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News release

Majority of Nigerians want unrestricted access to Internet and social media, Afrobarometer survey shows

A majority of Nigerians want unrestricted access to the Internet and social media, Afrobarometer survey findings show. The level of support for unfettered Internet and social media access is among the highest recorded across 18 African countries.

Among the two-thirds of Nigerians who are aware of social media, large majorities say these digital platforms keep people informed and enable them to have more impact on political processes. And while majorities also see social media as making people more likely to believe fake news and more intolerant of different opinions, positive views of its overall effects on society outnumber negative assessments by a ratio of 6 to 1.

As Nigeria has been rocked by #EndSARS protests against police brutality, Minister of Information and Culture Lai Mohammed has called for a social media policy that will help regulate the spread of fake news. But Afrobarometer findings show that Nigerians are more likely to blame politicians for disseminating false information than social media users and activists.

Key findings

- About two-thirds (63%) of Nigerians say they are aware of social media (Figure 1).
 - Awareness increases with citizens' level of education (88% of those with post-secondary education vs. 29% of those with no formal education) and decreases with age (66% of 18- to 35-year-olds vs. 43% of those aged 56 and above).
- Among those who have heard of social media, large majorities say it makes people more aware of current happenings (88%) and helps people impact political processes (76%) (Figure 2).
 - On the other hand, majorities also say it makes people more likely to believe false news (70%) and more intolerant of others with different political opinions (60%).
- Overall, two-thirds (65%) of citizens who are aware of social media rate its effects on society as positive, while only 11% see them as negative (Figure 3).
- Six in 10 Nigerians (61%) "agree" or "strongly agree" that access to the Internet and social media helps people to be more informed and active citizens, and should be unrestricted (Figure 4). Close to a quarter (23%) want government to be able to regulate access.
 - Among 18 countries surveyed in 2019/2020, Nigeria ranks fourth when it comes to demand for unrestricted access to the Internet and social media (Figure 5).
- Nigerians are most likely to blame politicians and political parties (69%) for spreading fake news, followed by government officials and "social media users" in general (60%).

each) (Figure 6). Journalists (50%) and activists and interest groups (40%) are somewhat less likely to be seen as knowingly spreading false information.

