

# Do young people act to make a difference?



## Key Findings

- Many youth say they can solve their own problems if they exert enough effort into finding a solution for themselves.
- Youth in Uganda believe they can handle difficulties based on their own coping capabilities.
- Many believe that they have no say in how the government runs the country.
- It is also a common belief that voting is the only way in which people can have a say in how the government runs.

## Introduction

Twaweza undertakes numerous communication interventions particularly focused on young people, with the aim of influencing knowledge and norms and promoting civic engagement. There are a number of key factors that determine whether people might be willing to take private, public, individual or collective actions to address problems they are facing. A major driving force for people's willingness and ability to become more active is their sense of self-efficacy, general and political.

Self-efficacy is effectively people's own perceptions of their ability to overcome obstacles and meet their own goals. Naturally, a person's sense of their capacity in this regard will play an important role in determining how he or she acts to address challenges.<sup>1</sup> The concept of self-efficacy is relevant in the context of interventions meant to foster or enhance citizen agency. Therefore, when Twaweza commissioned a survey in 2014 among Ugandans aged 15-35, an important component included looking at whether young people in Uganda are active in tackling community problems, whether they approach government with their issues and of their own sense of political and general self-efficacy.

<sup>1</sup>The concept of self-efficacy was introduced by Bandura (1977) as a key component of his social-cognitive theory. He hypothesized that, "expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences" (p. 191).

This brief presents findings in three parts, exploring young Uganda’s senses of self-efficacy, their political efficacy and what actions they have already taken in their community.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted by Ipsos Synovate, and included interviews with 2,432 respondents distributed across Uganda’s six regions (Central, Eastern, Kampala, Northern, Western, and West Nile). The estimates are representative<sup>2</sup> of the views and habits of Ugandans nationwide between the ages of 15-35. All figures are based on estimates using the entire sample population unless otherwise noted. Data and questionnaires are available on the Twaweza website [www.twaweza.org](http://www.twaweza.org)



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<sup>2</sup>The estimates reported below have been weighted to account for oversampling of urbanites and also correct for other features of the survey design. This includes the fact that the survey was stratified across rural and urban areas, with respondents clustered in enumeration areas within each region. Enumeration areas were selected with equal probability within each region. The survey was analyzed using STATA, which allows for automated correction of survey design effects.

This brief includes results based on regression analysis, which is a statistical technique for estimating the relationship among a set of variables. Whereas correlations can tell us about the relationship between two variables and regressions can tell us about the influence that a set of variables together exert upon an outcome of interest (e.g., the effect that rural/urban status, gender, and wealth when considered together have on education).

**Table 1: General self-efficacy among Ugandan youth**

<b>General Self-Efficacy Scale Question</b>	<b>Average Score (range 1-4)</b>
1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	3.1
2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want	3.0
3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals	3.1
4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	2.8
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations	2.8
6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort	3.0
7. I remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on coping abilities	2.9
8. When I am confronted with problems, I can usually find several solutions	3.0
9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution	3.1
10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way	2.8

## Self Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations.<sup>3</sup> Given the complexity of assessing this, self-efficacy is generally measured using scales. To assess Ugandan youth's sense of self-efficacy a ten item scale was used. Answers were given on a 4-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree).

### **Fact 1: Young Ugandans have a strong sense of their own ability to succeed**

Table 1 above shows the Uganda respondents' average answers to the ten statements about general self-efficacy. In general the responses were consistent with each other.<sup>4</sup>

Although it is instructive to look at the average level of agreement to each of these statements, general self-efficacy is measured as a single figure that adds the scores for all of these statements (so it ranges 10-40). In Uganda the self-efficacy score is 29.2. This is very close to the average from a study of general self-efficacy in 25 countries which was 29.6.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This is the General Self-Efficacy Scale; original version of this scale was developed by Jerusalem and Schwarzer in 1981, first as a 20-item version and later as a reduced 10-item version (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> As illustrated by the Cronbach's Alpha of .76. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of internal consistency. It can range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater consistency. As a rule of thumb, measures with a Cronbach's Alpha above .70 are considered to have reasonable internal consistency.

<sup>5</sup> The average was reported by Scholz et al. (2002) in their study of General Self-Efficacy in 25 countries. The average self-efficacy composite score they report for these countries does not include any African countries or many developing countries.

