



Working Paper No. 222

Political participation across generational cohorts in Uganda

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Abstract

Drawing on Bartels and Jackman's (2014) generational model of political learning, which posits that political attitudes and behaviours are shaped by the historical contexts in which individuals come of age, this study examines whether generational cohorts differ in patterns of political participation in Uganda. We identify three cohorts corresponding to key phases of Uganda's political history: Gen A, socialised during periods of political instability prior to the Museveni era; Gen B, shaped under the one-party regime; and Gen C, who came of age following the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 2005. Using Afrobarometer Round 10 (2024) data from a nationally representative sample of adult Ugandans, we employ binary and ordinal logistic regression models to examine participation in both conventional and unconventional political activities. The results show that older cohorts are more likely to engage in conventional forms of participation, such as voting and contacting elected representatives, while younger cohorts exhibit greater participation in unconventional activities, particularly protests. To assess whether these patterns reflect cohort-specific political socialisation or age-related life-cycle effects, we replicate the analysis using comparable Afrobarometer data from Tanzania, a country with a distinct political history. The Tanzanian results reveal broadly similar generational patterns in conventional participation, suggesting that these differences may reflect age-related dynamics rather than cohort-specific socialisation alone. However, the specific unconventional repertoires through which generational differences manifest appear to be conditioned by each country's political environment. These findings call into question strong cohort-based interpretations of political participation and underscore the importance of distinguishing generational from life-cycle effects in studies of political behaviour in Africa.

Keywords: generational cohorts, political participation, political socialisation, age-period-cohort, conventional and unconventional participation, Uganda, ordinal logistic regression

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1. Introduction

In a democratic society, political participation refers to voluntary activities that citizens undertake to influence decision making at various levels of government (Falade, 2014). Scholars highlight that political participation strengthens accountability and fosters civic engagement, both of which are central to democratic governance (Baizhumakzy, Tangkish, Mazhinbekov, Sarsenbekov, & Korganova, 2025). While economic development can occur under non-democratic regimes, as it has in China, Singapore, and Rwanda, within democracies, active citizen participation is essential for ensuring that development is inclusive, responsive, and accountable (Grace & Danfulani, 2015). Through participation, citizens can influence policy outcomes, advocate for their rights and needs, and hold their leaders to account. When those in power fail to meet public expectations, political participation provides legitimate channels for change.

Broadly, political participation manifests in two forms: conventional and unconventional participation (Grace & Danfulani, 2015). This paper conceptualises conventional political participation as legally sanctioned and institutionally recognised actions that aim at influencing political outcomes through formal electoral and representative systems (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002). Examples include voting, contacting officials, campaigning, and joining political parties. These actions are conceived as ways by which citizens express themselves or seek to change things (Linssen, Scheepers, te Grotenhuis, & Schmeets, 2018). In contrast, unconventional modes of political participation are non-institutionalised activities typically used to voice grievances, challenge the status quo, and draw attention to issues ignored by the political elites (Melo & Stockemer, 2014; Slavina, 2021; Bee & Kaya, 2017; Grace & Danfulani, 2015; Schürmann, 2023). They can take the form of public protests, violent acts, civil disobedience, or political debates on mass media or online, among others.

Understanding patterns of political participation requires attention not only to the forms that participation takes, but also to how citizens' political attitudes are shaped over time. One influential approach is to examine political participation through a generational lens, which emphasises how individuals' formative political experiences condition their preferences for conventional vs. unconventional modes of engagement. In contexts marked by political instability, regime change, or institutional transformation, generational differences may be particularly pronounced, as cohorts are socialised under sharply different political conditions.

Generational cohorts are defined as groups of people of similar age who have lived through comparable social, historical, and life events (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Singh & Prakash, 2020). These shared experiences shape political attitudes and behaviours, influencing not only whether individuals participate, but also which forms of political participation become most common within a cohort (Nemčok & Wass, 2021). In other words, period-specific events and socialisation experiences give each generational cohort a distinctive outlook, setting it apart from those that came before or after (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

Uganda provides a compelling case for examining generational differences in political participation because its post-independence history has exposed successive cohorts to markedly different political environments. Since Uganda gained its independence in 1962, the country has experienced a turbulent political history marked by coups, military dictatorship, disputed elections, civil wars, and military invasions. Within a period of 24 years (1962-1986), there were eight changes of government, five of which were violent and extra-constitutional (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008). The most recent violent change occurred in 1986, when Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Army (NRA) rebels captured power after a five-year guerrilla war. Since the end of the 1986 bush war, Uganda has largely enjoyed stability, notwithstanding episodes of localised conflict, including the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency in northern Uganda, where large-scale hostilities ended in 2006 (Allen, Atingo, & Parker, 2022), and election-related violence (Amnesty International, 2015; Ajuna, 2025).

