



# The state of Kenya

## Kenyan citizens' opinions on the state of the nation

### 1. Introduction

As we head towards the end of 2021, with less than a year remaining before the election scheduled for August 2022, citizens of Kenya face a range of challenges. This is partly a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, which has for more than 18 months now caused havoc across the globe, including here in Kenya – leading to major changes to lives and livelihoods, some temporary and some likely permanent. Other challenges pre-date the pandemic, including the state of the national economy and individuals' own jobs and livelihoods, corruption and security. Citizens' views on these matters and others can shape how they engage with election campaigns, and indeed how they choose to cast their vote.

This brief presents data on citizens' knowledge, attitudes and practices on matters relating to the state of the country. What are the most serious problems facing them in

the local areas, and what do they see as the most serious problems facing the country as a whole? How do they see the country's progress on key policy matters including economic management, job creation, security and public services? And how do they see the country's overall direction at this time?

Data for the brief come from a special round of Twaweza's *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile-phone panel survey. This was created through random sampling from a database of contacts from previous surveys to establish a new representative panel of the country's population. Statistical weightings have been applied to the panel, to ensure it is fully representative at national level, for rural and urban areas, as well as for Nairobi and Mombasa. For this brief, data were collected from 3,000 respondents in the fifth round of the special *Sauti za Wananchi* panel, conducted between September 11 and 24, 2021.

Key findings include:

- Citizens point to economic challenges as the most serious problems in their area
- Citizens also cite economic challenges as the main issue at national level
- Citizens see corruption as national problem, but transport and water as local problems
- Most citizens are dissatisfied with the country's direction across a range of areas
- Satisfaction with the country's direction in key policy areas is low compared to recent years
- Citizens are generally more positive about the coming year than the current situation
- 7 out of 10 citizens say the country is heading in the wrong overall direction

## 2. Kenyan citizens' experiences and opinions on national progress

### Insight 1: Citizens point to economic challenges as the most serious problems in their area

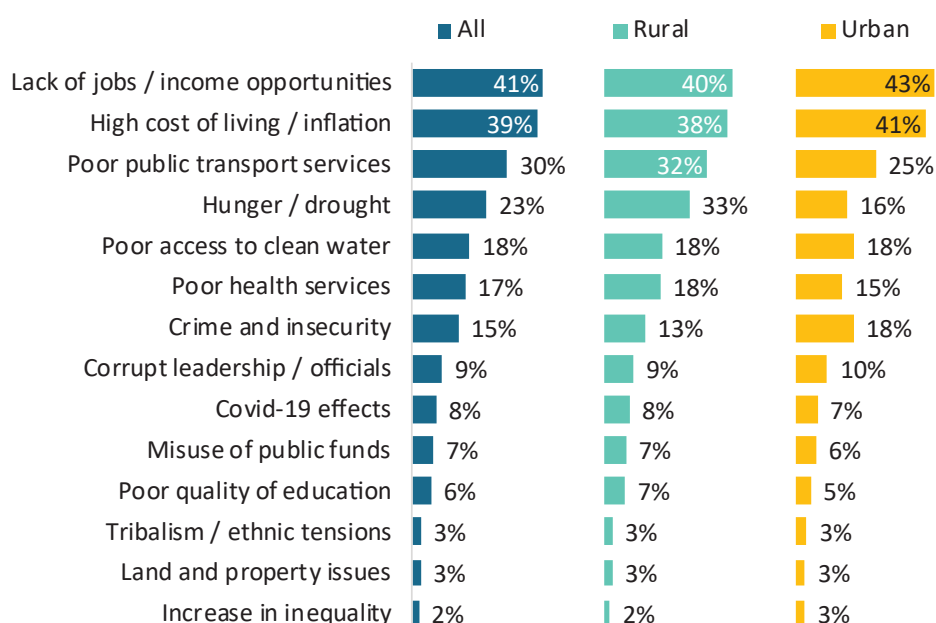
The two top issues highlighted by citizens as being among the most serious problems in their locality are both economic matters. Four out of ten citizens (41%) point to the lack of jobs / income opportunities, and a similar number (39%) point to the high cost of living and inflation. These are the top two issues in both rural and urban areas.

