

# BBG Research Series



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## Tibet Media Use 2012

Word-of-Mouth a Top Source for Reliable Information

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## Analysis of the Research Archive



*Photo: Phil Borges*

# Archived Research Projects

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- 10 annual surveys with refugees and travelers (2001-2011)
  - Media use and public opinion
  - Conducted outside Tibet
  - Comprehensive surveys of recent refugees/travelers aged 15+
  - January-December 2011 (n=1,332)
  - Not representative of Tibetans in Tibet
  - Respondent groups varied by year — demographics, size of group shaped by outflow from Tibet
- Dozens of qualitative projects conducted in India and Nepal

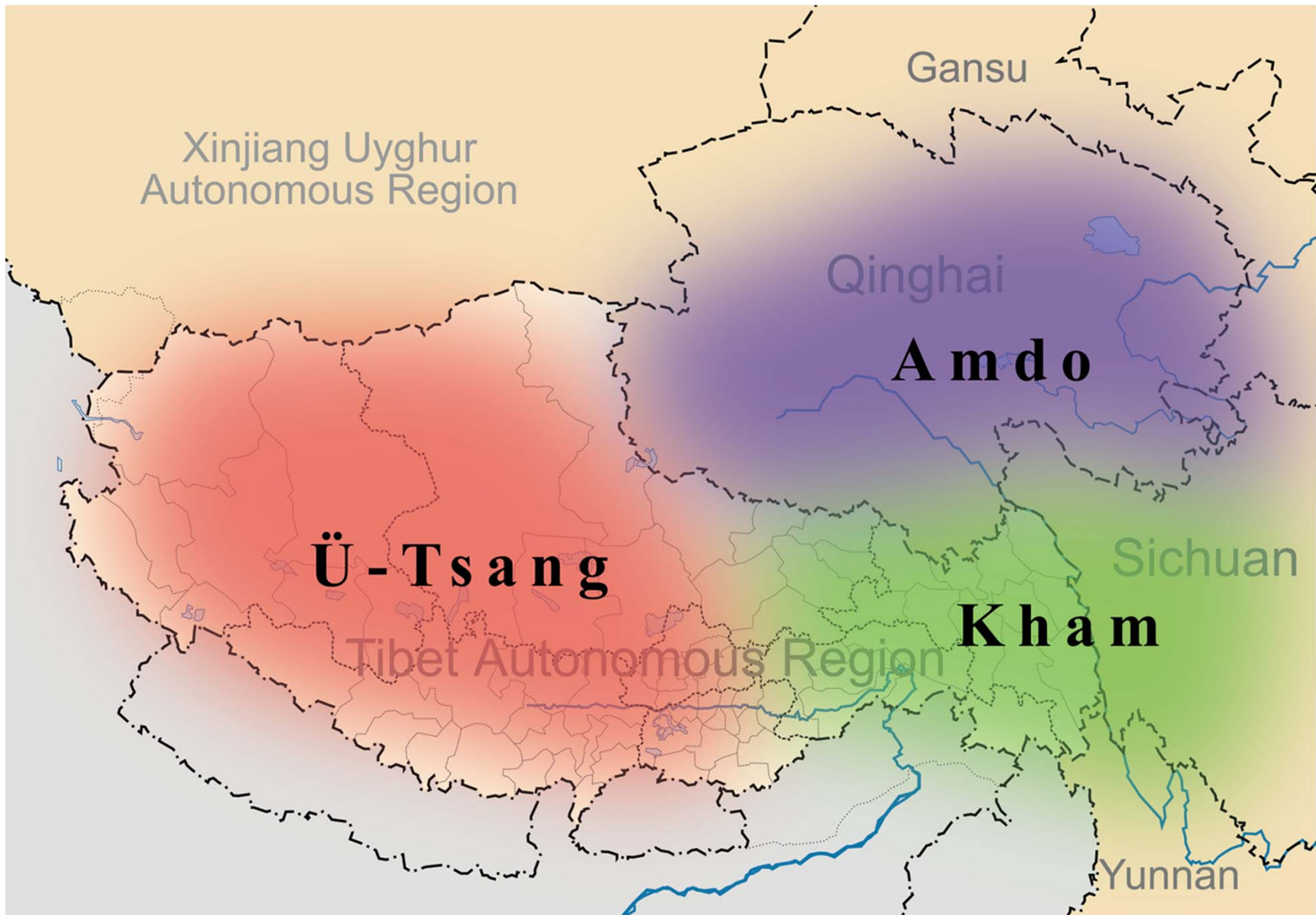


*Photo: AFP*





RFA graphic



