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Social Research and Integrated Business Consultancy

Kingdom of the Netherlands

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News release

Majority of Ugandans prefer unrestricted access to Internet and social media, Afrobarometer survey shows

A majority of Ugandans want unrestricted access to the Internet and social media, Afrobarometer survey findings show.

Among the six in 10 Ugandans who are aware of social media, large majorities say these platforms keep people informed and enable them to have more impact on political processes. Even though many also say social media makes people more likely to believe "fake news" and more intolerant of people with different opinions, a majority of citizens say the overall effects of social media are mostly positive. Ugandans are more likely to blame politicians for knowingly sharing false information than social media users and activists.

Two days ahead of Thursday's general elections, Uganda's Communication Commission (UCC) ordered all social media and message applications to be blocked after Facebook blocked some pro-government accounts. While the Uganda government rejects the idea that a foreign entity should decide for Ugandans who should or should not use social media, these survey results highlight the value that ordinary Ugandans attach to using social media.

Key findings

- Six in 10 Ugandans (60%) say they are aware of social media (Figure 1).
    - o Awareness is higher among men (71%) and urban residents (83%) than among women (50%) and rural residents (53%). It is almost four times as common among citizens with post-secondary education as among those with no formal education (94% vs. 24%), and almost twice as high among the youth as among older citizens (67% vs. 35%).

- Among Ugandans who have heard of social media, large majorities say it makes people more aware of current happenings (89%) and helps people impact political processes (74%) (Figure 2).
    - o 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 (58%).

- Overall, six in 10 (58%) of citizens who are aware of social media rate its effects on society as positive, while only 13% see them as negative (Figure 3).

- A majority (56%) of Ugandans "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). A quarter (26%), however, want government to be able to regulate access.
    - o Support for unfettered access to the Internet and social media increases with one's level of education (70% among those with post-secondary education vs. 37% among those with no formal education), and decreases with age (58% among citizens aged 18 to 35 vs. 43% among those aged 56 and above)

(Figure 5). Unregulated access is also more popular among men (62%) and urban residents (63%) than women (49%) and rural residents (53%).

- Ugandans are most likely to blame politicians and political parties (57%) for spreading fake news, followed by government officials (47%), "social media users" in general (45%), and journalists (43%) (Figure 6). Only a quarter (24%) see activists and interest groups as likely to knowingly spread false information.
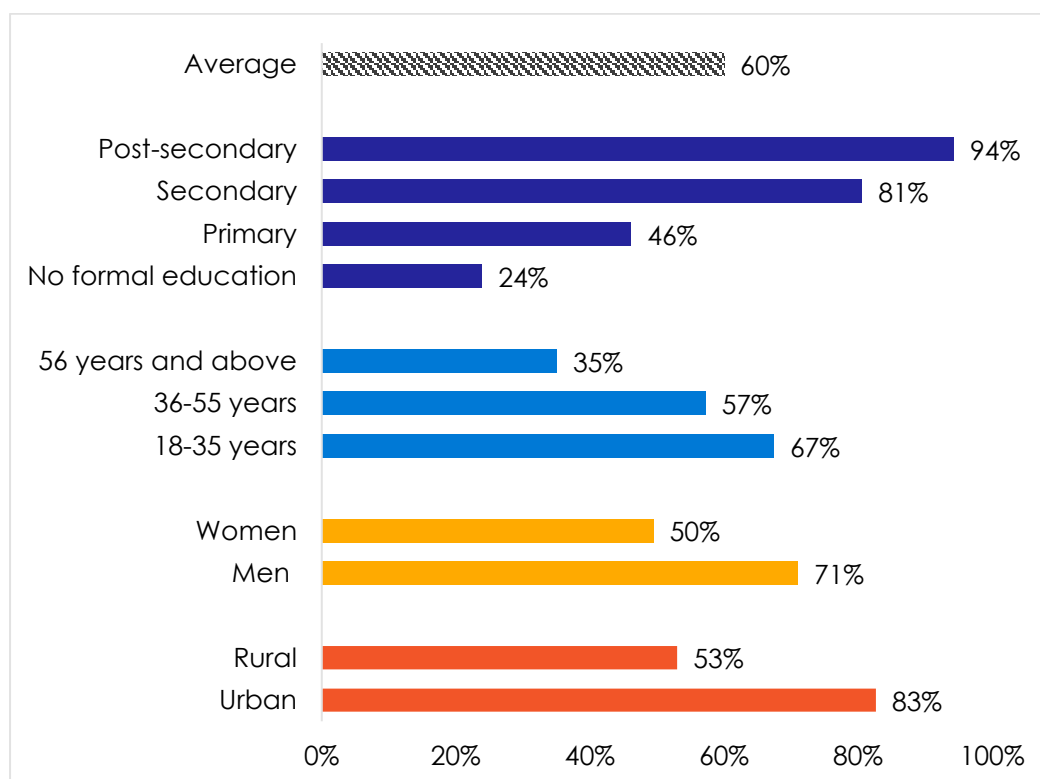
Afrobarometer surveys

