

## **Latest trends in technology for news media in Africa**

**Sibusiso Nkomo**

The latest trend in news media and communications technology in Africa shows a continent on an upward economic trajectory but still haunted by poverty and low levels of education. Access to news is not the same in every country even though technologies such as cellphones are widely available. This article is an examination of daily news consumption, new and old technology using the latest Afrobarometer survey data (and other sources) from more than 30 African countries, representing 84% of the total population.

### **Daily news consumption**

Daily news consumption varies greatly based on location and access to technology. Indeed, changes in the media industry have also had a huge impact. Newspapers in most regions have seen a decline due to increased levels of television and radio penetration. But social media is also on the rise (AD27, 2015).

Figure 1 below shows Afrobarometer survey respondents “source of news from radio, television, newspapers, Internet” and whether they received the news every day. A total of 34 countries were surveyed between 2011 and 2013. What is clear from the results is that countries that are better off with infrastructure and/or have stronger institutions tend to do well with supplying news to their people. While poorer and/or repressive states tend to limit the reach of news in their countries. In the case of the latter: Niger, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Malawi and Lesotho sit at the bottom of the table. Whilst in the former, the wealthier African countries: Mauritius, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and South Africa, are at the top of the table.

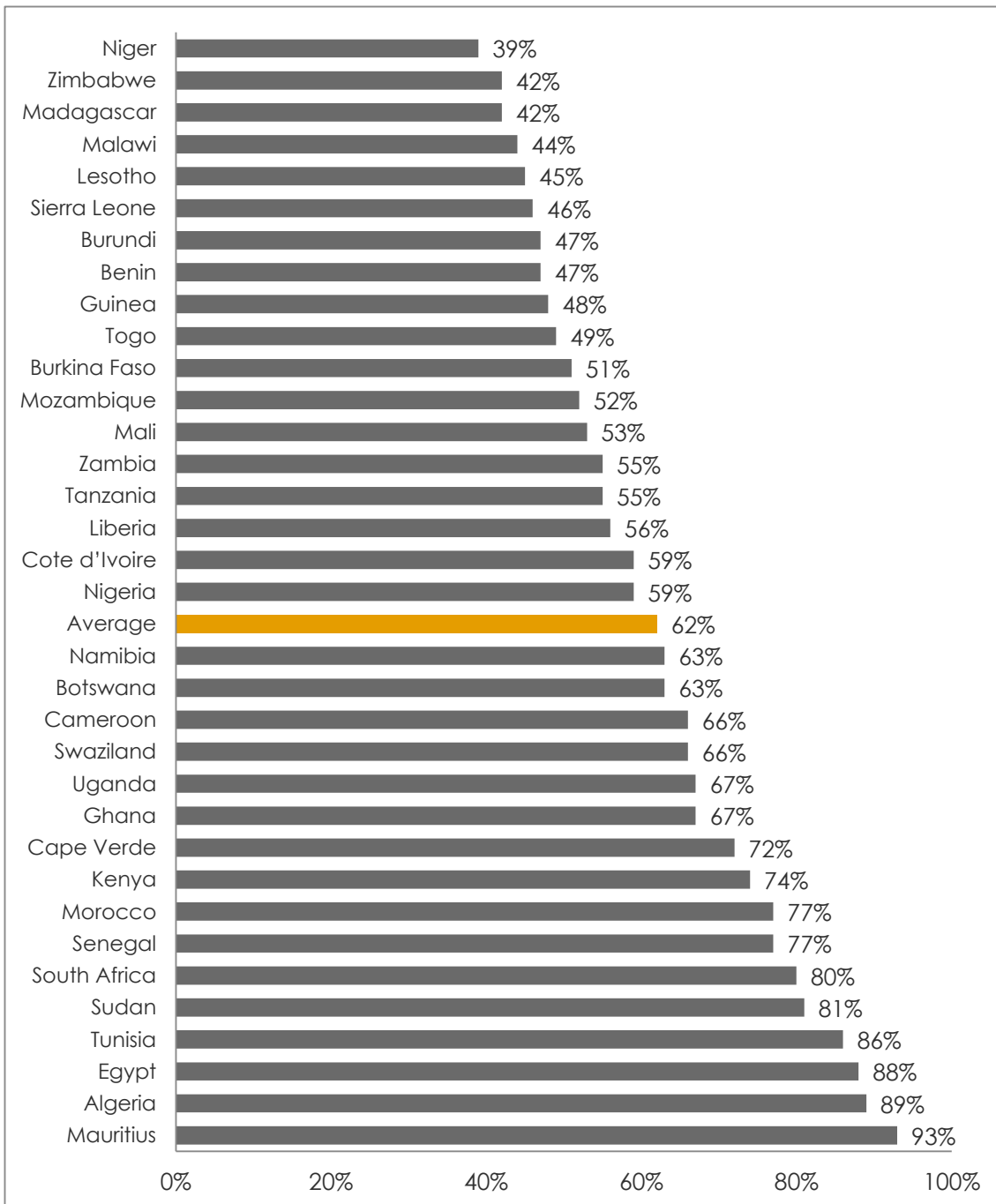
On average six in 10 (62%) of Africans surveyed by Afrobarometer had access to different news sources every day. While this is a good sign that the majority of people on the African continent know what is going on in their countries and regions, these levels do lag behind the rest of the world.

