

Empowered Voices?

Examining Youth Participation
in Uganda's Elections



Table Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Acronyms.....	ii
Executive Summary.....	iii
Findings	iv
Recommendations.....	v

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION.....1

1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Objectives of the study.....	2
1.3	Contextual analysis.....	2
1.4	Study methods.....	3
1.4.1	Design, sampling and data collection.....	3
1.4.2	Data management and analysis.....	3

SECTION TWO: FINDINGS.....4

2.1	Youth participation in elections.....	4
2.1.1	Levels of youth participation in elections.....	4
2.2.2	Youth attitudes towards elections.....	12
2.2	Participation of young women in elections.....	15
2.2.1	Barriers to young women's participation in electoral processes.....	15
2.3	Participation of youth with disabilities in elections.....	17
2.3.1	Participation of PWDs in voter education.....	18
2.3.2	Participation of Youth with disabilities as candidates, campaign agents and voters.....	19
2.3.3	Barriers to youth with disability in participant in elections.....	20
2.4	Voter education and youth participation in elections.....	21
2.4.1	Youth understanding of voter education.....	21
2.4.2	Targeted voter education for the youth.....	22
2.4.3	Impact of voter education on youth participation in elections.....	27
2.4.4	Content of voter education.....	29
2.4.5	Key Voter Education Providers.....	30
2.4.6	Barriers to Voter Education.....	31
2.5	Youth participation in election peacebuilding.....	32
2.5.1	Election violence.....	32
2.5.2	Peacebuilding in elections.....	37

SECTION THREE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....40

3.1	Conclusion.....	40
3.2	Recommendations.....	40

Acknowledgements

Open Space Centre extends its deepest gratitude to all individuals and institutions that contributed to the successful completion of this research.

We are especially grateful to the Centre for Basic Research, an independent research institution in Uganda, whose unwavering support made this study possible. Our sincere appreciation goes to Richard Ssewakiryanga and Mugole Emmanuel for their invaluable technical expertise and guidance throughout the entire research process.

We also acknowledge the dedication of the Open Space Centre research team. Wakib Bunnya led the study as the principal researcher, with Namuwonge Brenda coordinating research activities and taking the lead in drafting this report. Nassali Maria Agnes, Ochora Brian, and Nakato Remie Ssemimba made significant contributions, including supervising regional teams, analysing data and contributing to the report-writing process.

A heartfelt thanks goes to the regional data collection teams which worked across Iganga, Mbale, Kasese, Mbarara, Adjumani, Gulu, Kampala, Wakiso, and Mukono. Their commitment ensured comprehensive data collection. We are equally thankful to partner organizations and individuals who facilitated activities and mobilized young people for focus group discussions in these districts.

This project would not have been possible without the funding from the British High Commission. Their support enabled us to conduct meaningful research, have collective reflection, and generate knowledge to better understand youth participation in elections.

We further extend our gratitude to the local government officials, youth leaders, security personnel, Electoral Commission representatives, civil society organizations, women leaders, PWD leaders, and opinion leaders who participated in key informant interviews.

Finally, we thank the young people who shared their insights through focus group discussions and household surveys, as well as the civil society organizations, government representatives, and youth leaders who participated in the validation workshop of the research findings.

Acronyms

EC – Electoral commission

EPRC - Economic Policy Research Centre

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

FM – Frequency Modulation

HRW - Human Rights Watch

KII – Key Informant Interview

LC – Local Council

NCD – National Council for Disability

NDP - National Development Plan

NDP IV – National Development Plan Four

NGO – Non Governmental Organisation

NPA – National Planning Authority

NRM – National Resistance Movement

NUP – National Unity Platform

PWDs – People With Disabilities

RDC – Resident District Commissioner

SACCO – Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

VE – Voter Education

YWDs – Youth With Disabilities

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report comprehensively analyzes youth participation in Uganda's electoral processes, focusing on their roles, challenges, and contributions to peacebuilding. With youth comprising a significant portion of Uganda's population, their engagement is critical to shaping the country's democratic future. The study identifies structural, social, and economic barriers to youth participation, particularly for marginalized groups like young women and youth with disabilities, and offers actionable recommendations to enhance youth engagement and foster peaceful elections.

Youth participation in Uganda's elections presents both opportunities and challenges. While youth actively engage as voters, candidates, and campaign agents, their participation is hindered by barriers such as voter apathy, economic hardships, and exclusion of marginalized groups.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to achieve several key objectives: first, to examine the role of voter education in shaping youth participation in elections; second, to analyze the inclusion of young women and youth with disabilities in electoral processes; and third, to explore the role of youth in peacebuilding and addressing election-related violence.

Methodology

The study was guided by a conceptual framework that examined the interplay between socio-demographic factors (age, gender, education, and residence) and governance-related factors (voter education, inclusion of marginalized groups, and community perceptions) and their influence on youth participation in elections. The framework also considered the role of structural barriers, such as economic hardships, and non-structural factors, such as attitudes and perceptions, in shaping youth engagement in electoral processes.

Sample

The study was conducted across nine districts in four regions of Uganda: Kampala, Wakiso, and Mukono (Central); Adjumani and Gulu (Northern); Mbarara and Kasese (Western); and Mbale and Iganga (Eastern), to capture a wide range of socio-demographic and electoral dynamics. Utilizing a cross-sectional design, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 569 youth through structured questionnaires, 72 focus group discussions (FGDs), and 13 key informant interviews (KIIs) with local leaders, security personnel, and representatives from the Electoral Commission. Data analysis was performed using SPSS for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of youth participation in elections while reflecting diverse perspectives through various research methods.

2. Findings

2.1 Youth Participation in Elections

Voter Registration and Turnout: Only 60% of surveyed youth were registered voters, with higher rates among older and more educated youth. Voter turnout declined from 73% in 2016 to 68% in 2021, with regional variations showing higher turnout in the Northern and Eastern regions.

Youth as Candidates and Campaign Agents: Only 4% of youth participated as candidates, while 16% served as campaign agents. Barriers include the high cost of running for office and election monetization.

Youth Attitudes: While 72% of youth expressed enthusiasm for elections, this was often tied to financial incentives. Many youth are disillusioned with the electoral process due to mistrust and perceived voter apathy.

2.2 Participation of Marginalized Groups

Young Women: Women face barriers such as marital restrictions, sexual harassment, and economic challenges. Many prioritize household duties over political engagement.

Youth with Disabilities (YWDs): YWDs face accessibility challenges, lack of tailored voter education, and stigmatization, limiting their participation as voters and candidates.

2.3 Voter Education

Understanding and Impact: Only 18% of youth attended voter education events in 2021. Those who did were 20% more likely to vote. Barriers include limited outreach, negative perceptions of the Electoral Commission, and the monetization of voter education efforts.

Content and Providers: Voter education primarily focused on how to vote, with limited emphasis on broader civic responsibilities. Providers included the Electoral Commission, political parties, and NGOs.

2.4 Election Violence

Nature and Perpetrators: Election violence, including arrests, intimidation, and property damage, is prevalent before, during, and after elections. Political candidates are the primary instigators, often mobilizing youth to disrupt elections.

Youth Attitudes: Many youth view violence as inevitable or necessary to express grievances and achieve electoral outcomes. Economic hardships and frustration with perceived injustices drive youth involvement in violence.

2.5 Youth Participation in Peacebuilding

Youth play a critical role in promoting peaceful elections through voter education, community mobilization, and advocacy. However, their efforts are often underfunded and unsupported. Barriers to peacebuilding include mistrust in the electoral process and exclusion from decision-making.

3. Recommendations

To address the challenges and enhance youth participation in Uganda's elections, the study proposes the following recommendations:

- 1. Collaborate with Youth Leaders:** Engage youth leaders for long-term partnerships to enhance voter education and promote peaceful elections.
- 2. Dialogue with Youth:** Address misconceptions about the Electoral Commission through open conversations with young people to encourage their participation.
- 3. Non-Resident Polling Officers:** Use non-resident polling officers on voting day to reduce bias and misconduct, supported by strict regulations.
- 4. Utilize Local Radio Stations:** Leverage local radio to disseminate voter education in all local languages for rural youth.
- 5. Engage Aspiring Candidates:** Involve influential aspiring candidates in promoting peaceful elections during their campaigns.
- 6. Clear Electoral Road Map:** Provide a clear timeline for updates on electoral changes to keep youth informed.
- 7. Leverage Social Media:** Use platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp to educate youth about voting.
- 8. Effective Mobilization Strategies:** Develop strategies to mobilize diverse youth groups, including those with disabilities and young women.
- 9. Special Registration Dates for PWDs:** Implement special voter registration dates for Persons with Disabilities.
- 10. Reach Out-of-School Youth:** Create strategies to engage out-of-school youth through community partnerships.
- 11. Election Security Awareness:** Raise awareness of police roles and military deployment protocols during elections.
- 12. Punish Election Violence Perpetrators:** Ensure accountability for election violence through partnerships with security agencies.
- 13. Promote Gender Equality:** Uphold the voting rights of all citizens over 18 and promote gender equality through community campaigns.
- 14. Simplified Voter Education Materials:** Distribute easy-to-understand voter education materials tailored for youth with disabilities.

Conclusion

Youth are vital to Uganda's democratic future, but systemic challenges hinder their participation. By addressing these barriers and implementing the study's recommendations, stakeholders can empower youth to engage meaningfully and peacefully in elections, fostering a more inclusive and vibrant democracy.

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The participation of young people in Uganda's electoral processes presents both significant opportunities and challenges. With their sizable demographic, youth have the potential to influence political outcomes. However, past voter registration and turnout trends have shown inconsistencies in youth engagement, raising concerns about their effective involvement in shaping the country's governance landscape. While some youth actively participate as voters, candidates, campaign agents, and volunteers, there are notable gaps in the inclusion of marginalized youth, particularly young women and youth with disabilities. Addressing these gaps is critical, as youth can contribute to either peaceful electoral processes or election-related violence.

This study aimed to explore the dynamics of youth participation, inclusion, and their role in peacebuilding in elections, with the goal of providing actionable recommendations to strengthen youth engagement in Uganda's elections. Additionally, the study examined the relationship between structural and non-structural enabling and hindering factors that increase or limit youth participation in elections. It assessed how socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, level of education, and residence (urban/rural) status influence youth attitudes toward governance. Governance-related factors, such as voter education, the inclusion of marginalized groups, and the role of community perceptions, were analyzed to understand how they influence youth participation in Uganda's elections.

The study was conducted across nine districts in four regions of Uganda, including Kampala, Wakiso, Mukono (Central), Adjumani, Gulu (Northern), Mbarara, Kasese (Western), Mbale, and Iganga (Eastern). By focusing on these diverse regions, the research aimed to capture a broad understanding of youth involvement in elections, reflecting the socio-demographic factors that influence their participation. The significance of this study lies in its potential to offer critical insights into the factors that promote or hinder meaningful youth participation in democratic governance. The study further explored ways youth can be encouraged to participate peacefully and meaningfully in elections, providing valuable recommendations to stakeholders such as electoral bodies, policymakers, and civil society organizations. Additionally, the study contributed to understanding how marginalized groups, such as young women and youth with disabilities, can be empowered to take part in governance processes, ensuring that their voices are included in Uganda's political future.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The broader objectives of the study were:

- i. To examine the role of voter education in shaping youth participation in elections.
- ii. To analyze the practice of inclusion of young women and youth with disabilities in elections.
- iii. To explore the role of youth in peacebuilding and election-related violence.

1.3 Contextual analysis

Mugisha et al. (2016) highlight the paradox of ineffective youth participation in Uganda, despite the fact that young people make up a large portion of the electorate. They argue that this ineffectiveness stems from high levels of underemployment, which have exacerbated youth poverty and entrenched clientelist political systems. Additionally, youth organizations often struggle with effective organization, as they tend to be primarily urban-focused and lack strong connections at the grassroots level. As a result, the civic culture in Uganda remains notably weak, with low public awareness of citizens' rights, particularly regarding opportunities for youth to advocate for their interests.

Despite Uganda's policies, frameworks, and legal commitments to gender equality, significant inequality persists between women and men in political representation. Statistics from the 2016 Electoral Commission (EC) demonstrate this gender disparity in parliamentary representation. Of the 1,747 candidates vying for parliamentary seats, only 494 were women. Similarly, only 88 women competed for general seats compared to 1,255 men (EC, 2016). The active and effective participation of young women in election processes at the local government level depends on the incentives available to them and their adequate knowledge and understanding to engage actively as voters, candidates, and campaign agents (EPRC, 2021). Similarly, the participation of youth with disabilities faced several anomalies, including inadequate mobilization, sensitization, and logistical challenges during the formation of electoral colleges, affecting their effective participation in elections (NCD, 2016).

In the 2021 elections, youth participation was significant, with 41% of the 18 million registered voters aged between 18 and 30 years. However, the elections were marred by violence and unrest, particularly following the arrest of a presidential candidate for alleged breach of COVID-19 regulations, which catalyzed youth involvement in violence (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Election-related violence remains a pervasive feature of electoral dynamics in many African countries and is used by political actors to influence the process and outcome of elections. This violence involves coercive acts against humans, property, and infrastructure (Journal of Peace Research, 2020). From 2015 to 2021, political and media offenses peaked during election periods, with a total of 4,634 crimes reported.

In the 2016 general elections, groups of youth vigilantes and militias, such as crime preventers, Yellow Youth Brigade, Power10, Solida, RedTops, and Yellow Pigs, were formed. Most of these groups were urban-based and formed under the guise of "hunting for votes" or "protecting votes" (Women's International Peace Centre, 2019). The arrest of a presidential candidate in 2021 further catalyzed youth involvement in election-related violence (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Election violence affects all segments of society but has a significant impact on youth, women, and persons with disabilities. The youth unemployment rate stands at 13%, with 18.7% of youth not in employment, education, or training. During elections, youth are often engaged as agents and perpetrators of violence for political interests. Thus, youth are often viewed as troublemakers or only recipients of support instead of active agents of change (University of Glasgow, 2012). Local resistance to youth-led and inclusive peacebuilding activities emerged as a major challenge for young peacebuilders (Parliamentary Assembly Report, 2021).

Although peacebuilding is a complex, long-term process, the engagement of youth in sustaining peaceful elections is critical in shaping governance processes. Youth are strikingly creative in

sustaining peace and bridging divides within and between communities throughout the election cycle as observers, voters, campaign agents, volunteers, candidates, and civil society representatives. They monitor electoral-related violence, promote peace messages through innovative campaigns, and call for accountability, inclusion, and transparency by raising their voices through digital and offline platforms (UNDP, 2023).

