

Audience Motivations for Sharing Dis- and Misinformation: A Comparative Study in Six Sub-Saharan African Countries

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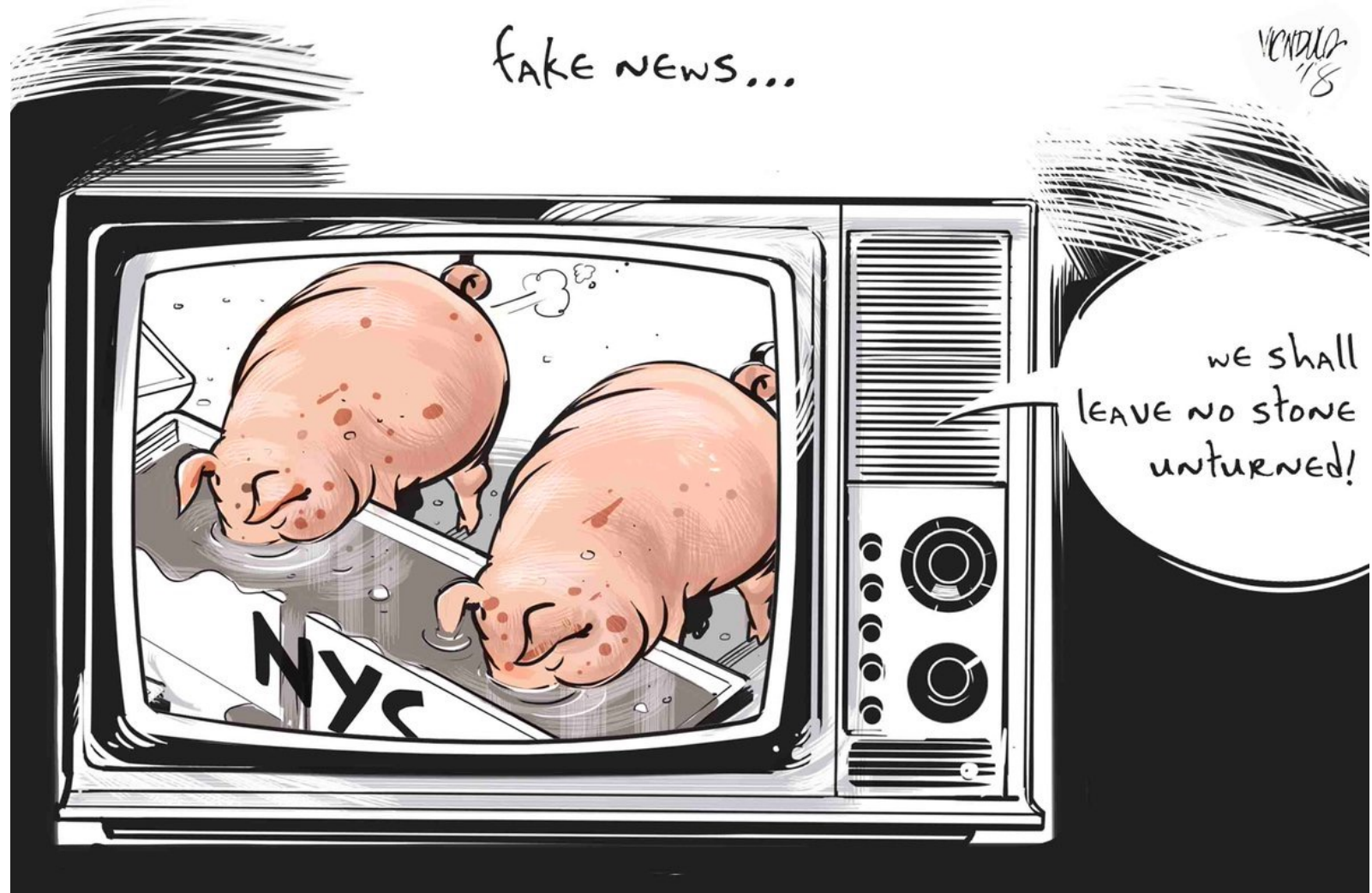
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A global phenomenon

- ‘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...

