

YOUTH PULSE

'BREAKING THE CYCLE': Young people's perspectives on the 2022 election



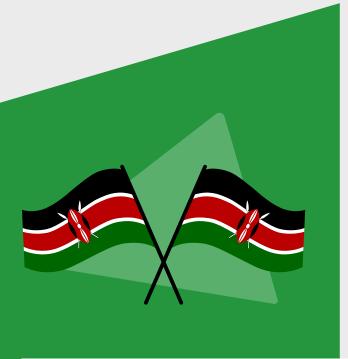












ABOUT

This is the second edition of Youth Pulse, sharing groundbreaking research on the engagement of young Kenyans with the 2022 general elections.

Youth Pulse is published by the MAPEMA Consortium, in collaboration with NCIC. It's supported by UNDP and OHCHR, with funding from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and the German Government, and with research led by Shujaaz Inc.

In the first edition, published in July, we spoke to Kenyans aged 15 to 24 about the upcoming elections. We unpacked their thoughts on voting, governance, politics and processes, and heard about the barriers to engagement they experience. Their testimony revealed long-term trends in the attitudes, hopes and fears of a generation.

For this edition, we spoke to young people across the country, to understand their experiences of and reflections on an election period labelled a 'triumph for democracy'. What were their thoughts on the electoral process? How has this informed their views on governance? And how do they feel about the future?

Our research reveals young people's optimism about a future of more peaceful, transparent national elections and feelings of hope that the youth voice will be heard in the corridors of power. It reminds us too about the critical role that community continues to play in young people's relationship to and engagement with local governance.

The previous edition of Youth Pulse was built on the evidence of the Shujaaz Inc large-scale national surveys of youth conducted over the past six years, and was supplemented by qualitative studies and rapid-response polls.

In this edition, we draw on rich qualitative data gathered through in-person and online focus groups conducted with young people, aged 15 to 24, across Kenya in October 2022 – following the confirmation of the election results in early September. We also take evidence from a national dipstick SMS survey of young people in the Shujaaz Inc audience, conducted in October.

This second Youth Pulse provides important insights into young peoples' perspectives on the democratic process, the barriers they face to engagement with it, and their hopes for the future: as a window for change is opened by an election seen by many as a turning point for Kenya.

PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTIONS

Most [young people] didn't vote because most of them did not register as voters due to limited time of the registration process.

MALE, 17, NAKURU

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I did not vote because my voting station was in Nairobi and I was told about transferring it when the process had already passed.

FEMALE, 24, THIKA

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I feel the IEBC did not educate the community effectively which would have improved delivery as compared to what happened. Especially in the case of spoilt votes.

MALE, 22, THIKA

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The reason I did not vote is because my voting station is not here and on the previous election I had to travel. And then the election was nullified which meant travelling to vote again, so this time round I decided not to incur the cost by travelling again.

FEMALE, 22, THIKA

THE KEY TAKEAWAYS:



Young people represented 28% of the electorate **BUT ONLY 10% OF** ALL REGISTERED VOTERS

YOUTH VOTER REGISTRATION WAS LOW

The exact numbers of young people who voted in the general elections are yet to be released. But the Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) have published details of voter registration.

IEBC records show that just under 2.3 million Kenyans aged 18 to 24 registered to vote.² That represents only a third of all (8 million+) eligible 18-to-24-year-olds and roughly 10% of all registered voters in the country.

YOUNG PEOPLE CONTINUE TO FACE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS, WHICH LIMITED REGISTRATION AND TURN-OUT

We saw in the first edition of Youth Pulse³ that young people faced a number of barriers to voter registration.

A lack of national IDs among young people was the most significant structural barrier. Many did not realise they needed an ID card to vote, or reported facing long delays to get hold of one. Some young people also report being prevented from obtaining a national ID by corrupt practices.

At a practical level, young people also reported that they were unsure about voting procedure, and the mechanics of how government and politics work.

Meanwhile, many young people chose not to register to vote because a lack of trust in their leaders. This had been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, during which they felt their experiences and voices were ignored.