Other issues highlighted by significant numbers include public transport (30%), hunger (23%, rising to 33% in rural areas), clean water (18%), health services (17%), and crime (15%)(Figure 1 on opposite page)

### Insight 2: Citizens also cite economic challenges as the main issue at national level

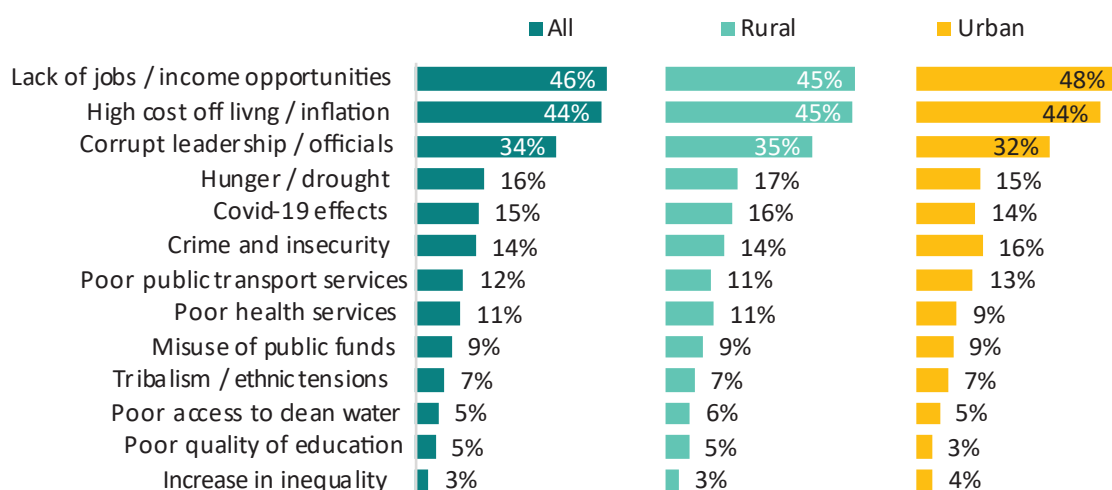
The top issues citizens highlight as the biggest problems facing the country as a whole are the same: lack of jobs and income opportunities (46%) and the high cost of living and inflation (44%). Third on the list is corruption (34%), followed by hunger (16%), the effects of Covid-19 (15%), crime (14%), public transport (12%) and health services (11%) (Figure 2 on opposite page)

**Figure 1: What are the three most serious problems experienced in your locality?<sup>1</sup>**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel r5 (11-24 Sep, 2021)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

**Figure 2: What are the three most serious problems experienced in Kenya today?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel r5 (11-24 Sep, 2021)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

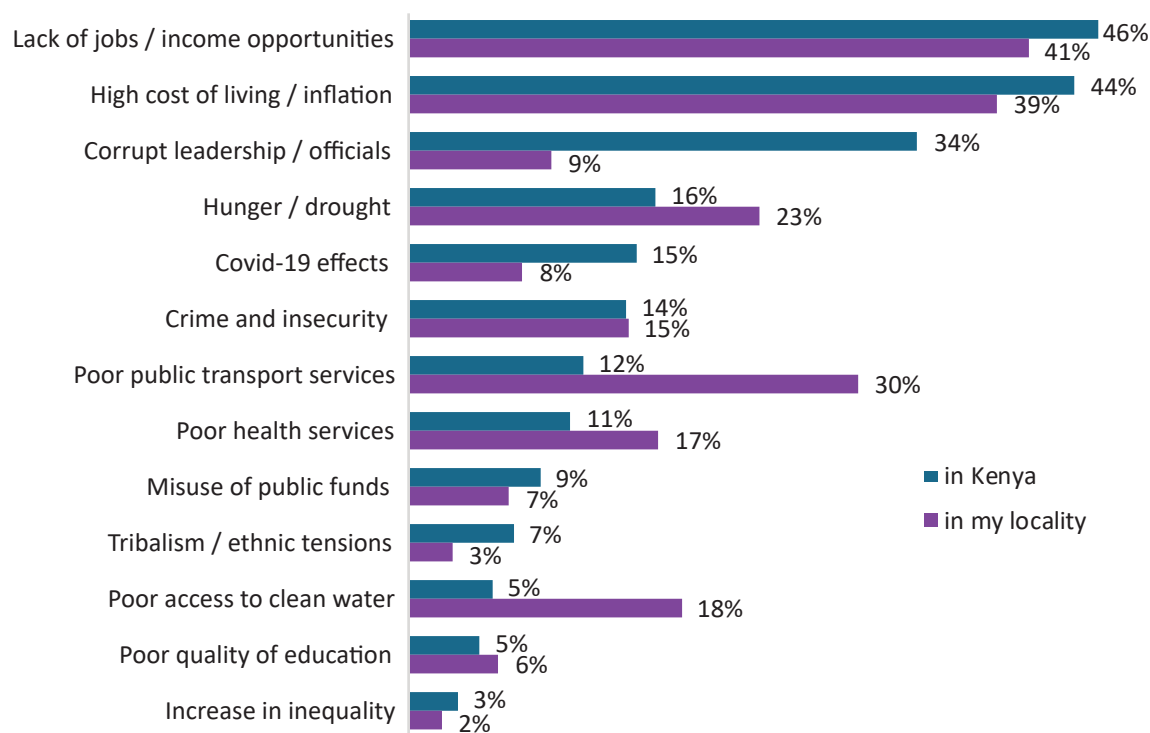
1 Percentages in charts may not add up to 100% due to rounding

