

Not to that extent?

Tanzanians' views on information and public debate

1. Introduction

Soon after taking office in 2015, the fifth phase government has drawn criticism for its attitude towards freedom of speech and the media. Although an Access to Information law has been enacted in 2016, it has taken almost two years for the regulations to come out. The government has closed or suspended several newspapers, including Tanzania Daima and Raia Mwema, and warned others. Several politicians and high profile figures have been arrested for criticising the government, often charged with “sedition” or with offences under the controversial 2015 Cybercrimes Act. In 2017, the government withdrew from the Open Government Partnership (OGP), and leaders have spoken publicly about strict limits to freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

This approach to democratic rights and freedoms stands in contrast to the

administration's, particularly the President's, apparent determination to address corruption and wrongdoing in government. In most countries, a strong and independent media and strong protections for freedom of speech are usually welcomed as indispensable allies in the fight against corruption. Tanzania has taken a different path.

This brief presents data on citizens' experiences of accessing information and their views on the media and freedom of speech. How often do citizens request information from different public offices and service providers? How many have passports, ID cards and voter registration cards? What forms of media do they use most often, and how much do they trust them? How familiar are citizens with new information-related laws? And how do they see freedom of speech, including the freedom to criticise public officials?

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Sauti za Wananchi



Data for the brief come from Twaweza’s flagship *Sauti za Wananchi* survey. *Sauti za Wananchi* is a nationally-representative, high-frequency mobile phone panel survey. It is representative for Mainland Tanzania. Information on the overall methodology is available at www.twaweza.org/sauti. For this brief, data were collected from 1,519 respondents from the 25th round of the second *Sauti za Wananchi* panel, conducted between November 7 and 27, 2017.

The key findings are:

- Few citizens have ever requested information from public offices; for those who do, physical visits are the most popular method for requesting information
- 1 out of 4 citizens has a birth certificate, 1 out of 5 has a national identification card
- 6 out of 10 citizens say they are not free to criticise statements made by the President
- Almost everyone says citizens should be free to criticise MPs, the government and the President
- Public support for freedom of speech and freedom of the press is strong
- Citizens’ support for access to information is strong and growing

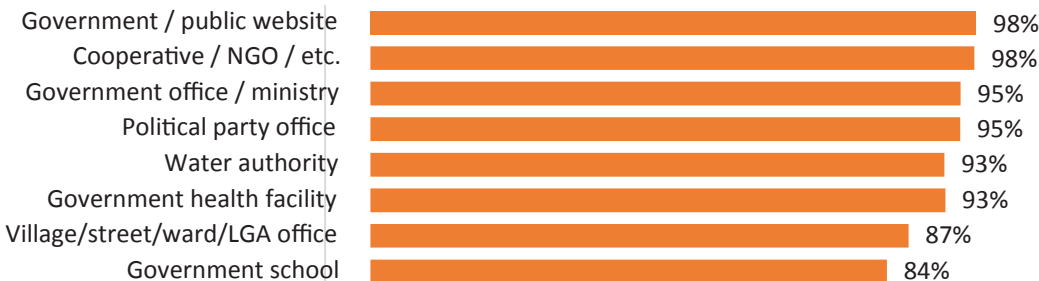
2.Eight facts about information and public debate

Fact 1: Few citizens have ever requested information from public offices

One out of fifty citizens (2%) has ever sought information from a government website in Tanzania. The same proportion have sought information from non-governmental public bodies such as NGOs (2%), government offices or ministries (5%) or political party offices (5%).

Seeking information from frontline providers of public services is slightly more common, but still a large majority of citizens have never done this. One out of six citizens (16%) has ever sought information from a government school, and a similar number (13%) has done so from a local government office.

Figure 1: Those who have never asked for information from the following places¹:



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017)