Old wine in a new bottle



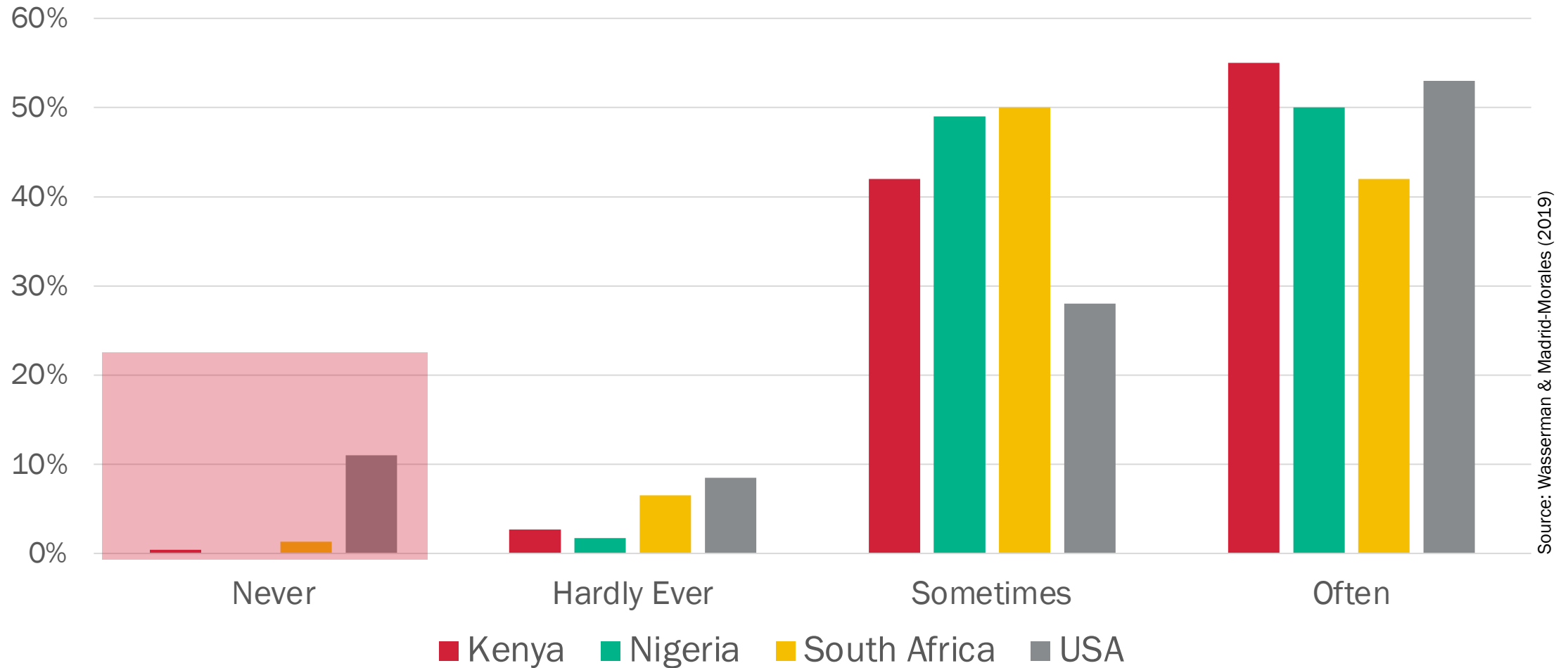
Disinformation in Sub-Saharan Africa – A research agenda