Young people can either promote peaceful electoral processes or contribute to election-related conflicts. The role of youth in peacebuilding processes is increasingly recognized. However, the lack of support is partly due to limited evidence on what works in youth peacebuilding strategies and programs. Identifying and measuring initiatives that positively impact the lives of youth and their communities is vital to scaling up effective support for youth worldwide. Understanding the factors that influence these outcomes and the extent of youth participation in election observation and monitoring is crucial to developing strategies for enhancing their role in fostering credible and peaceful elections. This research explored these dynamics and provided recommendations to strengthen youth involvement and contribution to peaceful electoral processes in Uganda.

1.4 Study methods

1.4.1 Design, sampling and data collection

Research activities began after receiving approvals from the Makerere University School for Social Science Research Ethics Committee (MakSSREC) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). A cross-sectional study design was employed for this research. The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative techniques for sampling, data collection, and analysis. The districts and sites included in the study were intentionally chosen based on their levels of peace or violence during previous elections. The primary focus was on youth (both male and female) aged 18 to 35 years, including youth representatives. Youth participants were selected through random sampling to ensure diversity, while youth representatives and other key informants were chosen purposefully.

Data collection tools included a structured and coded questionnaire, as well as a structured focus group discussion (FGD) guide. This was complemented by secondary data gathered through a literature review. Quantitative data were collected using CAPI-Kobocollect, a mobile application. In total, 569 youth completed the structured questionnaire, 72 participated in the FGDs, and 13 key informants, including local government leaders, security personnel, resident district commissioners (RDCs), persons with disabilities (PWDs), and Electoral Commission (EC) representatives, contributed across the nine districts involved in the study.

1.4.2 Data management and analysis

Quantitative data collected through KoboCollect was exported to SPSS, a software used for computer-aided quantitative analysis. This data was then cleaned and analyzed to generate descriptive statistics. In contrast, qualitative data gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) was analyzed thematically using a participatory manual process, which involved writing and sorting information on flash cards. Finally, the qualitative data was integrated with the quantitative data to provide a comprehensive presentation and triangulation of findings.

SECTION TWO: FINDINGS

2.1 Youth participation in elections

Participants in focus group discussions (FGDs) across all study districts noted that youth actively engage in various aspects of elections. They serve as voters, candidates, campaign agents, polling station observers, and mobilizers or volunteers. Specifically, participants from Iganga and Adjumani districts highlighted that the youth play a significant role in the electoral process by acting as mobilizers or party ambassadors within their political parties.

2.1.1 Levels of youth participation in elections

a) Youth participation as registered voters

In Uganda, electoral laws stipulate that individuals must be registered voters to participate in elections, either as voters or candidates. According to Table 2.1, 60% of the surveyed youth were registered voters, while 40% were not. Among the registered individuals, 31.7% were male and 28% were female.

The data also reveals differences in registration status based on age groups. The highest registration rates were observed among older youth: 95.5% of individuals aged 30-35 and 86.8% of those aged 26-29 were registered. In contrast, registration rates were significantly lower for younger age brackets, with only 54.6% of youth aged 22-25 and just 4.6% of those aged 18-21 registered. This trend indicates that the likelihood of being a registered voter increases with age among young people.

Qualitative data from FGDs support these findings. Participants noted that although many youth actively engage in campaign rallies, a substantial portion remains unregistered, particularly in the younger age groups. Additionally, participants from Kasese and Adjumani reported that some youth lack national identity cards, which are a key requirement for voter registration.

Table 2.1: Distribution of registered youth voters by sex and age group (%)

Characteristics		Are you a registered voter?		Total
		Yes	No	
Sex	Male	62.8	37.2	100.0
	Female	56.6	43.4	100.0
Age group	18 - 21	4.6	95.4	100.0
	22 - 25	54.6	45.4	100.0
	26 - 29	86.8	13.2	100.0
	30 - 35	95.5	4.5	100.0
Overall		59.7	40.3	100.0

The analysis of educational attainment among young people revealed significant disparities in voter registration status. Figure 2.1 shows that the likelihood of being registered to vote increases with the level of completed education. It indicates that 87% of young individuals who have attained a university education are registered voters, followed by 70% of those with vocational training. Registration rates drop to 57% for those who have completed secondary education and to 52.9% for those with only primary education. Interestingly, young people without any formal education had higher registration rates than those with primary and secondary education. This suggests that educational status plays a crucial role in influencing the voter registration status of young individuals.

Figure 2.1: Distribution of registered youth voters by sex and level of education (%)

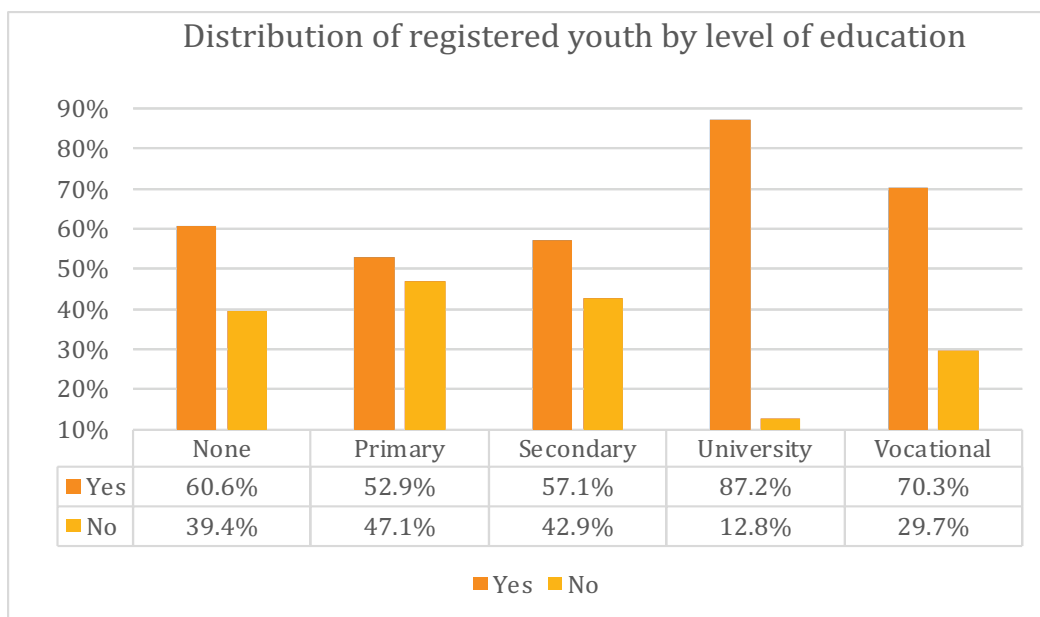


Table 2.2 presents an analysis of the distribution of registered youth voters based on their residential settings (urban or rural) and regional locations. The data indicates that youth in urban areas have a higher rate of voter registration (61.6%) compared to those in rural areas (57.5%). Regionally, the findings show that the northern and eastern regions have slightly higher percentages of registered youth voters (60% and 61%, respectively) compared to the central and western regions, both at 59%. These findings suggest minimal variation in voter registration rates across different regions and between urban and rural areas, indicating that geographical location does not significantly impact the voter registration status of young people. The gender analysis also shows that in both rural and urban areas, male youth have a 6% higher voter registration rate than female youth, and urban areas have 4% more registered female youth compared to rural areas.

Table 2.2: Distribution of registered youth voters by location (%)

Location		Are you a registered voter?		Total
		Yes	No	
Residence	Rural	57.5	42.5	100.0
	Urban	61.6	38.4	100.0
Region	Northern	60.0	40.0	100.0
	Eastern	61.4	38.6	100.0
	Central	58.7	41.3	100.0
	Western	59.2	40.8	100.0
Overall		59.7	40.3	100.0

b) Youth participation as voters in the 2016 general elections

To better understand youth participation in voting, young individuals were surveyed about their involvement in the 2016 and 2021 general election cycles. As of 2024, those who were eligible to vote in the 2016 general elections are currently aged 27 and older. Overall, Table 2.3 indicates that 73% of eligible youth participated in the 2016 general elections. The findings further reveal that 79% of those young voters were male, while 68% were female. Additionally, a significant majority (81%) of the youth who voted in the 2016 general elections are now in the 32 to 35 age group.

Table 2.3: Distribution of youth who voted in the 2016 general elections by sex and age group (%)

Characteristics		Did you vote in the 2016 general elections cycle?		Total
		Yes	No	
Sex	Male	78.7	21.3	100.0
	Female	67.5	32.5	100.0
Age group	27 - 31	68.9	31.1	100.0
	32 - 35	81.1	18.9	100.0
Overall		73.4	26.6	100.0

Table 2.3 reveals significant gender differences in youth participation in Uganda's 2016 general elections. Overall, 73.4% of youth reported voting, but the breakdown by sex shows that males (78.7%) were more likely to have voted compared to females (67.5%). This 11.2 percentage point gap indicates potential gendered barriers or differing motivations for electoral participation. These barriers may include socio-cultural norms, caregiving responsibilities disproportionately borne by women, or limited access to voter education initiatives. The data also shows that female youth were more likely to abstain, with 32.5% not voting compared to 21.3% of male youth. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions, such as promoting women's electoral participation through gender-responsive voter mobilization strategies and reducing structural obstacles that inhibit female engagement in political processes.

The qualitative data revealed different participation dynamics among the youth. In Mbale, FGD participants noted that young individuals are more inclined to vote for local government candidates, such as LC III and LC V, as well as area Members of Parliament, rather than participating in presidential elections. Additionally, participants from Kasese, Gulu, Mbale, and Adjumani reported that many young people have become disenchanted with the voting process, feeling fatigued by the persistent presence of the same candidates in office and believing that these individuals are unlikely to relinquish power. In Kasese specifically, some youth indicated that they only vote if they have family members running as candidates. Overall, the discussions highlighted a growing frustration among young voters with election outcomes and a diminishing trust in the electoral process.

"We are tired of pretending to vote, yet we vote for the same people who have overstayed in power"
- male FGD participant, Mbale districts.

"As a voter, I may not participate in elections, if none of my family member(s) is contesting for any position" - male FGD participant, Kasese district.

“Even when you labour to vote, your candidates of preference are never declared winners” - female participant, Adjumani district.

The findings presented in Table 2.3 reveal significant trends regarding voter turnout in the 2016 elections, with a focus on gender and area of residence. The data indicates that in rural areas, voter participation was notably higher among men, with 86.5% of men voting compared to only 67.3% of women. Conversely, the gender gap in urban areas was smaller, with 73.8% of men and 67.7% of women participating in the elections. Furthermore, the results show that men in rural areas had a higher voter turnout than their urban counterparts. Interestingly, the percentage of female voters was relatively consistent across both urban and rural settings.

Figure 2.3: Distribution of youth who voted in the 2016 general elections by sex and residence (%)

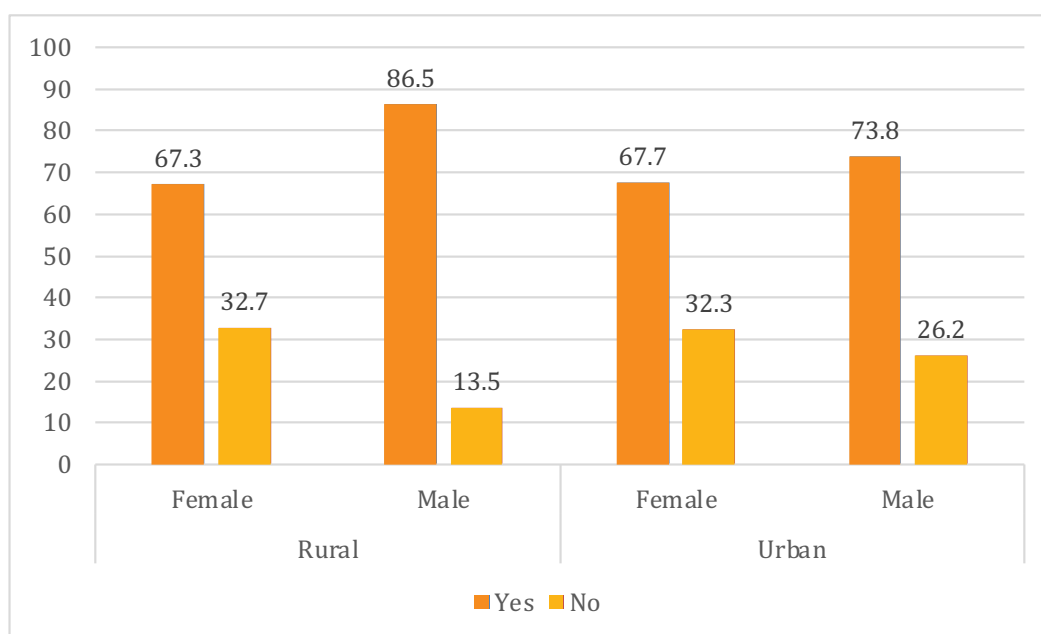


Table 2.4 illustrates the regional differences in youth voter turnout during the 2016 general elections. The data shows that youth in the Western (82%) and Northern (81%) regions had the highest participation rates. In contrast, the Central (63%) and Eastern (67%) regions reported comparatively lower turnout levels. Among these, the Central region had the lowest percentage of youth voters, while Western Uganda recorded the highest turnout of all regions.

Table 2.4: Distribution of youth who voted in the 2016 general elections by region (%)

Region	Did you vote in the 2016 general election cycle?		Total
	Yes	No	
Northern	80.6	19.4	100.0
Eastern	66.7	33.3	100.0
Central	63.2	36.8	100.0
Western	82.4	17.6	100.0
Overall	73.4	26.6	100.0

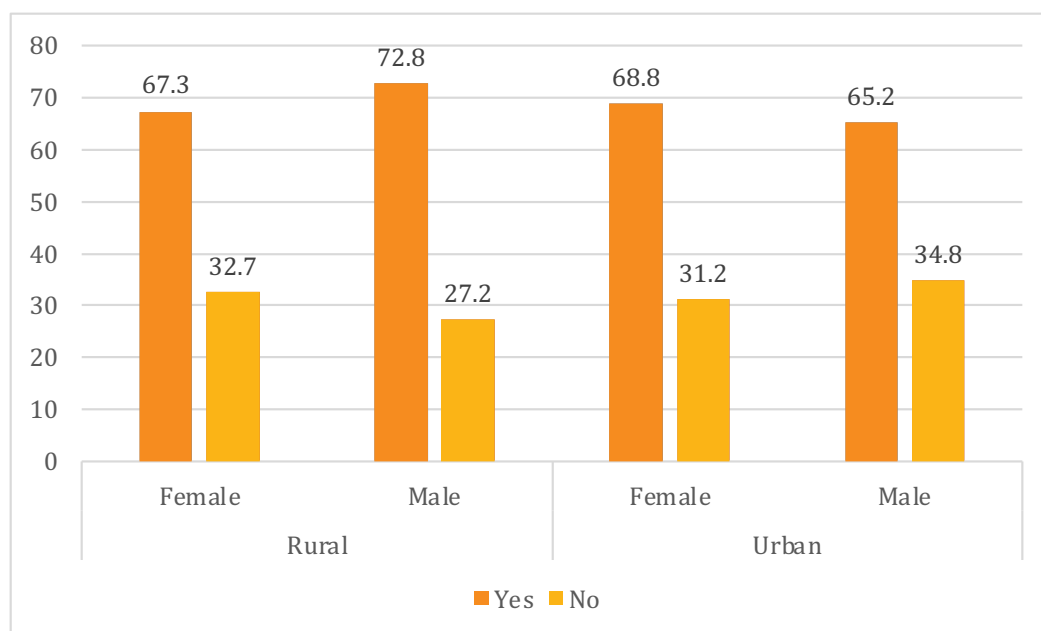
Table 2.5 presents the voter participation rates of youth during the 2021 general elections. Those who were eligible to vote in 2021 are now aged 22 and older as of 2024. Overall, 68% of eligible youth participated in the elections. The data reveals no difference in turnout between male and female youth, with both groups showing an equal participation rate of 68%. Furthermore, the majority of youth voters (85%) were in the 31-35 age group. The analysis also indicates a decline in voter turnout among younger segments of eligible youth, suggesting lower participation rates in the younger age brackets.