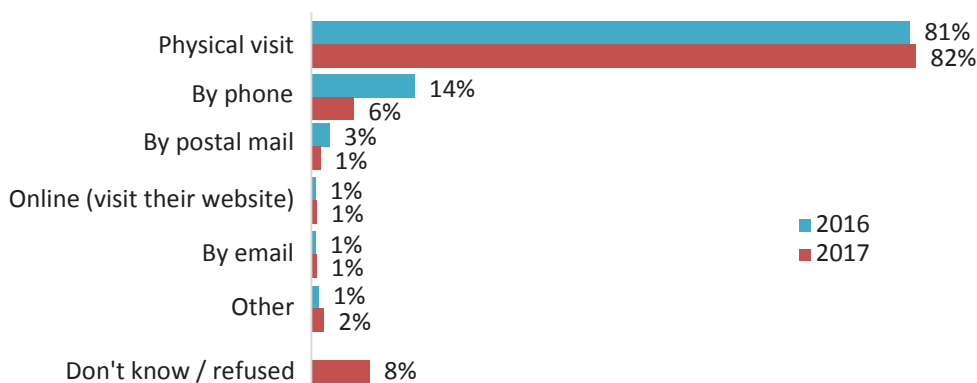
Across all eight different types of office, the most common type of information requested was information on budgets, resources and staffing (48%). Two out of three requests (67%) were

1 Percentages in charts may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

reported to be “completely” successful (not shown in charts).

Eight out of ten citizens (82%) say they would physically visit an office if they wanted information. Less than one out of ten (6%) would make a phone call, and a very small minority would use email (1%) or would seek the information online (1%).

Figure 2: If you were to request for information or public documents from a government office, which main way would you use?



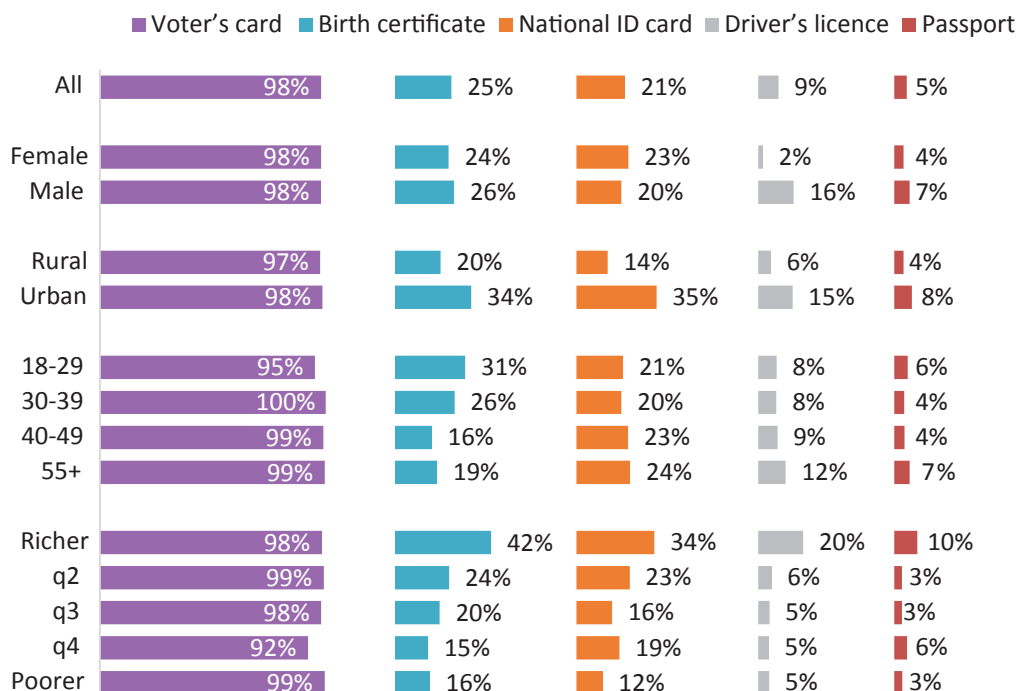
Sources of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017) and Round 7 (February 2016)

Fact 2: 1 out of 4 citizens has a birth certificate, 1 out of 20 has a passport

Almost all citizens (98%) report having a voter registration card, consistent across all demographic groups. Other documents are less common, including birth certificates (25%), national ID cards (21%), driver's licenses (9%) and passports (5%).

Figure 3: Do you have the following documents?