In focus groups conducted by Shujaaz Inc for this second edition of Youth Pulse, young people also reported frustration with the lack of voter education offered by the IEBC in the run up to the elections. Some said they didn't register to vote because they weren't aware they needed to, especially so far in advance. Others didn't know they were only allowed to vote at one particular polling station, and were subsequently turned away when they went to the wrong place.

Money also played a role in voter registration and turnout. As observed in the first Youth Pulse, many young people eligible to vote came from households that are struggling financially: almost half of Kenyans aged 15-24 (46% of girls and 50% of boys) earn less than \$1 per day, far below the World Bank's threshold for 'extreme poverty' (\$1.99 a day).⁴

It's therefore unsurprising that some young Kenyans said they couldn't afford the cost of transport to get to the polling station or to register, or did not want to waste valuable money on a vote they felt might not 'matter' to their lives. Others said they chose not to vote because they feel excluded from their communities because of their lowly financial status – and they didn't feel that voting would make any difference to this.

¹ While disaggregated data on registered adults by age and gender is not yet available, of all registered voters 51% were males and 49% were females. We can, therefore, use this proportion as the estimate for registered voters aged 18-24 | ² Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (September 2022) Voter Registration Age Distribution per County. | ³ <u>Youth Pulse, July 2022.</u> | ⁴ Shujaaz Inc annual survey of youth, 2021.

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There were people at the polling centre who were allowed to assist.

FEMALE, 19, MACHAKOS

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I rank [the IEBC] highly; they did a good job. Moving forward they should upgrade on some things such as technology so that we minimise having to go queue.

MALE, 26, THIKA

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In elections in the next upcoming years, I'd like to vote again because it is my responsibility.

MALE, NAIROBI

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It is hard to explain but as in things did not go wrong, most of us were expecting that there will be fights but that did not happen, everything was peaceful.

FEMALE, 24, THIKA

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People didn't fight, there was tight security.

FEMALE, 19, MACHAKOS

THE KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- YOUNG PEOPLE CELEBRATE THE **'TRANSPARENT AND PEACEFUL' 2022 ELECTION**
- BUT THEY'RE REALISTIC ABOUT PROBLEMS
 THAT REMAIN PARTICULARLY AT A LOCAL LEVEL
- THEY'RE CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT FUTURE NATIONAL ELECTIONS
- TACKLING MISINFORMATION IS A CHALLENGE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AWARE OF

YOUNG PEOPLE HAD POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF THE ELECTION

Young Kenyans who voted report feeling that the process was smooth and easy. IEBC representatives at polling stations, there to assist first-time voters and the elderly, helped to guide and reassure young people. Other than mentioning instances of long queues, the young voters who took part in the Shujaaz Inc focus groups had only positive things to say about the process of voting.

In addition, many said that the act of voting made them feel proud and empowered. Some said it was the first time in their lives they had truly exercised their civic rights as Kenyan citizens.

Young voters also praised the work of the IEBC in helping to improve the transparency and trustworthiness of the election. They were reassured to see completed ballots posted online to aid verification, and were thankful that the IEBC calculated the results of local elections quickly.

Young people celebrate a peaceful election

Most significantly of all, young Kenyans noted that the elections passed peacefully.

We saw in the first Youth Pulse that 'violence' was the most common concern referenced by young people when asked about the upcoming election.⁵ Unrest and violence, particularly following the 2007 vote, has marred Kenyan general elections in recent years and was at the forefront of young people's minds.

The 2022 vote, however, was seen by local and international observers as a 'triumph for Kenya's democracy'.⁶ The process was peaceful and transparent, and while the initial result was challenged, appeals were conducted through the proper constitutional channels. The Supreme Court's decision to uphold William Ruto's victory was accepted peacefully by both sides.⁷

Young people took note of all this, mentioning that the use of correct legal process helped people in their communities to remain calm, even though some were unhappy with the result of the election.

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I felt like I have used my right and felt some freedom. There is that peace that someone feels after they attain something that is theirs. It's a right and we should claim it. So I claimed mine and felt okay and free.

MALE, NAIROBI

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We showed some maturity this time. We are confident that when other elections come, we will not have violence. We will have peaceful elections.

