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News release

World Press Freedom Day: Afrobarometer data show increase in support for media freedom

A majority of Africans endorse the media's "right to publish any views and ideas without government control," rejecting the idea that a government should be able to prevent the media from publishing "things that it disapproves of," new Afrobarometer survey findings show.

Support for media freedom is the majority view in 31 of 36 surveyed countries and has increased by 12 percentage points across 30 countries tracked since 2014/2015.

Majorities in all 36 surveyed countries endorse the media's watchdog role in investigating and reporting on government mistakes and corruption.

The data also show that a majority of Africans assess their country's media as "somewhat" or "completely" free. But Gabon, Eswatini, Côte d'Ivoire, and Cameroon register large majorities who describe their country's media as "not very free" or "not at all free."

Key findings

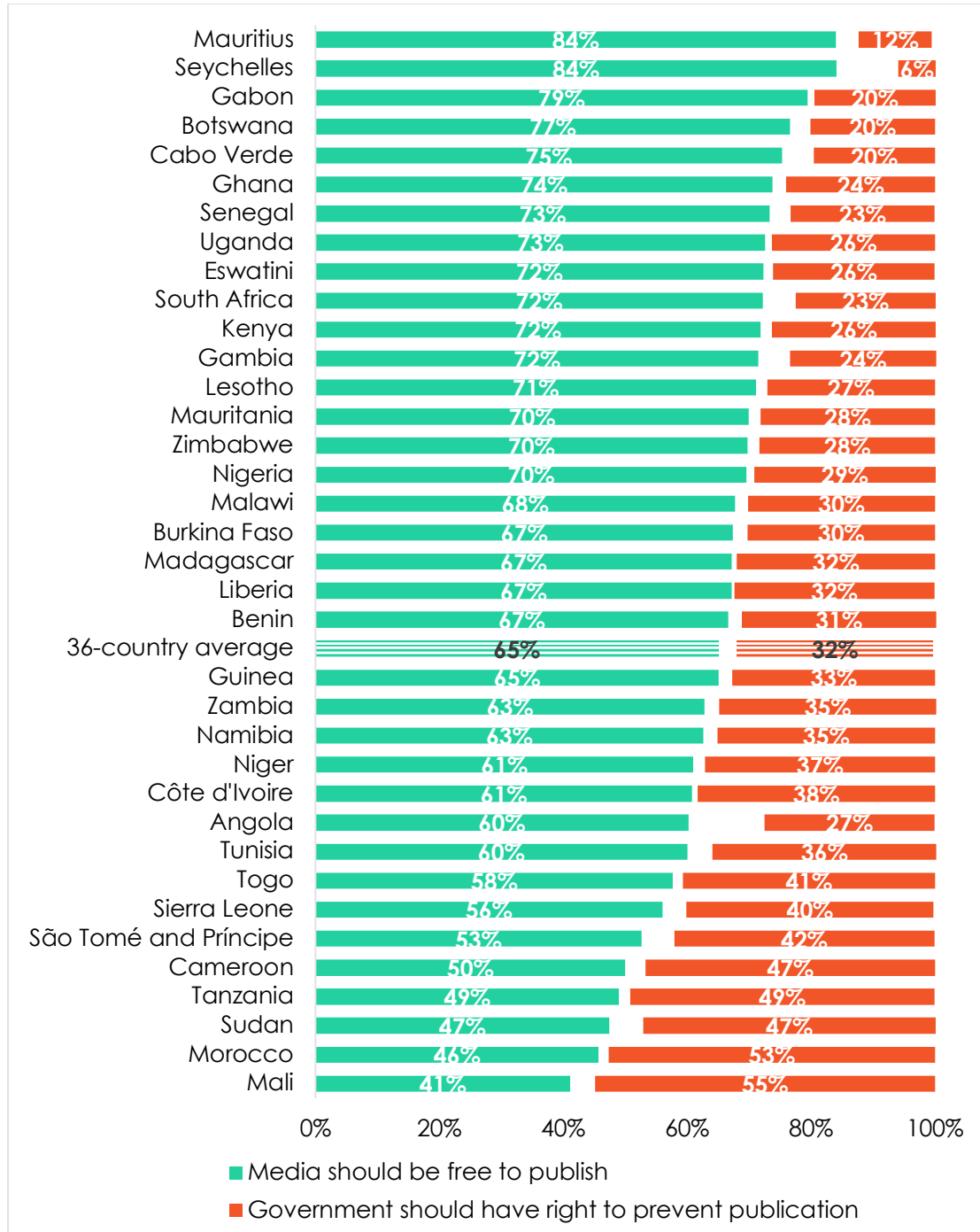
- On average across 36 African countries, two-thirds (65%) of citizens "agree" or "strongly agree" that the media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control (Figure 1). This includes more than three-fourths of citizens in Mauritius (84%), Seychelles (84%), Gabon (79%), and Botswana (77%).
- On average across 30 countries surveyed in both 2014/2015 and 2021/2022, support for media freedom has increased by 12 percentage points (Figure 2).
 - Support for free media has more than doubled during this time period in Senegal (from 27% to 73%), while 17 other countries also record double-digit increases.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of citizens "agree" or "strongly agree" that the media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption, while 25% say "too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country" (Figure 3).
- Close to six in 10 (58%) say the media in their country is "completely" or "somewhat" free (Figure 4). Perceived media freedom is highest in Tanzania (81%), the Gambia (79%), Tunisia (76%), and Mauritania (75%).

