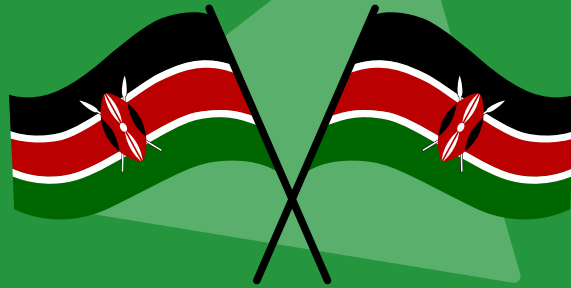


# YOUTH PULSE

Young people and the Kenyan  
general election: hopes, fears  
and new perspectives



## ABOUT

The Youth Pulse is a brand new publication from the MAPEMA Consortium, in collaboration with NCIC and support by **UNDP** and **OHCHR** and funding from the **United Nations Peacebuilding Fund** and the **German Government** with research led by Shujaaz Inc.

This report goes beyond the headlines and clichés to amplify the voices of a generation that will shape this election, and the country's future: their hopes, their fears and their unique perspective.

We have spoken with young Kenyans, the generation aged 15 to 24, about their thoughts on what is to come: on voting, governance, politics and processes, and the barriers to engagement that they experience.

What's revealed is a challenge to the hackneyed idea, often presented in our media, that 'young people are apathetic'. Young people do care about democracy and the outcomes of the elections. But they don't believe their vote will make any difference to their lives and to their communities, and they don't trust the procedure or their leaders – so they have detached from the political process. Yet despite this, they still see a role for themselves in the upcoming elections: as advocates for peace.

This report is built on the evidence of the Shujaaz Inc large-scale national surveys of youth (15–24) conducted over the past six years and supplemented by in-depth qualitative studies and rapid-response SMS surveys and dipstick polls, as the elections draw near.

As a result, we believe this Youth Pulse report will provide a valuable insight into the attitudes, hopes and fears of a generation of young Kenyans, as the country approaches a pivotal moment for their collective future.

# THE YOUTH ELECTORATE



I get info from word of mouth propaganda, Facebook, radio and television shows, Andrew Kibe 🤔🤔. We use mainstream news providers to confirm if rumours are true.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
MALE, MOMBASA**



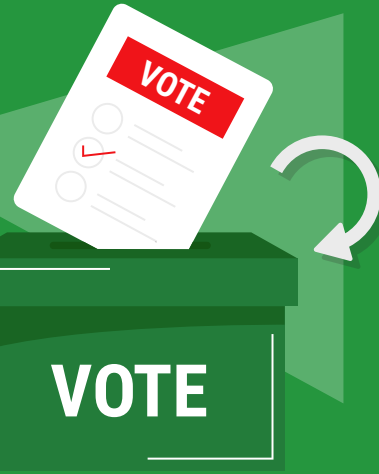
Now it's tricky since we are in the information age, we can't know what is true and false, so you are forced to do your own research.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
MALE, NAKURU**



I love news and I never wish it to bypass me. I even record it. I also listen to radio.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
FEMALE, NAIROBI**



**OVER  
8 MILLION**

Kenyans aged 18-24  
are eligible to vote

**28% OF THE  
ELECTORATE**

are young people  
aged 18-24

**LARGEST  
YOUTH  
ELECTORATE**

in Kenyan history

## THE LARGEST YOUTH ELECTORATE IN KENYAN HISTORY

As of the end of 2021, over 8 million Kenyans aged 18–24 were eligible to vote in the 2022 general election. That's the largest youth electorate in Kenyan history, representing around 28% of the total electorate.<sup>1</sup>

## 2022 vs 2017

At the last general election, in 2017, around 6.9 million Kenyans aged 18–24 were eligible to vote. According to the Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), turnout in 2017 among those aged 18–24 was just 17.4%.<sup>2</sup>

## FINANCIAL STATUS

Many of those eligible to vote in 2022 come from households that are struggling financially. The Shujaaz Inc annual survey of youth conducted in December 2021 showed that 50% of Kenyans aged 15–24 earn less than KES 3,000 a month – that's less than \$1 per day, far below the World Bank's threshold for 'extreme poverty' (\$1.99 a day).<sup>3</sup> Only 11% of these young people live alone, which means many don't have to sustain themselves solely on their personal income.<sup>4</sup>

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Almost three in five of those aged 15–24 have internet access, through their own smartphones or via other means.<sup>5</sup> In June 2022, a qualitative study with young people indicated that access to information helps them feel more engaged with and more informed about the general election.<sup>6</sup> Given the rise of information access among young people, this election is therefore likely to be more prominent in their lives than those that have come before.

