



# Ready to vote?

## Kenyan citizens' experiences and opinions ahead of the August 2022 General Elections

### 1. Introduction

General elections are just around the corner – scheduled for August 2022. As always, they represent an opportunity for citizens to influence the country's overall direction and to hold leaders to account for their performance. Nevertheless, elections are no more than a blunt instrument – with citizens asked to choose between two or more broad collections of politicians and policies – rather than a precise tool for picking out details. Further, the history of recent elections in Kenya has been far from straightforward, including a controversially annulled election last time around, in 2017.

This brief presents data on citizens' experience and opinions on preparations for the August 2022 election. Are citizens aware of key details of the election? Are they registered to vote and do they intend to vote, and if not why not? How much are citizens engaging in political

activity, and where are they getting news on election-related matters? Do citizens have confidence in the ability of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) to conduct the election credibly? And do they worry that there might be a return to the violence that marred the 2007 election?

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 sixth round of the special *Sauti za Wananchi* panel, conducted between December 20, 2021 and January 3, 2022.

This brief was written and produced by Twaweza East Africa.

P. O. Box 13784-00800, Nairobi, Kenya  
t: +254 715 563720, +254 786 563722  
e: info@twaweza.org | www.twaweza.org/sauti



&



Key findings include:

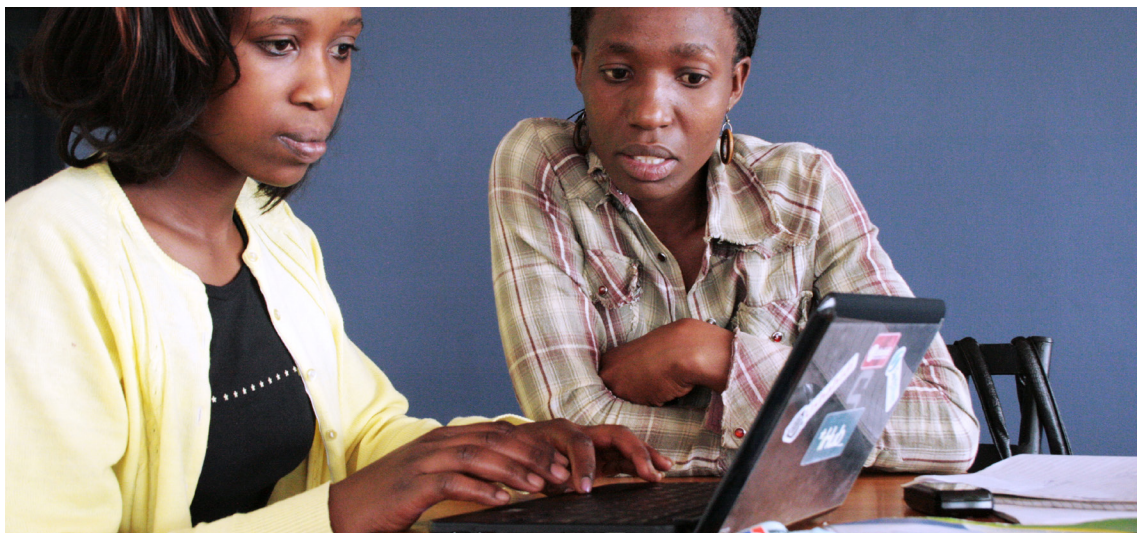
- Most citizens know of the IEBC and are aware of when the general election will be held
- Voter registration is currently lower than at the same time before the 2017 election
- Citizens mainly say that people may choose not to register because they do not intend to vote or because they do not have an ID card
- Most citizens are positive about their experience of the voter registration process
- Intention to vote is lower in 2022 than it was in 2017
- The main reasons suggested for why some people do not vote are that it changes little, or that voting is time consuming or that polling stations are distant
- 
- Citizens show signs of greater political activity now than in 2017
- Citizens have less confidence in the IEBC now than in 2017
- TV, radio and social media are citizens' main sources of news on election matters
- Citizens are divided as to whether there is any risk of election related violence in 2022

## 2. Citizens' experiences and opinions of election readiness in Kenya

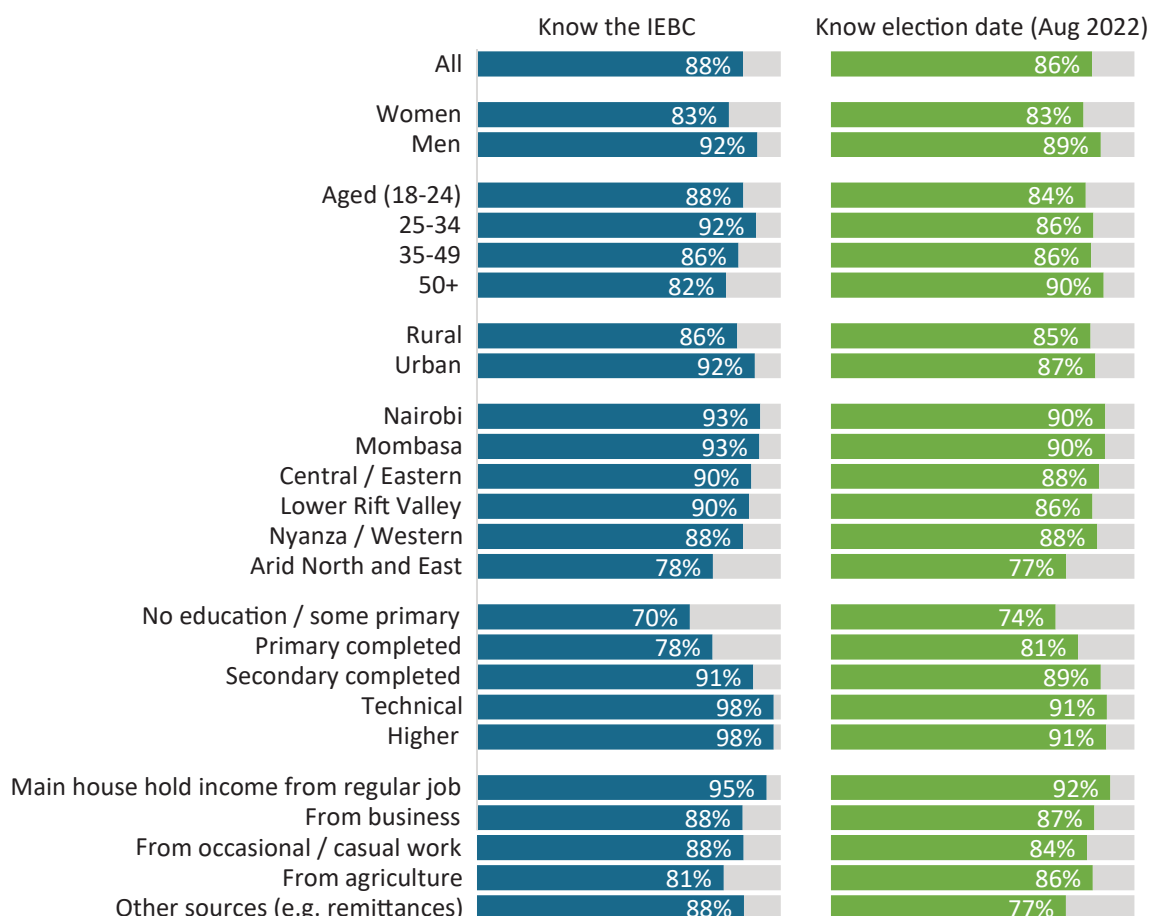
### Insight 1: Most citizens know the IEBC and when the general election will be held