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.

These findings are drawn from a survey of 1,200 adult citizens conducted in September-October 2019 by Hatchile Consult with financial support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.
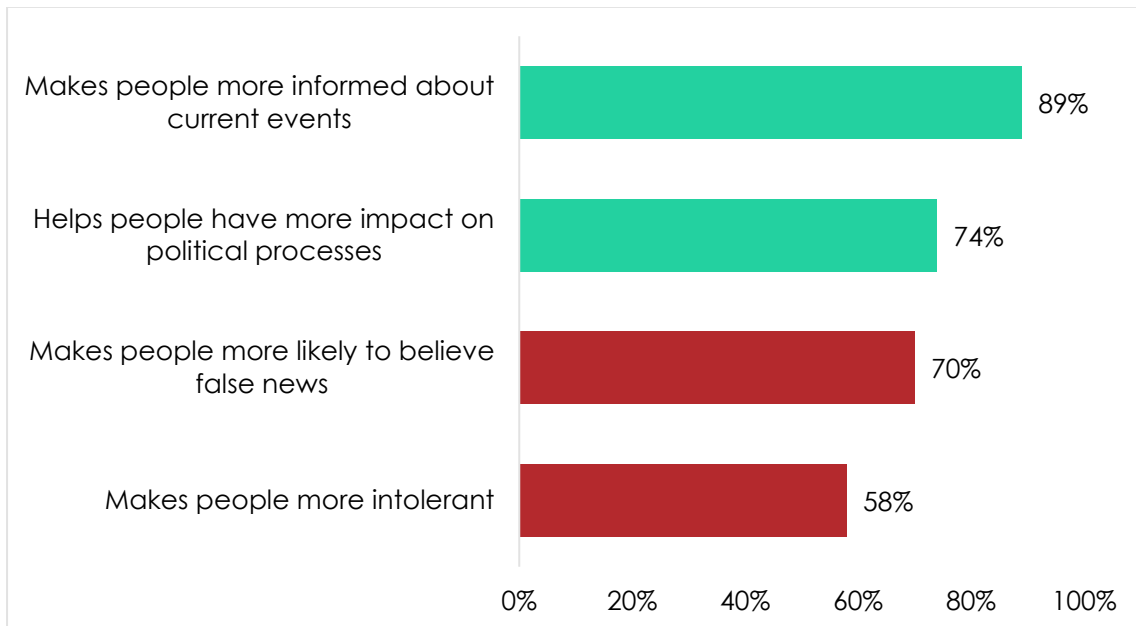
Charts

