

Angolans reject government restrictions on information, say media should report freely

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 655 | Asafika Mpako and Carlos Pacatolo

Summary

On World Press Freedom Day (3 May), Angolan President João Lourenço shared a congratulatory message to professionals in the media, applauding them “for the commitment and dedication they have shown in carrying out the mission of informing with truth, impartiality, and responsibility” (Ver Angola, 2023a).

The president's message came amid widespread perceptions of government restrictions on the flow of information and censorship of journalists. Although freedom of the press is enshrined in Angola's Constitution, those who dare to shine a light on government abuse of power and mismanagement are often prosecuted and handed heavy sentences (Reporters Without Borders, 2023).

Last year, the Freedom House (2022) Freedom in the World report listed Angola as one of the countries in the Southern Africa region exhibiting hostility toward the media (Mavhunga, 2022) and rated Angola only “partly free” in terms of Internet freedom. In 2023, Angola dropped 26 places on the World Press Freedom Index, placing it 125th out of 180 countries (Reporters Without Borders, 2023; Ver Angola, 2023b).

According to the most recent Afrobarometer survey, Angolans broadly agree that the media should act as a watchdog over the government, constantly investigating and reporting on government mistakes and corruption. Citizens value media freedom and reject the notion that public information should be the exclusive preserve of government officials. However, views are mixed on whether media freedom exists in practice.

Television and radio still outpace social media and the Internet as popular news sources in Angola, but not by much – especially among young and educated citizens.

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. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999, and Round 9 surveys are currently under way. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Angola, based at Ovilongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, interviewed 1,200 adult Angolans February-March 2022. 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 survey was conducted in Angola in 2019.

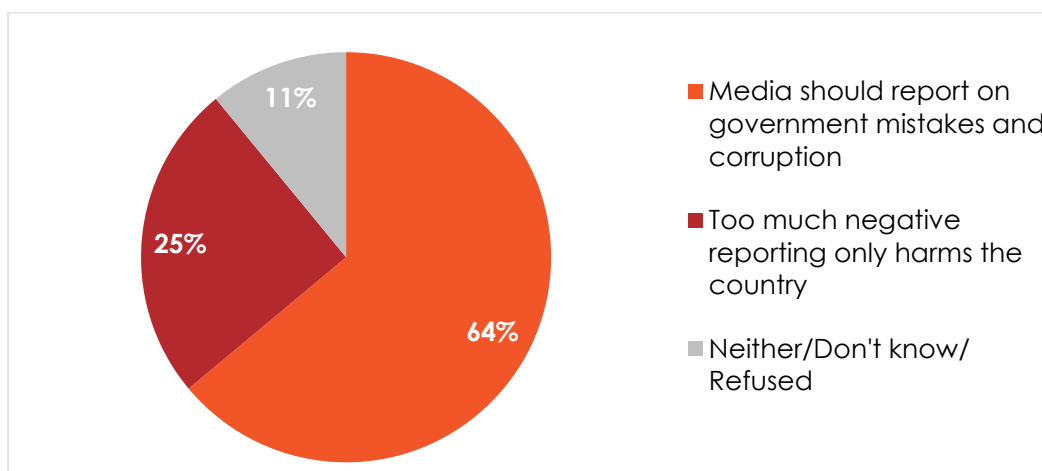
Key findings

- Almost two-thirds (64%) of Angolans say the media should “constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.”
- A similarly clear majority (60%) insist on media freedom, while 27% endorse the government’s right to prevent the publication of things it disapproves of.
- Nearly half (48%) of Angolans say the country’s media is “somewhat free” or “completely free” to report and comment on the news without government interference, but 43% disagree with that assessment.
- More than half (55%) think the public should have access to government information, while 31% say such information should be for use by government officials only and should not be shared with the public.
- Stronger majorities believe that government bids and contracts with businesses (73%), local government budgets (73%), and the salaries of teachers and local government officials (61%) should be shared with the public.
- Television and radio are still the most popular sources of news in Angola. But social media and the Internet follow close behind, especially among young and educated Angolans.

The role of the media

Most Angolans believe the media must hold the government accountable. Nearly two-thirds (64%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that the media should “constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption,” while just 25% instead emphasise that “too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country” (Figure 1).

