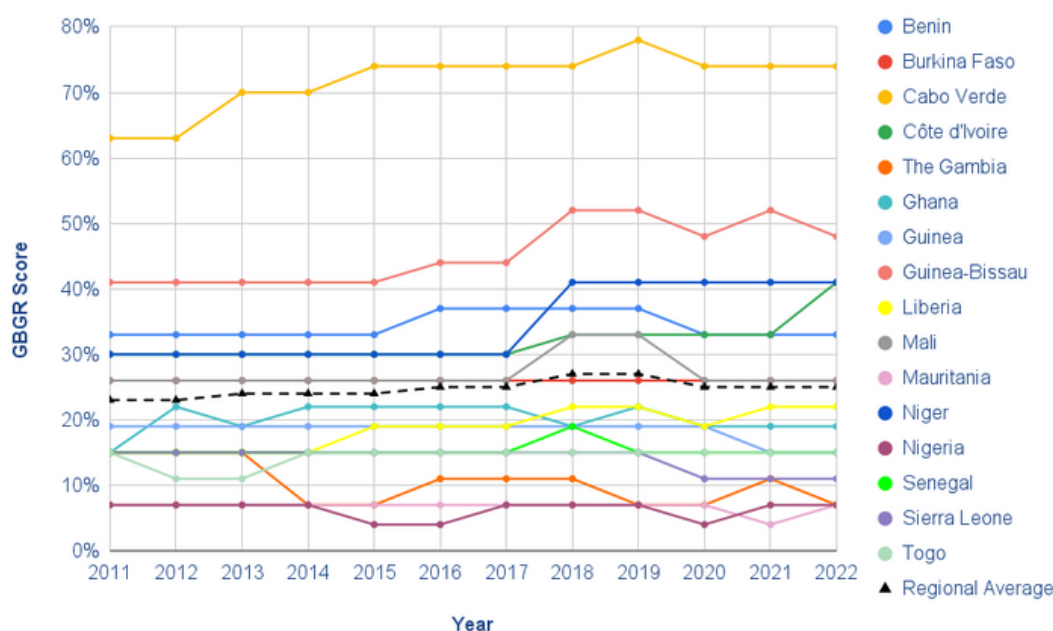
WEST AFRICA

Figure 13, below, illustrates that **Cabo Verde** stands out as an outlier in West Africa for LGB rights; the country consistently scores highest. As of 2022, the country scores 74% for gay rights – 67% higher than the lowest-scoring countries, which include Nigeria, Mauritania and The Gambia.

Mauritania's GBGR score has consistently remained at seven percent, except in 2021, when it fell to four percent because of reported violence against SO minorities. LGB people in the country suffer from inhumane punishments such as the death penalty and life sentences for same-sex acts, as well as frequent arbitrary arrests. There are absolutely no protections for SO minorities in Mauritania.

Another notable observation is that **Niger's** score increased by 11% from 2017 to 2018 due to positive changes in the country for LGB rights, including freedom from arbitrary arrest based on sexual orientation; SO minorities' having the right to privacy; and the right to a trial free from prejudice. Niger ties with Côte d'Ivoire for third highest-scoring country in West Africa in 2022.

