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Can e-voting Improve Youth Voter Turnout?: Experiences from the Kenya 2022 General Elections

Peter Gutwa Oino [α], Samuel Mong'are [σ] & George Aberi [ρ]

Abstract- Over the years, many youths have been targeted by politicians for votes in general elections due to their large numbers. However, they (youths) have always scored dismally in terms of turning up to elect leaders of their choice in various political positions. Existing voting patterns have shown that the majority of the youth participate in political campaigns, both on social media platforms and in the field, but rarely in the voting process. Notwithstanding, the numerous civic education campaigns organized to foster voter registrations prior to elections, less than 60% of the youth turn up for registration as voters. Using Roger Hart (1992) conceptual model on level of participation, and the normative democracy theory, this paper used a critical review of existing literature, interviews, and observations for the just concluded 2022 Kenya's general elections. We examine how e-voting can be employed as a strategy to influence the youths' voting processes, during general elections. Document analysis and interviews were done and the findings are presented in the inform of narratives and excerpts. Authors conclude that young people's active inclusion in political process spaces, especially in e-voting is not only a socio-economic imperative, but also key to preserving a stable economy and building peace. This in turn has a bearing on their wellbeing and the general development of their country. The paper recommends that there is need to engage the youth at a young age, in order to build trust and transparency between generations - and between citizens and their government. There is need for further research on how best to implement the e-voting system in Kenya, and get the assurance that the system will be trusted and be user friendly.

Keywords: e-voting, voting culture, youth, democracy, general elections, Kenya.

I. Introduction

Elections are a central component of democratic societies. Globally, political and electoral processes show that the tradition of regular elections has been established, albeit ambivalent, in terms of the elections' quality. Petitpas, Jaquet and Sciarini (2021) note that the youth are faced with the steady decline in electoral turnout, about which politicians and scholars recommend new communication technologies as possible remedies. With nearly half of the world's total population being 25 years or younger, the current youth generation of approximately 3 billion is becoming one of the most influential populations in history. However, although official voter turnout figures are not consistently available from electoral authorities across regions, data collected by surveys conducted in different regions are sketching a discouraging picture (Dezelan, 2015). The 2016 UN World Youth report on "Youth Civic Engagement," reveals that voter turnout has decreased in all democracies, since the 1980s and that the turnout decline is concentrated among the youth (UNDP, 2014). Survey results from a sample of 33 countries indicate that close to 44% of young adults aged 18–29 "always vote," compared with almost 60% of all citizens (UNDESA, 2016). The corresponding rate is more than 70% among those over the age of 50.

Electronic Voting (e-voting) is a process of casting votes, counting, and issuing results by means of Information and Communication Technology (henceforth ICT) (Adeshina & Ojo, 2017). Voting processes from the registration stage, pre-voting and voting, verification of results and counting of results are processed through ICT. This can be national, provincial or municipal elections. With the use of e-voting, the country stands to achieve improved participation and electoral management, faster vote count and reliable election results (Avgerou, Masiero, & Poulymenakou, 2019; Goretta et al. 2018). In 2010, there was an estimate of between 795-1469 implementations of e-voting around the world, compared to 2 700 in 2013 (Zolotov, Oliveira, & Casteleyn, 2018; Shat & Pimenidis, 2017). E-voting can make the voting process convenient and accessible to the youth, thereby improving youth participation (Schaupp & Carter, 2005; Arshad, 2015).

Participation of young people in formal political and electoral processes is relatively low and many of them exercise power outside of formal electoral processes, in situations of social and economic exclusion and difficulty. Little is done, however, to specifically target young people and build their confidence in formal democratic electoral systems, as a vehicle for political renewal. Even though there are varied reasons for the low levels of participation by young people, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) have a crucial role to play in advancing the inclusion of youth in electoral processes and in the structures of political representation. The rapid increase in the adoption of the internet in developing countries and the growth of citizen-centric e-government technologies have parked interest in electronic voting (e-voting) systems. E-voting systems enable voters to participate in elections remotely, using internet-based technologies.

