

30 April 2015

News release

African publics back rights, responsibilities of media watchdogs

A majority of Africans support an independent news media and expect the press to play an active role in reporting on poor government performance and corruption, a new analysis of Afrobarometer survey data shows.

In surveys representing more than three-fourths of the continent's population, 57% of respondents demand media freedom, although some countries and regions are more willing to tolerate government control than others. Less educated citizens are less likely to support a free news media that holds governments accountable.

Almost two-thirds of Africans say the media is effective in its watchdog role, but significant proportions – and in some countries large majorities – say the news media abuses its freedom by publishing lies.

In observance of World Press Freedom Day (May 3), this Afrobarometer analysis highlights everyday Africans' news habits and attitudes regarding media freedom, trustworthiness, and effectiveness. Results are detailed in **Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 27**, available at www.afrobarometer.org

Key findings

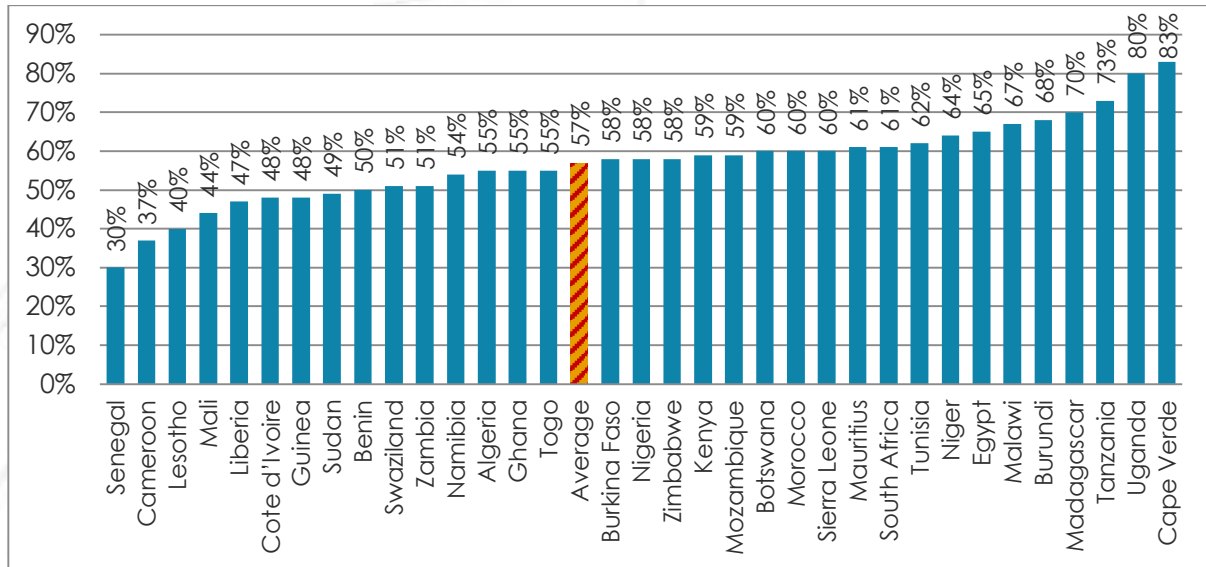
- Six in 10 respondents (62%) access news media daily. Radio remains the leading source of news but is declining in importance as television and the Internet build their audiences.
- A solid majority (57%) of Africans support the media's right to publish what it wants without government interference.
- Africans also support an active “watchdog” role for the press: On average, 69% believe that the media should exercise this role.
- Similarly, a majority (64%) believe the media is effective in exposing government mistakes and corruption.
- More than one-third (36%) of respondents say the media “often” or “always” publishes things it knows are not true. In some countries, this perception is shared by large majorities of citizens.

Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents. Samples of this size yield country-level results with a margin of error of between +/-3% (for n=1,200) and +/-2% (for n=2,400) at a 95% confidence level.