# YOUNG PEOPLE & GOVERNANCE



Most of the young people I interact with are excited about the upcoming elections since it will be their first time to vote though they are also confused about which candidates to vote for.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
FEMALE, NAKURU**

## THE KEY STATS<sup>7</sup>

### 46%

of young Kenyans believe they make a big impact in improving their communities

### 62%

think they can play a role in governance by voting in elections

### 66%

of eligible young people (18–24) planned to vote in the 2022 elections, as of December 2021

### 90%

of first-time voters said in a dipstick SMS survey that their vote is either 'important' or 'very important'

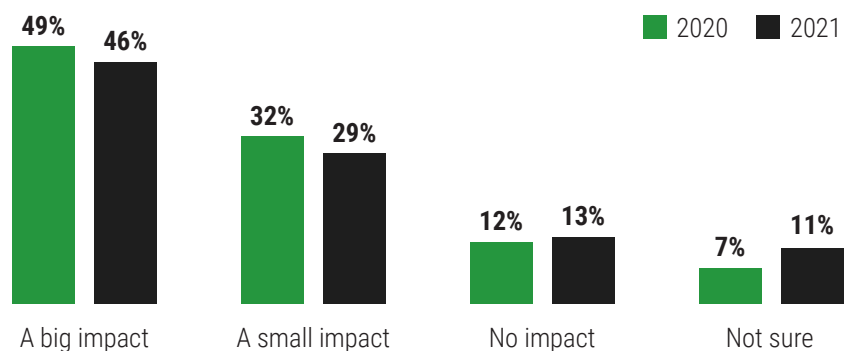
## YOUNG KENYANS WANT TO PLAY A ROLE

The multiple research studies that inform this report consistently show that young people care deeply about democracy and civic engagement.

For example, 68% of those who took part in the Shujaaz Inc 2021 annual survey of youth said 'being heard' was at least moderately important to feeling like their lives were 'good', and a quarter said it was highly important.<sup>8</sup> But young people want more than just to be heard; they want to actively contribute to their communities too. As the graphic below shows, young people feel they are already making a big impact in improving their communities, and having a voice means they are consulted on how to advance that impact.

At the turn of the year, three in five young Kenyans felt that voting in a general election was part of their role in local governance and two-thirds were planning to participate in the 2022 general election.<sup>9</sup>

## HOW MUCH IMPACT DO YOU HAVE IN MAKING YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE?



Source: Shujaaz Inc annual survey of youth, 2020-2021.

## YOUNG PEOPLE & GOVERNANCE



We need to choose people we know, vote for people that have been there, who have done something useful in the community.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEMALE, NAIROBI**

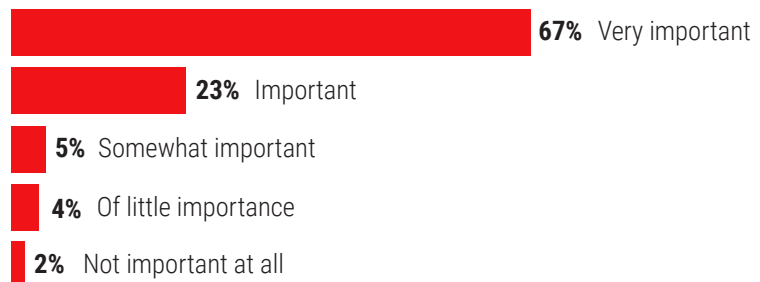


### FIRST-TIME VOTERS FEEL ENGAGED

In the Shujaaz Inc qualitative study conducted in June 2022 (N=23, Nairobi, Nakuru, Mombasa), young Kenyans who had reached voting age said they were excited about voting for the first time. They planned to vote for young candidates, to give their generation a greater voice among the leadership of the country.