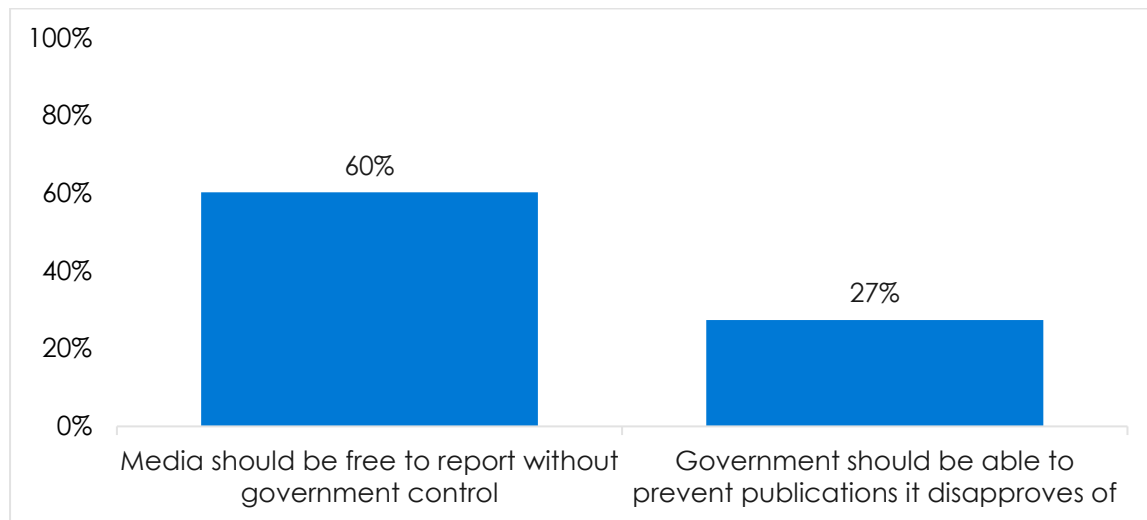
Figure 1: Media’s watchdog role | Angola | 2022



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)

Similarly, three in five citizens (60%) say the media should be free to publish any views and ideas without government interference, while only 27% believe the government should be able to prevent the media from publishing things it disapproves of (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Should the media be free? | Angola | 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 disapproves of.
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

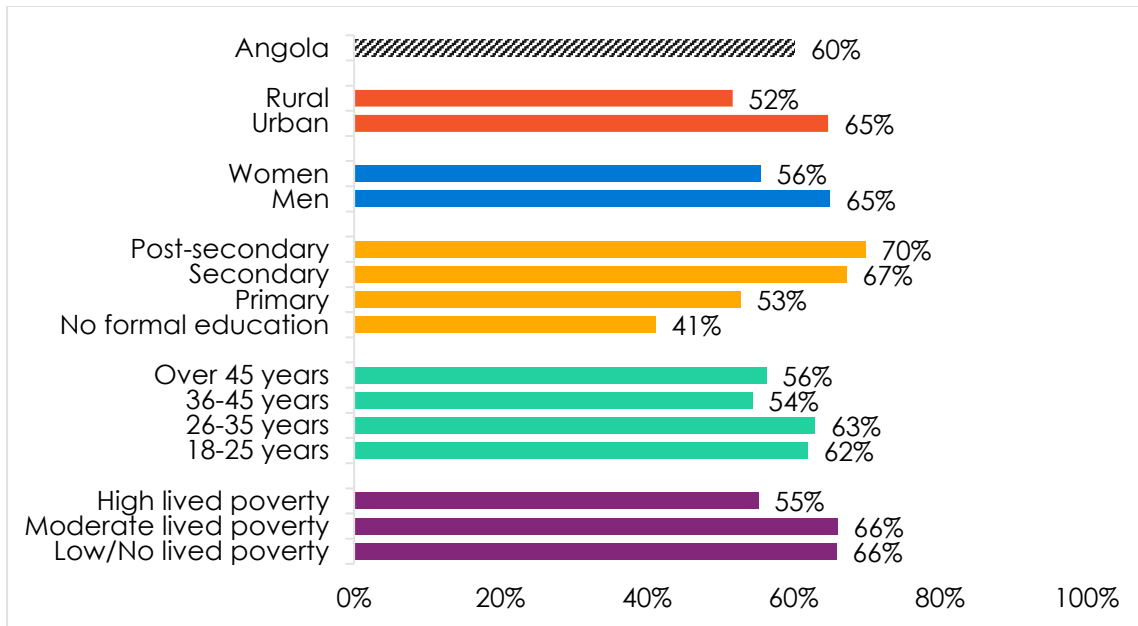
Media freedom wins greater approval in cities than in rural areas (65% vs. 52%) and among men compared to women (65% vs. 56%). Support increases as respondents' education levels rise, ranging from 41% among those with no formal education to 70% among those with tertiary qualifications (Figure 3).

Older citizens are somewhat less concerned about media freedom than their younger counterparts (54%-56% among those over 35 years old vs. 62%-63% among those between the ages of 18 and 35). Respondents experiencing high levels of poverty (55%) are also less concerned about media freedom than better-off citizens (66%).¹

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¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

Figure 3: Support for media freedom | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



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

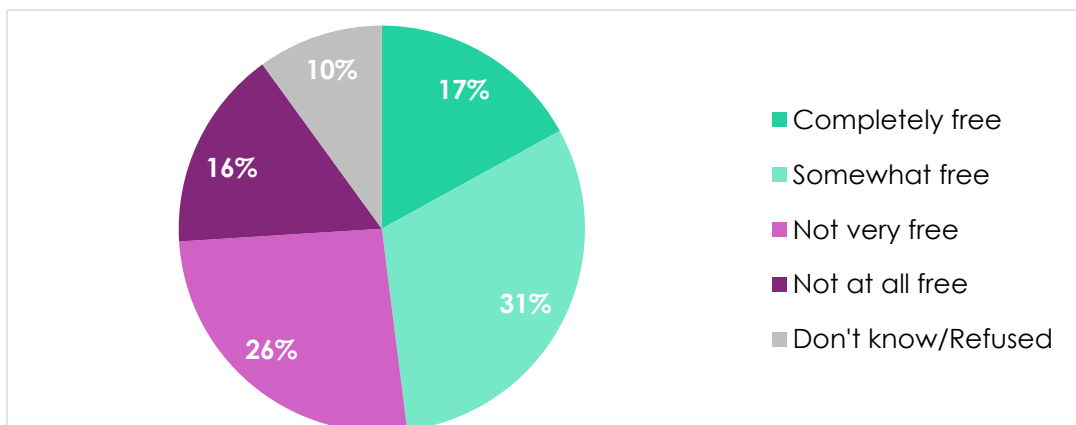
Statement 1: The media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control.