Figure 13. GBGR 2011-2022 - West Africa Scores



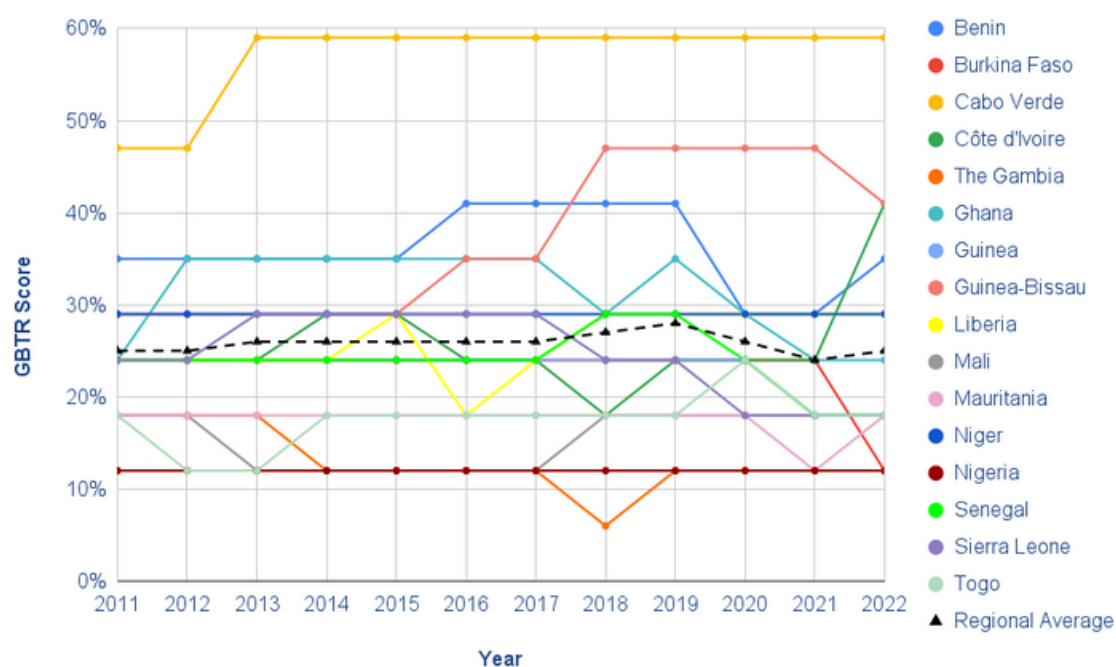
SUB-REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

WEST AFRICA

Figure 14, below, illustrates the average GBTR scores for West Africa and shows that trends for GI minorities mostly mirror those for SO minorities from 2011 to 2022. For instance, **Cabo Verde** is still the high scorer in the subregion. From 2012 to 2013, Cabo Verde's score increased by 12% due to changes which include the state's approving LGBT pride events and the provision of security forces for LGBT pride participants. It has, however, stagnated since 2013 as far as GI minorities' rights.

From 2017 to 2018, **Guinea-Bissau's** score increased by 12% due to LGBT organizations' being able to peacefully and safely assemble and the provision of security forces for LGBT pride participants. On the other hand, **Benin's** score decreased by 12% from 2019 to 2020. There were known arbitrary arrests based on gender identity or expression and reports of transphobic violence in Benin in 2020. Similarly, **Ghana's** score decreased by 11% from 2019 to 2021 due to LGBT organizations facing barriers to peacefully and safely assemble and reports of transphobic violence in 2021.