(% answering yes)



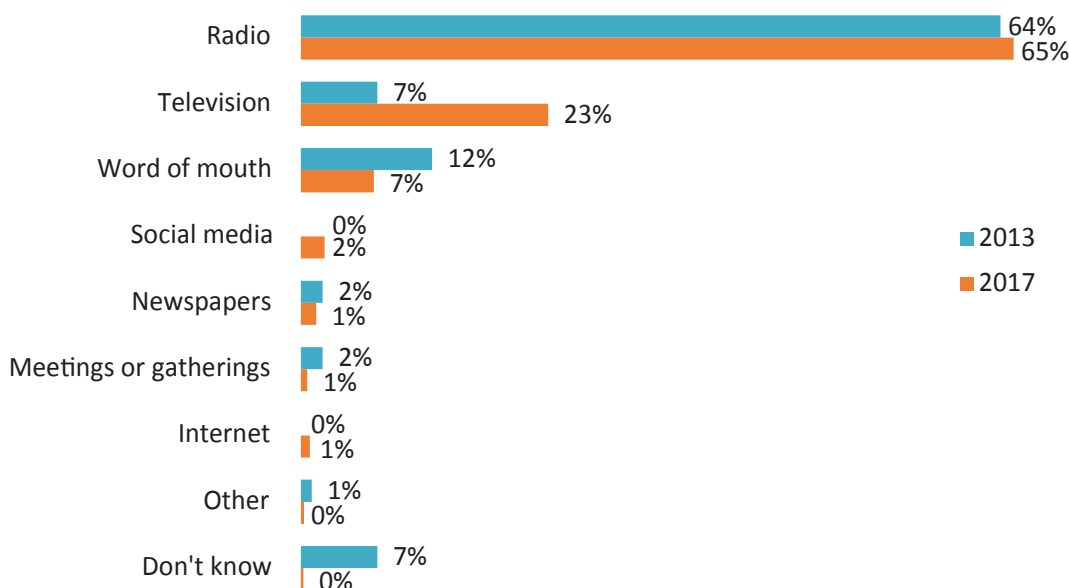
Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017)

Other than voter registration cards, possession of these other documents varies greatly between demographic groups. The strongest links are with location, with those in urban areas more likely to have all of these documents than those in rural areas, and wealth, with wealthier citizens more likely to have these documents than the poor. Younger citizens are more likely than older people to have a birth certificate, reflecting improvements in birth registration procedures. And there is a striking difference in possession of driving licenses between men (16%) and women (2%).

Fact 3: TV is growing fast as a source of information for citizens, but radio remains on top

Two out of three citizens (65%) say the radio is their main source of information, very similar to the number who cited radio four years earlier, in 2013 (64%). The number of citizens saying TV is their main source has risen sharply, from 7% in 2013 to 23% in 2017. And there has been a decline in people citing “word of mouth”, from 12% in 2013 to 7% in 2017.

Figure 4: Which media is your main source of information?



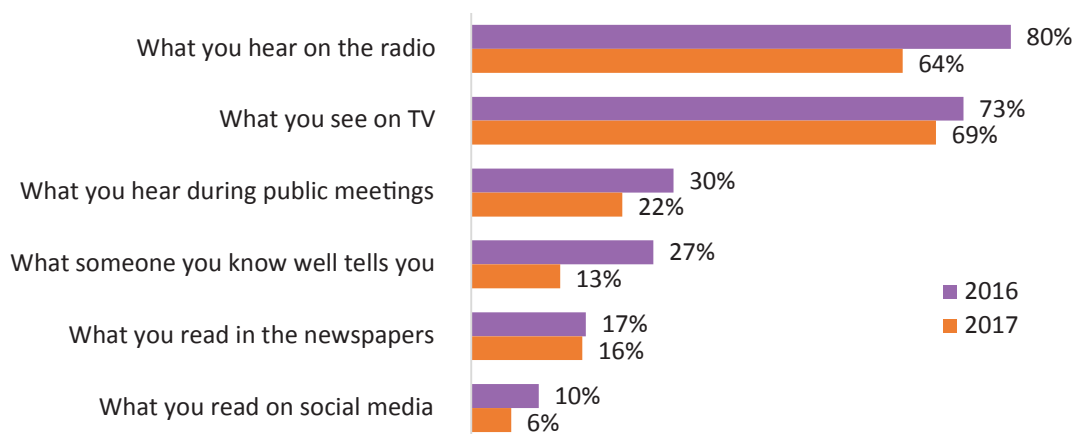
Sources of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Panel 2 Round 25 (November 2017) and Panel 1 Round 3 (May 2013)

Across most major forms of media, trust in the media has declined since early 2016. Whereas eight out of ten citizens (80%) said they “trust completely” what they hear on the radio in February 2016, by November 2017 this had dropped to two out of three (64%). Trust in information provided by friends and acquaintances has also dropped by half over this time, from 27% saying they trust such information completely in 2016 to 13% in 2017.

Trust in information on TV, heard in public meetings, and read on social media has also declined slightly.

