

Residents of Laikipia speak

Laikipia residents' views and experiences on economics, democracy and participation

1. Introduction

This brief explores how citizens experience the economy, democracy and participation in Laikipia County, Kenya.

What do they feel are the most pressing national issues at present, and what do they say the government should prioritise if they are able to increase spending? How many are going without basic essentials on a regular basis? Do they see democracy as working well? In what ways are citizens participating in governance matters in practice, and do they see opportunities to do so as meaningful?

Data for the brief come from Twaweza's *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile-phone panel survey. The panel was created randomly sampling from an existing database of over 250,000 contacts to establish a nationally representative panel.

For this brief, data were collected from 3,658 respondents nationwide, including 400 in Laikipia, in the thirteenth round of the special *Sauti za Wananchi* panel, conducted between 3rd and 30th March 2025.

Key findings include:

- Laikipia residents see the cost of living as the most pressing problem currently facing Kenya
- Laikipia residents suggest any increase in public spending should prioritise healthcare and education services
- Laikipia residents are less satisfied with citizen participation and efforts to address the cost of living than citizens elsewhere in Kenya
- Laikipia residents' experience of economic stress is broadly in line with national averages, but there are considerable differences within the county

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Sauti za Wananchi



- Most Laikipia residents are dissatisfied with how democracy has been working in Kenya over the past three years
- Laikipia residents are broadly typical of Kenyans overall in terms of participation in public affairs
- Attendance at public participation meetings is higher among older residents of the county
- Awareness of public consultations and understanding of county planning processes are both lower in Laikipia than elsewhere in the country
- Laikipia residents are somewhat sceptical of how meaningful public participation opportunities really are
- Most residents say it is difficult to influence county decisions and to access details of county government matters

2. Ten insights on Laikipia residents' experiences and opinions on economics, democracy and participation

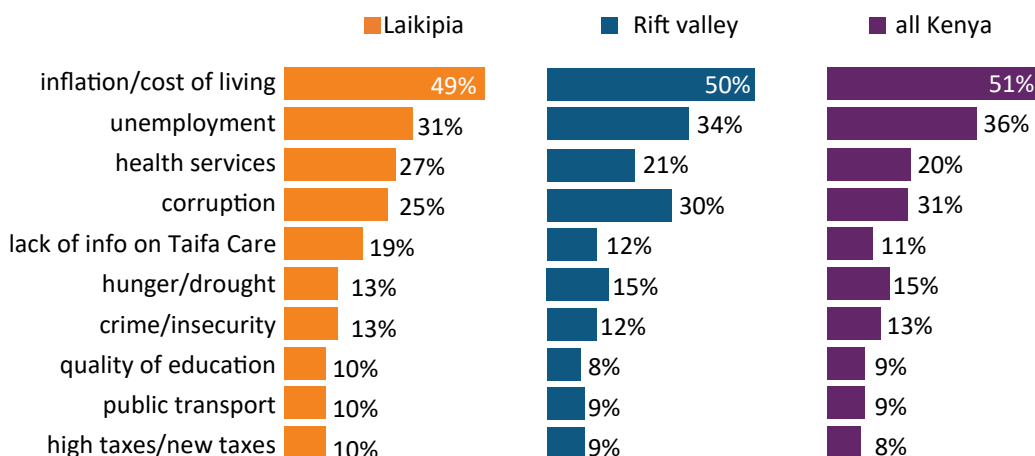
Insight 1. Laikipia residents see the cost of living as the most pressing problem currently facing Kenya

Half of Laikipia residents (49%) say inflation and the cost of living are among the three most serious problems facing Kenya today, well ahead of any other issue. This is followed by unemployment (31%), health services (27%) and corruption (25%).

These concerns are broadly similar to citizens' of Kenya as a whole. Laikipia residents are a little more likely to see health services as a serious problem than citizens across the rest of the country, and a little less likely to see corruption as a serious problem, but these differences are relatively small.

Within Laikipia, women are a little more likely than men to point to the cost of living or unemployment, while men are a little more likely than women to point to corruption (not shown in charts).