In constructing generational cohorts, this paper draws on Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Piaget & Duckworth, 1970; Piaget & Inhelder, 1972). It outlines four sequential stages of cognitive development culminating in the formal operational stage, which begins

around age 12. In the formal operational stage, children acquire the capacity to think abstractly, hypothesise, and engage in complex reasoning processes, including metacognition, or the ability to reflect on one's own thought processes (McLeod, 2025). These cognitive skills are essential for processing political information, evaluating ideologies, and participating in deliberative democracy.

In this paper, we categorise adult Ugandans into three generational cohorts based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development as well as Uganda's political history. Gen A consists of Ugandans aged 50 and above as of 2024. Individuals in this cohort were at least 12 years old by 1986, the year that marked Uganda's most recent violent change of government. They would therefore have reached Piaget's formal operational stage by that point, possessing the cognitive capacity to abstractly process, internalise, and remember dictatorship, military coups, and economic collapse (Morton, 2007; McLeod, 2025). Gen B – born between 1975 and 1992 – was socialised and grew up during the relative political stability of President Museveni's regime before the country's political space was opened up to multiparty competition. Gen C consists of Ugandans born after 1992, who were thus at least 12 years old by 2005, when the country opened up to a multiparty system. Building on Uganda's political history, this paper rests on the premise that Gen C constitutes a new political generation, whose socialisation sharply sets them apart from Gen A and Gen B. Another special feature of citizens in this generation is that they grew up during the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector beginning in 1998 (OpenNet Africa, 2014). As such, their political realities have been exposed to the Internet and other new technologies.

Political experiences and historical events often leave lasting psychological and behavioural legacies (Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017). We argue that Ugandans who lived through the country's turbulent periods, characterised by military coups, civil wars, and widespread violence, developed a deep sensitivity to the dangers of political instability. Having witnessed the destructive consequences of political upheaval, they tend to value peace and order, making them more inclined toward structured and institutionally sanctioned forms of participation such as voting or contacting elected representatives. This pattern reflects a form of political risk aversion, where conventional engagement is perceived as a safer and more legitimate way to express political preferences. By contrast, individuals who were less than 12 years old in 1986, or were born thereafter, were socialised in a relatively stable multiparty context and may view unconventional actions such as demonstrations or protest marches as legitimate extensions of civic participation rather than threats to stability. That said, it is important to acknowledge that the observed generational differences in participation might also reflect life-cycle or aging effects rather than cohort-specific socialisation alone. To empirically assess whether generational differences in political participation reflect cohort-specific socialisation or more general life-cycle effects, the paper adopts a comparative analytical strategy. Specifically, it examines patterns of conventional and unconventional participation across three generational groups in Uganda and then replicates these in a neighbouring country with a distinct political history.

In the literature, several approaches have been suggested to address the age-period-cohort (APC) conundrum, but all come with limitations (Yang & Land, 2013). In this paper, we sought to disentangle life-cycle from generational effects by replicating the analysis in the neighbouring country of Tanzania, which has a distinct political history. Unlike Uganda, whose post-independence history has been marked by coups, civil conflict, and regime change (Mutibwa, 1992; Reid, 2017), Tanzania has experienced a comparatively stable political trajectory. Since independence in 1961, it has not undergone military coups, civil war, or violent regime turnover. Political change unfolded incrementally, even during major ideological and institutional shifts such as Ujamaa socialism and the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s. This contrast makes Tanzania a useful benchmark for evaluating whether observed generational differences in Uganda are attributable to cohort-specific political socialisation or reflect more general age-related dynamics.

