

Afrobarometer
Accra, Ghana
21 May 2018

News release

Do East Africans still want a free media? Afrobarometer finds weakening popular support

Popular support for a free news media has declined significantly in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania – three countries currently making headlines for government attempts to limit press freedom.

Recent Afrobarometer surveys show that the proportion of respondents who say the government “should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it considers harmful to society” has risen sharply in Tanzania and Uganda, and more modestly in Kenya, over the past five years. At the same time, fewer citizens say they feel free to express their opinions.

Based on data collected in 2016/2017, these trends predate some of the latest government efforts to limit the flow of information in these East African countries. Media-freedom activists have expressed grave concerns about a series of recent government moves, including:

- A law in Kenya that makes it a crime to publish information deemed false or misleading. Even before the new cybercrimes law, authorities had attacked journalists and shut down broadcast stations, and in March, eight columnists resigned from Kenya's largest media group in protest against self-censorship by media owners and government infringements on media freedom.
- The Tanzanian government's continued attack on free expression, including the suspension of media outlets, prosecution of journalists, restrictions on peaceful protests, and a proposed new law that would charge bloggers a hefty fee for a license and give the government the power to revoke licenses for disagreeable content.
- A proposed new tax on social-media use in Uganda, where the government shut down social media during the 2016 presidential election. Critics say the tax would limit citizens' ability to share information and ideas.

Key findings

- In all three countries, the proportion of citizens who say the media “should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control” has declined significantly since Afrobarometer's 2011/2012 surveys (Figure 1 and Figure 2):
 - In Tanzania, from 73% to a minority of 40%
 - In Uganda, from 80% to 59%
 - In Kenya, from 59% to 50%
- In all three countries, support for media freedom is stronger, by 10-15 percentage points, among respondents who feel close to an opposition party than among those who feel close to the ruling party or to no party (Figure 3). Differences by respondents' education levels show no clear pattern.
- Citizens are divided in their views on whether the media's freedom increased or decreased during the years preceding the 2016/2017 surveys (Figure 4).

- Compared to Afrobarometer surveys in 2014/2015, fewer respondents say they feel "somewhat free" or "completely free" to say what they think (Figure 5):
 - In Tanzania, from 96% to 82%
 - In Uganda, from 87% to 80%
 - In Kenya, from 82% to 77%

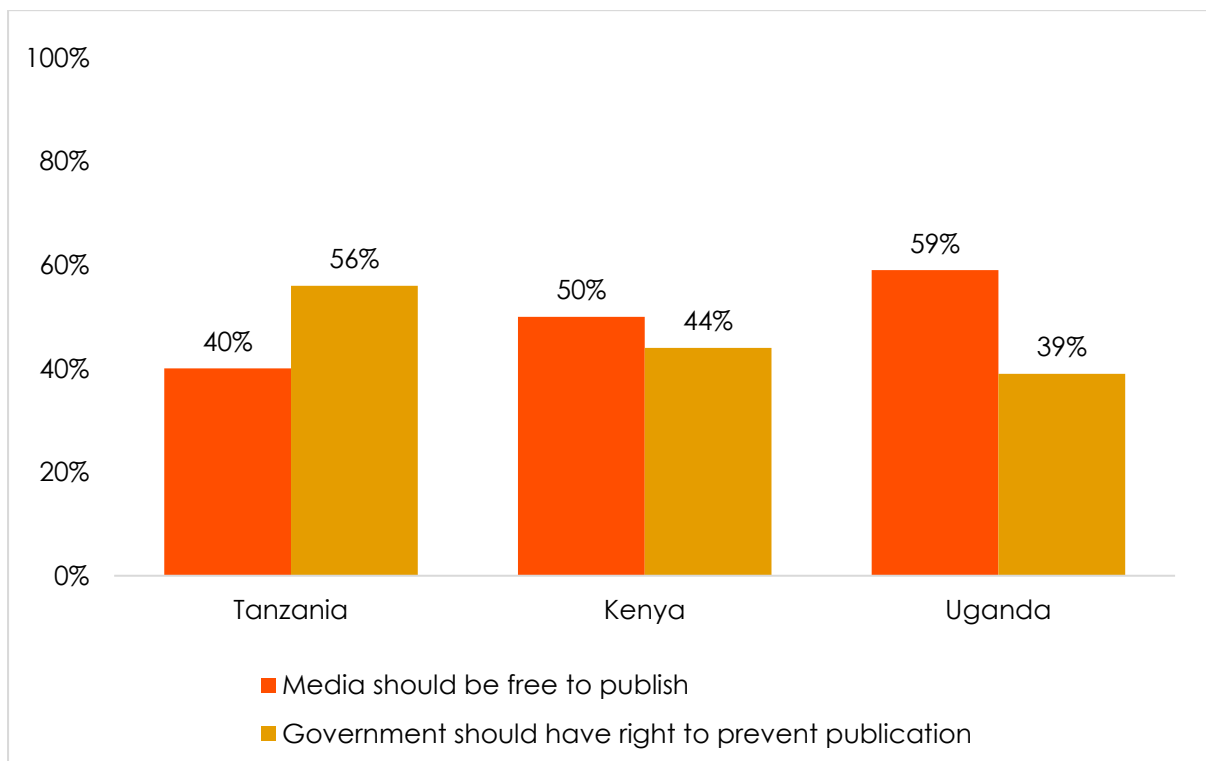
Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 African countries between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently underway.