### Insight 3: Citizens see corruption as a national problem, but transport and water as local problems

The list of problems highlighted by citizens at national and local levels are different in several interesting ways. Most particularly, corruption is ranked as one of the most serious problems at national level by 34% of Kenyans, compared to just 9% who say corruption is a big problem in their locality. Similarly, Covid-19 is seen as a national rather than a local problem.

On the other hand, several issues are ranked as more serious problems locally than nationally. This includes public transport (30% locally, 12% nationally), access to clean water (18% locally, 5% nationally), hunger (23% locally, 16% nationally) and health services (17% locally, 11% nationally).

**Figure 3: What are the three most serious problems experienced in Kenya today? And in your locality?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel r5 (11-24 Sep, 2021)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

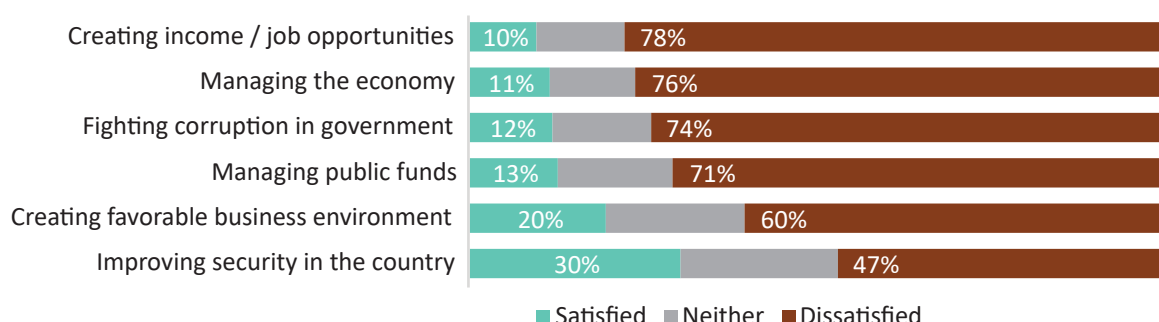
### Insight 4: Most citizens are dissatisfied with the country's direction across a range of areas

Across a range of policy areas, citizens are broadly dissatisfied with the country's direction. Just one out of ten citizens (10%) are satisfied with the country's direction on the creation of jobs and income opportunities, compared to almost eight out of ten (78%) who are dissatisfied.

Similar dissatisfaction applies across management of the economy (76% dissatisfied, 11% satisfied), addressing corruption (74% dissatisfied, 12% satisfied), managing public funds (71% dissatisfied, 13% satisfied) and creating a favourable business environment (60% dissatisfied, 20% satisfied).

Only on security matters is the picture more balanced. On these issues, three out of ten citizens (30%) are satisfied with the country's direction, though this still trails considerably behind those who are dissatisfied: close to half (47%).