Nine out of ten citizens (88%) know the name of the body that coordinates elections in Kenya – the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). A similar number (86%) know when the next general is due to be held – August 2022. A further 11% know it is due this year (2022) but are not sure which month (not shown in charts).

Awareness of these details is high across most demographic groups, though is a little lower in the arid north and west of the country, and among those with lower levels of education.



**Figure 1: Percentage who know the name of the body that coordinates elections in Kenya, and when the next general election is being held:**



**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)

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

## **Insight 2: Voter registration is currently lower than at the same time before the 2017 election**

Most citizens (85%) report that they have registered to vote, though the figure is lower than at a similar period before the 2017 elections (92%). There remains some time to raise this year's figure higher before the elections in August, as was seen in 2017.

**Figure 2: Are you a registered voter?**

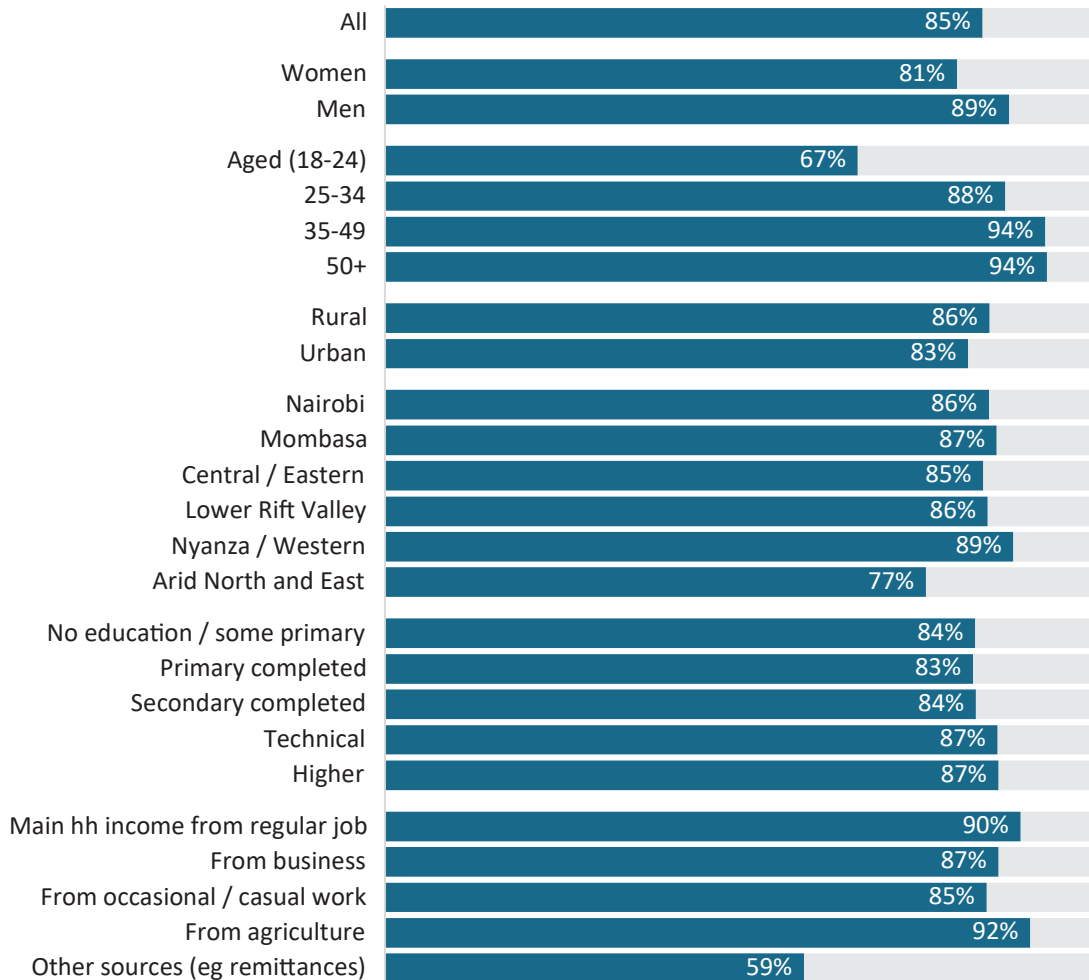


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022) and main panel r9 (Dec 2016) and r13 (Jun 2017)

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

Registration is currently lower among women, younger citizens (78%), who may not have been eligible to register for previous elections, and those in the north and west.