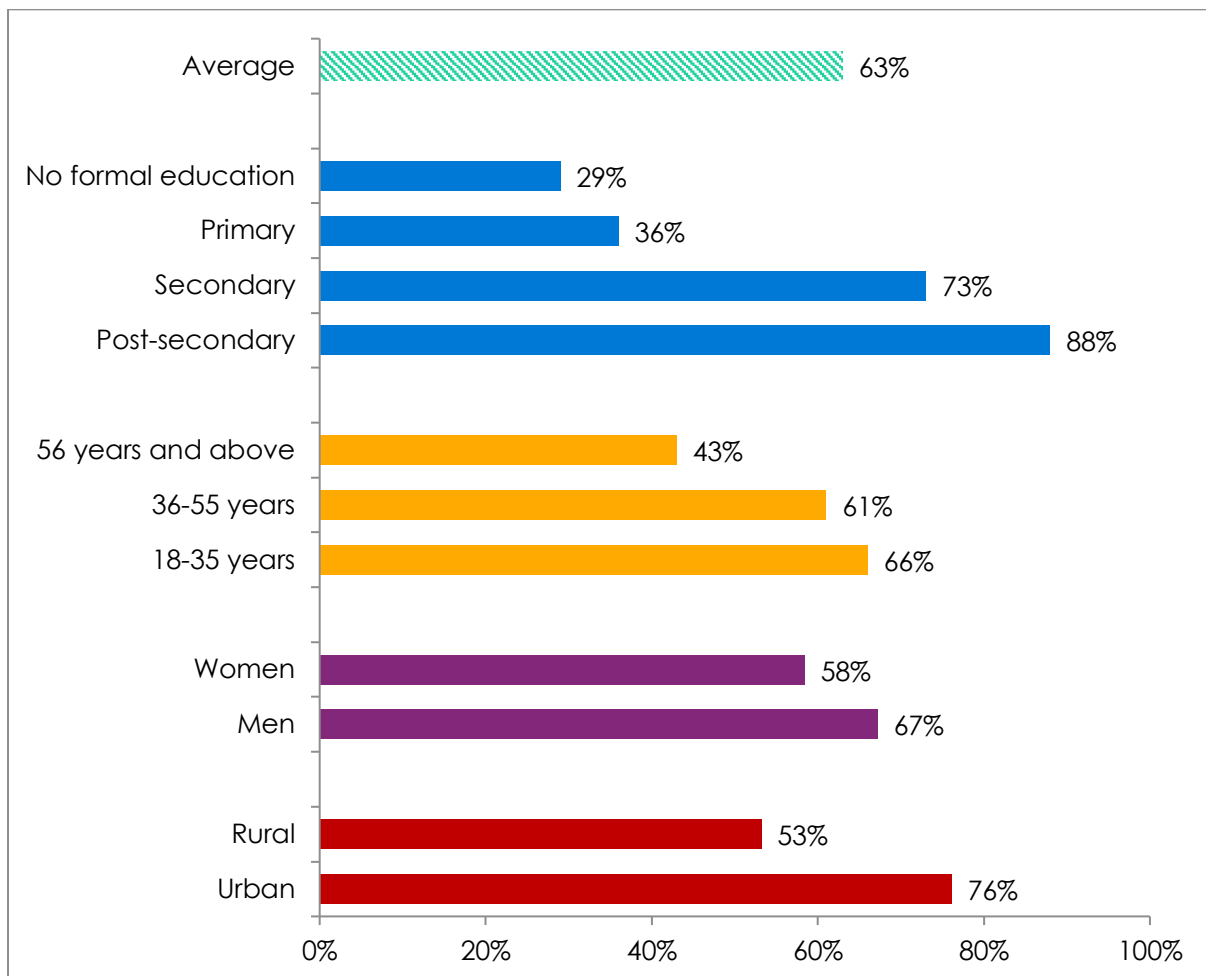
Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African 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 in 2019/2021 are planned in at least 35 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Nigeria, led by NOIPolls, interviewed 1,599 adult citizens of Nigeria in January-February 2020. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2.5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Nigeria in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

