

Banjul, the Gambia
3 May 2021

News release

Gambians support media freedom but want government to prevent false news and hate speech, Afrobarometer survey shows

Most Gambians support media freedom in principle but endorse government interference to prevent the publication of false news, hate speech, and views that criticize or insult the president, the latest Afrobarometer survey shows.

An overwhelming majority of Gambians say the media is in fact free to do its work without government interference.

Most Gambians get their news from the radio and television, the survey shows, but social media and the Internet are also major sources of regular news. At the same time, a majority of citizens blame social media users for knowingly spreading false news.

The Gambia's media environment has become somewhat less restrictive in recent years, including a 2018 Supreme Court decision that the criminalization of defamation is unconstitutional. The [2021 World Press Freedom Index](#) ranked the Gambia 85th out of 180 countries in media freedom, up two spots from the previous year.

Key findings

- More than eight in 10 Gambians say the media is “completely free” (46%) or “somewhat free” (36%) to report and comment on the news without censorship or interference from by the government (Figure 1).
- Three-fourths (75%) of Gambians say they listen to radio news “every day” or “a few times a week,” making radio the country's most widely used news source. Television is in second place (63%), followed by social media (55%) and the Internet (40%) (Figure 2).
- More than two-thirds (68%) say the media should be free to publish any views without government control (Figure 3).
- However, large majorities say the government should be able to limit or prohibit the sharing of news or information that is false (85%), hate speech (84%), and information or opinions that criticize or insult the president (76%). Four in 10 citizens (42%) approve of restrictions against information or opinions that the government disapproves of (Figure 4).
- More than eight in 10 citizens (84%) say that social media users spread information that they know is false, including 51% who say they do so “often.” Majorities also blame politicians and political parties (78%), government officials (63%), and the news media (60%) for at least “sometimes” knowingly spreading false news (Figure 5).

Afrobarometer surveys

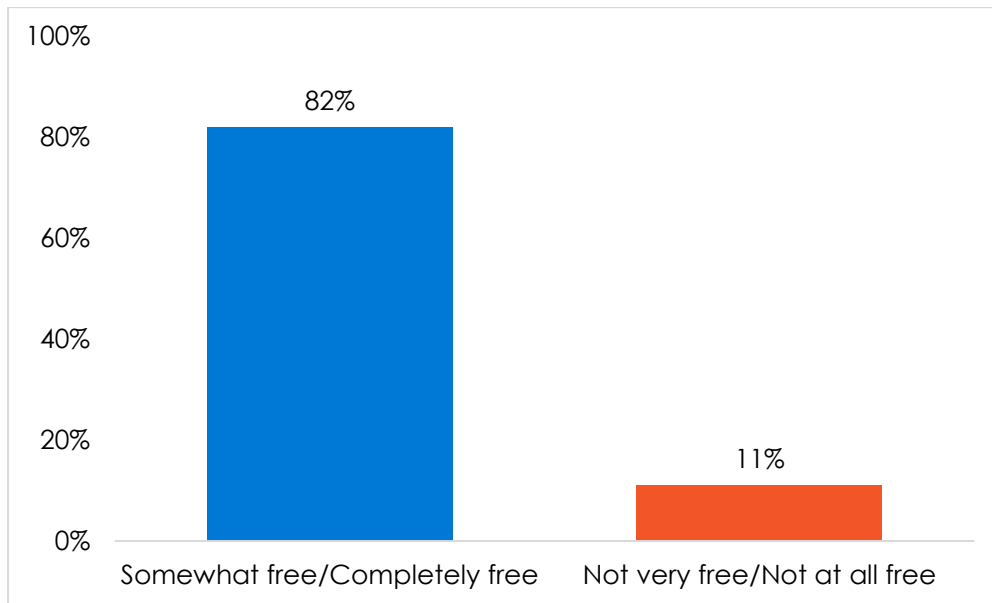
Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans' experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018.

Round 8 surveys are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in the Gambia, led by the Center for Policy, Research and Strategic Studies (CePrass), interviewed 1,200 adult Gambians between 30 January and 23 February 2021. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. A previous Afrobarometer survey was conducted in the Gambia in 2018.