Despite these changes, broadcast media (radio and TV) remain significantly more trusted by citizens as sources of information than newspapers and social media.

Figure 5: Citizens who completely trust information from the following sources:



Sources of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017) and Round 7 (February 2016)

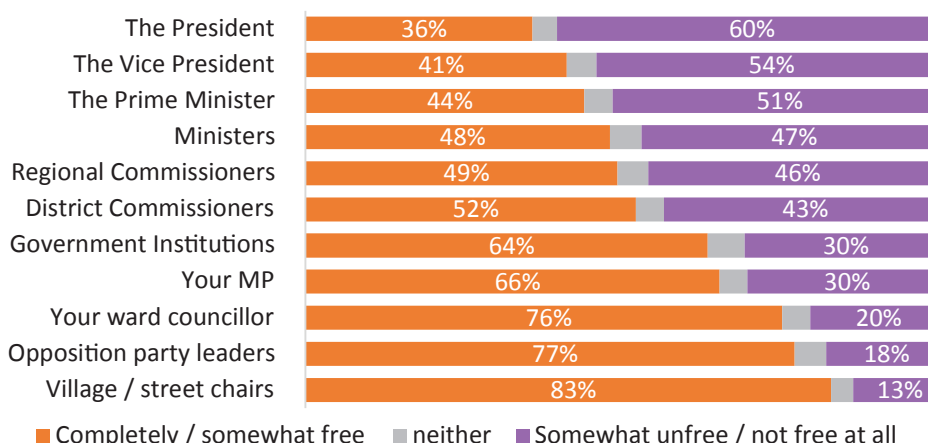
Fact 4: 6 out of 10 citizens say they are not free to criticise statements made by the President

A majority of citizens (60%) say they are not free to criticise statements made by the President, and similar numbers say the same about statements made by the Vice President (54%) or the Prime Minister (51%).

Citizens feel much freer to criticise public figures at lower levels of government or with less power. Eight out of ten citizens say they feel free to criticise village / street chairpersons (83%), opposition party leaders (77%) and ward councillors (76%).

Notably, citizens feel much freer to criticise their MP than their Regional or District Commissioner. This may be because citizens elect their MP, and therefore feel the MP has a responsibility to listen to citizens' needs and priorities and to act accordingly. Alternatively, it may be that Regional and District Commissioners are seen as closer to the President.

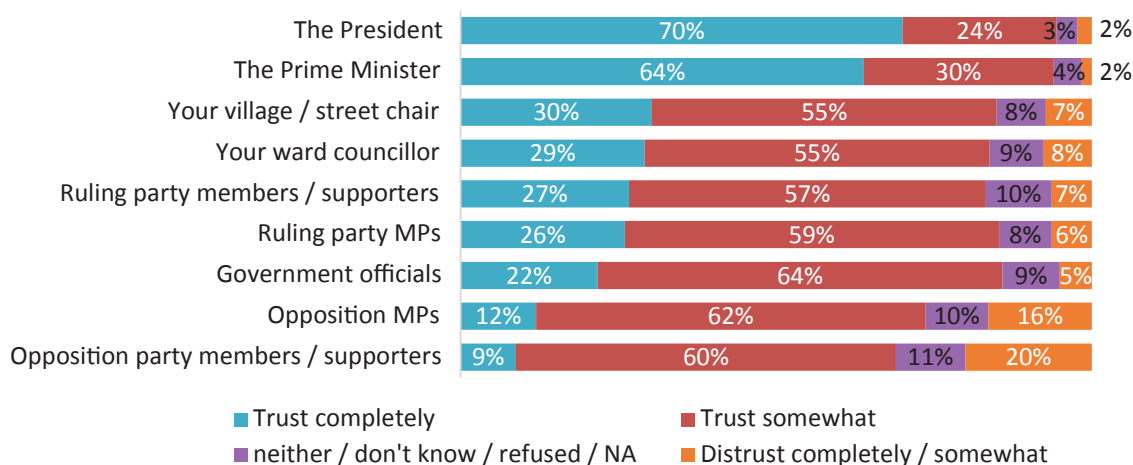
Figure 6: How free are you to criticise information or statements provided by the following individuals or institutions?



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017)

A majority of citizens say they “trust completely” information provided by the President (70%) or the Prime Minister (64%). Information provided by other leaders is trusted only “somewhat” by a majority of citizens, with information provided by opposition party MPs, members and supporters treated with more caution.

