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News release

AI and technology are not a panacea for voter apathy, Afrobarometer surveys director tells political campaigns expo

Artificial intelligence (AI) and technology can help address voter apathy, especially among African youth, but cannot take the place of substantive policy solutions, Afrobarometer Director of Surveys Boniface Dulani told the International Political Campaigns Expo (IPE).

"While AI and technology provide opportunities for greater engagement with voters, it's not a panacea to all the problems related to voter apathy, particularly among the youth," he said at the maiden edition of the IPE in Cape Town, South Africa.

The IPE brought together political leaders, political scientists, campaign strategists, AI experts, and technology innovators to explore the transformative potential of AI and Big Data for political campaigns and voter engagement in Africa.

Dulani expressed concern about the low rate of political participation by African youth and urged political parties to leverage technology and AI to engage them, considering the youth's heavy reliance on technology. But he also stressed the need to address the underlying issues that matter most to young people.

Afrobarometer data show that unemployment tops the list of the most important problems that African youth want their government to address, and young Africans are considerably more likely than their elders to be out of work and looking for a job. They are more likely than older cohorts to see state institutions and leaders as corrupt and to mistrust them. Youth are also more willing to tolerate a military takeover of the government if elected leaders abuse their power (56% among those aged 18-35 vs. 47% among those aged 56 and above).

"Simply reaching out through technology is not sufficient," Dulani insisted. "Political actors must actively tackle the root causes of youth apathy."

In a separate panel discussion at the Expo, Afrobarometer co-founder and senior adviser Robert Mattes echoed concerns about dissatisfaction eroding political party support. Mattes emphasised the impact of face-to-face interactions in political campaigns and debunked the misconception that gifts significantly influence voter turnout.

"Let's remember that the research literature suggests that face-to-face contacts have a far greater impact than other forms of voter engagement," Mattes said. "Canvassing matters and makes voters even more likely to vote. Campaign rallies also matter. But, in contrast to common wisdom, giving gifts does not seem to have any significant impact on voter turnout."

The International Political Campaigns Expo featured a line-up of speakers with a diverse range of perspectives and expertise, showcasing a shared commitment to effective political campaigns that promote sustainable development across the continent.

About Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer (AB) is a trusted source of high-quality data and analysis on what Africans are thinking. With an unmatched track record of 385,000+ interviews in 42 countries, representing the views of more than three-fourths of the African population, AB is leading



the charge to bridge the continent's data gap. AB data inform many global indices, such as the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, and the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators. The data are also used for country risk analyses and by credit rating and forecasting agencies such as the Economist Intelligence Unit. All AB data sets are publicly available on the [website](#) and may be analysed free of charge using AB's [online data analysis tool](#).

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