

# Navigating Closing Civic Space using Media and Social Media

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# Civic Space and Media

- *“Civic space is the bedrock of any open and democratic society. When civic space is open, citizens and civil society organisations are able to organise, participate and communicate without hindrance”* (Civicus)
- Media are integral to civic space as a public sphere/s  
Media fulfil three roles:
  1. Provide information for citizens
  2. Mobilising citizens and encouraging public participation
  3. Promote the work of civil society and promote free expression

# Media in African society

*“Regarding freedom of information legislation, journalists and civil society leaders generally believe that if governments can be forced to reveal their activities or disclose key information, this would lead to greater public pressure for reform”* (White & Mabweazara)

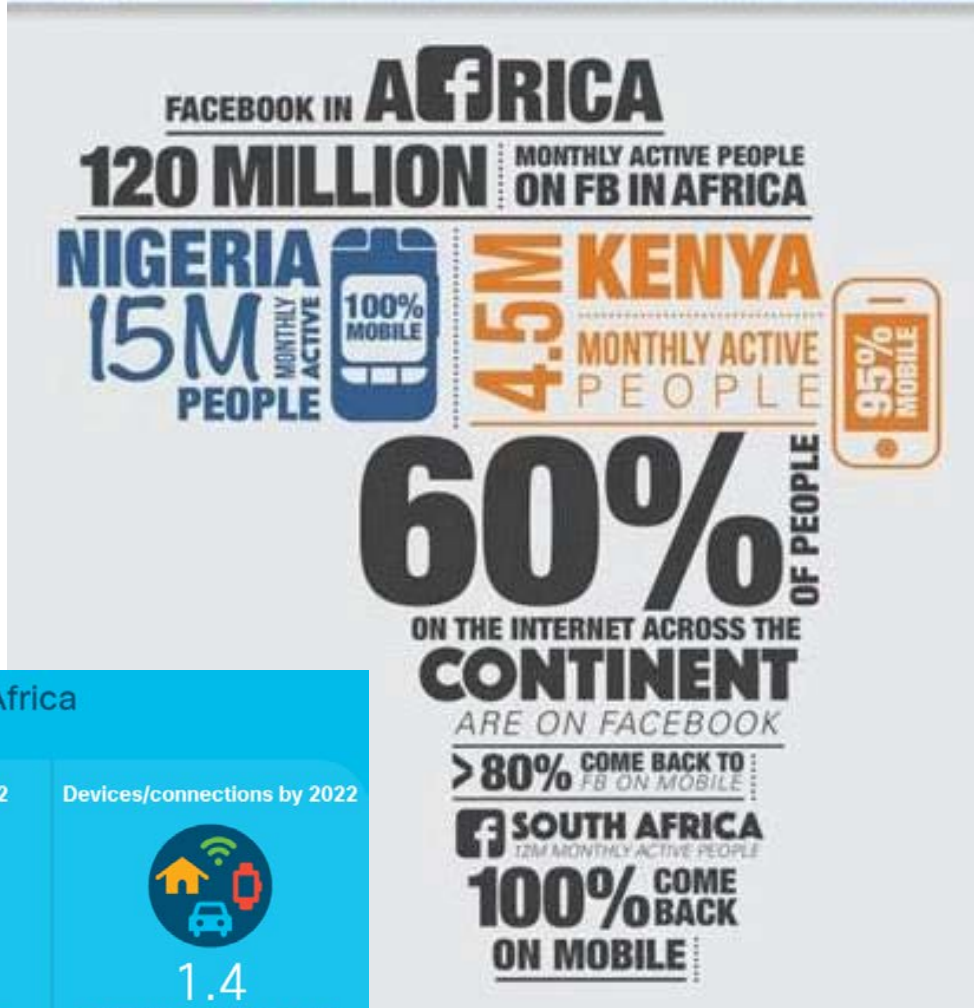
- Brown envelope journalism
- Partisan and neopatrimonialism (public vs state broadcasting)

*“Efforts towards accurate, honest and critical reporting on the African continent continually clash with personalistic governance which puts itself above the law and seeks to avoid any form of public scrutiny”* (White & Mabweazara)

*“In Africa, the mass media, whether public or privately owned, has problems of trust and objectivity, as such, citizens are frequently reluctant to explore them as an option of political communication”* (Eweka et al.)