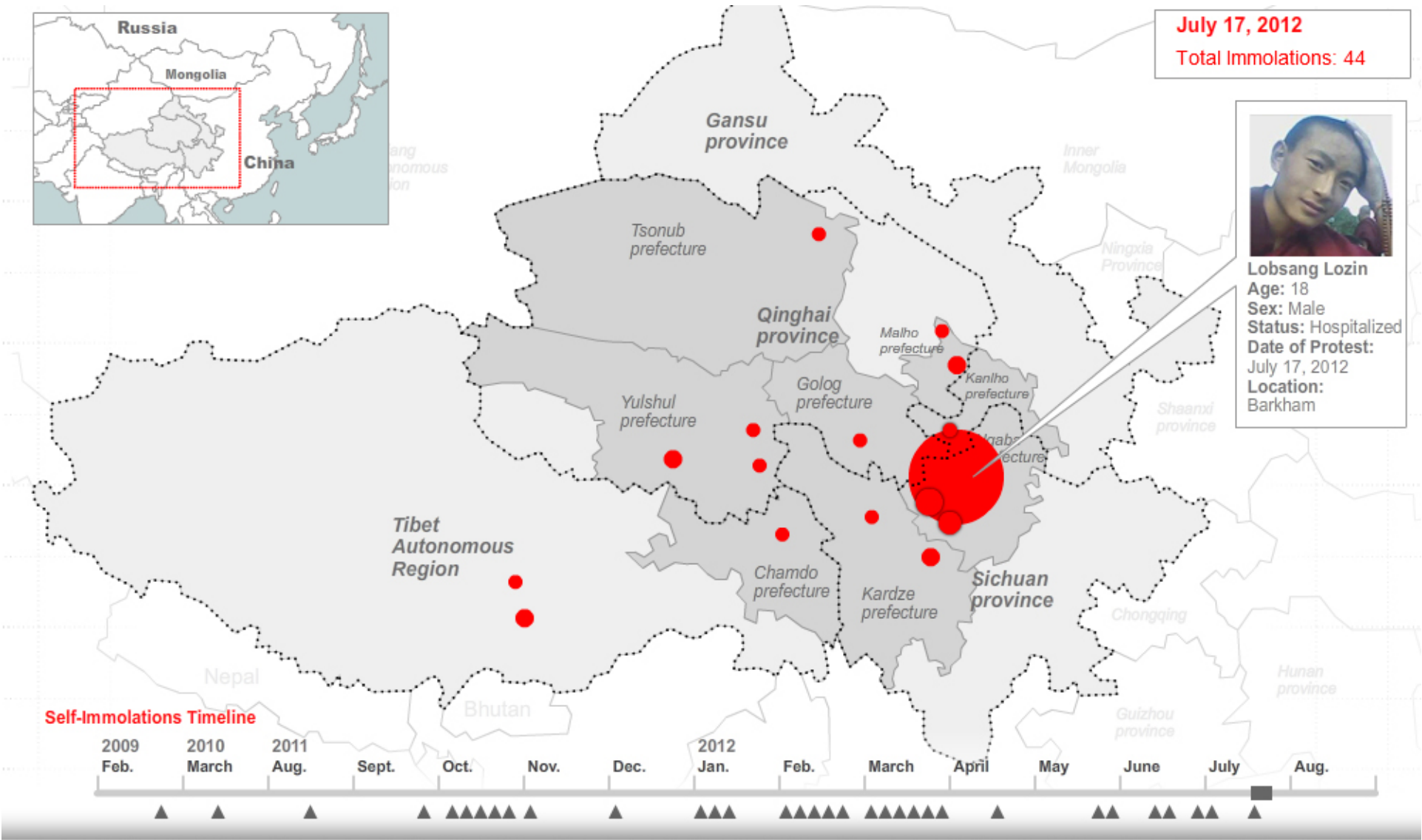
2011 Wikimedia Commons



**July 17, 2012**  
**Total Immolations: 44**

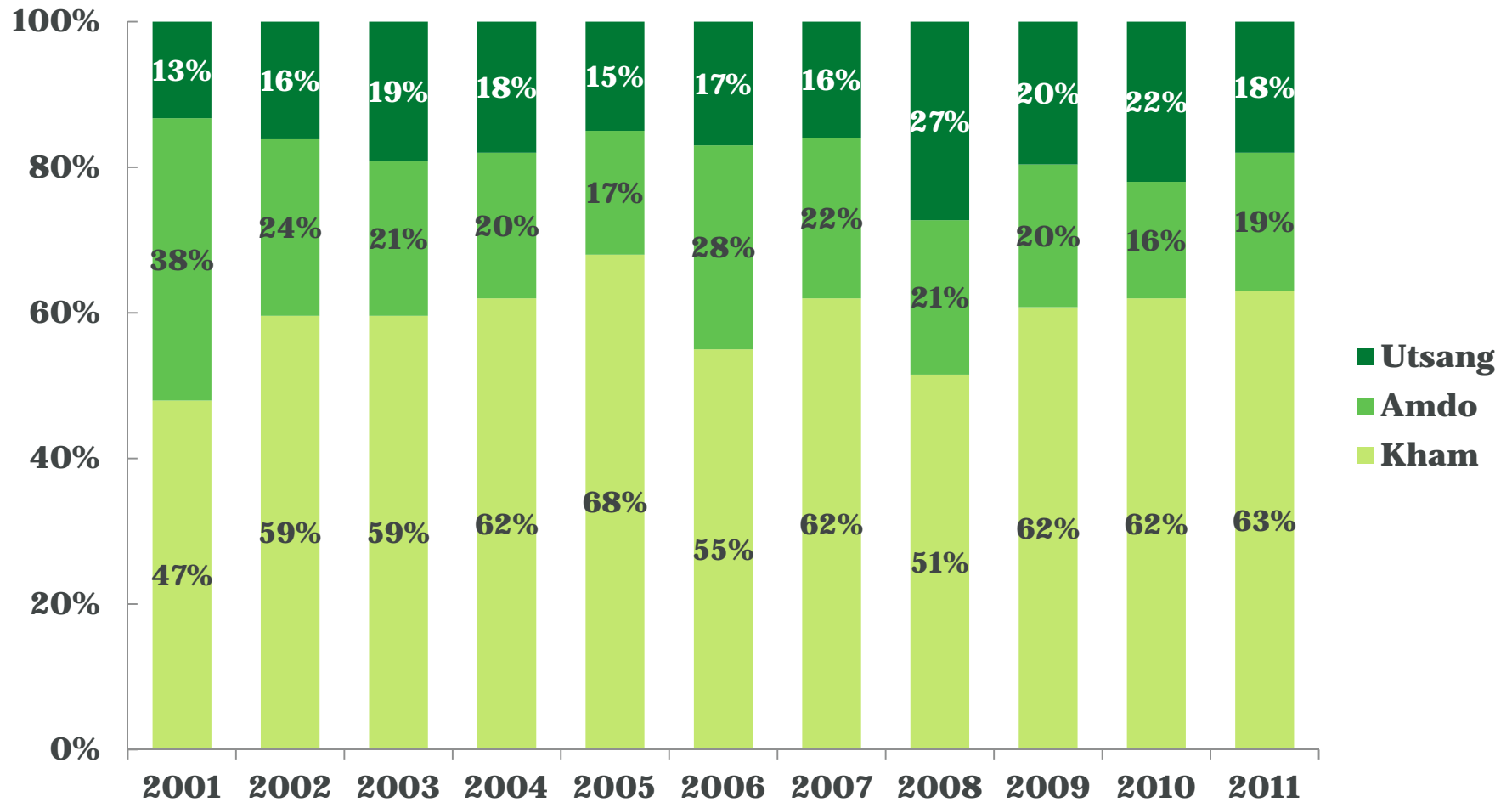


**Lobsang Lozin**  
 Age: 18  
 Sex: Male  
 Status: Hospitalized  
 Date of Protest: July 17, 2012  
 Location: Barkham



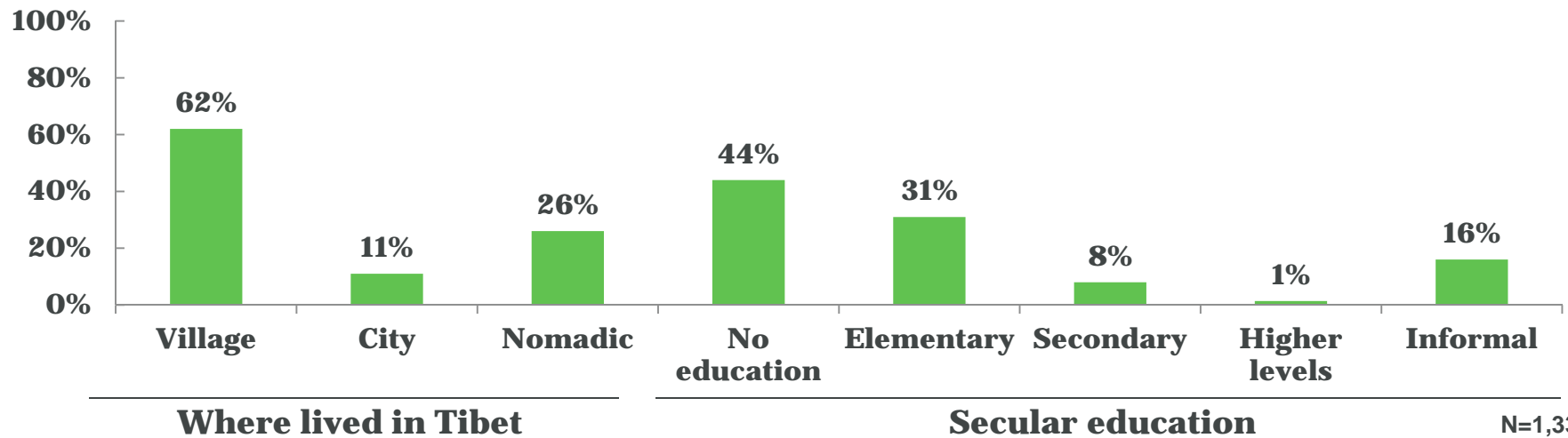
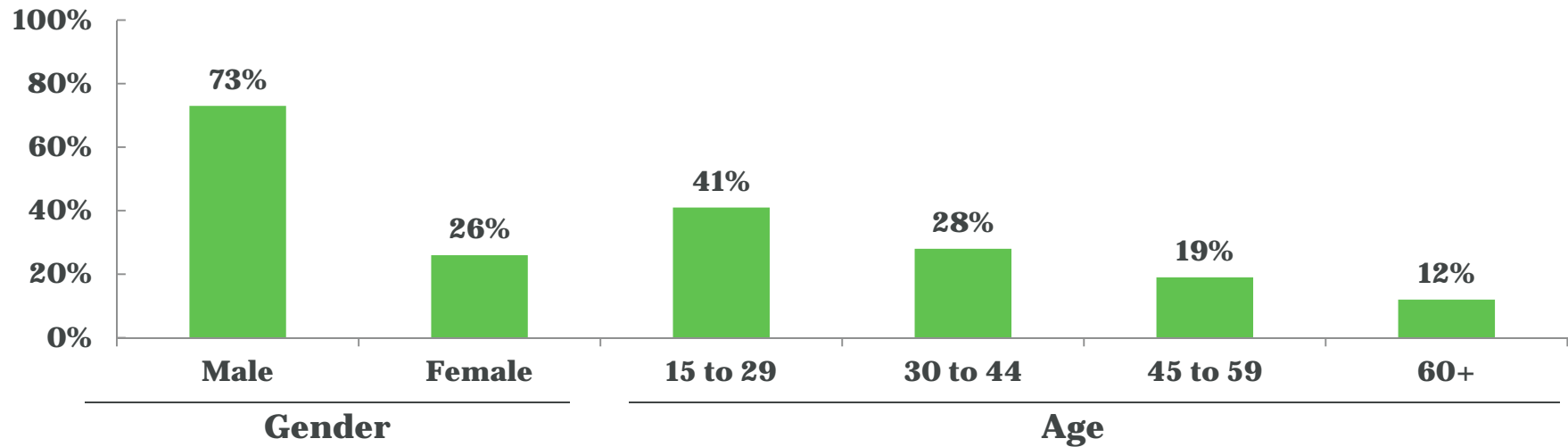
# Tibetan Self-Immolations

# Refugee/Traveler Survey: Region of Tibet





# Refugee/Traveler Survey: Demographics



N=1,332

# Refugee/Traveler Survey: Occupation

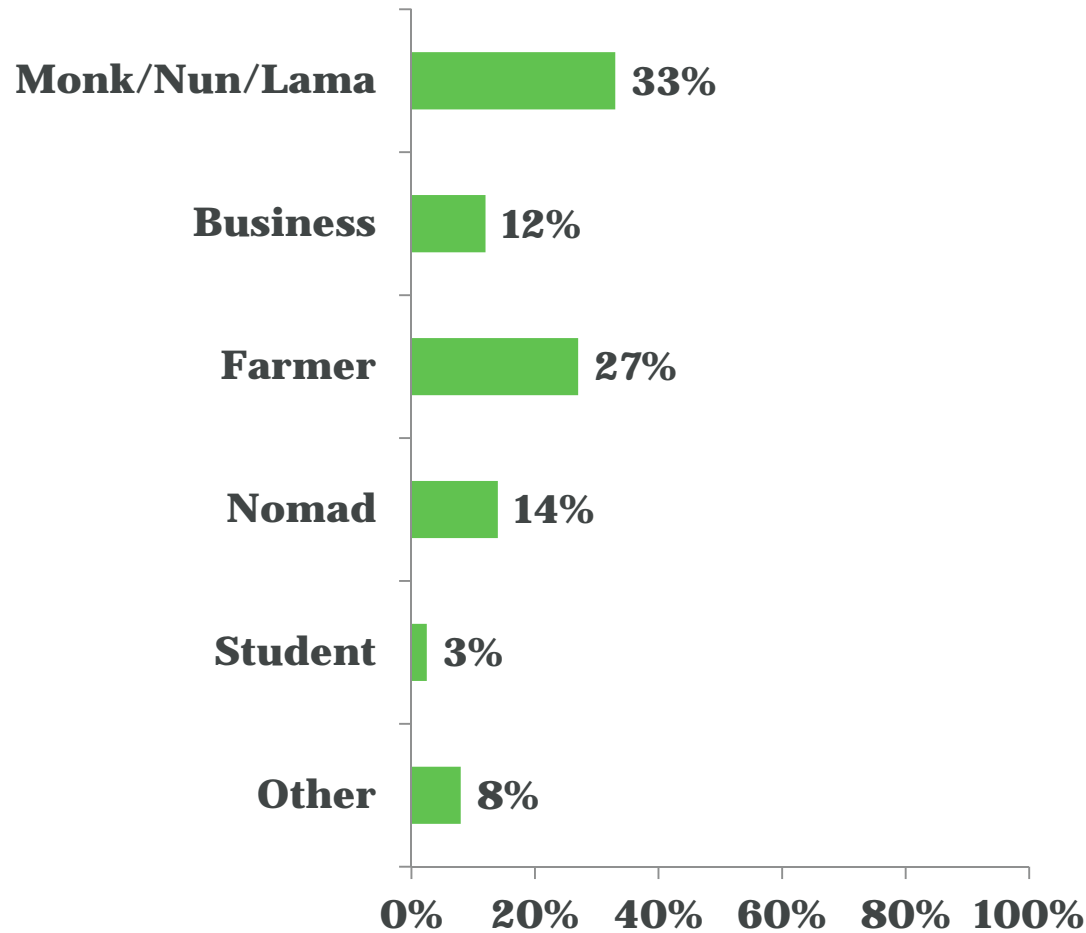


Photo: AFP

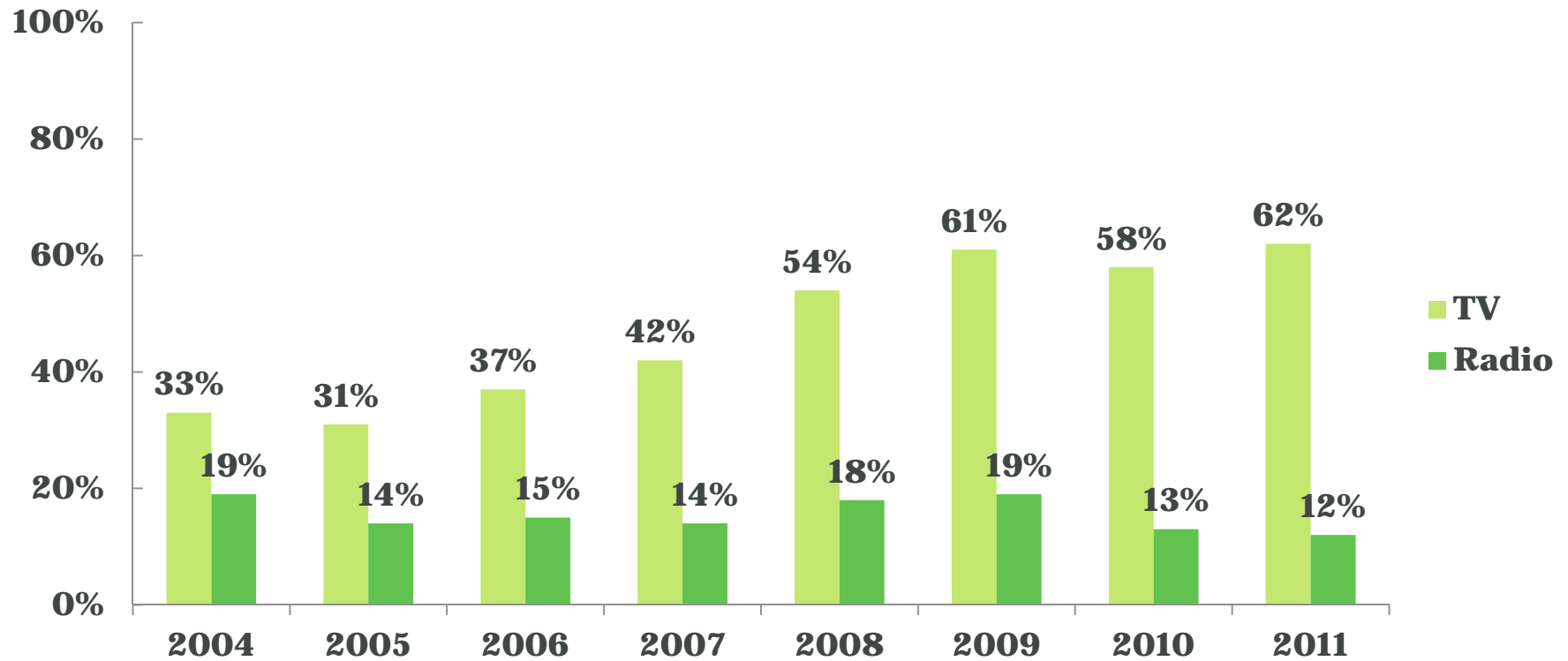
N=1,332

# Traditional Media Inside Tibet



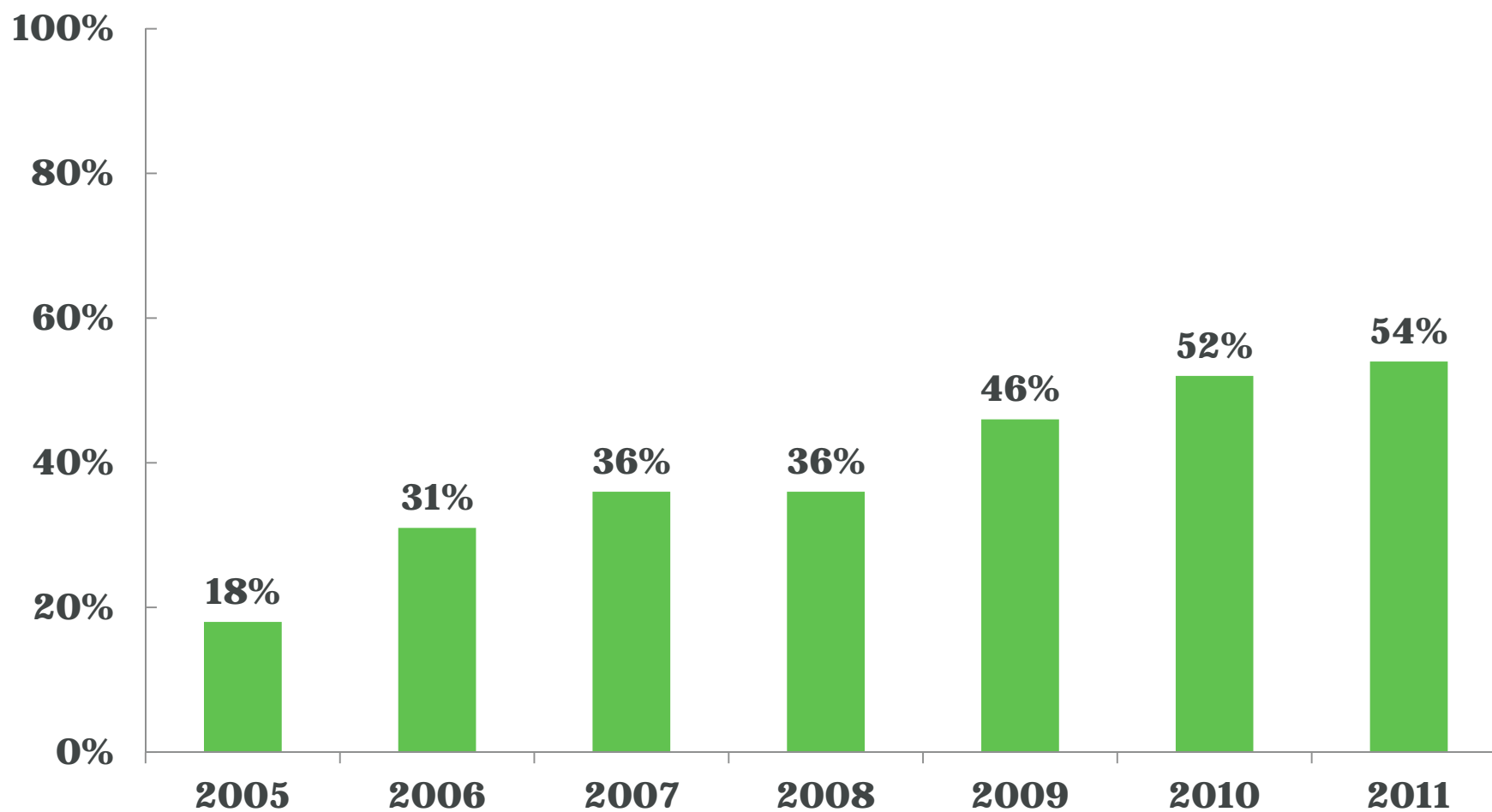
Photo: AFP

# Regular Use of Television Growing



- 2011 TV regular use: Utsang 72%, Amdo 73%, Kham 56%
- 2011 Radio regular use: Utsang 19%, Amdo 15%, Kham 9%