Table 2.5: Distribution of youth who voted in 2021 general elections by sex and age group (%)

Characteristics		Did you vote in the 2021 general election cycle?		Total
		Yes	No	
Sex	Male	68.2	31.8	100.0
	Female	68.1	31.9	100.0
Age group	22 - 26	52.9	47.1	100.0
	27 - 30	75.0	25.0	100.0
	31 - 35	84.8	15.2	100.0
Overall		68.2	31.8	100.0

Figure 2.4 illustrates the voting patterns of youth in the 2021 general elections, broken down by gender and area of residence. The data shows that in rural areas, 73% of male youth and 67% of female youth participated as voters. In urban areas, 65% of male youth and 69% of female youth voted. This indicates that male voter participation was higher in rural areas compared to urban areas, while the participation rate for female youth was slightly higher in urban areas than in rural areas.

Figure 2.4: Distribution of youth who voted in 2021 general elections by sex and residence (%)



Regarding regional participation in the 2021 general elections, Table 2.6 reveals that the Northern (72%) and Eastern (71%) regions had the highest percentages of youth voters, while the Central (64%) and Western (67%) regions reported lower participation rates in 2021. Notably, the Central region had the lowest voter turnout among youth compared to the other regions.

Table 2.6: Distribution of youth who voted in 2021 general elections by region (%)

Region	Did you vote in the 2021 general election cycle?		Total
	Yes	No	Total
Northern	71.7	28.3	100.0
Eastern	71.1	28.9	100.0
Central	64.1	35.9	100.0
Western	67.0	33.0	100.0
Overall	68.2	31.8	100.0

d) Trends in youth participation in voting

The data from Table 2.6 shows the distribution of youth who voted in the 2021 general elections by region. The Northern region had the highest youth voter turnout at 71.7%, followed closely by the Eastern region at 71.1%. The Western region had a turnout of 67.0%, while the Central region had the lowest turnout at 64.1%. Overall, 68.2% of youth participated in the 2021 general elections, with 31.8% not voting.

When comparing these figures to the 2016 elections, there is a noticeable decline in youth voter turnout. In 2016, 73% of youth participated, indicating a 5% decrease in 2021. This decline is more pronounced among male youth, with an 11% drop in participation from 79% in 2016 to 68% in 2021. Female youth participation remained consistent between the two election cycles.

Several factors contribute to this decline in youth voter turnout. One significant reason is voter apathy, where young people feel disillusioned with the political process and believe that their votes do not lead to meaningful change. Additionally, the fear of election-related violence and unrest, particularly in urban areas, discouraged many youths from voting. The logistical challenges of accessing polling stations, especially for those living in urban outskirts, also played a role in the lower turnout.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions impacted the electoral process. The arrest of a presidential candidate for breaching COVID-19 regulations led to heightened tensions and violence, further deterring youth participation. The lack of effective voter education and mobilization efforts, particularly for marginalized groups such as youth with disabilities, also contributed to the lower turnout.

In summary, the decline in youth voter turnout in the 2021 general elections can be attributed to a combination of voter apathy, fear of violence, logistical challenges, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these issues through targeted voter education, improved access to polling stations, and ensuring a safe and transparent electoral process is crucial to enhancing youth participation in future elections.

Figure 2.5: Distribution of youth who voted in 2021 and 2016 general elections by sex (%)

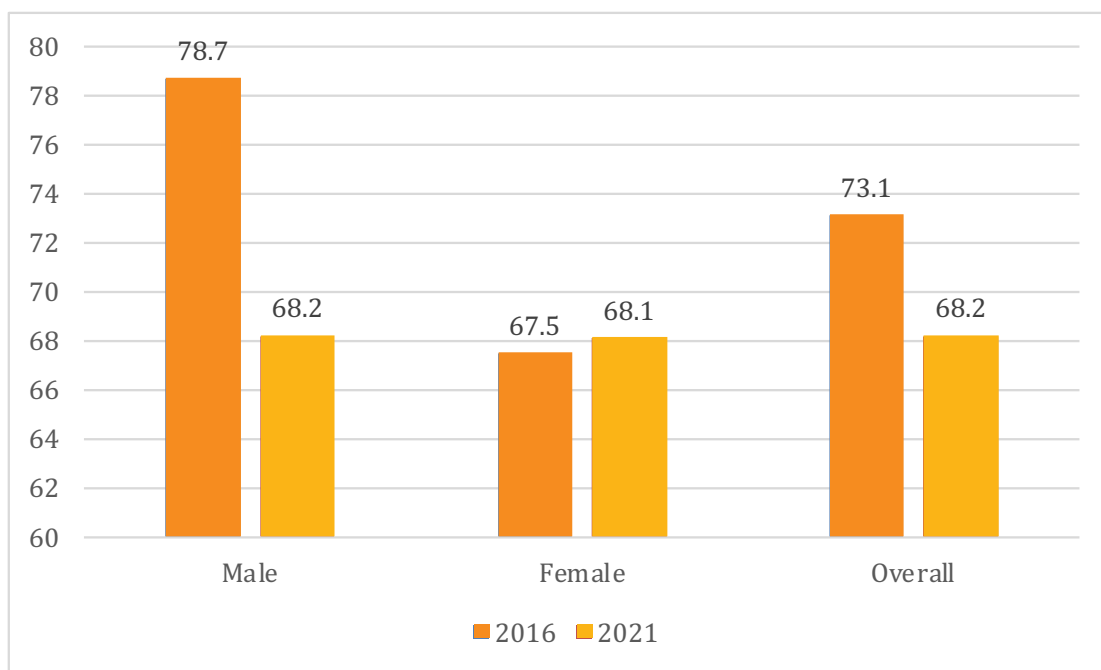


Figure 2.6 demonstrates that there were no significant differences in the participation of female youth as voters between the 2016 and 2021 general elections in both rural and urban areas. On the other hand, a comparison of the 2016 and 2021 elections shows a notable decline in male youth participation. In rural areas, male voter turnout dropped by 14%, from 87% in 2016 to 73% in 2021, while in urban areas, it decreased by 9%, from 74% in 2016 to 65% in 2021.

Figure 2.6: Distribution of youth who voted in 2021 and 2016 general elections by residence (%)

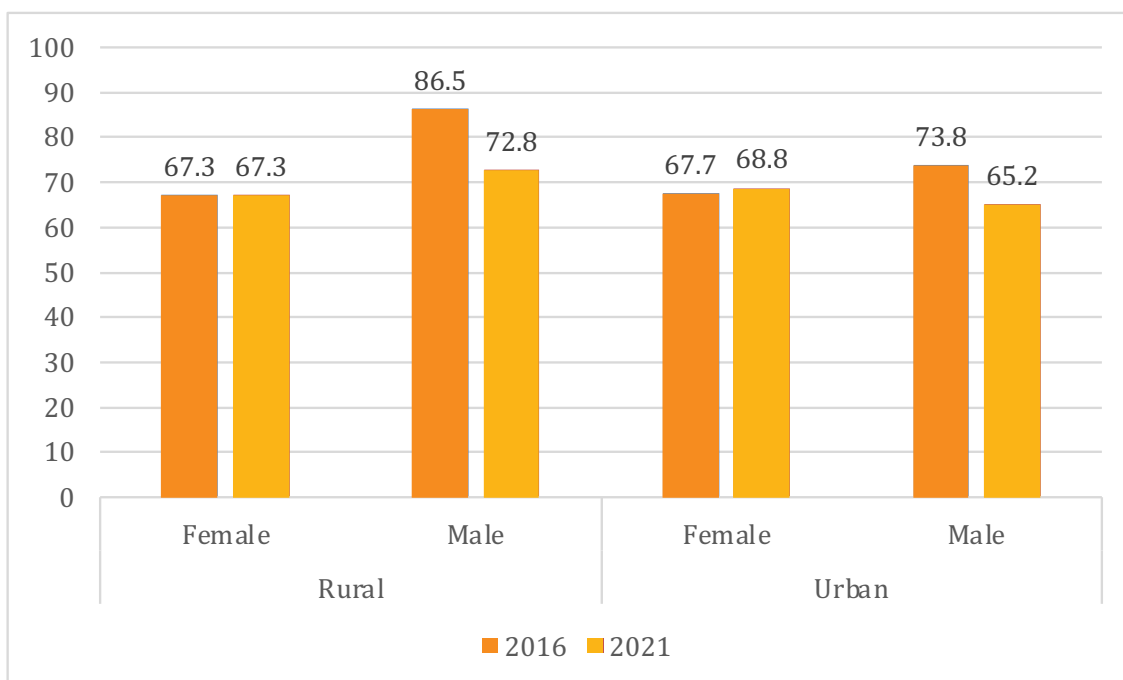
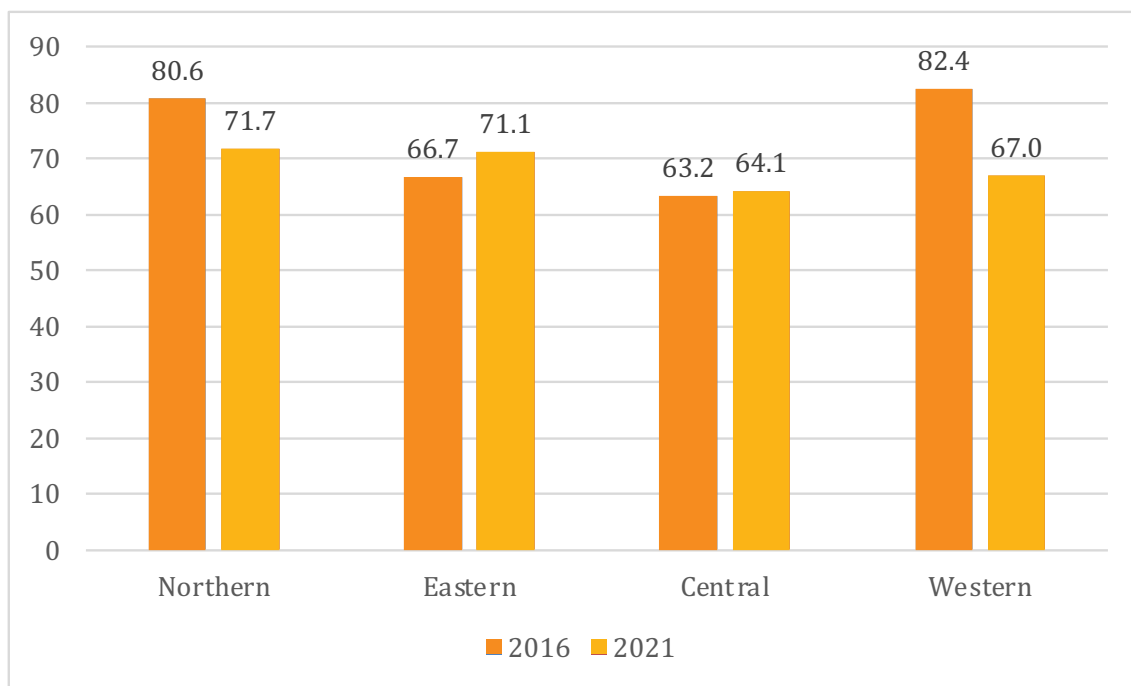


Figure 2.7 indicates a decline in youth voter participation in the northern and western regions between the 2016 and 2021 general elections. Specifically, participation in the northern region fell by 9%, from 81% in 2016 to 72% in 2021, and in the western region, it dropped by 15%, from 82% in 2016 to 67% in 2021. In contrast, the findings also highlight slight increases in youth voter participation in the eastern and central regions when comparing the 2016 and 2021 general elections.

Figure 2.7: Distribution of youth who voted in 2021 and 2016 general elections by region (%)



e) Youth participation in elections as candidates and candidates' agents

Table 2.6 shows that a majority of youth (67%) have not engaged in elections in active roles such as candidates, campaign agents, campaign volunteers, or polling agents. The data reveals that 16% of the surveyed youth have participated as campaign agents, 6% as campaign volunteers, 4% as candidates, and 4% as polling observers. Notably, young people are more likely to take on active election roles as campaign agents, with only a small fraction (3.7%) participating as candidates. Qualitative findings point to the monetization of elections as a significant barrier to youth candidacy. One focus group discussion participant from Iganga remarked, "If one doesn't have money, he/she can't win an election."

The data also highlights gender disparities, particularly in the roles of campaign agents, where male participation (20.3%) surpasses female participation (11.2%). This male dominance is similarly reflected across other categories of election participation.

Further analysis showed no significant differences in youth participation as candidates, campaign agents/volunteers, and election observers between urban and rural areas. However, the central region had slightly higher numbers of youth serving as candidates (8%) and campaign agents (19%) compared to other regions. Additionally, 10% of youth who have run as candidates were in the 30-35 age group, while 24% of youth serving as campaign agents were in the 26-29 age group.

Table 2.6: Distribution of youth participation in elections processes by sex (%)

Participation as	Sex		Overall
	Female	Male	
Campaign Agent	11.2	20.3	15.8
Campaign Volunteer	5.4	7.3	6.4
Candidate	3.7	5.0	4.4
None	73.6	61.5	67.4
Other	2.0	1.7	1.8
Polling Observers	4.1	4.3	4.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The qualitative data revealed that, aside from a few individuals offering themselves as candidates for elective positions, the youth, both female and male, primarily participate in elections as campaign agents, mobilizers, or volunteers for candidates running for Mayor, Members of Parliament (MPs), and Councillors. In Adjumani and Wakiso districts, it was reported that youth comprise a significant portion of election participants, particularly at campaign trails and rallies, serving as moral supporters. These young individuals are often responsible for composing campaign songs that praise their preferred candidates.