Figure 7: How much do you trust information provided by the following people?



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017)

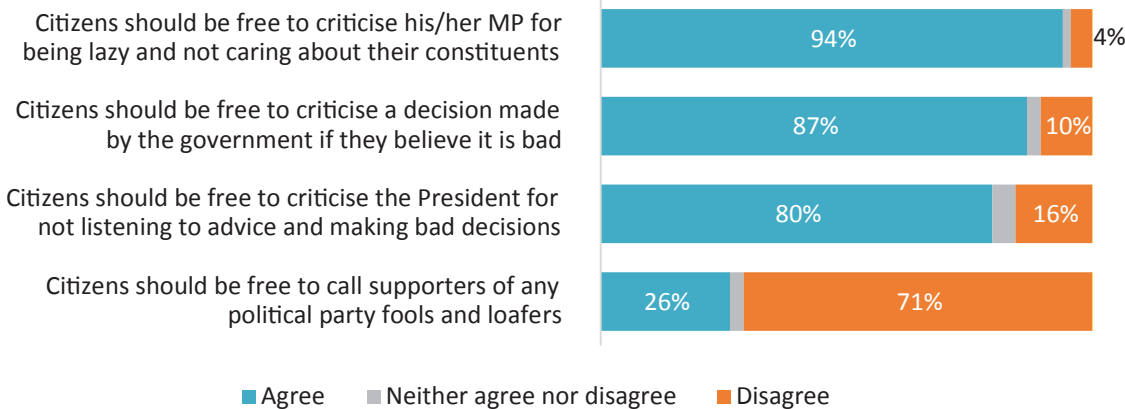
Fact 5: Almost everyone says citizens should be free to criticise MPs, the government and the President

Almost all citizens (94%) say citizens should be free to criticise their MP for being lazy and uncaring, and a large majority also say citizens should be free to criticise government decisions that they think are bad (87%).

Eight out of ten citizens (80%) say citizens should be free to criticise the President. This stands in contrast to the six out of ten citizens (60%) who say they do not in fact feel free to actually do so (see Fact 4).

Seven out of ten citizens (71%) say that citizens should not be allowed to call supporters of a political party “fools and loafers”.

Figure 8: Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statements:



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017)

Public support for freedom of speech and freedom of the press is strong. Eight out of ten citizens (81%) see criticism of national leaders as valuable as it helps them correct their mistakes, rather than undermining respect and unity.

A clear majority (62%) say that newspapers that publish something factually incorrect should apologise and publish a correction, rather than be shut down or fined by government. And another majority (54%) say government should not be allowed to punish newspapers without first getting court approval.

Figure 9: For each pair of statements, which do you agree with most?



If a newspaper prints something factually incorrect, they should apologize and publish a correction

If a newspaper prints something factually incorrect, the newspaper should be shut down or fined



If the government wants to punish a newspaper for reporting something deemed to be offensive, government should justify their decision in court

If a newspaper reports something the government deems offensive, government should close / punish them without justifying their decision in court



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017)

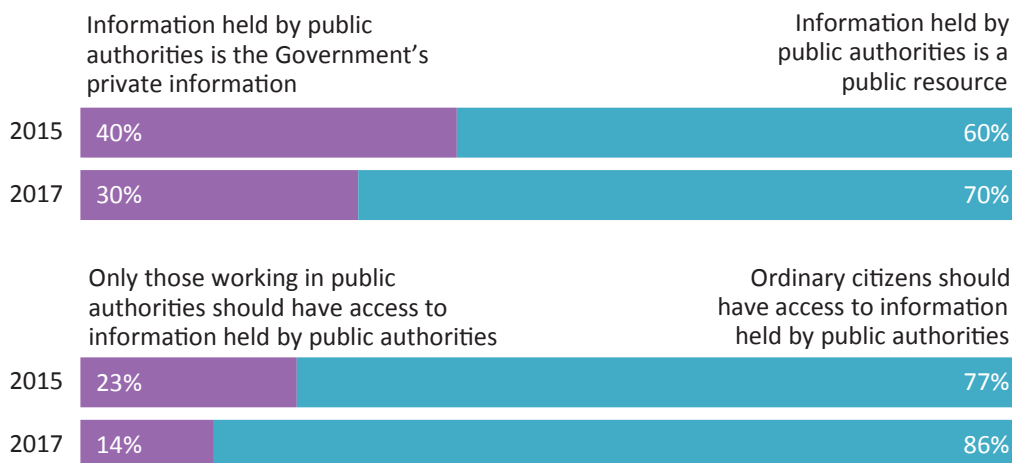
Fact 6: Citizens' support for access to information is strong and growing

On questions of public access to information, citizens' support for transparency is both strong and growing. Seven out of ten citizens (70%) say information held by the government is a public resource, up from six out of ten (60%) who felt this way in 2015.