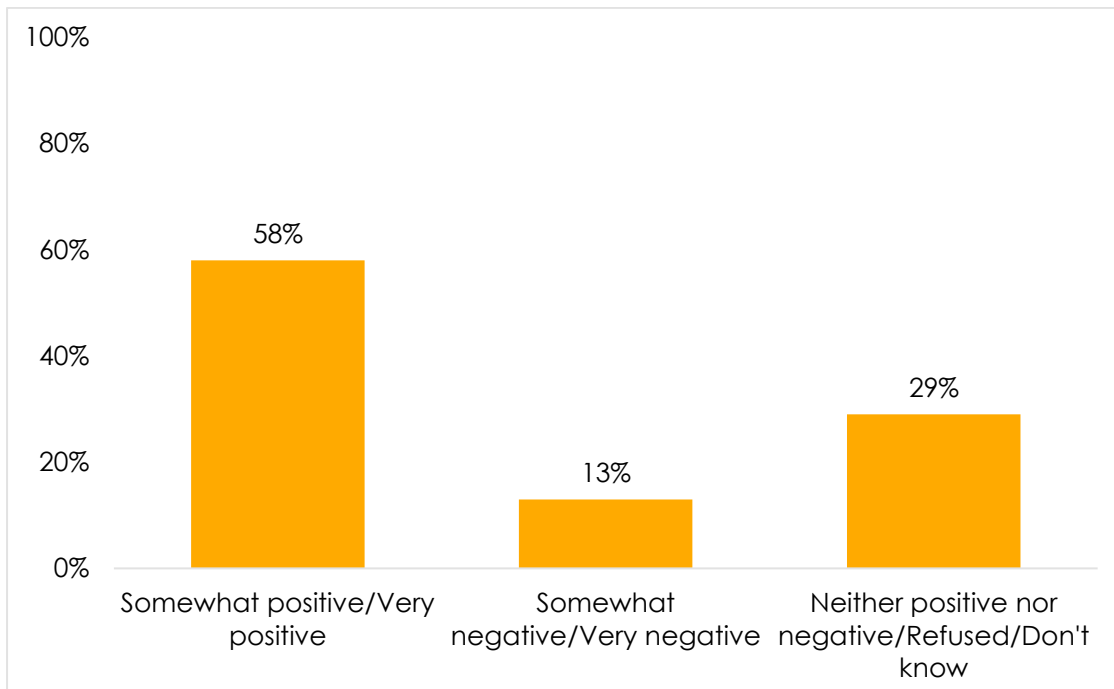**Figure 1: Heard of social media** | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2019

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

Figure 2: Effects of social media usage | Uganda | 2019

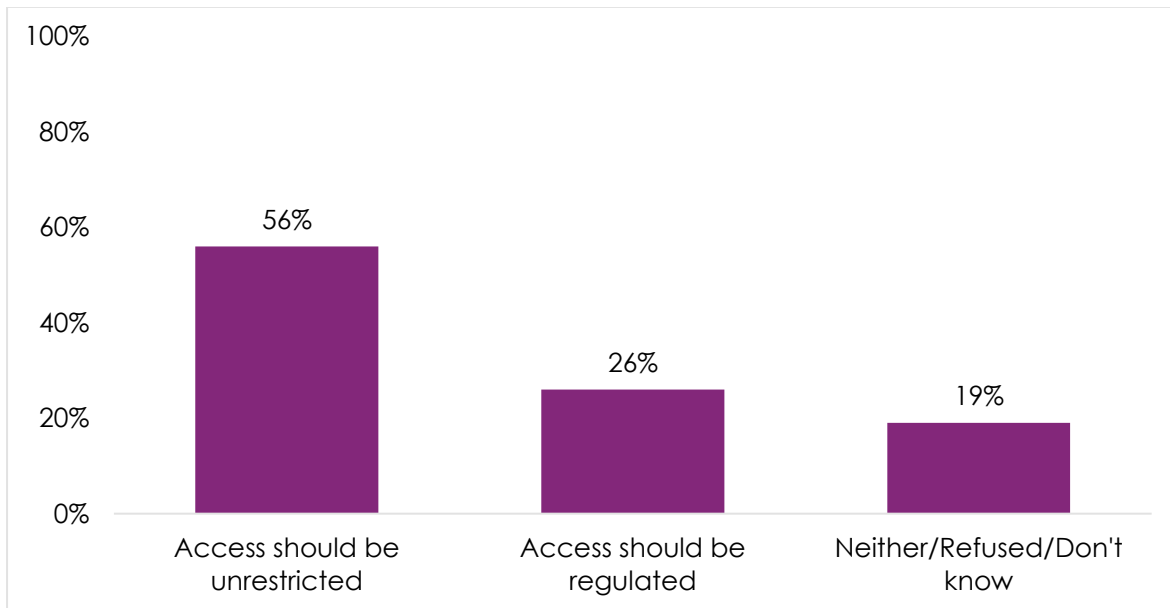|	
Makes people more informed about current events	89%
Helps people have more impact on political processes	74%
Makes people more likely to believe false news	70%
Makes people more intolerant	58%

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? | Uganda | 2019

Somewhat positive/Very positive	Somewhat negative/Very negative	Neither positive nor negative/Refused/Don't know
58%	13%	29%

