

# **“Fake News”, Disinformation and Media Trust in Africa: An exploratory study of Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa**

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# A global phenomenon

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- ‘Fake news’ has received **much attention globally** in scholarship and in popular discourse.
- The **2016 US election of Donald Trump an impetus**: Cambridge Analytica scandal, weaponizing of term to dismiss criticism...
- Multiple **countries around the world** grappling with the problem, and not all of them located in the Global North.
- “Fake news” feared to be a **factor in elections**, e.g. Nigeria, South Africa, India...

# Conceptual problems

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- “Fake news” is a **poorly defined and overly broad** term, covering wide spectrum.
- Some consensus around notion of **fabricated items that resemble news reports with potential to mislead** – for financial or political gain
- Could include **six types of “fake news”**: satire, parody, fabrication, photo manipulation, propaganda, and advertising and public relations (Tandoc et al., 2018)
- The terms **disinformation** and **misinformation** are preferred by UK Government & UNESCO.

# African examples I

- Social media entrepreneurs in 2019 Nigerian elections – spread false information about client's opponents.



# African examples II

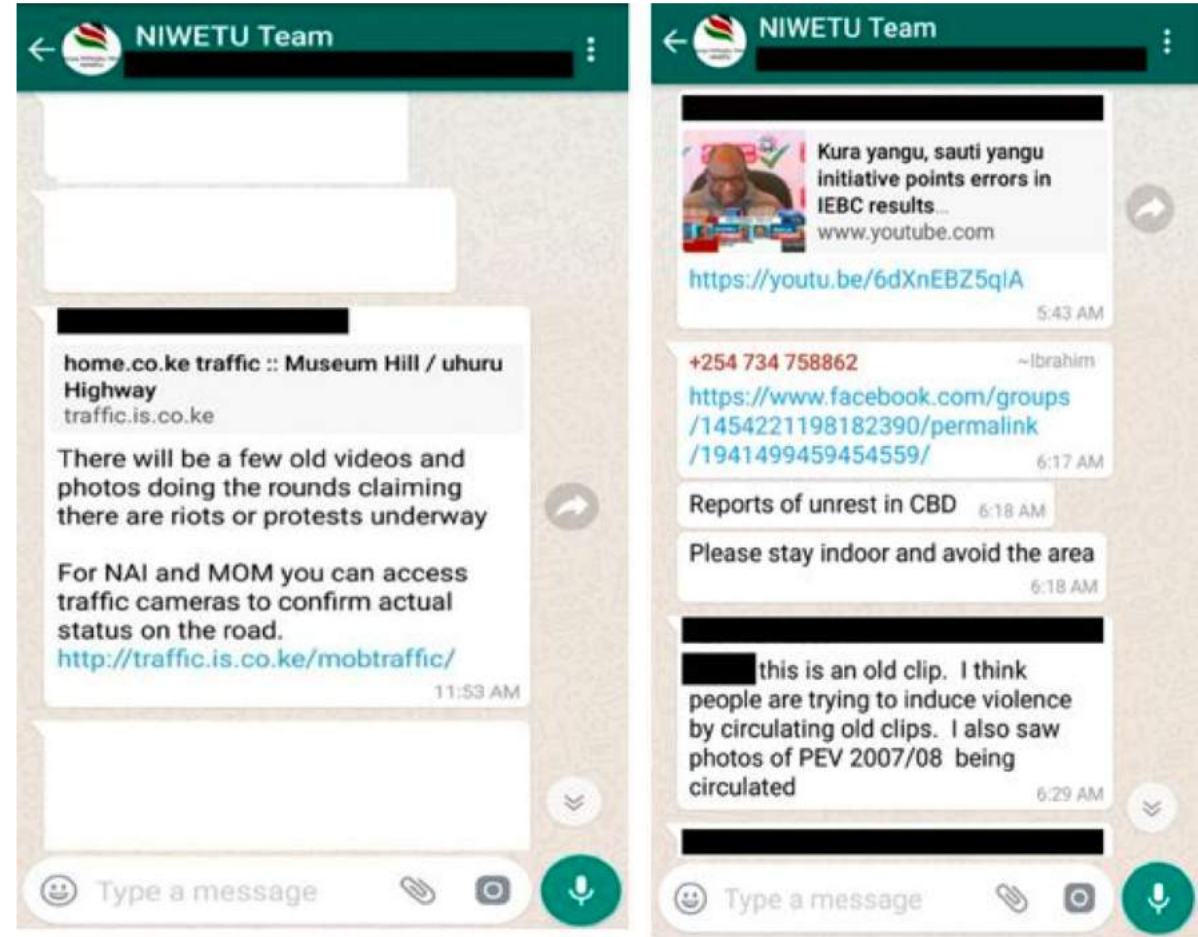
- South African elections 2019: ANC is said to **pay social media influencers**.
- In the 2016 election: “War Room” for fake election posters, and other examples.
- Orchestrated **misinformation campaign** on Twitter by Bell Pottinger to deflect corruption allegations against Jacob Zuma - #WMC.