# Satellite Dish Ownership by Tibetan Refugees and Travelers (2005-2011)



# Tibetan Refugees and Travelers' Satellite Ownership by Region

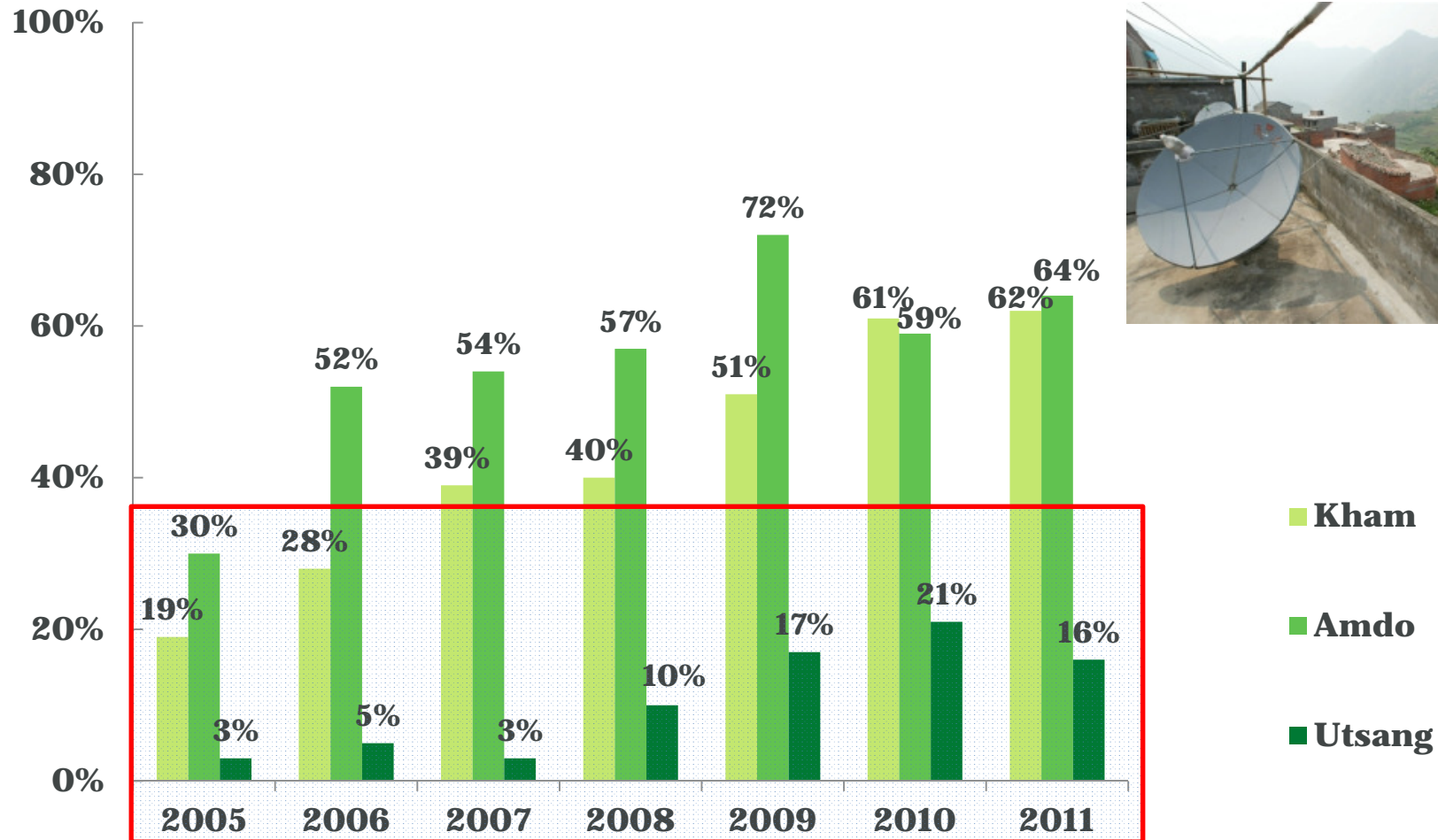
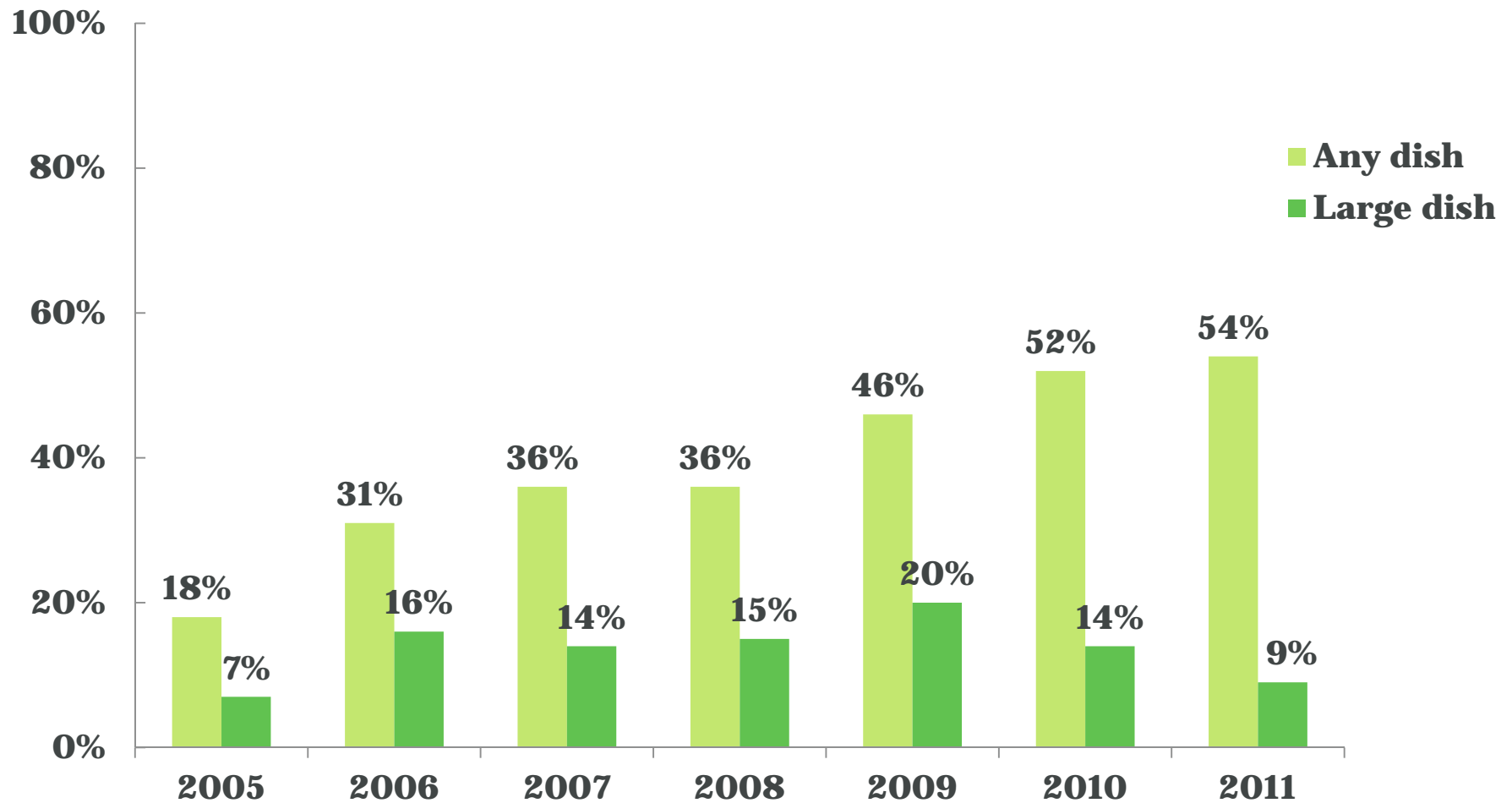
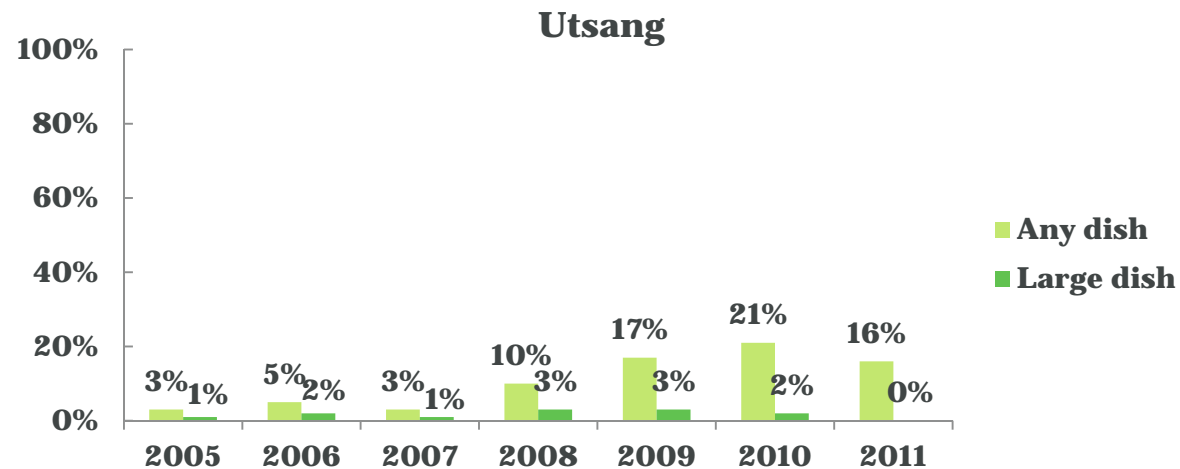
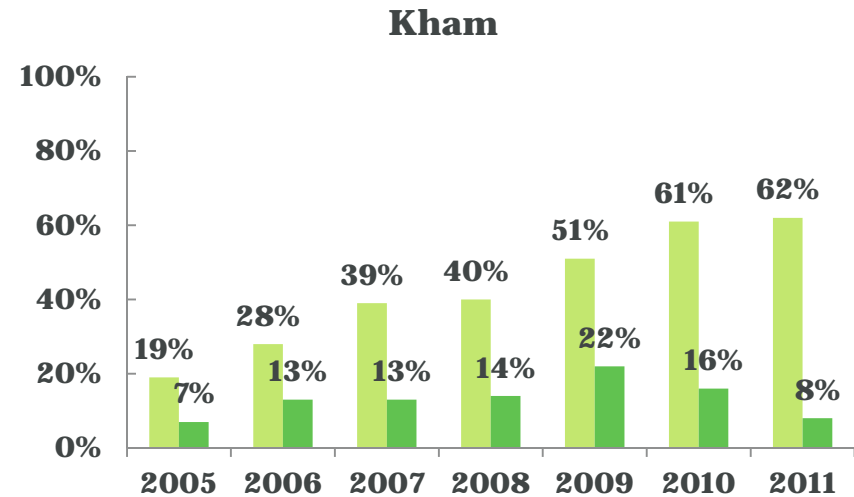
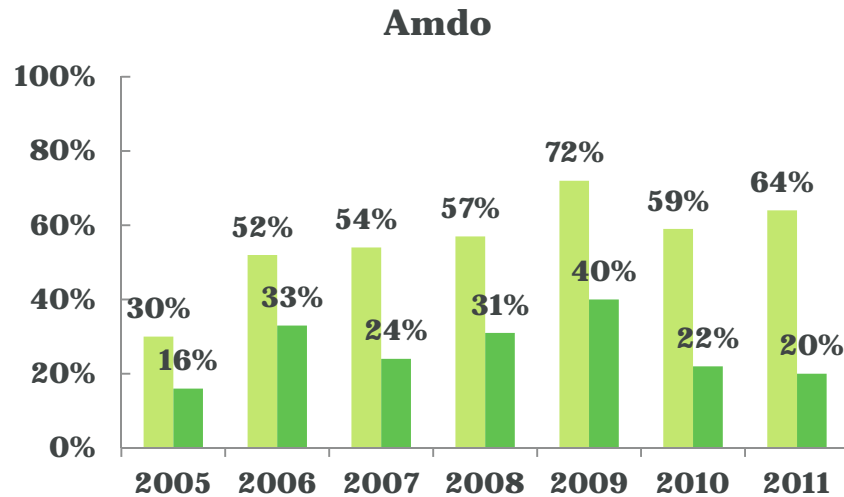