In their study covering the period 2005–2015 on Estonia and Switzerland, Vassil et al. (2016) noted that

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e-voting in Estonia started as a voting tool for the resourceful and privileged, with those aged 50–60 most likely to use this tool, and later diversified to other groups. Yet, they found no evidence that even after several online elections, it has made the electoral process more interesting for the youth and other out-groups. Even more directly, Petitpas et al. (2021) found out that the introduction of e-voting in Switzerland led to an increase in voting of the older rather than the younger cohorts. Concerning the group of occasional voters, the researchers noted that e-voting increases rather than decreasing the gender gap in voting.

In 2020, the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa stated its intention to introduce e-voting to lower the costs of voting, improve electoral transparency and efficiency, and to improve overall voter participation. There is, however, little research to explain the factors that could potentially influence voters, particularly young people (18-35 years) who are a growing voting demography with a declining interest in electoral participation.

As one of the most important formal avenues for political participation, voting has always been affected by voter turnout, as young voters tend to participate less in polls compared to older citizens (Ellis, 2007). Yet, in new democracies alone, the young generation is booming, with one-third of the population aged between 15 and 35. The sheer statistics on the total number of youths compared to the adult population on the continent befits their political and electoral inclusion. Afrobarometer (2019) survey in 36 African countries noted that 78% of the youth believe in the civic responsibility of voting. However, on Elections Day, this number decreases to 65%, who cast their ballots. The Youth tend to be disengaged from the democratic process and vote less frequently, stand as candidates less often and remain underrepresented in electoral managerial functions. Despite the continental and regional architecture for the promotion of youth participation, evidence shows that governments have not readily facilitated a meaningful inclusion of the youth in decision-making processes. In many countries, people have expressed deep concern, not only about the overall low level of participation, but especially among the youth.

Over the years, the private sector has proven that the use of ICT has the power to transform and deliver value (Achieng & Ruhode, 2013; Verkijika & De Wet, 2018; Mail & Guardian, 2019). The question, however, is, can e-voting induce the Kenyan youth to participate in electing their political leaders? In Kenya, the 2010 Constitution defines youth as any individual between 18 and 35 years of age. These youth constitute more than a third of the entire population, while nearly 80% of Kenyans are less than 35 years old[1]. Young people in Kenya's political landscape represent the largest demographic unit and political constituency. More significantly, effective participation of the youth in politics is critical to democratic developments, both in Kenya and globally.

Youth participation in political and electoral processes is a fundamental right to citizenship (Hart 1992). Juxtaposed against the youth who choose not to participate politically based on their needs not being met, are the youth recruited by political leaders, who participate through violent means. Electoral management bodies (henceforth EMBs) play a critical role when it comes to engaging the youth in electoral processes. Traditionally, EMBs have aimed to increase turnout rates among the youth through targeted campaigns young people to register and vote. In recent years, these approaches have included the use of the internet and social media. However, there is a need for EMBs to develop more sophisticated approaches and consider alternative methods that will produce higher involvement among youth (IDEA, 2015).

In Africa, evidence suggests that the increased competitiveness of elections has not necessarily led to an increase in citizen participation in electoral processes, but instead, cases of shrinking democratic space for citizen participation, infringement of fundamental freedoms and rights, and declining voter turnout continue to bedevil most African countries. More worrying is a glaring void of youth participation in political and electoral processes, yet the youth make up an estimated 430 million of Africa's population. The ability to vote online has the potential to increase voter turnout for elections, due to increased convenience over traditional voting polls.

Elections are a process composed of three intertwined cyclical phases (pre-election, election, and post-election) and subcomponents. Different actors, including the youth ought to participate in shaping the different election cycle components. The over-focus of the youth on Election Day activity has made them lose out on significant processes, before and after elections that actually define the outcome of elections. To add value to the electoral process, the youth need to understand and familiarize themselves with the election cycle to enable effective participation.