In Kasese, it was reported that youth actively encouraged their peers to participate in elections and consider running for office. One male participant from a focus group discussion in Kasese stated, "Even if my 60-year-old brother contested against a fellow youth, I would vote for the fellow youth."

Additionally, a female participant from Gulu district noted, "*The youth, especially the Boda-Boda riders, lead the campaign trails, cheering and making them lively.*"

2.2.2 Youth attitudes towards elections

Table 2.7 shows that 72% of respondents indicated that youth are enthusiastic about participating in elections. The findings reveal a slight difference between genders, with 73% of young males and 71% of young females expressing excitement about electoral participation. The highest level of enthusiasm was noted among those aged 26 to 29, with 78% indicating excitement, while the 18 to 21 age group reported the lowest level of enthusiasm at 66%.

Table 2.7: Responses on whether the youth are enthusiastic to participate in elections by sex and age group (%)

Attitude		Agree	Disagree	Not sure	Total	
Excited to participate in elections	Sex	Male	73.1	18.9	8.0	100.0
	Age group	Female	71.2	16.6	12.2	100.0
		18 - 21	66.0	15.7	18.3	100.0
		22 - 25	73.7	21.7	4.6	100.0
		26 - 29	78.7	16.2	5.1	100.0
		30 - 35	71.0	17.4	11.6	100.0
Overall	Total	72.1	17.8	10.1	100.0	

During the FGDs, youth participants shared that their enthusiasm for elections is largely tied to financial expectations and potential benefits. Many young people view elections as an opportunity to earn money, especially by working as mobilizers or campaign agents for candidates. Participants from different districts reported that elections have become heavily monetized, with candidates offering bribes to youth in exchange for their votes.

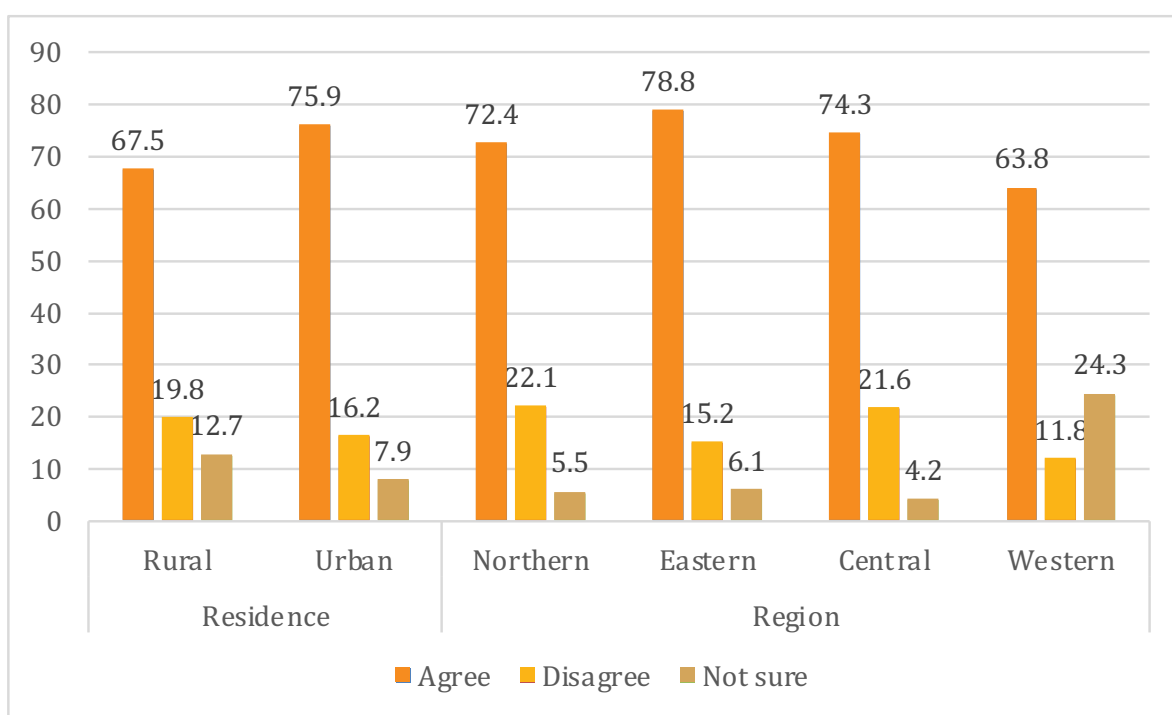
“During elections, youth support to the candidate, is to the highest bidder, or related to what a candidate fulfils before elections,” female FGD participant Adjumani district.

“... in search for money, youth accidentally participate in elections,” male FGD participant, Mbarara district.

“...elections are for the rich, the youth don't contest for positions, they don't have that kind of money,” male FGD participant, Kasese district.

Figure 2.8 illustrates that enthusiasm for elections among youth is significantly higher in the eastern regions, with 79% expressing agreement with the statement, compared to only 64% in the western regions. Additionally, the figure indicates that youth in urban areas show greater excitement about elections (76%) than those in rural areas (68%).

Figure 2.8: Responses regarding youth excitement to participate in elections by region and residence (%)



Participants in the FGDs, particularly those from Wakiso, Kasese, Gulu, Mukono, and Kampala, indicated that many young people are disenchanted with elections. They view the outcomes as unfair and believe that the results are always the same, especially concerning MPs and LCVs, where rigging is prevalent and often leads to violence and the use of tear gas.

One participant noted, *“Elections have lost their meaning. Politicians are no longer patriotic; they work for their own interests and those of their families instead of the people,”* said a female participant from Gulu district.

Another participant, a male participant with disabilities from Mbarara district, said, *“I don't know what I will gain from the person I'm going to vote for.”*

A female participant from Mbale also commented, *“Young people are no longer excited about elections because they feel the elections have lost their essence; the winner is already known.”*

However, some FGDs revealed that there are youth who remain hopeful and excited about elections, looking forward to changes in leadership and supporting candidates of their choice, particularly during local primaries at the village, parish, and sub-county levels. Across all districts surveyed, participants reported a general sense of disinterest among the youth regarding elections, with many feeling exhausted by the empty promises made by candidates. As a result, some young people choose not to participate in the electoral process.

In contrast to the findings presented in Table 2.7, where 72% of respondents indicated that the youth are excited about elections, Table 2.8 reflects a different perspective, showing that only 45% believe the youth care about elections, while 43% think young people do not care at all.

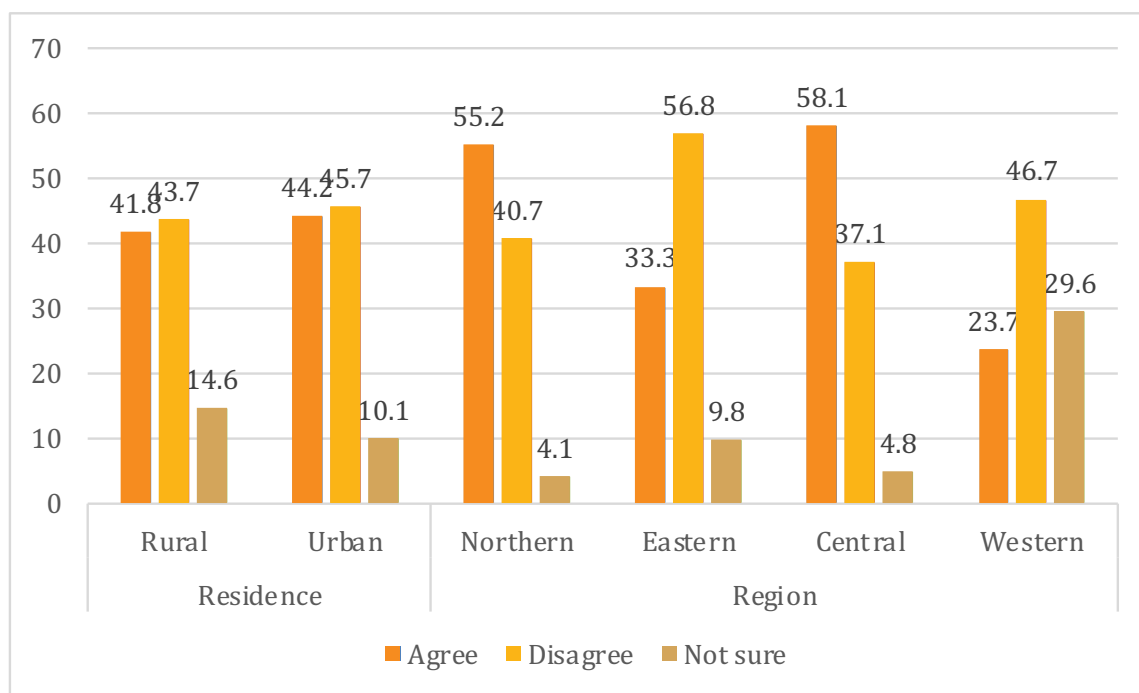
The data also indicates that there are no significant gender differences in opinions about youth engagement in elections. Furthermore, notable variations were observed across different age groups. For instance, the highest percentage (55%) of respondents who believed young people do care about elections belonged to the 26-29 age group, while the lowest percentage (40%) was found in the 22-25 age group.

Table 2.8: Responses on whether the youth don't care about elections by sex and age group (%)

Attitude			Agree	Disagree	Not sure	Total
Don't care about elections	Sex	Male	42.9	47.2	10.0	100.0
		Female	43.4	42.2	14.2	100.0
	Age group	18 - 21	41.8	40.5	17.6	100.0
		22 - 25	49.3	40.1	10.5	100.0
		26 - 29	36.8	55.1	8.1	100.0
30 - 35		43.9	44.5	11.6	100.0	
Overall			43.1	44.8	12.1	100.0

The analysis also revealed regional differences in young people's attitudes toward elections. Figure 2.9 illustrates that a higher percentage of respondents in the central (58%) and northern (55%) regions believe that youth do not care about elections, compared to those in the eastern (33%) and western (24%) regions. In contrast, the eastern region had the highest percentage of respondents (57%) who disagreed with the statement that youth do not care about elections. Additionally, Figure 2.9 shows a slight variation between urban (44%) and rural (42%) respondents, with a marginally higher percentage of urban respondents agreeing that youth do not care about elections.

Figure 2.9: Responses on whether the youth don't care about elections by region and residence (%)



2.2 Participation of young women in elections

Uganda has made commendable efforts to ensure fair representation of women in political offices at both national and local levels through various government policies. As a result, women now hold nearly 25% of parliamentary seats and a minimum of 30% of positions in local government. Beyond running for electoral positions, young women actively participate in elections by voting, attending political rallies, mobilizing voters, and engaging with political leaders and candidates. Their involvement is crucial for fostering inclusive and representative governance, highlighting the importance of continued efforts to support and empower young women in the political arena.

2.2.1 Barriers to young women's participation in electoral processes

Qualitative data shows that marital dynamics significantly limit women's electoral engagement, particularly among younger married women. These women often face a complex mix of gender and generational challenges as they navigate the political process. Younger individuals, typically first-time voters, find these processes especially daunting.

Both male and female respondents indicated that political differences can lead husbands to prevent their wives from participating in elections. Many men expect their wives to share their political views, and when they do not, they may restrict their voting rights.

In situations where wives choose to vote independently and secretly, they may face severe consequences, including domestic violence or even divorce. This behavior is not only common but also accepted by some men, who view it as a way to ensure their preferred candidate's victory. This dynamic highlights the significant influence husbands exert over women's political participation, often forcing women to choose between exercising their right to vote and maintaining harmony in their marriages.

A male focus group discussion participant from Mbarara City stated, *“When wives have differing political ideologies from their husbands, they choose family peace by not participating in elections.”*

Likewise, a female focus group discussion participant from Iganga District remarked, *“Women do not participate in elections for fear of being abused or divorced by their husbands.”*

Despite marital dynamics acting as a barrier to women’s political participation, the qualitative data also reveals that marital status can significantly affect electoral engagement. Table 3.1 shows that the voter turnout among married women and those who have been married was higher than that of women who have never been married in 2016 and 2021.

Specifically, in 2021, 73% of married women voted compared to 56% of single women. Furthermore, the percentage of married women who voted increased from 67.8% in 2016 to 73% in 2021, while there was no significant change in the voting percentages for women who have never been married. These findings suggest that, although marital dynamics can suppress individual women’s participation due to control or fear, being married may be associated with higher overall participation rates among women in elections.

Table 3.1 Responses on whether women voted in the 2021 and 2016 elections by marital status

Marital status	Did you vote in 2016		Did you vote in 2021	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Divorced/Separated	22.2%	77.8%	20.0%	80.0%
Married	32.2%	67.8%	26.9%	73.1%
Never Married/Single	42.9%	57.1%	43.9%	56.1%
Widow/Widower	0.0%	100.0%	25.0%	75.0%
Overall	32.5%	67.5%	31.9%	68.1%

The qualitative findings highlighted that many women prioritize household duties and traditional gender roles over voting or pursuing electoral positions. These responsibilities reinforce conventional gender expectations, which result in decreased interest in electoral engagement. Women often regard their domestic responsibilities as paramount, leading to limited political involvement and diminished trust in the electoral process. Some women expressed greater loyalty to community groups, such as Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs), than to political causes, indicating a disinterest or negative perception toward elections.

As one female participant from Mbale remarked, *“Women have a common saying, ‘If you don’t help me, I don’t help you.’”*

Another participant from Gulu City noted, *“Women are disinterested in political matters, so they neither vote nor stand as candidates. They prefer to support from a distance.”*

The findings also revealed that sexual harassment is a significant barrier to women’s participation as candidates in the electoral process. Running for office typically requires considerable financial

resources, which many women lack. In response, some women may feel compelled to rely on men, including opposing candidates, who offer financial support in exchange for sexual favors — a troubling practice reportedly common in districts like Mbale. Consequently, some women compromise their values out of desperation to remain competitive.

Additionally, this situation discourages potential female candidates from considering a bid for office due to fears of exploitation. Male participants also expressed reluctance about their wives running for office. One male participant from Mbale stated, ***“I can’t recommend my wife to join in elections, and if she ever does, I will first divorce her.”***

The nature of the political environment during elections, including long lines at polling places and the presence of security forces, further deters women from participating. The extended queues to cast a vote often leave women away from home for long periods, creating additional challenges. Heavy military and police presence around polling stations fosters an atmosphere of intimidation, with women interpreting such measures as potential signs of violence. Many choose to stay home to protect their families rather than risk attending the polls.