Photo: AFP

# Satellite Dish Ownership by Tibetan Refugees and Travelers (2005-2011)



# Satellite Ownership by Tibetan Refugees and Travelers by Region





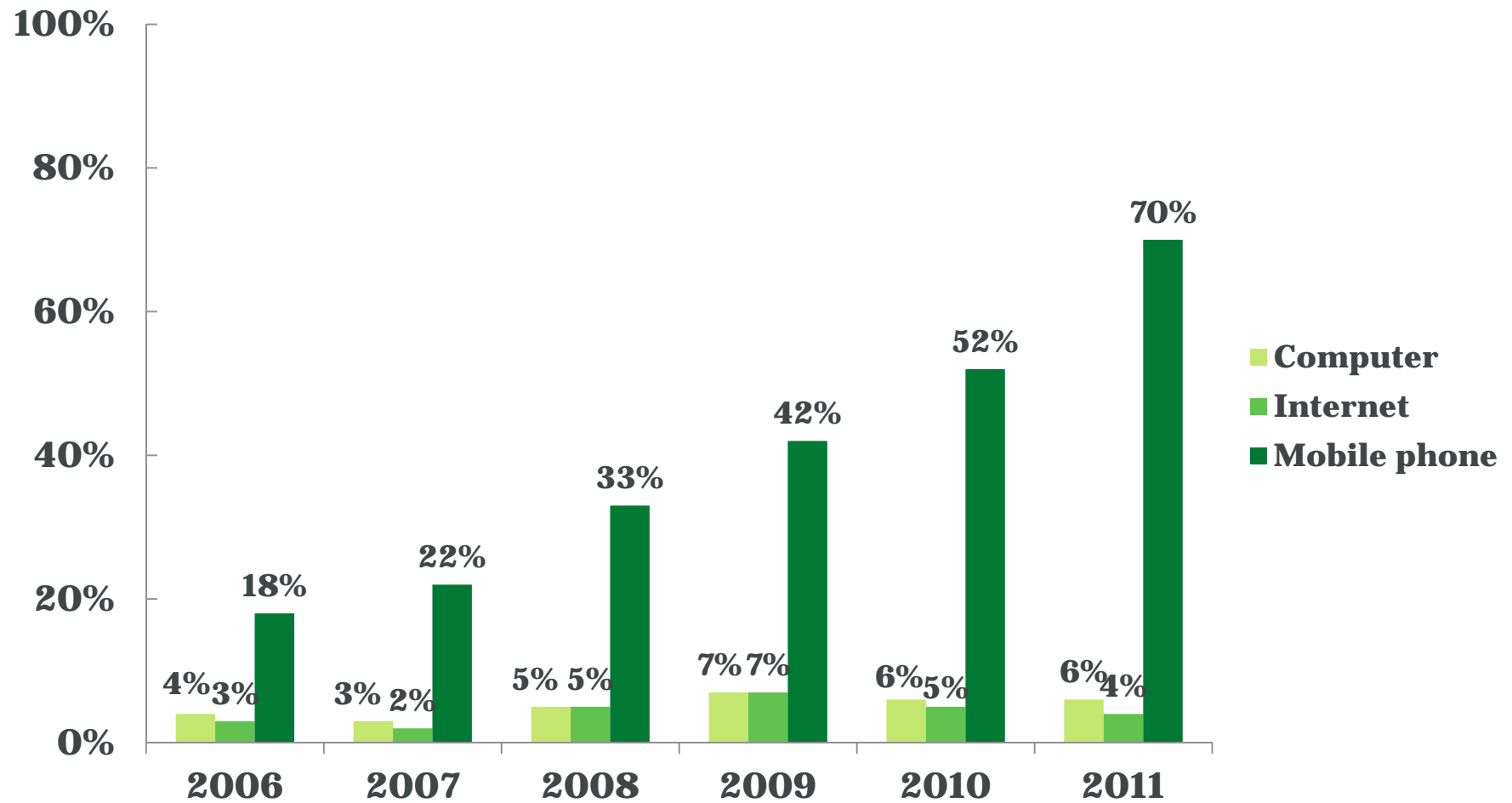
# New Media Inside Tibet

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*Photos: AFP*

# Regular Use of New Media Among Recent Refugees and Travelers from Tibet



# New Media Use Higher Among Amdowas



Photo: AFP

- Amdo:
  - 9% regular Internet use
  - 88% regular mobile phone use
- Kham:
  - 3% regular Internet use
  - 66% regular mobile use
- Utsang:
  - 4% regular Internet use
  - 66% regular mobile use

# Primary Language of New Media: Chinese

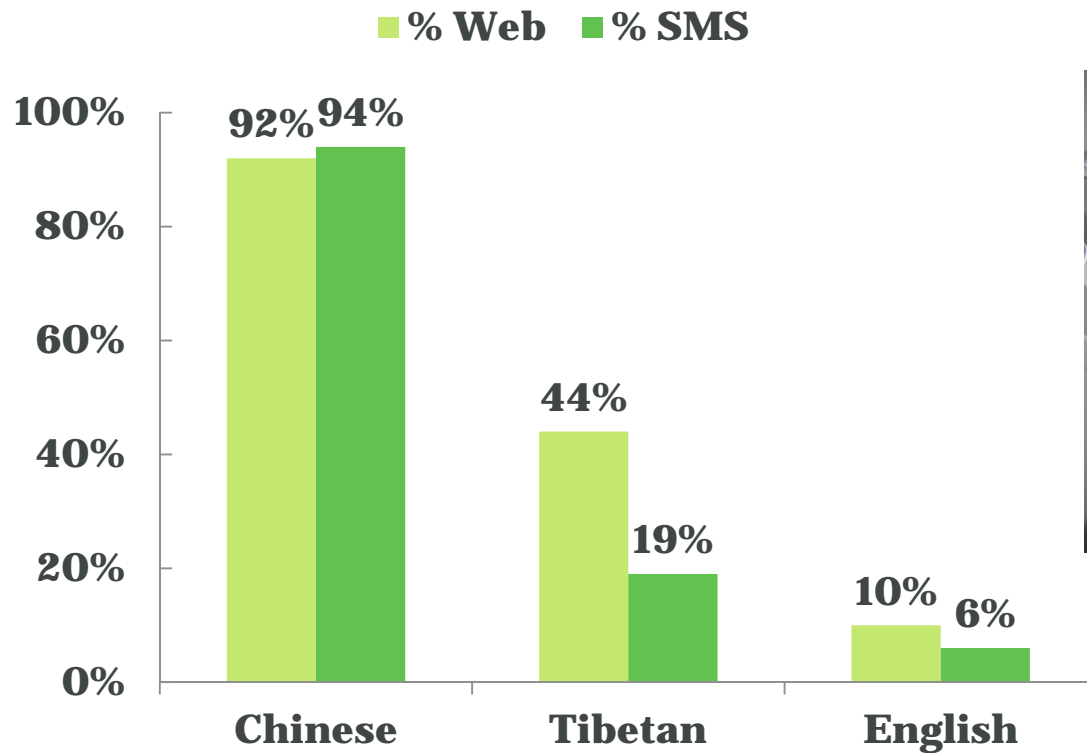


Photo: AFP

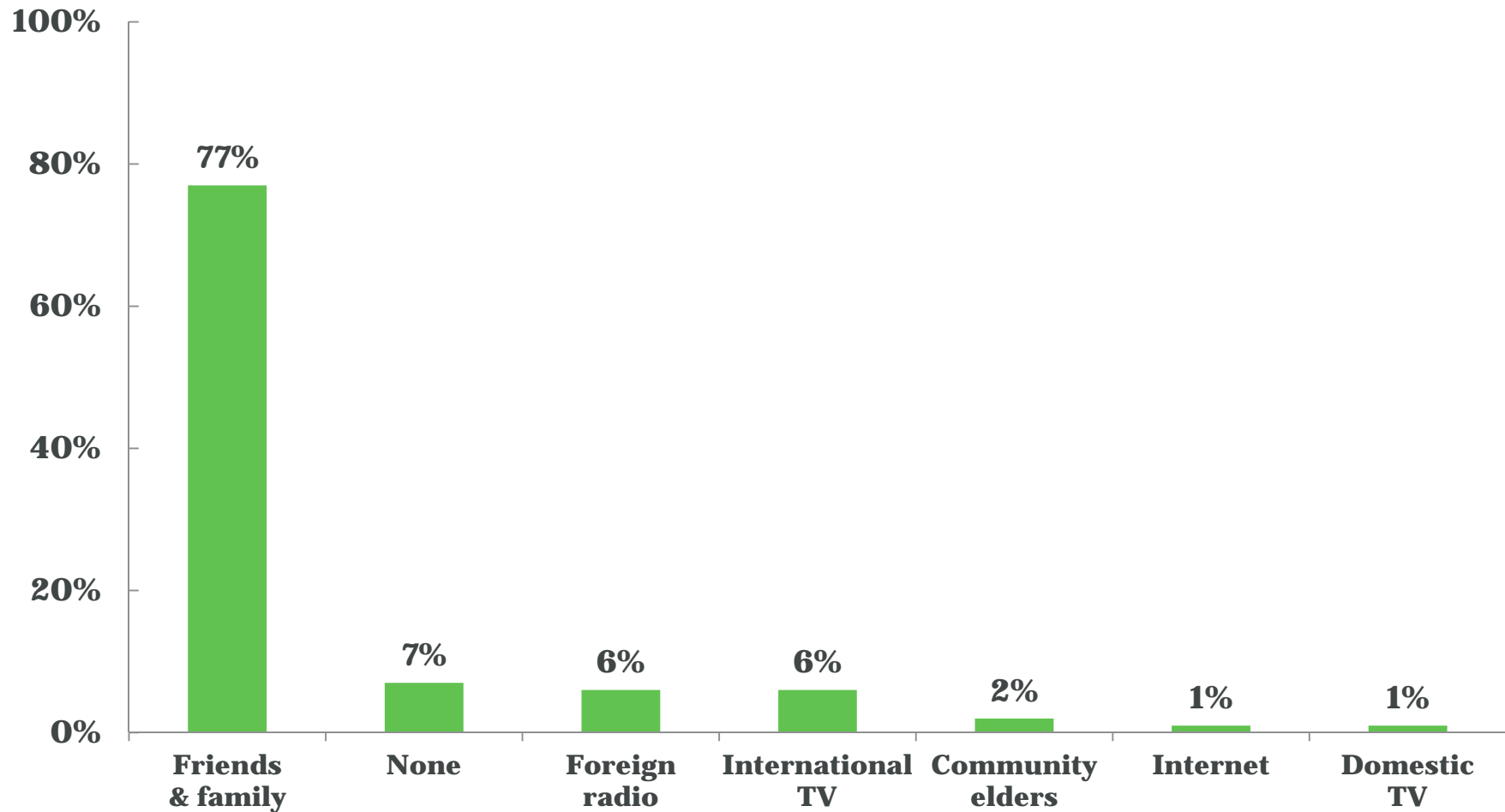
- Less than 5% of users had used circumvention techniques to get around China's Web Firewall.