Figure 1. What are the three most serious problems facing Kenya today?
(multiple responses permitted)



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)

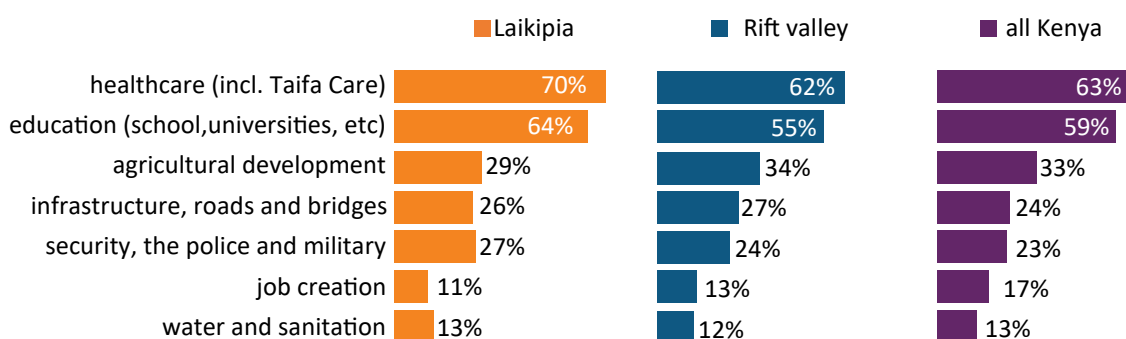
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 1,010 Rift valley region; 400 Laikipia)

Insight 2. Laikipia residents suggest any increase in public spending should prioritise healthcare and education services

Seven out of ten residents of Laikipia (70%) say any increase in public spending should prioritise healthcare, ahead of any other area of public spending. This is closely followed by education services (64%).

These two priorities are common across the whole of Kenya.

Figure 2. If the government could increase its spending, which areas do you think should be high priority?
(multiple responses permitted)



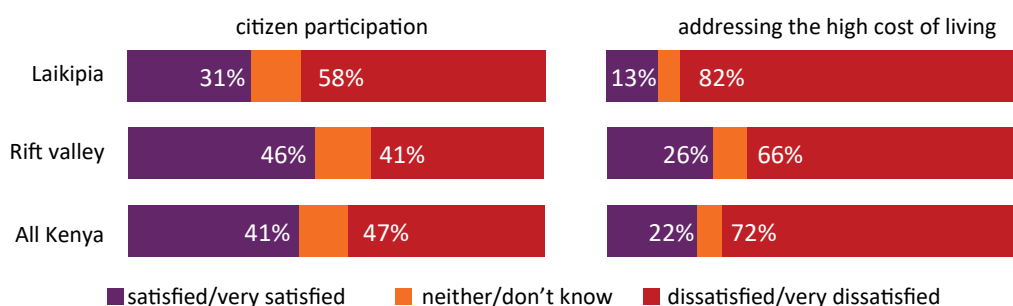
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 1,010 Rift valley region; 400 Laikipia)

Insight 3. Laikipia residents are less satisfied with citizen participation and efforts to address the cost of living than citizens elsewhere in Kenya

Six out of ten Laikipia residents (58%) are dissatisfied with the country's direction on citizen participation, well ahead of the wider Rift valley region (41%) and the country as a whole (47%).

Similarly, Laikipia residents are more dissatisfied with efforts to address the high cost of living (82%) than residents of the wider region (66%) or Kenya overall (72%).

Figure 3. How satisfied are you with the direction the country is headed in the following areas?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 1,010 Rift valley region; 400 Laikipia)

Insight 4. Laikipia residents' experience of economic stress is broadly in line with national averages, but there are considerable differences within the county

Across a range of measures of economic stress, Laikipia residents' recent experience is broadly similar to that of Kenya as a whole. A majority of residents have had to cope without cash income, medical treatment, electricity at home, food and water several times in the past twelve months. This mirrors the national picture.

Within the county, different Laikipia residents experience different levels of economic stress. For example, nine out of ten of residents aged 50 and above went without a cash income several times in the past year, compared to fewer than eight out of ten (76%) among those aged under 30, and women report going without food more often than men.

More strikingly, there is a strong relationship between level of education and economic stress, with residents who have no more than primary education much more likely than others to have had to cope without cash income, medicine or treatment, electricity, food and fuel.

Figure 4. Laikipia: % who have gone without the following several times or more in the past year:

		a cash income	medicine/ treatment	electricity at home	food to eat	clean water	fuel to cook
	all Kenya	80%	61%	60%	54%	51%	46%
	Rift valley	79%	59%	60%	48%	54%	45%
	Laikipia	85%	69%	62%	54%	55%	49%
Laikipia	women	89%	69%	57%	61%	56%	52%
	men	81%	68%	68%	47%	54%	45%
	rural	88%	69%	64%	55%	57%	50%
	urban	77%	69%	57%	52%	49%	45%
	aged 18-29	76%	56%	62%	54%	55%	39%
	30-49	87%	74%	63%	53%	55%	54%
	50+	92%	73%	63%	57%	55%	51%
	primary education or lower	92%	74%	68%	67%	56%	61%
	secondary and higher	79%	65%	58%	44%	54%	39%

