

FREETOWN HAS GONE DIGITAL

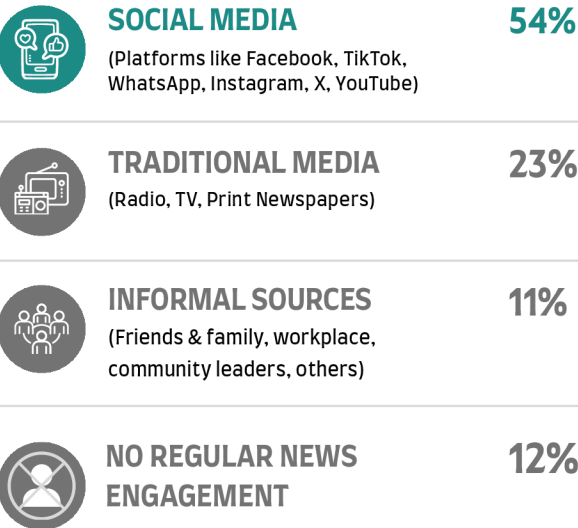


MERAKI ANALYTICS
Citizen Lens-Vol.1-002
17th July 2026

How Freetownians are getting their news in 2026
Survey responses from **1217** residents across Freetown.

1 Algorithms now control the news in Freetown

Where Freetownians get their news:



KEY INSIGHT

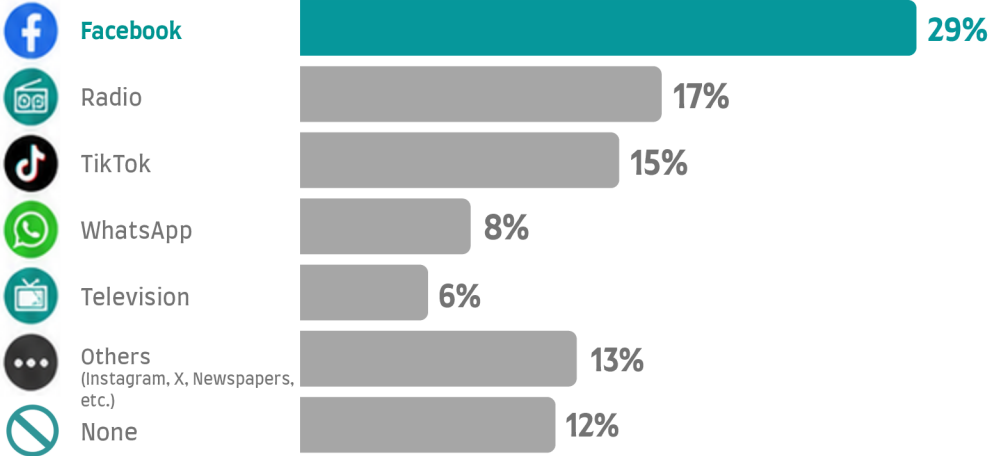
Social media has become the dominant news source in Freetown, with more than half of the population citing Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp etc, as their main platforms for news.

This suggests that what people see, read, and believe these days is increasingly shaped by algorithms. Traditional media still matters, but its influence appears to be waning.

A sizeable proportion of Freetown residents (perhaps due to limited access, low literacy levels or lack of trust) are disconnected from formal news channels, with about 11% depending on informal news sources while 12% have no regular news engagement whatsoever.

2 The Blue App opens the door, TikTok makes the waves

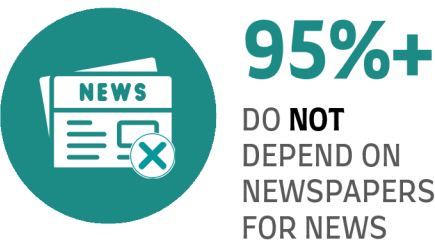
Platforms ranked by % of respondent who mentions it as their main source of news



KEY INSIGHT

Facebook is now the central gateway for news, while TikTok is rapidly closing the gap with traditional radio.

3 Is this the death of the good old Newspaper?



Among newspaper readers, **Awoko** and **Standard Times** emerge as the top 2 choices.