FEMALE, NAIROBI

SURVEYS SUGGEST OPTIMISM ABOUT FUTURE ELECTIONS

A dipstick survey conducted by Shujaaz Inc indicates that positive experiences of the 2022 elections may have changed the way some young Kenyans feel about the electoral process.

When asked if the elections had changed their level of trust in the process, 56% said they had, while only 20% said they hadn't.

A majority also said they would be more likely to vote in the next elections as a result of their positive experience of 2022.

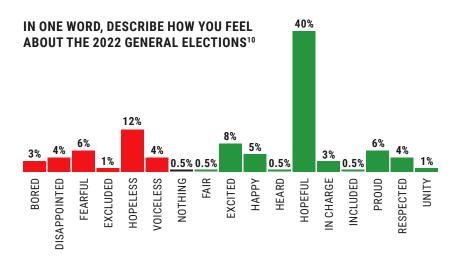
HAVE THIS YEAR'S ELECTIONS CHANGED YOUR LEVEL OF TRUST IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS?⁸

ALL YOUTH	YES 56%	NO 20%	UNSURE 24%
BOYS	YES 53%	NO 18%	UNSURE 28%
GIRLS	YES 59 %	NO 21 %	UNSURE 20%

WILL THIS YEAR'S ELECTIONS MOTIVATE YOU TO VOTE NEXT TIME?⁹

ALL YOUTH	YES 57%	NO 21%	UNSURE 22%
BOYS	YES 53%	NO 22%	UNSURE 25%
GIRLS	YES	63% NO 17	% UNSURE 20 %

In the same SMS survey, respondents elaborated on their feelings of cautious optimism. When asked to use one word to describe how they felt about the 2022 elections, 69% used positive adjectives, with the largest group (40% of all respondents) saying they felt 'hopeful'.



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You are given some amount and asked to stand at the gate and convince people to vote for the politician, take evidence and you'll pay them. So that becomes your job. A mobilizer.

FEMALE, 21, NAIROBI

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During the campaign period some politicians were dishing out money. As the youth in this economy you'll not say no to free money, you'll join the campaign and pretend to support the politician just to get money and then go your way.

FEMALE, 22, NAIROBI

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There is a certain guy who came and promised to fix the roads and hospitals and of course we know he will not deliver on the promises.

MALE, 20, THIKA

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Once we elect these leaders they don't deliver on the employment promises so it discourages you from waking up to vote.

FEMALE, 19, THIKA

BUT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CLEAR-EYED ABOUT THE PROBLEMS THAT REMAIN

Feelings of optimism following the 2022 elections are tempered by realism about the problems with Kenyan governance that remain.

This is clear from the barriers to registration and voting identified in the first Youth Pulse, as well as in the previous section of this report.

But young Kenyans who took part in Shujaaz Inc's research following the elections spoke of two further problems they experience: corruption and lack of trust.

Reports of corruption in local politics

There is so much corruption.

FEMALE, 19, MACHAKOS

Young people report that the electoral period creates a temporary 'political economy' across Kenya, in which money is seen to buy votes, loyalty and power.

Young Kenyans say that election candidates use money from wealthy backers, who they'll repay with favours and government contracts, to hire groups of young people as 'mobilisers'. These mobilisers in turn use bribes to do the bidding of the candidate: they pay people to turn up to rallies and meetings, bribe local influencers and offer cash to regular people in return for their vote.

According to testimony from focus group discussions, on providing a photo of a ballot showing that they voted for the 'right' candidate, voters can receive up to KES 5,000.

This political economy has evolved over several decades. Young Kenyans report that it's now so embedded at a local level, and such a well-oiled machine, that they see little chance of change.

Young people are sceptical of political promises

Discussions with young Kenyans also demonstrated that many still lack trust in politicians. They report feeling 'burnt' too many times by unfulfilled policies or offers of change, and remain sceptical when candidates make promises at election time.

This lack of trust is one of the barriers that contributes to young people choosing not to vote.

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We have TikTok, Instagram, Nairobi gossip, TV as well.

FEMALE, 24, NAKURU

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I like watching NTV news; that's where I got all info.