Exploratory three-country nonprobability online survey



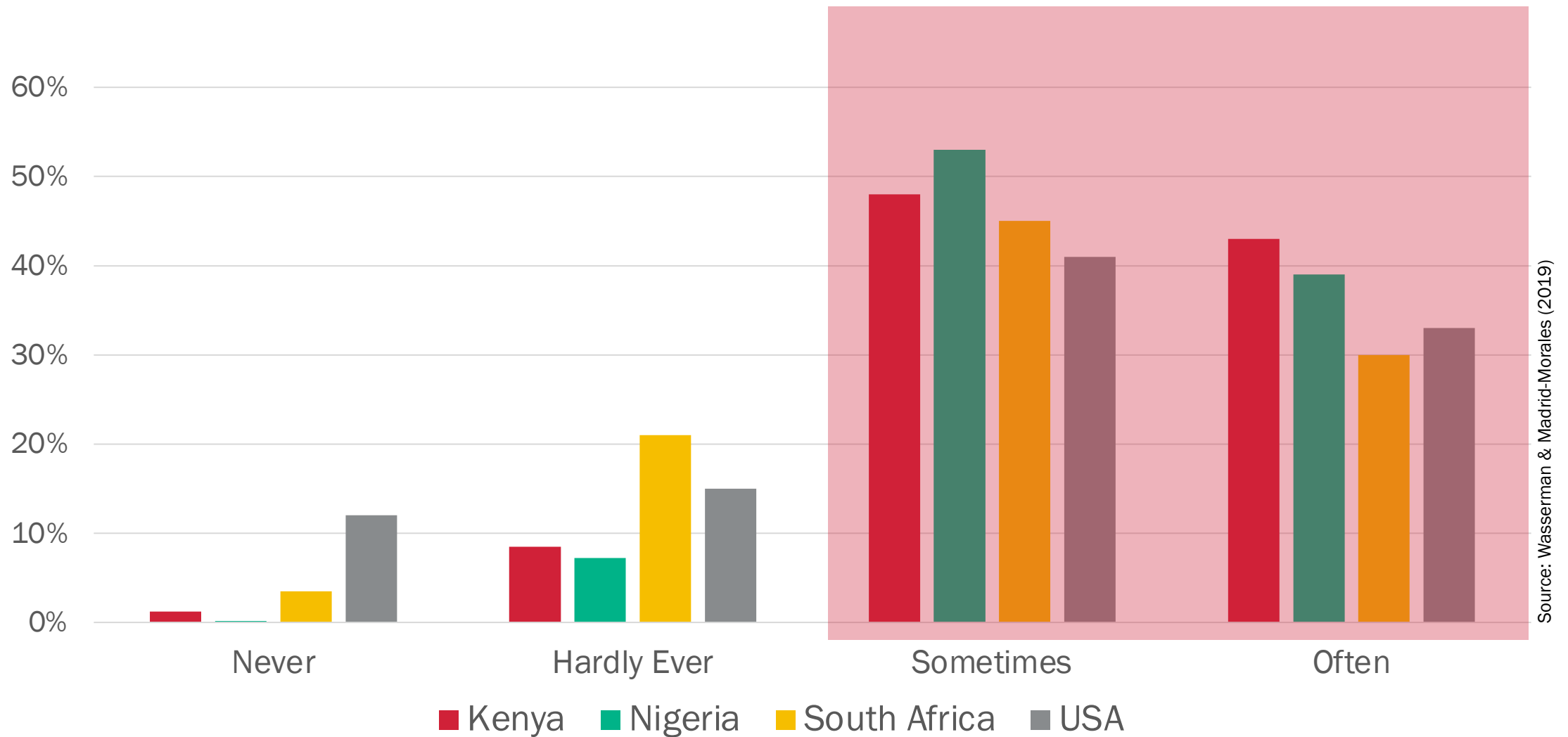
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How often do you come across news stories about politics and government online that you think are *not fully accurate*? (N = 2,784)