Afrobarometer surveys

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. Eight survey rounds in up to 39 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys are being completed in early 2023. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200-2,400 adult citizens. Samples of this size yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Charts

Figure 1: Support for media freedom | 36 African countries | 2021/2022



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 considers harmful to society.
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Figure 2: Changes in support for media freedom (percentage points) | 30 countries
 | 2014-2022

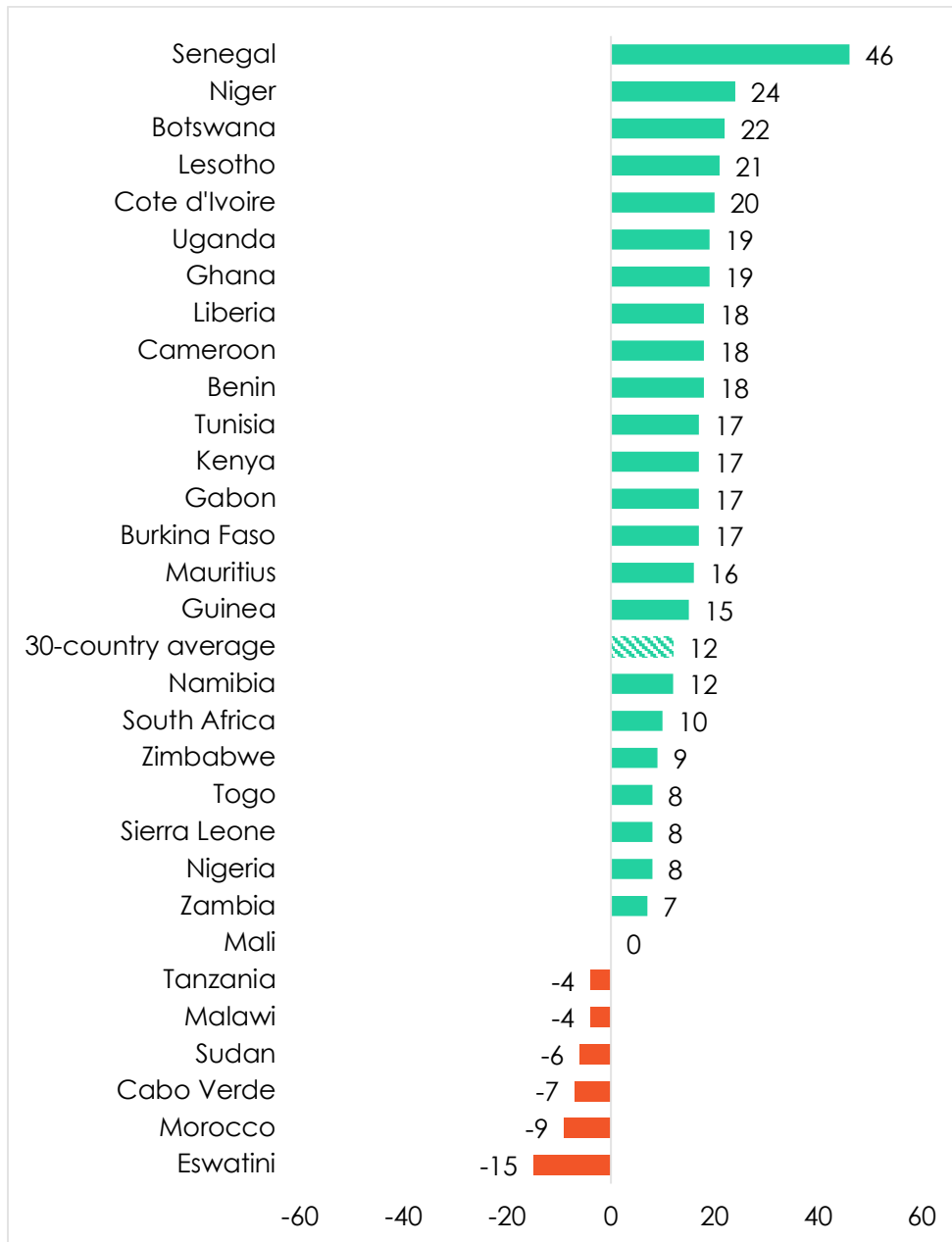
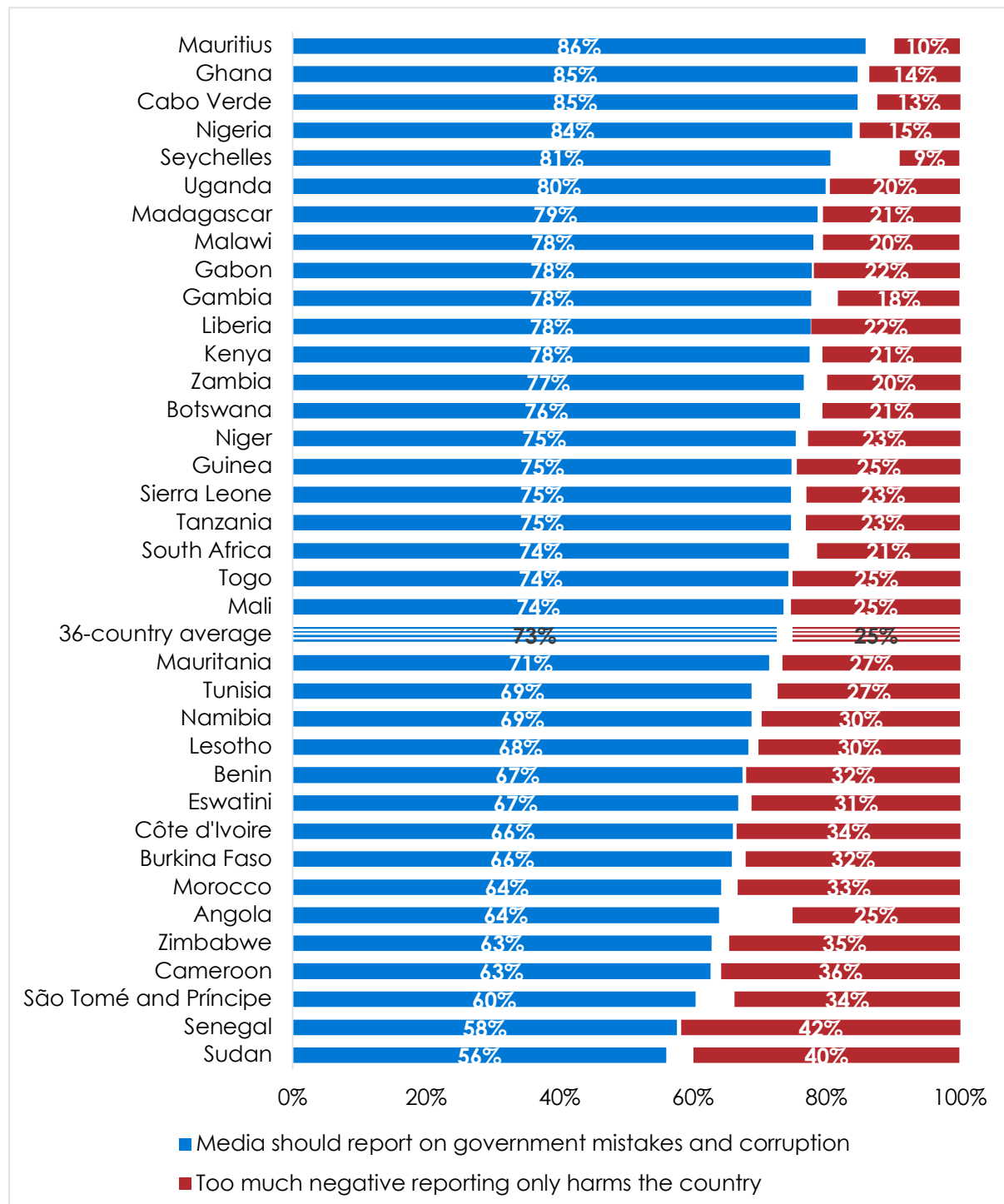