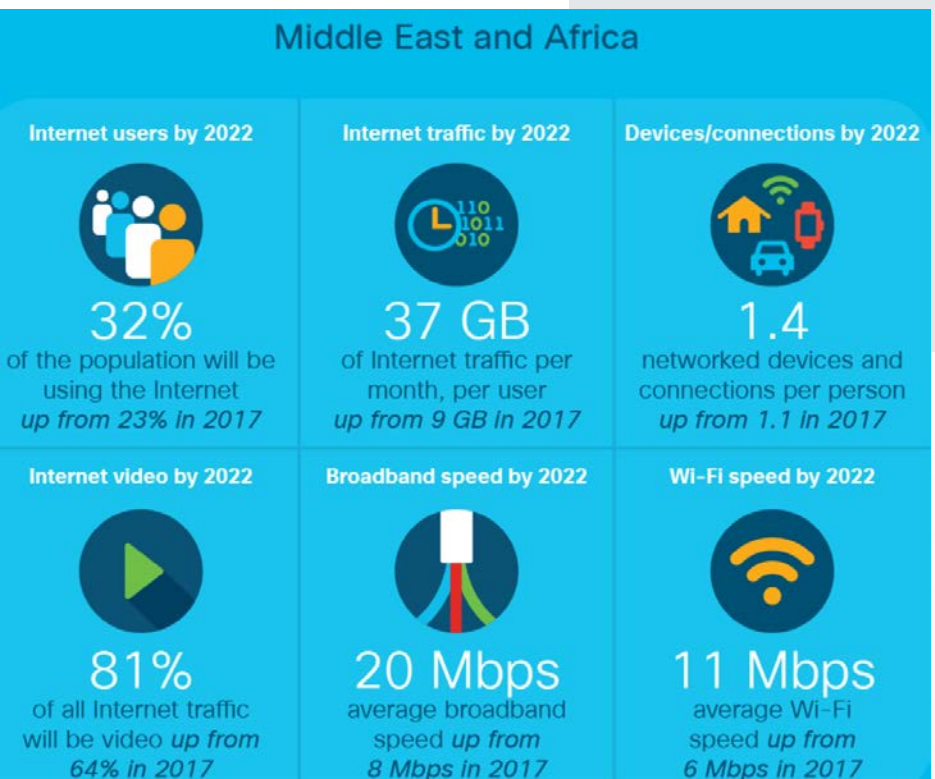
- Public Sphere requires legislative framework to ensure freedom of expression, access to information and open data – Often missing in African countries

# Social media in Africa



- Space for counter publics
- Potential communication unfulfilled by traditional media
- Diversity and pluralism of voices
- Arab Spring
- Further segregating marginalized

*“Despite concerns around the digital divide, Twitter is beginning to emerge in Africa as a virtual space for people to resist, challenge existing conditions, and propose alternatives” (Bosch)*