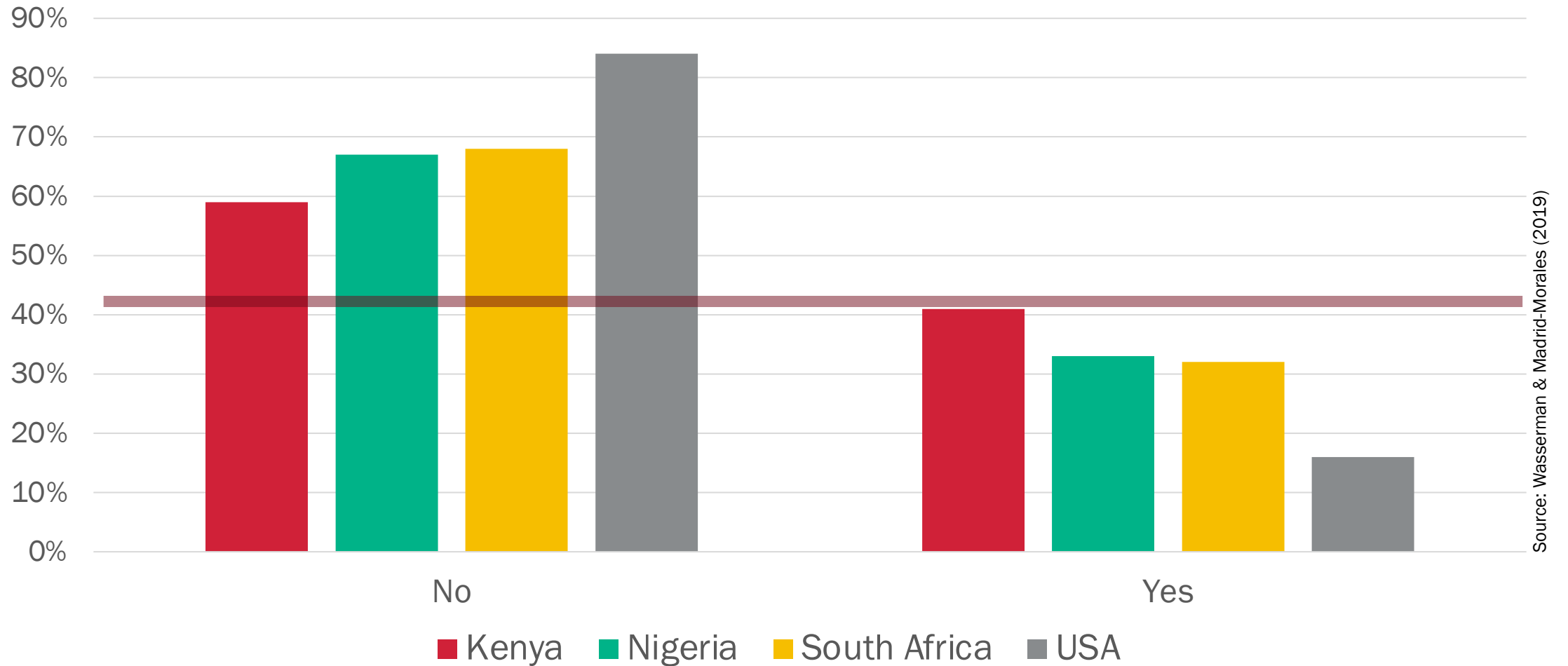
Source: Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2019)

How often do you come across news stories about politics and government online that you think are *completely made up*? (N = 2,784)