Similarly, the number who say ordinary citizens should have access to information held by public authorities has risen from three out of four (77%) in 2015 to five out of six (86%) in 2017.

And a large majority of citizens (86%) say greater access to information for citizens would reduce corruption and other wrongdoing, up slightly from eight out of ten (80%) who felt this way in 2015.

Figure 10: For each pair of statements, which do you agree with most?



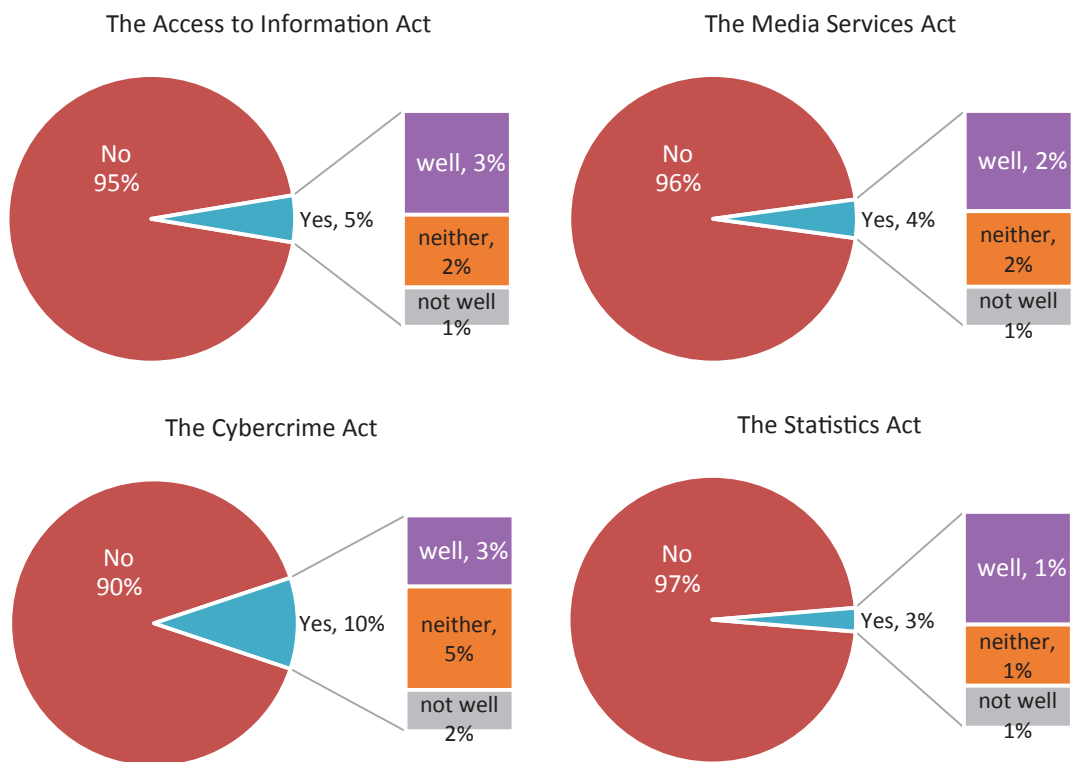


Sources of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017) and Round 3 (March-April 2015)

Fact 7: Most citizens are unaware of new laws on information

Various laws on information-related matters have been enacted by the National Assembly in the past few years, including the Statistics Act, Cybercrimes Act, Access to Information Act and Media Services Act. However, very few citizens are aware of these laws. Nine out of ten citizens (90%) have not heard of the Cybercrime Act, and even larger numbers have not heard of the Access to Information Act (95%), Media Services Act (96%) and Statistics Act (97%). These levels of awareness are largely unchanged since 2016.