Over the last two decades television has taken over the space of newspapers and to a limited degree, that of radio (see Figure 2) in the 16 countries tracked over time that were originally surveyed in 2002: Botswana, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Everyday consumption of news has gone up from 26% in 2002 to 33% today using television whilst reading of newspapers declined to 9%. But it must be noted that newspapers never did have a readership of more 15% since 2002.

Access to news via social media is on the increase in Africa due to the high penetration of mobile phone networks across the continent. Preliminary results (Figure 3) from 2014-2015 in Southern Africa show that access to Facebook and Twitter is at about one in 10 people (excluding Mozambique and South Africa whose results will be released soon) correlates with the high number of cellphones on the continent. Mauritius leads the way with a third of its population using social media such as Twitter and Facebook for news. Also close are Namibia and Swaziland with a quarter of their population also using social media for news. The exponential increase in the number of people using social media in those three countries has to do with an increase in the amount of technology in Africa in general but in the Southern Africa region in particular.

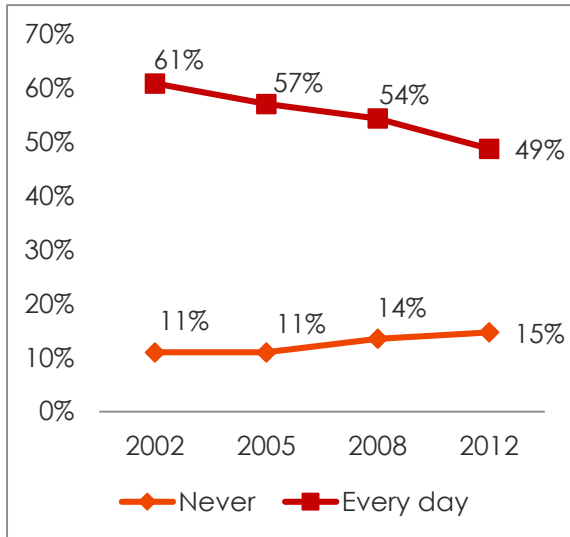
Figure 1: Daily news consumption | 34 countries | 2011-2013



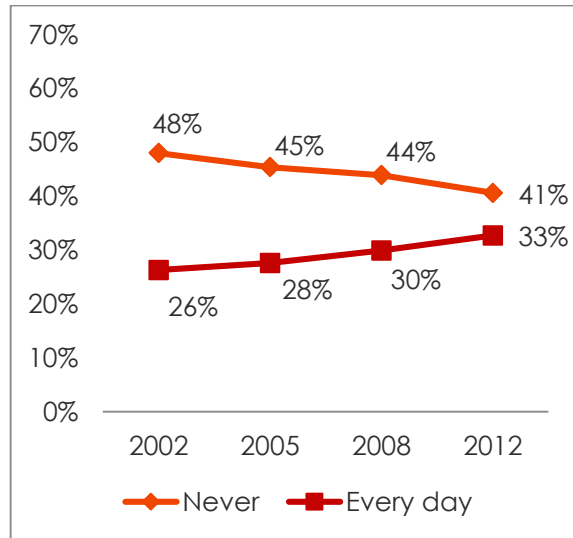
Respondents were asked: How often do you get news from the following sources: (a) Radio? (b) Television? (c) Newspapers? (d) Internet? (% who say they get news “every day” from at least one of these sources)