In Kenya, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (henceforth IEBC) reported that the number of registered young voters has dropped by five percent since the 2017 poll, in contrast to over-35s, whose tally has increased. Over 22 million Kenyans were eligible to take part in this year's polls, with young people accounting for less than 40% of that number. Low youth participation in the electoral process, especially during the Biometric Voter Registration (henceforth BVR) phase, which was introduced for the first time during the run-up to the 2018 elections was recorded. The BVR was the country's first systematic

[1] Constitution of Kenya 2010

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voter registration system. However, the youth remain skeptical about its credibility and generally ignorant about registration requirements and the period for the same. They were also not well informed about the electoral process, including why they have to vote, the difference between ward-based and polling station-based voting and which of the two could be used for the 2018 elections. Youth participation, not only as voters, but also as contestants and electoral officials is a fulfilment of their civic role in the governance processes. The Afrobarometer (2016) survey across 36 African countries noted that 78% of the youth believe in the civic responsibility of voting. Therefore, their participation cannot and should not be a subject of debate, but a certain and obvious reality.

Despite making up more than half of the population in many countries, young people aged 18-35 often find themselves marginalized from mainstream politics and decision making. They also struggle to gain the respect of public officials and are seen as lacking the skills and experience to engage in political activity and lead positive change in their communities[2]. This exclusion, combined with limited educational and economic opportunities, can leave young people both idle and frustrated with the status quo.

Moreover, today's youth need real opportunities to participate in political processes and contribute to practical solutions that advance development. When given an opportunity to organize, voice their opinions, and play a meaningful role in political decision-making, young people consistently demonstrate their willingness and ability to foster positive, lasting change. They also become more likely to demand and defend democracy and gain a greater sense of belonging. Access is a key pillar for youth participation in political and electoral processes. However, the youth face barriers that interfere with the access to their civil rights. There is, therefore, the need to create innovative means to break the barriers. This paper focuses on capacity development for the youths to map out barriers to their participation in general election processes.

II. Statement of the Problem

One of the most important issues facing the youth of the world is their participation in the democratic institutions that govern every aspect of their lives. There is an unfair derogatory criticism from older generations that the youth are somehow 'not interested' in participating in democratic processes. Countries over the world are opting for e-voting to lower the costs of voting, improve electoral transparency and efficiency, and to improve overall voter participation, especially among the youth who are skeptical on manual voting. Despite this understanding, there is little evidence to show whether e-voting can influence the majority of the youth aged 18-35, to vote during general elections. We argue that voters' participation is important to sustain the country's democracy and e-voting adoption could be a key consideration for a young democracy like Kenya.

III. Theoretical Framework

Roger Hart (1992) offers one of the best explanations of the rationale for youth participation: youth participation is a fundamental right to citizenship. Hart developed a tiered "rungs" model, in which he defines the degrees of participation. This model draws heavily from Hart's model above, but does not seek to replace it. Instead, it serves as an additional tool for practitioners, in terms of helping them to explore different aspects of the participation process. Shier's approach offers a participatory progression that effectively functions as a scaffolding guide for educators and other adults working with the youth. Underpinning youth participation in voting processes during elections implies that there is a belief that the youth are a diverse group, who hold unique beliefs and experiences. Using this model, it applies a positive youth development approach to empower their agency, enhance skillsets and foster engagement between young people and political and civil actors, systems and processes. It proposes the engagement of the youth, as active participants in the electoral process.

IV. Methodology

Using Roger Hart (1992) conceptual model on level of participation, and Normative Democracy theory, the authors used a critical review of existing literature, interviews, and observations for the just concluded 2022 Kenya's general elections. In this paper, we innovate by shedding light on whether e-voting can be the best voting channel for the youth. We take advantage of a unique collection of individuals who participated in the Kenya 2022 August general elections from Uasin Gishu and Kisii Counties respectively. Document analysis and interviews were done and the findings are presented in the inform of narratives and excerpts.

V. Findings and Discussion

a) Civic Education through Mass Media

i *Registration as Voters*

In most countries, registration is a prerequisite for voting. Non-voters can be divided into two groups: those who are registered but abstain, and those who do not appear on the voters' list.