**Figure 3: Are you a registered voter?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)

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

### Insight 3: Not planning to vote or not having an ID are the main reasons given for why people may not register

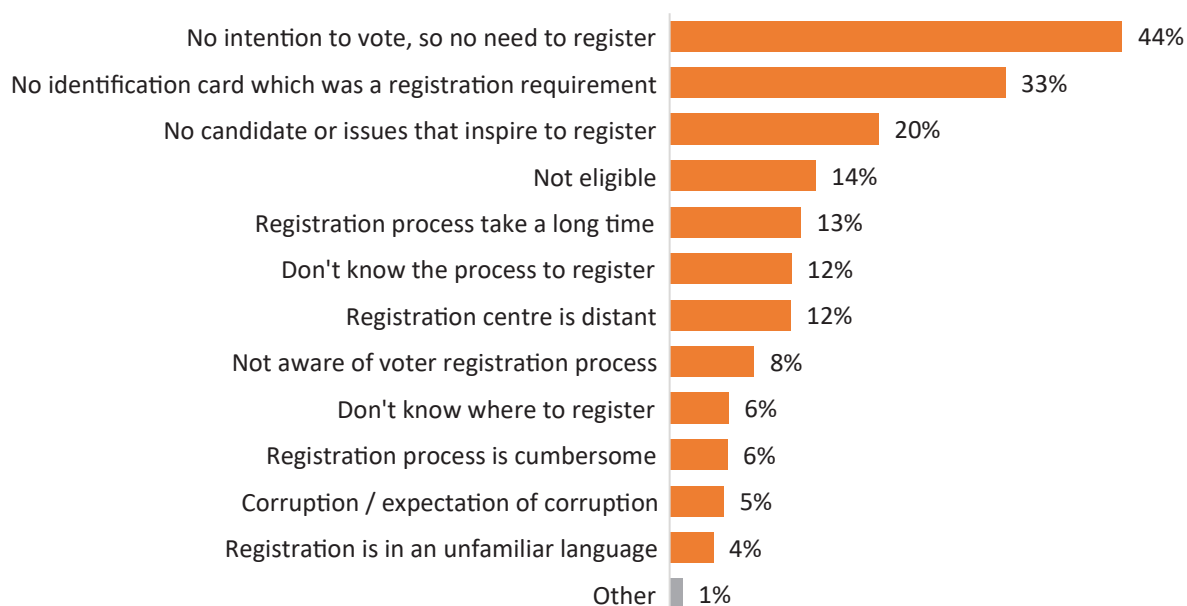
The main reasons given for explaining why some people choose not to register to vote are that they have no intention of voting (44%), and that they lack an ID card (33%).

Other reasons suggested include lack of candidates or issues that inspire (20%), and difficulties with the registration process such as it taking a lot of time (13%), registration centres being too far away (12%) or not knowing the process (12%).

The same list of reasons is given by women and men, and by younger and older citizens (not shown in charts).

The main reasons given by those who have themselves chosen not to register are similar – that they have no ID card (4%) or no intention of voting (4%) (not shown in charts).

**Figure 4: Why are some people not registered as voters?**  
(multiple responses permitted)

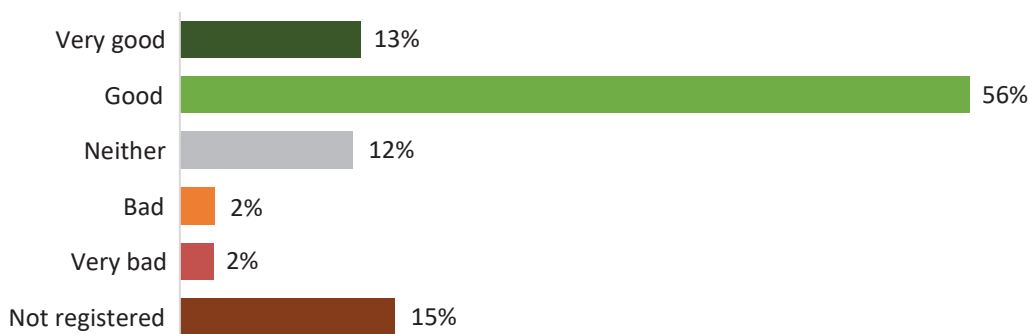


**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

### Insight 4: Most citizens are positive about their experience of the voter registration process, describing it as clear, simple and inclusive

Most citizens (69%) say the voter registration process was either very good (13%) or good (56%). This compares to a small number (4%) who say the process was bad (2%) or very bad (2%).

**Figure 5: How would you rate your experience with the voter registration process?**

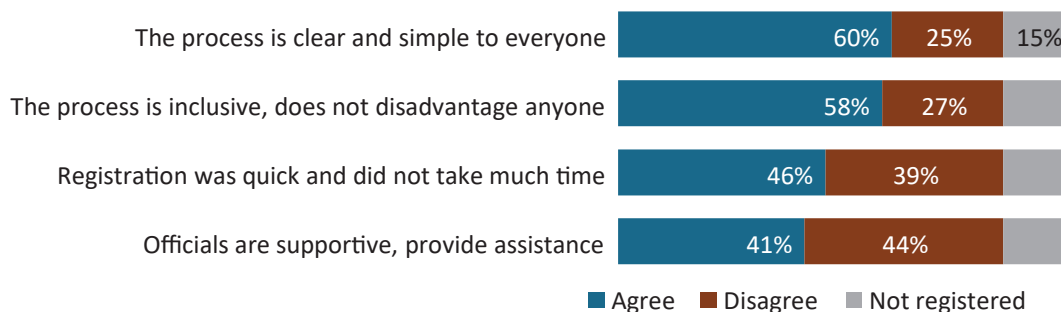


**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

Six out of ten citizens (60%) say the registration process is simple and clear, and a similar number say it is inclusive (58%).

Half (46%) say the registration process did not take much time, and four out of ten (41%) say officials were supportive and provided assistance where necessary. However, in these two cases, substantial numbers disagreed.

**Figure 6: Which of the following apply to your experience with voter registration?**



**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

### Insight 5: Intention to vote is lower in 2022 than in 2017

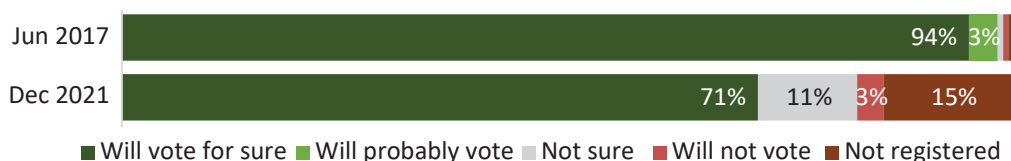
Fewer citizens now (71%) say they are certain to vote in the general elections than said the same a few months before the 2017 elections (94%). The difference is partially accounted for by the larger number of citizens who remain unregistered.

