

Afrobarometer
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News release

In Africa, support for media freedom declines to a minority view, Afrobarometer surveys show

Across Africa, popular support for media freedom has dropped to below half of adults, according to new Afrobarometer findings from across the continent.

In the sixth of its Pan-Africa Profiles series based on recent public-opinion surveys in 34 African countries, Afrobarometer reports that media-freedom supporters are now outnumbered by those who believe governments should have the right to prevent publications they consider harmful.



Declines in support for unfettered media were recorded in 25 of 31 countries tracked since 2011, including steep drops in Tanzania (-33 percentage points), Cabo Verde, Uganda, and Tunisia.

While many Africans believe that media in their countries have more freedoms today than they did several years ago, this is more often seen as problematic than as progress, the data suggest.

The new report, available at www.afrobarometer.org, also analyzes Africans' news habits, showing that radio remains ahead of television as the most widely accessed source of news. Use of the Internet and social media as news sources is expanding, but a large digital divide still disadvantages poorer, less-educated, older, rural, and female citizens.

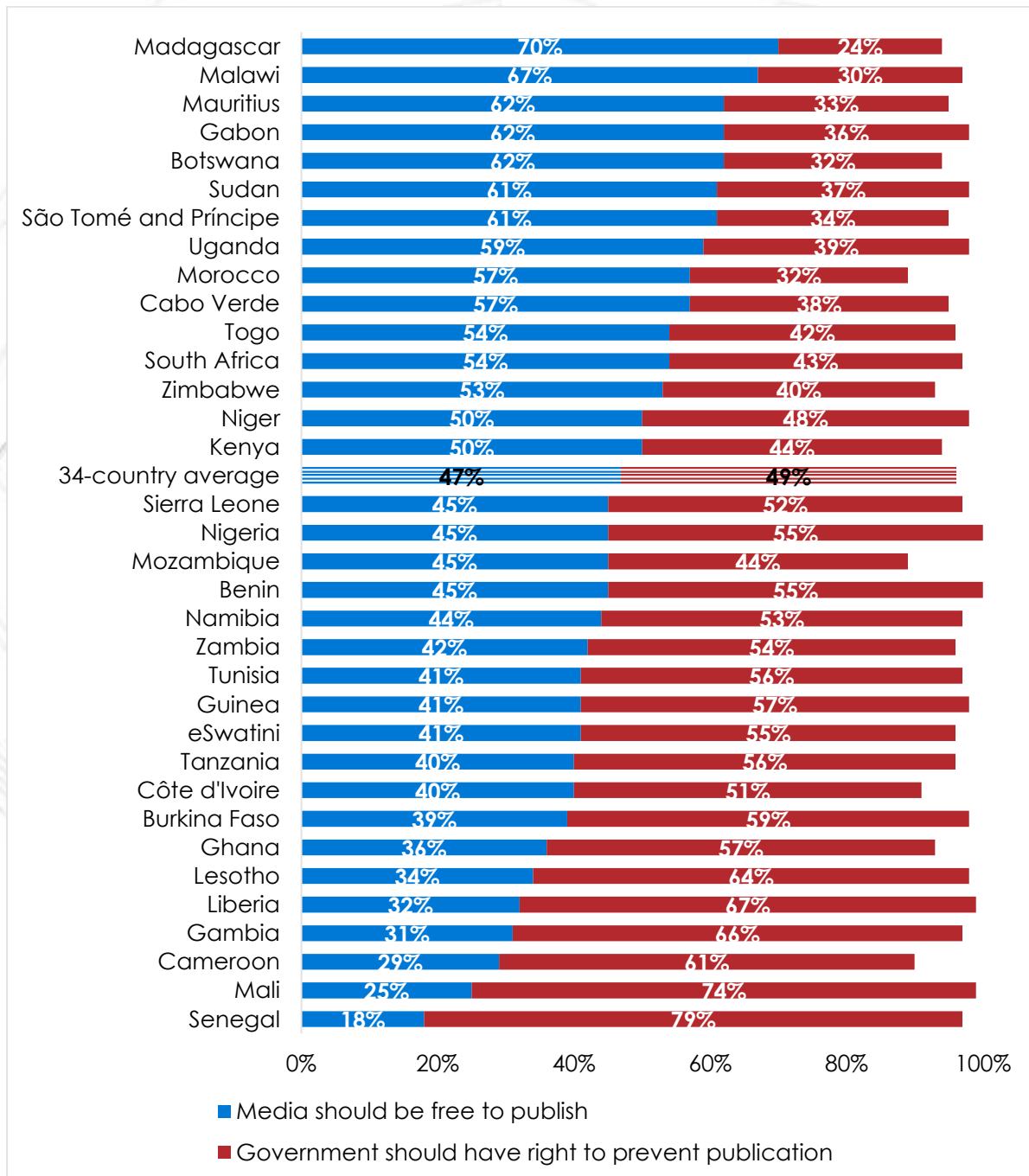
Key findings

- Popular support for media freedom continues to decline, dropping to below half (47%) of respondents across 34 countries. More Africans (49%) now say governments should have the right to prevent publications they consider harmful (Figure 1). Across 31 countries tracked since 2011, support for media freedom has declined by 10 percentage points (Figure 2).
- Twenty-five of 31 countries tracked since 2011 experienced declines in support for media freedom over that period, including steep drops in Tanzania (-33 percentage points), Cabo Verde (-27), Uganda (-21), and Tunisia (-21) (Figure 3).
- More Africans see the media's freedom to investigate and criticize government as increasing (43%) than declining (32%), but countries vary widely in their assessments.
- Africans are generally dissatisfied with the state of the media. Of those who say freedom is increasing in their country, a majority (54%) support increased government regulations. However, among those who assess freedom as decreasing, a majority (54%) support media freedom over government regulations.
- Radio remains the top source for mass-media news, though its dominance is declining: 42% report using it every day, down 5 percentage points from 2011/2013. Television is a daily news source for about one in three Africans (35%), and is the top source for news in nine countries. Only 7% read newspapers daily (Figure 4).
- Reliance on the Internet and social media for news is increasing rapidly. Almost one in five Africans say they use the Internet (18%) and/or social media (19%) daily for news.

Use of the Internet and social media for news is significantly higher among younger, urban, and better-educated populations.