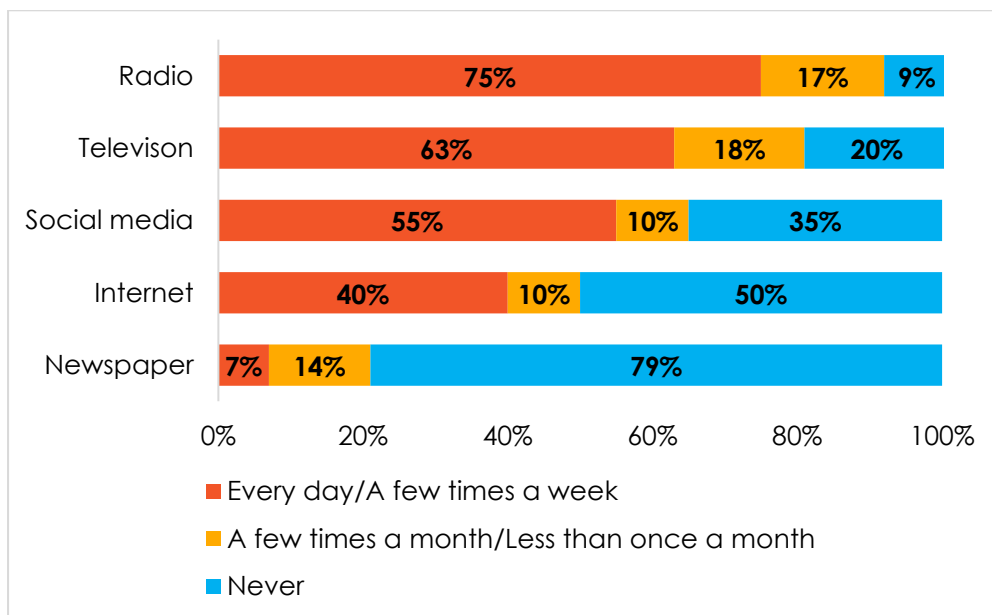
Charts

Figure 1: How free is the media? | The Gambia | 2021



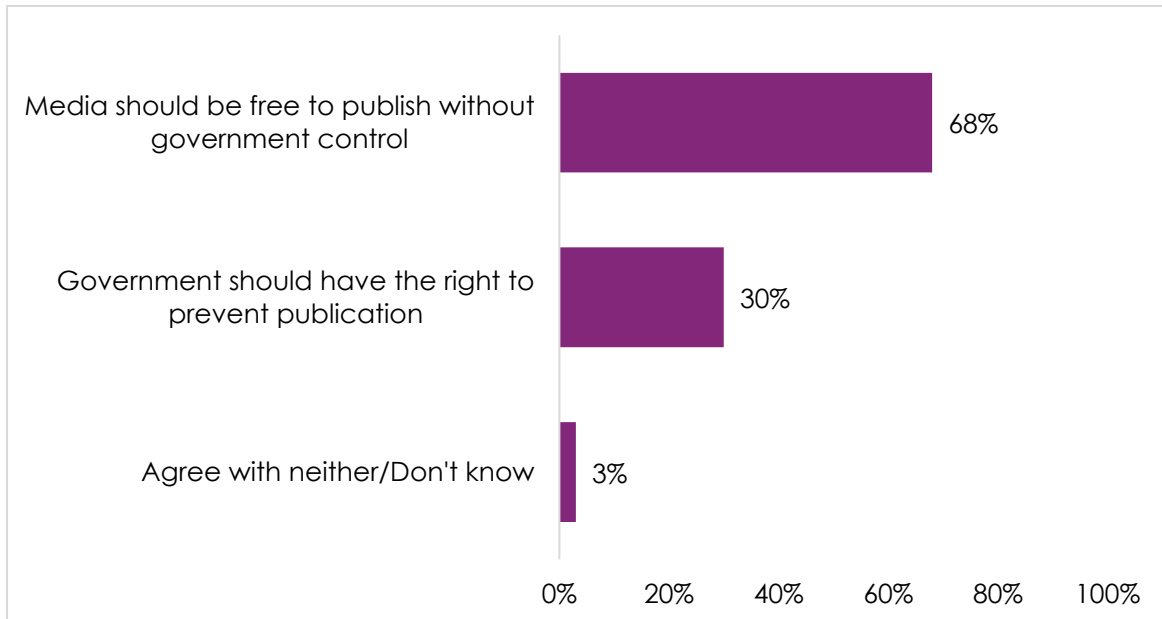
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how free is the news media in this country to report and comment on the news without censorship or interference by the government?

Figure 2: Sources of news | The Gambia | 2021



Respondents were asked: How often do you get news from the following sources?