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 Statement 1)

Angolans' views on the reality of media freedom in the country are quite mixed. Almost half (48%) of citizens say the country's media enjoys some level of freedom: 17% say the media is “somewhat free” and 31% say it is “completely free” to report and comment on the news. But almost as many (43%)² consider the media “not very free” or “not at all free” (Figure 4).

Figure 4: How free is the media? | Angola | 2022

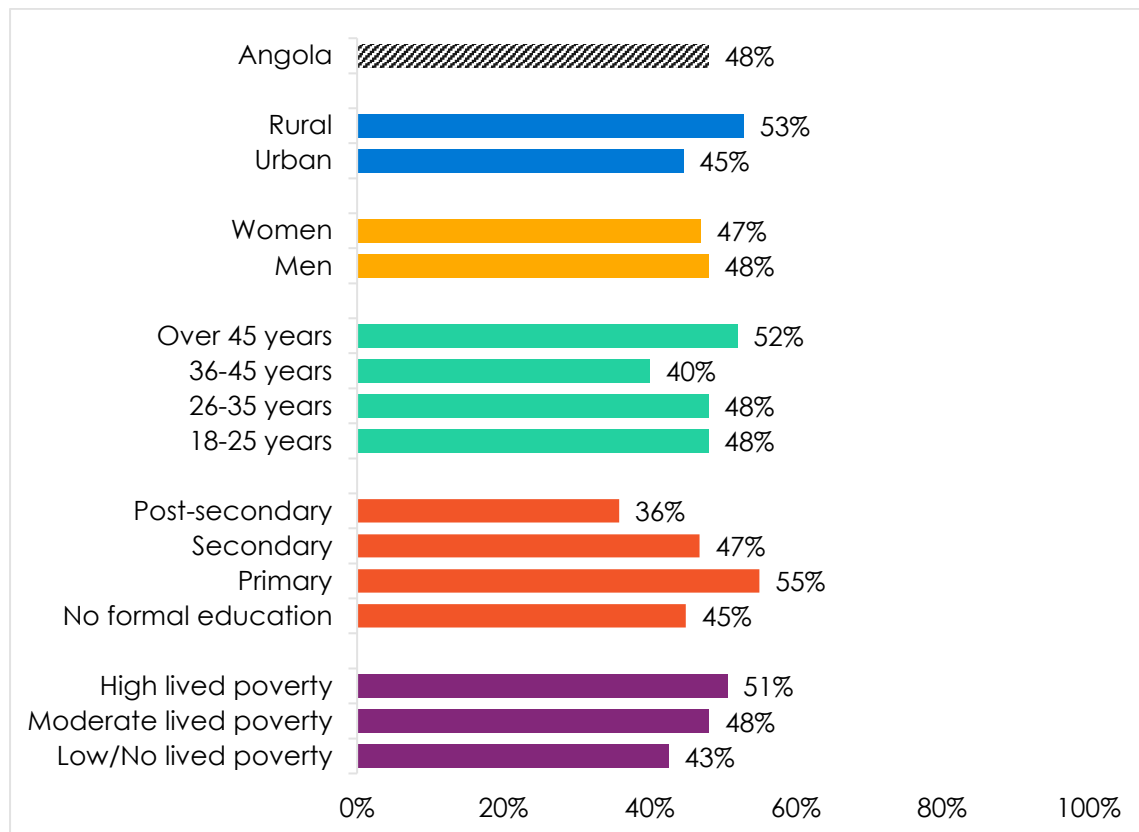


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how free is the news media in this country to report and comment on the news without censorship or interference by the government?

² Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures (e.g. 26% “not very free” and 16% “not at all free” sum to 43%).

The view that the media is “somewhat” or “completely” free is more common among rural residents (53%) than urbanites (45%), among the elderly (52%) than younger respondents (40%-48%), and among those with primary education (55%) compared to their counterparts in other education brackets (Figure 5). Citizens experiencing high lived poverty (51%) are also more likely to say that the news media in the country is free compared to those who are economically better off (43%-48%).