**Figure 4: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the direction Kenya is headed in the following areas?**



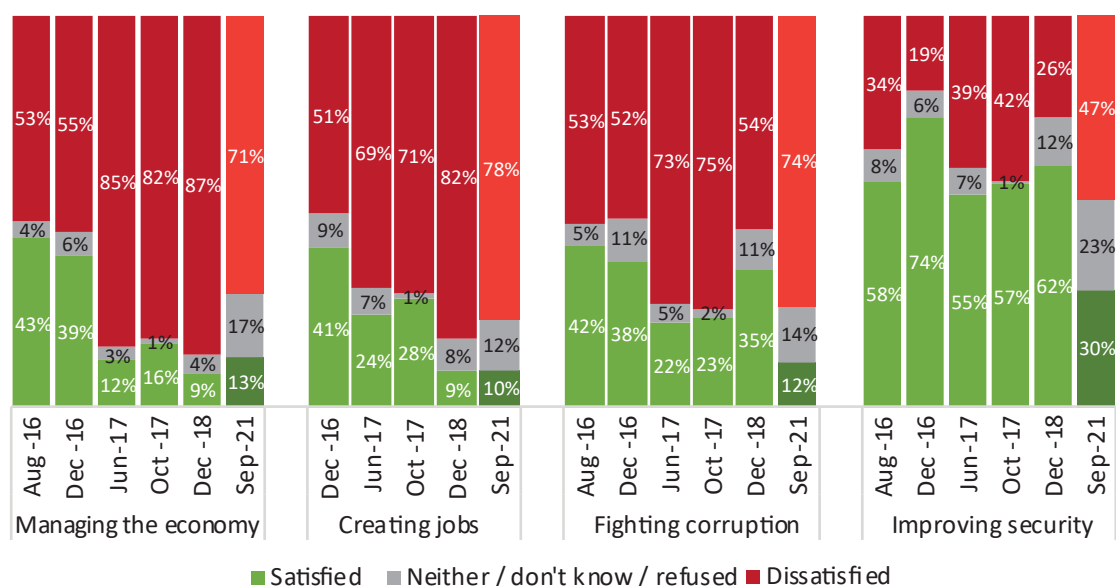
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel r5 (11-24 Sep, 2021)

**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

### Insight 5: Satisfaction with the country's direction in key policy areas is low compared to recent years

Satisfaction with Kenya's direction on key policy areas is low compared to recent years. On economic management, satisfaction has been low since 2017 and remains low in 2021. On job creation, satisfaction has been falling over the past five years. On fighting corruption and improving security, satisfaction with the country's direction is currently lower than at any time in the past five years. This is the first time more citizens have been dissatisfied than satisfied with progress on security matters.

**Figure 5: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the direction Kenya is headed in the following areas?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel r5 (11-24 Sep, 2021)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

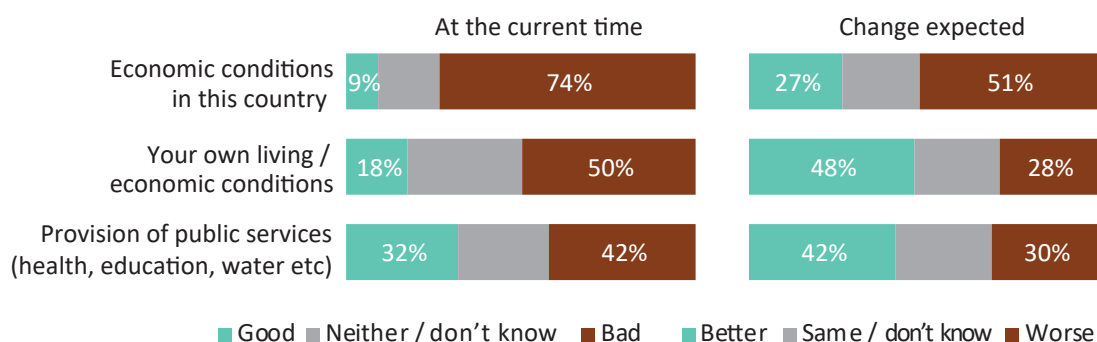
## Insight 6: Citizens are generally more positive about the coming year than the current situation

Citizens are generally disappointed by the current situation in Kenya, but are more hopeful that things will improve in the coming twelve months.

Just one out of ten citizens (9%) say the current economic conditions in Kenya are good, compared to three quarters (74%) who say they are bad. Similarly, citizens are more likely to say their own living conditions are bad (50%) than good (18%) and more likely to say public services are bad (42%) than good (32%).

On national economic conditions, more citizens expect things to get worse (51%) rather than better (27%) over the coming year. However, citizens are more optimistic on their own living conditions, with more expecting an improvement (48%) than for things to get worse (28%). Similarly, more citizens expect public services to get better (42%) than get worse (30%) over the coming twelve months.