MALE, 19, NAKURU

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The reason I wouldn't [vote for this candidate] is because of the scandals surrounding him such as he is a thief which have not been proven.

MALE, 24, THIKA

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The [IEBC] agents were teaching publicly on how to do it [vote], during campaigns.

MALE, 22, MACHAKOS

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This year's elections have given me trust in IEBC and the judicial system because they have been fair.

MALE, NAIROBI

INFORMATION, MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

A key part of young people's experience of the election was the way in which they consumed information – and their awareness of the circulation of misinformation and disinformation.

Sources of information

In the focus group discussions, young people reported using a wide range of resources to get information about the elections. These included social media, TV, the IEBC website, radio and more.

Fake news

During the research, young people showed a keen level of awareness of, and concern about, the spread of misinformation through the election period.

They reported that social media was the main source of 'unproven' negative evidence against politicians, highlighting stories, videos and myths that were widely circulated. Some fake information was only partially fake, they said. This mix of facts and lies is difficult even for more experienced voters to identify.

According to young people, disinformation and sabotage took place even at polling stations. For example, focus group participants reported incidents of fake 'assistants' telling people to put a cross next to the names of the candidates they did not want to vote for (making their ballots invalid). Young Kenyans said that some politicians used their 'mobilisers' to promote misinformation and use peer pressure to reinforce it.

Some young people said they were able to recognise the 'cross' trick because the IEBC had communicated information about valid and invalid ballots prior to the elections, including via an SMS to registered voters.

The role of the IEBC

Aside from misinformation – shared without intention to deceive – young people noted that because of the high stakes at the election and extensive local corruption, deliberate disinformation was also prolific.

Young people lauded the IEBC for being proactive in trying to control the false narrative, despite the risks the IEBC staff were continuously facing, including abuse and physical harm.

In the focus group discussions, most young Kenyans agreed that IEBC staff were successful in detecting and addressing misinformation and disinformation, including through their voter education and communication efforts.

THE ELECTION RESULT

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The past elections were like a youth inspired elections.

FEMALE, 22, NAKURU

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I think the elections and the campaigns this time have changed coz right now we are choosing change, vision, ambition and what is in line with our goals as the youth.

FEMALE, NYERI

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Ruto has grown from zero to hero so he understands poverty.

MALE, 24, THIKA

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Ruto understands what everyone is going through from the bodaboda guy to everyone.

MALE, 20, THIKA

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Let me explain. As in for the longest we have had Uhuru and Moi family in power for so long. But now we can see that a farmer can rise and become a president breaking that cycle.

FEMALE, 22, THIKA

THE KEY TAKEAWAYS:

YOUNG PEOPLE SEE POSITIVE SYMBOLISM IN THE ELECTION OF A 'HUSTLA'

who started his journey as a chicken farmer THEY'RE OPTIMISTIC THAT YOUNG VOICES WILL BE HEARD



'A YOUTH-INSPIRED ELECTION'

Regardless of political preference, the young Kenyans that Shujaaz Inc spoke to saw a great deal of positive symbolism in the outcome of the 2022 general election. In keeping with their thoughts on the electoral process, they believe that these elections were more 'youth-inspired' than previous elections have been, and that they as young people played an important role in positive changes to Kenyan democratic systems.

SYMBOLIC NEW PRESIDENT

Regardless of political allegiance, the young people we spoke to were able to speak positively about both Raila Odinga and William Ruto, the two leading presidential candidates.

They described Raila Odinga as persistent, patient, knowledgeable and experienced, and appreciated the fact that he had been in politics since the early years of Kenya's independence.

But a key theme from discussions of the election result was the positive symbolism young people see in the election of President Ruto.

Many highlighted his journey from chicken farmer to president as an inspirational story that sends a powerful message to young people: that with motivation and planning, anyone can achieve success. Whatever their political preference, the positioning of Ruto as a 'hustla' seems to have resonated with young people.

Young Kenyans also see the election of Ruto as a turning point in Kenyan politics. Unlike previous presidents, they note that Ruto isn't from a political 'dynasty'. They feel his election has broken a cycle that has existed for decades. The victory of a political 'newcomer' therefore feels like a new start for governance in Kenya.