Figure 5: Media is somewhat/completely free | by demographic group | Angola | 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? (% who say “somewhat free” or “completely free”)

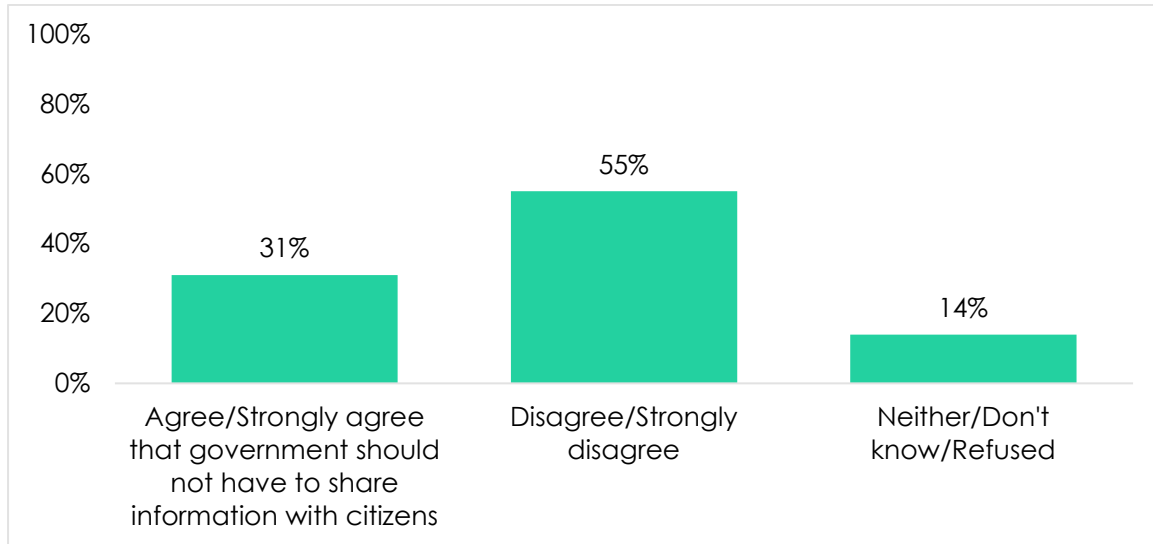
Government regulation of information

What do Angolans think about restrictions on access to information? Do they believe their government should be required to share information with the public?

More than half (55%) of Angolans favour citizens' right to government information, disagreeing with the assertion that information held by public authorities is for use only by government officials (Figure 6). About three in 10 (31%) support limiting such information to government use.

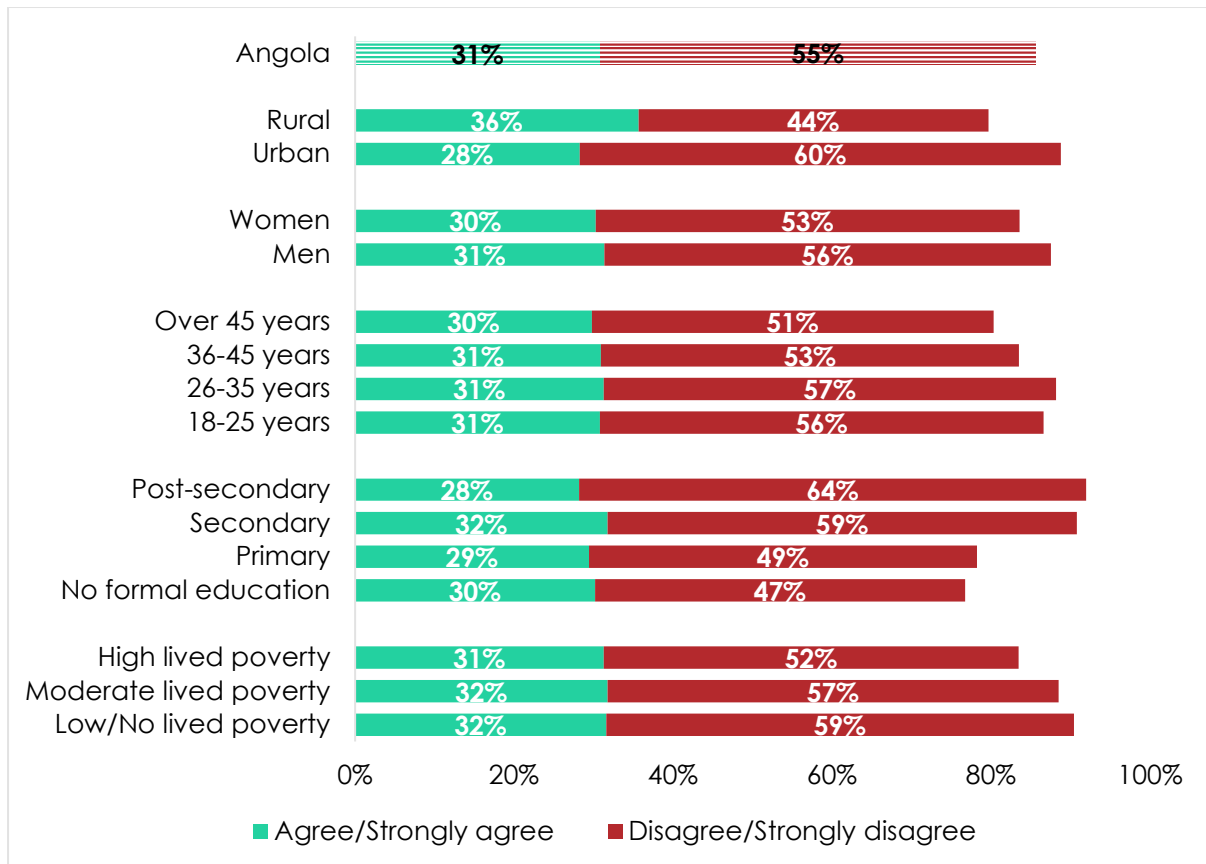
Support for public information sharing is stronger among educated respondents, ranging from 47% of those without formal schooling to 64% of those with post-secondary qualifications (Figure 7). It also gains more favour among urban residents (60%), younger respondents (56%-57%), and the economically better off (57%-59%).