As stated by a female participant from Mbale District, ***“Women are intimidated by the police or army at the polling stations, and the army jets that fly around to ensure security.”***

Another participant from Kasese District added, ***“The heavy deployment of security intimidates female youth and hinders them from participating in elections.”***

Economic factors, particularly the monetization of elections, were also identified by participants as barriers to their involvement. Campaigns are often highly monetized, and many women lack the funds to run for office, restricting their candidacy to lower-level or mainstream positions. Additionally, financial incentives frequently drive voter participation among women, as candidates offer small bribes — sometimes as little as UGX 5,000 — to secure votes from young women. This practice has become deeply entrenched, especially among candidates seeking support from female voters. Consequently, if candidates do not offer monetary compensation, many women are unwilling to leave their businesses or homes to vote since they prioritize earning an income to support their families.

As some participants stated, ***“Women cannot leave their businesses behind to go and vote without being given money by a candidate; they have to feed their children,”*** noted a female participant from Iganga District. Another participant from the same district commented, ***“When women are paid 5,000 shillings or 10,000 shillings, they view it as compensation for leaving their businesses behind to go and vote.”***

2.3 Participation of youth with disabilities in elections

The participation of youth with disabilities (YWDs) in elections is a critical step toward fostering inclusive democratic processes and ensuring that no one is left behind. The inclusion of YWDs in electoral systems and structures not only empowers them to exercise their civic rights but also strengthens the overall integrity and representativeness of elections. This aligns with the global commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly the ***“Leave No One Behind”*** (LNOB) principle, which emphasizes the need for full and meaningful participation of marginalized groups, including youth with disabilities, in all aspects of society — elections being no exception.

Despite these commitments, the participation of YWDs in elections remains a complex issue, influenced by various factors such as accessibility, tailored voter education, and societal attitudes. This section explores the involvement of YWDs in voter education, their roles as candidates, campaign agents, and voters, and the challenges they face in these processes. Insights are drawn from data collected through household questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs), shedding light on both the progress made and the barriers that persist in ensuring the full electoral participation of youth with disabilities.

2.3.1 Participation of PWDs in voter education

Voter education is essential for ensuring that youth with disabilities can effectively participate in electoral processes. It helps them understand their rights and responsibilities as voters and ensures they are well-informed about the voting process. However, this study identified significant gaps in the provision of tailored voter education for youth with disabilities.

Data indicate that 20 youth with disabilities were interviewed through a household questionnaire, six participated in FGDs, and two took part in Key Informant Interviews. According to the FGDs, some youth with disabilities reported receiving voter education through various channels such as rallies, radio, television, and social media platforms like WhatsApp, where they form community groups to share information about voter education.

One female participant highlighted the role of peer support in disseminating information, stating, ***“We get information through social media platforms like WhatsApp. We form village committee groups where we share about voter education.”***

Youth with disabilities noted that during voter education efforts, they are often reached out to by other youth or individuals with disabilities. Some aspiring candidates collaborate with organizations within the disability community to provide voter education tailored to youth with disabilities. However, the education provided often lacks emphasis on the importance of voting and occasionally includes incorrect information. One participant lamented, ***“YWDs are given information without explanations, making it hard for them to participate in elections,”*** while another added, ***“Some YWDs receive incorrect information concerning elections.”***

Conversely, some youth with disabilities expressed that they do not receive voter education tailored to their specific disabilities. Communication with the deaf community is particularly challenging, leaving them excluded from voter education initiatives.

During a key informant interview, a local leader who is also a person with a disability stated, ***“In all my time, I have never seen voter education specifically for PWDs.”*** Another male youth with disabilities emphasized the lack of information from candidates, stating, ***“Candidates do not explain to us the importance of voting and the roles and responsibilities of a leader.”***

These findings underscore the need for comprehensive, accurate, and tailored voter education programs for youth with disabilities to ensure their effective participation in elections.

2.3.2 Participation of Youth with disabilities as candidates, campaign agents and voters

The findings from the FGD revealed that Youth with Disabilities participate in elections as candidates, voters, campaign agents, and observers, depending on the type of election and the specific electorate involved.

During the FGDs, YWDs indicated that in the Special Interest Group elections, particularly for persons with disabilities (PWDs), they participate fully as candidates because there is less competition and the elections are conducted peacefully. A youth leader with a disability shared that during the PWD electoral college elections, it is the responsibility of the aspiring candidates to ensure that fellow YWDs have the necessary requirements to participate as voters. Another YWD respondent mentioned that they only engage as voters when electing fellow YWDs.

“As a youth leader with a disability, during the 2021 elections, I prepared my fellow YWDs to participate in the PWD electoral college elections by ensuring they had their national IDs ready and were registered voters,” said a male YWD participant from Mbarara City.

“YWDs participate through the PWD structures at the village, sub-county, and parish levels,” added a female FGD participant from Kasese District.

In the general elections, some YWDs confirmed that they do not fully engage as voters due to obstacles such as inaccessible polling stations. However, those who do participate often rely on facilitation from candidates, including transportation to polling stations, and personal motivations, like voting for loved ones. One YWD respondent mentioned that they tend to vote for candidates who offer them money. Another added that they often feel needed only for their votes and ignored after the elections, which explains their inclination to support candidates who provide financial incentives.

“PWDs are bribed to participate and are usually picked up from their homes to go to polling stations,” said a male YWD during the FGD in Iganga District.

“PWDs are often sought for their votes but ignored afterward,” noted a male PWD in a Key Informant Interview (KII) in Mbale City.

“Youth with Disabilities do not fully participate in general elections, but they do actively engage in voting for fellow YWDs,” stated a male PWD during a KII in Mbarara City.

Youth with Disabilities actively participate in elections as candidates, voters, campaign agents, and observers, particularly in Special Interest Group elections for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). However, their engagement in general elections is often limited by obstacles such as inaccessible polling stations and inadequate voter education. To enhance their participation, it is essential to address these barriers and ensure that electoral processes are inclusive and accessible. This will empower YWDs to fully exercise their electoral rights and contribute meaningfully to the democratic process.

2.3.3 Barriers to youth with disability in participant in elections

Youth with disabilities highlighted that the absence of specialized support services, such as hearing aids and sign language interpreters, significantly limits their participation in the election process. Additionally, some YWDs mentioned that long distances to polling stations create mobility challenges, further hindering their ability to vote.

“YWDs need transportation to the polling station. If this support is not provided, they do not vote during elections,” said a Key Informant Interview participant from LCII in Kasese District.

The lack of essential items, such as national IDs, also restricts their electoral participation. When asked why many YWDs do not possess national IDs, reasons included the high costs of acquiring them, a lack of awareness regarding the registration process, and the inaccessibility of ID registration locations. YWDs suggested establishing specific timelines for their registration.

“YWDs do not participate as voters due to missing requirements like national IDs,” noted a male YWD during a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in Mbarara City.

Low self-esteem and a lack of confidence were also identified as barriers to electoral participation. One YWD mentioned avoiding participation to not inconvenience others by asking for help. Another added that candidates without disabilities often do not appreciate the efforts YWDs make when voting for them.

External factors, such as stigmatization, adverse weather conditions, and election-related violence, were also cited as obstacles to YWDs' participation in elections. The deployment of military forces during elections intimidates YWDs, making them more likely to avoid polling stations due to fears of violence. An official from the Electoral Commission mentioned that there are no contingency plans for accessible polling stations during adverse weather, suggesting that such conditions could negatively affect YWD participation.

“Violence during elections prevents persons with disabilities from participating because they are more likely to become victims,” stated a female FGD participant from Mbale City.

Access to accurate information is crucial for YWDs to make informed decisions throughout the election process. The lack of detailed and correct information leaves them vulnerable to election misinformation and disinformation. YWDs reported that insufficient information about electoral processes and the dissemination of incorrect information often leads them to abstain from voting. Moreover, they indicated that many aspiring candidates are reluctant to share their manifestos with them.

“YWDs receive information without adequate explanations, making it difficult for them to participate in elections,” shared a participant during a Key Informant Interview in Mbale City.

“Some YWDs receive incorrect information regarding elections,” another participant noted.

“People close to YWDs often decide who they should vote for,” mentioned a FGD participant from Iganga District.

Furthermore, one YWD expressed that when they run for positions beyond those specified in the PWD electoral college, other youth often hesitate to support them due to perceptions of incompetence in leadership. It was also pointed out that mainstream positions meant for YWDs are frequently occupied by older persons with disabilities, who regard younger YWDs as incapable.

“Most people don't want to vote for YWDs because they perceive them as incompetent,” stated a participant from an FGD in Wakiso District.

“Even positions meant for YWDs are taken by older PWDs,” noted a male youth leader during an FGD in Mukono District.

2.4 Voter education and youth participation in elections

2.4.1 Youth understanding of voter education

Some youth who understand what voter education is believe that it involves informing them about their right to vote, how to vote, and their roles and responsibilities in the election cycle. Some respondents further mentioned that voter education includes educating people on when and how to vote, sharing the requirements needed to vote, emphasizing political tolerance and coexistence during elections, and clarifying the eligibility of voters. However, some responses showed that understanding of voter education was limited to just how to vote during elections.

“Voter education is what is taught for people to understand their right to vote.” - FGD Wakiso District.

“Voter education involves teaching citizens about their right to vote for the right person and empowering them to actively participate in voting.” - FGD Kasese District.

On the other hand, some youths' understanding of the concept of voter education is subjective and abstract, leading to misconceptions about what it entails. For instance:

“Voter education is persuading someone to support a particular candidate during elections.” - FGD Kasese District.

“Voter education is informing youth about how His Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni came into power and how he should be maintained in power.” - FGD Mbarara City.

“Voter education is sharing posters of the aspiring candidates.” - FGD Mbarara City.

Additionally, some participants noted that voter education sometimes includes sharing information on political tolerance and coexistence during elections. However, it is essential to highlight that many FGD participants had a limited view of voter education, focusing mainly on the mechanics of voting itself.

Furthermore, voter education presents an opportunity to address the misinformation and disinformation among youth regarding the electoral process. Yet, the concept remains subjective and abstract for some, as there are still misconceptions about what it entails.

“Voter education is persuading someone to support a particular candidate during elections,” stated a male participant from Kasese District.

The understanding of voter education among youth varies significantly, with some recognizing its importance in informing them about their right to vote, the voting process, and their roles and responsibilities in the election cycle. However, misconceptions persist, with some youths viewing voter education as merely persuading support for specific candidates or sharing campaign materials. This highlights the need for comprehensive and accurate voter education programs

that emphasize political tolerance, coexistence, and the broader aspects of electoral participation. Addressing these gaps is crucial to ensuring that youth are well-informed and actively engaged in the democratic process.

2.4.2 Targeted voter education for the youth

Targeted voter education is essential for empowering young voters and ensuring their active participation in electoral processes. It involves tailored strategies to reach different segments of the youth population, providing them with the knowledge and motivation needed to engage in elections meaningfully.

Qualitative data reveals differing findings on the targeting of youth during voter education efforts. In the Kasese district, some youth indicated that they are targeted through channels such as games, sports, and entertainment due to their numerical strength. Specific categories of youth, including youth leaders, political party youth representatives, party flag bearers, and aspiring youth leaders, are often the primary targets. An Electoral Commission (EC) representative noted that students in secondary schools and higher education institutions are also targeted, but only by invitation from the EC to extend information on voter education.

“During Voter Education, they only target youth leaders and youth political aspirants,” shared a key informant from Mbale City.

“It is only leaders who have access to voter education,” mentioned an FGD participant from Kasese District.

“The Electoral Commission conducts voter education in schools and institutions of higher learning,” stated an EC representative.

Conversely, FGD respondents from other study districts reported that youth, especially those in grassroots communities, are not adequately targeted during voter education efforts. One respondent mentioned that voter education is often attended by individuals aged 35 and above. Another key informant from the Electoral Commission indicated that there are no voter education efforts specifically targeting out-of-school youth or those in communities, leaving a significant portion of the youth population without direct access to voter education.

“Voter education is not received by youth at grassroots levels,” noted an FGD participant from Mukono District.

“Voter education is always attended by those who are 35 and above,” added a participant from Adjumani District.

These findings highlight the need for more inclusive and comprehensive voter education strategies that effectively reach all segments of the youth population, ensuring that every young person is informed and empowered to participate in the electoral process.

Table 3.1 indicates that 32% of the youth reported having experienced voter education in their communities during the election periods of 2016 or 2021. In contrast, the majority — 52% — stated that voter education was not conducted in their communities. Additionally, 16% were unsure

Table 3.1: Responses on whether there has been community voter education in the 2016 or 2021 elections

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	190	31.9
No	309	51.8
Not Sure	97	16.3
Total	596	100

Table 3.2 indicates that 35% of urban communities received voter education, compared to 29% of rural communities. Additionally, communities in the eastern region (52%) and northern region (41%) were more likely to receive voter education than those in the central region (28%) and western region (11%).

Table 3.2: Responses on whether there has been community voter education during the 2016 or 2021 elections by residence and region (%)

Location		Has this community had voter education during the 2016 or 2021 elections?			Total
		Yes	No	Not Sure	
Residence	Rural	28.7	50.4	20.9	100.0
	Urban	34.5	53.0	12.5	100.0
Region	Northern	40.7	44.8	14.5	100.0
	Eastern	51.5	27.3	21.2	100.0
	Central	27.5	61.7	10.8	100.0
	Western	11.2	69.1	19.7	100.0
Overall		31.9	51.8	16.3	100.0

Table 3.3 shows that only 18% of the youth surveyed attended a voter education event during the 2021 election period, while the majority (82%) did not participate in any such events. Among those who did attend, 23% were male and 12% were female. The largest group of attendees (24%) fell within the 30-35 age range, followed by 21% in the 26-29 age range. The significant difference between those who attended and those who did not suggests that youth may be insufficiently targeted in voter education efforts, or that various barriers may prevent their participation in these events. However, Table 3.3 indicates that the level of education does not impede youth from attending voter education events, as the majority (27%) of those who have participated had no formal education.

Participants in the focus group discussion reported that youth are often targeted for voter education through games, sports, and entertainment. In response to the social gathering restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020/2021 elections, new and innovative methods for delivering voter education were implemented.

The findings presented in Table 3.10 indicate that 56% of young people consider radio their primary source of information about voter education, followed by television at 31%. Additionally, 25% of youth identified social network groups as a significant source of information, while social media was noted by 23%. Political rallies were mentioned by 18% of young people as another source of

Table 3.3 Sources of information on voter education by residence (%)

Information sources	Rural	Urban	Overall
FM Radio	26.8	29.6	56.4
Television	10.3	20.2	30.5
Social Network Groups	10.3	14.8	25.1
Social Media	8.1	15.3	23.4
Political Party Rallies	7.2	10.4	17.7
News Papers	1.9	2.0	3.9
Others	1.9	1.7	3.5

Further analysis revealed significant differences in the channels young people use for radio and television. The findings indicate that the top five most-watched television stations — NTV, Bukedde, UBC, and Spark — collectively account for 70% of viewership among young people. This pattern closely aligns with the findings from the Uganda Media Landscape report by BBC Media Action (2019) and the Geopoll Uganda reports from 2018 and 2015. In contrast, the top five radio stations preferred by young people are local stations, such as Radio West, Aulogo FM, Elgon Radio, and Mega FM. This suggests that targeting young people through television is most effective using national broadcasting channels, while engaging them through radio is best accomplished via local stations.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants noted that radio is one of the most effective channels for disseminating information on voter education. They observed that young people not only listen to the radio but also actively participate in live call-ins during talk shows to inquire further about the information shared regarding voter education. This sentiment was echoed by an official from the Electoral Commission (EC), who stated,

“Radio is a very effective channel for conducting voter education. During voter education radio programs, listeners call in and ask questions to gain a clearer understanding of the topics discussed,” KII EC.