Figure 2: Trends in sources of news |16 countries| 2002-2013

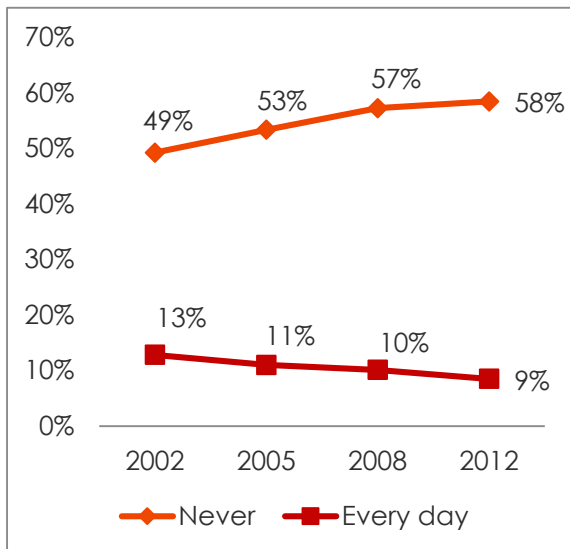
2a: Radio



2b: Television

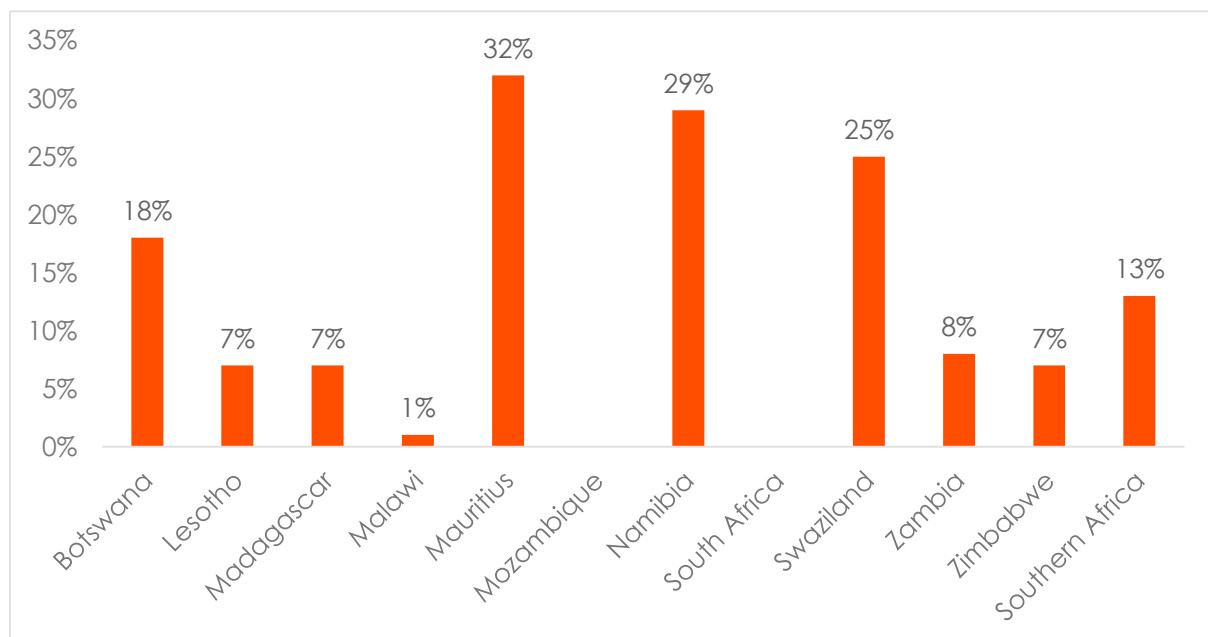


2c: Newspaper



The 16 countries tracked over time are Botswana, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Figure 3: News from social media Facebook/Twitter every day |Southern Africa|2014-2015



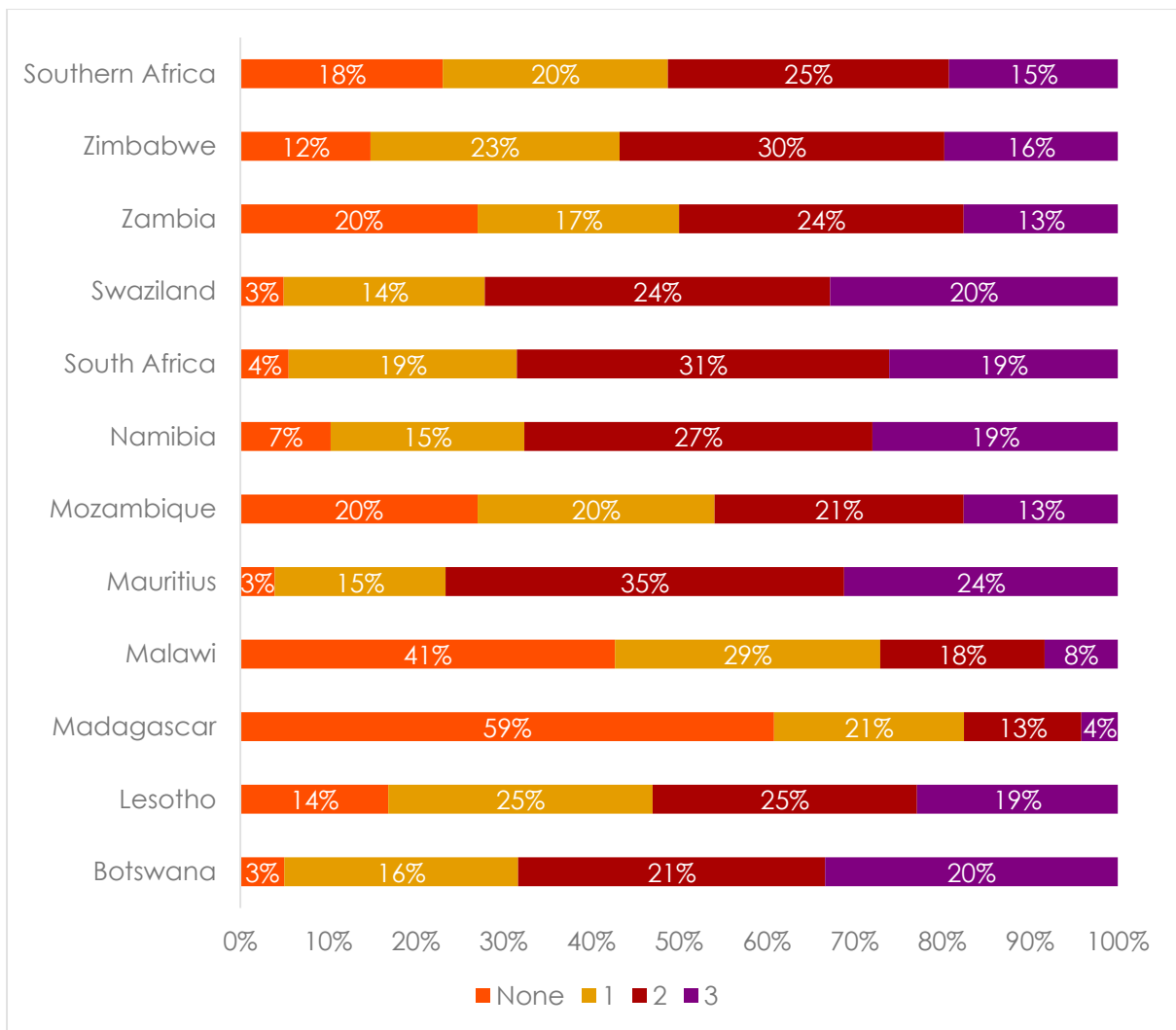
### Ownership of technology to access news