# Information Inside Tibet

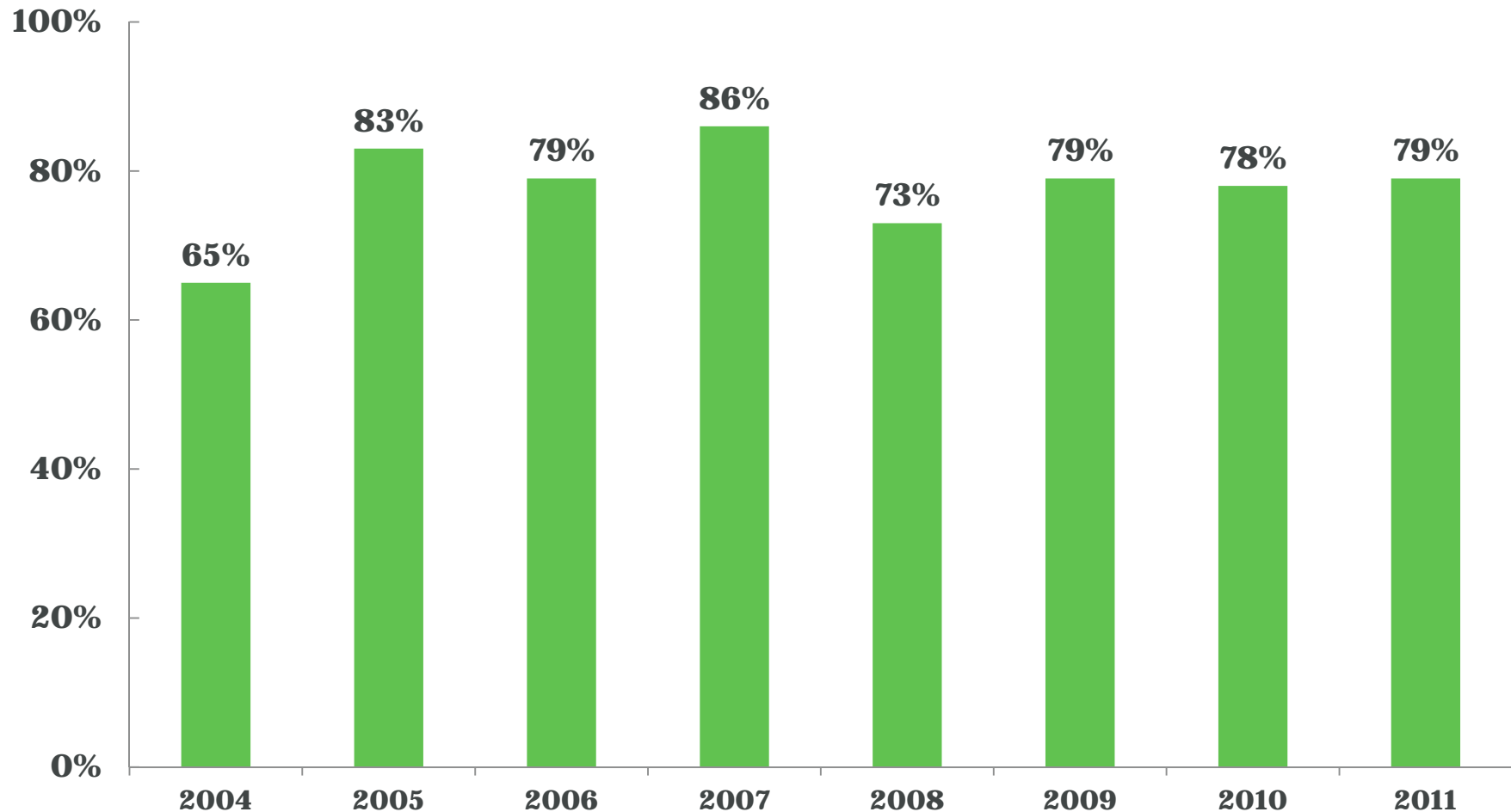


*Photo: Free Tibet*

# Top Source of Reliable Information in Tibet Among Tibetan Refugees and Travelers



# Percent of Tibetan Refugees and Travelers Whose Top Source of News Is Word-of-Mouth (2004-2011)



# Reliance on WOM Shows Regional Variation

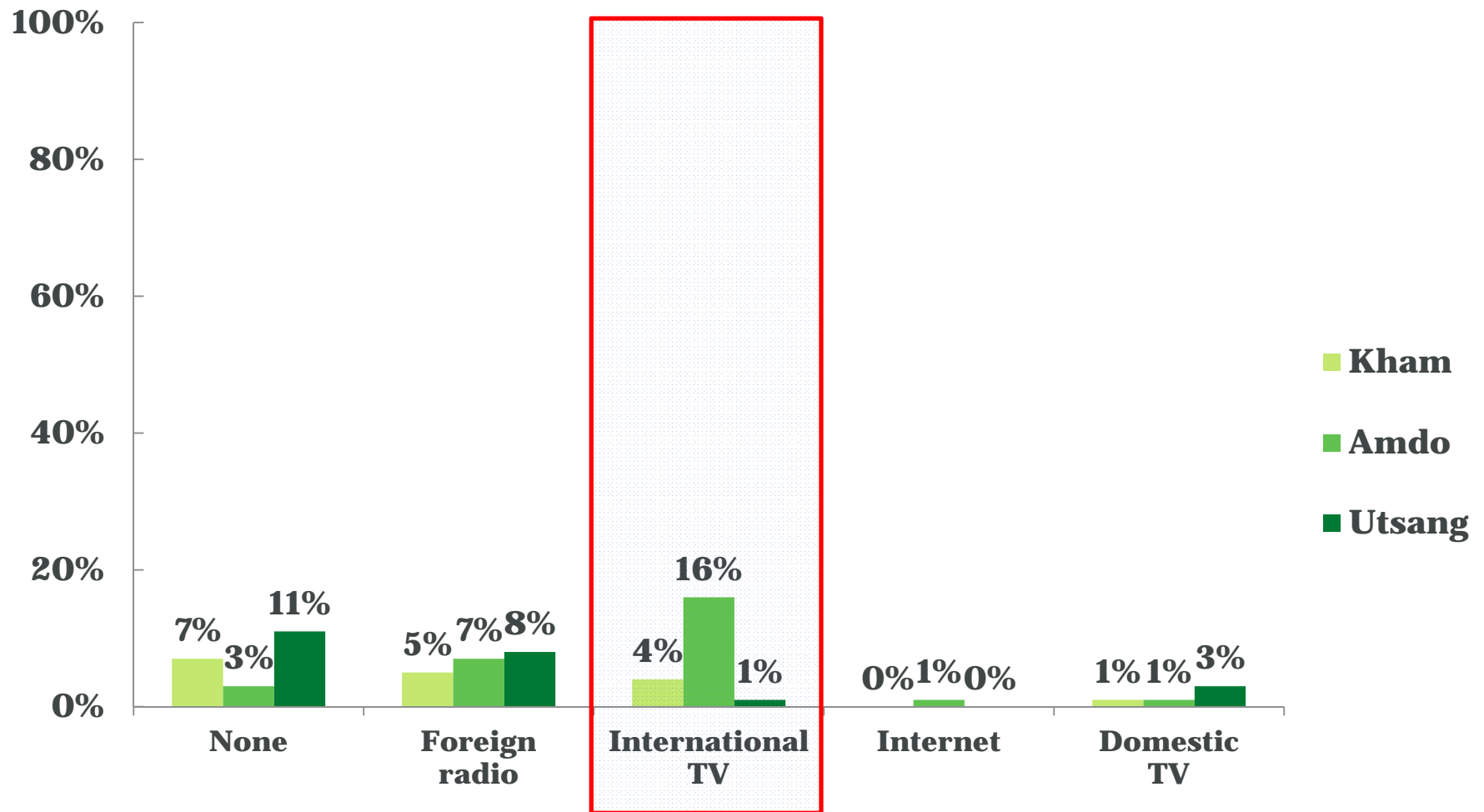


Photo: Alexander Bubba

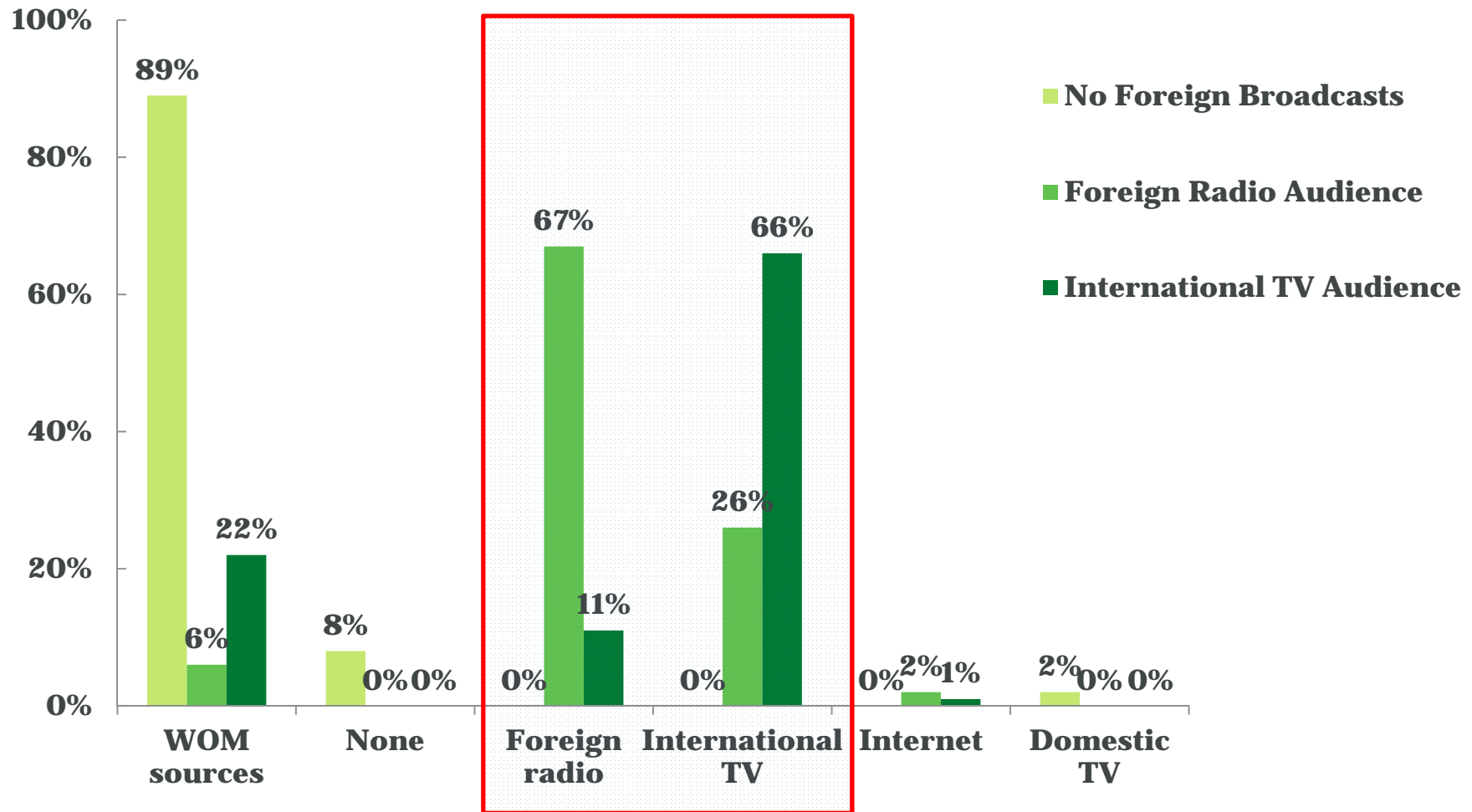
- Utsang:
  - 76% WOM
  - 11% None
- Kham:
  - 88% WOM
  - 8% None
- Amdo:
  - 71% WOM
  - 3% None



# Top Source of Reliable Information in Tibet: Regional Variation in Non-WOM Sources



# Top Source of Reliable Information in Tibet: Foreign Media Audiences vs. Others



# Research Questions for Bodhgaya

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- What are the dynamics of word-of-mouth?
  - How is information shared?
  - Who shares?
- What role does new media play?
- How have WOM dynamics played out in recent events?
  - Self-immolations
  - Exile government elections



Photo: AFP

# Methodology – Bodhgaya Travelers Survey

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- Quantitative**                      Non-probability sample of Tibetan travelers to India
- Coverage:                      Travelers coming from Amdo, Kham, and Utsang regions
  - Eligibility criteria:              Age range of 20-50, use of mobile phones beyond voice, planning to return home
  - Sample size:                      117
  - Methodology:                      Face-to-face
  - Field period:                      Dec. 25, 2011 – Jan. 15, 2012

**Qualitative**                      12, media/technology savvy Tibetan travelers to India, aged 20 to 50 and planning to return home

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# Research Objectives

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## Quantitative

- Understand general media habits
- Understand role played by international media in reporting news
- Learn about the spread of news and information through word-of-mouth and digital networks
- Identify key information nodes for news about Tibet
- Role of mobile phones in news sharing

## Qualitative

- In addition to all of the above, deeper insights about Tibetans' media use and experience with international media

# Television Is the Dominant Media

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- Television is the most widely used media among this population
  - 9 out of 10 interviewed reported watching it at least once last month
    - Visual appeal a key reason
  - Satellite dishes are the dominant way of receiving television signal in rural areas
    - Cable more prevalent in urban areas
- Different channels for different needs
  - Chinese channels are largely reserved for entertainment
    - Distrust the news on most Chinese television channels
- Local dialect programming important (Amke, Khamke, or Uke)
  - No single dialect is dominant across all regions
  - Chinese and English broadcasting has limited audience