[Raila] has been after this for so long yet he has never given up, that is patience. After every five years he tries.

MALE, 26, THIKA

THE ELECTION RESULT

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The youth agenda will be voiced.

MALE, 24, ELDORET

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[I expect] the poverty level to come down.

MALE, 26, THIKA

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We want a president who will reduce food prices.

FEMALE, 19, MACHAKOS

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We expect the new government to support education.

MALE, 19, MACHAKOS



EXPECTATIONS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Young people in Kenya face many challenges, not least economically.

Shujaaz Inc research has shown that almost half of Kenyans aged 15–24 earn less than KES 3,000 a month (46% of girls and 50% of boys), far below the World Bank's threshold for extreme poverty.¹¹ And data from the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics suggests that less than 10% of new entrants to the job market secure a formal job¹²; according to the Shujaaz 2021 annual survey, the proportion of those employed/working for a company was 6% for males and 4% for females aged 15-24.

What's more, both in previous Shujaaz Inc research and in focus group discussions for this report, young people consistently reported feeling unheard and discriminated against by older generations and those in power. As we sawearlier, many also say they're sceptical of promises made by politicians.

But despite the scale of these challenges, young Kenyans in our focus group discussions expressed high hopes for the new government. This may be partly due to the general trend of high expectations for any new leader, but many said they felt optimistic that the new president will give greater voice to the youth agenda.

When asked more specifically what their expectations of the government were, many spoke of improving the economic situation for young people in Kenya, including better employment prospects. Some also mentioned improving the level of education in the country.

BEYOND THE VOTE: COMMUNITY & PARTICIPATION

THE KEY TAKEAWAYS:

YOUNG PEOPLE BECOME MORE ENGAGED WITH GOVERNANCE & VOTING WHEN THEY FEEL

SUPPORTED BY THEIR COMMUNITIES

BUT YOUNG KENYANS FEEL ISOLATED

AND SAY THEIR COMMUNITIES ARE DIVIDED

YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO BE POSITIVE ACTORS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

AND BE RECOGNISED AS SUCH

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Young people's optimism around electoral process and the symbolism of the 2022 result could signify a window in which trust in democratic systems is high – and therefore a chance for greater youth engagement with governance.

But as we observed in the first section of this report, youth voter registration remained low in 2022, and there are several barriers to engagement that must be removed if progress is to be made.

One of the most significant of these is rooted in community, and where young people fit into it. In Generation Engaged, a previous Shujaaz Inc study on youth engagement with governance, it was observed that 'governance is about more than government. It's about how local communities are run, connected, organised and networked.'¹³

When young people feel isolated and disempowered within their communities, and when they feel they don't have opportunities to make an impact, they are less likely to engage with governance – and are less likely to vote in elections.

Conversely, as we observed in the first edition of Youth Pulse, young Kenyans who felt a strong sense of social engagement in their lives – those who felt supported by their communities – were markedly more likely to express an intention to vote in the general election.

INTENT TO VOTE IN 2022, BY PERCEIVED COMMUNITY SUPPORT¹⁴



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Community means people living in the same place, believing in the same things; they have certain rules, respect each other, and do things according to an institution or to their agenda.

MALE, 25, THIKA

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I would say I am not in a community because not everyone is from that community, most have come in from different places; so, there is some suspicion before you get to know each other.

MALE, 25, THIKA

BEYOND **THE VOTE: COMMUNITY &** PARTICIPATION

Community is a place where you can get help and can help many.

FEMALE, 19, MACHAKOS

There is a name mostly used by the Indians, I have forgotten it. But it's related to social status. who is rich and who is broke. The rich do not hang out with the poor.

MALE, 25, THIKA

I don't have a mentor. I am on my own. People are not willing to share their experiences. I decided to be alone.