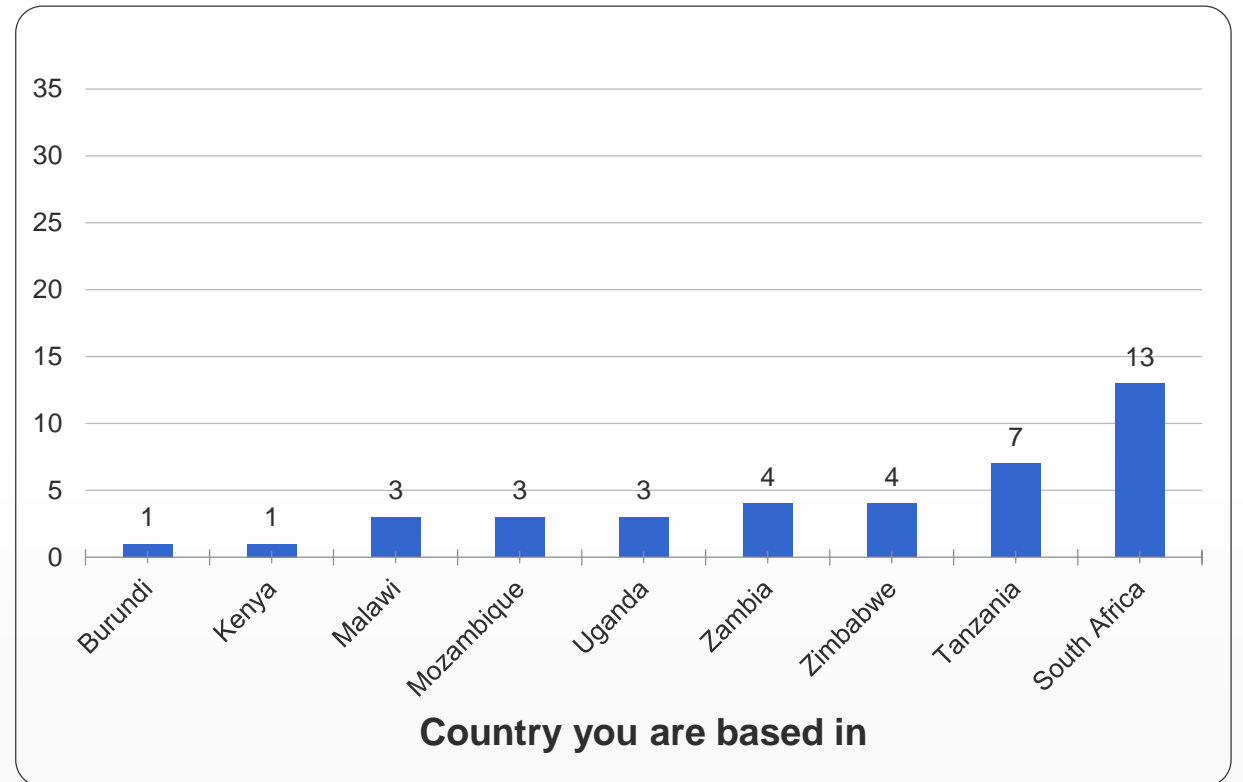
# Closing civic space in Africa

- *“Across Africa, major advances in democracy have been affected by restrictions on civic space and on the activities of civil society organisations, the media and individual activists...this downward trend is precipitated by laws, policies, physical attacks, threats and demonization of those who stand up for the rights of citizens”* (Kode)
- **Formal restrictions** (NGO Amendment Bill in Malawi; Electronic & Postal Communications (online content) Regulations in Tanzania; Media Services Act in Tanzania; Public Order Act in Zambia)
- **Indirect challenges** to civic space (Internet shutdowns, threats and attacks)

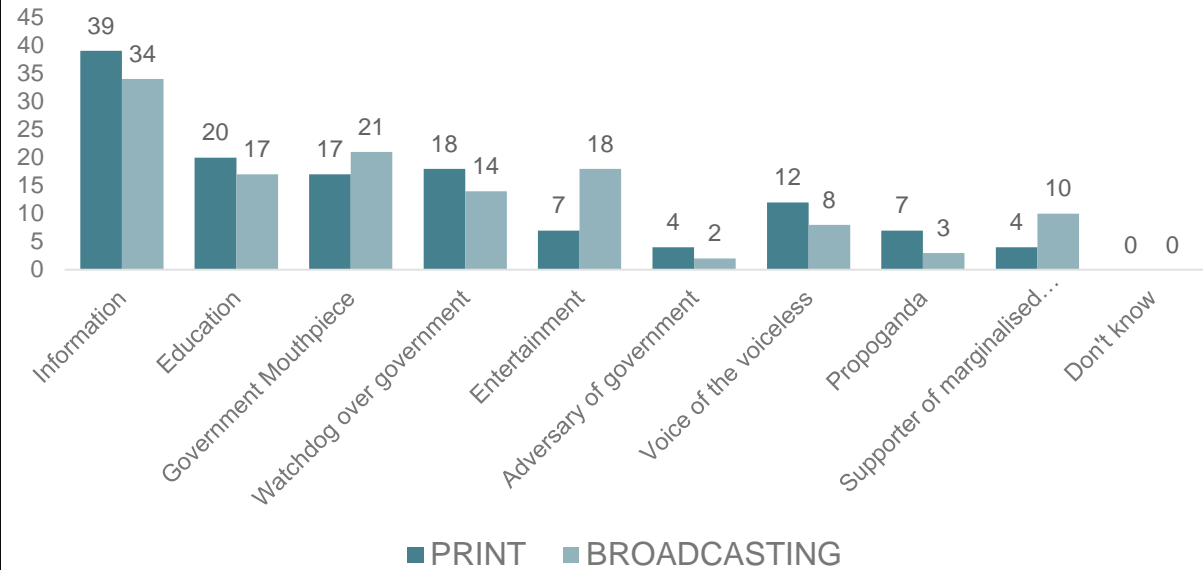


# Methodology

- Qualitative & Quantitative
- Survey of 39 participants
- Interviews with 10 CSOs (Zambia - 2; Tanzania – 3; Mozambique – 2; Malawi – 3)
- Purposive sampling – CSOs doing accountability work, selected countries)