By comparing generational patterns of political participation in Uganda and Tanzania, the paper contributes to ongoing debates surrounding the APC identification problem (Yang &

Land, 2013). Rather than attempting definitive causal separation, the analysis assesses whether Uganda's distinctive political history appears to condition or amplify broadly observed age-related patterns of participation. This comparative approach allows for a more cautious and theoretically grounded interpretation of generational differences in political engagement.

Taken together, the analysis suggests that generational differences in political participation in Uganda may be better understood as reflecting age-related or life-cycle dynamics rather than cohort-specific socialisation alone. While older citizens tend to exhibit higher levels of conventional participation across a wide range of democratic contexts, Uganda's distinctive political history may shape how these age-graded tendencies are expressed. Rather than producing wholly unique patterns of participation, prolonged exposure to authoritarian rule and political instability appear to condition or intensify preferences for order, predictability, and institutionally sanctioned forms of engagement among older Ugandans. In this sense, the paper contributes to ongoing debates surrounding the age-period-cohort identification challenge (Yang & Land, 2013) by illustrating how national political histories may amplify broadly observed life-cycle effects without generating clearly distinct cohort-specific behaviours.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First we carry out a theoretical review on the role of generational cohorts and covariates in predicting political participation. Next we discuss the research methodology, including the data, operationalisation of variables, analytical techniques, and estimated model. In the results section, findings are presented, and conclusions follow at the end.

2. Theoretical considerations

The perspective that patterns of political participation vary across generations draws on Bartels and Jackman's (2014) generational model of political learning, which posits that political views within identifiable birth cohorts evolve in distinctive ways over time. The interaction of age-related factors with period-specific experiences produces enduring variation in political attitudes, as members of the same generation who share similar ages, socialisation contexts, and formative political environments develop collective orientations that shape how they engage with politics throughout life (Nemčok & Wass, 2021). Such generational imprints help explain why cohorts exposed to different political conditions – authoritarian, transitional, or democratic – may prioritise distinct modes of participation. This aligns with Chironi, della Porta, and Milan's (2024) argument that cohorts and generations are key to understanding differences in political behaviour.

2.1. Generational cohorts and political participation

Studies across different contexts suggest that patterns of political participation vary across generational cohorts or are shaped by the political environments in which individuals were socialised. For example, one stream of research conducted by Grasso (2016) in Western Europe shows that conventional political activities such as voting and party membership tend to be dominated by older individuals, while “elite- challenging” repertoires such as demonstrating, online petitions, Internet discussion groups, and cyber activism are most preferred by the younger generation.

In their study on generational differences in political participation in Finland, Huttunen and Christensen (2024) demonstrated that older generations were more active in conventional activities, whereas younger generations were more inclined toward new outlets such as spearheading protest movements as ways of voicing their concerns. These findings echoed the findings of Grasso and Giugni (2022) in a sample of nine European countries. For political party activities and associational involvement, the differences between the older and younger generations were minimal. In Italy, Quaranta (2016) found that while unconventional forms of participation were more common among cohorts born after the 1950s, and conventional participation more widespread among baby boomers, younger cohorts were not apathetic or detached from the political sphere. Grasso, Farrall, Gray, Hay, and Jennings

(2019) further demonstrate that generational effects underpin declines in political activism in Britain, with cohorts socialised in politically intense periods exhibiting higher engagement than those raised in more depoliticised contexts.

Loader, Vromen, and Xenos (2014) and Chironi et al. (2024) contend that due to growing mistrust in traditional political institutions, younger generations are more inclined to engage in unconventional modes of political participation, while the older generation is more likely to favour conventional forms of political engagement. The situation where young people are more likely to participate in unconventional modes of political participation has been described by McAdam (1990) as “biological availability,” that is, the absence of personal constraints that might increase the risks of activism, such as full-time employment, family obligations, or dependents. Young people are often characterised by greater time availability and fewer family- or work-related responsibilities, which makes them more likely to participate in protest actions (McAdam, 1989). All else being equal, the concept of biological availability has been found to be important in explaining why the likelihood of being recruited into protest is much greater among the youthful population than their elders (Milkman, 2017). In fact, Petrie (2004) found biological availability to have a significant influence in explaining involvement in protests. Dmytrenko (2024) also observes that despite low electoral participation, young people are overrepresented in protest movements, as exemplified by their prominent role in the Arab Spring protests of 2011.