In this section the focus is on cellphones, television and radio. On average six in 10 households (60%) in the Southern Africa region have one to three cellphones in their household based on surveys conducted between 2011 and 2013 (Figure 4). Leading the pack in region is Mauritius with seven in 10 (74%) of households having more than one cellphone, followed by South Africa and Zimbabwe with nearly seven in 10 (69%). Madagascar and Malawi have low numbers of cellphones in households with six in 10 (59%) of Malagasy not owning one. The type of cellphones is unknown as Afrobarometer does not ask that question but Pew Research Center (2014) conducted a survey in big African markets and found that: “In a few short years, the proliferation of mobile phone networks has transformed communications in sub-Saharan Africa. It

has also allowed Africans to skip the landline stage of development and jump right to the digital age”.

Pew’s Spring 2014 Global Attitudes Survey found that in South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria eight to nine in 10 citizens had cellphones on par with the United States (Figure 5-a). But smartphone ownership (Figure 5-b) is still low compared to feature phones (these are capable of texting, calls and basic graphics and some are available in colour but are not internet phones, like for example an iPhone 6s). The young and educated make use of smartphones more than anyone else, according to Pew’s research (Figure 5-c) and most people also use their phones to text, take video, access social media, look for jobs and get political news, in South Africa for example (Figure 5-d).

Figure 4: Number of cellphones in a household|Southern Africa|2011-2013





**Figure 5: Cellphone ownership and use|Pew Research Center|2014**

Figure 5-a

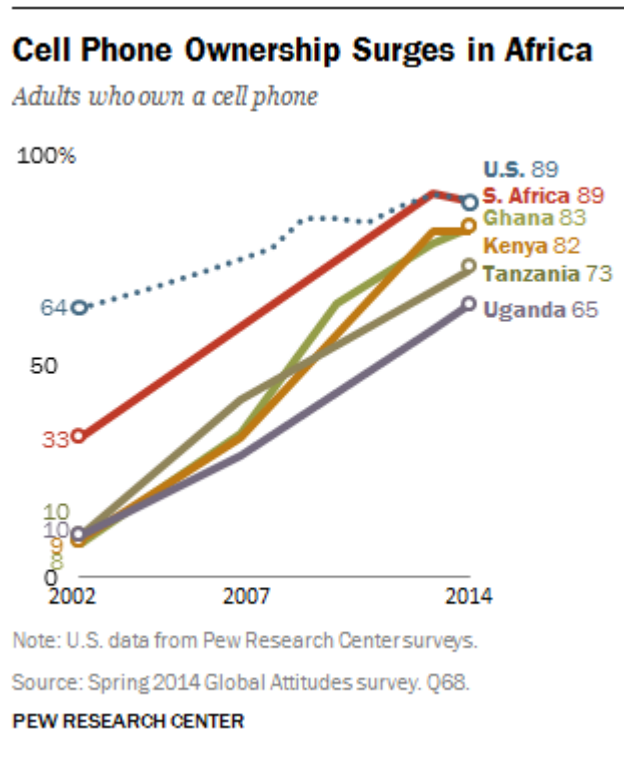
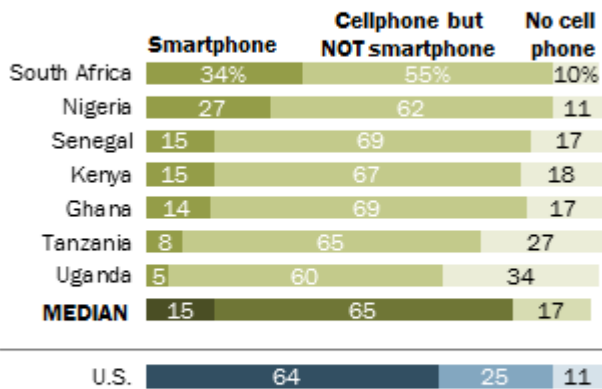