Source: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-03-01-anc-gambles-on-twitter-influencers/>

# African examples III

- “Fake news” and disinformation also take form of **extreme speech** fomenting racial or ethnic tension, especially on Whatsapp (e.g. South Africa, Kenya).
- Used as excuse for **internet shutdowns** in Cameroon, Togo, Ethiopia to silence online criticism.



Source: <https://dai-global-checkpoint.com/what-to-do-about-fake-news-ask-kenya.html>

# Trust issues

- The increased awareness around problems with dis- and misinformation occurs against a **long-standing use of satire, gossip and jokes** in Africa, including on social media.



Source: [https://twitter.com/ndula\\_victor/status/1001123438604554245](https://twitter.com/ndula_victor/status/1001123438604554245)

# Trust issues

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- What Ellis (1989) has called “**pavement radio**”
  - Provides **political criticism** and commentary when mainstream media are captured by the state or elites.
  - Plays progressive role, undermines official narratives, taps into everyday lived experience
- Rumour most likely to to be **alternative source of information** when conventional media lacks credibility (Nyamnjuh, 2005).
- Patrimonial relationships in African societies also **erode trust** in journalists’ independence.



# Countries studied

- South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria all have **vibrant media**.
- Improved **freedoms but pressures** remain.
- Already **examples of disinformation** in all three countries.
- Little known about **how** disinformation spreads and **why**.
- Compared with Pew Research Centre study of disinformation in the United States (2017).



# Research Questions

**RQ<sub>1</sub>**: How often do Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans say they encounter "fake news"?

**RQ<sub>2</sub>**: Who do Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans believe is responsible for preventing fake news from spreading?

**RQ<sub>3</sub>**: In what instances do Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans share "fake news"?

**RQ<sub>4</sub>**: How much do Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans trust local, national, global and social media?

**RQ<sub>5</sub>**: What is the relationship between perceived exposure to "fake news" and media trust in the three countries?

# Methods – Research design

- We use data from a **two-wave online survey** of adults in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa fielded in January'18 (wave 1) and April'19 (wave 2).
- The countries were selected because:
  - Central nodes in regional network of news production.
  - English is widely spoken
  - Availability of online panels
- Online panels in Sub-Saharan Africa amplify **problems of representativeness** seen elsewhere, but remain most accessible tool for survey research.

# Methods – Sampling

- Sample size:  $N = 1,847$  adults 18 and over ( $N_{Kenya} = 617$ ;  $N_{Nigeria} = 647$ ;  $N_{South\ Africa} = 583$ ).
- Our study **oversampled highly educated individuals** (*Median* = Some University), and professionals, which is a common problem with online panels.
- We used **post-stratification weighting** (raking) to match population distribution using cross-classifications of gender & age groups, plus geographic distribution.