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? | Uganda | 2019
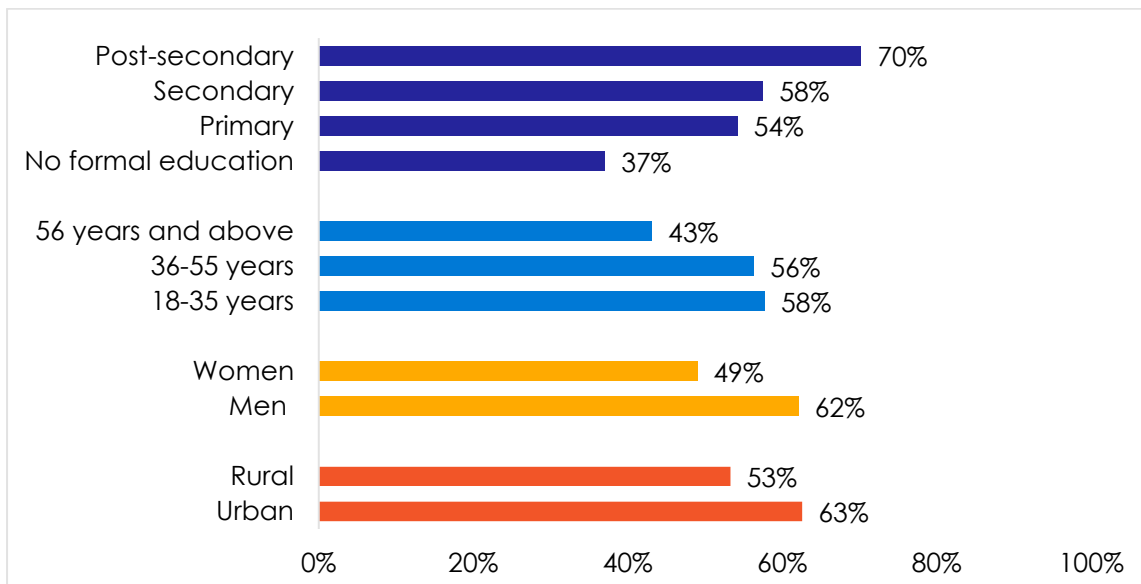

Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
Statement 1: Unrestricted access to the Internet and social media helps people to be more informed and active citizens, and should be protected.
Statement 2: Information shared on the Internet and social media is dividing Uganda, 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 | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2019
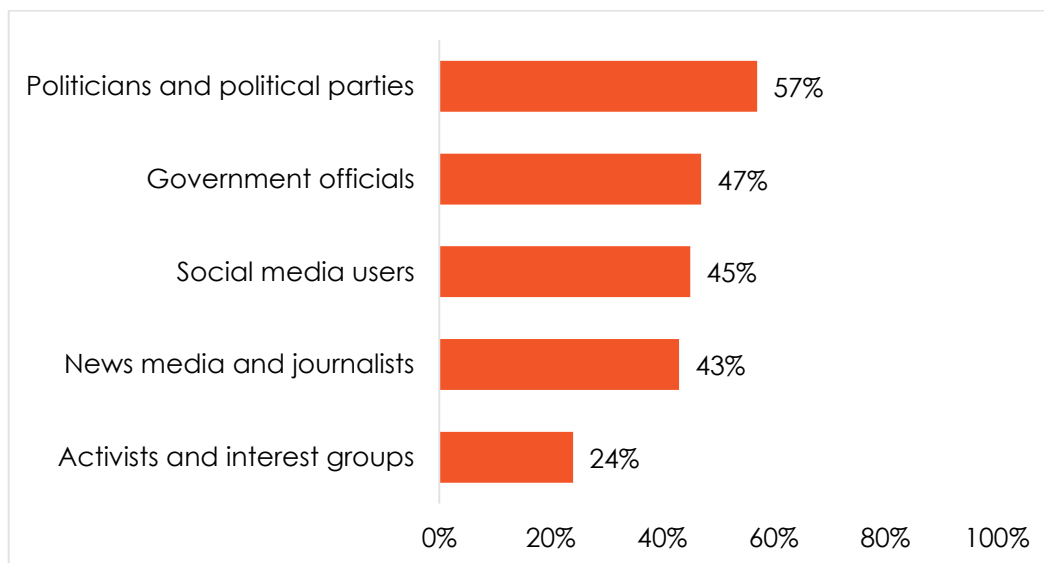

Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
Statement 1: Unrestricted access to the Internet and social media helps people to be more informed and active citizens, and should be protected.
Statement 2: Information shared on the Internet and social media is dividing [our country], so access should be regulated by government. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

Figure 6: Who spreads false information? | Uganda | 2019

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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