

Kampala, Uganda
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News release

Media-only¹ election campaigns likely to leave many Ugandans under-informed, analysis shows

Media-only election campaigns proposed to avoid mass rallies during the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to leave many Ugandans under-informed, a new analysis of Afrobarometer survey data shows.

Migrating most campaign activities to the media to limit the spread of the coronavirus, as recently directed by the Electoral Commission, may be feasible as the number of registered/operational media outlets in Uganda has reached more than 300 radio stations, 50 television stations, and 10 major news publications while the Internet and social media are now available in most trading centers and villages. Recent increases in media penetration into the countryside and in local-language media, as well as strong popular support for a free media, add to the feasibility of media-only campaigns in the 2021 elections.

However, Afrobarometer survey data show that the proportion of Ugandans who can access and who make use of various media channels remains relatively low and concentrated among certain demographics, such as the young, the more educated, men, urban residents, and people in the Central region. Media-only campaigns may thus disadvantage more women than men, and many poorer, less educated, older, and rural citizens.

These findings make a strong case for the government to ensure access to media that guarantees equitable access and free engagement between candidates and members of the public.

Key findings

- Most Ugandans have access to a mobile phone (87%) and a radio set (79%). Fewer have access to a TV set (29%) and a computer (8%). See Figure 4.
- Eight out of 10 Ugandans get news “every day” or “a few times a week” from radio (80%). Regular news consumption is much lower for television (31%), newspapers (12%), the Internet (13%), and social media (14%) (Figure 1 and Figure 4). Access to news through television, newspapers, the Internet, and social media is most common in urban areas, in the Central region, and among the young, men, and those with at least a secondary education.
- The proportion of Ugandans who get news from television “every day” or “a few times a week” has grown by 10 percentage points since 2015, increasing from 21% to 31%. News from Social media has grown from 8% to 14%, Internet 9% to 13%, radio from 76% to 80% while Newspaper sources have registered no increase (13% to 12%). (Figure 2).
- The national electricity grid reaches nearly one-half of all villages sampled in the survey (49%), while 26% of all households sampled were connected to the national electricity grid. While 18% of survey respondents reported that electricity from the national grid is available “most” or “all of the time”, 38% of Ugandans use other power sources, including 33% who use solar.

¹ Media-only election campaigns have also been referred to as “scientific” election campaigns

- The proportion of Ugandans who feel that the media usually provide fair coverage during election campaigns fell from 52% in 2015 to 37% in 2019.
- Most Ugandans endorse the media's right to publish freely without government restrictions (70%) and support the media's "watch-dog" role of investigating government mistakes and corruption (79%) (Figure 3). A majority (56%) also support unrestricted public access to the Internet. Only minorities are opposed to government restrictions on sharing information that criticizes or insults the president (29%) or is false (17%), as well as hate speech (22%).