# Digital Modes of Sharing Information is Popular

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- Texting has become a common mode of communication in Tibet
  - More than 4 out of 10 (44%) report sending and receiving texts on their mobile phones
- Web-based instant messaging program like QQ or SMS-based programs like Caixin or Xinxin remain popular for sharing news and information
  - Sharing sensitive news is, however, limited; barriers include
    - Need for registering SIM cards
    - Web blocking
    - Extensive café monitoring
  - Individuals find ways around these obstacles
    - Unregistered SIM cards
    - Thumb drives
    - VCD/DVD

# Users of International Media More Likely to Be Seen as Information Nodes Within Tibet

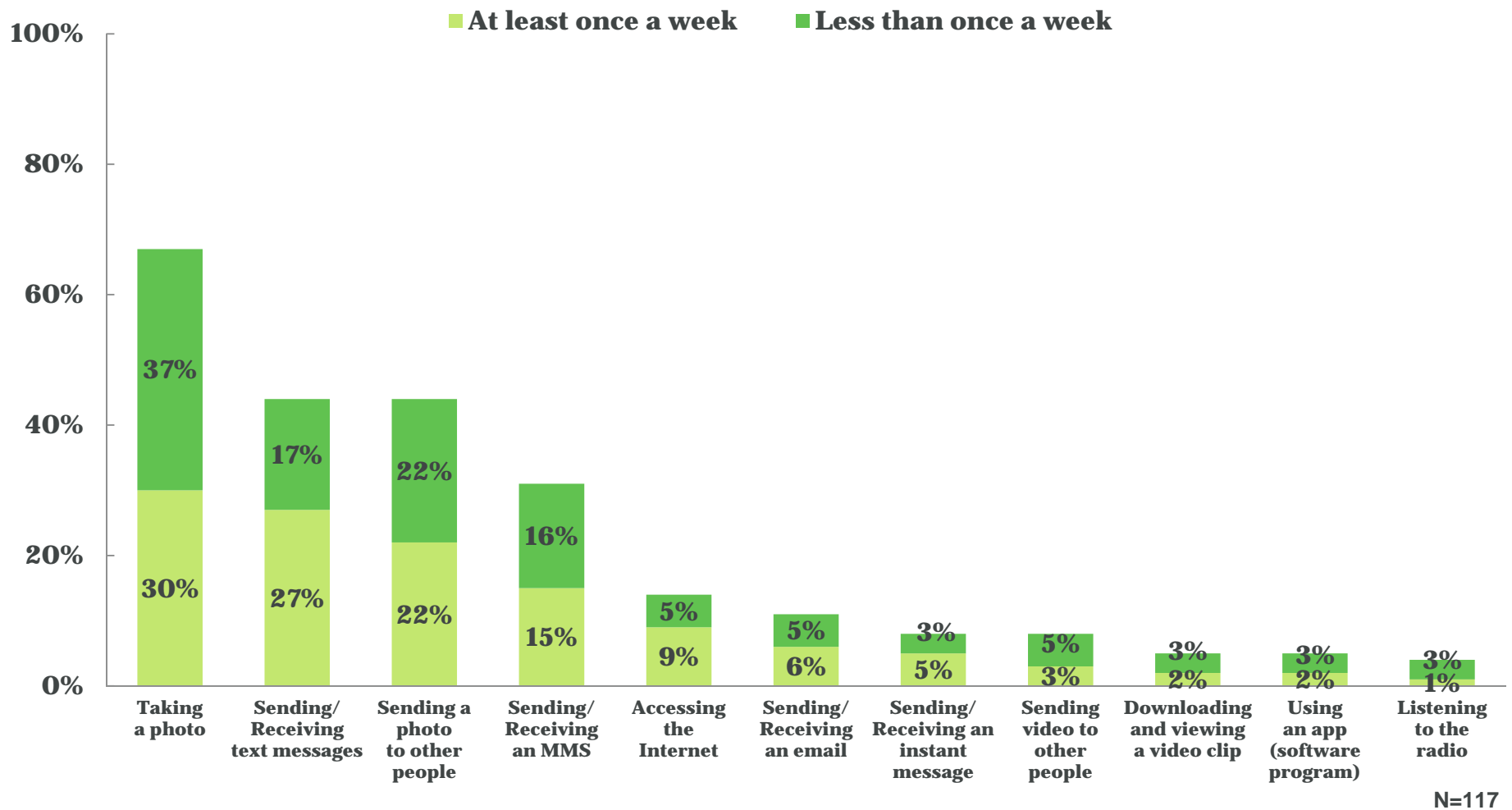
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- More than one in five (21%) of those interviewed report being seen as a source of news and information in their communities
- Almost two-thirds of these self-reported “information nodes” claim using international media at least occasionally
  - Mostly men
    - Higher proportion of monks
    - Disseminators of accurate and unbiased information
    - Well educated
    - Skilled in the use of technology
    - More likely to report having consumed international media
    - Willing to share information with trusted members in the community
  - A majority report being able to understand all or most of the newscast in Amke dialect

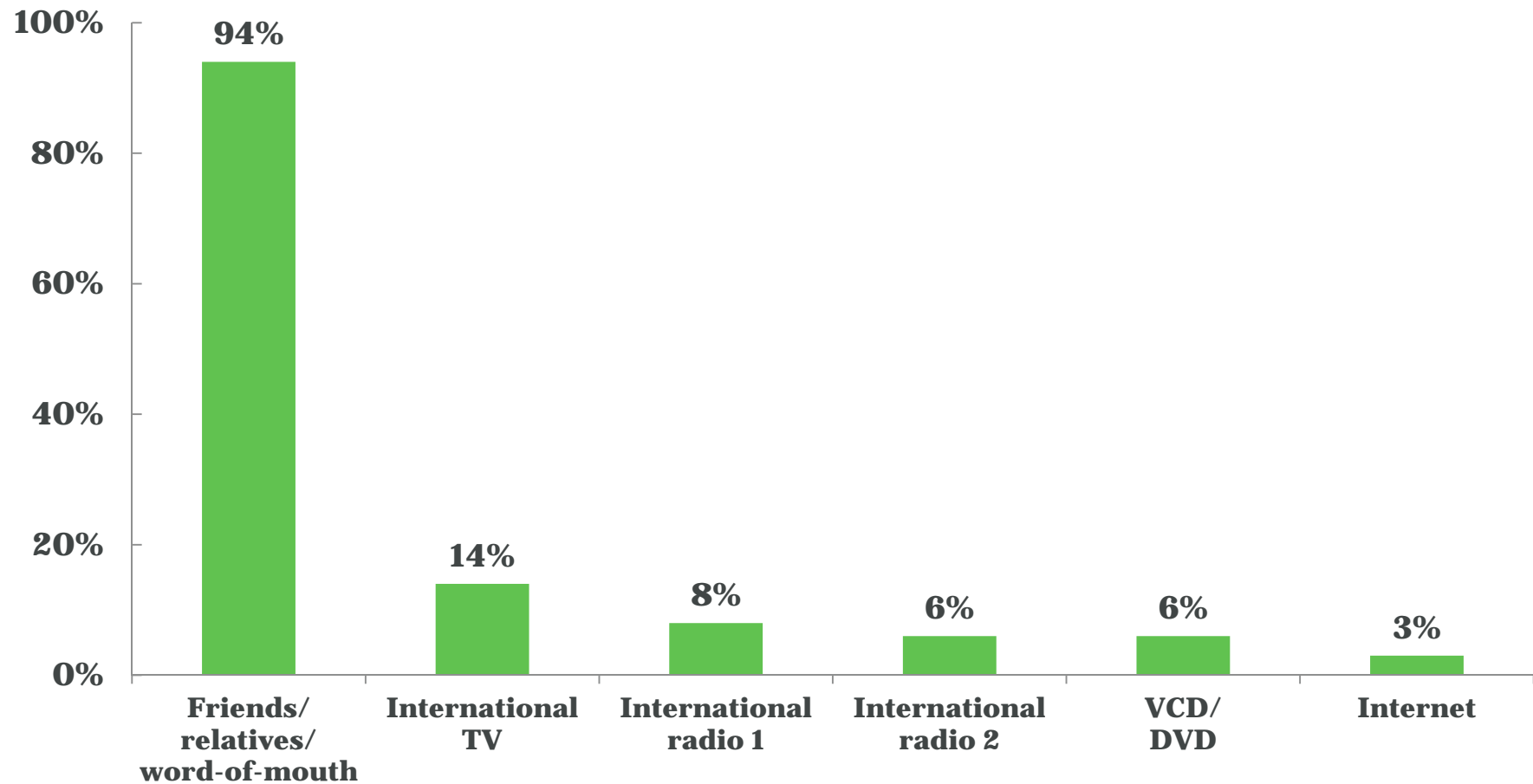
*“Monks and lamas hear a lot of news about Tibetan issues from RFA and VOA Tibetan TV. Tibetans inside Tibet ask the monks about news on Tibetan issues.”*



# Potential Use of Mobile Phone for News Sharing Remains Untapped



# Besides Word-of-Mouth, International TV and Radio Are Seen as Reliable Sources of Information



N=117

# Word-of-Mouth Continues to Be the Most Reliable Source of and Mode of Sharing Information

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- Word-of-mouth among friends and relatives is perceived universally as the main source of information about current events
  - news shared actively within trusted social circles
  - news travels fast, as most Tibetans belong to several social networks
  - take pride in sharing news
  - events within Tibet a key reason for the younger generation to keep information flows alive
  - A majority reported hearing news about “self-immolations” and Lobsang Sangay’s election first from close friends and relatives

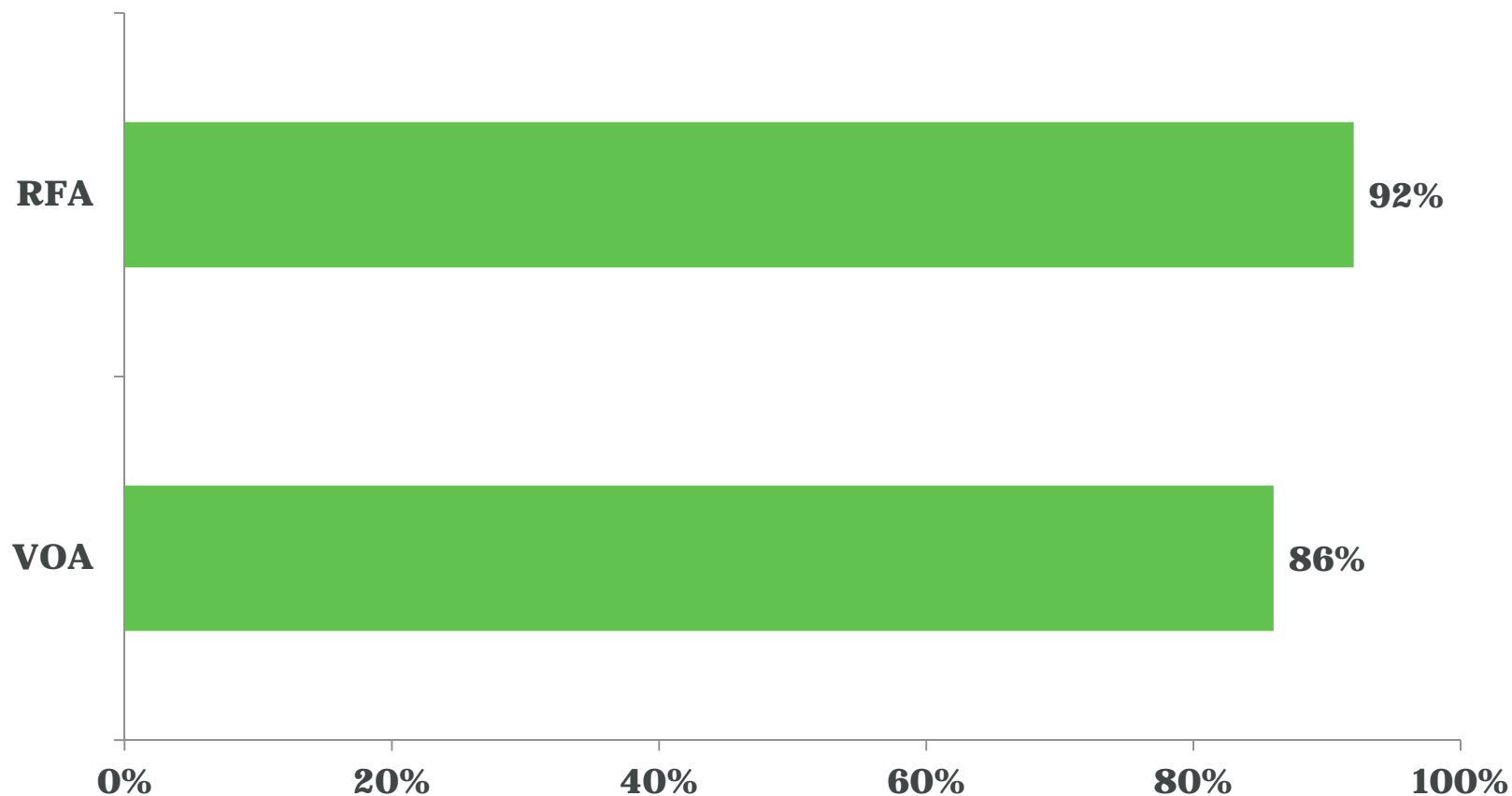
*“I trust the news only if I think it is true and can be trusted. I share the news with pride if I think I have such a piece of news to share. We talk mainly about Tibetan issues. We talk about HHDL, Sino-Tibet dialogue, and international news. We share news wherever we meet.”*