Figure 6: Should the government have to share information with citizens? | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Information held by public authorities is only for use by government officials; it should not have to be shared with the public.

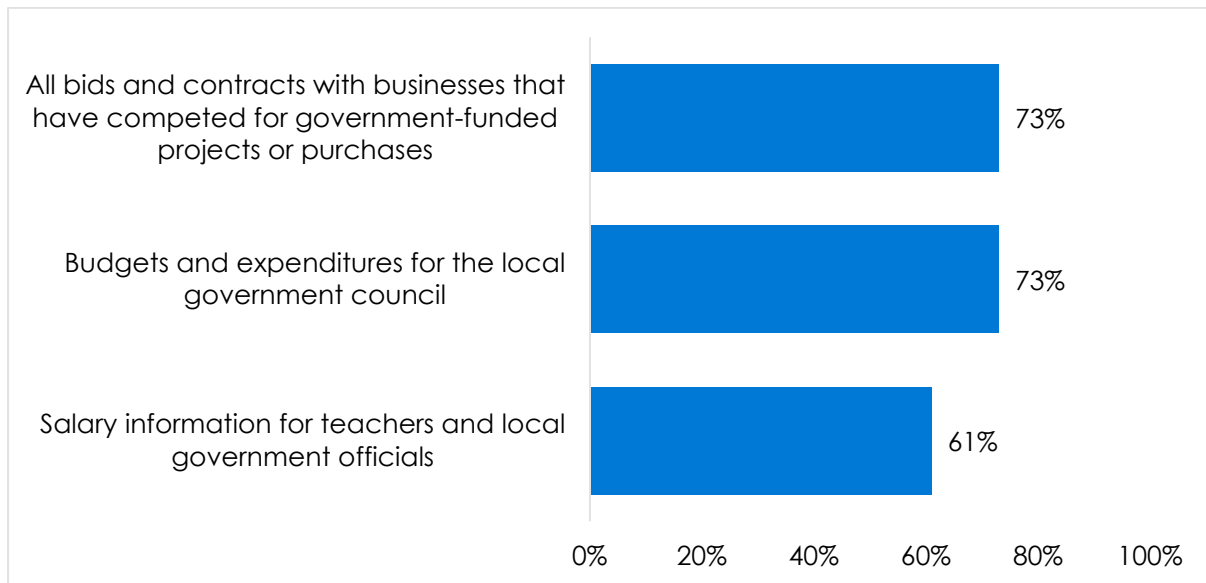
Figure 7: Should the government have to share information with citizens? | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Information held by public authorities is only for use by government officials; it should not have to be shared with the public.

Although only a slim majority (55%) of citizens support giving the public access to government information in general, strong majorities endorse the proposition that specific types of information should be made publicly available, including information regarding bids and contracts for government-funded projects or purchases (73%), budgets and expenditures for local government councils (73%), and salaries of teachers and local government officials (61%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Government should have to share certain types of information
 | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following, please tell me whether ordinary citizens and news media should have the right to obtain this information from government, or whether government should be allowed to keep the information away from the public. (% who say this information should be available to the public)

Angolans' sources of news

Angolans are loyal to their televisions and radios, which are still the most widely used mass media channels for getting news. About six in 10 citizens say they get news via television (62%) and radio (60%) “every day” or “a few times a week” (Figure 9).

But substantial shares of the population also regularly turn to social media (40%) and the Internet (39%) for news – a finding in line with DataReportal (2022) data showing that the number of Internet users in Angola increased by 389,000 (3.2%) in 2022.

Only 13% of citizens rely on newspapers as regular news sources, while 65% say they never read newspapers.

A breakdown by demographic group shows that television and radio are popular news sources across age groups. But older respondents are far less likely to obtain their news from social media and the Internet (Figure 10).

While television is king at the post-secondary and secondary education levels, citizens with primary schooling or less most frequently get their news from the radio (Figure 11). Social media and Internet use increase dramatically with respondents' education levels, ranging from 3%-4% among respondents with no formal education to 85%-86% among those with post-secondary qualifications.