Using regression analysis, we find that older respondents are more likely to report higher self-efficacy when holding other variables constant. Similarly rural respondents and those of higher socioeconomic status also have higher self-efficacy.<sup>6</sup> After accounting for these significant factors, there was no difference in self-efficacy between men and women.

### Political Self Efficacy

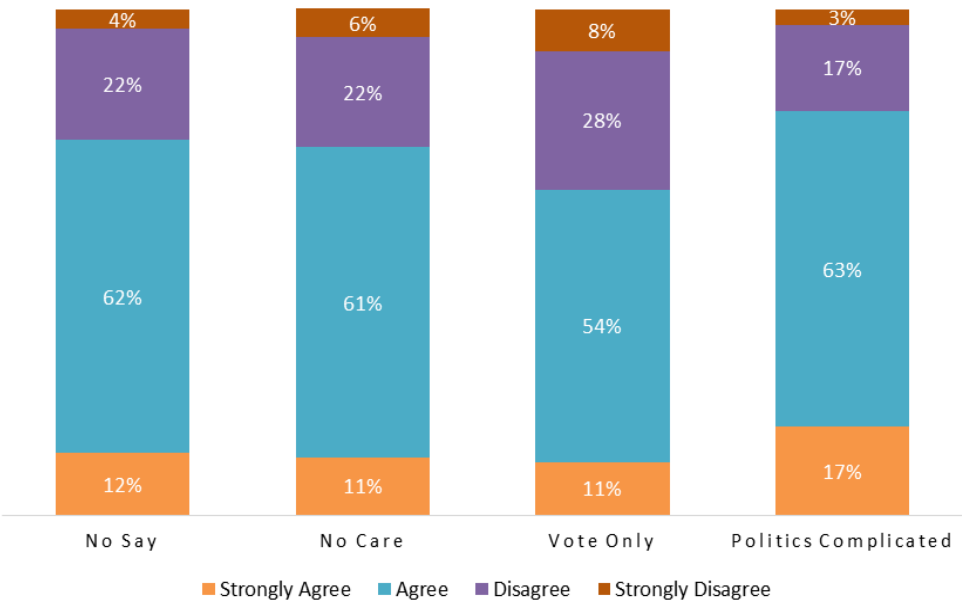
Another important dimension of self-efficacy is *political* efficacy, which relates to people’s perceptions of their own political capacity – the ability to engage with and influence political processes. In order to measure political self-efficacy, a four item scale was used, composed of the following statements:<sup>7</sup>

- People like me don’t have any say about what the government does (“No Say”)
- I don’t think public officials care much about what people like me think (“No Care”)
- Voting is the only way people have any say in how the government runs (“Vote Only”)
- Sometimes politics and government can seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what is going on (“Politics Complicated”)

**Fact 2: Young Ugandans have low political self-efficacy**

Figure 1 illustrates Ugandans’ responses to statements in the political self-efficacy scale. Broadly, young Ugandans agree with these statements indicating low political self-efficacy.

**Figure 1: Political self-efficacy**



<sup>6</sup> The positive coefficient on age shows that older respondents are more likely to have higher reported self-efficacy, holding gender, rural/urban setting, and socioeconomic status constant. The effect is not huge – it suggests that on average, an increase of age by one year is associated with a less than 0.1 increase on the 40-point self-efficacy scale. The coefficient on rural indicates that moving from an urban to rural area is associated with a 0.8 increase on the self-efficacy scale. Finally, moving from low to medium SES, or from medium to high SES, is associated with a 0.6 increase.

<sup>7</sup> Measure developed by Pollock (1983), based on responses to four questions from the 1972 National Election Study conducted by the U.S.-based Center for Political Studies.