In addition to radio, FGD participants identified other channels through which young people receive information about elections. These include youth camps, community outreach events organized by candidates, community meetings, conversations during funerals, hangouts, drinking places, and weddings, as well as games and sports events. For instance, one female FGD participant from Kasese District mentioned, “Youth obtain information on voter education during funerals, hangouts, and weddings.” Another key informant noted, “Some community outreach events related to elections were conducted at least four times,” according to a KII Youth Leader from Iganga District.

FGD participants also shared that voter education was primarily conducted before the 2021

general elections. Participants from Adjumani, Iganga, and Kasese districts, as well as Gulu City, reported that voter education usually occurs around election time. A key informant stated, *“The Electoral Commission conducted voter education in 2021 and encouraged youth participation in the elections,”* noted a KII LC II representative from Kasese District. In Kasese, participants indicated that voter education on the demarcation of polling stations at the village level was conducted recently. However, across all districts visited, the youth observed that many communities have never been targeted with voter education..

Table 3.4 Attendance of voter education event by sex and age group (%)

Characteristics		Have you attended or participated in any meeting or workshop or seminar on voter education?		Total
		Yes	No	
Sex	Female	12.2	87.8	100.0
	Male	22.9	77.1	100.0
Age Group	18 - 21	7.8	92.2	100.0
	22 - 25	18.4	81.6	100.0
Level of education	26 - 29	20.6	79.4	100.0
	30 - 35	23.9	76.1	100.0
	None	27.3	72.7	100.0
	Primary	17.6	82.4	100.0
	Secondary	17.5	82.5	100.0
	University	5.1	94.9	100.0
	Vocational	20.3	79.7	100.0
Overall		17.6	82.4	100.0

Participants in FGDs across all districts highlighted that voter education primarily targets community meetings; however, most young people do not attend these gatherings. One participant noted, *“We usually don’t attend these meetings unless there is a financial incentive. They don’t even bother to invite us to join.”*

According to the FGDs, community meetings are predominantly attended by individuals aged 35 and older. Additionally, one key informant pointed out that there are no voter education initiatives specifically aimed at the youth, particularly those who are out of school, which leaves a significant portion of the youth population without meaningful access to voter education.

Figure 3.1 shows that 18% of the youth who have ever participated in a voter education event are from urban areas, compared to 17% from rural areas. Furthermore, the majority of youth who have attended such events are from the northern region (29%), while the western region has the lowest attendance rate at 6%.

Figure 3.1 Attendance of voter education event by residence and region (%)

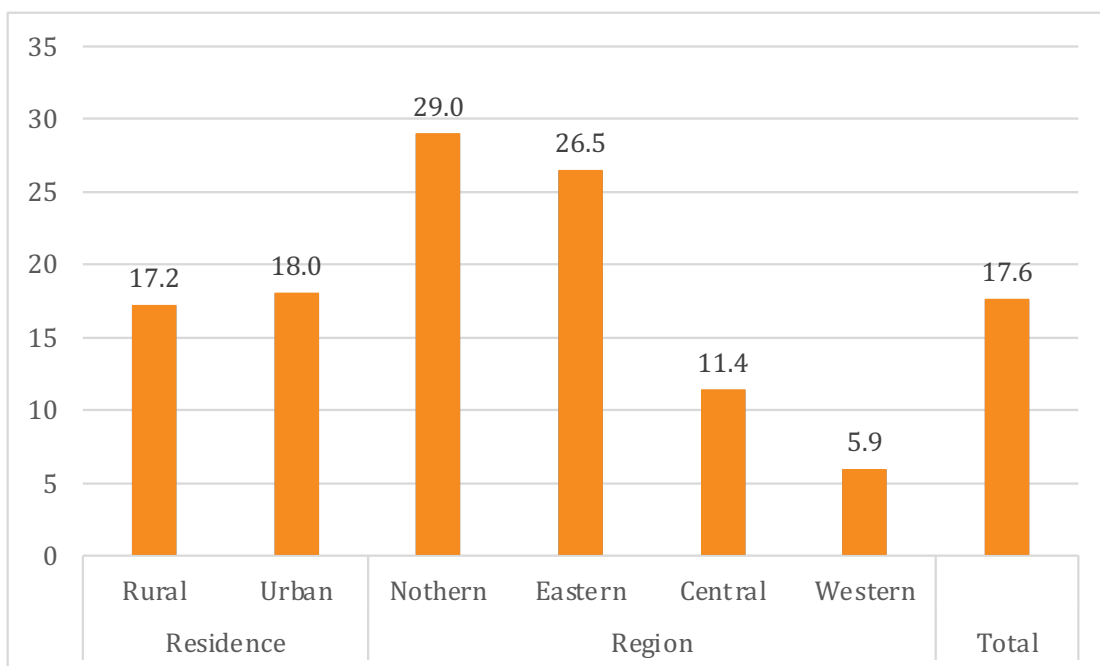
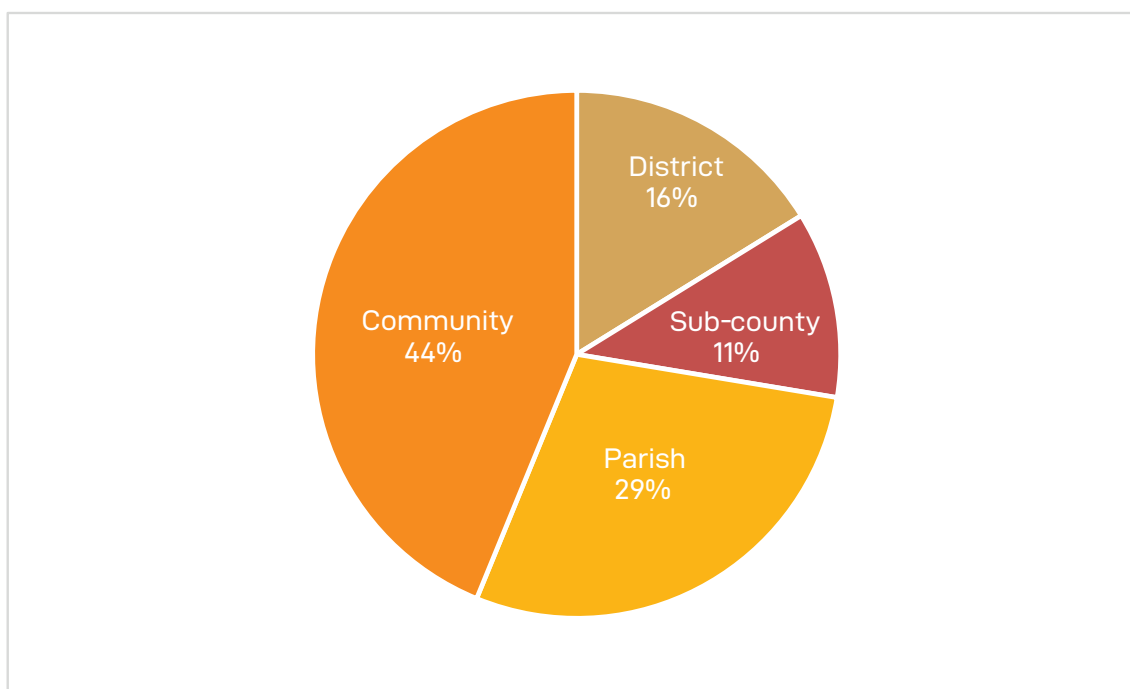


Figure 3.2 shows that the majority (43%) of the voter education events that the youth attended were organised at the community level. This denotes that youth at the community and district level are more likely to be targeted and attend voter education than those at the parish and sub-county level.

Figure 3.2 Location where voter education events were organised



2.4.3 Impact of voter education on youth participation in elections

Table 3.4 presents the correlation between voter education and voting behavior. It reveals that 84% of youth who attended a voter education event participated in the 2021 general elections, while 16% did not vote. In contrast, 64% of those who did not attend any voter education event voted in the 2021 election, while 36% neither voted nor attended a voter education event. This indicates that youth who receive voter education are 20% more likely to participate in voting compared to those who do not receive such education.

Table 3.5 Attended voter education and voted in 2021(%)

Question items		Did you vote in the 2021 general elections cycle?		Total
		Yes	No	
Have you attended or participated in any meeting or workshop or seminar on voter education?	Yes	83.9	16.1	100.0
	No	64.0	36.0	100.0
	Overall	68.2	31.8	100.0

Table 3.5 indicates that among youth who believe that voter education leads to free and fair elections, 72% participated in the 2021 general elections. In contrast, only 32% of those who disagreed with this statement and 52% of those who were uncertain about it did not vote. Additionally, Table 3.5 shows that a significant majority (70%) of youth who agreed that voter education helps in voting for the right candidates participated in the elections, whereas 32% of those who disagreed did not vote.

Table 3.6 Perceptions on whether voter education and free and fair elections, voting right people, and youth voting in 2021 elections (%)

Youth perception on voter education		Did you vote in the 2021 general elections cycle?		Total
		Yes	No	
Voter education leads to free and fair elections	Agree	71.5	28.5	100.0
	Disagree	68.5	31.5	100.0
	Not sure	48.2	51.8	100.0
	Overall	67.7	32.3	100.0
Voter education contributes to voting for the right people	Agree	69.5	30.5	100.0
	Disagree	68.3	31.7	100.0
	Not sure	56.1	43.9	100.0
	Overall	67.5	32.5	100.0

Table 3.6 indicates that a significant majority (70%) of those who agreed that voter education contributes to a higher turnout of female voters participated in the 2021 general elections. In contrast, only 39% of those who disagreed participated in the elections. Similarly, the table shows that another 70% of individuals who believed that voter education leads to increased male voter turnout also voted, while 45% of those who disagreed did not vote.

Table 3.7 Perceptions on whether voter education leads high turn-up of male and female voters, and youth voting in 2021 elections (%)

Youth perception of voter education		Did you vote in the 2021 general election cycle?		Total
		Yes	No	
Voter education leads to high voter turn-up of young female voters	Agree	70.2	29.8	100.0
	Disagree	60.6	39.4	100.0
	Not sure	56.6	43.4	100.0
	Overall	67.7	32.3	100.0
Voter education leads to high voter turn-up of young male voters	Agree	70.2	29.8	100.0
	Disagree	55.0	45.0	100.0
	Not sure	60.7	39.3	100.0
	Overall	67.5	32.5	100.0

Table 3.7 indicates that among the youth who believed voter education contributes to violence during elections, 35% did not vote, and another 35% were uncertain about its impact, while 65% who agreed with the statement did participate in voting. Conversely, despite 72% of the youth feeling that voter education creates biases in election outcomes, they still voted in the 2021 general elections.

A female participant from a focus group discussion in Mbale City noted, *“When political parties organize voter education, those who are not affiliated with the organizing party often avoid attending due to concerns about being manipulated.”*

Table 3.7: Perceptions on whether voter education leads to youth violence, creates bias in election outcomes, and youth voting in 2021 elections (%)

Youth perception on voter education		Did you vote in the 2021 general elections cycle?		Total
		Yes	No	
Voter education leads to youth violence in elections	Agree	65.3	34.7	100.0
	Disagree	69.7	30.3	100.0
	Not sure	65.4	34.6	100.0
	Overall	67.6	32.4	100.0
Voter education creates a bias towards election outcomes	Agree	71.5	28.5	100.0
	Disagree	68.6	31.4	100.0
	Not sure	60.6	39.4	100.0
	Overall	67.5	32.5	100.0

Additionally, the FGD participants observed that many young people have lost interest in elections, believing that they are not receiving adequate voter education, which contributes to their ignorance about electoral processes.

One male participant from Gulu City stated, *“The government is intentionally keeping the population uninformed about electoral processes. If the Electoral Commission were genuinely committed to voter education, why does the government prevent opposition party members from engaging with citizens to share information about elections?”*

However, some FGD participants noted that there are youth who hold positive attitudes towards voter education and have a strong interest in elections, particularly those with political aspirations.

2.4.4 Content of voter education

The EC Voter Education Manual 2020 emphasizes that voter education involves providing information about the electoral process. This includes the demarcation of electoral areas, the reorganization of polling stations and administrative units, voter registration, updates to the voter register, displaying the register, candidate nominations, campaign activities, and the polling process.

Findings in Table 3.8 reveal that the most frequently covered topic during voter education sessions was “how to vote,” with 78% of young attendees acknowledging that this topic was addressed. This statistic further indicates that many youths perceive voter education primarily as training on the voting process, as noted by participants during focus group discussions (FGDs).

For instance, a female participant from Iganga District stated, *“The topics covered by the Electoral Commission include how to stand for a position, the requirements for voting, the voting processes, and the setup of polling stations.”*

A male participant from Kasese District added, *“During the 2021 elections, we were taught how to vote and how to engage peacefully in the electoral process.”*

According to an interviewee from the Electoral Commission in Kampala, *“When conducting voter education, we focus on relevant and timely information related to electoral processes and the roadmap. For instance, right now everyone is interested in the demarcation exercise, and that is where our focus lies.”*

The second most addressed topic was the importance of citizen participation in electoral processes, with 44% of youth attendees confirming that this subject was covered. Other mentioned topics included awareness of civic responsibilities and obligations, understanding election-related violence and how to address it, awareness of human rights and the rule of law, and promoting political tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Table 3.8: Topics covered during voter education sessions

Topics	No. of responses confirming	Percent
How to vote	81	77.9
Why it is important to participate in election processes	46	44.2
Awareness of our civic responsibilities and obligations	40	38.5
Political tolerance and peaceful co-existence	36	34.6
Awareness of human rights and respecting the rule of law	30	28.8
How to determine who to vote for	24	23.1
Awareness of election violence and how to deal with it	19	18.3
Leadership training	16	15.4
How to detect and deal with corrupt voters	16	15.4
Analysing and addressing community problems	9	8.7

2.4.5 Key Voter Education Providers

The Electoral Commission (EC) has the mandate and responsibility to conduct voter education. However, the EC collaborates with competent, non-partisan, self-financing civil and community-based organizations to facilitate voter education on its behalf. As indicated in the findings shown in Table 3.9, while the EC is primarily responsible for voter education, it does not perform this task alone. Other key stakeholders, such as political parties, civil society organizations, and candidates, also engage in voter education activities.