Afrobarometer teams conducted face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples in Kenya (September-October 2016), Uganda (December 2016-January 2017), and Tanzania (May 2017). Sampling margins of error are +/-2% in Kenya and +/-3% in Uganda and Tanzania.

Charts

Figure 1: Should media be free to publish without government control? | Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda | 2016/2017



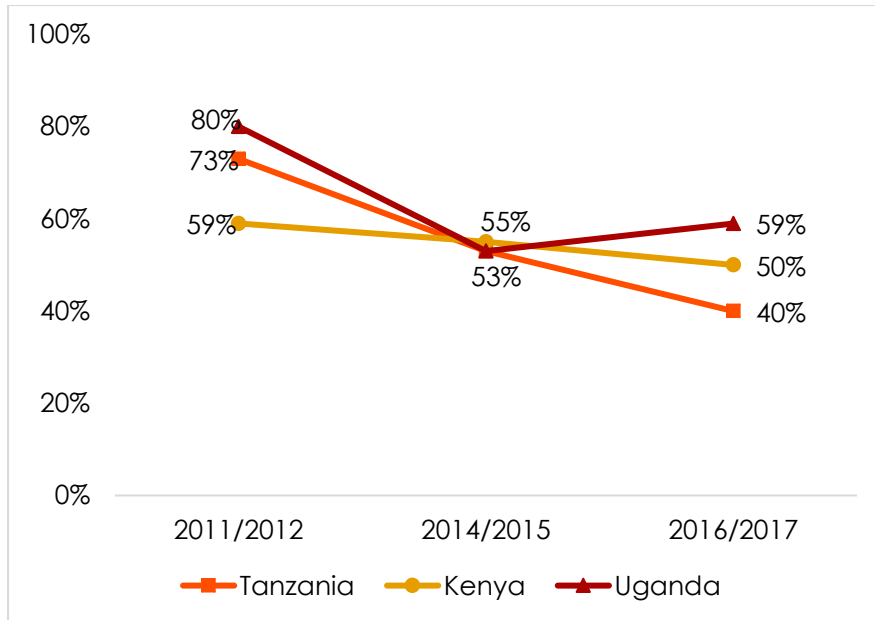
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

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.

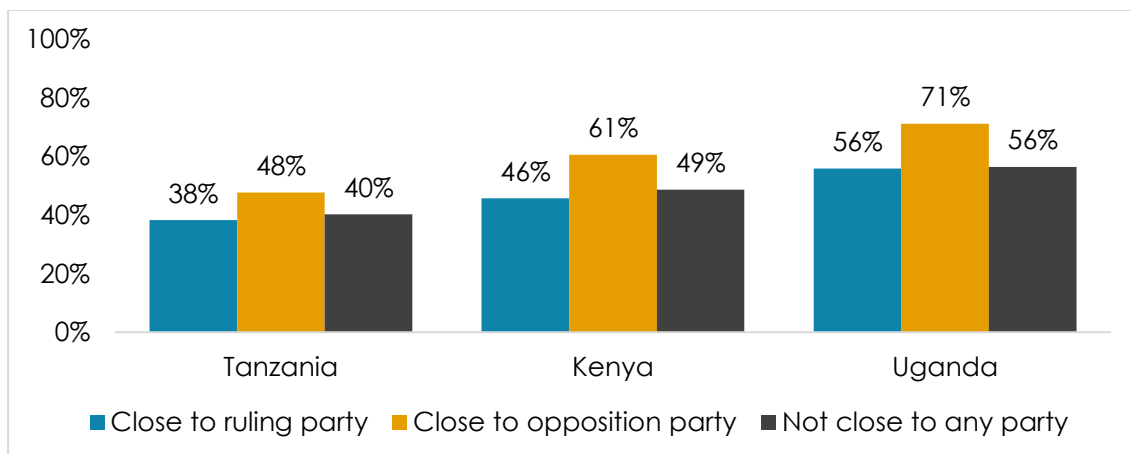
(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Figure 2: Media should be free to publish | Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda
 | 2011-2017