MALE. 19. MACHAKOS

"Community is a place where you can get help and help many"

How do young people define a community? In the focus group discussions conducted by Shujaaz Inc in October 2022, young Kenyans shared similar definitions. Their collective testimony identified four core characteristics that separate a community from a mere group of people:



GROUNDED IN THEM



MUTUAL RESPECT AND SUPPORT

A SENSE OF

UNITY AND GOOD COMMUNICATION **WORKING TOGETHER TO SOLVE COMMUNITY** ISSUES

When these four characteristics are present, young people feel engaged and appreciated. This, in turn, motivates them to contribute to their communities including by voting.

DIVISION OVER UNITY: MANY FEEL COMMUNITY SUPPORT IS LACKING

While young Kenvans have a clear sense of what community means, most participants in the research said they do not live in functioning or supportive communities.

This results in young people feeling restricted and voiceless, limiting their motivation to engage in governance either at a local or national level.

Division: cultural, economic and generational

Many young Kenyans feel a sense of division, rather than unity, in their local areas. Often, they said, this is due to the fact that many residents are internal migrants from other parts of the country, who have different and often contradictory cultural values.

Another dividing factor is wealth, or lack of it. Many young people feel that their local areas are split between rich and poor, and that poverty makes them a target for discrimination and exclusion. The difficulty of finding a job or source of income also leads to competition rather than collaboration among citizens: few older people are willing to share their expertise and act as mentors to younger people, preferring to keep their knowledge, experience and contacts closely guarded.

Young Kenyans also consistently report feeling disregarded by older generations. Previous studies, such as Shujaaz Inc's Generation Engaged,¹⁵ have shown that a majority of young Kenyans don't feel they are given the opportunity to make an impact in their communities, and that negative rhetoric about young people fuels a generational disconnection.

Shujaaz Inc's latest discussions with young Kenyans show that these feelings persist. Respondents felt they were subject to discrimination by police and micromanagement from parents, among other things.

BEYOND THE VOTE: COMMUNITY & PARTICIPATION

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There are places you cannot go to because of age, you'll be discriminated against because some people feel you are too young.

MALE, 19, MACHAKOS

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The police are against young people.

MALE, 22, THIKA

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Parents are against young people as well. They will dictate even on the friends you are supposed to have.

MALE, 26, THIKA

YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO CONTRIBUTE: COULD THIS ELECTION BE A TURNING POINT?

Despite their concerns about lack of community support and their feelings of isolation, we know from previous research that young Kenyans are keen to make a positive difference to society.

In the first edition of Youth Pulse, we saw that 64% of young people felt they could play a role in local governance. We also saw that nearly half of young Kenyans are taking an active role in making their communities better places to live, despite the lack of opportunities.¹⁶

In the 2021 Shujaaz Inc annual survey, 82% of 15-to-24-year-olds (85% of boys and 79% of girls) said they had something to contribute to the community and to the world.¹⁷ And when asked in another survey by Shujaaz Inc about what they would do if they achieved success, the most popular answer among young Kenyans was that they would give back to their communities and help others.¹⁸

This willingness to contribute and desire to engage with society may present an opportunity in the context of the 2022 election.

If young people's positive experiences of the election and their feelings of optimism for the future of Kenyan governance can be harnessed, the 2022 vote may yet act as a turning point for a generation.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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

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 sample for the survey was 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.

 $\mbox{-}$ The participants of the survey were males and females, both urban and rural.

The <u>Kenya Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment Report</u>, a large-scale mixedmethod 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, Kakamage, 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.

- Dipstick SMS national survey with Shujaaz Inc audience, October 2022, N=293.
- A qualitative study with N=32 Shujaaz Inc audience members conducted in October 2022 in Nairobi (Kibera, Ruaka, Buruburu, South C), Eldoret, Nakuru, Thika and Machakos.



Cite this document as:

Shujaaz Inc, Youth Pulse - 'Breaking the Cycle': Young people's perspectives on the 2022 election. MAPEMA - Maintaining Peace through Early Warning, Monitoring and Analysis, November 2022.

This youth pulse was compiled as part of Maintaining Peace through Early Warning, Monitoring and Response (MAPEMA) project implemented by the **National Cohesion and Integration Commission, Code for Africa, Shujaaz Inc,** and **AI Fluence** with support from **UNDP** and **OHCHR** and funding from the **United Nations Peacebuilding Fund** and the **German Government**.