# Methods – Measures

- *Perceived exposure to misinformation* (0 to 4), is a composite variable from two items:
  - how often do they encounter political news that are **not fully accurate**
  - how often do they encounter political news that are **completely made up**
- *Blame attribution* (0 to 4) asked about **four different actors**
  - Government
  - Public
  - Social media companies
  - Search engines
- *Disinformation dissemination* (yes/no)
  - have they shared stories that **they later found out were made up**
  - have they shared stories **knowing that they were made up**

# Methods – Measures

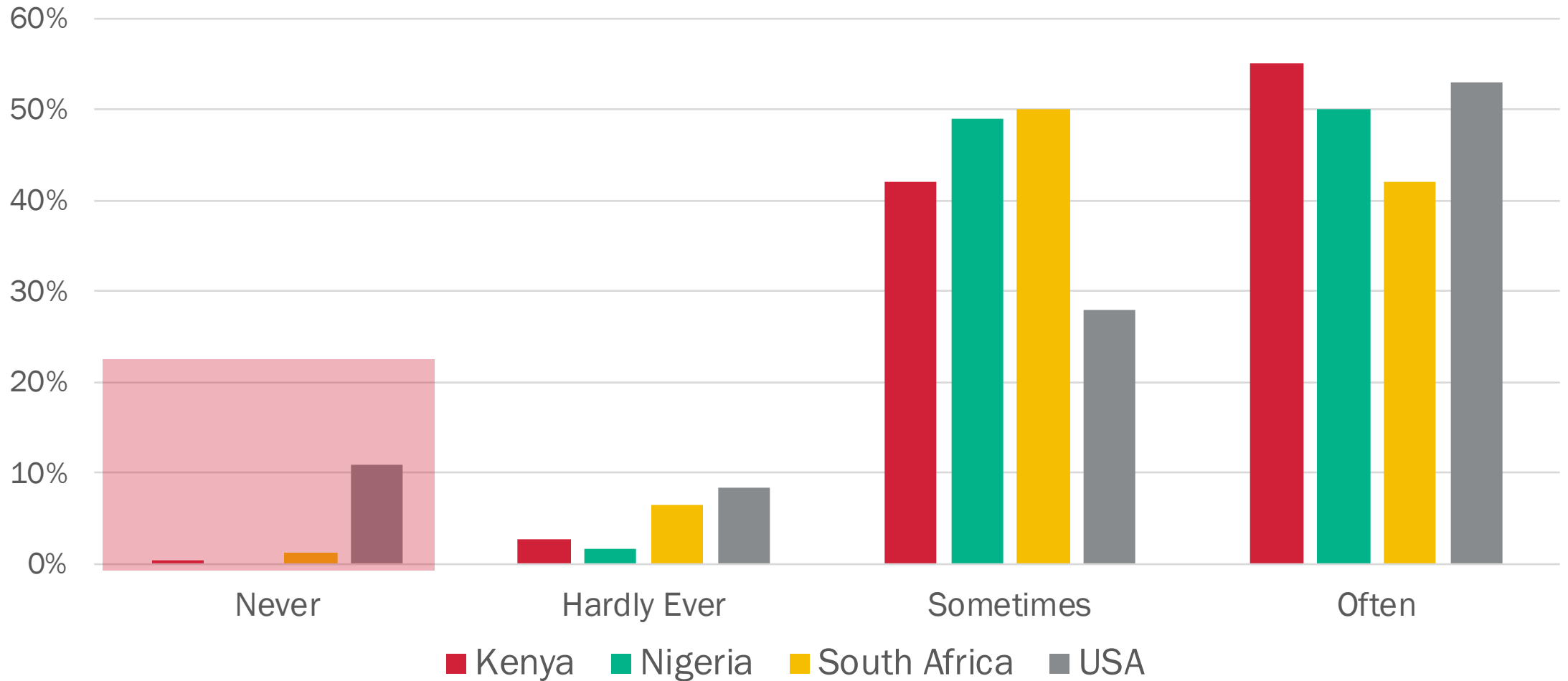
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- *Media trust* (0 to 3), asked about 4 actors and they aggregated into one composite variable:
  - National news
  - Local news
  - Global news
  - Social media
- *Support for media freedom* (-4 to 4), derived from questions included in the Afrobarometer.
- *News consumption* (0 to 4) on television, radio, newspapers and online.