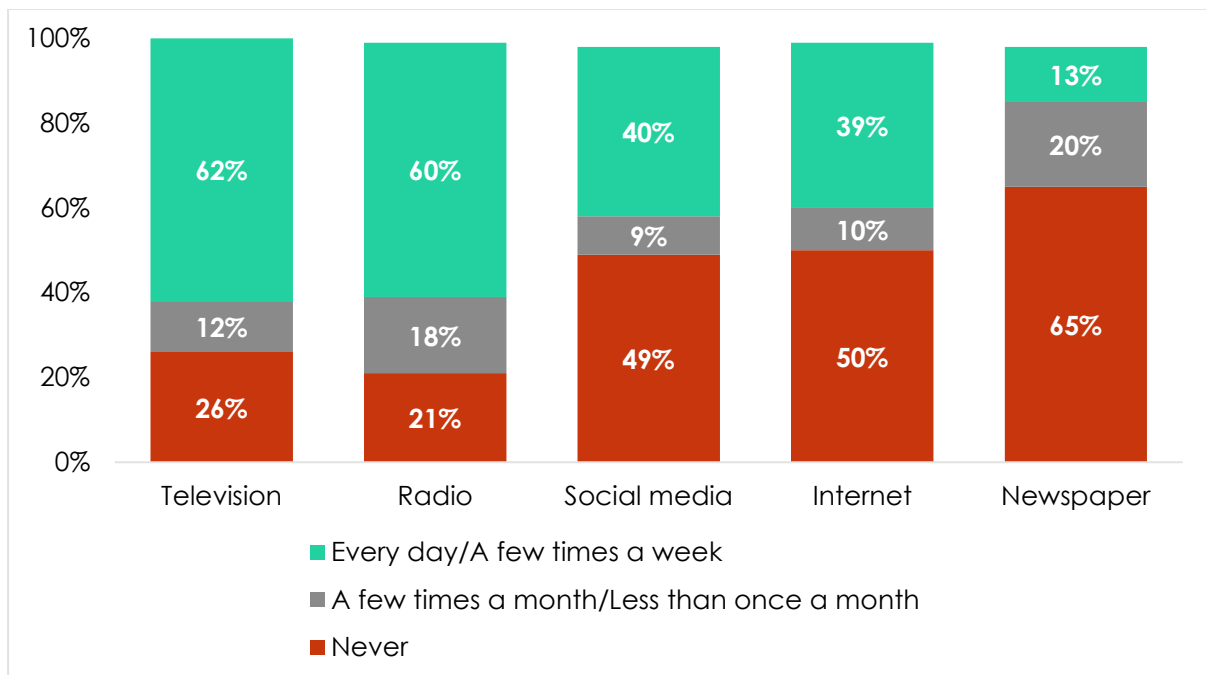
Reflecting a similar pattern, eight in 10 city residents (82%) regularly obtain their news from television, 63% from the radio, 55% from social media, and 54% from the Internet. The

numbers for rural residents are considerably lower: Radio is the only news source that is used regularly by more than half (52%) of rural residents (Figure 12).

Men are somewhat more likely than women to consume news via radio (66% vs. 54%), television (64% vs. 60%) and newspaper (15% vs. 11%), while about equal proportions of men and women get their news via social media and the Internet (Figure 13).

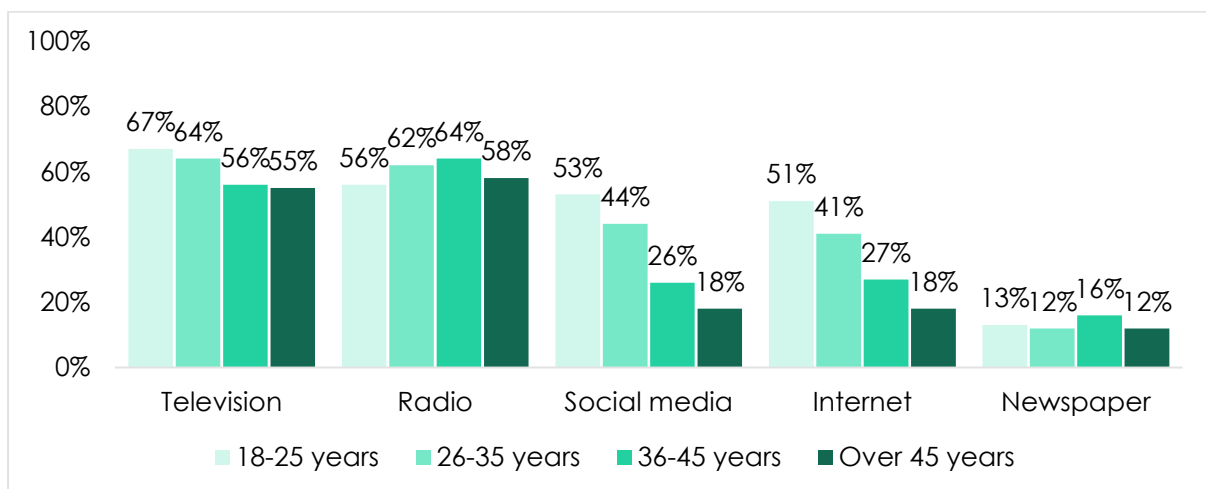
Finally, as might be expected, economically better-off citizens are far more likely than the poor to consume news regularly via television, social media, the Internet, and newspapers. Radio is the only major channel where economic status seems to make little difference in who tunes in to the news (Figure 14).