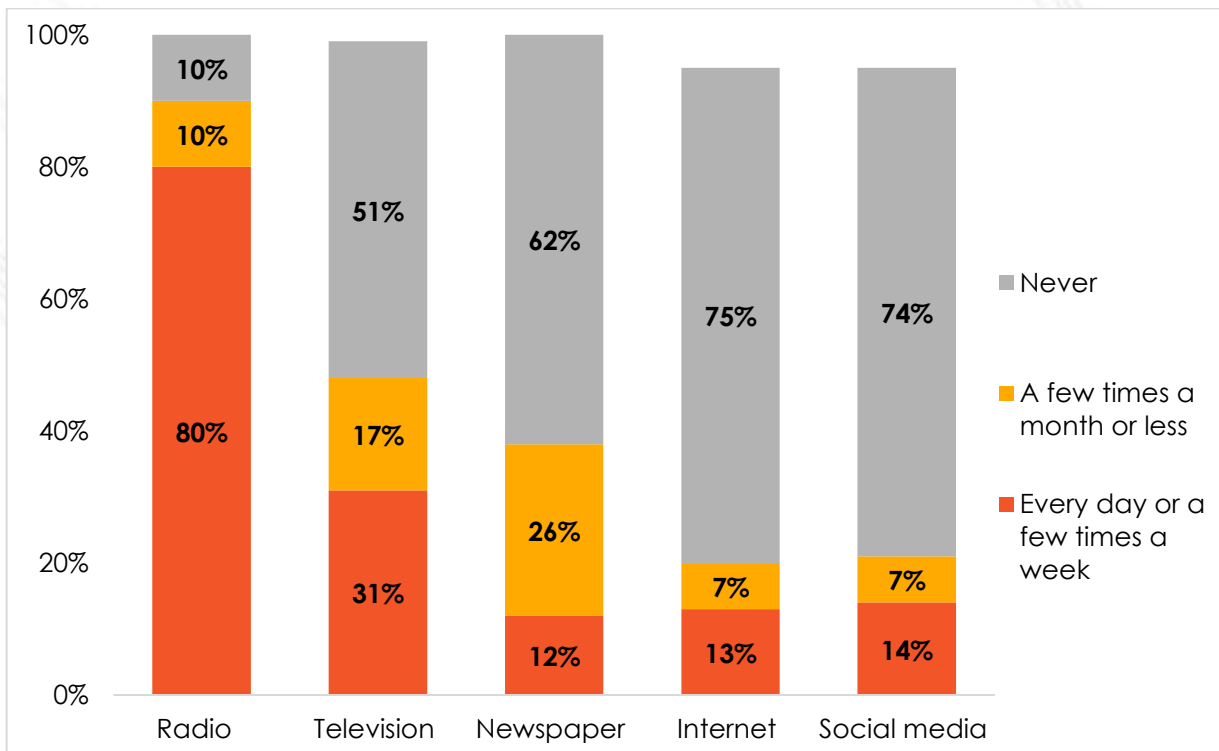
Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan 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 2019/2020 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 Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult, interviewed 1,200 adult Ugandans between 30 September and 31 October 2019. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Uganda in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015 and 2017.