According to official data, 15.6 million citizens voted in the August 2017 general election, representing 61% of the voting age population<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/156/40>



**Figure 7: What is the likelihood you will vote in the upcoming general election?**

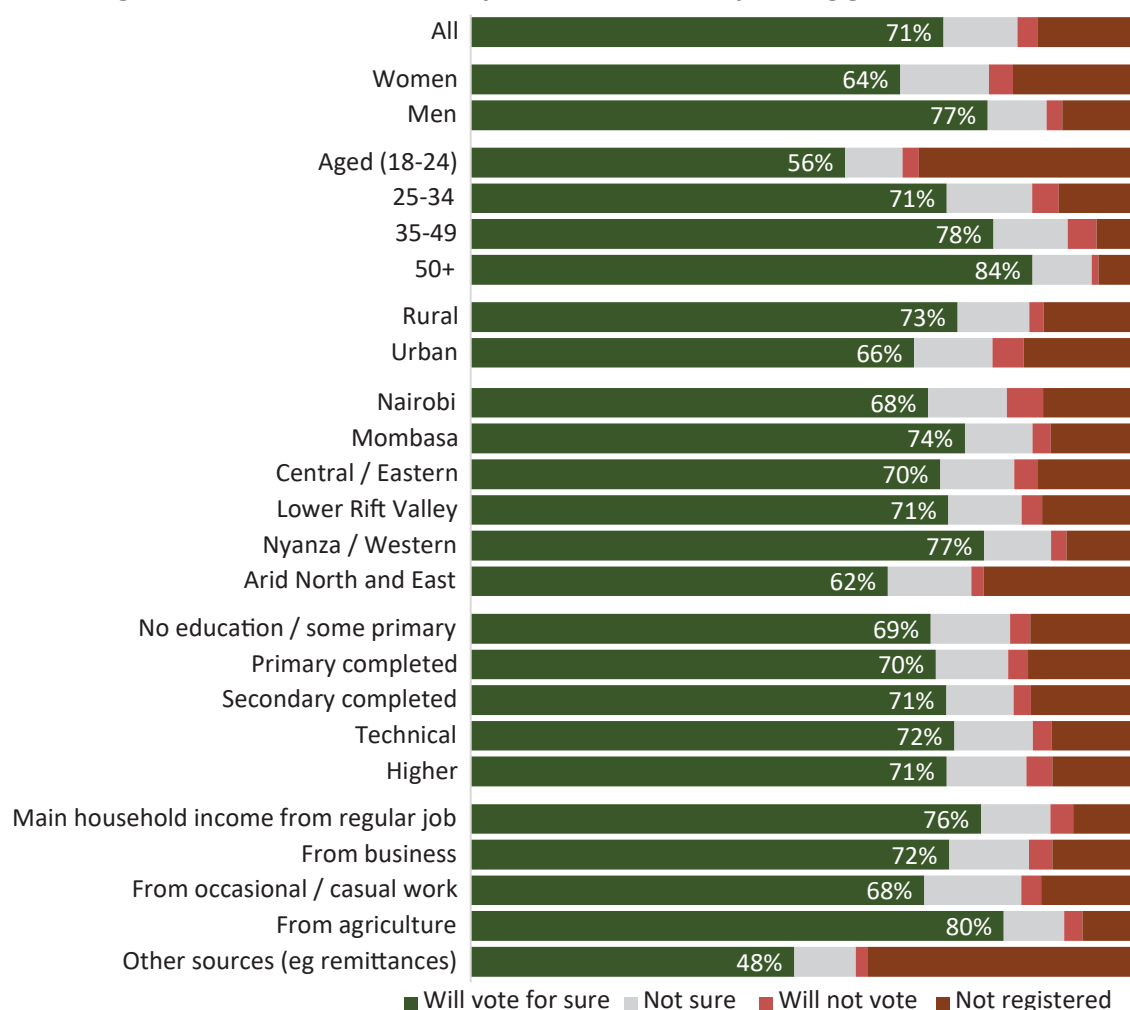


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022) and main panel r13 (Jun 2017)

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

Intention to vote is lower among women, young people, those in urban areas and those in the arid north and west of the country.

**Figure 8: What is the likelihood you will vote in the upcoming general election?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)

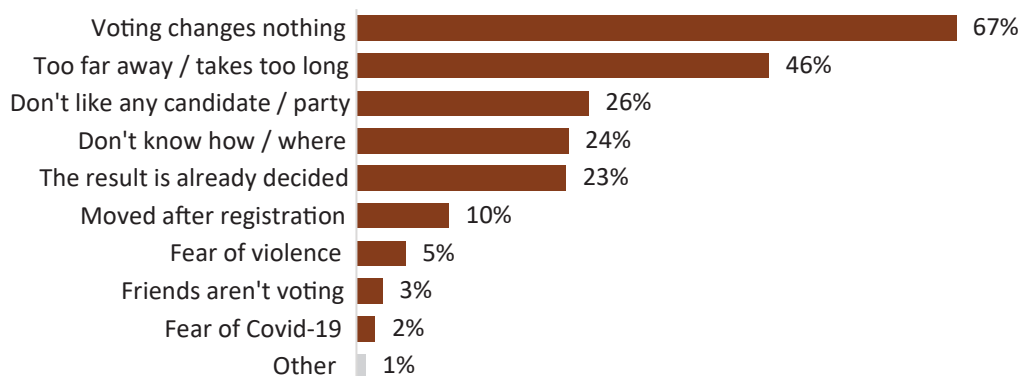
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

## Insight 6: The main reasons suggested for why people do not vote are that it changes little, voting is time consuming, and polling stations are distant

The main reasons suggested for why some people do not vote, even when they are registered, are the perception that voting changes nothing (67%), and that polling stations are too far away or voting takes too long (46%). Other reasons suggested are a lack of candidate or parties they support (26%), that some don't know how or where to vote (24%), and that some believe the results have already been decided by those in authority (23%).

Women and men and different age groups give very similar reasons (not shown in charts).

**Figure 9: Why might some people not vote, even when they are registered?**  
(multiple responses permitted)



**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)

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

Those who personally say they may not vote give similar reasons, most notably the view that voting changes nothing (9%) (not shown in charts).

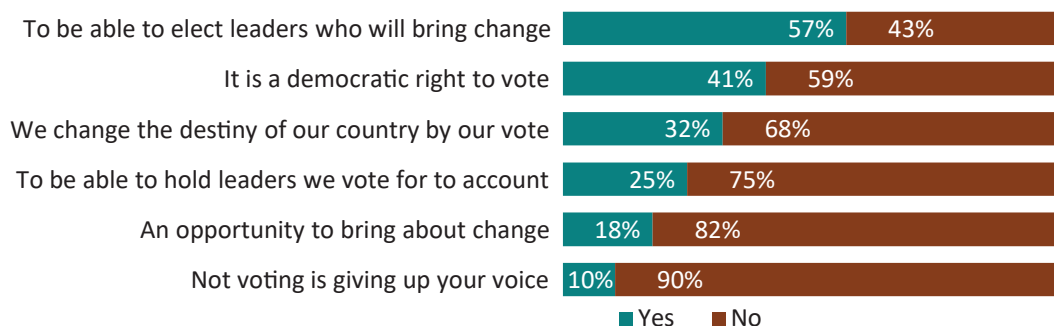
## Insight 7: Many citizens disagree with commonly stated reasons for voting

Most citizens (57%) agree with the view that voting is important because it enables someone to elect leaders who will bring change. However, across a range of other possible reasons for voting, a majority of citizens do not agree.