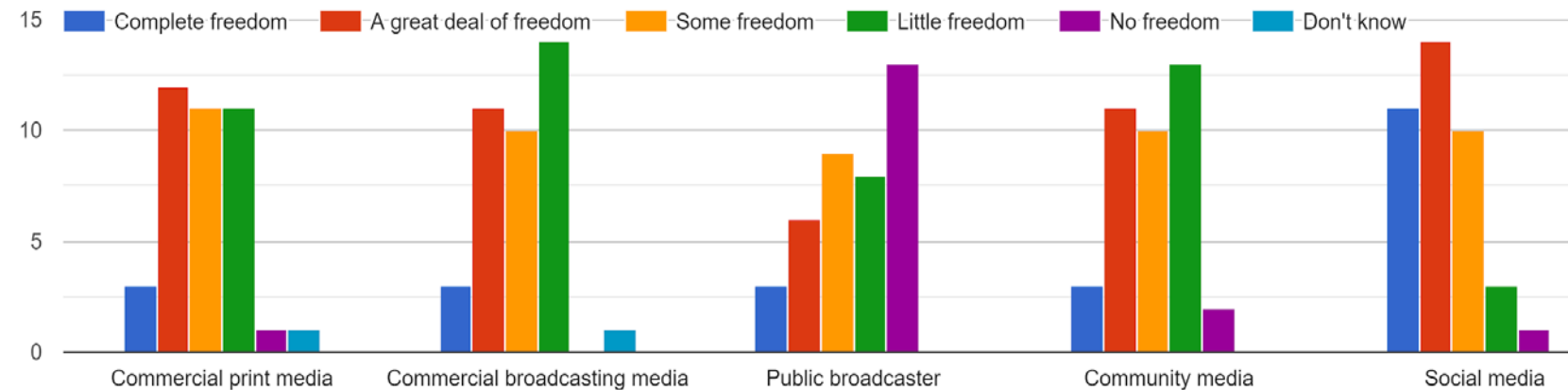


How would you describe the function of media in your country?



## Findings – Traditional media & civil society

How would you describe the freedom of the media in your country to report critically on public officials?





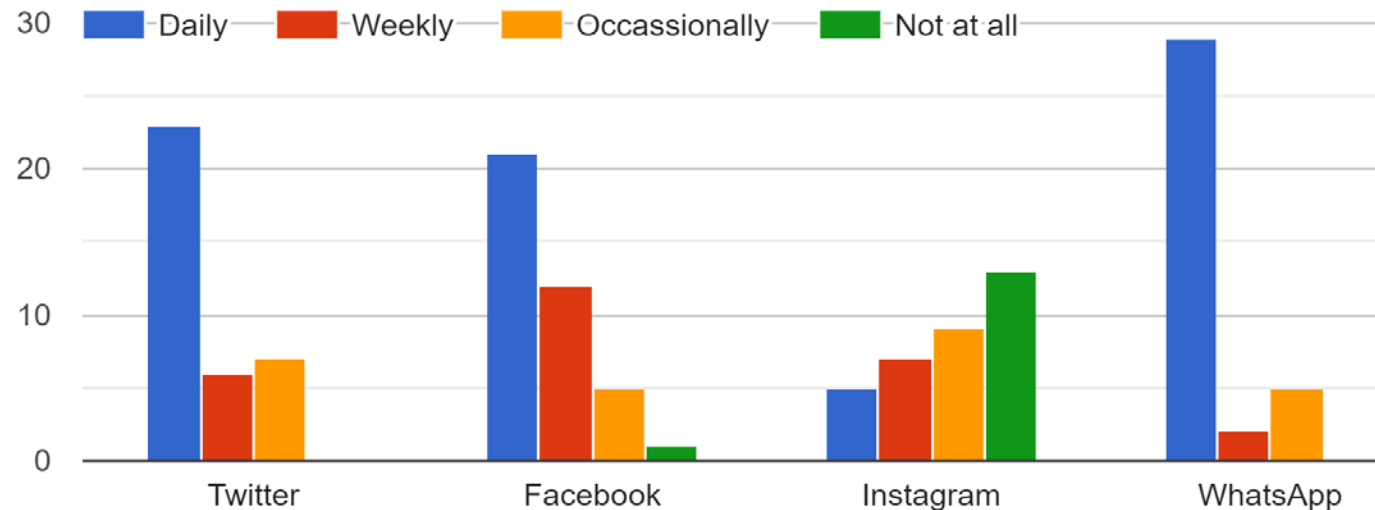
# Findings – Traditional media & civil society

- Traditional media regarded as information sharing tool
- Part of a larger ecosystem of accountability – *“When you say the media is a watchdog, I think we are pushing it a bit too much, we are expecting too much out of one actor...you have to link up a number of actors”* (participant)
- Investigative journalism threatened by lack of resources, lack of willingness to expose corruption, self-censorship and censorship. *“It’s like walking on a hill of broken glass, you never know what will happen, you never know what the reaction will be”* (Participant)
- Lack of trust in traditional media
- Lack of sustainability in reporting on issues. *“most of the time it is just one event, there is no continuation or follow up [from the media]”* (Participant)



# Findings – Social media & civil society

Which social media platform do you use most?