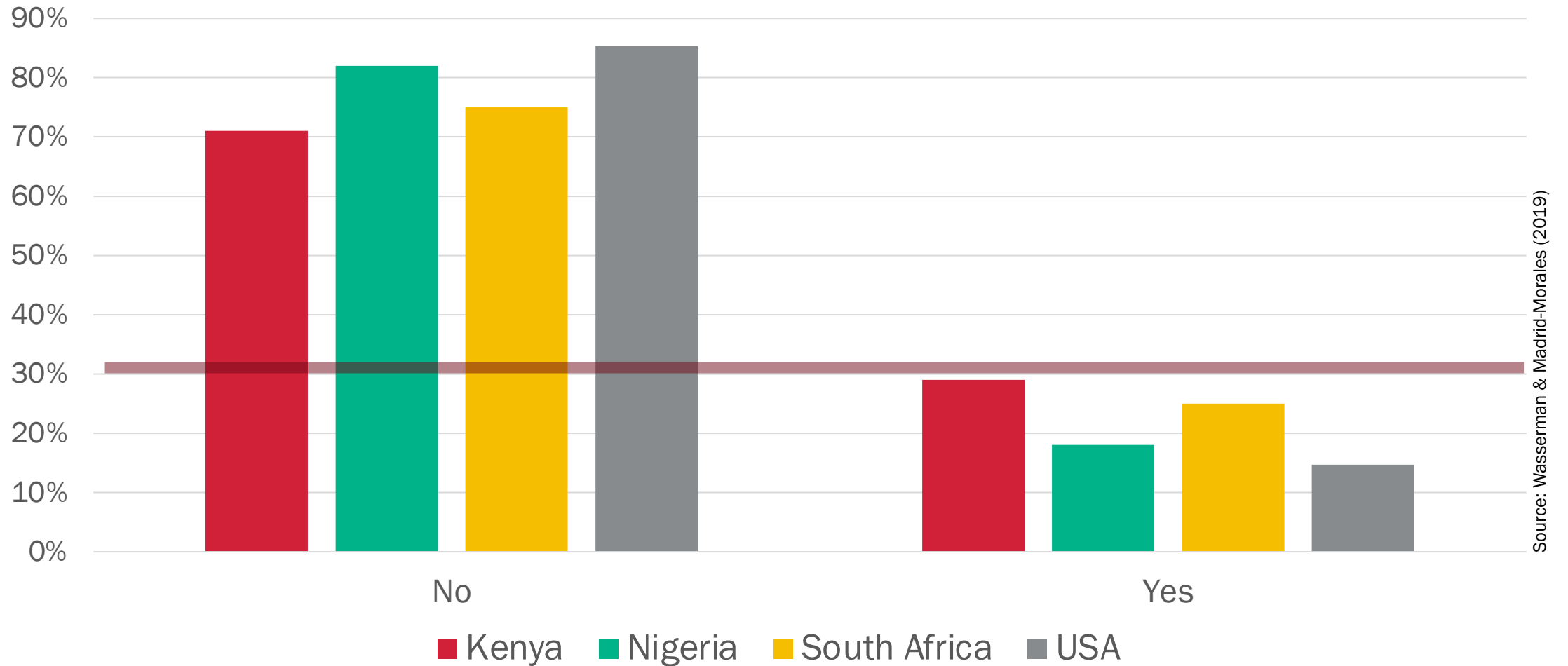
Source: Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2019)

Have you ever shared a political news story online that *you later found* out was made up? (N = 2,784)



Source: Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2019)

Have you ever shared a political news story online that you thought *at the time* was made up? (N = 2,784)



Source: Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2019)

Unanswered questions

- Our previous work helped us understand how much **we still don't understand** about the spread of mis- and disinformation in Sub-Saharan Africa...
 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. What makes Kenyans, Nigerians and South Africans **share inaccurate news** rather frequently?

News sharing

- A wide range of individual and societal motivations for sharing dis- & mis-information have been identified in different socio-political contexts.
 - In “advanced” democracies, it responds to “**chaotic**” motivations to “burn down” the entire established democratic ‘cosmos’” (Petersen, Osmundsen, & Arceneaux, 2018)
 - In the UK, people share inaccurate information to “**express their feelings**”; “to **inform others**”, and “to **find out other people’s opinions**” (Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019)
 - In Singapore, “fake news” & rumors are shared to “cope with **uncertainty**, **build relationships**, and for **self-enhancement**” (Duffy, Tandoc & Ling, 2019)
 - In Kenya and Nigeria, sharing information is... (Chakrabarti, Rooney, & Kewon, 2018)
 - a form of **social currency** that derives from a desire to be “in the know”
 - a **civic duty** to share warnings of impending crises or disasters
 - a democratic right - **information is democratic** and needs to be shared.

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Focus group discussions with university students in 6 countries