Figure 3: Should the media be free? | The Gambia | 2021



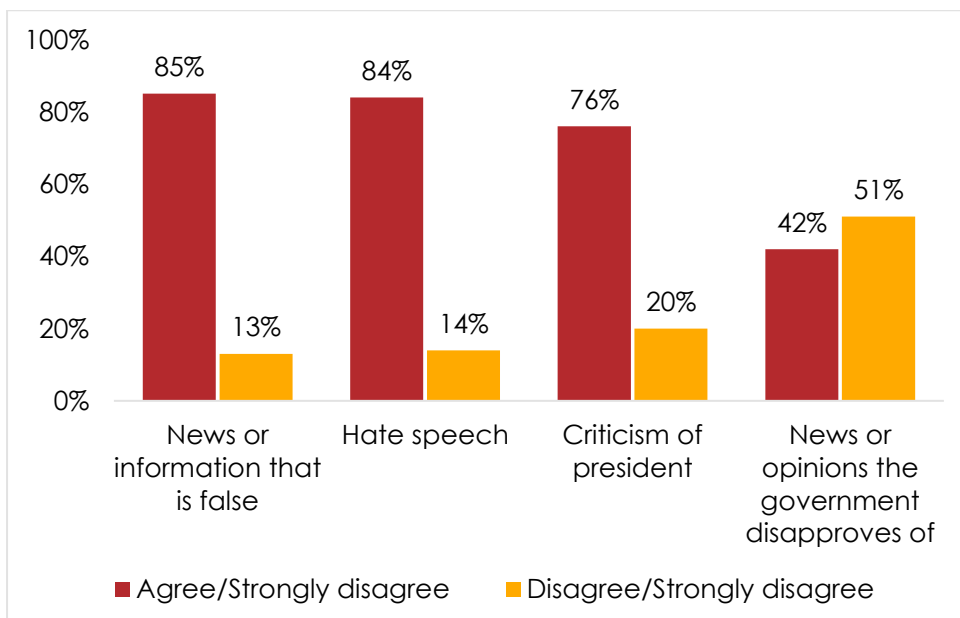
Respondents were asked: Let's talk for a moment about the kind of society you would like to have in this country. Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: The media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control.

Statement 2: The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it disapproves of.

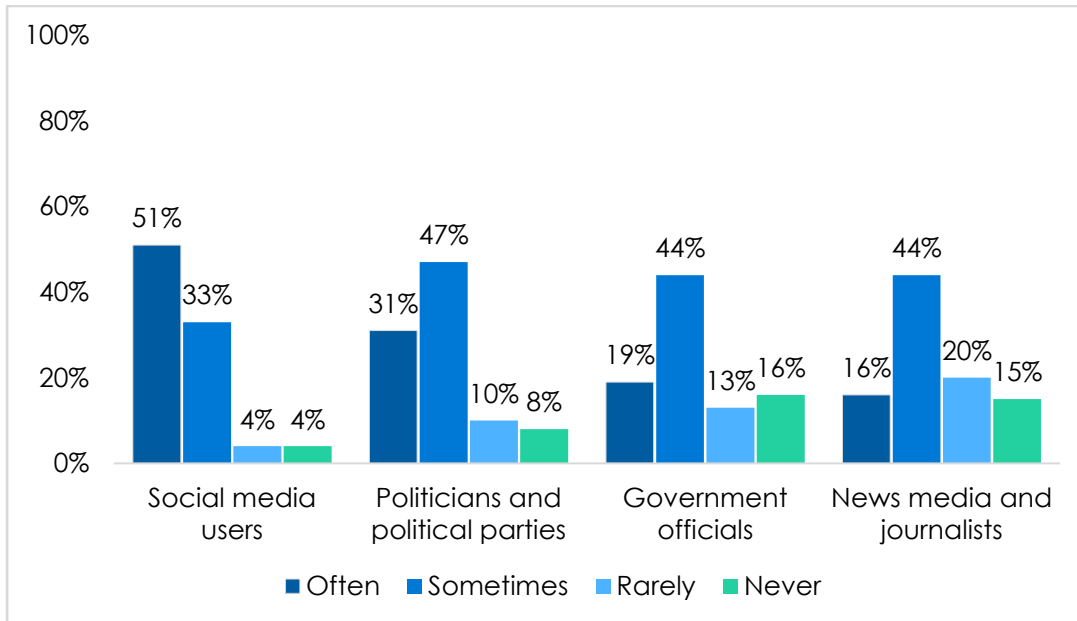
(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Figure 4: Limit or prohibit sharing of news or information | The Gambia | 2021



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree that the government should be able to limit or prohibit sharing of: News or information that is false? News, information, or opinions that the government disapproves of? News, information, or opinions that criticize or insult the president? Hate speech, that is, news, information, or opinions designed to attack or vilify certain groups in society?

Figure 5: Purveyors of false news | The Gambia | 2021



Respondents were asked: Please tell me how often, in this country, you think people from each of the following groups spread information that they know is false?

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