



Press Release
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8 out of 10 citizens think they should be free to criticize the President and government, and that such criticism helps leaders to avoid making mistakes
But more than half do not feel free to criticize the President, Vice President and Prime Minister

29 March 2018, Dar es Salaam: The majority of citizens do not feel free to criticise the President (60%), the Vice President (54%) and the Prime Minister (51%). Close to half also do not feel free to criticise Ministers (47%), Regional Commissioners (46%) and District Commissioners (43%). However, huge proportions of citizens believe they should be able to criticise the government (87%) and the President for making bad decisions and not listening to advice (80%). They believe that criticism can help stop the government from making mistakes (81%) rather than undermining respect and unity (19%). But they are not supportive of insulting language: 71% do not think that citizens should be allowed to call supporters of any political party fools and loafers.

These findings were released by Twaweza in a research brief titled *Not to that extent? Tanzanians' views on information and public debate*. The brief is based on data from *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative high-frequency mobile phone survey. The findings are based on data collected from 1,519 respondents across Mainland Tanzania (excluding Zanzibar) in November 2017.

Despite this perceived lack of freedom, many citizens have complete trust in the information provided by the President (70%) and the Prime Minister (64%). Much lower numbers trust their village chair (30%), MPs (ruling party 26%, opposition MPs 12%), and government officials in general (22%).

Citizens also continue to have strong and rising support for access to information: 7 out of 10 say that information held by public authorities is a public resource (70%, up from 60% in 2015); and 9 out of 10 say that ordinary citizens should have access to information held by public authorities (86%, up from 77% in 2015) and that giving citizens access to information can reduce corruption (86%, up from 80% in 2015).

Despite strong support for access to information, nine out of ten citizens have never asked for information from a government office (95%), a water authority (93%) or a health facility (93%). Actually, people have largely used the same sources of information over time with no major changes except in television: in 2013 television was the main source of information for 7% of citizens, in 2017 for 23%. However, trust in these different sources of information is declining – radio from 80% in 2016 to 64% in 2017, television from 73% in 2016 to 69% in 2017 and word of mouth from 27% in 2016 to 13% in 2017.

Despite decreasing levels of trust in media in particular, citizens still firmly believe in media freedom: citizens would rather a newspaper that publishes false or incorrect information apologise and publish a correction (62%) than be shut down or fined (38%). A majority also believe that the government should justify any proposed punishment for offensive content in court (54%).

Although citizens have strong views on access to information and freedom of expression, very few of them are aware of the laws that govern these issues. The most well-known recent law in this area is the Cybercrimes Act (2015), which 10% of people know about while only 4% of people know about the Media Services Act (2016). Citizens are also not well connected to the system with 1 out of 4 or less possessing a birth certificate (25%), a national ID card (21%), a driver's license (9%) or a passport (5%). However, almost all citizens have voter ID cards (98%).

Aidan Eyakuze, Executive Director of Twaweza, said: *"Citizens strongly support access to information and free expression. But the truth is, citizens rarely demand information and they have low levels of trust in all sources of information apart from statements from the President and Prime Minister. They also do not feel that they can criticize senior government officials."*

"Given that the government has recently passed regulations for the Access to Information law," he continued, "we are optimistic that citizens' desire for government information will be met. We encourage the government to proactively disclose information to meet their expectations. Sadly, we have seen the growing criminalization of people's opinions on social media and other platforms. The government must recognize the value of open public debate and constructive criticism in eliminating waste and on the fight against corruption in the country"

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Notes to Editors

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at www.twaweza.org/ www.twaweza.org/sauti, Twaweza Tanzania (Facebook) @Twaweza_NiSisi
- 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