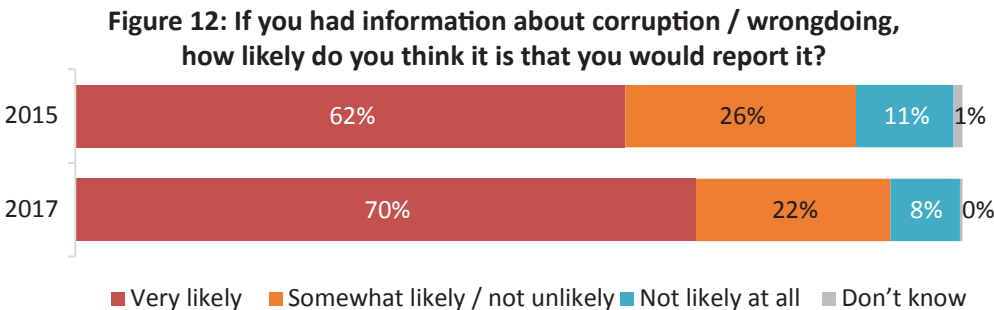
Figure 11: Are you aware of the following laws? If so, how well do you think the government is implementing the law?



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017)

Fact 8: 7 out of 10 citizens say they would report corruption if they had information

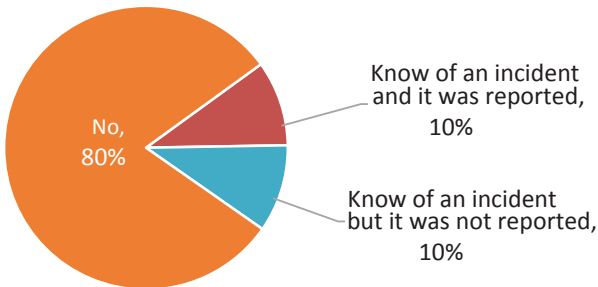
Seven out of ten citizens (70%) say they would be “very likely” to report any information they had about corruption or wrongdoing, up from six out of ten (62%) in 2015.



Sources of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017) and Round 3 (March-April 2015)

However, most citizens (80%) say they do not know of any such incidents in their area. Where citizens are aware of corruption or other wrongdoing, they say around half the incidents were reported, and half were not.

Figure 13: Do you personally know or have heard of any incident/s of wrong doing or corruption in your community or area? If so, was the incident reported to the relevant authorities?



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, mobile phone survey, Round 25 (November 2017)

Citizens give several suggestions for how the government could encourage more reporting of corruption, including public education campaigns (21%), stronger police-community relations (20%), better police work (13%) and better protection of witnesses and whistle-blowers (11%) (not shown in charts).

3. Conclusion

There are findings in this brief that do not provide encouragement to freedom of information advocates. In particular, it remains very rare for citizens to seek information from government, and it's clear that most citizens have not even heard of the new information-related laws that activists have concerns about. Where citizens do not seek information from government and do not know what the law says about information, they remain far from becoming an informed and active citizenry, advocating for services that meet their needs and holding government to account for its performance.

Nevertheless, the most striking conclusion of this brief is the big gap between citizens' belief that they, as citizens, should have the right to criticise government, MPs and indeed the President, and their sense that they do not have this freedom in practice. An overwhelming majority believe first in the freedom of citizens to criticise national leaders and second that such criticism is a constructive force, helping the government and leaders to correct their course where they may be going wrong. And yet, at the same time, most citizens do not feel free to criticise statements made by the President, Vice President or Prime Minister.

Citizens' views on access to information and freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, are clear and consistent. Most citizens believe that where newspapers print something that is factually incorrect, this should be addressed by the paper publishing an apology and a correction, rather than by the government punishing the paper through monetary fines and closure. Similarly, a majority believe that where newspapers print something that it deemed to be offensive, the decision on whether a paper is suspended or closed should rest with the courts, not with the government.

Further, strong and growing majorities believe that information held by the government really belongs to the public and should be accessible to the public, and that making such information available to the public would be an effective way of combatting corruption.

This points to a possible contradiction in the current government's approach to corruption. There are many signs that President Magufuli and his administration are serious about addressing corruption – and a recent Sauti za Wananchi brief² has shown that the public approve of these efforts. However, this survey suggests that citizens also believe that stronger protections for the media and greater public access to information would further strengthen the fight against corruption. In other words, Tanzanian citizens share global view that the most effective strategies to combat corruption involve a strong and independent media through which to receive information and to express their views.

2 The untouchables? Tanzanians' experiences and views of corruption, November 2017. Available at <http://www.twaweza.org/go/szw-corruption-2017>