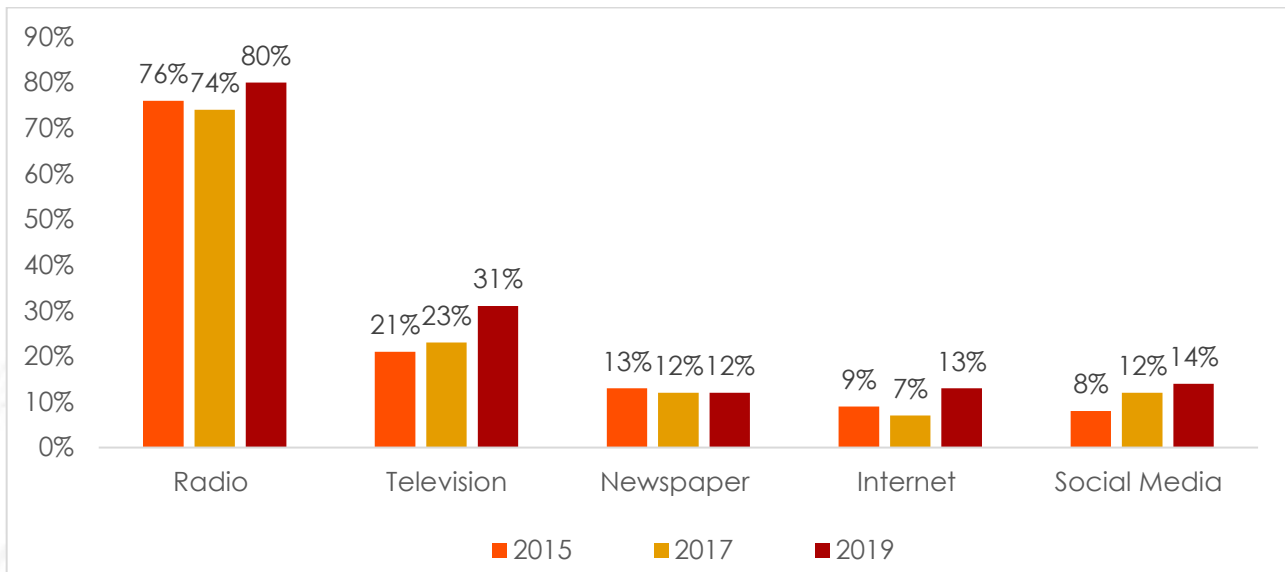
Charts

Figure 1: Frequency of getting news by media source | Uganda | 2019



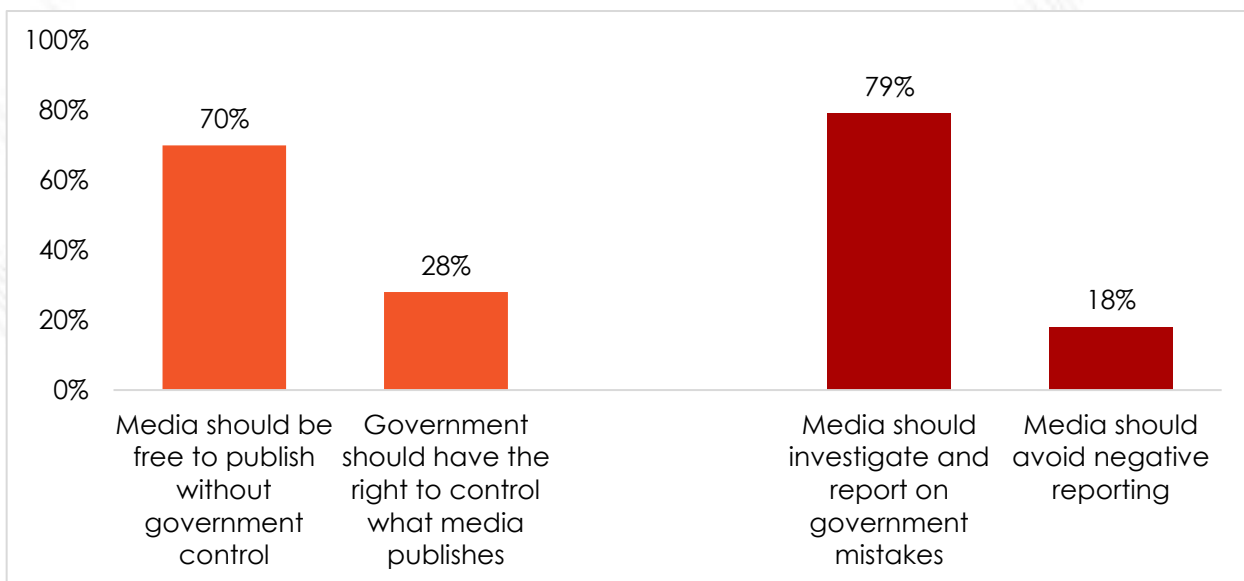
Respondents were asked: How often do you get news from the following sources: Radio? Television? Newspaper? Internet? Social media? (% who say "don't know" or "refused" not plotted)

Figure 2: Trends in news regular media consumption | Uganda | 2015-2019



Respondents were asked: How often do you get news from the following sources? (% who say “every day” or “a few times a week”)

Figure 3: Public support for free media | Uganda | 2019



Respondents were asked:

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)

