

Africans back media freedom, says survey

Most Africans want the media to play a watchdog role, and support its right to publish what it wants without government interference, says a new analysis of African public opinion.

But a third of Africans think the media often publishes things journalists know are not true.

In a [study published to mark World Press Freedom Day](#), the Afrobarometer research network says that a majority of citizens support media freedom in 25 out of 34 countries covered in their surveys on the topic.



Image via [123RF](#)

Support for media freedom was strongest in Cape Verde, Uganda, Tanzania, Madagascar and Burundi, where it ranged between 83 percent and 68 percent. In South Africa 61 percent of respondents supported it, compared to 59 percent in Kenya and 58 percent in Nigeria.

Support was weakest in Senegal (30 percent), Cameroon (37 percent), Lesotho (40 percent), Mali (44 percent) and Liberia (47 percent). On average, nearly six in every 10 Africans (57 percent) supported media freedom.

Also on average, Africans showed more support for the media's watchdog role than their right to publish. Here nearly seven in 10 (69 percent) backed the view that journalists should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.

Support was highest in Uganda, Cape Verde, Mauritius, Tanzania and Burundi - where it ranged from 86 percent to 80 percent (with Liberia also near the top, in sixth place at 77 percent support). It was lowest in Algeria, Swaziland, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Senegal (ranging from 49 percent to 57 percent).

Seventy-three percent of Kenyans, 70 percent of South Africans and 66 percent of Nigerians backed the media as watchdog.

Across the continent as a whole, a bare majority (51 percent) said the media never published things they knew were untrue. Trust levels were highest in Burundi, Malawi, Mauritius, Zambia and Tanzania, and lowest in Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Tunisia and Cameroon. In major economies, trust levels were: Kenya, 64 percent; Nigeria, 60 percent; and South Africa, 54 percent.

Afrobarometer said the study - based on the latest surveys, conducted between 2011 and 2013 -

represented more than three-quarters of Africa's population.

It added that 64 percent of Africans thought the media effective in exposing government mistakes and corruption, but that less educated citizens were less likely to support journalists in holding governments accountable.

Analysing people's use of different types of media, the study showed that while the largest number of Africans get their news from radio, its popularity is sliding: across the 16 countries tracked since 2002, the daily use of radio news dropped from 61 percent in 2002/2003 to 49 percent in 2011/2013.

Over the same period, the daily reading of newspapers dropped from 13 percent to nine percent, but television gained popularity, from 26 to 33 percent.

The growth of the Internet has not been surveyed for the full period, but in the 2011 to 2013 survey seven percent of respondents said they used it.

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