Figure 5-b

## Few Own Smartphones in Africa, But Cell Phones Common

*Do you own a cell phone? Is it a smartphone?*



Note: Percentages based on total sample. U.S. data from December 2014 Pew Research Center surveys. Median percentage excludes the U.S.

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q68 & Q69.

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Figure 5-c

## Younger, Educated and English-Speaking Africans More Likely to Own Smartphone

*Adults who own a smartphone*

	Total	By education:			By English language ability:			By age:		
		Secondary or more	Less than secondary	Diff	Speak or read English	Cannot speak or read English	Diff	18-34	35+	Diff
	%	%	%		%	%		%	%	
South Africa	34	57	13	+44	-	-	-	41	27	+14
Nigeria	27	35	5	+30	33	2	+31	34	17	+17
Senegal	15	46	8	+38	38	5	+33	20	9	+11
Kenya	15	28	5	+23	19	1	+18	18	11	+7
Ghana	14	21	4	+17	20	2	+18	21	6	+15
Tanzania	8	-	-	-	17	1	+16	10	5	+5
Uganda	5	20	3	+17	7	1	+6	7	2	+5

Note: Based on total sample. Only countries with sufficient sample sizes shown. All demographic differences shown are statistically significant. For English language ability, South Africa excluded due to insufficient sample size for non-English speakers. Respondents who replied that they can read or speak some English, or took the survey in English, were considered to have English language ability.

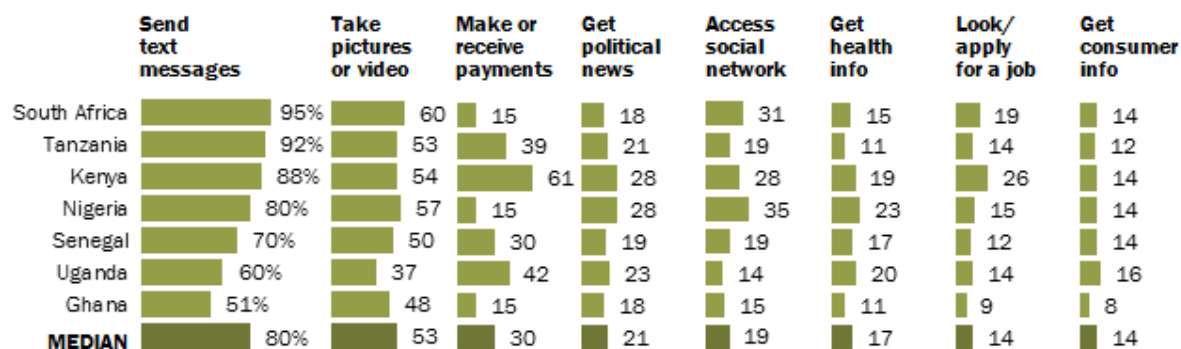
Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q68 & Q69.