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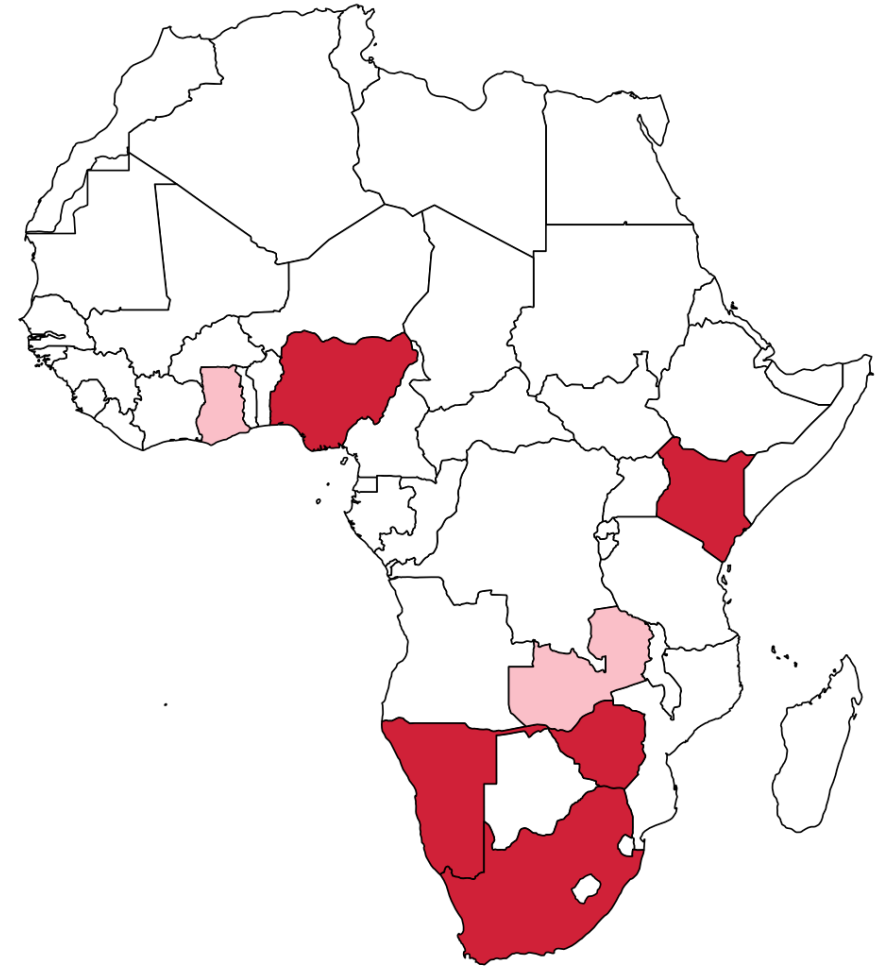


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Country selection

Table 1. Location, Political and Press Freedom Indexes of Selected Countries (2019)

	The Economist Democracy Index*	RSF Press Freedom Index^	Region
Ghana	Flawed Democracy (6.63)	Satisfactory situation (20.81)	West Africa
Kenya	Hybrid regime (5.18)	Noticeable problems (32.44)	East Africa
Nigeria	Hybrid regime (4.12)	Difficult situation (36.50)	West Africa
South Africa	Flawed Democracy (7.24)	Satisfactory situation (22.19)	Southern Africa
Zambia	Hybrid regime (5.09)	Difficult situation (36.38)	Southern Africa
Zimbabwe	Authoritarian (3.16)	Difficult situation (42.23)	Southern Africa




Methods – Stimuli (I)

UserABC 
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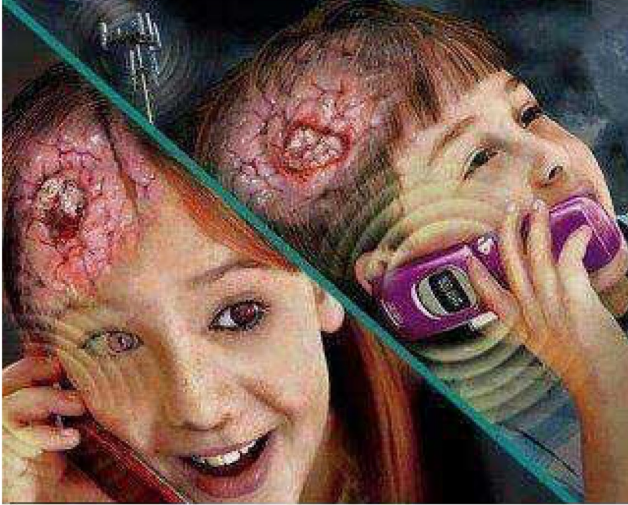
A Chinese Restaurant Association official said that eating three bowls of this fake rice would be like eating one plastic bag. #FakeChina #Rice