Equally important in explaining political participation is the work of psychologists who explain why exposure to political turmoil might affect individuals' level of political involvement. Beber, Roessler, and Scacco (2014) observe that traumatic experiences intensify victims' fears of future hostilities, which fosters stronger ingroup bonds. Such effects subsequently influence victims' perceptions and their level of political engagement in the aftermath of conflicts (Nalepa, 2012). Therefore, military coups, civil wars, and widespread unrest may instil profound aversion to political upheavals or any developments that can threaten the prevailing status quo of a country. People who have experienced such unrest would therefore prefer legally recognised forms of participation instead of those that fall outside traditional political processes.

The preceding literature supports the hypothesis that political participation can be profoundly shaped by period-specific shocks and socialisation environments. This hypothesis may be relevant in Uganda, where citizens in the three generations have different political experiences that defined their formative years. Nonetheless, disentangling *age* from *cohort* effects remains analytically complex. What appears to be an “age effect” could partly reflect *cohort socialisation* – the distinctive political repertoires and value orientations acquired by generations during formative periods (Bartels & Jackman, 2014; Grasso, 2016). For example, cohorts that matured in eras of civic unrest may carry enduring protest orientations even into later life, making them appear permanently more activist than older generations. Conversely, generational cohorts shaped by authoritarianism or limited political freedoms may retain enduring caution toward confrontation, regardless of their age. This interplay of biological and social conditioning renders political participation a dynamic outcome of overlapping influences. The biological-availability argument captures how life-course constraints shape conventional or unconventional political participation, while cohort theory illuminates how shared generational experiences structure political repertoires. Understanding these interdependencies is therefore crucial for explaining participation in conventional and unconventional activities.

This study conducts a comparative analysis to examine how generational cohorts influence citizens' engagement in both conventional and unconventional political activities. It represents an initial effort to explore whether and how generational cohorts defined in relation to Uganda's distinct social and political history are associated with differing forms of participation. By situating the analysis within Uganda's unique historical trajectory, the study recognises that variations in participation may reflect not only generational socialisation but also age-related life-cycle effects, which are often difficult to disentangle empirically (Rekker, 2024; Mitteregger, 2025). This complexity, well noted in comparative research on

political behaviour, stems from the overlapping influence of age, period, and cohort dynamics that jointly shape individuals' political orientations over time. Against this background, the study highlights how the formative experiences and values of three generations have contributed to distinct repertoires of participation, ranging from conventional (e.g. voting, party activities) to unconventional (e.g. protests, petitions, online activism) modes of engagement. Building upon prior research on cohort effects and political socialisation, the discussion is guided by the following research hypotheses:

H1: *Ugandans socialised during periods of authoritarianism marked by military coups, civil wars, and widespread violence are more likely to be active in conventional political activities and less likely to take part in unconventional forms of politics compared to Ugandans socialised in a more politically stable and multiparty context.*

H2: *Ugandans socialised in a more politically stable and multiparty context, are more likely to be open to unconventional activities and less involved in conventional forms of political engagement.*

2.2. Role of covariates

Beyond generational cohort differences, political participation is consistently shaped by a range of demographic, socioeconomic, informational, and contextual factors. A review of the literature reveals how covariates such as gender, education, residential location, material deprivation, news consumption, and closeness to a political party influence political participation.

Gender: Men tend to be more active than women in both conventional and non-conventional modes of participation. Studies from Europe show that women are less likely to engage in activities such as contacting politicians, holding party membership, campaigning, and producing political content online (Pfanzelt & Spies, 2018; Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2016).

Education: Higher educational attainment is generally associated with increased engagement in conventional and digital forms of participation (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2016; Utari, Wulandari, Colby, & Crespi, 2023). Some studies, however, find that education shifts participation away from conventional toward non-conventional forms (Pfanzelt & Spies, 2018).