[2] https://www.ndi.org/what-we-do/ndi-youth

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The challenge is how to get both groups to vote, but for the latter group the first hurdle is to identify and include them on the voter list/register. In some countries, most notably, the United States and Kenya, the responsibility to register as a voter rests on the individual. On their part, the electoral authorities assume responsibility for compiling and maintaining the voters list, doing door-to-door enumeration, which must be done periodically to encourage more individuals to register.

In the Kenyan case, the country is considered a nation of the youth, with those under 35 years comprising 75% of the country's 47.6 million population (Population and Housing Census, 2019). In August 2022 general elections, the number of Kenyan voters aged between 18-35 that registered to vote dropped by 5.27% compared to 2017 (IEBC, 2022). This is even after 22.1 million voters registered for Kenya's general polls up from 19.6 million five years ago. Of these numbers, only 39.84% of those voters were the youth. Despite promises from both candidates on economic liberation for the youth should either one win in the August polls, the low number of young registered voters provides evidence of skepticism. The fall in registration among young people reflected a wider pattern of voter apathy among Kenyans, especially the youth. In the run-up to the 2022 elections, the country's electoral agency added just 2.5 million voters to the register, against a target of six million. This included those who had turned 18, since the country's last census in 2019.

During our interview with selected youths in Kisii and Uasin Gishu Counties, respectively, the youths blame the low figures on economic hardships facing them and worsening cases of corruption. This has made them to lose hope in the electoral processes in the country. In this context, for instance, an interviewee reiterated that *"I did not register because I was busy looking for money to take care of my two children, politicians will not feed my family."* Another youth argued that "*after being voted in, some leaders disappear and don't perform the role they promised.*" More interesting was the remark "*there is no need for me to go, parade and register myself as a voter then vote for a person who won't be elected because the leader has already been predetermined*" From the above evidence, it is clear that there is a growing sense of betrayal among most Kenyans, especially the youth, who feel that politicians increasingly use them as collateral damage in the wake of personal re-invention and self-preservation. Notice that politicians promise the youth great things every five years, which they hardly endeavor to fulfil. That is, politicians use their positions to misuse public resources, sponsor violence and violate the rule of law.

ii *Politics of Promises and Handouts*

From the views and opinions of youths interviewed, it was revealed that some young people can only vote if they are given money. "I *only attend rallies to get money…and if they pay me, then I can go to vote during the elections,*" Another youth said that… "*I have only come to the rally because there is money. I hope there will be something.*" These utterances are indicative of the widespread Kenyan practice of offering freebies to prospective voters. In this respect, for instance, Kenya's current Minister for Internal Security, Dr. Fred Matiang'i even told news reporters on Wednesday that the banks were running short of 100 and 200 shilling notes, "*because politicians are bribing villagers*". Politicians give money to lure the youth to vote, but this hasn't worked in Kenya and the main question is: 'will this ever work?' For instance, a presidential aspirant said: "*If I win the presidency, my administration will make available KSh. 50bn ($425,000) for loans to young entrepreneurs. "The coming government will be for the youth, the hustlers."* To counter this, his opponent promised to give a monthly stipend of Ksh 6000, to the single mothers and jobless people in the country, while another presidential candidate convinced the youth to vote him in because he would help to legalize bhang (cannabis) farming in Kenya. Despite all these promises, there was low turnout by the youth during the Elections Day. Moreover, politicians have responded by offering cash, umbrellas, shirts, caps and even packets of maize flour among other things, in the name of convincing young people to vote for them. In this context, the African Union and COMESA election observers attributed the low youth participation to the youth unemployment and poverty, lack of trust and confidence in the political system, and the general conception that their votes do not count in elections, (theeastafrican.co.ke, August 14 2022).

iii *Voting Technologies*

Existing studies revealed that e-voting facilitates the voting act, by reducing the time and effort required to participate (Kenski 2005; Gainous and Wagner 2007; Powell et al., 2012). Such electoral reforms decrease the direct and objective costs of voting (Berinsky, 2005), and also help to decrease the perceived costs of voting (Blais et al., 2019). In Kenya, the 2022 general elections faced the lowest youth voter turnout compared to the last three general elections. In this context, more than 14 million persons cast their votes, in 46,229 polling stations across the country, with the Central region, which has the highest population, recording the lowest turnout. The drop in numbers was blamed on lack of voter education, low interest by the youth, reduced trust and confidence in the political system, poverty and youth unemployment. Some foreign observers regretted that the low turnout was worrying for Kenya, whose electoral processes were largely transparent compared with other African countries. The question that remains to be answered, however, is "Can e-voting turn around things? From the perspective of the

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normative democratic theory, participation in e-voting is desirable to the extent that it helps to ensure equal consideration of the preferences and needs of the citizens, in this case the youth (Teorell, 2006).