Figure 14. GBTR 2011-2022 - West Africa Scores



SUB-REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

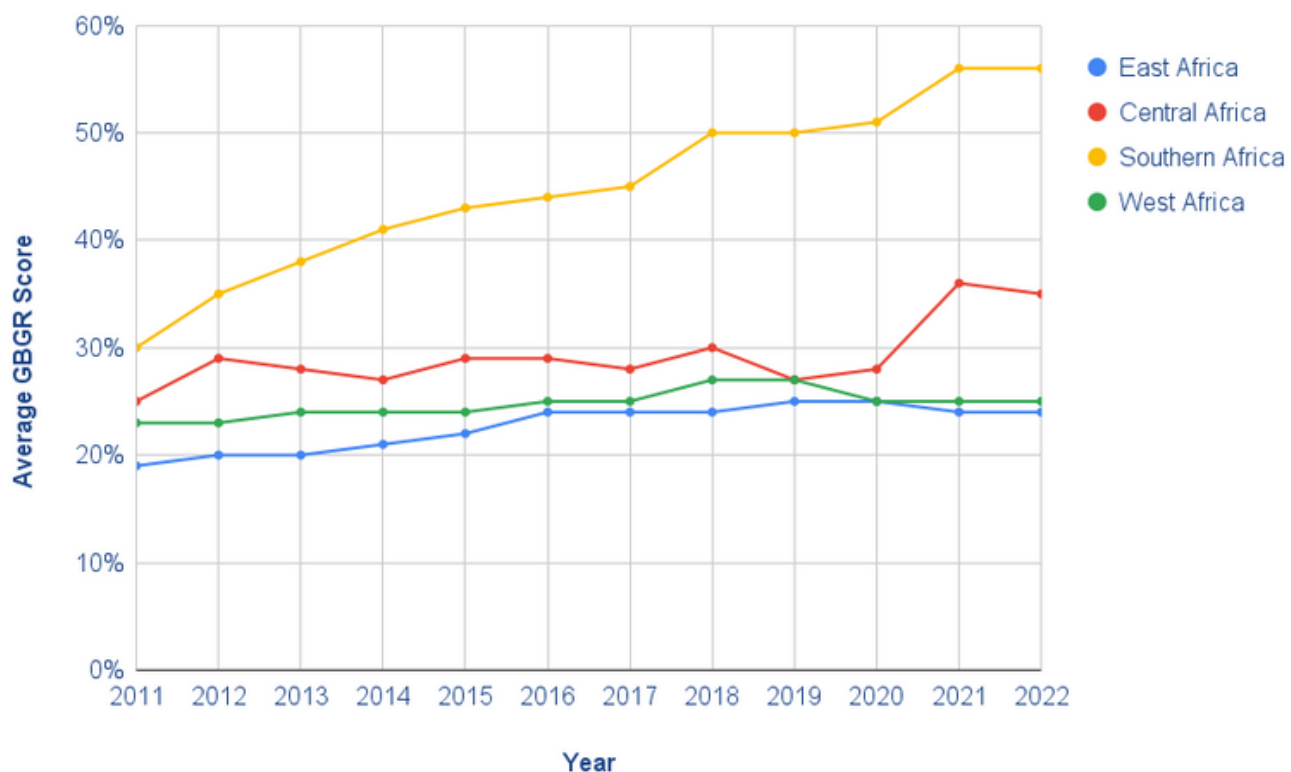
GBGR SUB-REGIONAL AVERAGES

Figure 15, below, shows average GBGR scores for East, Central, Southern, and West Africa from 2011 to 2022. **Southern Africa** stands out as the highest-scoring subregion for LGB rights. However, as of 2022, the subregion still fails, scoring an F-Persecuting (56%), which is far from an ideal score of A-Protecting.

On the other hand, **West** and **East Africa** have consistently achieved the lowest sub-regional scores over the years because several states actively persecute LGB citizens with harsh legislation and inhumane societal practices.

Countries in **Southern Africa** have demonstrated positive changes in legislation as independent nations, which signals promising potential for other subregions' future approaches to LGBT rights.