Charts

Figure 1: Support for media freedom | 34 countries | 2011/2013

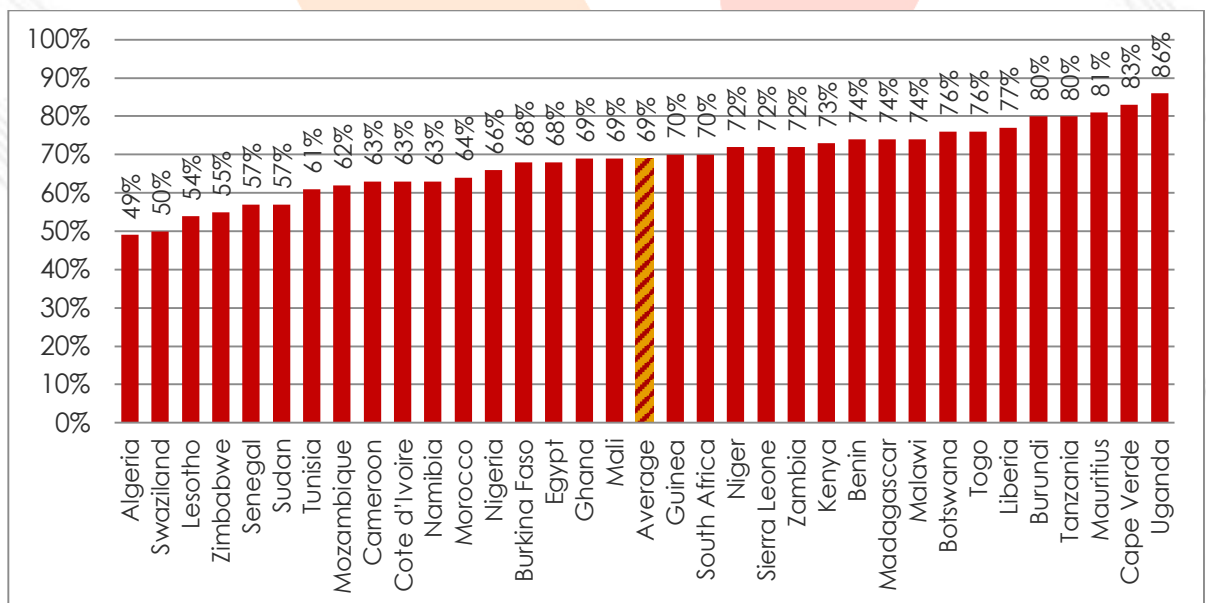


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

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.