• Awoko	33%
• Standard Times	23%
• Awareness Times	12%
• Concord Times	12%
• Night Watch	12%
• The Calabash	5%
• Global Times	2%
• Salone Times	2%



KEY INSIGHT

Offline Newspapers appear to be losing their relevance as a daily news source. The implication is that newspaper outlets that want to stay relevant must consider online distribution channels.

FREETOWN NEWS CONSUMPTION: WHO, HOW & WHY

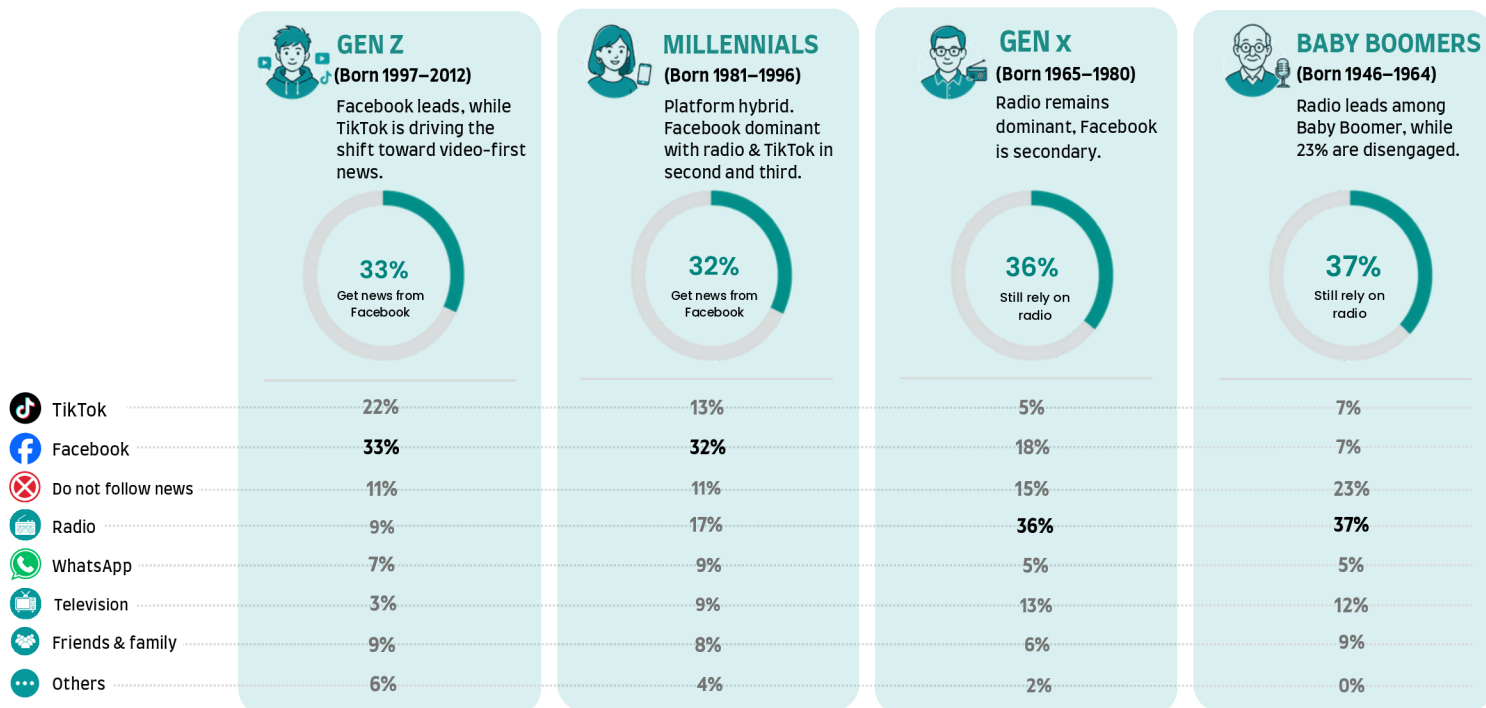


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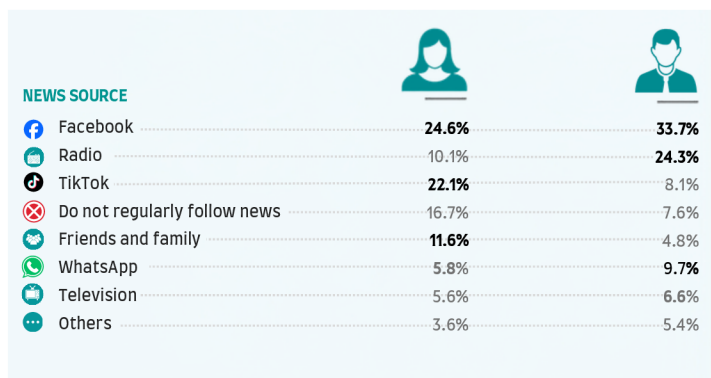
A deeper look at audience behavior and structural shifts.