Figure 9: Source of news | Angola | 2022



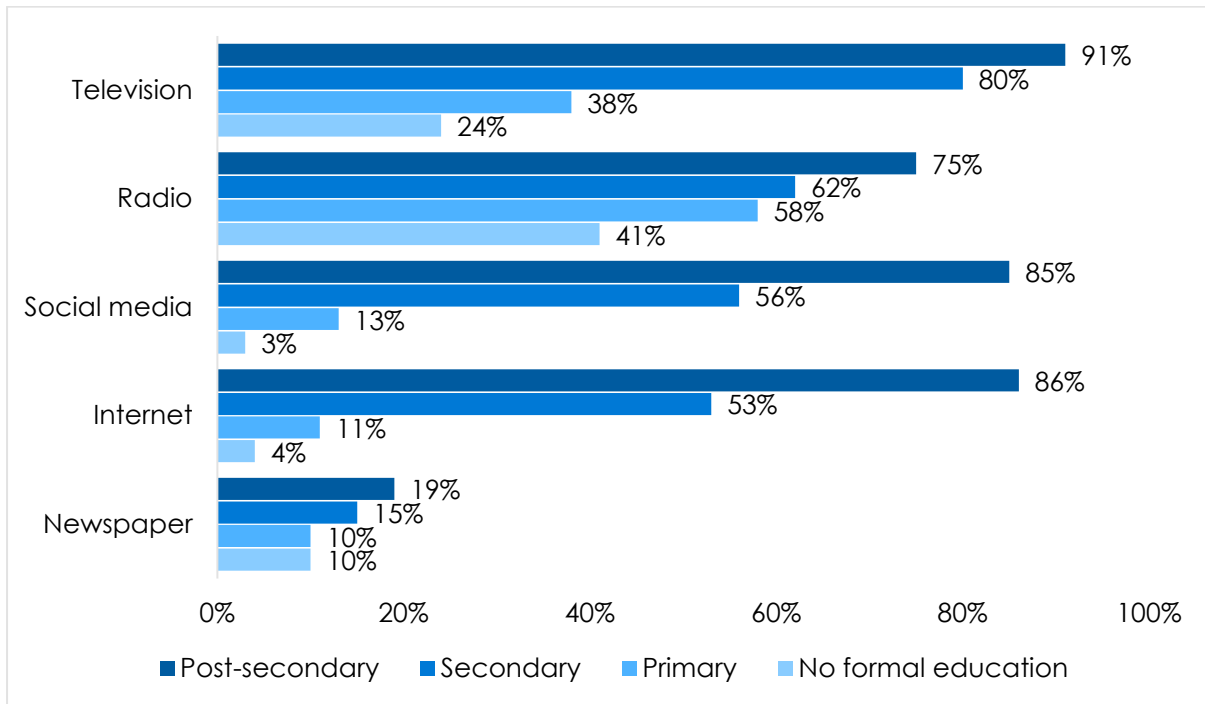
Respondents were asked: How often do you get news from the following sources?

Figure 10: Regular source of news | by age group | Angola | 2022



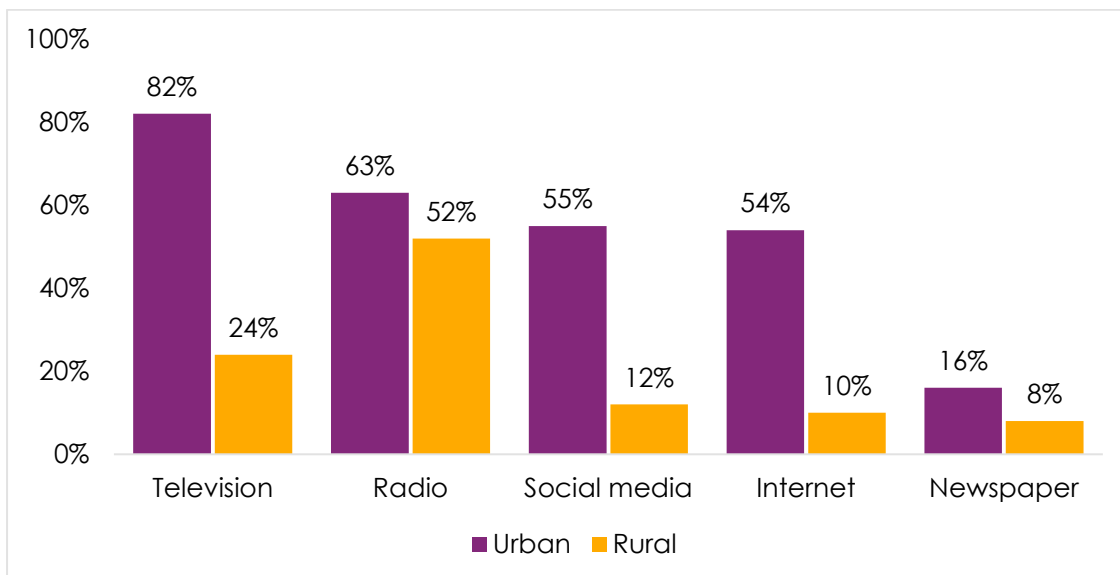
Respondents were asked: How often do you get news from the following sources? (% who say "every day" or "a few times a week")