Understanding how young people use technology and reflect their use of traditional and new media into tailored communication strategies plays a central role for governments seeking to efficiently inform, communicate and engage with them.[3] In some countries, the youth are apathetic, because participating in electoral activities, such as voter registration and voting requires the youth to travel vast distances between registration centers and where they were residents. This is cumbersome, based on the general economic challenges experienced by young people. Even in cases where the youth are keen to participate in electoral processes, they are disenfranchised by the long distance between their places of residency and the polling stations, as well as the discrepancies in the voters' roll, where they do not find their names in the voters' register.

The proponents of internet voting make several arguments in favor of e-voting. First, internet voting may make it easier for voters to participate in elections, considering that every computer that has an online connection becomes a potential polling site. Internet voting also might lower the cost of voting for the entire electorate, and it has the potential to eliminate problems, such as those that might have kept millions of voters from participating in the 2000 presidential elections. That is, voters will no longer have to trudge down to a school, church, or community center in order to vote. What is more, factors like bad weather, long lines, or confusion over the location of polling places will no longer impede voter participation. In their study, Petitpas, et al (2021) find out that e-voting can increase voter turnout among abstainers and occasional voters, because of its convenience and flexible voting time for the electors.

According to Staerkle (2015), political attitude determines individuals' behavior during an election. For instance, it voting is concerned with the political thought and behavior of individuals within politically organized communities, that is, how they participate in decision making at individual and collective levels-through collective action. In most cases, they are influenced by public opinion and political elites. During our interviews with youths in the study area, some of them expressed their attitudes towards e-voting. They revealed that they can use e-voting should it become available and that they are willing to learn how to use the e-voting system. This suggests that e-voting can improve youth participation in elections.

[3] https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/Young-people-in-OG.pdf

The above findings are confirmed by scholars, such as Gerlach and Gasser (2009), Unt et al. (2016) and Germann (2020, who argue that e-voting is supposed to appeal to the youth, for whom internet and social networks have become the main mode of communication and part of their life. To remedy on the reduced number of youths participating in voting processes, therefore, a 2017 study by Brookings revealed that Electric Voting Machines have led to: (i) a significant decline in electoral fraud; (ii) strengthening the weaker and vulnerable sections of the society; and (iii) a more competitive electoral process." E-voting has largely solved these issues. The machines only register five votes each minute to combat virtual ballot stuffing. In this respect, marginalized groups are encouraged to vote, since their vote would not be counted by a biased and politically motivated person. More candidates have a better shot at being elected due to the higher representation of all voices.

In Philippines, for instance, electronic voting serves as a model of success. After implementing e-voting through the British company Smartmatic, the country's 2016 election brought 81% of the Philippines' 100 million people to the polls in a record turnout. At the time, the election stood as the largest electronic vote-counting project in history. Aside from the high turnout, the election also broke a record for the fastest voting count. The e-voting machines immediately tracked and published the results online, as votes came in. The technology was also carefully surveyed pre- and during the election with the aid of more than 200,000 citizen volunteers to prevent crashes.