Urban-rural location: Theoretically, the relationship between political participation and location is mixed. On the one hand, stronger social capital in rural areas, combined with an older population profile, suggests that rural communities may exhibit higher levels of political participation. On the other hand, lower socioeconomic conditions and greater physical and logistical barriers to engagement are associated with lower participation in rural settings (Lin & Trujillo, 2023). Some studies suggest that because individuals in urban areas have greater access to information, connectivity, and civic networks, political participation via digital platforms and conventional modes is often higher compared to rural residents (Tsuma, 2023). But literature on voting in the United States shows that rural residents may have different patterns of engagement, sometimes participating more in local or place-based acts (e.g. putting up political signs), while urban residents engage more in protest or digital actions, indicating that residence can shape opportunity structures and forms of participation, not just levels of engagement (Lin & Trujillo, 2023).

Material deprivation: Evidence from Nigeria indicates that higher levels of lived poverty increase the likelihood of protest participation and willingness to engage in future protest action (Tuki & Kwari, 2025). More broadly, social class has been shown to shape both offline and online participation, with individuals in higher socioeconomic positions exhibiting greater engagement online due to having more access to time, financial resources, and political information (Grasso & Giugni, 2022; Dalton, 2017).

Digital news consumption: Digital news consumption, particularly via social media, has become a key driver of political participation. Research shows that in contexts with

significant social media use, exposure to political information online promotes both online and offline forms of political participation, although the effect varies by context and individual characteristics (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Boulianne, 2015). Employing cross-national data, Wattenberg (2024) attributes low voter turnout among young people to changes in media consumption, among other factors. Raiskila and Wiberg (2017) identify online participation and social media use as important forms of political activity among youth. In the same vein, Strandberg and Borg (2020) found that younger generations were more active than older ones in following political news and expressing political views online.

Traditional media consumption: Traditional media sources such as television, radio, and newspapers remain important influences on political participation in many contexts. Exposure to such media has been linked with higher youth participation, including campaign involvement and discussing politics, and greater TV and radio news exposure corresponded with more offline political activity (Tsuma, 2023).

Feeling close to a political party: Often conceptualised as partisan attachment or psychological identification with a party, closeness to a political party is a major predictor of political participation. Individuals with stronger partisan ties are more likely to engage in conventional activities, such as voting and contacting representatives, as well as non-conventional actions, including attending rallies and mobilising others. This is because party identification provides a motivational and identity-based framework for political participation and is also seen as the best method to support the party (Hooghe, Okolikj, & Oser, 2025; Jöst, Krönke, Lockwood, & Lust, 2023; Ward & Tavits, 2019). This relationship holds across diverse contexts.

Although studies conducted in other settings have contributed to an understanding of political participation, none has focused specifically on generational differences as a key explanatory factor in Uganda. This gap limits a full understanding of whether generational cohorts engage differently with the political process. Through a comparative analysis, we address this gap by using Afrobarometer survey data to better understand the role of generational cohorts in explaining the level of citizen participation in political activities in Uganda.

3. Data and methodology

The paper relies on Afrobarometer Round 10 survey data for Uganda. The Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Ltd., interviewed a nationally representative sample of 2,400 Ugandans in January 2024. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous standard surveys were conducted in Uganda in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2022. Respondents were at least 18 years old, with men and women represented equally in the sample. Section 3.1 outlines the variables used to estimate the regression models.

To partially address this challenge, the analysis was replicated for Tanzania, a neighbouring country with a distinct post-independence political trajectory but broadly comparable demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Rather than attempting to statistically disentangle age, period, and cohort effects within a single national context, this comparison serves as a diagnostic test. If similar generational gradients in political participation are observed in both Uganda and Tanzania, this would be consistent with life-cycle dynamics common across political contexts. Conversely, if Uganda exhibits systematically different patterns or magnitudes of generational participation, this would suggest that political context conditions how generational effects manifest. By embedding the analysis within two contrasting political environments, the study strengthens inferential leverage and reduces the risk of interpreting age-related differences as cohort effects.