An overwhelming majority – 90% – felt their vote was either ‘important’ or ‘very important’, and 68% said they were ‘very confident’ they could make a well-informed decision.<sup>10</sup> This is due in part to the continued improvement of access to information among young people in Kenya, which allows them to stay informed about candidates and their campaigns.

### DIPSTICK POLL: HOW IMPORTANT IS YOUR VOTE IN THIS YEAR'S GENERAL ELECTION?



Source: Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, June 2022 (N=264).

# VOTING IN 2022: BARRIERS



Votes have been stolen in every past election and the youth have lost faith in the voting process.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, MALE, MOMBASA**



Majority of the youth have lost faith in politics and the leadership structure in the country and they are saying they won't vote unless they get paid by politicians.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, MALE, KIKAMBALA**



Most of the leaders in government who are representing the youth are above 70 years old, so they do not have our interests at heart.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, MALE, NAIROBI**

## THE KEY STATS<sup>11</sup>

**ONLY 22%**

of eligible first-time voters have registered to vote

**46%**

of young people in a dipstick survey said they were unsure how to vote

**26%**

of dipstick poll participants who were not registered to vote said they lacked a national ID

**UP TO 84%**

of those questioned in dipstick surveys felt they weren't listened to during the pandemic

## WHY HAVEN'T MORE YOUNG KENYANS REGISTERED TO VOTE?

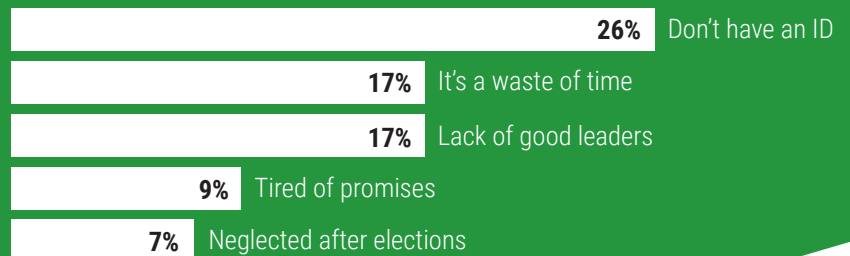
Despite young people's enthusiasm and desire to make a positive difference in their communities, only around half of Shujaaz media users who were eligible told us they'd registered to vote by the time registration closed.<sup>12</sup> And the IEBC says only 22% of eligible first-time voters have registered. Why is this?

## THEY DON'T TRUST THEIR LEADERS

Covid-19 further eroded the limited trust that many young people had in their government. Young Kenyans, who carried a heavy burden during the pandemic, felt they were ignored by decision makers, with 84% saying in August 2020 and 82% in November 2020 that their voices were not adequately represented in Kenya's Covid strategy.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout 2021 and 2022, qualitative research by Shujaaz Inc has shown that young Kenyans continue to feel let down by national and local leaders. Nearly a fifth of those we spoke to in May this year who had not registered to vote cited a lack of good leaders, and 17% felt voting would be 'a waste of time'.<sup>14</sup> Many felt older politicians do not regard their opinions as important.

## DIPSTICK POLL: WHY DID YOU NOT REGISTER TO VOTE?



Source: Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, May 2022 (N=57).

<sup>11</sup> 'Concern as Kenya's voters shun registration for 2022 elections', DW, 1 November 2021 Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, May 2022 (N=340); Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, August 2020 (N=945) and November 2020 (N=257); Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, May 2022 (N=57); | <sup>12</sup> Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, May 2022 (N=340); | <sup>13</sup> Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, August 2020 (N=945) and November 2020 (N=257). | <sup>14</sup> Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, May 2022 (N=57).