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)

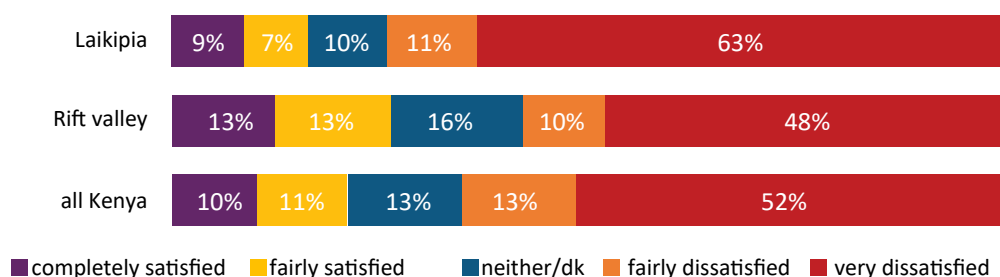
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 1,010 Rift valley region; 400 Laikipia)

Insight 5. Most Laikipia residents are dissatisfied with how democracy has been working in Kenya over the past three years

A clear majority of Laikipia residents (74%) are dissatisfied with how democracy has been working in Kenya over the past three years, including over six out of ten (63%) who are very dissatisfied. These levels of dissatisfaction are higher than elsewhere in the Rift valley region (58% dissatisfied) and Kenya overall (65%).

Reasons given by Laikipia residents for dissatisfaction are similar to those given across the rest of the country, led by poor governance causing other problems (25%), lack of respect for freedom of expression (22%) and abductions of government critics (17%) (not shown in charts).

Figure 5. How satisfied are you with the way democracy has been working over the past three years?



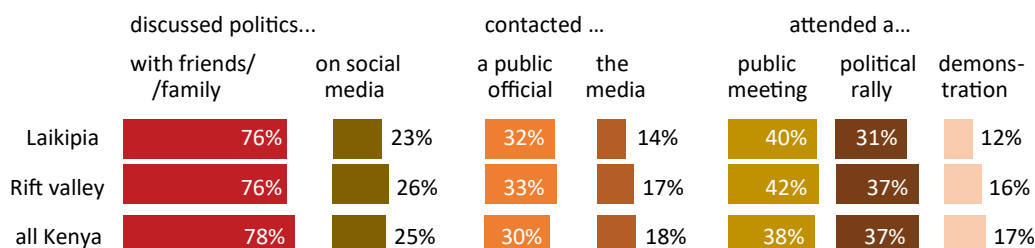
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)

Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 1,010 Rift valley region; 400 Laikipia)

Insight 6. Laikipia residents are broadly typical of Kenyans overall in terms of participation in public affairs

Residents of Laikipia county are broadly typical of Kenyan citizens overall in terms of their levels of participation in public affairs. Three out of four have discussed politics with friends and family both nationally (78%) and within the county (76%), and one out of four has done so on social media (25% nationally, 23% in Laikipia). Laikipia residents are a little less likely to have attended a political rally or a demonstration.

Figure 6. Which of the following have you done in the last 12 months?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)

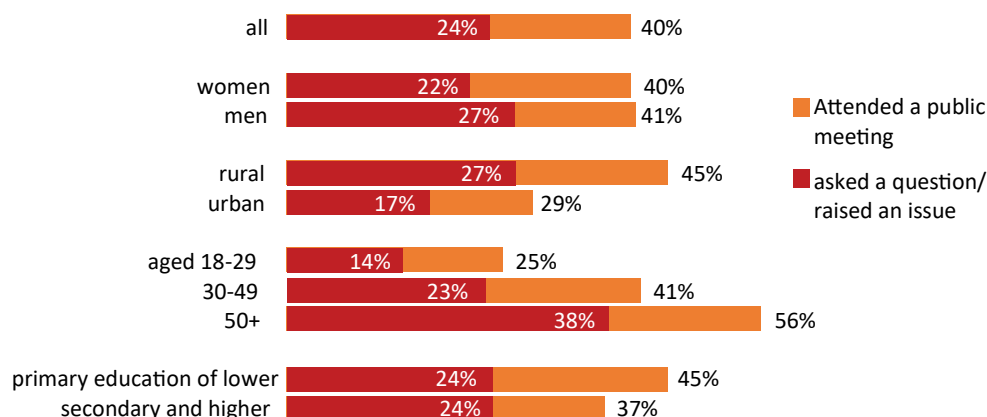
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 1,010 Rift valley region; 400 Laikipia)

Insight 7. Attendance at public participation meetings is higher among older residents of the county

Among residents aged over 50, a majority (56%) attended a public participation meeting in the previous year, more than twice as many as did so among the under 30s (25%). Residents of rural parts of the county (45%) are also considerably more likely to have attended such a meeting than those in urban areas of the county (29%).