**Figure 6: In general, how would you describe the following at the current time?  
And how do you expect things to change in the next 12 months?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel r5 (11-24 Sep, 2021)

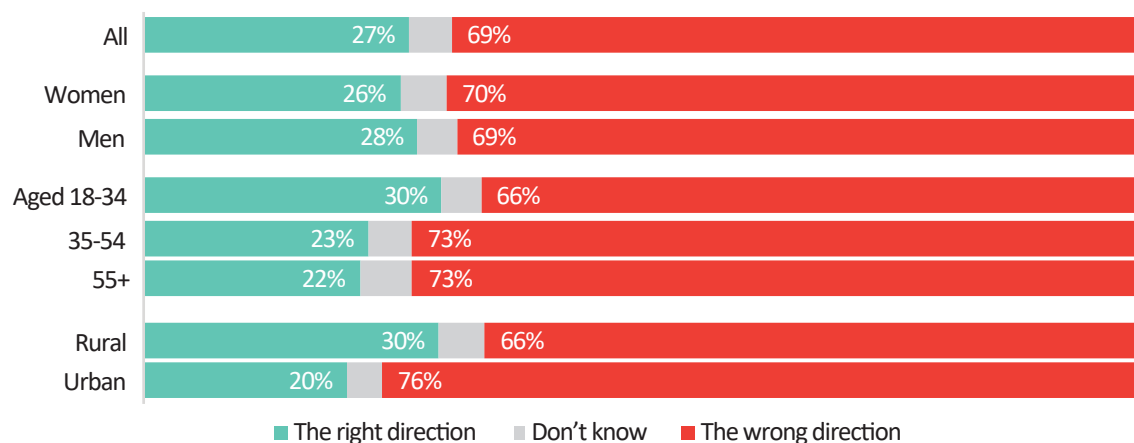
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

## Insight 7: 7 out of 10 citizens say the country is heading in the wrong overall direction

Seven out of ten citizens (69%) say that Kenya is going in the wrong overall direction at present, compared to three out of ten (27%) who say it is going in the right direction.

These figures are consistent across women and men, though younger citizens (30%) and those in rural areas (30%) are more likely to say the country is heading in the right direction, compared to older citizens (22-23%) and urban residents (20%).

**Figure 7: Overall, would you say Kenya is going in the right or wrong direction?**

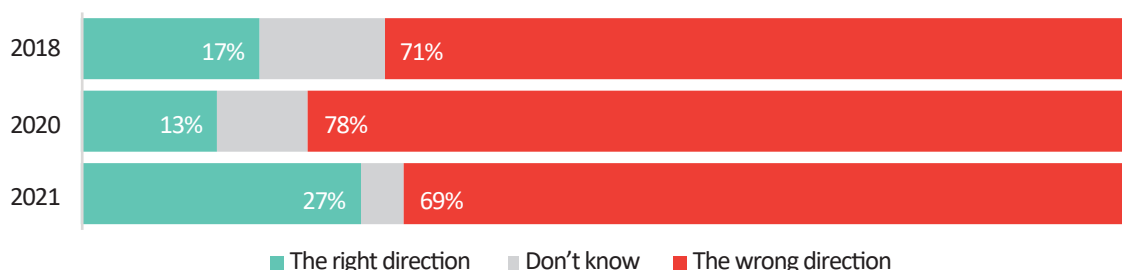


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel r5 (11-24 Sep, 2021)

**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

Nevertheless, the proportion of citizens who see the country as heading in the right direction has increased compared to recent years – from 17% in 2018 and 13% in 2020 to 27% this year.

**Figure 8: Overall, would you say Kenya is going in the right or wrong direction?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel r5 (11-24 Sep, 2021)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

### 3. Conclusions

A clear theme emerges from this brief: that citizens are concerned about the state of the economy. A lack of jobs and the high cost of the living are some way ahead of anything else on their list of local and national concerns. This is likely due in part, but probably not entirely, to the Coronavirus pandemic and measures taken in response.

Other problems vary according to whether something is seen as a local or national problem. Corruption is seen as a national rather than local problem, while public transport, water, hunger and health services are seen much more as local problems. This could be linked in part to devolution and the specific responsibilities accorded to counties. It could also be that such challenges as public transport and water supplies are seen and felt locally but lack prominence in national public discourse.

More broadly, the consistently low (across several years) and declining levels of confidence in the country's direction across a number of important policy areas is alarming. Whether it comes to job creation, corruption or security, citizens are less positive now than at any point in the past five years. And although slightly more now say the country is heading in the right direction than said the same in 2018 and 2020, the majority still say the opposite.

Looking towards a general election in 2022, these figures will be of concern to those currently in government. They represent fertile ground for opposition candidates to appeal for change.