## VOTING IN 2022: BARRIERS



We are used to being lied to about jobs, roads ... I think the economy will go down or there will be no change at all.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
FEMALE, MOMBASA**



The voters feel their vote has no say and leaders are selected in board rooms.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
MALE, MOMBASA**



I have heard most [youth] saying they won't vote, they won't waste time choosing people who won't help.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
FEMALE, NAKURU**

### THEY'RE UNSURE ABOUT PROCEDURE

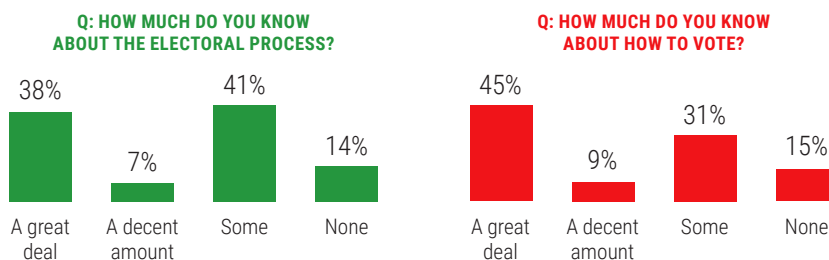
Young people also lack knowledge of how government, voting and politics work.

In a Shujaaz Inc dipstick poll, nearly all were aware that the general election is happening,<sup>15</sup> and according to the Twaweza special panel, 88% are aware of the IEBC and 84% know the exact dates of the elections.<sup>16</sup>

But only around half understand the basic system of devolved governance in Kenya,<sup>17</sup> and more than 50% in a dipstick SMS survey reported either having 'only some' or 'no' information about the electoral process. Just under half said the same about voting procedure.<sup>18</sup>

The contested 2017 general election, with the legal and political confusion that followed, may have contributed to young people's confusion around electoral procedure.

### DIPSTICK POLL: YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF ELECTORAL AND VOTING PROCEDURE



Source: Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, May 2022 (N=320).

### TOO FEW HAVE NATIONAL IDs

In addition to knowledge barriers, there is a significant structural barrier to young people voting: too few have national IDs or are aware they need one to register and to vote. As the graphic on page 6 shows, lack of an ID was the top reason (26%) cited by those participating in a dipstick SMS survey who had not registered to vote.

According to the 2021 Finscope study, 28% of Kenyans aged 16–25 lack a national ID, and the proportion appears to be higher among younger subgroups and among girls and women.<sup>19</sup> And many young people have complained about difficulties in obtaining an ID, which are issued to citizens at the age of 18.<sup>20</sup>

In a cross-sectoral study of Kenyan Youth, young people reported especially long delays – and occasionally requests for bribes – in the counties with ongoing and, latent tribal, religious and national conflicts (e.g. counties with a high proportion of former Somali citizens). The general consensus was that the 'system' did not work well for young people from non-privileged, marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, May 2022 (N=418). | <sup>16</sup> *Twaweza Sauti Za Wananchi, Brief 41: Ready to Vote?, March 2022.* | <sup>17</sup> Shujaaz Inc annual survey of youth, 2021. | <sup>18</sup> Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, May 2022 (N=320). | <sup>19</sup> *2021 FinAccess Household Survey, December 2021* and Caribou Digital, *Kenya's Identity Ecosystem, 2019.* | <sup>20</sup> Shujaaz Inc, USAID and Making Cents International, *Kenya Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment Report, 2020.* | <sup>21</sup> Ibid.

# VOTING IN 2022: ENABLERS



The youth do not have a say in politics because if you want to join a political party and contest for election, you will not be given audience unless you have money and many supporters, yet money is scarce among the youth.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, MALE, NAIROBI**