Figure 15. GBGR 2011-2022 - Sub-Regional Averages



SUB-REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

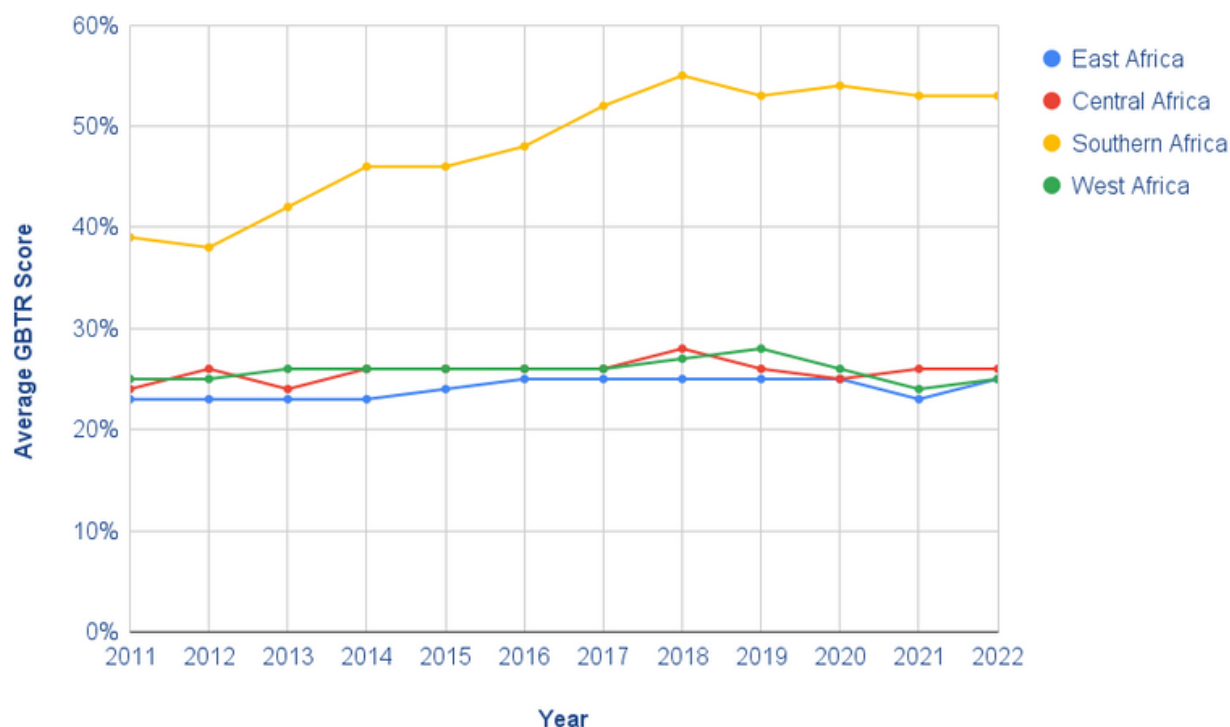
GBTR SUB-REGIONAL AVERAGES

The chart in **Figure 16**, below, displays average GBTR scores for East, Central, Southern, and West Africa from 2011 to 2022, illustrating that average GBTR scores mirror average GBGR scores. **Southern Africa** again stands out, scoring significantly higher on transgender rights compared to the other subregions; this result is remarkable, as the subregion has also shown substantial growth since 2011. Southern Africa's GBTR score was 39% in 2011; it sits at 53% in 2022.

East, Central, and West Africa show almost identical performance in terms of transgender rights, with the subregions progressing negligibly between 2011 and 2022. East and Central Africa saw one-to-two percent increases during the decade, while West Africa declined. Much more improvement is noted for LGB rights than for transgender rights in the region. While there were more significant variations in scores among the three subregions on the GBGR, scores on both the GBGR and the GBTR remain firmly below 30% for East, Central, and West Africa.

Even though Southern Africa outperforms its sub-regional counterparts, it still earns an F- Persecuting on the GBTR, indicating that there is still much to achieve in the fight for transgender rights and protections in the region.

Figure 16. GBTR 2011-2022 - Sub-Regional Averages



GBPI RESPONSE BREAKDOWN

Figures 17 and 18, below, display the average F&M Global Barometers LGBTQI+ Perception Index (GBPI) survey scores,* for Sub-Saharan Africa and for its subregions.** Southern Africa consistently scores higher on almost every question, surpassing global averages on two questions. Central Africa scores second highest on the GBPI, although it trails significantly behind Southern Africa.

N #	Q1: Safety	Q2: Safety in Gathering	Q3: Acceptance
9	East Africa 24%	East Africa 26%	East Africa 18%
2	Central Africa 28%	Central Africa 30%	Central Africa 25%
5	Southern Africa 59%	Southern Africa 66%	Southern Africa 52%
9	West Africa 19%	West Africa 21%	West Africa 13%
25	Sub-Saharan Africa 43%	Sub-Saharan Africa 48%	Sub-Saharan Africa 37%
137	Global 60%	Global 64%	Global 57%

Figure 17.
2022 GBPI -
Sub-Regional
Breakdown
for Questions
1-3

NB: "N" is both the number of countries included in the subregion and the global tally of countries *earning more than 30 responses*.

Conversely, West Africa scores the lowest on all questions with the exception of Q4: Discrimination, in which East Africa scored one percent lower. These results are consistent with the subregions' GBGR and GBTR results. On some questions, Southern and Central Africa score much higher than other subregions on the GBPI, while East and West Africa score well below their counterparts and below global averages, as well.

N #	Q4: Discrimination	Q5: Fear of Police	Q6: Violence
9	East Africa 34%	East Africa 24%	East Africa 31%
2	Central Africa 42%	Central Africa 30%	Central Africa 34%
5	Southern Africa 55%	Southern Africa 60%	Southern Africa 55%
9	West Africa 35%	West Africa 19%	West Africa 26%
25	Sub-Saharan Africa 47%	Sub-Saharan Africa 44%	Sub-Saharan Africa 44%
137	Global 60%	Global 59%	Global 55%