Furthermore, during the election cycle, the Uganda Human Rights Commission plays a role in educating young people about their rights, particularly focusing on their right to vote.

According to the quantitative data presented in Table 3.9, 48% of the youth who participated in voter education sessions reported that these sessions were organized and delivered by government agencies like the Electoral Commission. In addition, 24% indicated that political parties or candidates conducted the sessions, while 9% received information from civil society organizations, such as NGOs. The data also reveals that 17% of the youth could not recall who provided the voter education, and 8% mentioned receiving voter education from other sources.

Table 3.9: Voter Education Providers

Who organized the voter education session(s)	Frequency	Percent
Government Agency	50	47.6
Political Party	25	23.8
Not sure/Don't remember	18	17.1
Others	8	7.6
NGOs	4	3.8
Total	105	100.0

In contrast to the findings presented in Table 3.9, which indicate that 48% of respondents believe voter education is primarily delivered by government agencies, participants in Focus Group Discussions across all visited districts reported that voter education is mainly provided by aspiring candidates and political parties. These entities utilize platforms such as national delegate conferences and campaign events. Additionally, campaign agents play a role in mobilizing youth to participate in both campaigns and the voting process. Participants also noted that NGOs contribute to voter education, albeit to a lesser extent.

For instance, one female participant from Gulu City remarked, ***“Voter education is primarily shared by aspiring candidates, political parties, and non-governmental organizations.”***

Similarly, a male participant from Kasese District stated, ***“Voter education is provided by political party flag bearers during campaigns.”***

2.4.6 Barriers to Voter Education

During FGDs, youth participants shared various barriers to accessing voter education, which differed depending on the actors involved, including the youth themselves, youth leaders, political parties, candidates, and local government officials. Many participants noted that youth attitudes toward elections play a significant role in these barriers.

A common concern expressed during the FGDs was the fear among youth of being manipulated into political games disguised as voter education. Several participants indicated that some young people view voter education as a tool for coercing them to support specific political parties or candidates against their will. This sentiment was echoed across all the districts visited in the study.

Additionally, it was reported that the youth’s attitudes toward the Electoral Commission (EC) can either facilitate or hinder their participation in voter education. Participants expressed the perception that the EC favors the ruling political party, which discourages youth affiliated with opposition parties from engaging in voter education initiatives.

For instance, one male participant from Mbale City remarked, ***“Voter education facilitators in meetings always state, ‘You see the money that organized this function is from NRM,’ which creates bias among youth.”*** Another male participant from Mukono District added, ***“Candidates prevent their supporters from attending voter education sessions.”***

Participants from Mbale, Kasese, Kampala, and Mukono emphasized that although conducting voter education is primarily the responsibility of the EC, this function receives insufficient attention. In addition to the youth’s negative perceptions of the EC and elections in general, other unique factors that hinder youth participation in elections, particularly in voter education, include unemployment (youth are often preoccupied with making ends meet), expectations of financial rewards, the difficulty in mobilizing youth for voter education efforts, and the arrest of youth participating in voter education activities organized by opposition political parties.

2.5 Youth participation in election peacebuilding

2.5.1 Election violence

Nature of violence in elections

Election violence refers to acts of violence that occur during the electoral period with the intent to influence the electoral process and its outcomes. While it is closely related to political violence, election violence is distinct in that it specifically takes place within the context of elections. Qualitative data gathered indicates that election violence is prevalent before, during, and after elections. Some participants noted that the violence tends to cease only after elections, suggesting that perpetrators often go unpunished for their actions once the electoral process concludes.

The findings also revealed that the intensity of election violence often escalates based on the significance of the candidacy position; the higher the political office, the greater the likelihood of violence occurring. It was reported that violence is frequently employed as a deliberate tactic in the election process, with candidates and their supporters using slogans or figurative language intended to incite violence or intimidate their opponents.

The forms of election violence reported include:

- Arrest of opposition candidates and their supporters during and after elections
- Property damage,
- Forceful election rigging,
- Torture,
- Intimidation,
- Kidnappings.

This violence is often politically motivated, specifically targeting supporters or candidates of a particular political party. In some cases, those targeted by such violence are forced to flee the country when the situation becomes too dangerous.

Additionally, findings show that election violence extends to digital platforms, where cyberbullying and online intimidation are commonly directed at individuals. For many young people, participating in election violence serves as a way to express their frustrations or concerns when other channels of communication are ineffective.

Voices from focus group discussions include:

"The police in Mbale are very alert; if you are found wearing red, you are arrested immediately," - FGD Participant, Mbale.

"When candidates from the ruling party win the election, it signals to the opposition, especially the NUP, that they should flee the country for some time because NUP supporters are arrested after elections," - FGD Participant, Mbale.

"One participant shared that when he stood under the NUP, most leaders warned him that he was a dead man," - FGD Participant, Mbale.

Perpetrators of Violence in Elections

Young people are often viewed as major participants in electoral violence, leading to the misconception that they are the primary perpetrators. However, qualitative data from this study reveals that a broader range of actors instigate violence during elections. A significant portion of the responses (44%) identified political candidates as the main instigators of election violence. These candidates influence and encourage young people to engage in violent acts for various reasons, including the desire to assert their relevance in the electoral process, gain or maintain voter support, manipulate vote counts, and protect their votes at polling stations. It is common for candidates to mobilize and pay young people to incite violence as needed. As one respondent noted, candidates frequently instruct their supporters to assault or intimidate voters:

“When an aspiring candidate is violent, chances are high that the supporters will also become violent,” stated a male participant from Mbarara City.

“If a candidate without enough voters stands against one who has won the trust and love of the people, the disliked candidate usually pays people to disrupt and confuse the voters of the opponent,” remarked a female participant from Kampala Capital City.

Following political candidates, the qualitative findings show that young people represent the second-largest group responsible for violence during elections. They often provoke security forces, such as the police, who then respond with force. This provocation can stem from misinformation or ignorance. In some cases, young people may resort to violence due to personal grievances or unresolved disputes. For those young individuals running for political office, violent actions can be seen as a way to defend or protect their votes during election periods.

“I started using violence during the elections because one of the elected leaders had not fulfilled their promises during their term in office. I mobilized fellow youth, and we attacked, intimidated, and verbally abused her until she gave up contesting,” shared a male participant from Kasese district.

“In 2021, I ran as an independent candidate, and if anyone tampered with my votes, I was willing to take someone’s life—not because I wanted to, but because of the circumstances at that time,” recalled a male participant from Mukono district.

In some districts, like Mbale, youth refuted claims of being the primary perpetrators of violence, instead identifying the government or security forces, including the police, as the instigators. According to these respondents, young people are often provoked into violence when security forces use excessive force, such as tear gas, particularly against opposition supporters. Some participants also pointed out that family members or security personnel contribute to their vulnerability to violent behavior.

“Young people are not agents of violence in Mbale City; rather, they have been predisposed to it by their families and security personnel,” stated a female participant from Mbale City.

Youth Attitudes Towards Election Violence

The analysis aimed to explore young people's attitudes towards election violence, particularly because of their prominent involvement in such acts. The findings reveal a range of opinions, reflecting complex perspectives on the necessity and inevitability of violence in Uganda's elections.

For some young people, violence is seen as an essential component of the electoral process. They believe that winning an election in Uganda is impossible without resorting to violence, particularly in contests for significant political positions.

Among certain young men, violence is viewed as a means of self-protection and protecting their families. One participant from Gulu City stated, ***“Some youth are violent because it's one way to win elections, especially if you're opposing the government; the strongest violent opposer wins.”***

Many young people consider violence to be a natural aspect of elections, asserting that it is infeasible to conduct elections without some level of violence. While they acknowledge that efforts to reduce violence may have a positive impact, they believe it cannot be completely eradicated. This belief stems from the perception that Uganda's multi-party governance system inherently results in unfair elections, making violence unavoidable. Even when young people attempt to use peaceful methods, they report that these efforts often lead to chaos.

Some suggest that the only way to prevent violence is to allow them full freedom of action, which they recognize is unrealistic. As a result, violence is perceived as an inevitable part of the electoral process. An FGD participant from Mukono district remarked, ***“It is impossible, and it will never be possible, to have peaceful elections in Mukono.”***

Young people also regard election violence as a way to express grievances and achieve desired electoral outcomes. Given the widespread belief that elections are neither free nor fair, many resort to violence to voice their dissatisfaction and try to influence change. They often expect their chosen candidates to win, and when that doesn't happen, they turn to violence.

Frustration with the political, social, and economic landscape, combined with a desire for change, drives some young people to view violence as a legitimate means of expressing their discontent. Moreover, many are significantly influenced by the candidates they support, sometimes resorting to violence at the command or instigation of these leaders.

An FGD participant from Kasese district stated, ***“All we need is change; even if the elections are free and fair, we shall still involve ourselves in election violence.”***

Another from Wakiso district added, ***“Youth become violent to capture the attention of the media so that vote rigging does not happen.”***

A participant from Mbale City expressed, ***“Peace is no longer possible; people have resorted to violence.”***

Notably, many young people are indifferent to the consequences of their violent actions because they feel they have little to lose. Some believe they have already faced various forms of violence, leading to a desensitization that makes them willing to push for their demands without fear of repercussions.

A youth leader pointed out that young people's ignorance of the consequences of election violence contributes to their readiness to engage in it. Additionally, male youth are often perceived as the instigators of violence due to their physical energy and propensity for aggressive behavior.

An FGD participant from Mbale City stated, *"Young people from the opposition side have experienced all forms of violence; they are no longer afraid."*

Another male FGD participant from Mbarara City remarked, *"Youth are not moved by the use of guns during elections."*

Push factors for young people's involvement in violence.

Young people engage in violence for a variety of reasons, including social, economic, political, and psychological factors. These conditions can compel individuals or groups to resort to violent behavior during electoral processes. Such factors create an environment filled with frustration, anger, and desperation, leading many to view violence as a viable means of expressing grievances or achieving their goals. This analysis outlines the key reasons that drive youth involvement in electoral violence.

Economic hardship is a significant factor influencing youth participation in this violence. Research shows that many young people resort to violence because they feel they have nothing to lose. High unemployment rates and economic deprivation leave youth vulnerable to manipulation by politically powerful figures. Leaders may exploit these individuals by offering financial incentives, knowing that they will comply with directives in exchange for payment. Moreover, because young people often lack stable employment, they devote much of their time to election-related activities, making them prime targets for political exploitation. The data suggests that youth who are paid to vote for specific candidates feel obligated to ensure those candidates win. If the results are unfavorable, they may resort to violence out of frustration or a sense of betrayal.

Qualitative findings indicate that a candidate's stance on violence greatly influences the behavior of their young supporters. Candidates who promote violence as a means to address political grievances often inspire their followers to adopt similar tactics. Young supporters may feel pressured to align themselves with this aggressive identity, normalizing violent acts within their networks. Additionally, political leaders frequently exploit youth by positioning them as enforcers of their ideology, which creates an environment where loyalty is often tied to aggression. Though framed as expressions of support, these roles primarily serve the leaders' interests, frequently leading to conflict with youth from opposing factions. It was reported that candidates actively recruit young people for acts like vote rigging, instilling a sense of importance and ownership in them, thereby further embedding violence within the political process.

Participant feedback highlights this connection:

"When an aspiring candidate is violent, chances are high that the voters will also become violent."
– FGD participant, Mbarara district.

"In 2021, youth who participated in violence were influenced by our area leader who was contesting for the MP position and encouraged young people to start violence in exchange for payment." – FGD participant, Mukono district.

The actions of security forces during elections also play a crucial role in fueling youth violence. Findings indicate that heavy-handed tactics, such as arbitrary arrests and perceived biases in law enforcement, contribute to heightened tensions among young people and provoke aggressive responses.

Youth frequently perceive security forces as unjust, especially when their actions favor specific political groups. This perception fosters a sense of victimization, leading many to adopt defensive stances that culminate in violent acts. The findings suggest that frustration and fear resulting from such experiences with security forces are key motivators of retaliatory violence among young people.

Moreover, youth often engage in violence to settle personal scores and grievances. They view elections as an opportunity to express dissatisfaction with leaders who have not fulfilled their promises or who have wronged them in other ways. In these cases, violence is not purely political but deeply personal, driven by feelings of betrayal, frustration, or unmet expectations.

Consequently, some young people take matters into their own hands, believing that by targeting individuals they hold responsible for their grievances, they can exact revenge or force them to step down. This personal dimension of violence illustrates how the frustrations of youth can extend beyond political differences, becoming reactions to perceived injustices, unfulfilled promises, or the failure of political figures to meet their expectations.

"When an aspiring candidate is violent, there is a high chance that the voters will also become violent." – FGD participant, Mbarara district.

"In 2021, youth who participated in violence were influenced by a local leader contesting for the MP position, who encouraged them to engage in violence in exchange for payment." – FGD participant, Mukono district.

The actions of security forces during elections play a crucial role in fueling youth violence. Findings indicate that heavy-handed tactics, such as arbitrary arrests and perceived bias in enforcement, contribute to heightened tension among young people and prompt aggressive responses. Youth often perceive security forces as unjust, especially when their actions appear to favor specific political groups. This perception fosters a sense of victimization, leading young people to adopt defensive stances that can result in violent acts. The frustration and fear driven by these experiences with security forces are key factors motivating retaliatory violence among young people.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that youth engage in violence to settle personal scores and grievances. Many young people view elections as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with leaders who have not fulfilled their promises or have wronged them in some way. In these instances, the violence is not purely political but deeply personal, motivated by feelings of betrayal, frustration, or unmet expectations, leading them to take matters into their own hands. Additionally, youth may use violence as a form of retaliation, believing that by targeting those they hold responsible for their grievances, they can exact revenge or force them to step down. This personal dimension of violence indicates that the frustrations of youth can transcend political differences, becoming a reaction to perceived injustices, unfulfilled promises, or the failure of political figures to meet their expectations.

“I started engaging in violence during the elections because one of the elected leaders had not fulfilled their promises during her term in office. I mobilized fellow youth, and we attacked her, intimidating and verbally abusing her until she gave up on contesting.” – Male FGD participant, Kasese district.

The findings further indicate that perceptions of unfairness largely drive youth violence during elections. Many young people resort to violence when they believe the electoral process is not free or fair, particularly if their candidate is losing or if they feel their votes are being tampered with. When elections are perceived as unfair, youth often view violence as the only means to express their frustration and fight for their success or the success of their candidates. These actions are exacerbated by the lack of repercussions for violent behavior after elections and the weak enforcement of regulations against election violence, creating an environment where youth feel empowered to act without fear of consequences.

“Once youth feel cheated during elections, the only option is to become violent.” – FGD participant, Mbarara district.