## THE KEY STATS<sup>22</sup>

**80%**

of young Kenyans aged 18–24 in post-secondary education plan to vote

**3/4**

of employed and self-employed young Kenyans plan to vote

**74%**

of young Kenyans aged 18–24 in the highest income quartile plan to vote

*versus only*

**42%**

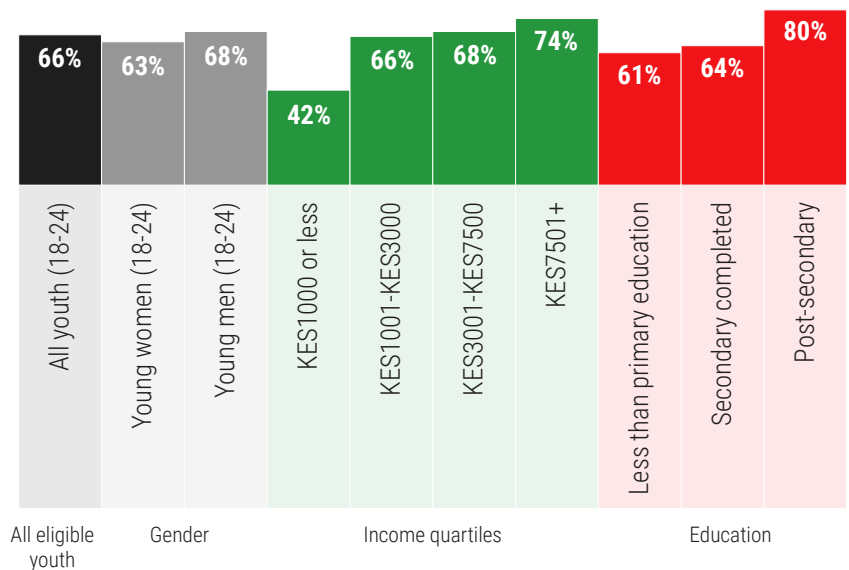
in the lowest quartile

## EDUCATION AND INCOME ARE THE MAIN DETERMINERS

Which demographic characteristics make young Kenyans more likely to vote in 2022? The IEBC continue to emphasise a gender gap among those registered,<sup>23</sup> but Shujaaz Inc research shows that education and financial status are stronger determiners of intent to vote.

The Shujaaz Inc annual survey of youth (15–24) at the end of 2021 showed that 80% of young Kenyans in post-secondary education were planning to vote in 2022, compared with 61% with less than a primary education.<sup>24</sup> And intent increased from 42% in the lowest income quartile to 74% in the highest.<sup>25</sup>

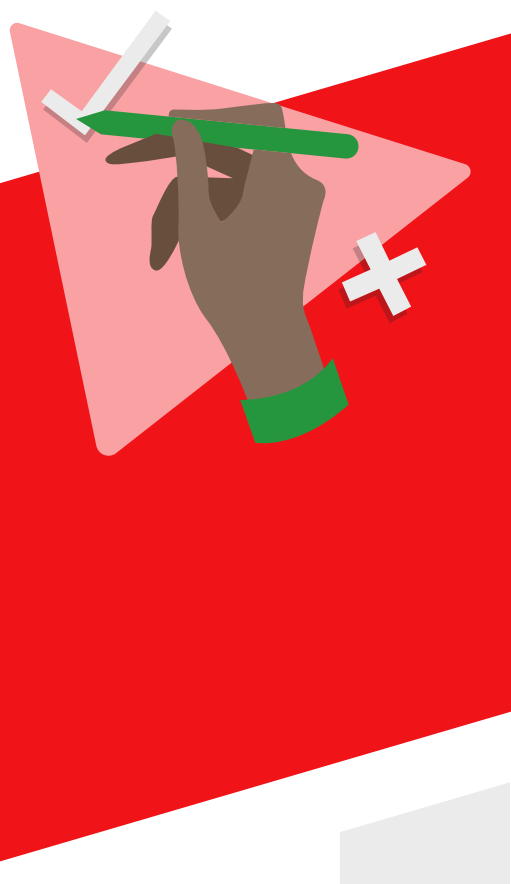
## KENYANS AGED 18–24 WHO INTEND TO VOTE



Source: Shujaaz Inc annual survey of youth, 2021.



# VOTING IN 2022: ENABLERS



## EMPLOYMENT STATUS ALSO INFLUENCES INTENT

Young Kenyans who were in employment or earned income from micro-entrepreneurship were markedly more likely to say they intended to vote (72% and 73% respectively) than those with more unstable employment status (60%).<sup>26</sup>

This follows a trend observed in the Shujaaz Inc annual surveys of youth since 2016: young people who identify as employed or self-employed show more engagement in governance than their peers.