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Figure 5-d

## Texting, Taking Pictures and Videos Most Common Use of Cell Phones in Africa

*Adult cell phone owners who used a cell phone in the past 12 months to ...*



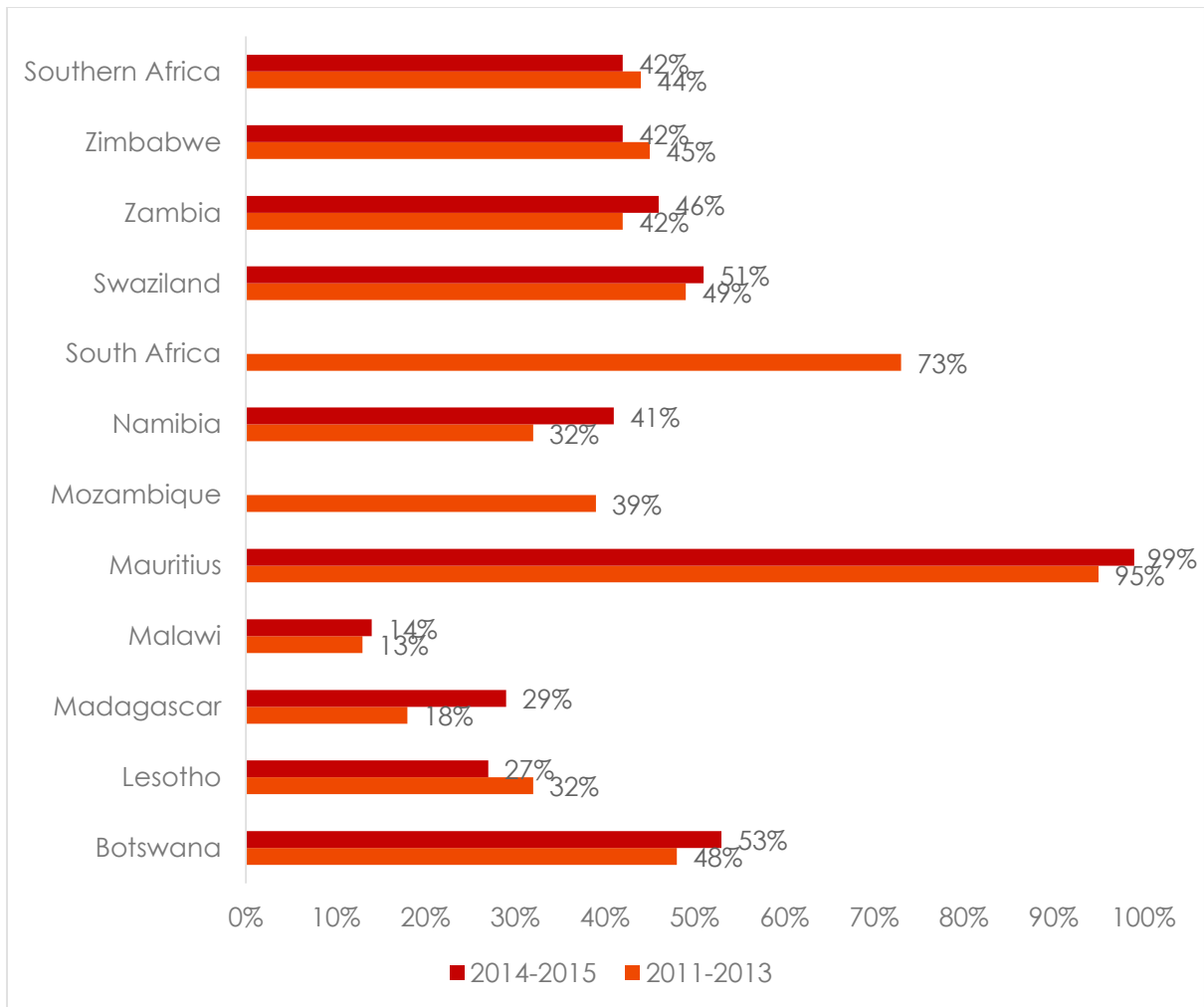
Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q74a-h.