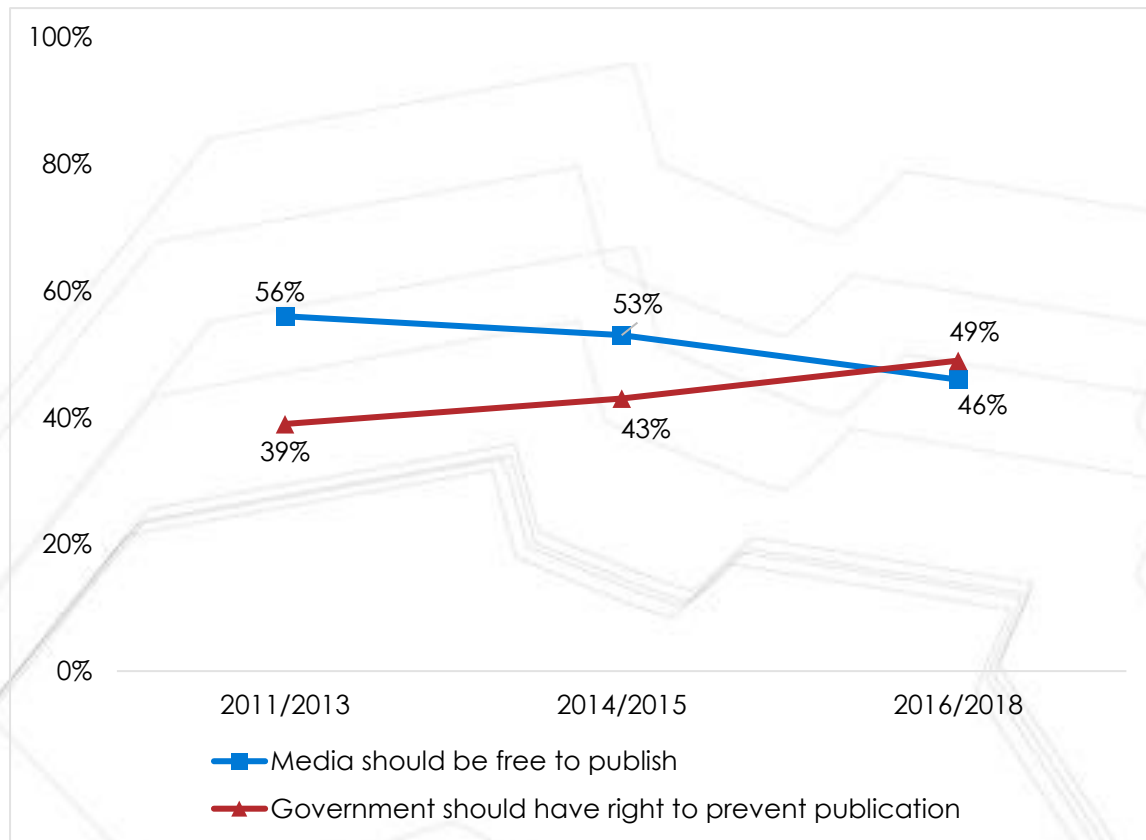
Charts

Figure 1: Support for media freedom | 34 countries | 2016/2018



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: Support for media freedom | 31 countries | 2011-2018



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Figure 3: Changes in support for media freedom | 31 countries* | 2011-2018