Fewer than half agree that voting is important because it is your democratic right (41%), that we change the direction of the country by voting (32%), that voting allows people to hold their government to account (25%), that it is an opportunity to bring change (18%) and that not voting is giving up your voice (10%).



**Figure 11: Why is it important that people vote in the coming elections?**



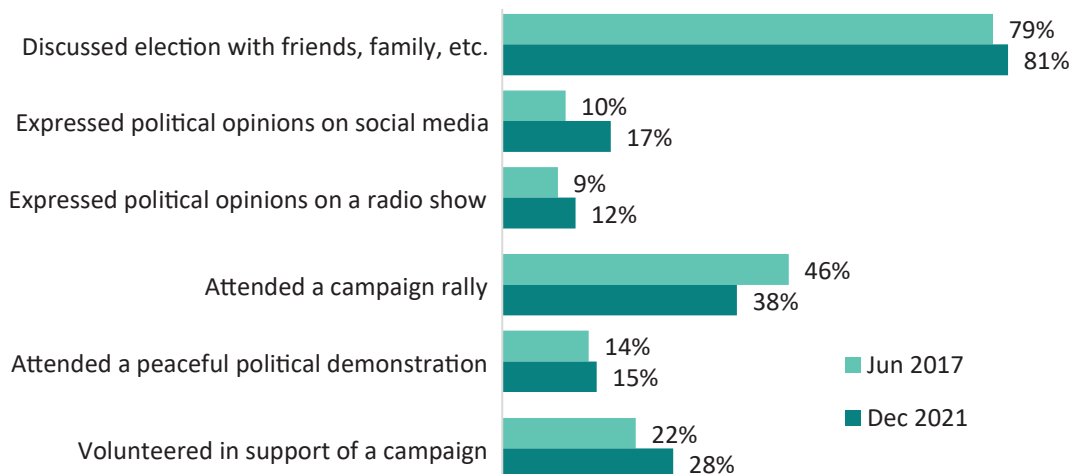
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

### Insight 8: Citizens show signs of greater political activity now than in 2017

Across a range of possible political activities that citizens can engage in, more citizens now report having taken such actions in the past 12 months than said the same in 2017. This includes discussing elections with friends and family, expressing political opinions on social media or the radio, attending a peaceful demonstration, or volunteering in support of a campaign.

The one area where fewer citizens currently report participating than in 2017 is attending campaign rallies. This may be because the data in 2017 was collected two months prior to the election, whereas the current data was collected eight months before election day.

**Figure 12: Percentage who have participated in the following at least once in the past 12 months:**

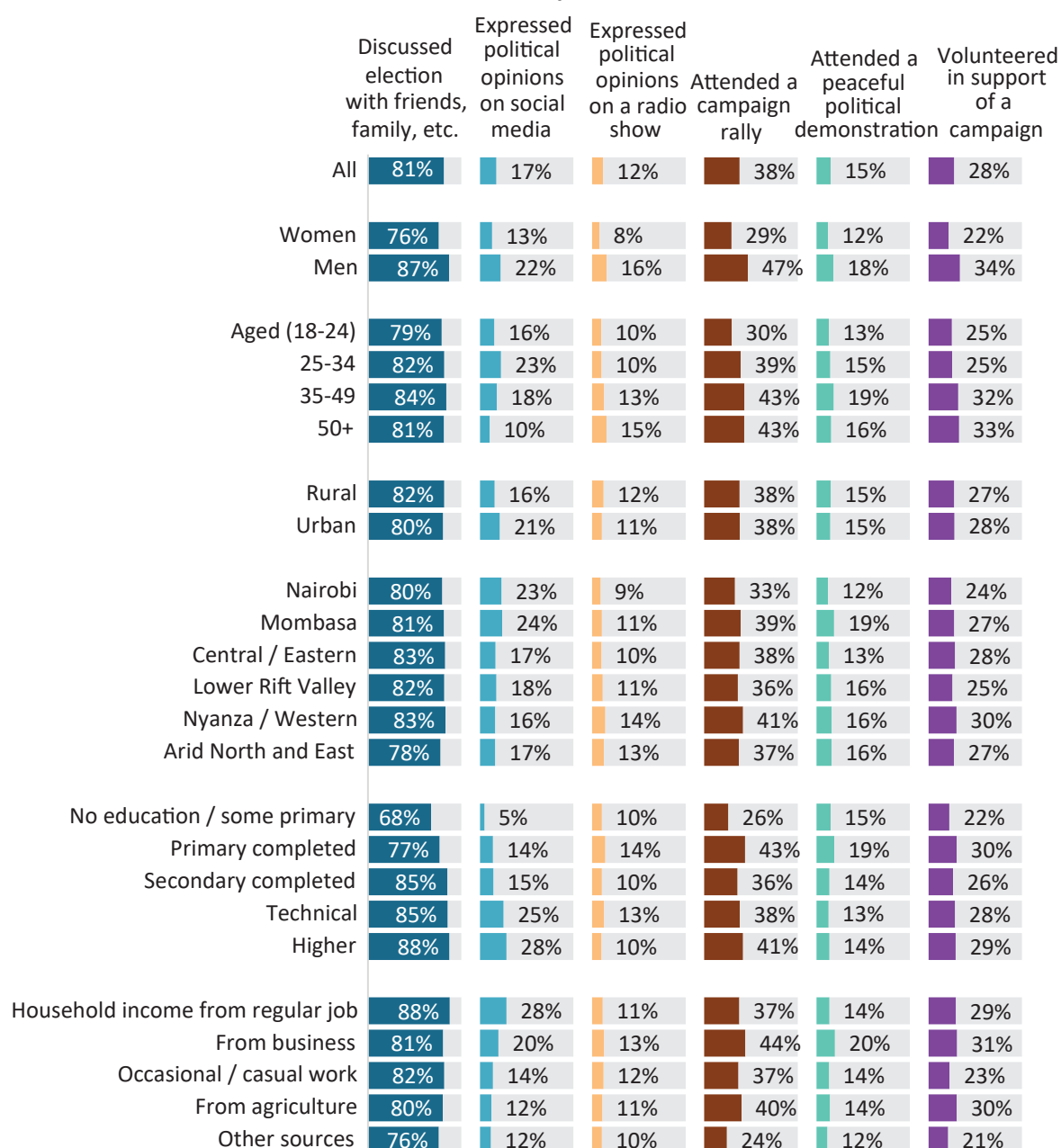


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022) and main panel r13 (Jun 2017)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

Across the range of possible actions, men are more likely to report participating than women.