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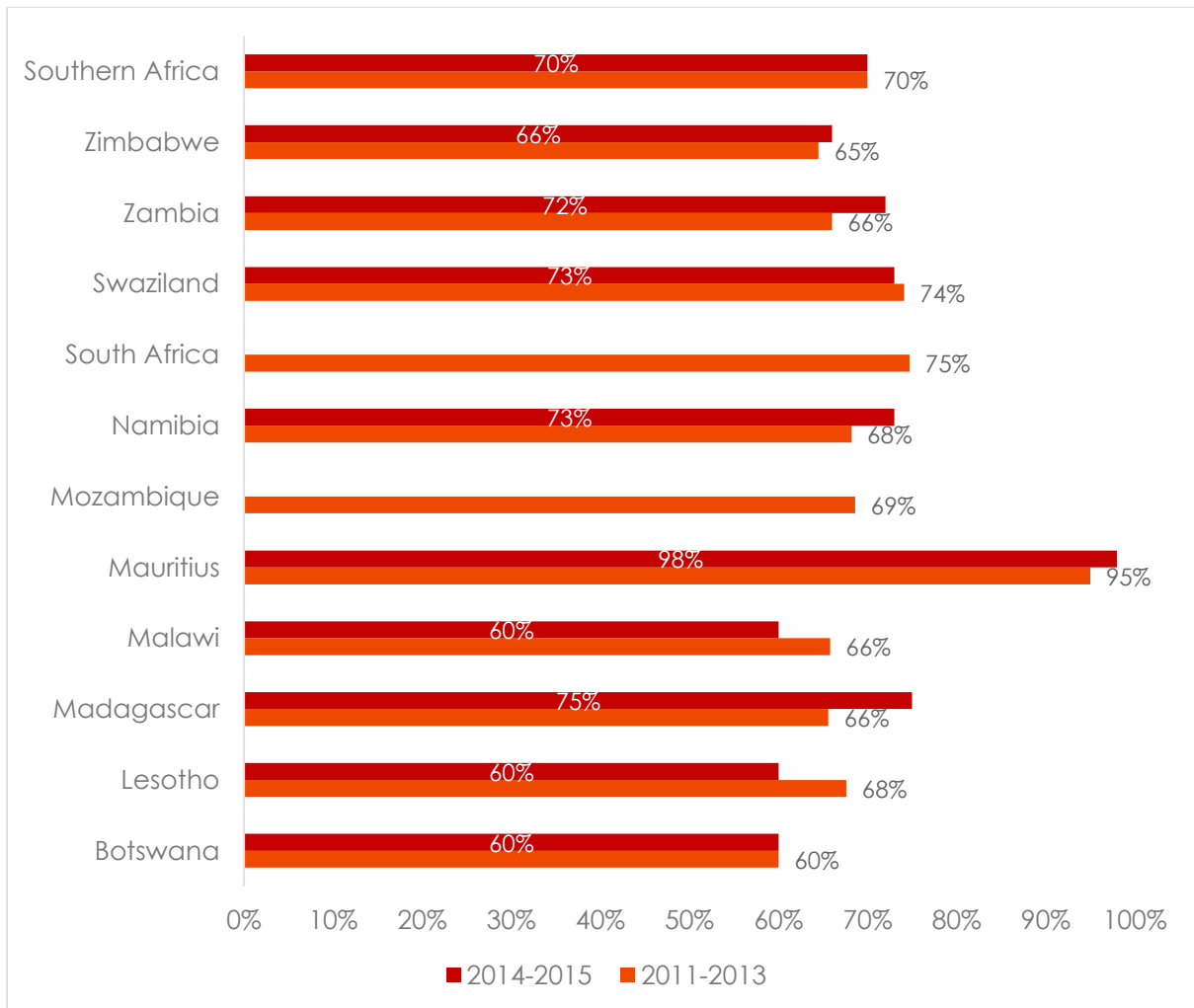
## Old technology ownership

While the focus at the moment is heavily on cell phones and their fast tracking of Africa into the digital age, older technologies such as television, and radio are highly represented in African households. An average of four in 10 households in Southern Africa have televisions, while radio is available in seven in 10 (70%) of households. Radio is still the best source of news in the region and is most available in Mauritius, South Africa and Swaziland. But newspapers are not doing too well in the region. The section below looks at the oldest news dissemination technology.

**Figure 6: Television access |Southern Africa|2011-2015**



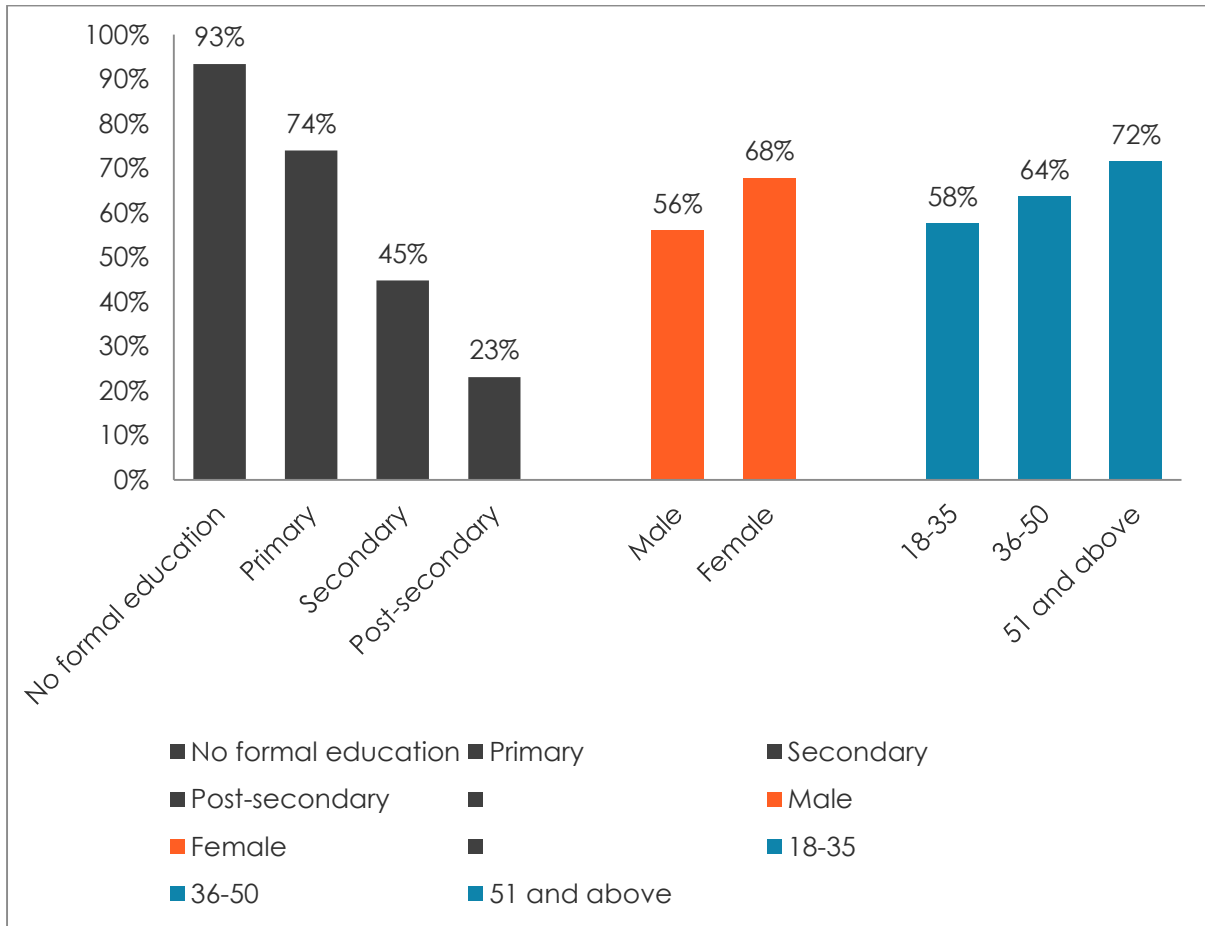
**Figure 7: Radio access|Southern Africa|2011-2015**