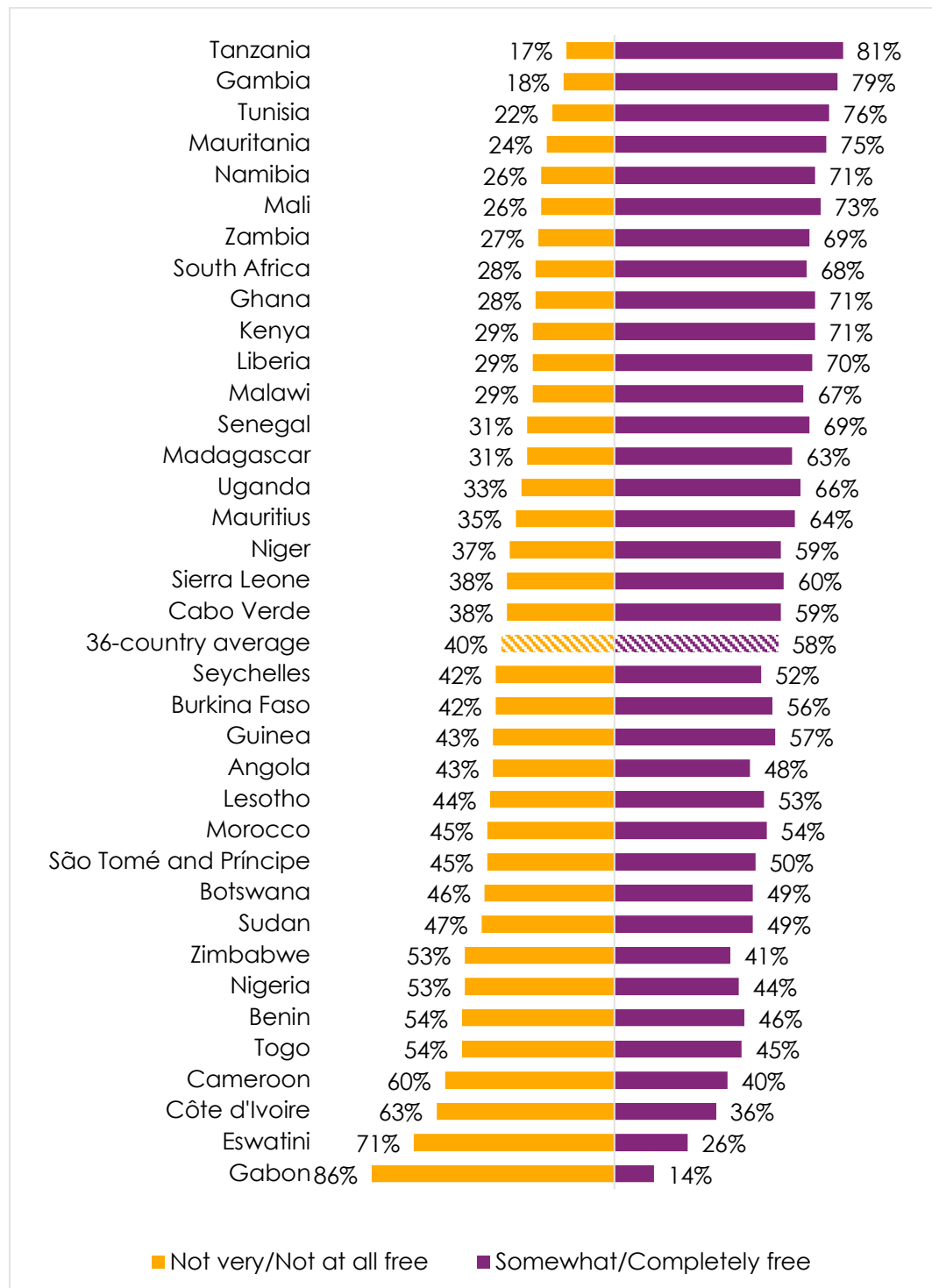
Figure shows changes (in percentage points) between 2014/2015 and 2021/2022 in the proportion of respondents who "agree" or "strongly agree" that the media should be free to report without government control.

Figure 3: Media should check government vs. avoid negative reporting
| 36 countries | 2021/2022



Respondents were asked: 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: How free is the media ? | 36 countries | 2021/2022



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?*

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