Employment is associated with a higher level of education and hence leads to greater engagement in the electoral process. In the case of micro-entrepreneurs, this tends to be because local governance decisions – how much to invest in youth funds, where to build a marketplace, whether to repair a road – directly affect their businesses and their income.

## THOSE WHO FEEL SUPPORTED ARE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE

Conversations with young Kenyans conducted by Shujaaz Inc have consistently shown that social engagement – with families, peers and the community – is very important to them. And these relationships play a role in how likely young people are to vote.

In the 2021 Shujaaz Inc annual survey of youth, those who did not feel supported by their community were noticeably less likely to say they intended to vote in the 2022 election.

## INTENT TO VOTE IN 2022, BY PERCEIVED COMMUNITY SUPPORT

	I am planning to vote in the election
I have strong role models and/or mentors in my life	<b>67%</b>
I do not have strong role models and/or mentors	<b>58%</b>
When in crisis, I have people I can turn to	<b>67%</b>
I do not have people I can turn to when in crisis	<b>56%</b>
I feel I have something to contribute to the community and the world	<b>68%</b>
I don't feel I have something to contribute to the community and the world	<b>57%</b>

Source: Shujaaz Inc annual survey of youth, 2021.

# ELECTION FEARS



The young people in my neighbourhood are afraid of post-election violence like the one that happened in 2007.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
FEMALE, NAKURU**



In 2017, there were riots in Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu and other parts of the country. Property was stolen and people got killed because of their political alignments.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
MALE, MOMBASA**



The people I have interacted with are mostly afraid of post-election violence.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
MALE, NAKURU**



Last election there wasn't war, so chances are that this can be peaceful. IEBC are advocating for a peaceful election which might help.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
MALE, NAKURU**

## THE KEY STATS<sup>27</sup>

### IN SHUJAAZ INC DIPSTICK SURVEYS:

57%

of young people said they'd observed discrimination and hate speech during the election period

37%

of young men said 'all' or 'most'  
of their friends had been offered  
money to cause disruption

## DIPSTICK POLL: WHAT COMES TO YOUR MIND WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE 2022 GENERAL ELECTION?



Source: Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, May 2022 (N=232).

## YOUNG KENYANS HAVE SEEN EXISTING TENSIONS WORSENING

Many communities in Kenya routinely struggle with tribal, political and social tensions,<sup>28</sup> and young people are observing warning signs that these are worsening in the run-up to the general election.

In a dipstick SMS survey in June, almost three in five young people said they are seeing discrimination, hate speech and other instances of abuse in their communities, in relation to the election.

## ELECTION FEARS



I also witnessed hate speech when some people in my community were saying they cannot elect a certain leader because people from that leaders' community do not practise circumcision and hence are not real men.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
MALE, NAKURU**



They say, 'Most [women aspirants] don't have husbands, so how will they lead us if they were not capable of leading their husbands?'

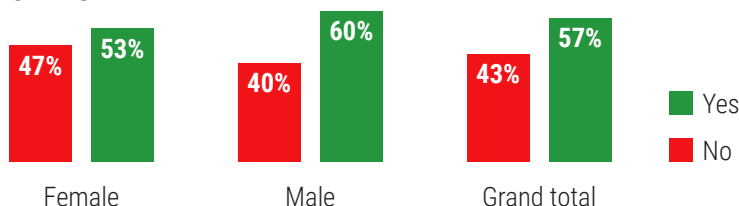
**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
MALE, MOMBASA**



Someone told us in confidence that women are not even given a say in the governmental seat they take, they are bullied and silenced most of the time, so they do nothing but bear through it.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
MALE, NAKURU**

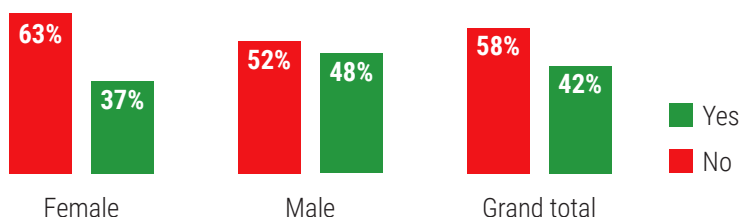
### DIPSTICK POLL: IN THIS ELECTION PERIOD, HAVE YOU SEEN OR EXPERIENCED INSTANCES OF DISCRIMINATION AND/OR HATE SPEECH?