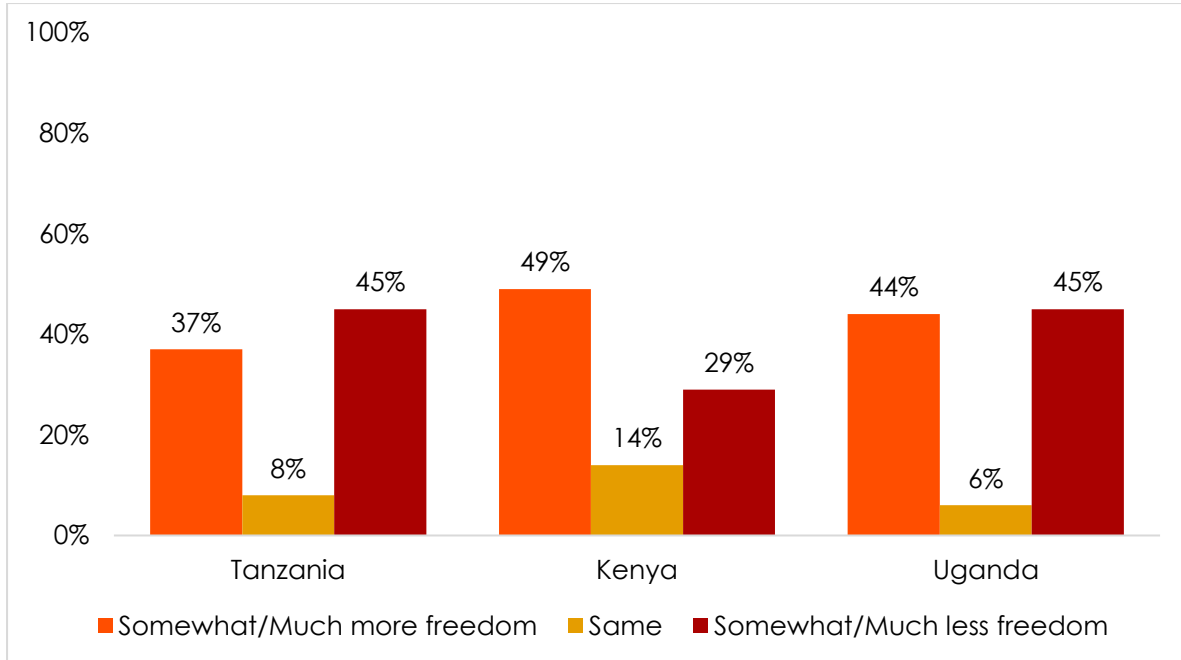
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control.
 Statement 2: The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it considers harmful to society.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” that the media should be free from government control)

Figure 3: Media should be free to publish | by political-party affiliation | Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda | 2016/2017



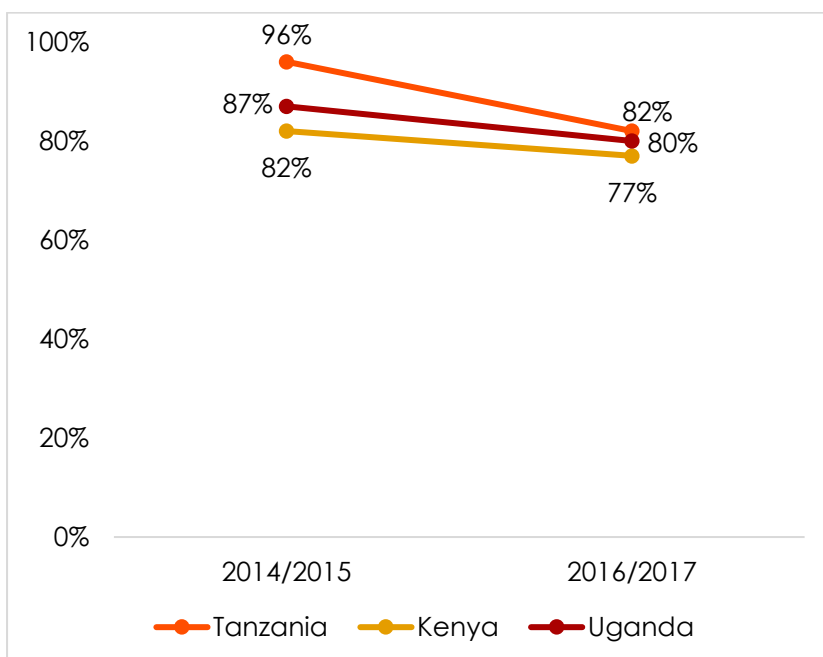
Respondents were asked:
 - Do you feel close to any political party? [If yes:] Which party is that?
 - Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control.
 Statement 2: The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it considers harmful to society.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Figure 4: Has media freedom increased or decreased? | Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda | 2016/2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me if there is more or less freedom now compared to a few years ago, or are things about the same: The media's freedom to investigate and report on government mistakes or to criticize government actions or performance?

Figure 5: Freedom to say what you think | Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: In this country, how free are you to say what you think? (% who say "somewhat free" or "completely free")

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