1 Gen Z scrolls, Boomers, Gen X still turn the dial

Each generation has a different "news universe"



2 Algorithms drive the women, men hold on to the airwaves



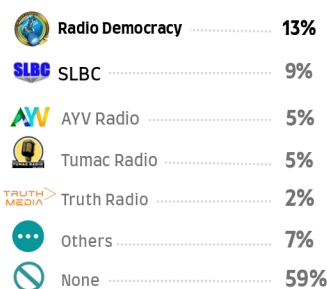
Gender influences platform preference:

Women → get news mainly from Facebook, TikTok and Friends/Family
Men → rely on Facebook, Radio and WhatsApp for their news

3 Radio's crown has slipped, but its loyal listeners still turn to Radio Democracy – and AYV leads on TV



TOP 5* RADIO STATIONS



TOP* TV STATIONS



*Based on respondents who cited outlet as the one they trust most - the one they go to first, listen to or watch most



Radio remains the most trusted traditional medium, with Radio Democracy leading the radio trust ranking, while AYV Media Empire leads TV trust.

4 1 in 8 Freetownians are disengaged from the news landscape

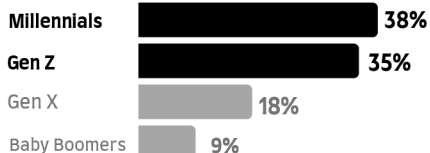
A serious concern: 12% do not follow the news



12%

DO NOT REGULARLY FOLLOW NEWS

Millennials and Gen Z make up the chunk of those who do not follow news



WHY IT MATTERS

News fatigue and low trust appears to be a concern, especially among younger people. Are entertainment and lifestyle content winning the competition for attention?



SOURCE:

Meraki Analytics-Citizen Lens/
OneField Public Perception Survey



WHEN DATA WAS COLLECTED:

13th April – 4th May 2026

OUR PARTNERS:



VIEW REPORT

FREETOWN HAS GONE DIGITAL

What the shift means for policy-makers and businesses, and what to do about it

THE FINDING

Social media has become the primary source of news for Freetown residents, with 54% of residents relying on digital platforms, more than double traditional media (23%). Facebook leads at 29%, while TikTok (15%) has surpassed television and is closing on radio (17%). Over 95% don't get their news from newspapers. About 12% of respondents follow no news at all. The audience has also fragmented: Gen Z is video-first on TikTok, Baby Boomers remain on radio, and women lean digital while men hold to the airwaves. This means that what Freetown sees, reads, and believes is increasingly decided by algorithms, not editors.

THE TREND: A DECADE OF MIGRATION

- **2015:** Radio was king. Some 81% of Sierra Leoneans had access and 47% listened daily, while only about one in ten could access the internet (BBC Media Action).
- **2018:** Radio was the most used medium nationally (39% daily, ~66% at least weekly); just 2% read a newspaper daily — among the lowest rates in Africa (Afrobarometer R7)
- **2020:** Sierra Leone recorded one of Africa's fastest spikes in regular internet news use, up 8 percentage points in five years (Afrobarometer).
- **2022:** Radio was still ranked the country's most popular medium, with 228 stations against 242 largely irregular newspapers (RSF).
- **2026:** National internet penetration is only ~21% (DataReportal). Yet in Freetown, over half the city already gets its news from the feed. The capital is running years ahead of the national curve, and where Freetown goes, the country tends to follow.