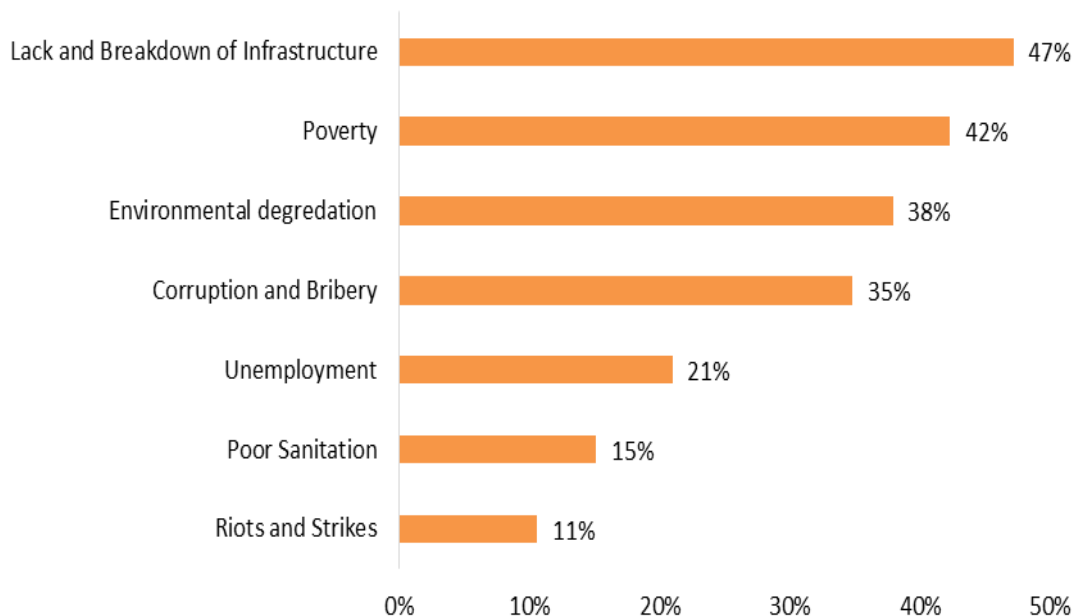
Further, the four item scale can be grouped into internal (a person’s sense of their own political capacity) and external (a person’s sense of the external environment and how conducive it is to political action on their part) political self-efficacy. External political self-efficacy is derived from adding No Say and No Care while internal political self-efficacy comes from adding Vote Only and Politics Complicated. Internal and external political self-efficacy are reported at similar levels among young Ugandans, and there are no significant differences in terms of gender, rural/urban, socioeconomic status, or age. On the other hand, if we standardize the two measures so that they fall between 0 and 1, we see that political efficacy is considerably lower than self-efficacy (.40 vs. .73 on average).<sup>8</sup>

### Citizen Agency and Action

Although self-efficacy, political and general, are an important predictor of whether people are willing and able to take actions to address their challenges and meet their goals, we also asked young people of their direct experiences in this regard. Respondents were asked to identify major challenges in their community, whether they had taken or would consider taking action on any of these issues, who they generally turn to for help and who in their community they admire and why.

**Fact 3: Infrastructure and poverty are the major challenges identified by young Ugandans**  
Ugandan youth report a number of problems affecting their communities. The most commonly reported problems are the lack of and breakdown of infrastructure, poverty, corruption/bribery and environmental degradation as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Commonly reported problems**



<sup>8</sup> Despite the standardization to a common range, this comparison is imperfect since the variables are not measured in precisely the same way.



**Fact 4: Almost 1 out of 3 young Ugandans have taken action to address community issues**

When asked whether they, personally, have taken any action to address community issues, almost 1 out of 3 young Ugandans (31%) say they have done so. Among respondents who report not having taken action, nearly half (49%) say they would consider taking action but only one out of three (34%) say they know, or could figure out, how to go about taking action.

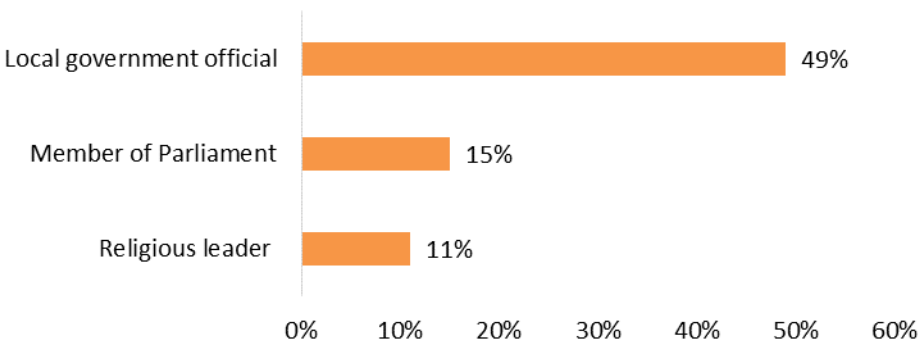
We again wanted to find out whether some respondents are more likely to take action than others, according to the characteristics measured in the survey. Using regression analysis we find women are less likely to take action as compared to men: for every five men that take action, only three women will do so.<sup>9</sup> Age also has a small effect, with older people slightly more likely to take action; respondents with higher socioeconomic status are also more likely to take action than those with lower socioeconomic status.