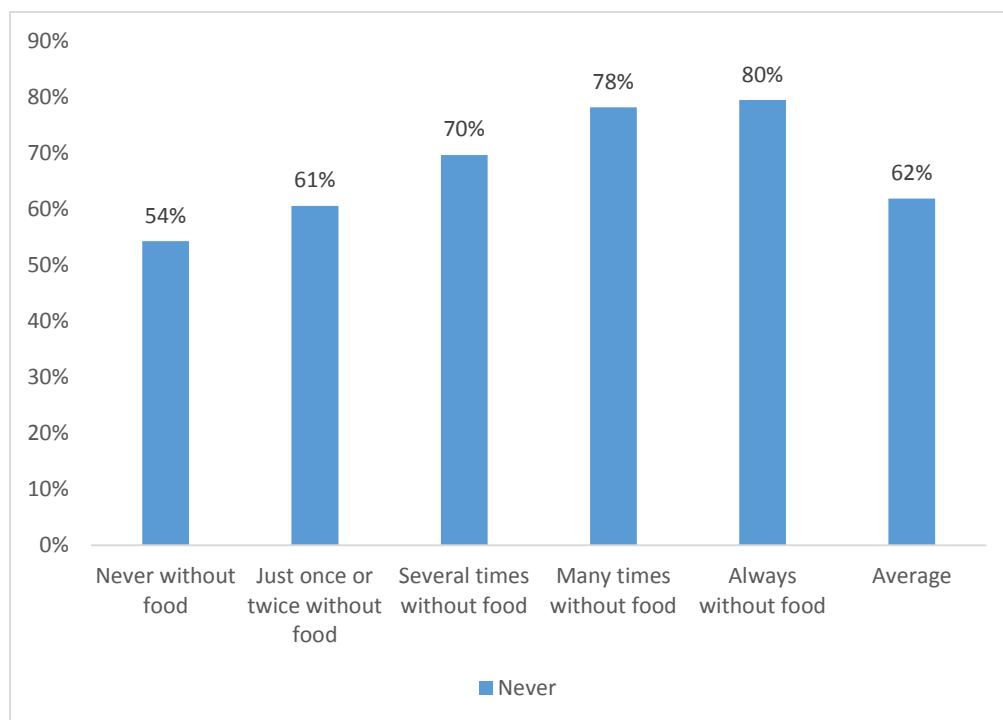
### Newspapers are on the decline

About six in 10 Africans never read a newspaper and this is tied to poverty, education, gender and age. About 93% of Africans without a formal education do not read newspapers, whilst 63% of women do not read newspapers and 72% of those who are over 50 years old do not (Figure 8). When it comes to access to food, newspaper consumption tracks the factors above. For those without food every day, eight in 10 (80%) would not read a newspaper and those who have food every day also have high levels of non-readership at five in 10 (54%). This means that newspapers may be seen as more of a luxury in most African households and not necessary compared to radio. But also it does not mean people cannot access news – radio accounts for over 70% of delivery, followed by television as outlined above.

**Figure 8: Respondents who do not read newspapers |by age, education and location|34 countries|2011-2013**



**Figure 9: Newspaper consumption |by food access|34 countries|2011-2013**



## References

Bentley, Thomas, Kangwook Han and Mina Okuru (2015), Afrobarometer Dispatch AD27: African publics back rights, responsibilities of media watchdogs

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