# Word-of-Mouth Continues to Be the Most Reliable Source of and Mode of Sharing Information

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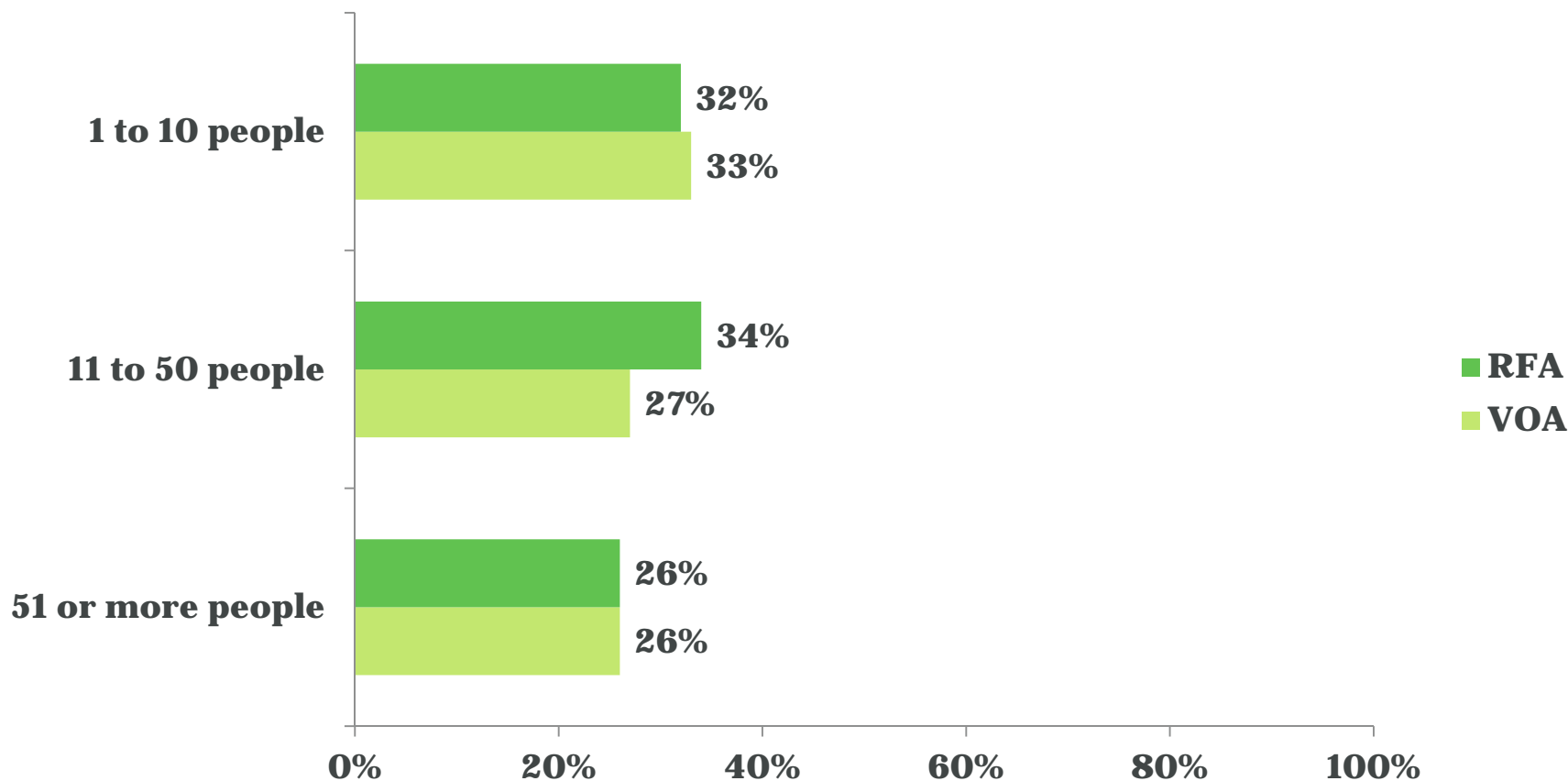
- Several respondents reported sharing news that they heard through international broadcasters
  - Whether it is news about the Dalai Lama
  - Breaking news about the self-immolations
  - Lobsang Sangay's election in April 2011

# Q. “In Tibet, did you ever share what you had heard on RFA/VOA with others?”



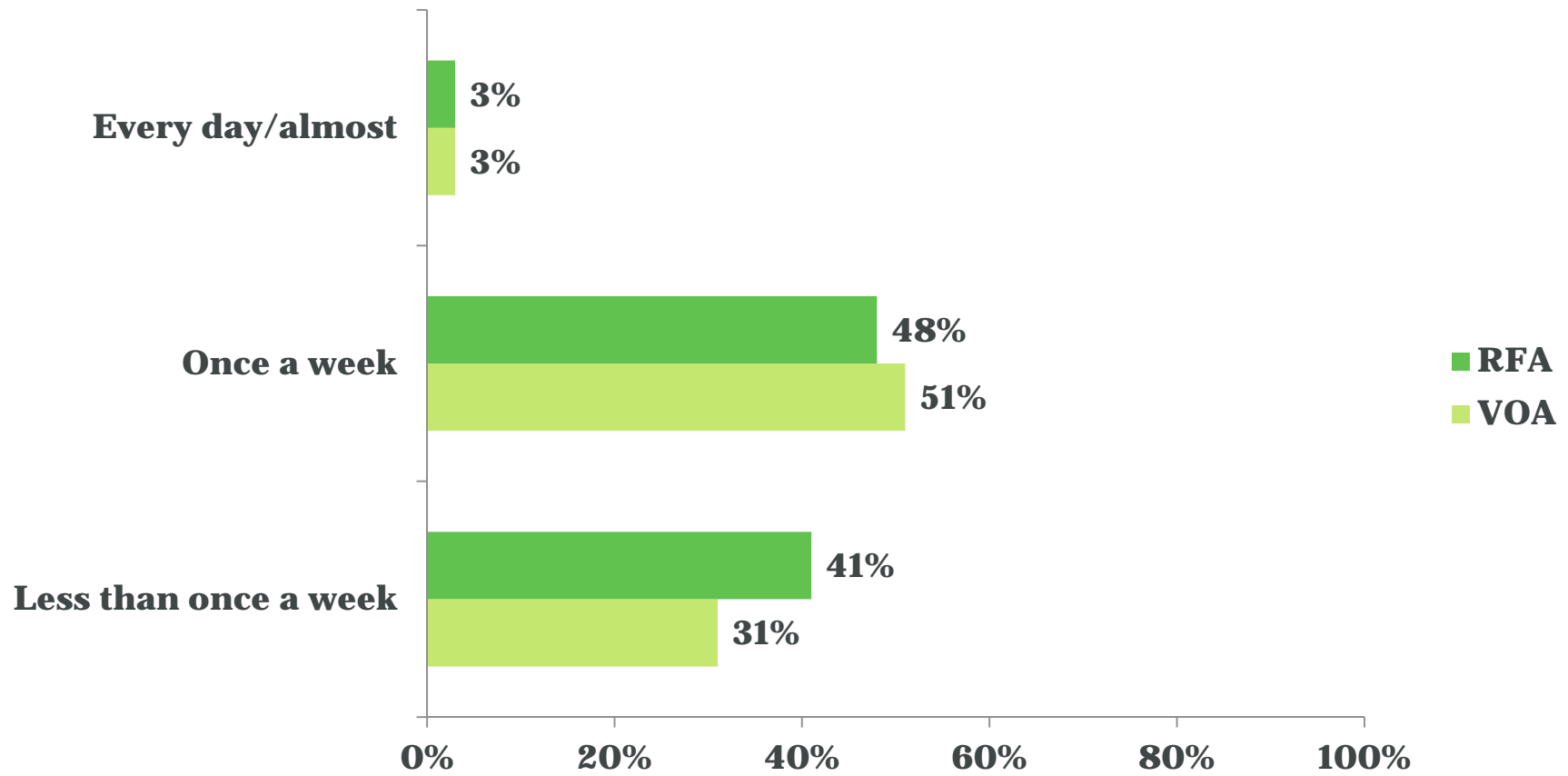
Base: Past month audience RFA (n=80) and VOA-TV (n=90) ; figures show percentages of users who shared RFA/VOA information with others

# Q. “... how many others did you share what you heard on RFA/VOA on a regular basis?”



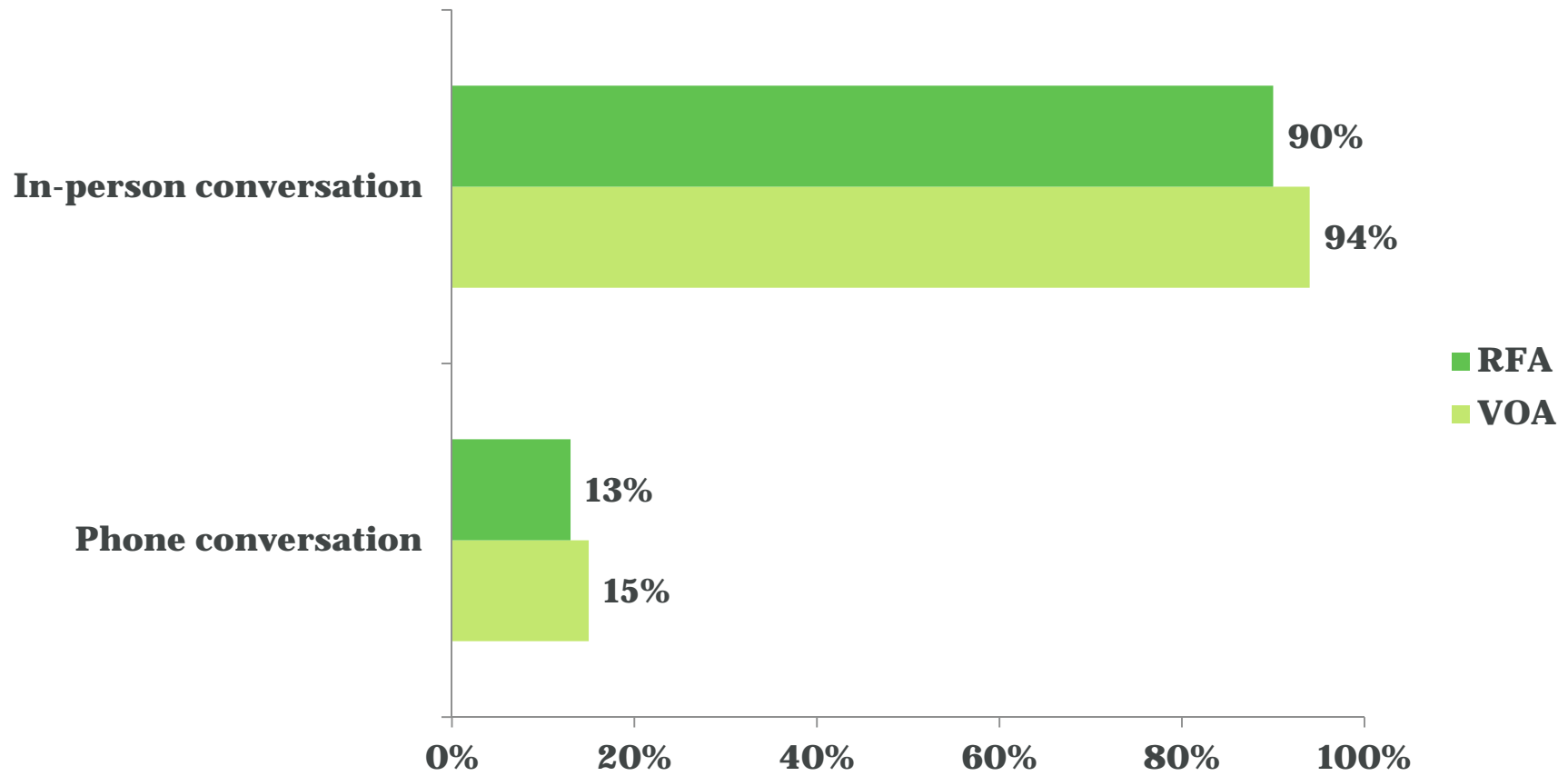
Base: past month audiences to RFA and VOA-TV; figures show percentages of each station's audience sharing information with number of people indicated.