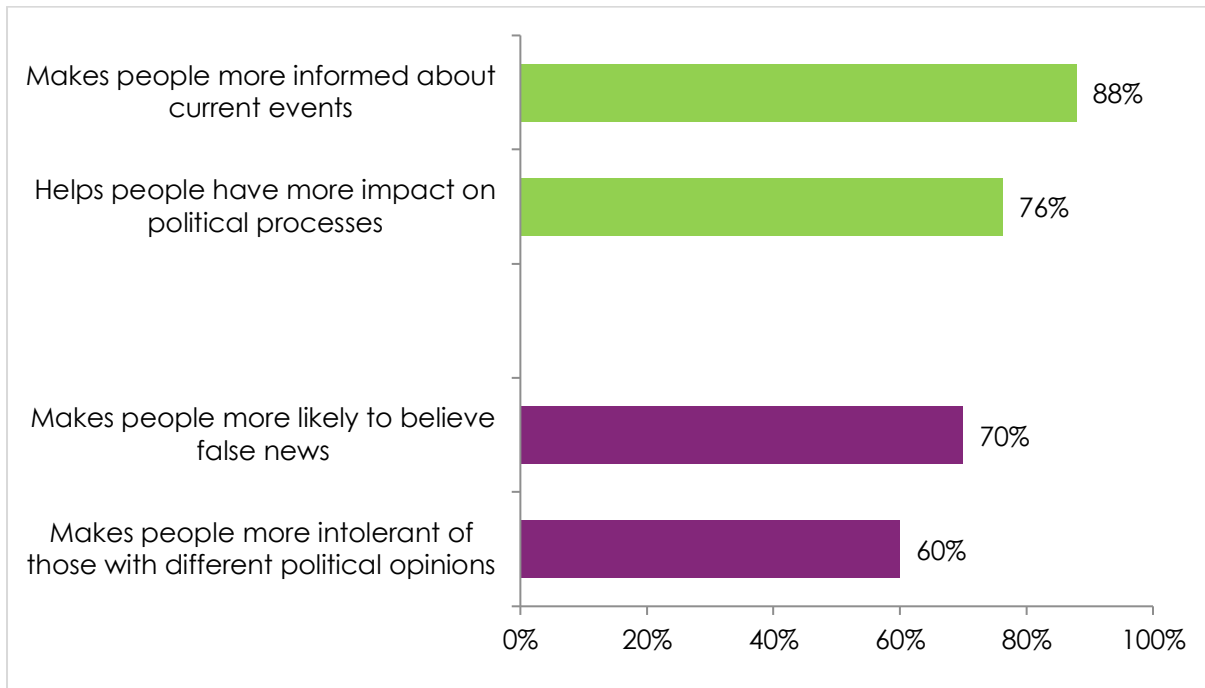
Charts

Figure 1: Heard of social media | by socio-demographic group | 2020



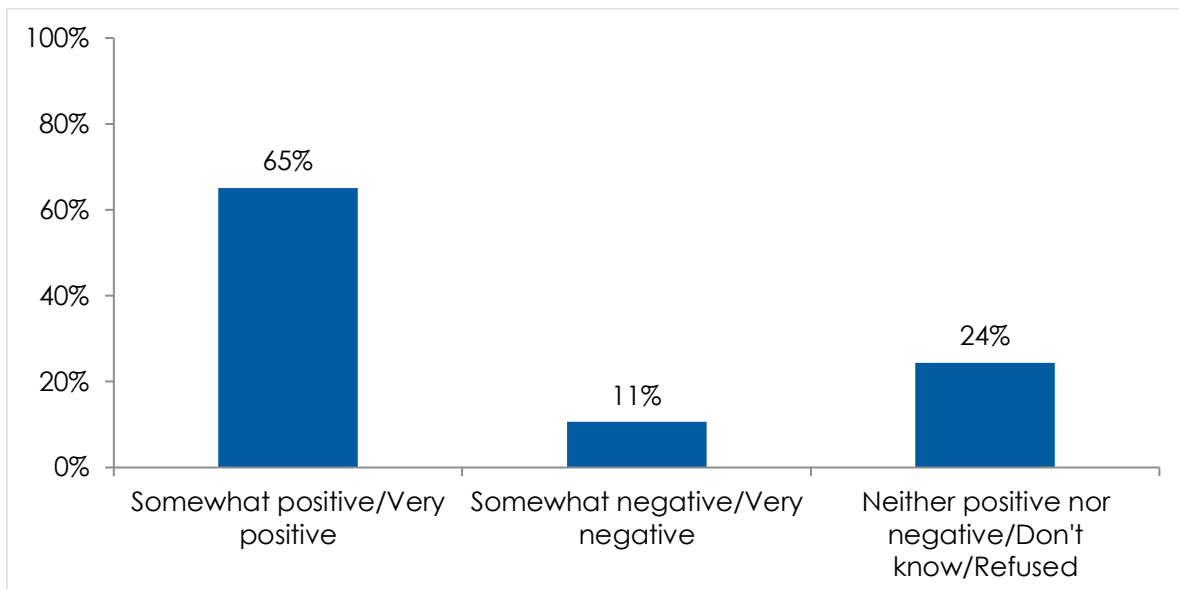
Respondents were asked: Have you heard about social media, for example, Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp?