Nigeria opted for e-voting in the 1990s, due to concerns that plague many African nations. It is among many countries in the continent that consistently report election violence, ballot stuffing, government-manipulated results and voter suppression, as pressing issues in elections. The country formed the Independent National Electoral Commission to integrate Electronic Voting Systems into their elections. The group plotted out polling locations across the country, and used a Geographic Information System technology to map out the country's population density to more accurately monitor the votes coming in from all areas. While e-voting is still in its infancy in Nigeria, it has been considered a necessity and as the only solution for credible elections. Notice, however, that the initial installing of e-voting proved largely unsuccessful in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, technology is seen as a promising means to curb the overflow of political violence and issues rampant in the country's elections in the future.

a. *Capacity Building*

As the children grow to become youth and then adults, introduction of civic and political education curriculum in the formal education system can be an

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impetus to increased participation in the voting processes during elections. Such a curriculum is critical to ensuring that the youth appreciate what it means to be citizens and what their contribution must be to their communities and the country at large. In designing effective voter education campaigns, targeted at young people, it is important that the objectives of the campaign are clearly identified, as different approaches are required to achieve divergent goals. For instance, it is the role of various stakeholders, including the government and CSOs to hold workshops for the youth on election and electoral processes, including, how they can participate as voters and candidates for elective positions.

In the months leading up to the August 2022 polls, observers suggested that the youth factor could help heal Kenya's often toxic tribal politics, with a younger electorate less likely to vote according to ethnic affiliations. However, we argue that though the youth are less tribally-minded, the majority of them majority lack ideological steadfastness. As such, teaching cognitive skills to allow young voters to make a meaningful choice is important. Therefore, as e-voting is brought closer to them, the youth voters need to be able to assess the competing views and positions of political parties and candidates in order to make a meaningful choice. This necessitates being provided with background information and relevant arguments on issues and information on the positions taken by the various candidates and parties. Public, media, and school-based debates, as well as non-partisan voting guides can assist in allowing the youth registered as voters to make informed choices and advance their own interests. Education about the role, responsibility and rights of young voters ought to be appealing to young people's civic spirit, patriotism, responsibilities and duties as citizens of a particular country. If successful, it will greatly provide the necessary motivation to participate in elections, and develop good voting habits from a young age. Voting apathy has also been experienced during general elections, despite intense mobilization for the youth to register as voters. As explained by one civic educator, *"we did a lot of mobilization during registration using all available election tools and still voter apathy was too high*." Some youths didn't show interest to vote, and one of them argued that: "*I don't think I am going to vote,*" …"*I have no interest, because the politicians put themselves first rather than us.*"



Source[4]*: Kijana-jihusishe-youth-promoting-peaceful-2022-elections-kenya project.*

From the foregoing discussion, it is noted that organizations such as the European Union (EU) recognize the significance of youth engagement, empowerment and participation in democratic governance, before, during, and after elections. Through empowerment programme, such as the Kijana Jihusishe in informal settlements, the EU worked with the Life and Peace Institute, the Kesho Alliance, and the SNDA Africa to sensitize the youth and strengthened their participation in the 2022 General elections. The project took a peer-to-peer approach to reach out to fellow youths, including the hard-to-reach and those more likely to participate in political violence. Through such kind of initiatives, the youths get enlightened on the significance and role of elections and voting in a democracy. This involves educating young voters to understand that elections are one of the defining events of a democratic system. Likewise, voting allows them to make informed choices between individuals, parties and policy options. Campaigns need to help young people to understand that their vote counts and has a significant influence on the political decisions of their country. Besides, in order to create and sustain momentum for efforts to get young people excited about

[4] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kenya/kijana-jihusishe-youth-promoting-peaceful-2022-elections-kenya_en?s=352

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their role as citizens, the problem of apathy and abstention and its implications ought to be recognized and addressed for the future of democracy. Think tanks, policy experts, researchers, civic organizations, and media also need to be involved intensively. This is in line with IDEA (1999), which emphasizes that whatever the motives of the various stakeholders, by reaching out and involving young people, they are collectively working towards the challenge of ensuring a vibrant democracy in the country.

b. *Transparency and Trust*

Digital technology has expanded the opportunities for e-voting and allowed political dissidents and other actors to connect virtually. One of the objectives of youth involvement in e-voting is transparency as it reduces misconduct and improves public trust. For the youth to trust e-voting, the electoral bodies must be transparent in how the system works and educate them about the system (Avgerou, Masiero & Poulymenakou, 2019). This, however, poses the question, can this be achieved in a country like Kenya? Can the electoral body improve the credibility of the system and assure people about the security of the votes? (Wirtz, Daiser & Binkowska, 2016). When achieved, this will boost the youth's confidence in voting. According to Sciarini et al. (2013) and Mendez and Serdult (2017), the potential positive effects of e-voting on turnout can be hampered by citizens' security concerns. Fears of vote manipulation and fraud may discourage voters from using e-voting. Thus, concerns about the integrity of elections might even decrease the turnout.