# RQ1

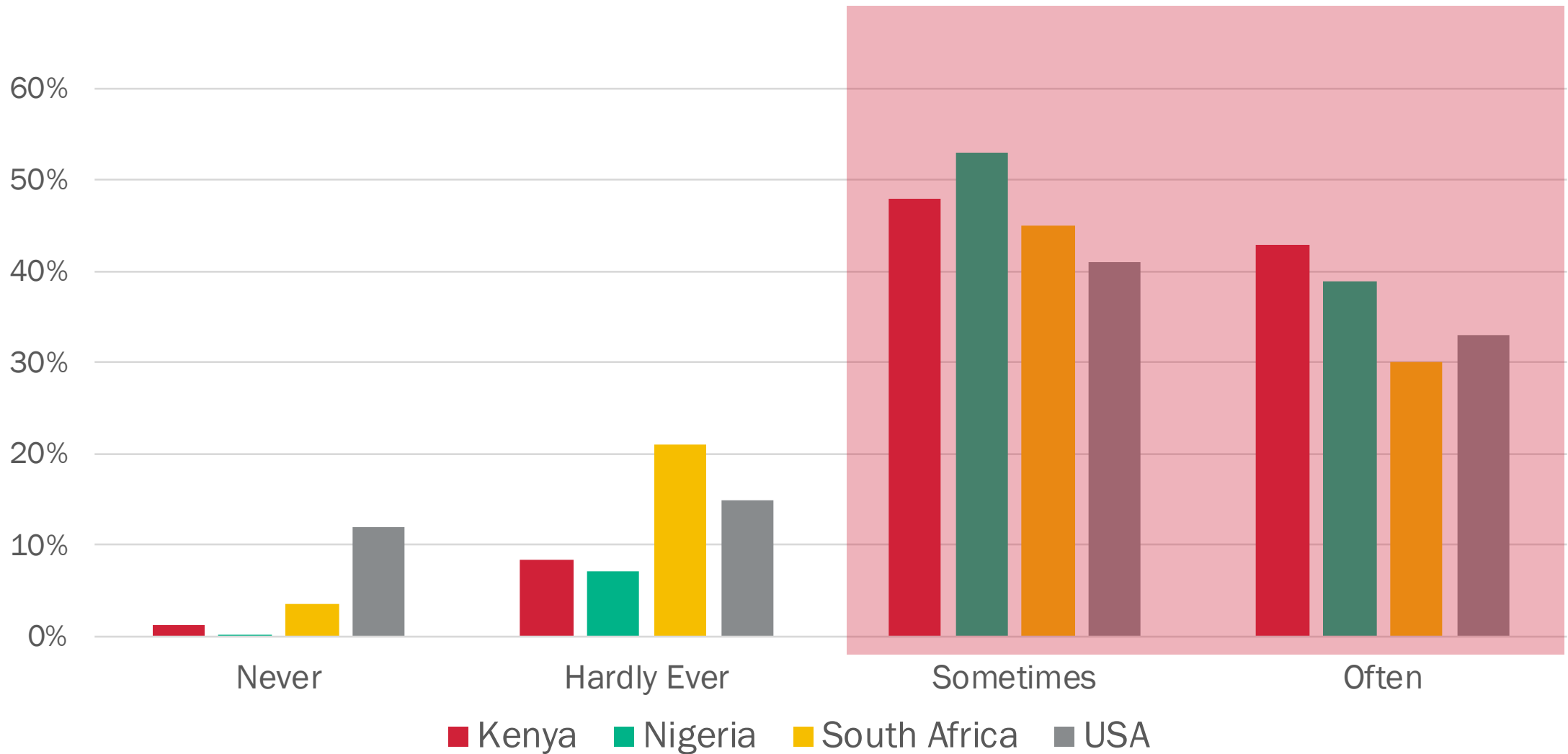
How often do Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans say they encounter "fake news"?

# How often do you come across news stories about politics and government online that you think are *not fully accurate*?





# How often do you come across news stories about politics and government online that you think are *completely made up*?