Figure 2: Effects of social media usage | Nigeria | 2020



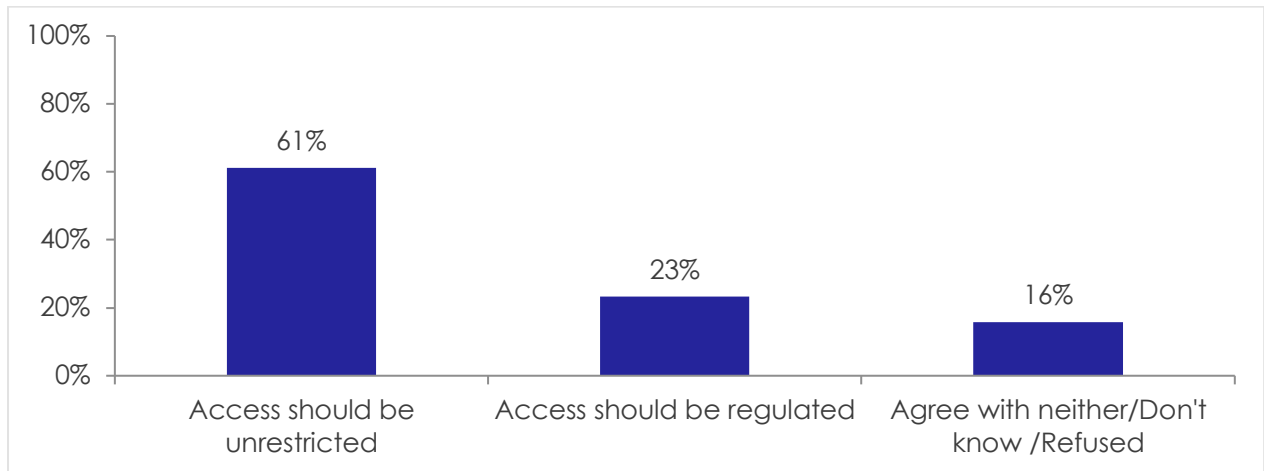
Respondents who have heard about social media were asked: Regardless of whether you personally use social media yourself, please tell me whether you agree or disagree that social media [has the following effects]. (% who "agree" or "strongly agree") (Note: Responses exclude those who have not heard about social media.)

Figure 3: Overall effects of social media: Positive or negative? | Nigeria | 2020



Respondents who have heard about social media were asked: Overall, do you think that the effects of social media on society are mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Note: Responses exclude those who have not heard about social media.)

Figure 4: Should Internet and social media access be regulated? | Nigeria | 2020



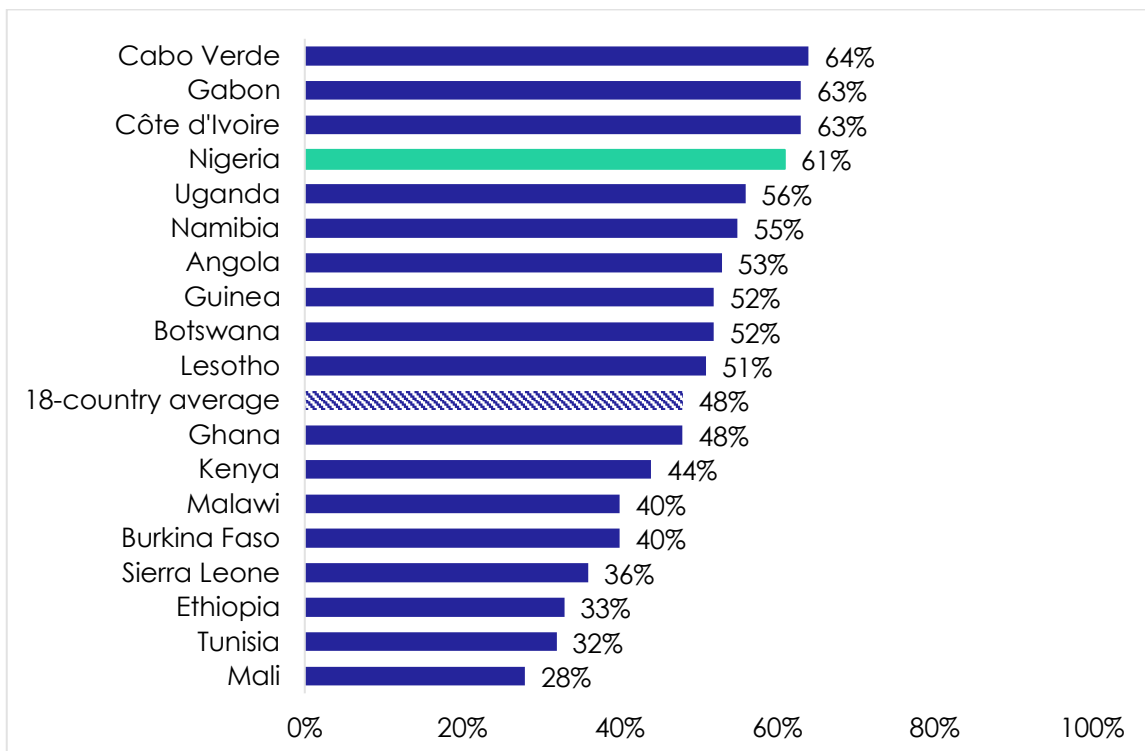
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Unrestricted access to the Internet and social media helps people to be more informed and active citizens, and should be protected.