21 Aug 2019


UserABC
August 21 at 1:04pm • 

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Methods – Stimuli (II)

DAILY ACTIVE KENYA

- HOME
- NEWS_SPORTS
- NEWS_ENTERTAINMENT
- NEWS_POLITICS
- NEWS_LIFESTYLE
- BUSINESS
- CRIME
- OTHERS
- RELIGION
- NEWS_SPORTS.SOCCER

Raila is harvesting, now feted as ‘Person of the year in Africa.’

lutta October 23, 2018 11:12 am GMT+0000 October 23, 2018 11:12 am GMT+0000 Others
 #Raila's AU Appointment, Bobi wine, Kassai kaseim, Mangari Maathai, Times



Kenyan Chief Opposition and Now the African Union Special Envoy, in charge of Infrastructure, Raila Odinga voted the greatest persona of the year.

The Times defined Mr Odinga as a statesman whose efforts in Kenya and entire Africa cannot be ignored.

In their Statement, The Times pointed out special cases and occurrences Mr Odinga has been involved before.

Search ...

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TO GO

The President of the Republic of Namibia, Hage Geingob who acted as the head of state and the head of government of Namibia, as well as the commander-in-chief of the Namibia Defence Force, according to the Constitution of Namibia is reported dead last night.

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Breaking News: President Buhari Orders immediate arrest of Obasanjo

By News Agency - July 29, 2019 - 7:25 a.m. 3132

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Preparing People for Success in the Era of AI

Prepare for the Era of AI

Information started flying around from the first hour of Monday, July 29th, that former President Olusegun Obasanjo's arrest has been ordered by President Muhammadu Buhari.

The yet-to-be-confirmed arrest is said to be in connection with the recent open letter written Obasanjo to the incumbent president, touching on very sensitive state issues, most especially, the wave of insecurity in the nation.

RQ1

How do audiences decide which information they share through digital and social media?

'Take all news with a pinch of salt'

- Widespread **use of cues** to decide how credible a piece of news is:
 - Authorship, format, sources cited, quality of photos, verified vs. non verified users...
- 'Knee jerk reaction' when faced with dubious information is to do **additional research**:
 - From a simple Google search to cross-referencing with "established" sources
 - Not a single participant suggested they'd use fact-checking websites.
- Information sharing **not seen as a form of social currency**, but some types of sharing practice could be.

RQ2

To what extent do different types of content and sources affect shareability?

'It's more harmful not to share than to share'

- Very few found **political stories** shareable
 - General dislike towards encountering political content on social media
- Quite a few thought **health-related stories merited sharing** because
 - They create awareness, just in case it is true...
 - It is a way of showing people that stories are not true (meta-sharing)
 - It helps to get a sense of people's opinion on a topic
- In South Africa, Kenya & Nigeria, undergraduates would share inaccurate stories **"just for fun"**
 - Quite a few share content from parody accounts, also comedians (e.g. Trevor Noah)

'I use WhatsApp for everything'

- We found very few between-country differences, but consistent **within-country differences** (undergraduate vs. postgraduate)
- Global international media (BBC, CNN, New York Times) are seen as **reliable sources of information**. Also, some legacy media in each country are respected.
 - Zimbabwean & Nigerian participants were the most distrustful; but there's no narrative of 'the media cannot be trusted'.
- We found no evidence of **"chaotic" motivations** to share mis- & dis-information.

Final Ideas

- A persistent topic in all discussions was the idea of a “**generational divide**” in information sharing and media literacy:
 - Older relatives are “blamed” for spreading information because.
- There was a quasi unanimous support (except for South Africa) for **stricter laws on social media content**, particularly “fake news”.
 - The potential negative consequences of widespread disinformation justify curtailment of freedom of speech.
- Information sharing is most prevalent in small and large groups on **WhatsApp** in all five countries.
 - News consumption on Twitter & Facebook is not consistent. YouTube (SA) and Instagram (NG) alternative sources of information.

Understanding disinformation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Exploratory three-country online survey



Focus group discussions with university students in 6 countries



Focus group discussions in non-urban settings in 6 countries



Multi-country nationally representative survey

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