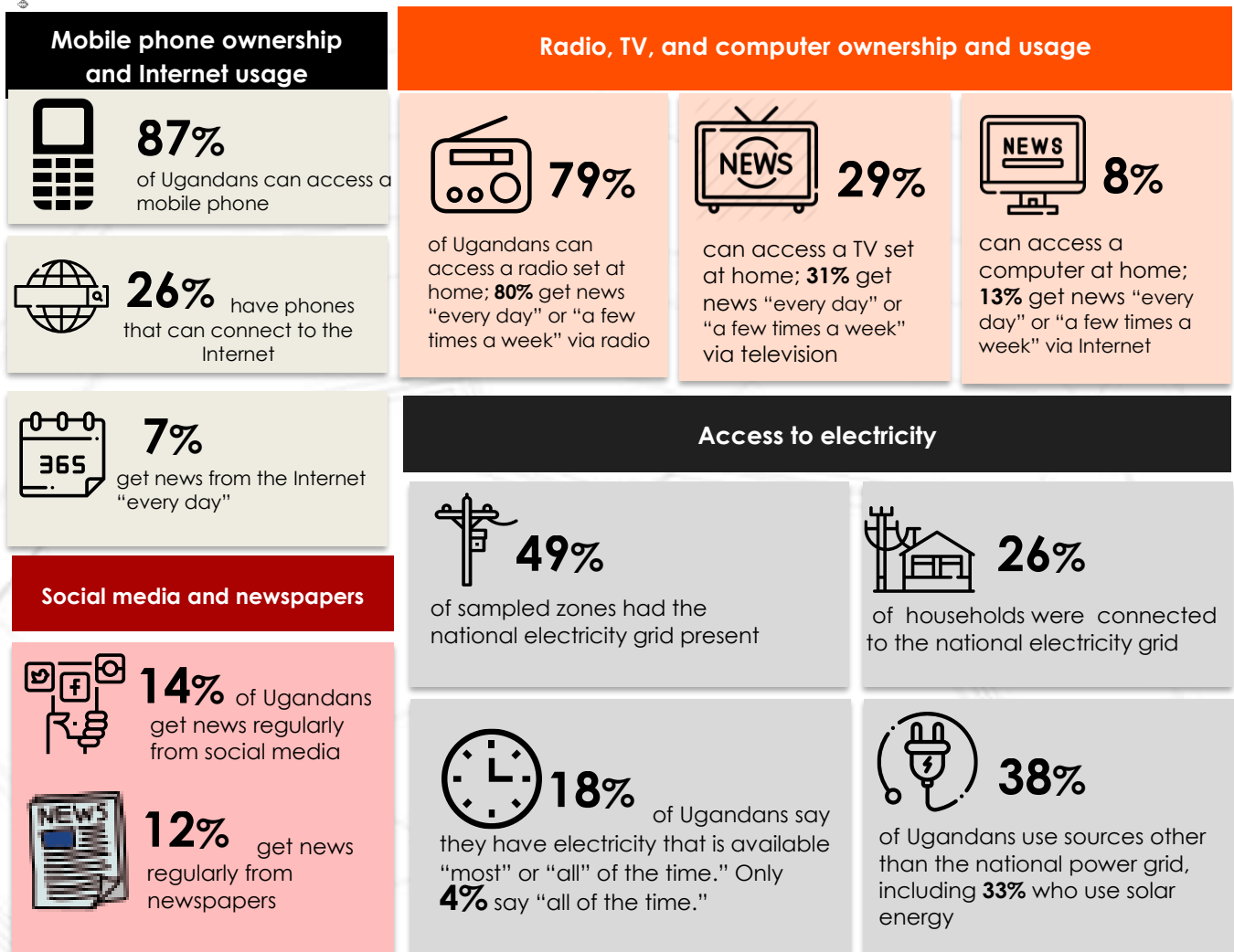
Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: The news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.

Statement 2: Too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country.

(% who “agree” or “strongly agree” with each statement)

Figure 4: Access to and use of media | Uganda | 2019



Respondents were asked:

Mobile phone ownership and Internet usage:

1. Which of these things do you personally own: A mobile phone? [If "no"]: Does anyone else in your household own one? (% who say they or someone else in household owns a mobile phone)
2. [If "yes" to personally owning a mobile phone:] Does your phone have access to the Internet? (% "yes")
3. How often do you get news from the following sources: Internet? (% who say "every day")

Radio, TV, and computer ownership and usage

4. Which of these things do you personally own: Radio? Television? Computer? [If "no"]: Does anyone else in your household own one? (% who say they or someone else in household owns one)
5. How often do you get news from the following sources: Radio? Television? Internet? (% who say "every day" or "a few times a week")

Newspapers and social media

6. How often do you get news from the following sources: Newspapers? Social media? (% who say "every day" or "a few times a week")

Access to electricity

7. [Question to survey enumerators:] Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area:
 - a) Electricity grid that most houses can access?
 - b) Mobile phone service?
8. Do you have an electric connection to your home from the national power grid?
9. How often is electricity actually available from this connection?
10. Does your house use electric power from any source other than the national power grid?
11. What is the source of the electricity for this connection?

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