# Q. “... how often did you share what you heard/saw on RFA/VOA with others?”



Base: past month audiences to RFA and VOA-TV; figures show percentages of each station's audience sharing information with frequency indicated

# Q. “... in what way did you share what you heard on RFA/VOA with others?”

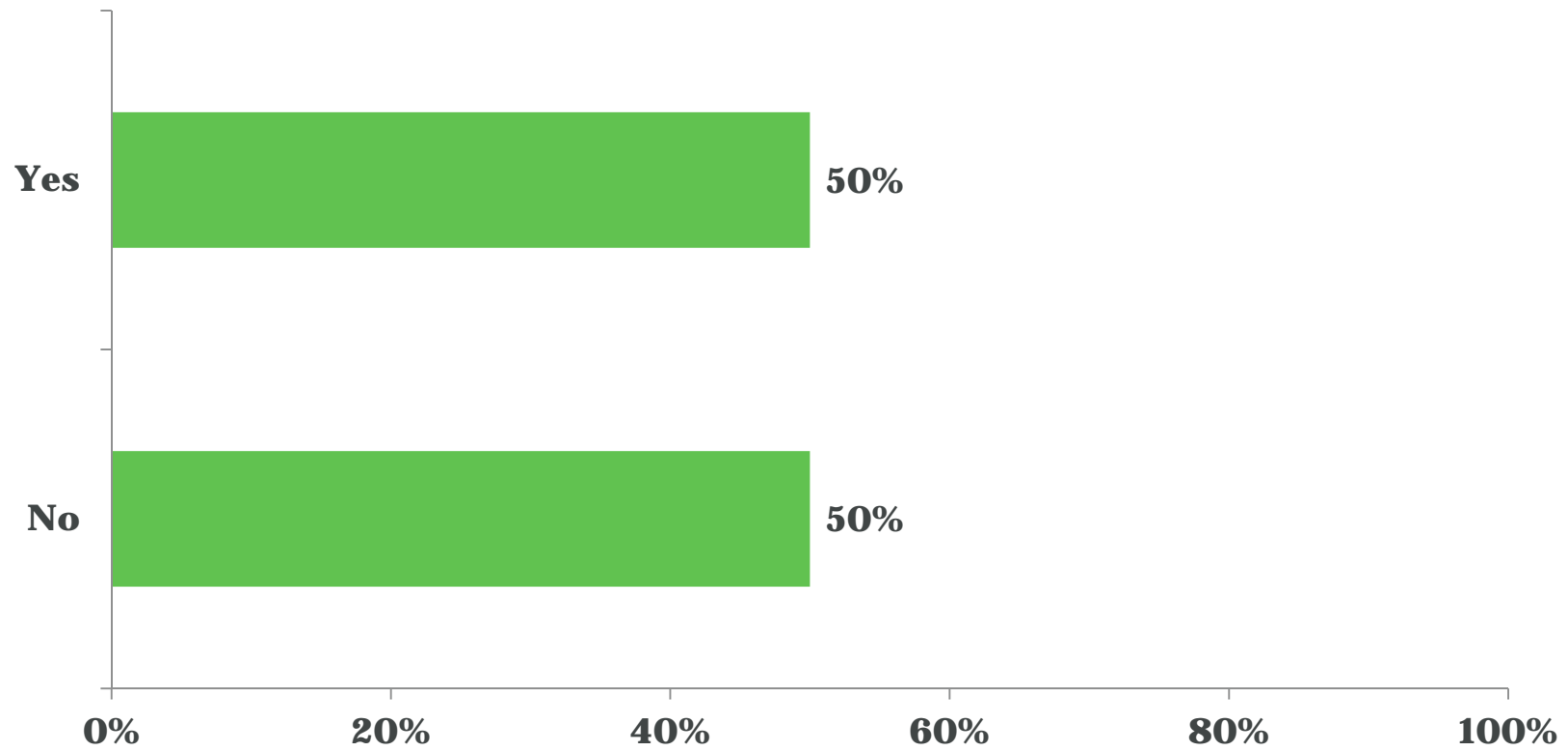


Base: Past month audience for each station. Figures show percentages of each station's audience sharing information via means shown. (Multiple responses allowed; no other methods of sharing mentioned by more than 2 percent)



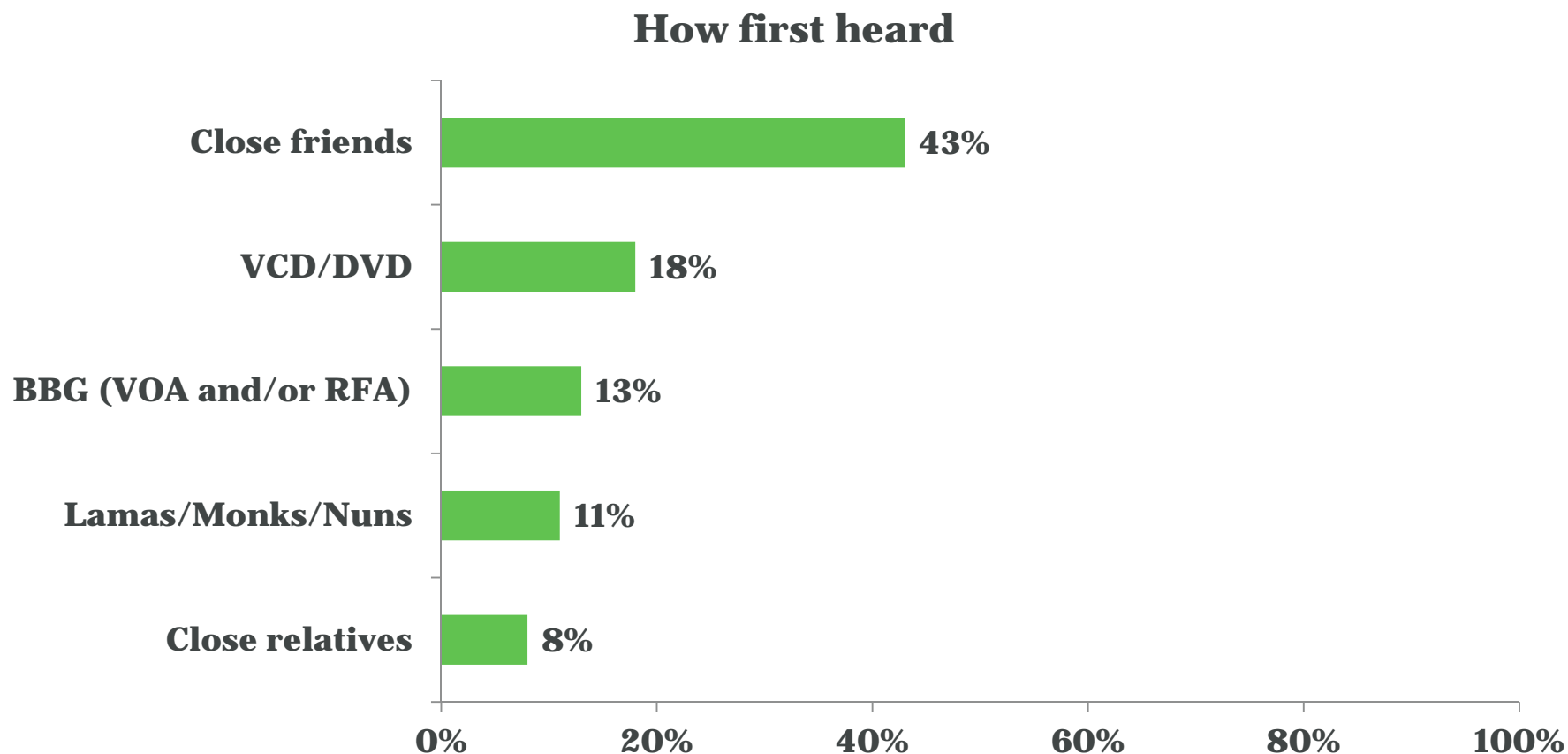
# Q. “Did you hear about the elections held by the Tibetan government in exile while in Tibet?”

## Heard about elections



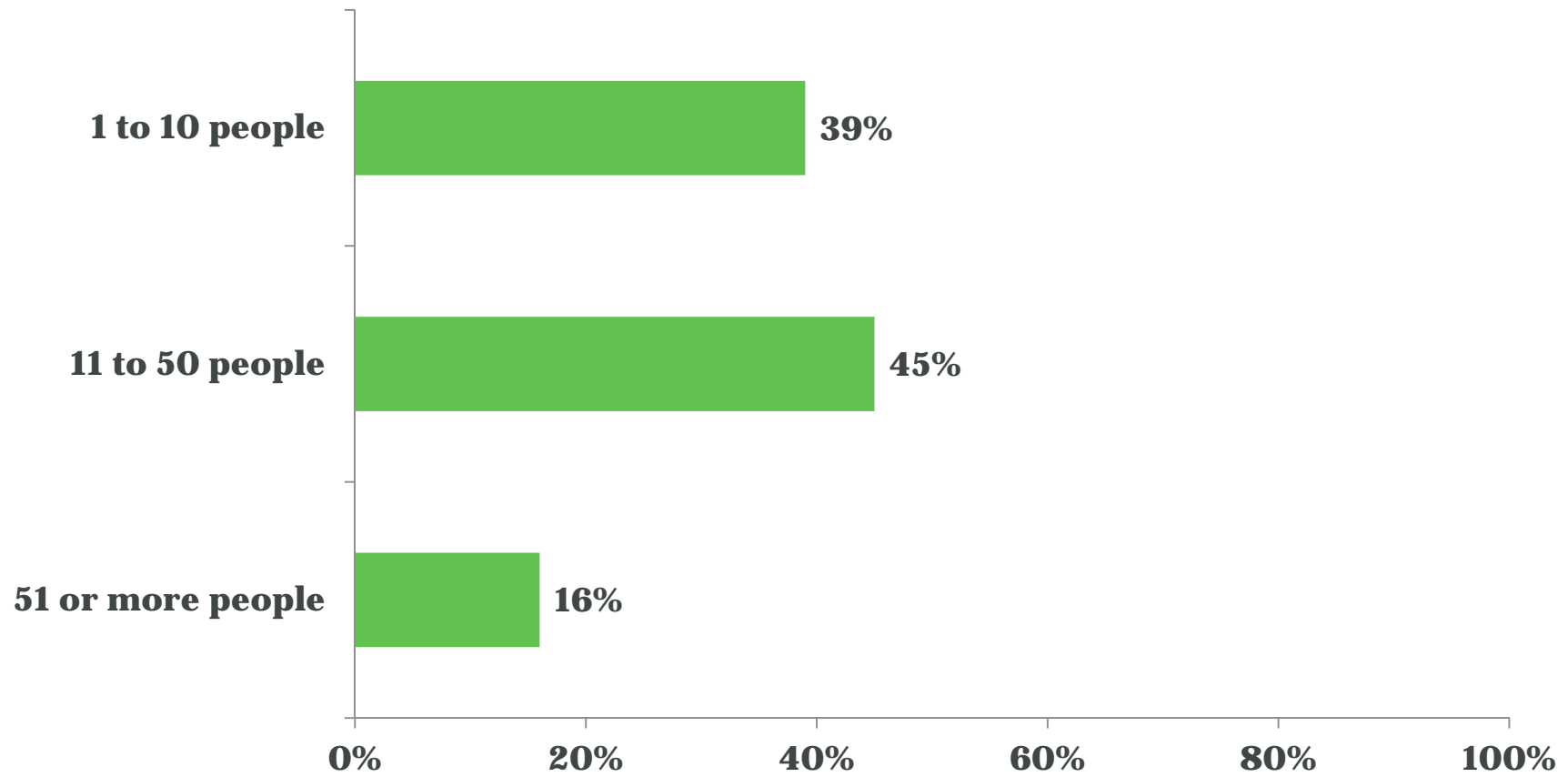
Base: All respondents (n=1,332)

# Q. “From where did you first hear about (the elections)?”



Base: All who had heard about the elections while in Tibet (n=663)

# Q. “With how many people did you share this story?”



Base: All who heard elections story on BBG outlet and shared with others (n=89)

# Conclusions

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- Television use has grown with the rapid increase in official Tibetan broadcasts. The attractiveness of the visual medium is clear in the success of VOA-TV where it is accessible. International media remains a valuable source of unbiased news and information
- Media access and information sources vary by region, with Amdo ahead of other Tibetan regions
- Word-of-mouth is a critical source for Tibetans to receive and share news and information; Domestic media is valued but not trusted for news.
- Many Tibetans consider U.S. broadcasts their only media source for reliable information inside Tibet
  - Audiences report sharing information widely

# Conclusions

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- Direct access to international media is limited by state controls:
  - Radio jamming
  - Replacement with satellite dishes that are unable to pick up international broadcasting
  - SIM card registration
  - Café monitoring/Web blocking
- “Information nodes” play key role in spreading information
- Mobile phones and other digital media provide new possibilities for disseminating news and information.



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## Upcoming BBG Research Series events:

- Thursday, August 16: Nigeria
- Thursday, September 20: Burma

Learn more about our work and events online at: <http://www.bbg.gov/> & <http://www.gallup.com>

Have a question? Contact us at 202-203-4400 or [pubaff@bbg.gov](mailto:pubaff@bbg.gov)