

## How do social and gender norms influence youth and women's participation in the 2025 election in Tanzania?

BBC Media Action Tanzania conducted research to understand the social and gender norms influencing youth and women's participation in elections. Findings show that women's and youth's participation in political processes is growing but negative norms limit their full participation.

### Context

Political representation of women and young people in Tanzania continues to be challenging. Patriarchy, family opposition, lack of resources and connections, and gender-based violence (GBV) remain significant obstacles for them. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2025, Tanzanians went to the polls to elect the president, members of the parliament and councillors. A total of 37.6 million citizens were registered to vote across both mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar. The elections were marred with violence. There were feelings of dissatisfaction after the main opposition party, Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), failed to participate in the elections due to lack of political and legal reforms. Moreover, the feeling of unresolved issues such as unemployment, influenced young people's apathy to participate in the election.

### The project

Since 2013, BBC Media Action has been implementing the *Niambie* project in Tanzania, focusing on empowering young women and girls to make informed decisions about their social, economic, and political rights while promoting

gender equality. The project's primary target is youth aged 15-35 years. It is delivered through radio and social media. Following the general election in 2025, there was a need to understand the social and gender norms that shape youth and women participation in the election processes across the country.

### Research methodology

This study adopted qualitative approaches to examine youth and women's engagement in election processes:

- **Diary study:** The study engaged 31 journalists and young people to document diaries of the election events they observed. The diaries were collected through WhatsApp chats, SMS, pictures collected from events and voice notes.
- **Media monitoring and social listening:** This was used to capture and analyse online conversations, narratives and sentiments that reflect broader social dynamics and perceptions. Brandwatch and media cloud were used for data collection covering X, online news outlets and blogs. Manual searches of online platforms were also conducted to capture trending election narratives.

The study was conducted in Mbeya, Katavi, Dodoma, Mtwara and Zanzibar where BBC Media Action are partnering with local radio stations and in Dar es Salaam, Kigoma, and Arusha where there was high voter registration during the 2024 local election.

### Key findings

- **Trust in women's leadership is growing:** 32% of parliamentary candidates in the 2025 elections were women, compared to

23% in 2020. Women were also well represented in the committees that selected candidates for specific positions.

- **Women's participation in campaigns enhanced traditional gender roles:** Women's involvement in campaigns was largely structured around tasks that align with traditional gender roles: door-to-door mobilization, collective singing and dancing, and presenting themselves as a unified group dressed in party-branded clothing. These behaviours are rooted in gender norms that value women as the "social glue" of the community, rather than engaging in political debate or policy influence.
- **Patriarchism was evident in the 2025 elections:** Women entering politics for the first time, especially at ward and council levels, were judged more harshly than male newcomers. Women were described as less confident, less articulate, or not experienced, even when their male counterparts had similar or lower levels of experience. More harsh criticism of female contestants was seen in social media spaces with some facing personal attacks to shame and silence them.
- **Young people's participation in the election was transactional:** Young people were hostages of political patronage forced to attend campaigns and show support for political leaders for material gains such as fuel allowances for their boda bodas and stipends.
- **The election emboldened young people's activism:** While voting was poor, young people did not shy away from activism to show their frustrations with the elections. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X, and Facebook were used to circulate images, align narratives, and frame protests as a legitimate form of political participation in a bid to express dissatisfaction with the electoral process.
- **Financial capacity and corruption remain a challenge for women and young people to navigate the political scene:** Internal party nomination processes were reported to be

marred by corruption, with those with financial power having an unfair advantage. This posed a significant challenge for young people and women who are economically disadvantaged as they failed to progress beyond the nomination stage because they lacked the funds to bribe.

*"Both youth and women have come forward, but the major challenge has been money. There has been a lot of bribery involved in influencing delegates votes, which has hurt many female candidates"*

Journalist, Mbeya

### Key implications

- Persisting negative norms in political participation call for persistence in interventions tackling inequalities, challenging stereotypes and promoting political processes that will ensure equal leadership opportunities in decision-making.
- Negative social norms are also present and aggravated in social media. This means interventions need to be creative enough to promote positive gender attitudes within online spaces.
- The 2025 election revealed a growing number of youths using social media. The same space could be moulded through mentorship as a space for promoting policies and agendas for youth with interest in political leadership to navigate from traditional campaign limitations.

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