Source: Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, June 2022 (N=128).

In a dipstick SMS survey of Shujaaz fans (N=113, June 2022), two in five said they had witnessed discrimination and hate speech specifically targeting female politicians. Young men were more likely to report such instances than young women.

### DIPSTICK POLL: HAVE YOU SEEN DISCRIMINATION OR HEARD HATE SPEECH DIRECTED TOWARDS WOMEN?



Source: Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, June 2022 (N=113).

According to young people, this gendered hate speech is rooted in the traditional view that a woman's role in society is to raise children and take care of her household.

In the 2017 post-election qualitative study conducted by Shujaaz Inc, young people observed that to become a respectable aspirant, a woman first had to marry the right man, raise several well-behaved children and build a successful business. She then had to secure the endorsement of a male political leader. Without these things, women in politics were viewed with suspicion.<sup>29</sup>

In the 2022 qualitative study (N=23, Nairobi, Nakuru and Mombasa), young people reported similar prejudice around women's involvement in politics.

## ELECTION FEARS



The hate speech I have witnessed is when presidential aspirants call each other thieves without providing evidence of the alleged theft.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
FEMALE, NAKURU**



They [young people] are paid to cause chaos and since they want money they do all kinds of jobs.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
FEMALE, MOMBASA**



Some aspirants are using money to mobilize youths to cause chaos during political rallies and campaigns. We see recruitment into riot teams of a particular aspirant. Some aspirants send out supporters to recruit members who will create havoc.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT,  
MALE, MOMBASA**

Young Kenyans also reported they had seen outbreaks of fighting over political preferences and felt an increased fear of violence among their community.<sup>30</sup> They gave several reasons for this:

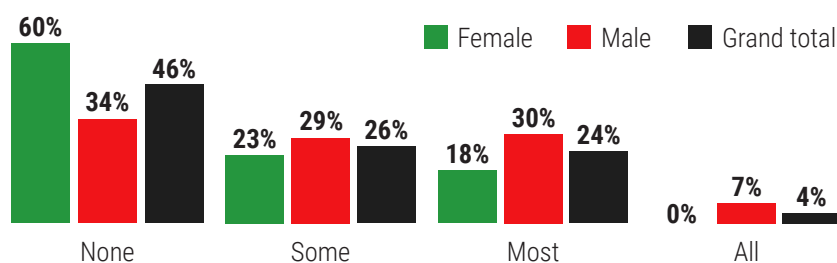
- Polarised and entrenched support for different political candidates
- Candidates paying financially vulnerable young people to cause disturbances
- Open hostility between political leaders, leading to hate speech and abuse among their followers
- Existing problems of tribalism and social inequality that are being exploited by politicians.

### SOME POLITICIANS ARE EXPLOITING VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

As mentioned above, young Kenyans report that some politicians seek to prey on their financial vulnerability by offering them money to cause disruption and intimidation.

Young people are aware of this manipulative tactic, and most are able to resist it. But given that so many young Kenyans live in extreme poverty, it can be difficult for them to avoid making negative choices in order to support their families.

### DIPSTICK POLL: WHAT PROPORTION OF YOUR FRIENDS DO YOU THINK HAVE BEEN USED TO DISRUPT A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN?



Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, June 2022 (N=132).



# CHAMPIONS FOR PEACE



I will continue to advocate for peace in my community as I continue with my photography business, I can't run away and leave my business because of the elections, I will take photos and upload them online with a peace hashtag.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEMALE, NAIROBI**



Youth also have information, they understand themselves and what they want is peace.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, FEMALE, MOMBASA**



What we are gaining on the ground is that the youth really want to change things and this election but there is still chances for many to be manipulated with the aspirants for selfish reasons of the aspirants. We should preach peace and hope people will hear and know there is life after the elections.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, MALE, NAKURU**

## THE KEY STATS<sup>31</sup>

# 64%

of young people believe they can play a role in governance

# 49%

of young people take an active role in helping their communities

## YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE THIS ELECTION

Despite their worries about increasing tensions, there is still hope among young Kenyans that the elections will pass peacefully, and there is a desire among them to play a role in preventing disruption.