Figure 11: Regular source of news | by education level | Angola | 2022



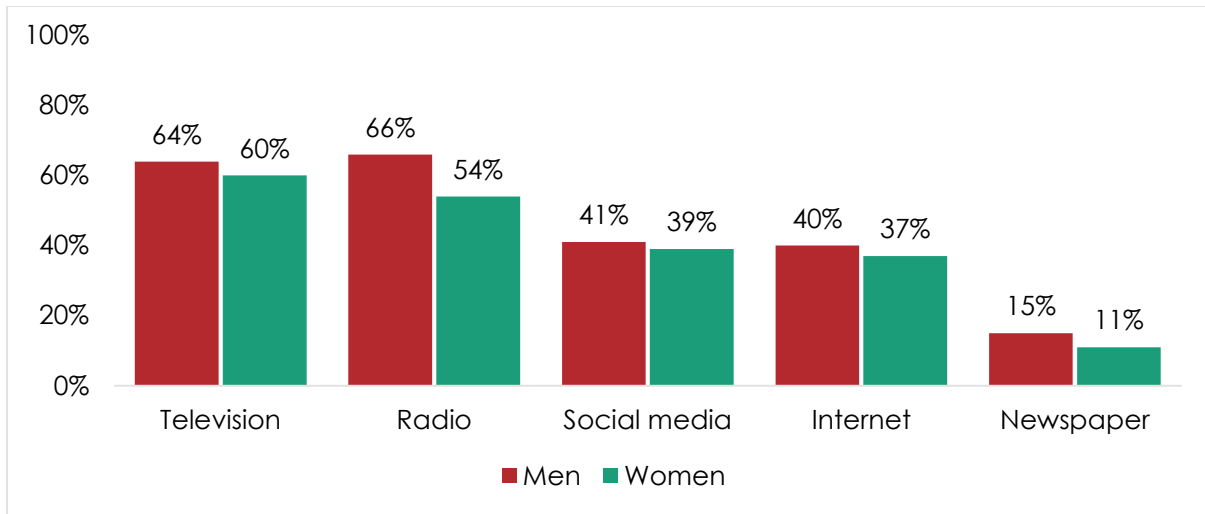
Respondents were asked: How often do you get news from the following sources? (% who say “every day” or “a few times a week”)

Figure 12: Regular source of news | by urban-rural location | Angola | 2022



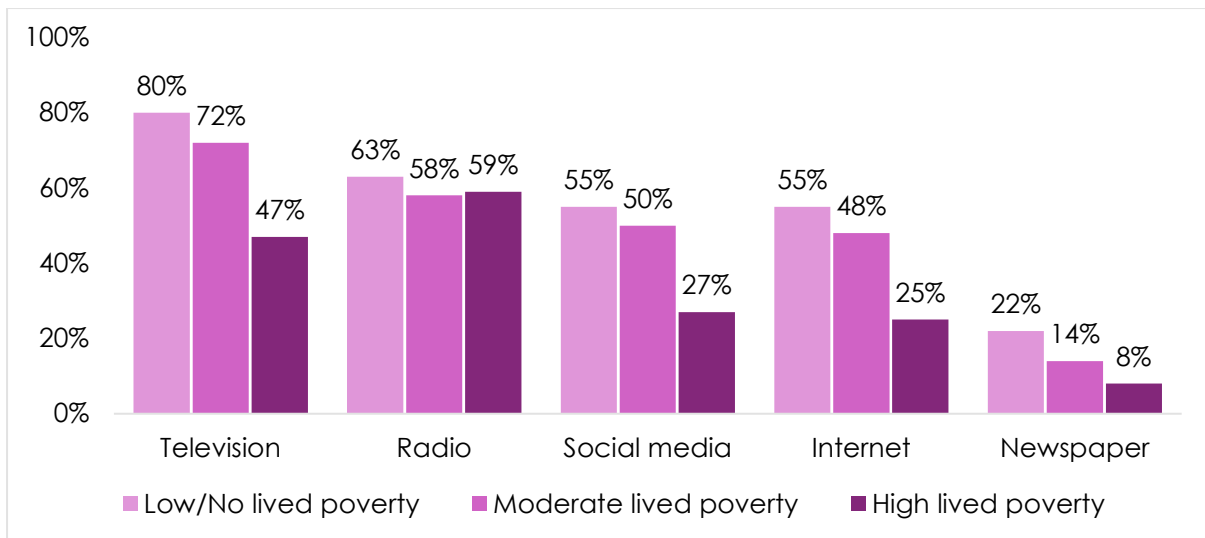
Respondents were asked: How often do you get news from the following sources? (% who say “every day” or “a few times a week”)

Figure 13: Regular source of news | by gender | Angola | 2022



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

Figure 14: Regular source of news | by lived poverty | Angola | 2022



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

Conclusion

Angolans clearly value the media's role as a watchdog and the free flow of public information. Majorities demand media freedom and public access to information such as government bids and contracts, local government council budgets and expenditures, and salaries of teachers and local government officials. This is good news for democracy as citizens show a desire for government accountability through checks by the media and the right to freedom of speech. However, fewer than half of Angolans think media freedom is a reality in their country today.

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