There is little difference in levels of attendance between women and men in the county, though men are more likely to say they asked a question or raised an issue at a meeting (27% of men, 22% of women). Better educated residents are less likely to attend public participation meetings, but just as likely as their less well-educated counterparts to speak at such meetings.

Figure 7. Laikipia: % who attended a local public participation meeting in the past year, and % who asked a question or raised an issue:



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)

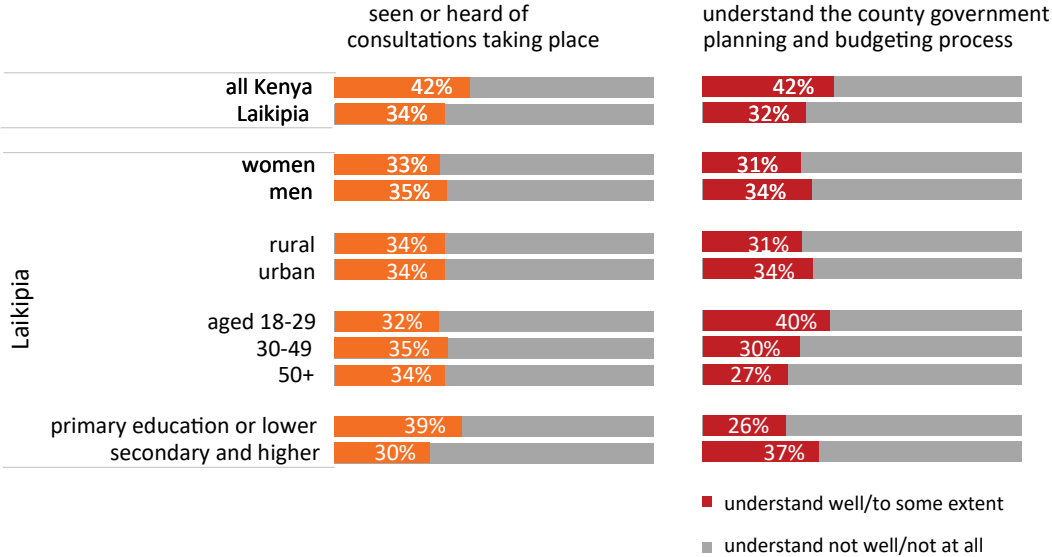
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 1,010 Rift valley region; 400 Laikipia)

Insight 8. Awareness of public consultations and understanding of county planning processes are both lower in Laikipia than elsewhere in the country

Fewer Laikipia residents (34%) than citizens of Kenya as a whole (42%) have seen or heard of public consultations taking place about county government planning, and fewer residents say they have a reasonable understanding of the county planning process (32% in Laikipia, 41% nationally).

Within the county, awareness of consultations is a little higher among those with lower levels of education, but is otherwise largely consistent across key demographic groups. However, younger residents and those with higher levels of education are more likely to say they have a reasonable understanding of the county government planning and budgeting process.

Figure 8. Laikipia: Have you ever seen or heard of any consultations taking place about county government planning? To what extent would you say you understand county government planning and budgeting processes?



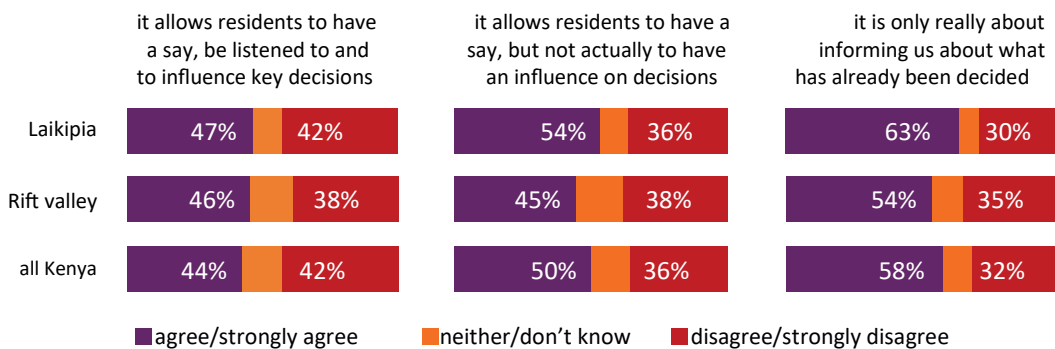
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 1,010 Rift valley region; 400 Laikipia)

Insight 9. Laikipia residents are somewhat sceptical of how meaningful public participation opportunities really are

A majority of Laikipia residents (63%) agree with the statements that public participation opportunities within the county are “only really about informing us about what has already been decided.” Similarly, a majority (54%) agree that the process “allows residents to have a say but not actually to have an influence on decisions”. However, there is some inconsistency in residents’ views, as almost half (47%) agree that public participation “allows residents to have a say, be listened to, and to influence key decisions.”