Then, we added both general and political self-efficacy into the mix. Interestingly, while political self-efficacy has no effect on the likelihood of taking action, general self-efficacy has a very significant effect (when holding all other variables constant): young Ugandans with the maximum reported self-efficacy are seven times more likely to take action than those with the minimum self-efficacy.

**Fact 5: Young Ugandans rely on Government to help them solve problems**

When asked who in their community they would turn to in order to help solve the main problem, nearly half of the respondents (49%) say they would turn to a local government official. The next most popular response was their Member of Parliament (15%) followed by a religious leader (11%).

**Figure 3: To solve the main problem, who would you turn to?**



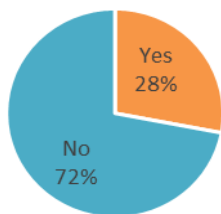
Despite the large proportion of respondents who say they would turn to their local government officials for help, less than three out of ten young Ugandans (28%) report having done so (Figure 4a). Of those who have done so, just under seven out of ten (68%) said that it helped (Figure 4b). Of those who have not done so, just under six out of ten (58%) say they would consider it (Figure 4c).

<sup>9</sup>. Based on odds ratios as calculated using logistic regression.

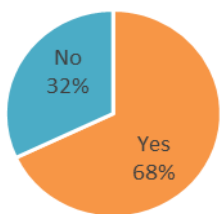
**Fact 6: Few young Ugandans admire anyone in their community**

Respondents were asked whether there is someone in their community that they really admire because they have done something special. Only one out of three young Ugandans (36%) indicated that there was such a person. The most popular admired people were community leaders (36%), followed by political leaders (19%) and business partners (10%). The most commonly given reasons for admiring such people were their ability to address the community’s problems (30%) or having initiated many developmental programs (15%).

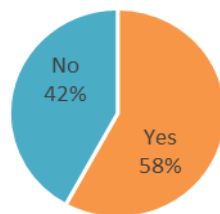
*Figure 4a: Have you been to a local government official for help with a problem?*



*Figure 4b: If so, did it help?*



*Figure 4c: If not, would you consider it?*



**Conclusions**

The survey reveals some novel and important information about young Ugandans’ perceptions of self-efficacy and the influence of such perceptions for taking action to improve their lives. Young Ugandans report average self-efficacy levels in keeping with those of people in other countries who have been asked similar questions. Reported self-efficacy is considerably higher than political efficacy, perhaps reflecting young Ugandans’ mistrust of the Ugandan political system.

Furthermore, self-efficacy appears to matter more than gender, age, and socioeconomic status, and self-efficacy has important influence on whether or not young Ugandans take action to address the most significant problems affecting their communities. This suggests that interventions to increase self-efficacy might play an important role in convincing people to take action to address the problems they face. Perhaps what is needed is an understanding of initiatives or interventions that could increase young people’s self-efficacy.

Furthermore, the findings on reported citizen agency are mixed. It is interesting to note that young Ugandans would look to the government to solve problems in their community, but only 28% report having ever talked with a local official about a problem, and less than half of those who have not do so would even consider it. And although a third of young Ugandans report that they personally have taken an action to address a problem, of those who have not done so (but would) only a third know where to turn or what to do. Along these findings, we see that young Ugandans generally do not admire people in their own community (although a third do), suggesting that perhaps there are not many realistic role models to emulate.

These findings scratch the surface of understanding young Ugandan’s engagement within their communities. What makes young Ugandans tick, what issues would galvanize them, what kinds of role models would inspire them to take civic action? Twaweza needs to explore these issues further in order to encourage citizen agency among young people in Uganda.

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