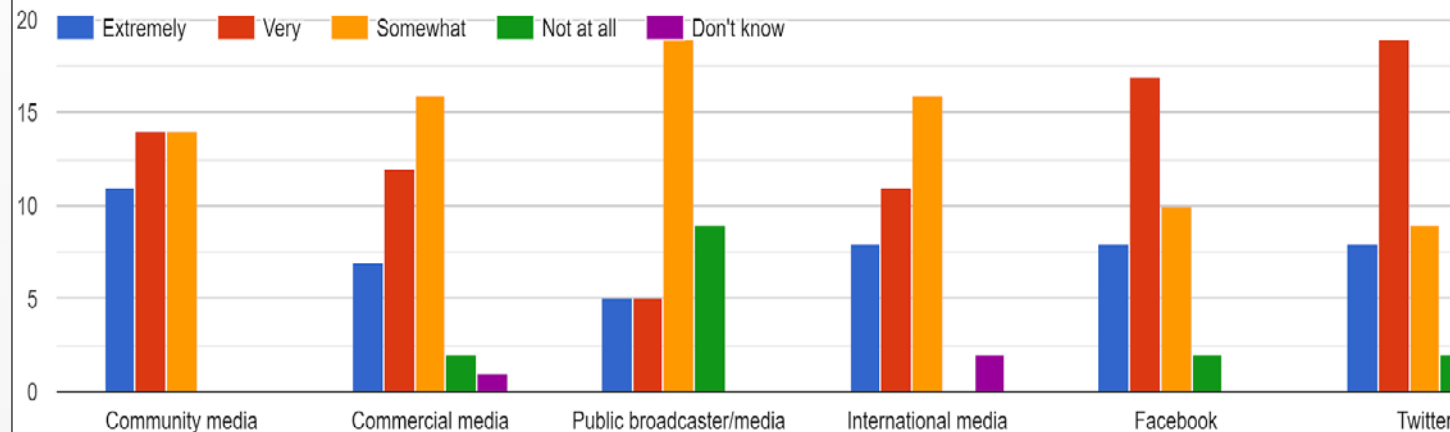


- ***“Due to closing of the freedom of traditional media, the organisation has opted to use social media, the platforms are used daily to inform and influence discussion on accountability issues” (participant)***
- ***“Twitter and Facebook help us interact with various stakeholders, including our beneficiaries. It’s the fastest way to inform them about our activities and current affairs” (participant)***
- ***“Social media platforms help us to reach out to a larger audience timely and get instant feedback” (participant)***

# Findings – Social media & civil society (Advantages)

- No gatekeepers to navigate. *“With social media, I am in complete control at minimum cost with much wider reach. With traditional media, I have to convince them that my story is news. It can be expensive if there are costs associated with conducting investigative journalism and the story will be published from the perspective of the journalist, not mine”* (participant)
- Make use of prominent opinion makers/ ‘influencers’. High visibility and strong following means issues become prominent and cannot be ignored
- **Quickly reach diverse audiences directly**
- Cost effective
- Trusted more than traditional media

How much do you trust the following media to help in your accountability work?



# Findings – Social media & civil society (Disadvantages)

- Too much visibility is threatening to the state (e.g. G40 in Mozambique)  
*“They have a machine to fight back social media”* (participant)
- Biased towards urban centres
- Ignore voices of ordinary citizens
- *“If you are famous maybe the people [state] will harass you, they will call you, they will look for you, but if you are not that famous sometimes they just ignore you”* (participant)

# Social media, media & civic space - Conclusions

- Still a strong reliance on traditional media *“It would be very hard to work without the media because it is a means for communication”* (participant)
- Balance between too much visibility and being ignored
- Questions about who is setting the agenda on social media?
- Moving onto social media without a clear strategy – reacting to context
- States are learning to ‘fight back social media’ – another new strategy required
- More of the same? Informative vs accountability
- More holistic strategy required to tackle closing civic spaces? E.g:  
Social media + community media + independent media  
Prominent voices + ordinary citizens + global campaigns + viral content...

# Thank you

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