



Press Release

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7 out of 10 citizens think that media should report on government mistakes and corruption, while 3 out of 10 think that this can harm the country

As the new Media Services Act is signed into law, Sauti za Wananchi and Afrobarometer data show strong citizen support for media's role in helping them hold government to account

1 December 2016, Dar es Salaam: According to Afrobarometer, the majority of citizens (65%) agree that media should report on government mistakes and corruption while 3 out of 10 think that doing so harms the country.

And 8 out of 10 citizens (75%) think that media are effective in revealing government mistakes and corruption, while 2 out of 10 (18%) think they are not effective.

Half of citizens (53%) also think that media should be free to report on any story while 4 out of 10 think that government should be able to close down newspapers.

Although this over-arching support for media's role as government watchdog has decreased slightly in recent years, it remains high.

Similarly, 7 out of 10 citizens think that media never or rarely abuse their freedoms by saying things they know are not true.

Citizens also express strong support for freedom of expression and information. Almost all citizens (95%) think that citizens should be free to criticize government when they believe it has done something wrong.

The majority of citizens also support democracy more generally. Recent Sauti za Wananchi data (September 2016) show that 69% see democracy as preferable to any other kind of government. This support is also shown in Afrobarometer's latest dataset (2014) in which 79% said that democracy is their preferred type of government and 81% agree that they should choose their leaders during elections.

Access to information is also important to citizens. Eight out of ten citizens (77%) agree that ordinary citizens should have access to public information held by the government, while far fewer (23%) think that only civil servants should have access to that information.

Citizens are clear on why they value access to information; 80% agree that providing information to citizens would help to cut down on corruption while 20% think that public servants would just find new ways of hiding-wrong-doing.

In further support for their right to access government information, almost all citizens (92%) think that it is important for parliamentary sessions to be aired live and 8 out of 10 (79%) disapprove of the government's decision to ban these broadcasts. Almost all citizens (88%) also agree that

parliamentary broadcasts should be aired irrespective of costs while 12% agree that constraining expenditure in other areas is a good reason not to air parliamentary sessions.

These data were collated and shared by Twaweza as a new and potentially repressive Media Services Act is signed into law. They are drawn from the most recent Afrobarometer findings for Tanzania and various rounds of the Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey.

Aidan Eyakuze, Executive Director of Twaweza, said *“This year, 2016, has been a challenging one for access to information and freedom of expression. Live broadcasts of parliamentary debates were stopped. Several citizens were charged under the Cybercrimes Act for expressing their opinions, and a potentially draconian Media Services Act was signed into law. Our data reveal that citizens value and support three crucial pillars of a vibrant democracy: an independent media, freedom of expression and access to information. Citizens also have a sophisticated understanding of the trade-offs between these freedoms, and the dangers of a completely unregulated media. Citizens’ views must be respected. As the Media Services Act becomes law, we urge maturity, restraint and moderation in its application.”*

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Notes to Editors

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at www.twaweza.org, or www.twaweza.org/sauti
- For more information about Afrobarometer: www.afrobarometer.org
- Twaweza works on enabling children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be more open and responsive in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. We have programs, staff and offices across all three countries, and a globally respected practice of learning, monitoring and evaluation. Our flagship programs include *Uwezo*, Africa’s largest annual citizen assessment to assess children’s learning levels across hundreds of thousands of households, and *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa’s first nationally representative mobile phone survey. We undertake effective public and policy engagement, through powerful media partnerships and global leadership of initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership
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