Discussing politics on social media is more common among those with higher levels of education and those in households that earn income mainly from formal employment or from a business.

**Figure 13: Percentage who have participated in the following at least once in the past 12 months:**



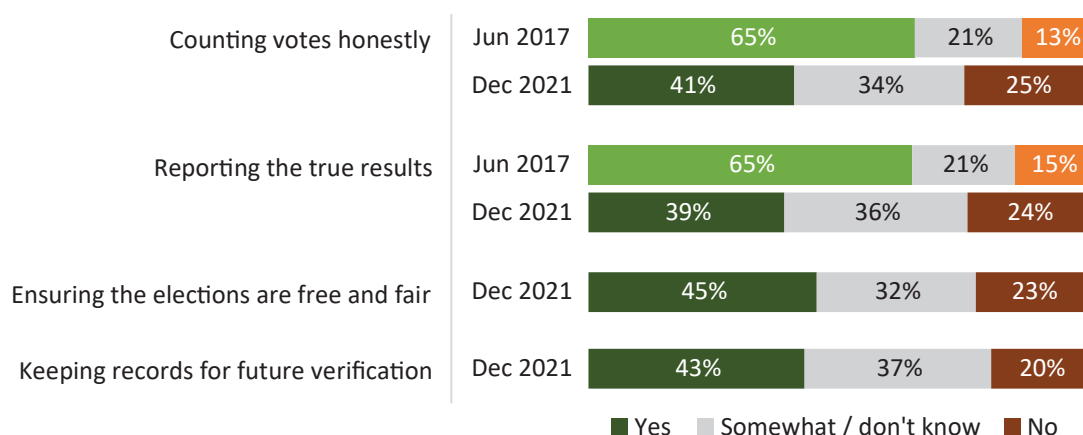
**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

### Insight 9: Citizens have less confidence in IEBC in 2022 than in 2017

Four out of ten citizens (41%) currently say they are confident that the IEBC is capable of counting votes honestly, down from two out of three (65%) who said this in 2017. Similarly, fewer citizens in 2022 (39%) are confident that the IEBC can report true results than felt this way in 2017 (65%).

Fewer than half (45%) are confident that the IEBC can ensure the elections are free and fair or that it can store records safely for future verification (43%).

**Figure 14: Do you have confidence that the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) is capable of ...?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022) and main panel r13 (Jun 2017)

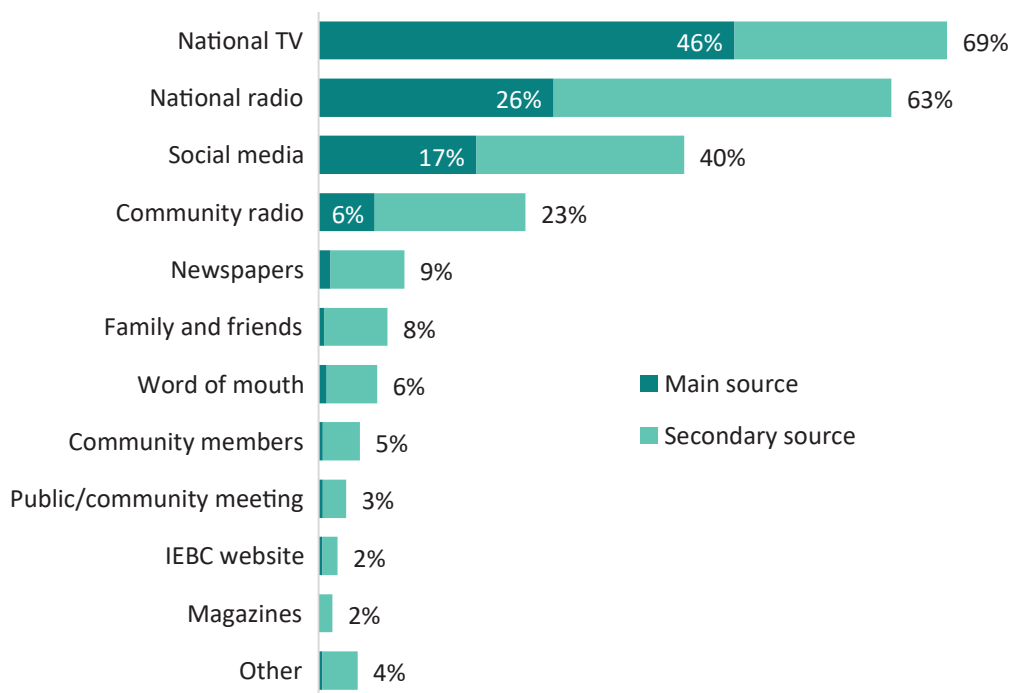
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

The main reasons given for lacking confidence that the IEBC can conduct the election freely and fairly are that previous elections have not been free and fair (9%), that the IEBC is corrupt (8%) and that it is not independent (5%).

### Insight 10: TV, radio and social media are citizens' main sources of news on election matters

National TV (69%) and radio (63%) are citizens' main sources of information and news on election matters, followed by social media (40%) and community radio (23%).

**Figure 15: Which of the following have been your sources of information/news over the last four weeks on election matters?**