Figure 2: Support for media's watchdog role | 34 countries | 2011/2013

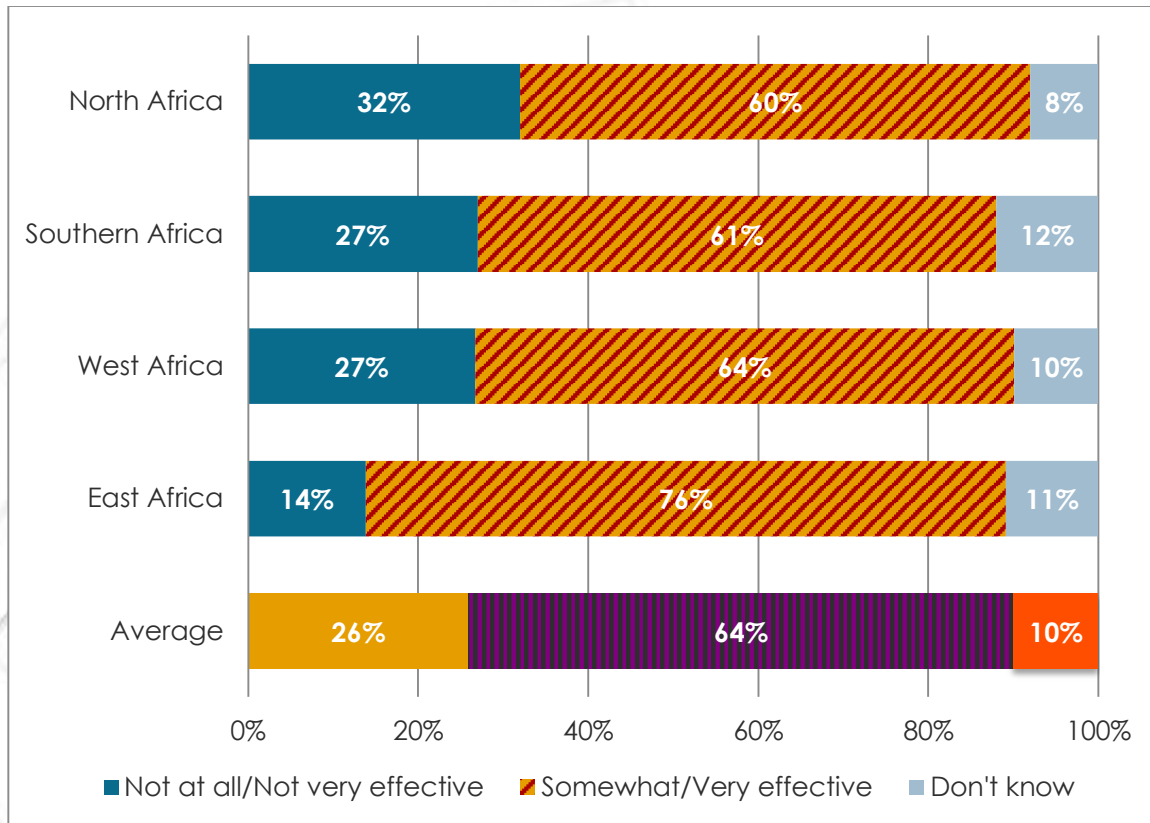


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

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

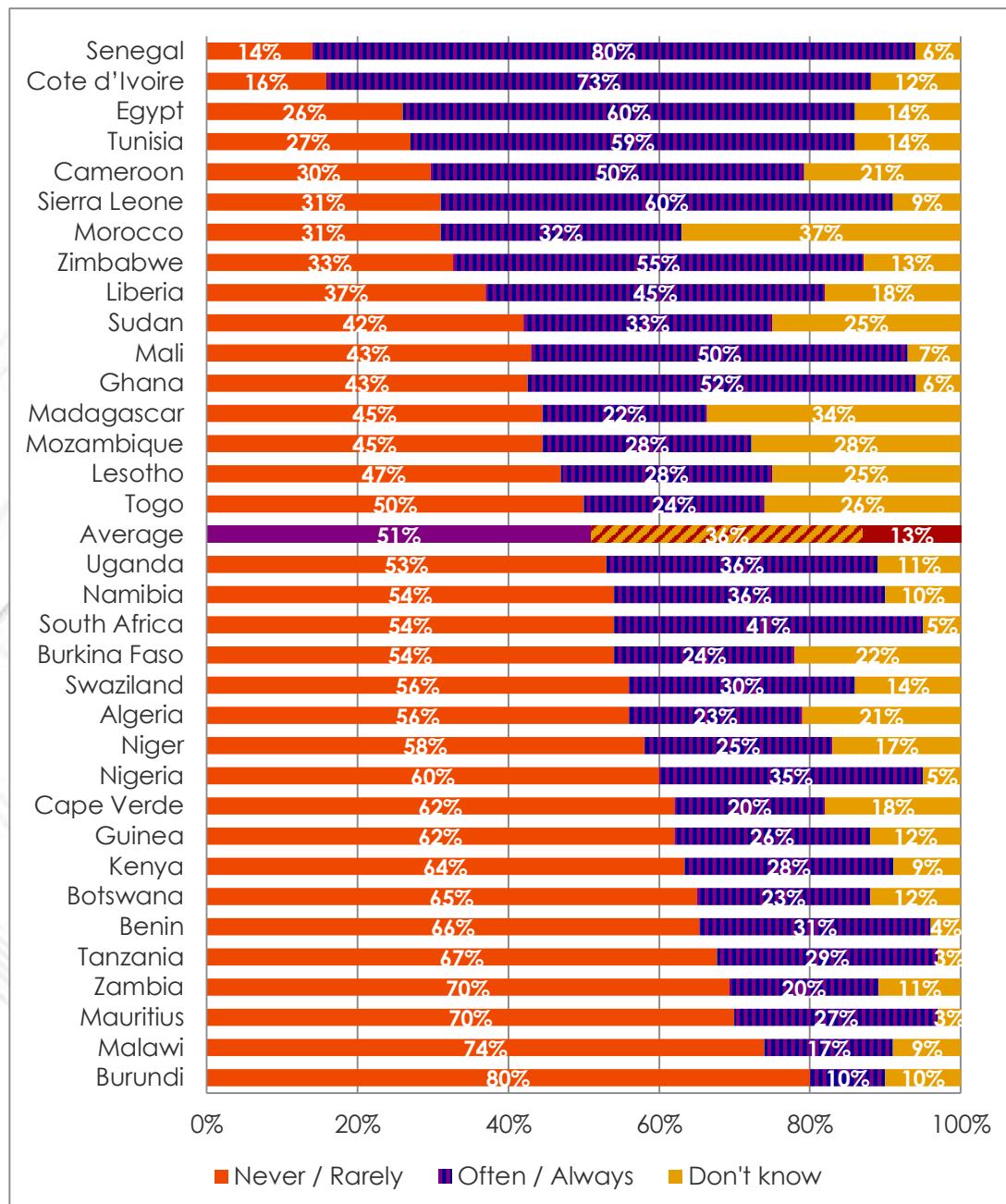
Statement 2: Too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country.

Figure 3: Effectiveness of news media in checking government | by region
 | 34 countries | 2011/2013



Respondents were asked: *In this country, how effective is the news media in revealing government mistakes and corruption?*

Figure 4: How often news media abuses its freedom | 34 countries | 2011/2013



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country, does the news media abuse its freedom by printing or saying things it knows are not true?*

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