# OLS Regression Coefficients of Exposure to Fake News (N = 1,847)

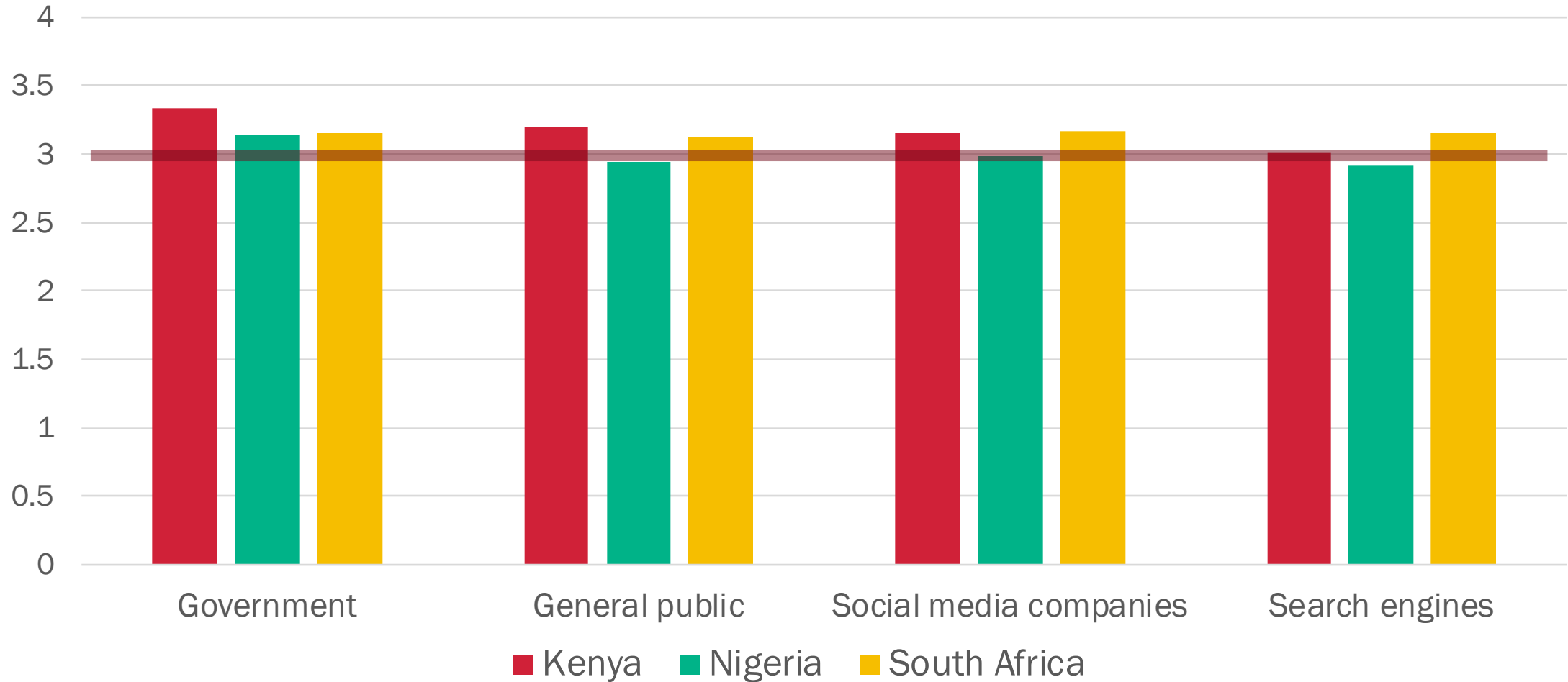
	Kenya	Nigeria	South Africa
Support for media freedom	-.019	.020	-.014
News consumption			
Television	-.040	.031	-.049*
Radio	.044	-.029	.014
Newspapers	.039	-.001	.062*
Online media	.102	-.051	.116*
Control variables			
Age	.008#	-.002	-.001
Gender (baseline = Female)	-.043	.126#	-.054
Wave (baseline = wave 1)	.029	.048	.032
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.073	.036	.051
N	617	647	583

\*  $p < .05$ ; #  $p < .10$

# RQ2

Who do Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans believe is responsible for preventing fake news from spreading?