These views broadly align with those of citizens across the whole of Kenya, though there are some small signs that Laikipia residents are a little more sceptical than citizens elsewhere in the country.

Figure 9. How much do you agree or disagree with the following views on public participation opportunities at county government level?



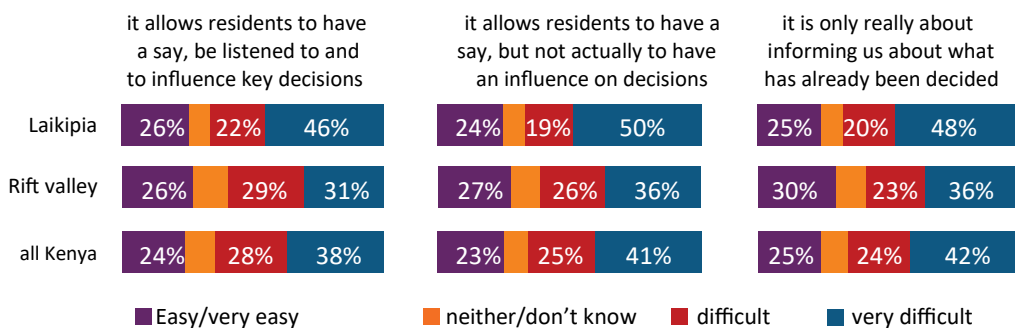
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 1,010 Rift valley region; 400 Laikipia)

Insight 10. Most residents say is it difficult to influence county decisions and to access details of county government matters

Most Laikipia residents say it is difficult to influence county decision making (68%) and to access information on county budgets, legislation and project plans (75%).

In this, Laikipia residents are broadly similar to citizens across the whole country, where 66% say it is difficult to influence county decision and 66% say it is difficult to access information on budgets, laws and plans.

Figure 10. Thinking about public participation as enshrined in Kenya's constitution, how easy or difficult would you say it is to ...?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 1,010 Rift valley region; 400 Laikipia)

3. Conclusions

The findings from this *Sauti za Wananchi* survey highlight significant challenges that residents of Laikipia face in influencing county government decisions as well as in their own daily lives.

Looking first at residents' economic status, the data clearly highlights several significant concerns. First, residents overwhelmingly point to the cost of living as the biggest challenge facing the country. And second, they report repeated experience of having to cope without basic essentials on a regular basis. On both points, Laikipia mirrors the situation nationwide, but the data shows significant challenges. There is a clear need for improvements to social protection, as well as better support from County government for disadvantaged groups

On democracy and governance – including public participation, a principle enshrined in Kenya's constitution – there remains a considerable gap between the ideal and the reality. There is scepticism as to whether public participation opportunities offer the meaningful possibility of influencing decisions, or whether they are mere tick-box exercises to rubber stamp pre-determined outcomes. And awareness of the processes is generally low. Again, it should be noted that this is not limited to Laikipia county, although dissatisfaction with democracy is higher in Laikipia than elsewhere in the country

The challenges in public participation suggest structural and systemic barriers that hinder meaningful engagement between county governments and residents. Despite the framework provided by devolution, which was intended to bring government closer to the people, these findings point to a lack of transparency and accessibility in county government operations. For many, the processes of budget formulation, legislative development, and project planning remain unclear and inaccessible.

To bridge this gap, there is a pressing need for county governments to create more inclusive opportunities for citizen engagement. Transparency should be prioritised through the provision of timely and comprehensible information about budgets, legislation, and development plans. Additionally, targeted efforts to build civic awareness and capacity among residents are essential to empower them in exercising their constitutional rights.

Overall, while Kenya's devolution framework has the potential to enhance local governance and citizen participation, the findings of this survey reveal that significant barriers remain. Addressing these challenges will require concerted effort and commitment from both county officials and citizens to realise the full promise of participatory governance. Only then can the ideals enshrined in the constitution translate into tangible benefits for all Kenyans, including residents of Laikipia County.