The use of e-voting requires knowledge and skills in ICT, and it is important to ensure that most of the potential users can use e-voting without problems. Prototype apps can also be used to allow users to play with the system and gain skills in the e-voting system (Bisong, 2019). As observed in some countries, such as the United States and which can be borrowed by Kenya, emphasis is on logistic difficulties and consequent efforts are usually placed on countering low and declining turnout by simplifying registration and voting. By making it easier, these measures can tip the scales in favour of voting. During our interviews with one IEBC official, he narrated that: *"If citizens will not come to the polls…why not bring the polls closer to the citizens…that is through e-voting."* This is confirmed by Nooris (2004, who avers that introducing e-voting will greatly simplify the voting act and may eventually foster participation by mobilizing new voters.

b) Dilemma with Future of Electronic Voting among the youth in Kenya

Although young people constitute a large segment of the electorate in Kenya, and would thus seem to provide ample potential recruits, advocates face unique challenges in organizing them politically in significant numbers, and in channeling their involvement into a lasting commitment to the group. While electronic voting in developing countries has promoted healthy and democratic elections in many instances, it is not without its problems. Technology, especially the type being sent to developing countries, has an easy tendency to glitch and lend itself to user errors for those unfamiliar with the technology.

Furthermore, many countries have used e-voting to combat top-down corruption, though such forms of technology still remain under the jurisdiction of the government. Therefore, it carries the potential to be used in rigging, thereby producing more fraudulent and difficult-to-trace results. Some scholars have argued that e-voting may reduce inequalities by increasing the turnout among groups that participate less, such as young voters (Krueger 2002; Serdült et al., 2015). Whereas, others disagree and fear that e-voting will reinforce the inequality of turnout by favoring those who already vote more, such as the well-educated and wealthier citizens (Berinsky 2005; Gerlach & Gasser 2009; Norris 2001).

E-voting also makes recounting virtually impossible, due to the lack of a paper trail. However, many developing countries have nonetheless used this technology to their advantage. They are in the process of making e-voting a dependable reality. Namibia, Ghana and Kazakhstan are in the early stages of using e-voting and hope to run their elections solely by means of elections e-voting. With the aid of continuing technological advancements, e-voting can hopefully plant a successful footing in developing countries. To achieve greater effectiveness in reaching out to young citizens in e-voting, it is essential to build strategic alliances and seek support from other interested parties. These could include private sector organizations, such as business enterprises that see young voters as future clients or customers, and other industries that cater for the youth. In this respect, the youth are likely to make good partners, because their involvement will definitely allow them to participate in developing their country, while at the same time pursuing their own interests.

Our major argument is that e-voting will decrease barriers to civic engagements, and reduce inequalities in participation by attracting groups that participate less, such as the youth. However, other scholars are quite pessimistic about this idea, and argue that e-voting cannot change the motivational basis for political activism, and that it (e-voting) will have the opposite effect, i.e., that it will reinforce the social stratification of the vote (Berinsky 2005, and Goodman, 2014). Similarly, it is arguable that e-voting can a digital divide, considering that it will favor those citizens that are familiar with the internet, and who usually vote, thereby leaving behind the less educated, the elderly,

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and women (Gainous and Wagner 2007; Oostveen and Van den Besselaar 2004). We also argue that voting is a habit that individuals develop; if e-voting increases the turnout among young voters, then this might have a durable impact on their participation record.

c) Participation beyond Formal Electoral Processes

Beyond formal political and electoral processes and structures, there are a number of ways by which young people can be actively involved in decision-making processes and institutions that affect their environment and lives. These include structures that enable the youth to provide inputs and influence policy-making processes and structures that enable them to learn about policy-making processes. However, opportunities for the youth to participate in political processes depend largely on the political and cultural contexts, and a democratic environment is always favorable to participation in general.