Figure 18.
2022 GBPI -
Sub-Regional
Breakdown
for Questions
4-6

* The order of the GBPI questions here is different than the order presented to respondents in 2022. Since 2022, the questions have been reordered to align with the 2024 survey methodology. Visit our "Background Note No. 2" on the FMGB Methodology to learn more: <https://www.fandmglobalbarometers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/FMGB-Methodology-Background-Note-No-2.pdf>

** See note on p. 4 for list of 25 countries included in GBPI analysis of Sub-Saharan Africa.

GBPI RESPONSES

Selected Comments from the 2022 GBPI

Bisexual, Senegal

“

I am the victim of discrimination, disgust, marginalization, and harassment within my life and my family, I am rejected and put [to] the door by my family. An uncle welcomed me to his home and the latter rapes me and forces me to sleep with him without my consent because if I refuse he will put me outside. I can no longer concentrate in my studies and the little jobs that I have [are] no more suitable because I would like a place where I would have freedom, harmony far from prejudices a place I will feel free to live my Sex life where I could study properly without stress, without judgment far from the looks of others ... [sic]

”

Trans Woman/Queer, Uganda

“

Am [in] deep fear of being harassed and arrested by the police coz [sic] of my sexual orientation, I also face difficulty to get [sic] a job here in my country, I was also chased away from my home by my family hence dropping out of school so trust me when I tell you that life is very hard...

”

Gay, South Africa

“

I was abducted three months ago. A hookup on Grindr turned out to be a set up. I was robbed of my Life Savings, Car etc [sic].

”

Lesbian, Nigeria

“

The situation varies based on how economically empowered someone is. I see myself as in the middle class, that is why I feel a little safer.

”

CONCLUSION

Although Sub-Saharan African countries trail other regions in the world in their protection of LGBT+ people, they do not do so uniformly. The sub-regional and individual country data show that the Southern African subregion performs significantly better than the other subregions of Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, former Portuguese colonies, like Angola and Cabo Verde, are far more protecting than most former British colonies, with the exception of South Africa and Botswana. Nevertheless, the legacy of colonialism persists in many nations.

On the whole, South Africa, Angola, Cabo Verde, the Seychelles and Botswana stand out, scoring dramatically higher than other countries in the region. These countries provide basic human rights to their LGB citizens: there is no death penalty or prison time for sexual orientation, and people generally have freedom from arbitrary arrest. Additionally, these countries provide essential human rights to their transgender citizens: gender identity and expression are not criminalized, and LGBT organizations are able to legally register. These five countries set an example for other nations in the region, illustrating that all citizens' rights should be respected and protected.

The FMGB encourage further research comparing factors such as economic development, globalization, and levels of corruption with measurements of LGBT human rights, protections, and experiences.

GBGR & GBTR Methodology

The F&M Global Barometer of Gay Rights (GBGR) and the F&M Global Barometer of Transgender Rights (GBTR) measure state protections and societal persecution of LGBT people worldwide. Based on 27 items for the GBGR and 17 items for the GBTR, both barometers assess five dimensions: *de facto* and *de jure* protections, the sanction or suppression of LGBT advocacy, socio-economic rights, and societal persecution of LGBT persons. Each item is scored on a binary scale (0/1) and undergoes a double-blind review; then, the country's overall score is calculated with a percentage (0-100%) and assigned a letter grade (A-F), where 100% (A) is the most protective and 0% (F) is the least protective.

GBPI Methodology

The F&M Global Barometers LGBTQI+ Perception Index (GBPI) developed as a joint project between the F&M Global Barometers and the Council for Global Equality. Launched between June 28 and September 29, 2022, the survey garnered over 169,000 responses from 194 countries. The GBPI gauges the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ people worldwide. Available in four languages (Arabic, English, French, and Spanish), it asks six basic questions to which the respondents answer from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). The overall score for each country is calculated with a percentage (0-100%) and assigned a letter grade (A-F), where 100% (A) is the most positive and 0% (F) is the least positive.

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Notes

- [1] Leah Buckle, “African Sexuality and the Legacy of Imported Homophobia,” *Stonewall.org*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/african-sexuality-and-legacy-imported-homophobia>.
- [2] Bernadine Evaristo, “The Idea that African Homosexuality was a Colonial Import is a Myth,” *Guardian.com*, March 8, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/08/african-homosexuality-colonial-import-myth>.
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