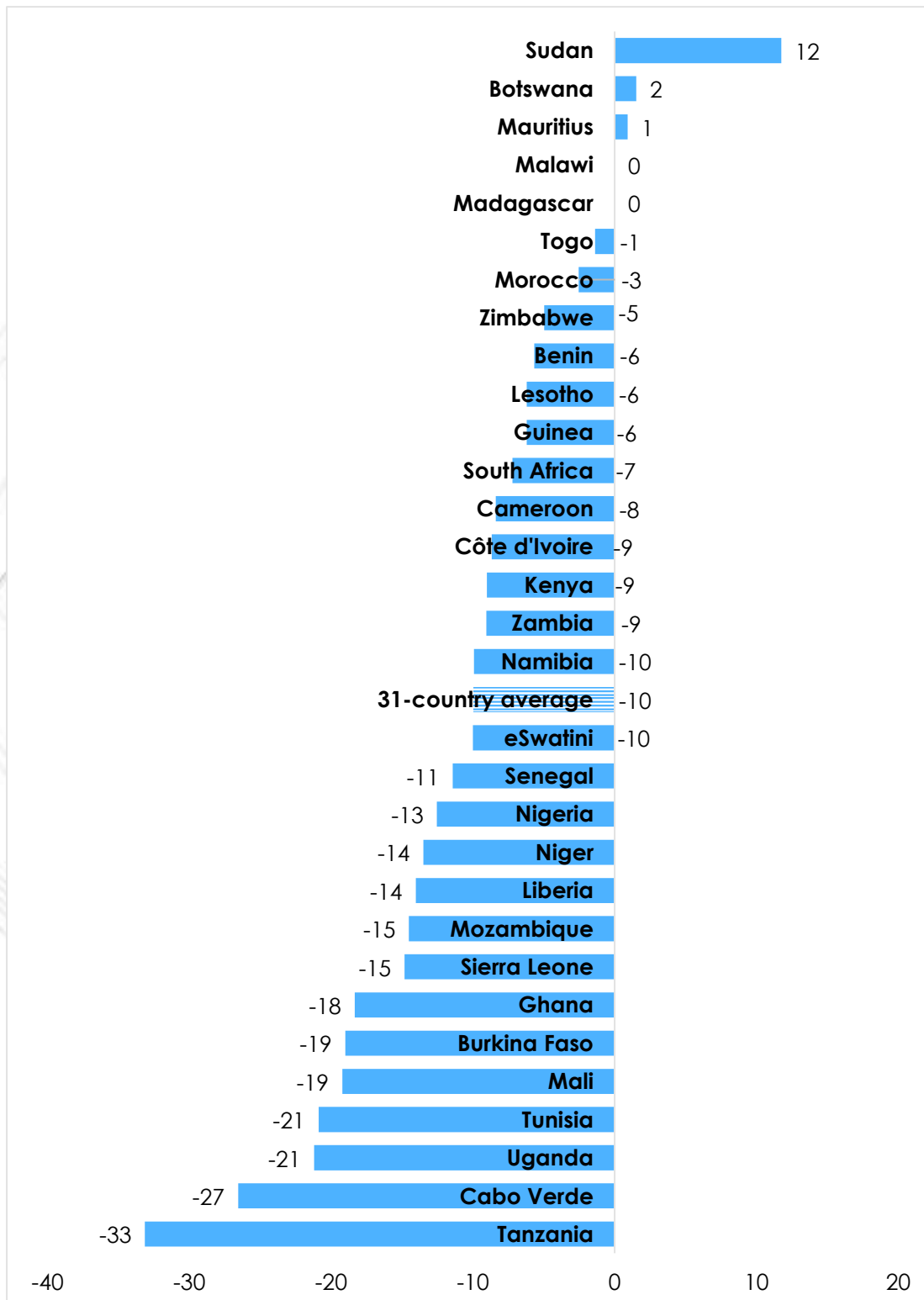
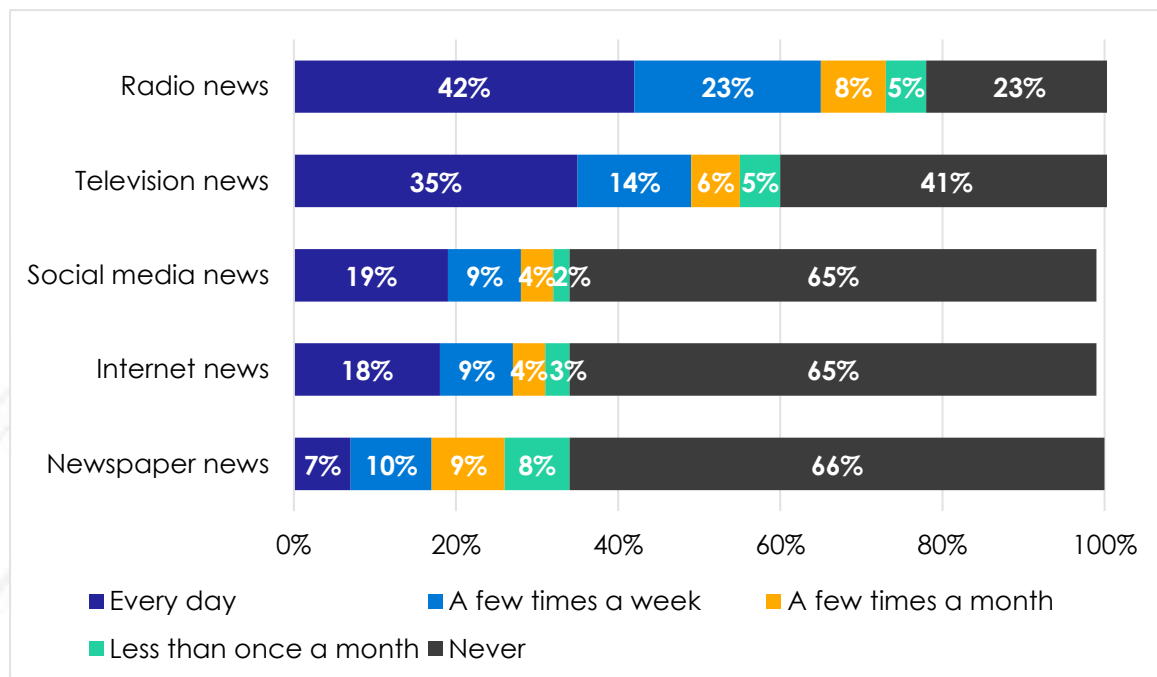


Figure shows change, in percentage points, between surveys in 2011/2013 and 2016/2018 in the proportion of respondents who “agree” or “agree very strongly” that the media should be free of government control. (* Gabon, the Gambia, and São Tomé and Príncipe were not surveyed in 2011/2013.)

Figure 4: News media consumption | 34 countries | 2016/2018



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

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 survey findings in 34 countries are being released in 2018/2019. Interested readers may follow our releases, including our Pan-Africa Profiles series of cross-country analyses, at #VoicesAfrica and sign up for our distribution list at www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples. Sample sizes of 1,200-2,400 yield country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-2 to 3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

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