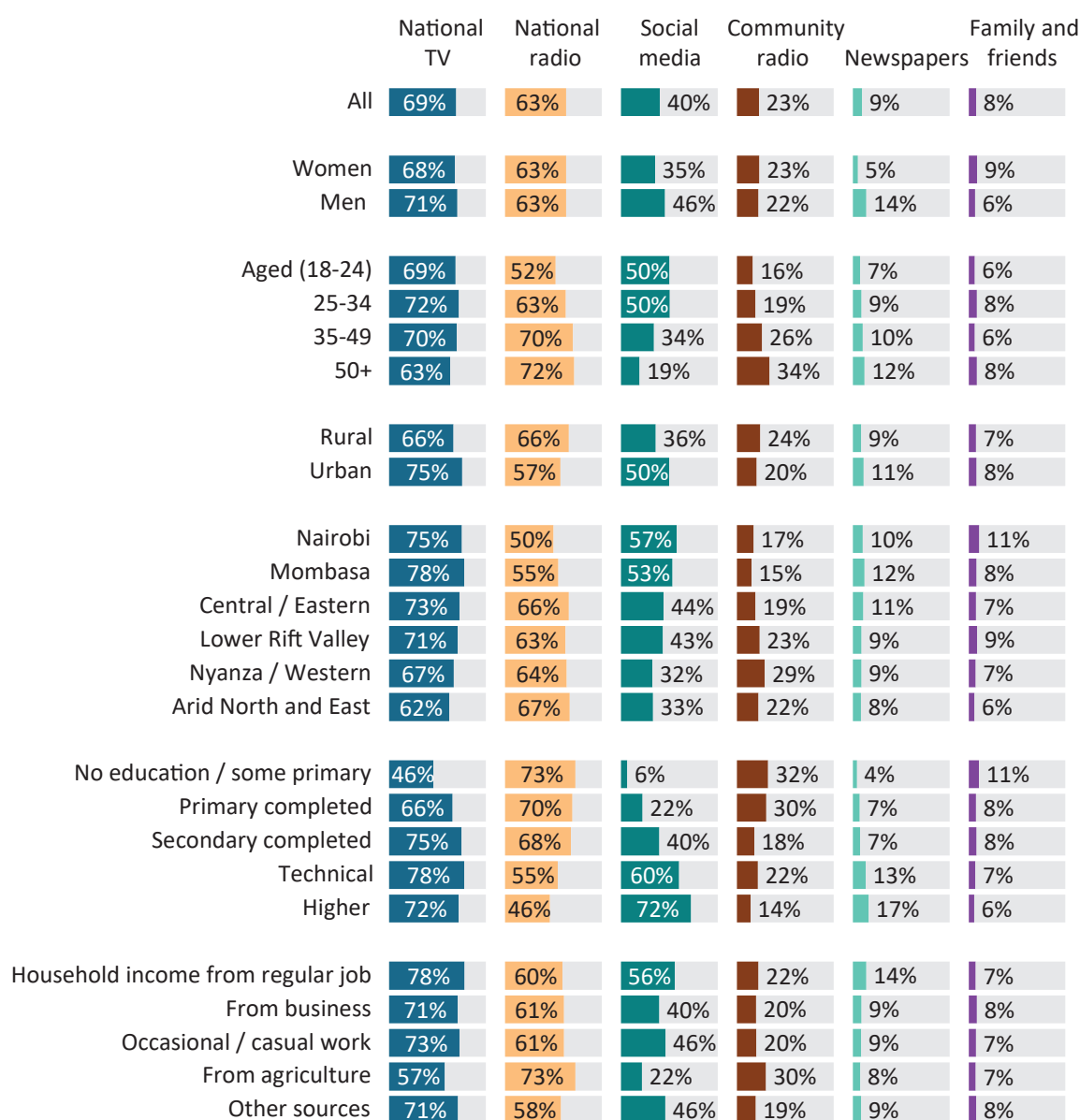


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)

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

Social media usage for election-related news is concentrated among better-educated citizens, younger citizens and those in urban areas. National radio is the most important source for several groups including older citizens, those with lower levels of education, and those who mainly earn their household income from agriculture.

**Figure 16: Which of the following have been your sources of information/news over the last four weeks on election matters?**

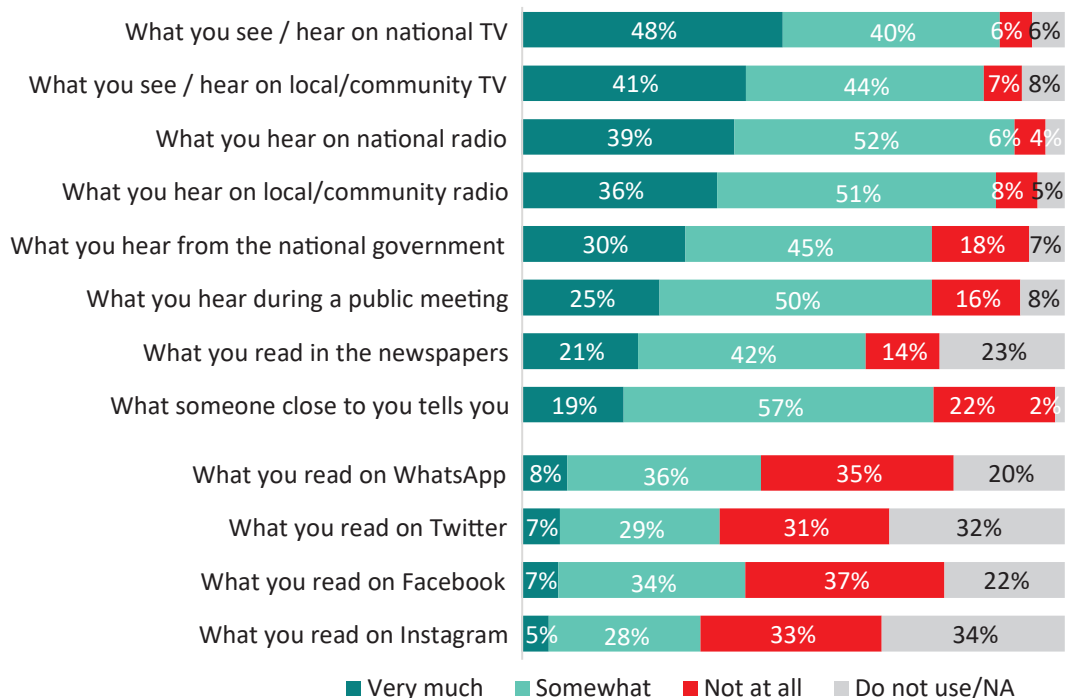


**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)

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

National TV and radio are also the most widely trusted sources of information, though even in these cases, a substantial number have some doubts. Information shared on social media is the least trusted source.

**Figure 17: How much do you trust the following sources of information?**



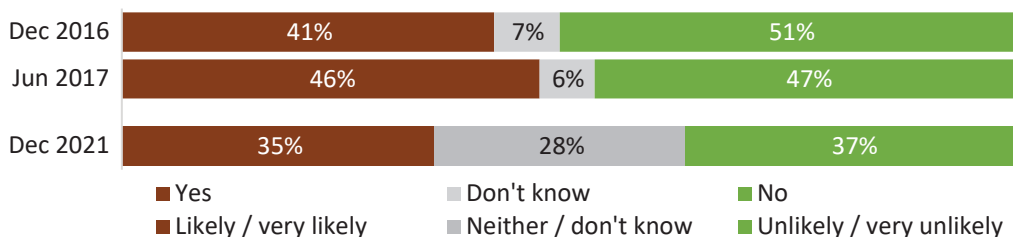
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

### Insight 11: Citizens are divided on whether there is any risk of election related violence in 2022

Roughly the same number of citizens say election related violence is likely in 2022 (35%) as say it is unlikely (37%). This leaves a considerable number (28%) who are uncertain.