For the most part, promoting youth participation needs to be geared towards achieving levels relative to those of the rest of the population. For example, in Ukraine, a young activist mobilized young people in her community to open a youth radio station. Co-funded by the local government and USAID's DOBRE program, it works to increase the involvement of local residents and civil society organizations in local government decision-making, while at the same time holding local officials accountable through monitoring.[4] In Kyrgyzstan, the youth united their voices ahead of the presidential vote in 2017 elections. The youth-led initiative succeeded in getting people, and the youth in particular, engaged in the electoral process. Voter turnout in the 2017 presidential elections was higher among young people aged 18-29, than in any other age group. The total number of young voters also increased by approximately 5%, compared with the 2015 parliamentary elections.

d) Voting abstention and individual health

In Kenya and other countries, the health policy is core to the political agenda. Therefore, failure of the youth to participate in the electoral process can influence their health in one way or the other. In democracies, voting is an important action through which citizens engage in the political process within a country or region. Through voting, we send a signal of support or dissent for policies that finally shape the social determinants of health, which subsequently influence who votes and who does not (Brown et al., 2020).

Social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age that shape health. They include factors, such as, socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood and physical environment, employment, and social support networks, as well as access to health care (Artiga & Hinton, 2018). This shows that addressing social determinants of health is important for improving health and reducing longstanding disparities in health and health care systems. What is more, lower socio-economic position of an individual has been associated with poor health over the life course (Arah, 2008). As a result, voting abstention becomes an indicator of low social capital that ultimately leads to negative health effects. The general pattern is that individuals with poor health tend to abstain from voting, suggesting that politics and health are mutually exclusive.

Participating in the democratic process might be instrumental to the well-being of the youth and the entire population in general. Youth participation in electoral processes is recognized as a human right, in line with Article 12 of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), which stipulates young people's right to participate in decisions that affect them, including those regarding their health and well-being (Wigle et al., 2020). Therefore, the youth need to be aware of this fundamental right, considering that health is a political choice that is unevenly distributed; its determinants are dependent on political action, and health is a critical dimension of human rights and citizenship (Mackenbach, 2013). The youth can influence the processes that shapes the social determinants of health through voting as one of the key aspects of democratic engagement. Notice that voting has several effects on the social determinants of health. These include, determining on who holds political power, those in power in turn put forward and support policies that respond to the needs and demands of their constituents that shape the social determinants of their health, and finally the social determinants of health affect voting patterns (Brown et al., 2020). As such, there is need for the youth to better understand the functioning of politics, both nationally and locally and the mechanisms that connect politics to public health.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the foregoing discussion, the authors conclude that in order for the youth to effectively participate in political and electoral processes, they need to be given proper tools, such as education and access to credible and requisite information that enables them to understand their role in the socio-political national discourse and actions that can promote their meaningful participation in elections. Engaging young people can also increase their understanding and interest in civic and political affairs, including fostering active citizenship. More significantly, the youth are more likely to feel that they are actively involved in decision-making processes, and that their

[4] USAID, "Young Ukrainians Inspire Local Community Development," (USAID, July 2018), https://www.usaid.gov/results-data/success-stories/young-people-inspire-local-community-development.

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concerns are taken seriously by government officials. This will also contribute to their social wellbeing at the individual level, by building their self-esteem and a sense of empowerment, including bringing about important benefits for societies, such as increased awareness of common challenges and a joint commitment to identify solutions that work in the long-run.

Furthermore, young people's active inclusion in political process spaces, especially in voting is not only a socio-economic imperative, but also key to preserving a stable economy and enduring peace. Ultimately, it also benefits society as a whole by reinforcing a positive civic behavior, thus staying informed on politics, including encouraging young people to run for official positions in elections. The paper recommends that there is need to engage the youth at a young age, in order to build trust and transparency between generations, and between citizens and their government. There is need for further research on how best to implement the e-voting system in Kenya, considering that the youth like using the internet in most of their activities.

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