3.1. Operationalisation of the variables

3.1.1. Dependent variable: Political participation

The dependent variable is political participation during the year preceding the survey. The paper categorises participation into conventional and unconventional modes. In the literature, there is no universally accepted classification of what constitutes conventional vs. unconventional political participation. Several scholars conceptualise political participation as a broad and evolving spectrum of activities whose categorisation depends heavily on political culture, institutional context, and historical experience. For instance, Eme and Onuigbo (2015) argue that whether a particular activity is considered conventional or unconventional is contingent upon a country's political culture, legal framework, and processes of political socialisation, implying that classifications are inherently context-dependent rather than fixed. Similar observations are made by Marcin (2026), who notes that the distinction between conventional and unconventional participation varies substantially across studies, time periods, and theoretical approaches, with no single agreed list of behaviours belonging to either category. This lack of consensus is reinforced by comparative research showing that activities such as demonstrations, consumer boycotts, and other collective actions may be perceived as unconventional in some political settings but as normalised or even conventional in others (Linssen, Schmeets, Scheepers, & te Grotenhuis, 2011; Pitti, 2018). This body of work suggests that the conventional–unconventional dichotomy is fluid, historically contingent, and analytically sensitive to context, rather than a universally stable typology.

Despite this ambiguity, the literature shows relatively greater agreement on what constitutes conventional political participation, particularly with respect to electoral and elite-directed activities. Voting is widely recognised as the most prevalent and archetypal form of conventional participation (Hooghe & Marien, 2013), and many empirical studies consistently classify voting, contacting elected representatives, and engagement with party officials as formal and legal modes of political engagement (Sairambay, 2020; Ileanacho, 2018; Grace & Danfulani, 2015). By contrast, the classification of unconventional participation remains more contested, especially regarding activities such as protests, media engagement, and online political expression. While some scholars include demonstrations, boycotts, civil disobedience, and strike action among unconventional forms because they are less routine and challenge established political channels (Grace & Danfulani, 2015; Schürmann, 2023), others differ on the status of media and social media use. Certain studies view media exposure and online political expression as components of democratic participation that enhance political knowledge and civic engagement (Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2020; Tariq, Zolkepli, & Ahmad, 2022), whereas others associate these activities more strongly with protest, mobilisation, and non-institutional political action, particularly when tied to social movements (Scherman, Etchegaray, Browne, Mazorra, & Rojas, 2022). In fact, Kamiloğlu and Erdoğan (2014), using factor analysis, found online political activities had higher loading with unconventional participation items than conventional ones, illustrating how the same mode of engagement (i.e. digital participation) may be variably classified across theoretical frameworks. Still, some recent scholarship argues that because media and social media posting are legal, socially accepted, and increasingly routinised means of influencing public opinion, they may reasonably be treated as conventional participation (Baboš, Dolný, & Világi, 2024).

In light of these competing perspectives and the absence of a settled consensus, we adopted a context-specific operationalisation. Conventional political participation includes engagement through established and institutionalised political channels involving voting, contacting MPs, and contacting political party officials. These forms of participation are legally sanctioned and recognised actions undertaken within formal electoral and representative systems to influence political outcomes and reflect classifications widely supported in empirical research. Unconventional participation, in contrast, comprises activities that operate outside direct institutional channels and are less formalised. In this paper, these include attending demonstrations or protest marches, contacting the media,

posting about politics or community affairs on social media, and getting together with others to raise an issue. Such activities operate outside traditional political processes (Melo & Stockemer, 2014; Bee & Kaya, 2017; Grace & Danfulani, 2015; Slavina, 2021). The above distinction is justified not by assumptions of legality or peacefulness, but by the degree to which these activities are embedded within, or operate outside of, formal political institutions in the Ugandan context.

Voting is a categorical variable and was transformed into a dichotomous variable (i.e. voted or did not vote). The remaining dependent variables were measured using four ordered response categories: For frequency-based items, responses were coded as 0=Never, 1=Only once, 2=A few times, and 3=Often. For binary-response items with intensity, responses were coded as 0=No, 1=Yes, once or twice, 2=Yes, several times, and 3=Yes, often. Accordingly, the ordinal measure assumes that participation is not binary but varies in intensity of participation. Thus, in order to account for the ordinal nature of the dependent variables, ordinal logistic regressions are employed. This statistical approach has also been utilised in recent Afrobarometer studies to model ordinal outcomes, as seen in the works of Kerr and Lührmann (2017), Tuki (2024a, b), and Tuki and Kwari (2025).