“No one will seek out someone who initiated or participated in election violence after the elections.” – FGD participant, Mukono district.

2.5.2 Peacebuilding in elections

A peaceful election is characterized by an electoral process conducted without violence or intimidation, allowing citizens to participate freely and safely. Key elements of a peaceful election include fair campaigning by candidates, adequate security at polling places, transparency in voting and counting, and effective mechanisms for resolving disputes to enable a smooth transition of power, ensuring that the will of the people is accurately reflected.

Attitudes of Young People Towards Peaceful Elections

Findings reveal that many young people have a strong desire for peaceful electoral processes, viewing violence as a barrier to their participation. Some participants in focus group discussions emphasized their preference for peace because they have families to care for and recognize that violence disrupts their stability and well-being. Overall, young people favor peaceful elections, noting that peace ensures inclusive participation, allowing everyone to exercise their right to vote without fear. They also reported that peaceful elections are associated with a sense of satisfaction and trust in the electoral process. Additionally, some participants mentioned that election violence diminishes their enthusiasm for participating in electoral processes.

“Youth prefer peaceful elections because they have families to care for,” stated a female FGD participant from Mbarara City.

The analysis also highlighted perspectives that challenge the idea of peaceful electoral processes. Some young people believe that Uganda has not yet fully matured into a multiparty political system, and without a deeper understanding of this system, electoral violence will persist. This belief is further fueled by the perception that security agencies primarily serve the interests of the ruling party, making it difficult for them to maintain peace impartially. For some, peaceful elections are perceived as unexciting, rendering the electoral process dull. Others see peace as unattainable due to the inherent vulnerabilities of human nature. Some young people expressed

that peace could only be achieved if power dynamics, money, and coercion were removed from the election process. Additionally, a segment of the youth indicated a desire for peace but only under conditions they deem favorable. This suggests that while some youth are committed to peace, others hold negative attitudes that may hinder efforts toward peaceful initiatives.

“Peace in elections is possible, but it's not fun,” remarked a female FGD participant from Kampala District.

Young people identified various key actors who play significant roles in fostering peaceful elections. The findings revealed that aspiring candidates have a critical role, as they significantly influence their voters and should set an example by conducting peaceful campaigns. Youth leaders are also vital, as they can educate their peers on the importance of maintaining peace during elections. The electoral commission is a major player responsible for promoting peaceful elections. Political parties have also been instrumental in urging young people to maintain peace. Other important figures identified included community members, religious leaders, and political leaders..

Strategies to Promote Youth Participation in Peaceful Elections

The youth emphasized that the Electoral Commission should **prioritize continuous voter education** as a key strategy to combat the ignorance that often leads to election violence among young people. By providing regular, accessible information about the electoral process, voting rights, and the significance of peaceful participation, the EC can empower youth to make informed decisions. Engaging young people through workshops, social media campaigns, and community outreach can simplify the electoral process and encourage civic responsibility. When young people understand the importance of their votes and the impact of their actions, they are less likely to be influenced by misinformation or engage in violent behavior. Ultimately, consistent voter education fosters a culture of respect and engagement, contributing to a more peaceful electoral environment for the youth.

The findings indicate that the **government, NGOs, and local leaders should work together to sensitize communities about the importance of peaceful elections.** This multi-faceted approach can effectively raise awareness. The government can provide resources and frameworks for educational initiatives, while NGOs can implement grassroots programs that focus on engaging diverse youth groups, particularly marginalized populations. Local leaders can facilitate discussions and host community events to promote dialogue on the significance of peaceful electoral participation among young people. Together, these efforts can help build trust and foster a culture of respect and tolerance, ultimately contributing to a more peaceful and inclusive electoral process.

Respondents emphasized that **deploying properly trained Electoral Commission staff** at polling stations is essential for protecting the integrity of votes and ensuring a smooth electoral process. These trained officials will oversee voting procedures, ensure compliance with electoral laws, and address any issues that arise. Their presence will instill confidence in the voting process, reassuring citizens that their votes will be counted fairly. Additionally, properly trained EC members will facilitate communication between voters and security personnel, helping to maintain a peaceful environment.

Respondents also suggested that ***having leaders present at polling stations is crucial for promptly addressing issues and ensuring a smooth electoral process.*** Their presence would help foster trust among voters, as they provide a direct line of communication to address concerns or conflicts that may arise. Leaders can facilitate dialogue between voters, polling officials, and security personnel, promoting a cooperative atmosphere. By being on-site, they can quickly resolve misunderstandings, mitigate tensions, and uphold electoral integrity. This proactive approach not only enhances voter confidence but also reinforces the importance of peaceful participation among youth in the electoral process..

Participants suggested that ***establishing offices specifically for young people to voice their views and inquiries about elections could be a powerful initiative.*** These offices would serve as safe spaces where youth can engage with electoral processes, ask questions, and express their concerns. By providing resources, information, and support, these offices can empower young people to become more informed and active participants in democracy. Additionally, having staff trained to listen and respond to their needs can foster a sense of community ownership and trust in the electoral process. This engagement not only helps combat misinformation but also encourages youth to feel valued and heard, ultimately promoting peaceful participation in elections.

Respondents explained that having ***polling officers from different villages or constituencies can be an effective strategy to reduce bribery and promote peaceful elections.*** When polling staff are not from the immediate community, it minimizes the likelihood of personal relationships influencing their actions and decisions. This geographical separation can create a sense of impartiality and fairness, which encourages voters to trust the electoral process. Moreover, it can minimize the potential for local biases and corruption, fostering a more transparent environment. When polling officers are perceived as neutral, it enhances the integrity of the election and encourages a culture of peaceful participation among young voters.

Focus group discussion (FGD) participants proposed that educating people on the importance of peaceful coexistence is essential for creating a conducive environment for youth participation in elections. Educational programs and community initiatives can promote understanding, tolerance, and respect among diverse groups. By emphasizing the value of dialogue and collaboration, these efforts help mitigate tensions and build trust within communities. When citizens recognize the importance of peaceful coexistence, they are more likely to engage constructively in elections, ultimately strengthening democratic processes and community cohesion.

The findings also revealed that ***youth leaders play a crucial role in mobilizing and sensitizing those who may be inclined to engage in violence, encouraging them to become agents of peace during elections.*** By reaching out to these individuals, youth leaders facilitate discussions that highlight the benefits of peaceful participation and the negative consequences of violence. Furthermore, youth leaders can empower these individuals by involving them in positive activities, such as community service or advocacy campaigns, which promote unity and constructive dialogue. When young people feel invested in the peace process, they are more likely to advocate for non-violence and contribute positively to the electoral environment..

SECTION THREE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Conclusion

This study, titled "Empowered Voices? Examining Youth Participation in Uganda's Elections," emphasizes the vital role of youth in shaping the country's democratic future. By implementing the recommendations from this study, we can enhance the active, meaningful, and peaceful involvement of young people in Uganda's electoral processes.

Addressing the challenges faced by youth and harnessing their potential will ensure that they are well-informed, empowered, and actively engaged in elections. Through collaboration, targeted voter education, and inclusive practices, we can create an electoral environment that encourages youth participation and contributes to a more vibrant and representative democracy. Empowering the voices of youth is essential for building a resilient and inclusive political landscape in Uganda!

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendations for Enhancing Youth Participation in Elections

Based on the study's qualitative and quantitative findings on youth participation in elections, the following recommendations are proposed to improve existing structures and enhance young people's active, meaningful, and peaceful engagement in the electoral process. These recommendations aim to address the challenges faced by youth and harness their potential as agents of change during elections.

- 1. Collaborate with Youth Leaders:** Key actors in the electoral cycle should engage in long-term collaborations with youth leaders and existing youth leadership structures. Youth leaders can significantly influence their peers and extend their impact to voter education, active participation in elections, and discussions on peaceful elections, positioning youth as agents of peace throughout the electoral cycle.
- 2. Dialogue with the Youth:** The Electoral Commission should engage in dialogue with youth to address biases and misconceptions about its role in ensuring free and fair elections. Many youths perceive the Electoral Commission as political and selective, which affects their participation in elections.
- 3. Non-Resident Polling Officers:** On polling day, the Electoral Commission should consider using non-resident polling station officers and assistants to mitigate bribery, favouritism, and vote rigging. Alternatively, clear and strict rules and regulations should be established to govern polling station officers and assistants, holding them accountable for any misconduct.
- 4. Enhancing First-Time Voter Participation:** The Electoral Commission and civil society organizations involved in voter education should develop targeted strategies to increase the participation of first-time voters in elections as they have lower voter turnouts. Tailored initiatives such as awareness campaigns, peer engagement programs, and digital outreach can encourage greater participation among young and newly eligible voters.

5. Utilize Local Radio Stations: Radios, especially local stations, are effective channels for sharing voter education among rural youth. Key actors should use radios to disseminate voter education in all local languages, ensuring youth understand the concepts.

6. Engage Aspiring Candidates: Aspiring candidates, who have significant influence among youth, should be targeted to disseminate information on peaceful elections during their campaigns. This initiative should be supported by their respective political parties.

7. Clear Electoral Road Map: The Electoral Commission should highlight clear time periods for disseminating changes made after each electoral activity milestone. This ensures youth are informed about any updates, such as constituency demarcations and polling station changes.

8. Leverage Social Media: Key actors should use social media platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp to reach youth with voter education. WhatsApp, in particular, is widely used by youth for accessing voter education.

9. Effective Mobilization Strategies: Key actors should adopt effective mobilization strategies for diverse youth groups, including youth with disabilities and female youth. Strategies include mobilization through youth leaders, women groups, community-based organizations, informal youth groups, Special Interest Groups of Persons with Disabilities, and SACCOs.

10. Special Registration Dates for PWDs: The National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) should roll out special registration dates for Persons with Disabilities, especially those out of school.

11. Reach Out-of-School Youth: The Electoral Commission should develop clear strategies to reach out-of-school youth during voter education efforts. This includes establishing partnerships with community organizations. NIRA should also partner with community influencers, opinion leaders, and youth leaders to ensure the registration of unorganized youth groups.

12. Election Security Awareness: The Uganda Police should create awareness of its role in the electoral cycle and provide timely updates on the circumstances under which army forces are deployed.

13. Punish Election Violence Perpetrators: Magistrate courts should ensure that perpetrators of election violence are traced and punished throughout the electoral cycle. This can be achieved by raising awareness about the punishments for election violence and establishing partnerships with local security agencies.

14. Remote Gender Equality: All election stakeholders, especially the Electoral Commission and Civil Society Organizations, should reaffirm the right of all Ugandan citizens above 18 years to participate in elections, regardless of gender. CSOs should create community awareness drives about gender equality and its impact on democratic processes.

15. Simplified Voter Education Materials: The Electoral Commission should draft and share simplified versions of core voter education topics with political parties, youth leaders, civil society, and community-based organizations. These materials should be customized to be easily

Annexes

REFERENCES

Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS), 2019/20 https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/09_2021Uganda-National-Survey-Report-2019-2020.pdf (accessed on 10th June 2024)

https://devinit.org/documents/849/Uganda-disability-data-landscape_IF.pdf (accessed on 10th June 2024)

UNHCR Commissioner for Human Rights Compilation Report 2016
https://web.archive.archive.unhcr.org/20170107212814mp_/http://www.refworld.org/type.COMP...57f4fceb4.0.html (accessed on 10th June 2024) DGF-UYONET. (Forthcoming). 'Evaluation of 2013-2017 Development Strategy.

DGF-UYONET. (Forthcoming). 'Evaluation of 2013-2017 Development Strategy

Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. (2014). 'Uganda's Unemployment Challenge.

Ministry of Finance, planning and economic development (2014): Uganda's 2014 Poverty Status Report.

Journal of Peace Research 2020, Vol. 57(1) 3–14: Electoral violence: An introduction.

Kamusiime, W. (2021, April 19). IGP launches annual crime report 2020. Uganda Police Force.

UBOS Statistical Abstract, December 2023 (<https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/2023-Statistical-Abstract.pdf>)

Kiiza J, Sabiti Makara and Lise Rakner (2008), Electoral Democracy in Uganda, Kampala

United Nations Population Fund – Uganda Country Office (2020): Rapid Assessment Report on Youth and Peacebuilding in Uganda

[Violence Hotspot districts: https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/election-observers-list-10-violence-hotspots-1640676](https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/election-observers-list-10-violence-hotspots-1640676)

Women's peace International election center research report 2019: Election related conflict and violence in Uganda

[Violence Hotspot districts: https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/seven-northern-uganda-districts-marked-as-electoral-violence-hotspots](https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/seven-northern-uganda-districts-marked-as-electoral-violence-hotspots)

[Human Rights Watch: https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/21/uganda-elections-marred-violence](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/21/uganda-elections-marred-violence)

Kagoro, J. (2023). The Status Quo at All Costs: Human Rights Abuses during the 2021 Elections in Uganda.

Muyomba-Tamale, Mitigating Incidences of Violence and Emergent Conflicts in Uganda's Electoral Process, Paper for Uganda Situation Room Debating Brief No.7, (2015).

[UHRC Preliminary Election Observer Report: https://uhrc.ug/download/preliminary-election-observer-report/](https://uhrc.ug/download/preliminary-election-observer-report/)

UNDP research report (2023): Youth Participation to Sustain Peace during Electoral Processes.

Karugire, Samwiri Rubaraza. (2003). Roots of Political Instability in Uganda. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

Human Rights Watch (2017): Uganda 2017 Human Rights Report. (<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Uganda.pdf>)

The African Leadership Institute (ALI) and the African Union's Office of the Youth Envoy (OYE) (2020): Greater inclusion of African youth in public services and governance.

UNFPA (2017): Young People the Untapped Resource for Development

National Planning Authority and UNFPA (2018): Harnessing the demographic dividend for Uganda

Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Youth Affairs (2023): The 2023 state of the youth report. Assessing government investment in young people.

Fjelde, Hanne & Kristine Hoglund (2016b) Electoral violence: The emergence of a research field. APSA Comparative Democratization Newsletter 14(2): 8–11.

Straus, Scott & Charles Taylor (2012): Democratization and electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa, 1990–2008

United Nations Youth (2013): Youth, Political Participation and Decision-making

UNDP (2012): Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle

African Union Election Observers report (2016): African Union election observation mission to the 18 February 2016 general elections in the republic of Uganda (https://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/africa/UG/aeom-preliminary-statement-uganda-2016-elections/at_download/file)

European Union Election Observation Mission 2016: Uganda 2016 Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council Elections, Preliminary Statement (https://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/africa/UG/eu-eom-preliminary-statement-uganda-2016/at_download/file)

EU Election Observation Mission (2011): Final Report on the General Elections 18 February 2011 (https://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/africa/UG/uganda-final-report-general-elections-eu-2011/at_download/file)



T: 0200999637

E: openspaceuganda@gmail.com

W: www.openspaceyouth.org