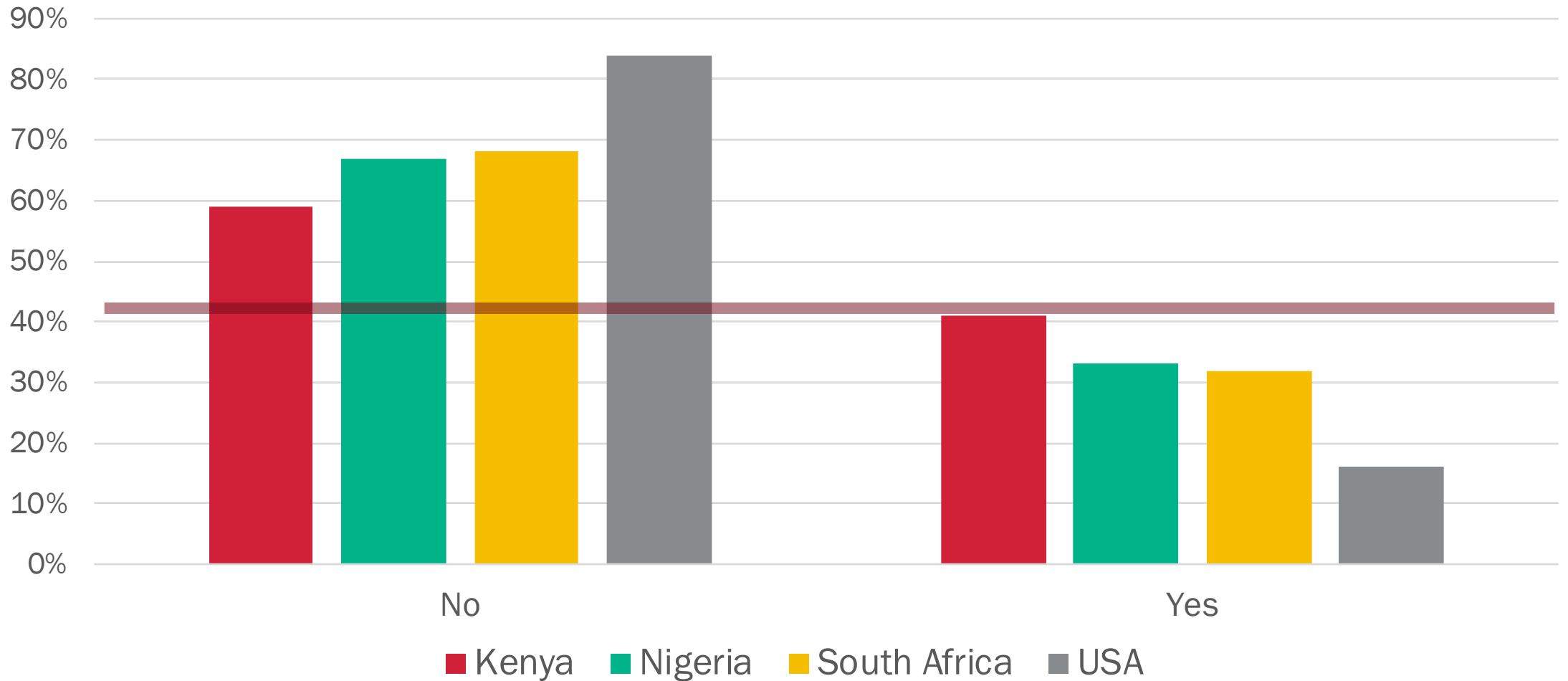
# How much responsibility do ... have in trying to prevent made up stories from gaining attention?