3.1.2. Independent and control variables

The primary independent variable of interest is generational cohort. This is categorised into three cohorts, that is, Gen A, B, and C. The analysis also uses a set of covariates to control for a variety of confounding variables, including gender, level of education, location (urban or rural), and feeling close to a political party. The paper also includes two variables for news consumption (digital and traditional) as well as material deprivation, measured by the Afrobarometer Lived Poverty Index, which averages five poverty items.¹

In the literature, age is an important variable shaping individuals' decision to participate in political activities (Tambe & Kopacheva, 2024; Gamo & Park, 2022; Stockemer, 2014). As such, its inclusion would have been important in order to control for its influence and its curvilinear effects within each of the three generational cohorts, as well as to keep the results comparable with international studies. However, to avoid multicollinearity, age and its squared term (age^2) were excluded from the final model because in the preliminary diagnostics, age influenced the stability of coefficient estimates with values of the variance inflation factors above the threshold of 10 (Appendix A.2)

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Descriptive statistics

4.1.1. Conventional modes of political participation

Of all measures of political participation we explored, voter turnout is the main activity in which a majority of Ugandans are involved (Figure 1). However, while electoral participation remains a dominant form of political engagement, the findings show that enthusiasm for voting fluctuates.

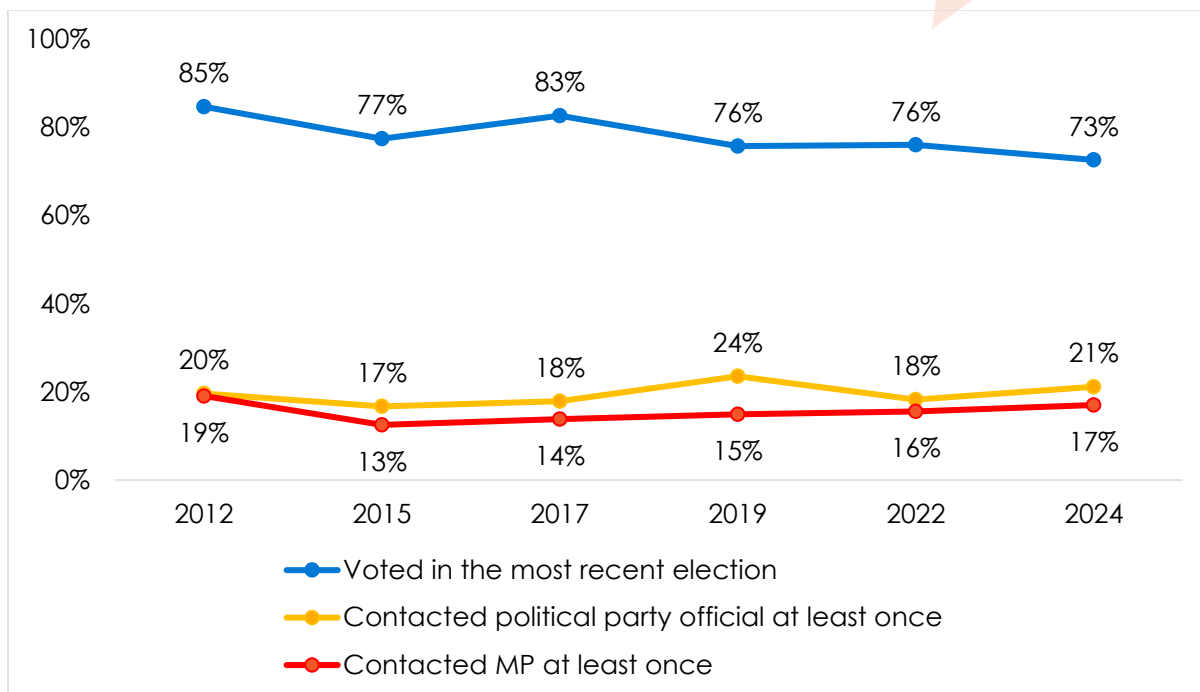
In contrast, engagement with political representatives has remained far lower. The percentage of Ugandans who contacted an MP at least once during the year preceding the survey dropped from 19% in 2012 to 13% in 2015 and has recovered only partially, to 17% in 2024. A possible explanation for the low level of contact between citizens and parliamentarians is the perceived unresponsiveness of MPs, which has been on an upward trend for two decades (Ssenkumba & Nakasujja, 2025).