WHAT FREETOWN'S DIGITAL SHIFT MEANS FOR THE ENTIRE COUNTRY

- **The bellwether effect.** With data costs falling and 4G and satellite internet expanding, the rest of Sierra Leone is set to follow Freetown's curve. The national information landscape of 2030 is visible in Freetown today, and the decisions made now will shape it.
- **A two-speed information nation.** While Freetown lives on the feed, most of the country remains offline and radio-dependent. National communication must now run on two tracks, and the gap between them is becoming an equity issue.
- **Civic life is moving onto social media platforms.** Political debate, mobilization, and the battle against misinformation or disinformation might increasingly play out on feeds owned by global platforms with little local accountability. It will be interesting to see how this plays out in the 2028 electoral cycle.
- **Local media economics are at risk.** As attention migrates, advertising revenue follows it out of the local media economy to global platforms, potentially weakening the institutions that produce verified local news.

FOR POLICY-MAKERS

- **Public information must go where citizens are.**
Government messaging built around radio and print only may miss the majority of residents. Health, civic and emergency communication needs a digital-first channel mix.
- **Misinformation/Disinformation risk is now structural.**
With algorithms rather than editors deciding what over half the city sees, digital and media literacy programmes and rapid fact-checking capacity are urgent.
- **The disengaged are a civic blind spot.** The 12% who follow no news are effectively unreachable for elections, public health and emergency alerts.
- **Regulation lags the market.** Media policy is still built around licensing broadcasters and print, while the actual news market has moved to unregulated platforms.

FOR BUSINESS OWNERS & MEDIA HOUSES

- **Ad spend should follow attention.** Facebook (29%) and TikTok (15%) together now reach more people than radio and TV combined. Budgets weighted to broadcast are paying for yesterday's audience.
- **One channel no longer reaches Freetown.** Segment by generation: TikTok for Gen Z, Facebook/WhatsApp for Millennials, radio for 44+.
- **WhatsApp is the underrated route to women.** Women lean digital and use WhatsApp for news at a disproportionately high rate, making it a low-cost, high-trust channel.
- **For media houses, trust is the asset.** The trust that established broadcast brands still command is their strongest currency, and converting it into short video and digital-first distribution is the survival play.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Journalists and media outlets must adapt.** The audience figures suggest that the future is online. Newspapers, radio, and TV stations that fail to cater to the growing online audience might go out of business.
2. **Go digital-first in public communication.** Businesses, Government and MDAs should build campaigns for Facebook, TikTok and WhatsApp first, with radio as the deliberate bridge to citizens 44+ and rural audiences.
3. **Invest in digital and media literacy.** Embed it in schools and public campaigns so citizens can judge what the algorithm serves them, paired with rapid fact-checking capacity. Efforts to tackle misinformation and disinformation should be sustained programmes, not one-off campaigns.
4. **Reallocate advertising by generation, not habit.** Businesses should plan channel mixes per cohort and measure reach by generation and gender, not gross audience.
5. **Win back the disengaged.** Treat the 12% who follow no news as a target audience. Entertainment and lifestyle formats are the realistic door back into news.

About OneField

OneField, powered by Meraki Analytics (SL) Limited, is Sierra Leone's first unified and pooled data collection service designed to deliver affordable, reliable, and decision-ready insights for businesses, development organizations, public institutions, researchers, and other stakeholders.

About Citizens Lens

Citizens Lens is a citizen-driven public research initiative delivered through OneField. Implemented by Meraki Analytics, it aims to generate independent, high-quality insights into the knowledge, attitudes, and experiences of Sierra Leoneans.

Through face-to-face household interviews targeting 1217 randomly selected respondents, this inaugural edition of Citizens Lens explores how adults in Freetown across generations perceive issues such as governance, entrepreneurship, entertainment, collaboration, accountability, and everyday livelihoods. The initiative seeks to help shift national conversations beyond partisan politics toward evidence, opportunity, and sustainable development.

Through periodic public-interest research, Citizens Lens aims to amplify citizen voices, strengthen data-informed dialogue, and support more inclusive decision-making across Sierra Leone.

About Meraki Analytics

Meraki Analytics (SL) Limited is a leading research, data science, and technology consulting firm based in Sierra Leone, specializing in large-scale data collection, program evaluation, advanced analytics, training, and capacity development.

With a highly experienced team of data scientists, statisticians, researchers, and field specialists, Meraki Analytics has successfully implemented nationally representative studies and field operations across Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. The firm possesses deep expertise in research design, digital data collection, enumerator training, field supervision, quality assurance, data analysis, and reporting.

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