As we saw earlier in this report, nearly half of young Kenyans are taking an active role in making their communities better places to live, and the 2021 Shujaaz Inc annual survey of youth shows that 64% believe young people can play a role in local governance.<sup>32</sup>

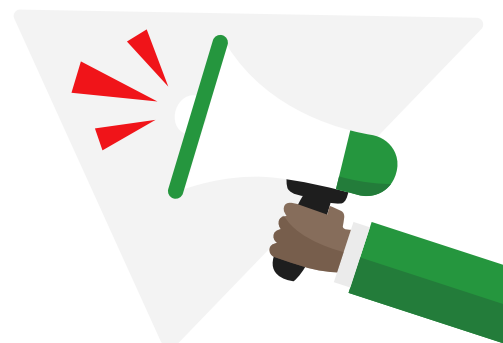
To build on this evidence, we conducted a dipstick SMS survey of Shujaaz fans to ask what type of contribution they felt they could make. The most popular response was to refuse to be used by politicians to cause disruption, while advocating for peace and educating others also emerged as important themes.

## DIPSTICK POLL: WHAT CAN YOUNG PEOPLE DO TO ENSURE THERE'S PEACE DURING THE ELECTION PERIOD?



Source: Shujaaz Inc dipstick SMS survey, May 2022 (N=211).

Young people's willingness to serve as champions for peace and their awareness of ways in which they can help presents an opportunity: to speak meaningfully to them about governance, and to restore their confidence that their voices are being heard and their contribution matters.



# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This report relies on several sources of primary and secondary data:

- Dipstick SMS national surveys with Shujaaz audience:
  - May 2022, N=232
  - June 2022, N=141.
- A qualitative study with N=23 Shujaaz audience members conducted in June 2022 in Nairobi (Kawangware), Nakuru and Mombasa.
- Shujaaz Inc annual national surveys of young Kenyans (15–24 years old):
  - Wave 2017 (N=2,923), January–May 2017; Wave 2018 (N=2,020), February–March 2018; Wave 2019 (N=2,020), April 2019; Wave 2020 (N=2,015), December 2020–January 2021; Wave 2021 (N=2,006), November–December 2021.
  - The samples for the surveys were drawn using a stratified multistage approach. The Census data (2009 for Waves 2017–2019 and 2019 for Wave 2020–2021) on Kenyans aged 15–24 was used as the sampling framework. Proportional-to-population-size calculations were carried out to allocate the number of primary sampling units (PSUs) in each of the 47 counties. A total of 200+ secondary sampling units (SSUs) were selected randomly from the list of SSUs in each county. A total of 10 PSUs/households were selected in each SSU using a random route technique. Only one respondent was interviewed in each household.
  - The participants of the surveys were males and females, both urban and rural.
- The [Kenya Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment Report](#), a large-scale mixed-method study on vulnerable, marginalised and disenfranchised young people in Kenya, conducted by Shujaaz Inc in partnership with the USAID Youth Power programme from April to August 2020:
  - The study used a number of data collection methods: desk review, WhatsApp focus group discussions (130 participants), positive deviant interviews (6 participants), key informant interviews (3 participants), stakeholder interviews (9 participants), SMS surveys (N=7,630), big data analysis focusing on Twitter (10,000+ Shujaaz Twitter users), and design thinking sessions (41 participants).
  - All young people were aged 18–26 and resided in six USAID priority counties: Nairobi, Mombasa, Isiolo, Kakamaga, Homa Bay and Nakuru.
  - The participants of the qualitative data collection were recruited using referral and snowballing techniques. The participants for the quantitative data collection were selected randomly from the Shujaaz Inc database.
- Shujaaz Inc Barometer collection of studies conducted in 2020, available at [https://www.shujaazinc.com/news-publications/?\\_sft\\_topics=covid-19](https://www.shujaazinc.com/news-publications/?_sft_topics=covid-19)



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