



Press Release | 7 March 2022

Voter registration, intention to vote is markedly lower than during the same period in 2017
Young Kenyans, and those living in the arid North and East are the least engaged

Monday 7 March, Nairobi: Seven out of ten Kenyans (71%) say they are likely to vote in the upcoming elections while one out of 10 are not sure (11%) and the remaining two out of ten (18%) are not registered or do not intend to vote. This is a marked decline from 2017 when almost all Kenyans (94%) said they would vote in the upcoming elections at the time. Similarly, in June 2017, 99% of Kenyans said they were registered to vote compared to 85% who currently report being registered.

In both cases, young citizens and Kenyans living in the arid North and East are much less likely to report being registered or planning to vote.

However for those who have registered, they describe the process positively. Seven out of ten Kenyans say their experience was good or very good. Similarly many agreed that the process was simple and clear (60%), inclusive (58%), and quick (46%) and that officials were supportive and provided assistance as needed (41%).

These findings were released by Twaweza in collaboration with the Organisation of African Youth and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) in a brief titled *Ready to vote? Kenyan citizens' experiences and opinions ahead of the August 2022 general elections*. The briefs are based on data from *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative high-frequency mobile phone survey. The panel for this research was established through random sampling from a database of contacts from previous surveys to establish a new representative panel of the country's population. For this brief, data were collected from 3,000 respondents in the sixth round of the special *Sauti za Wananchi* panel, conducted between 20 December 2021 and 3 January 2022.

When asked why some Kenyans are not registered, citizens report that not planning to vote (44%), not having the required ID (33%) or not being inspired by the candidates or issues (20%) are the main reasons. And when asked why people may not vote even when they are registered, two out of three Kenyans (67%) state that voting does not change anything. Other reasons mentioned as to why people might not vote include that it takes too long or is too far (46%) or that they don't like any candidate or party (46%).

Strikingly, many Kenyans disagree with commonly stated reasons for voting. A small majority (57%) agree that voting is important to elect leaders who can help bring about change. However most Kenyans disagree that voting is important because: it is a democratic right (59% disagree); it allows citizens to change the destiny of the country (68% disagree); it enables citizens to hold leaders to account (75% disagree); or because it is an opportunity to bring change (82% disagree).

However, almost all Kenyans disagree that not voting means giving up your voice (90% disagree). This may be connected to increases in political activity by citizens more recently, compared to the previous election period. Citizens report discussing politics more with family and friends (81% compared to 79% in 2017), expressing political opinions more on social media (17% compared to 10%) or on radio (12% compared to 9%); and volunteering more for campaigns (28% compared to 22%). However fewer citizens report attending campaign rallies in 2021 (38%) compared to in 2017 (46%).

These lower levels of enthusiasm around voting appear, therefore, not to be driven by a lack of knowledge on logistical issues around the elections. Almost all Kenyans can name the entity responsible for coordinating elections as the IEBC (88%) and can name the date for the next elections (86%). Instead the data appear to show a lack of faith and confidence in electoral processes. This is emphasized by lack of trust in the IEBC, in particular in comparison to 2017. Around four out of ten Kenyans have confidence in the IEBC's ability to: ensure elections are free and fair (45% think they can); keep records for future verification (43%); report true results (39% think they can compared to 65% in 2017); and count votes honestly (41% think they can compared to 65% in 2017).

The perceptions and beliefs of Kenyans in terms of elections are based on information they get mostly from national TV (69%), radio (63%), social media (40%) and community radio (23%). But citizens do not have high levels of trust in these sources of media with less than half (48%) saying they trust what they see on TV a lot. Levels of trust in social media are the lowest with less than one out of ten Kenyans trusting what they read on Whatsapp (8%), Twitter (7%), Facebook (7%) and Instagram (5%).

Dr James Ciera, Country Lead for Twaweza in Kenya, said: *"There are some clear messages from voters in this survey. They do not trust the electoral process and the institutions tasked with overseeing it. They also do not believe in elections as a vehicle for change or progress. Although we can take some comfort in increased levels of engagement from citizens in other types of political activity, we must emphasize the importance of elections as the cornerstone of democracy – elections are vehicles for ensuring participation, engagement and accountability. We are calling on all actors – those overseeing elections, those engaged in voter education, media, artists, NGOs, government, political parties, religious leaders and others – to convey why elections matter to voters in meaningful ways."*

Michael Asudi, from the Organization of African Youth said: *"We are disappointed to see that youth are one of the least likely groups to be registered or express intention to vote. However, we are not surprised. Young people increasingly feel voiceless and distant from national politics and elections. We have to push for inclusive national dialogue on how we can rebuild trust in and enthusiasm for the electoral process especially among young voters."*

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Notes to Editors

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at www.twaweza.org / www.twaweza.org/resources/
- Twaweza works to address limited citizen agency and shrinking civic space in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. @TwawezaKe (Facebook), @Twaweza_Ke (Twitter), Twaweza East Africa (Instagram).
- Organization of African (OAY) Youth works to support meaningful youth engagement and participation. @OAYouthKenya (Facebook), @oayouthkenya (Twitter), oay_kenya (Instagram).
- IEBC is responsible for conducting or supervising referenda and elections to any elective body or office established by the Constitution, and any other elections as prescribed by an Act of Parliament. @IEBCKenya (Facebook), @IEBCKenya (Twitter) @IEBCKenya (Instagram)