Fewer citizens now say violence is likely than said so in 2017, but fewer also now say that violence is unlikely. This is accounted for by the increased number who are currently uncertain on this matter.

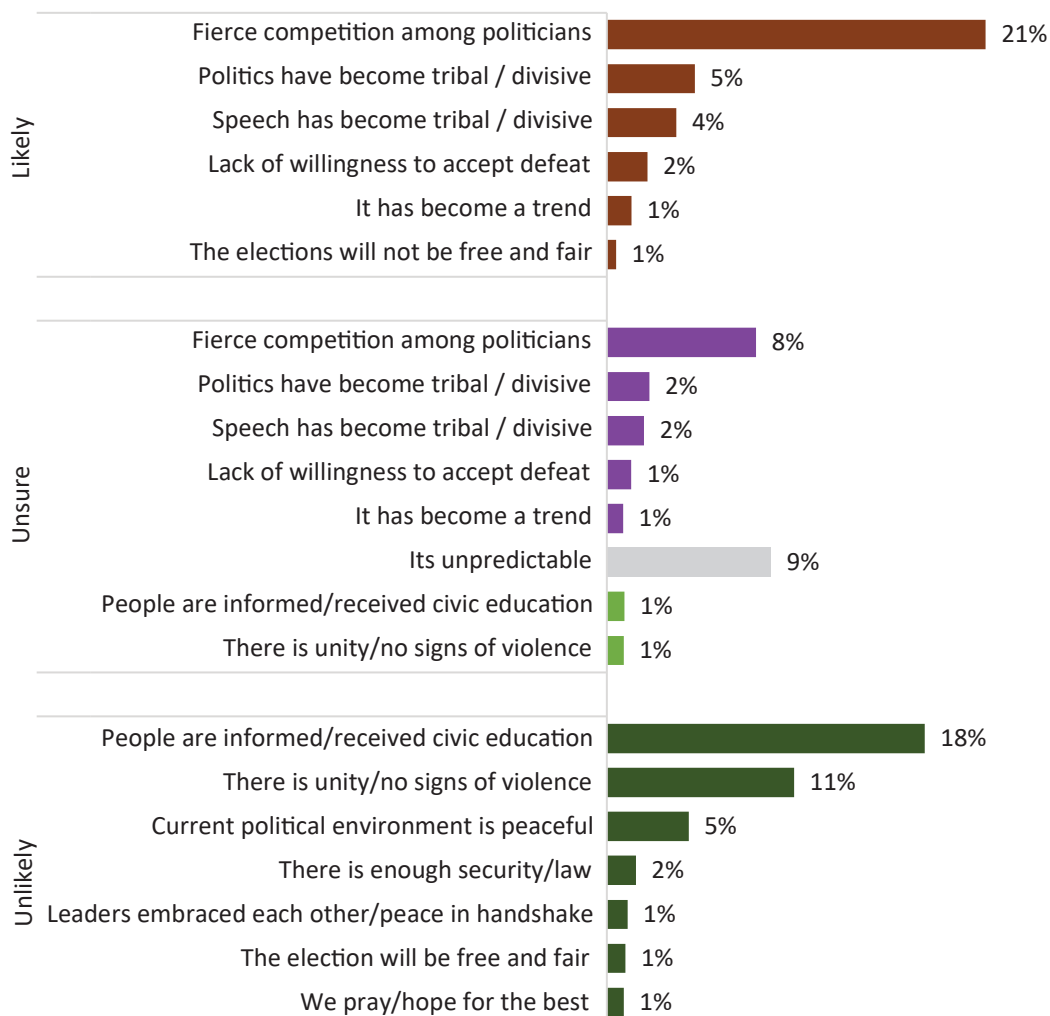
**Figure 18: Do you think there is any risk of election related violence?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022) and main panel r9 (Dec 2016) and r13 (Jun 2017)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

The main reason given for thinking that violence is likely is that there is fierce competition among politicians (21%). The main reasons given for thinking violence is unlikely are that people are well-informed about the election (18%) and that there is currently unity and no signs of violence (11%).

**Figure 19: Why do you say political violence is likely / unlikely?**  
(multiple responses permitted)



**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey, special r6 (Dec 20, 2021 – Jan 3, 2022)  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)



### 3. Conclusions

This brief presents a mixed picture on citizens' readiness for Kenya's 2022 general elections. On the positive side, the vast majority of citizens know of the IEBC and know when the election is due to take place. Most are registered and most say they intend to vote. Most also say the registration process is relatively straightforward. These are not small matters, and those who have worked hard to raise public awareness and to register voters should be applauded.

However, there are several reasons for concern. First, both voter registration and intention to vote are lower now than was the case in 2017, an election in which 61% of the voting age population voted. This is despite indications that citizens are currently slightly more engaged in political activity than in 2017.

Second, citizens are sceptical about the benefits of voting. Most citizens do not agree with the views that voting is important because it enables people to hold leaders to account or that it is an opportunity to bring about change. The perception that voting changes nothing – either because politicians on all sides let people down or because the results are determined before any votes are cast – is widespread.

Third, and perhaps the biggest cause for concern, fewer than half of citizens have confidence in the IEBC – either to conduct a free and fair election, to count results honestly, to report true results, or to keep proper records for future verification. This distrust makes for fertile ground for dissatisfaction with the elections, and for citizens to become frustrated with either these elections in particular and/or with democracy in general. It also means political leaders on either side may be able to tap into public concern with the processes and manipulate the situation to their advantage.

Democratic processes in Kenya remain fragile and not entirely trusted by citizens. Their experience has taught them that elections are difficult, highly contested and can lead to serious divisions. Nevertheless, when it comes to holding governments to account and enabling citizens to live free and prosperous lives, there is no better system than democracy, including regular competitive elections. It is therefore imperative that Kenyans find a way to overcome their scepticism.

Trust must be earned. In this case, it must be earned by the authorities demonstrating that they can deliver genuinely free and fair elections, and by political leaders on all sides conducting campaigns that are hard but fair. Only then will citizens start to regain faith in democratic processes.