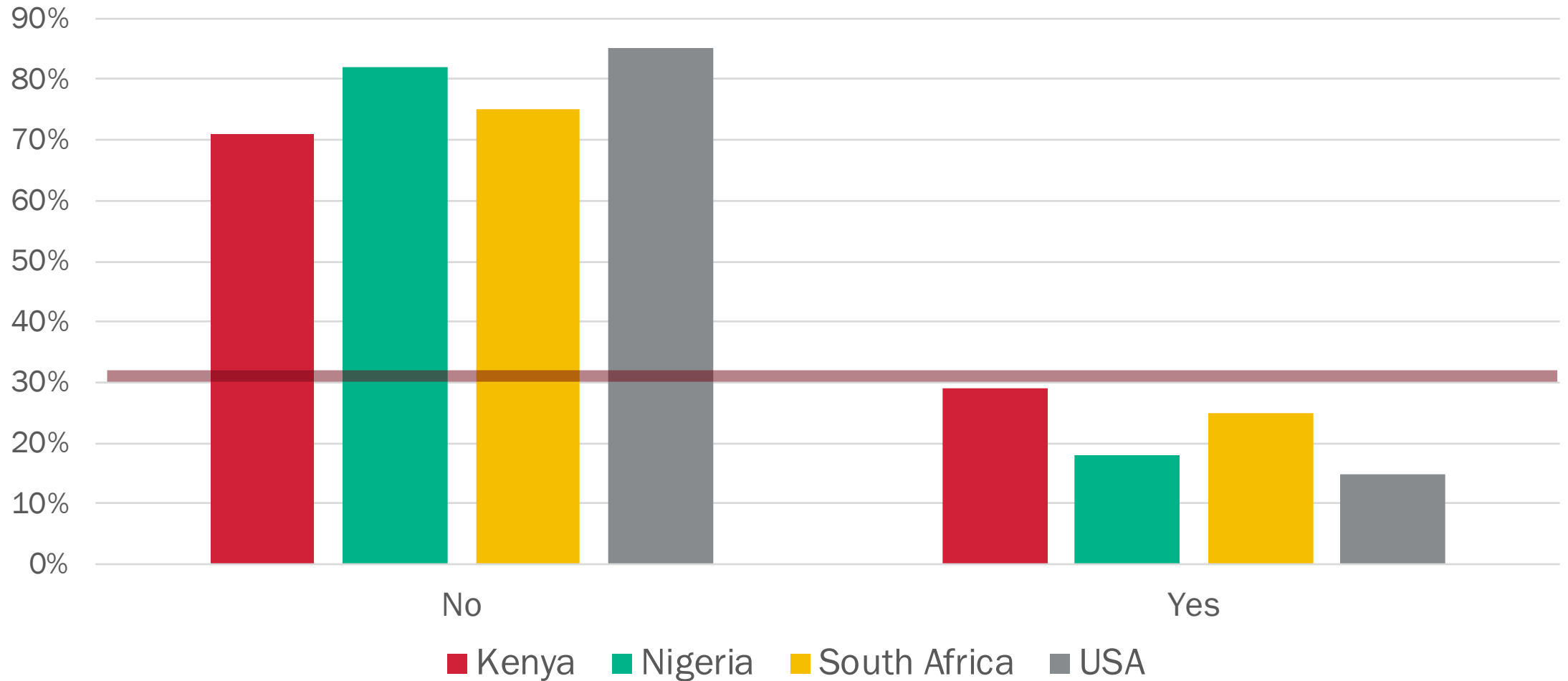
# RQ3

In what instances do Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans share “fake news”?