Statement 2: Information shared on the Internet and social media is dividing Nigeria, so access should be regulated by government.

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

Figure 5: Access to Internet and social media should not be regulated | 18 countries | 2019/2020



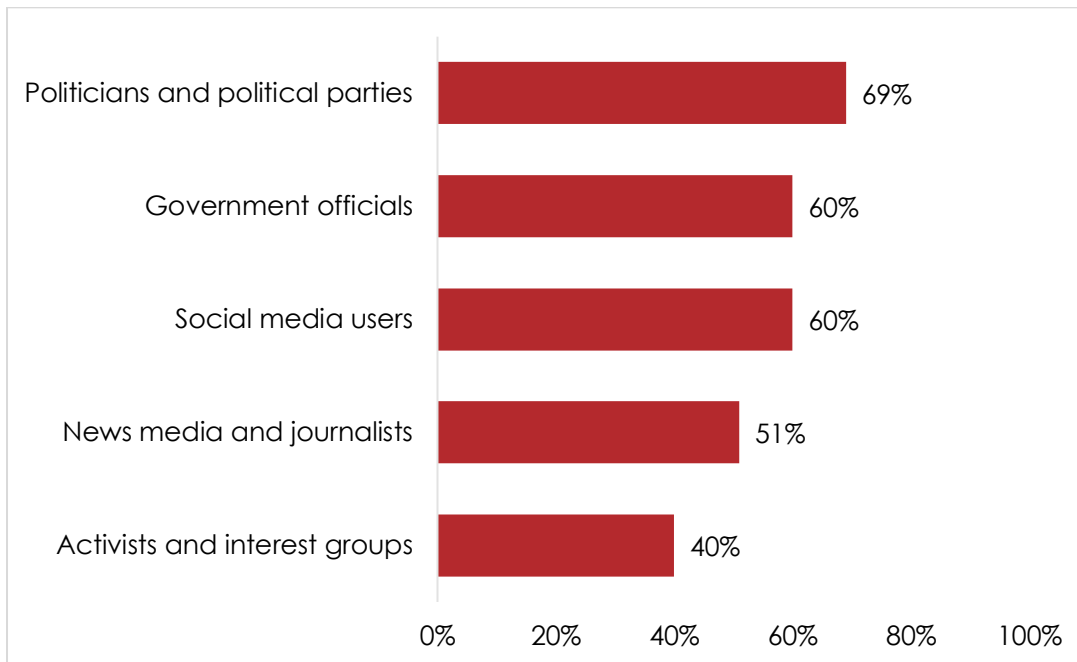
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Unrestricted access to the Internet and social media helps people to be more informed and active citizens, and should be protected.

Statement 2: Information shared on the Internet and social media is dividing [our country], so access should be regulated by government.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

Figure 6: Who spreads false information? | Nigeria | 2020



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. (% who say "sometimes" or "often")

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