# Have you ever shared a political news story online that *you later found* out was made up?



# Have you ever shared a political news story online that you thought *at the time* was made up?

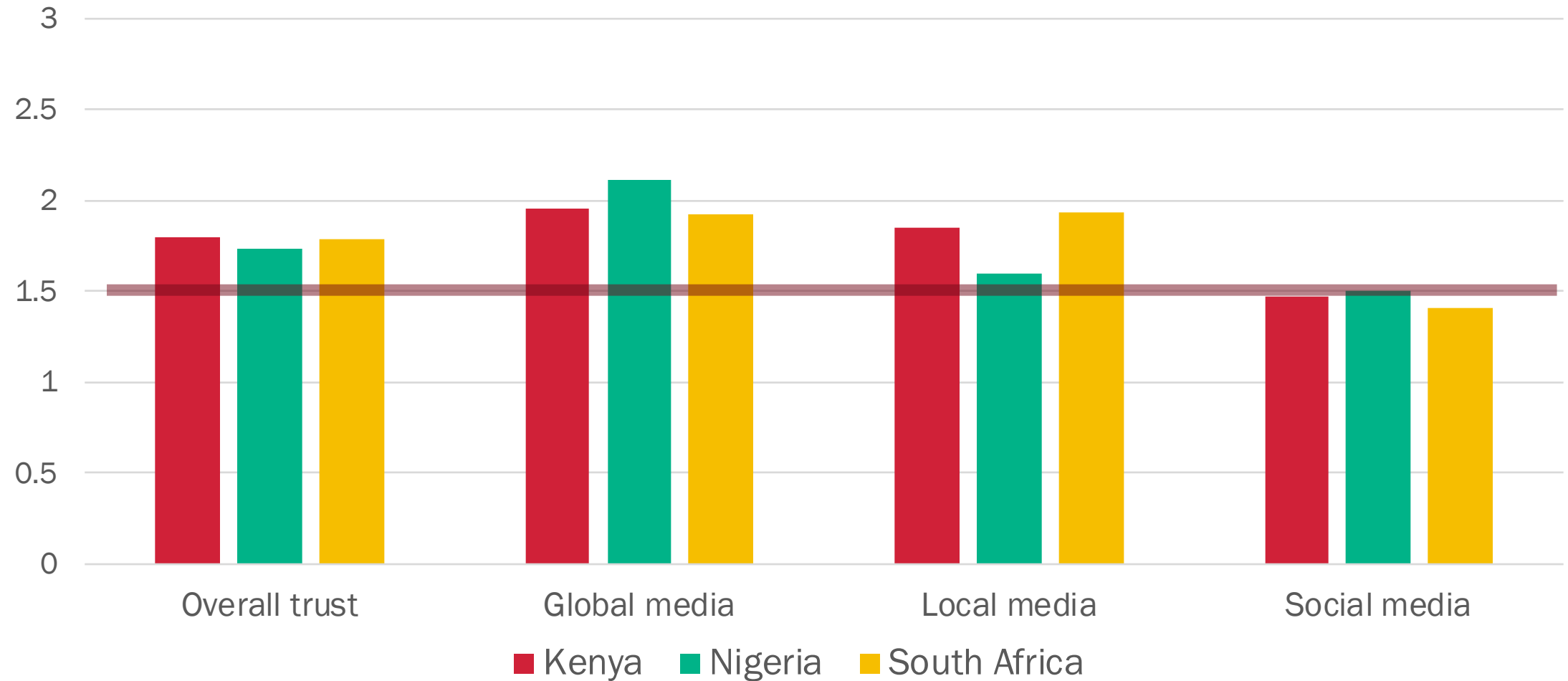


# RQ4

How much do Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans trust local, national, global and social media?



## How much do you trust *the following types of media organizations?*



# RQ5

What is the relationship between perceived exposure to “fake news” and media trust in the three countries?

# OLS Regression Coefficients of Media Trust (N = 1,847)

	Kenya	Nigeria	South Africa
Perceived exposure “fake news”	.056	.038	-.093*
Support for media freedom	.046*	.017	-.003
News consumption			
Television	.003	.047	.031#
Radio	-.027	-.045	.030#
Newspapers	-.022	.104**	.044*
Online media	.108	.165*	.022
Control variables			
Age	-.003	-.012**	-.002
Gender (baseline = Female)	.922**	-.014	.019
Wave (baseline = wave 1)	-.158#	-.120#	-.100*
Gender x Perceived exposure	-.335*		
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.073	.145	.067
N	617	647	583

# Final Ideas (I)

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- Africa's media hasn't been exempted from concerns about “fake news” and politically motivated disinformation campaigns.
- We have shown that:
  1. Among educated and highly educated Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans there is a strong perception that they are **exposed to “fake news” rather frequently**.
  2. Trust levels in the media **have been in decline** for some time, and our survey shows no sign of a reprise.
  3. In South Africa, and among Kenyan men, those who perceive they are more exposed to “fake news” also report lower levels of trust in the media.
  4. It is important to understand the **socio-political and cultural context** in which mis- and disinformation boomed in Sub-Saharan Africa.

# Final Ideas (II)

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- The results in this study point towards some areas where further research is needed:
  1. Can these results be **replicated** among those with lower levels of formal education?
  2. Are the patterns identified in these three media saturated countries applicable to **other African nations**?
  3. What is the **direction of the relationship** between exposure to “fake media” and decreasing media trust?
  4. Why makes Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans **share inaccurate news** rather frequently?

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