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Lekalake (2025).

Contact with political party officials has varied between 17% (in 2015) and 24% (in 2019), remaining at 21% in 2024.

These trends suggest that while there is some engagement with political leaders, a majority of Ugandans participate in politics primarily through voting rather than direct interaction with their representatives. The relatively stable but low levels of direct engagement with MPs and party officials indicate that conventional political participation beyond voting remains limited.

Figure 1: Conventional modes of political participation | Uganda | 2012-2024



Respondents were asked:

During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A member of Parliament? A political party official? (% who say "only once," "a few times," or "often")

People are not always able to vote in elections, for example, because they weren't registered, they were unable to go, or someone prevented them from voting. How about you? In the last national election, held in 2021, did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can't you remember whether you voted? (% who say they voted; respondents who were too young to vote are excluded.)

4.1.2. Trends in protesting as an unconventional mode of political participation

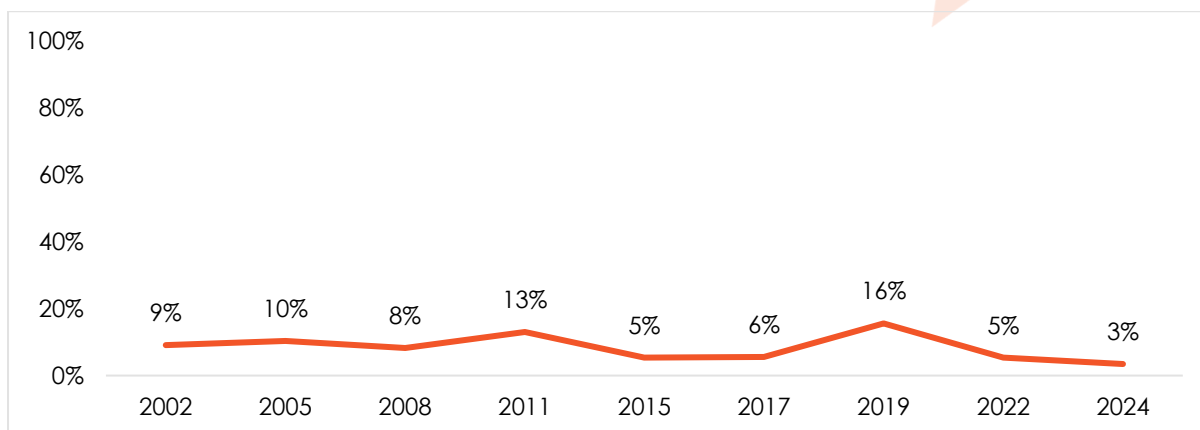
The proportion of Ugandans who reported participating in a protest or demonstration has fluctuated over the years, with peaks in 2011 (13%) and 2019 (16%), followed by sharp declines in 2015 (5%) and 2022 (5%), reaching its lowest level in 2024 (3%) (Figure 2). High levels of protest participation seem to reflect economic and political factors. One high point (2011) occurred when Uganda was experiencing high inflation rates (reaching around 30% by October 2011), which made life extremely difficult for ordinary citizens (Kron, 2011). The Walk to Work campaign was initiated that year under the Activists for Change (A4C) movement as a form of peaceful protest against high fuel prices and the government's failure to address the rising cost of living (Musaazi, 2011; Dunn, 2011).

On the political side, protests followed the February 2011 presidential election, which was characterised by administrative defects and resulted in another term for Museveni (Refworld, 2012). And in 2019, protests were fuelled by growing public dissatisfaction with the government's handling of political opposition, especially the treatment of prominent opposition figure Robert Kyagulanyi (Bobi Wine), whose popularity had risen among the

youth (Al Jazeera, 2019). Demonstrations followed incidents of arbitrary arrests, police brutality, and restrictions on freedom of assembly during Bobi Wine's political rallies.

The significant drop in recent years may reflect changes in civic space, public attitudes toward protests, and/or government responses to demonstrations. A point to note is that protest activities tend to rise in the lead-up to or during national elections (such as 2011 and 2019) before subsiding in non-election years.

Figure 2: Trends in protesting as a form of unconventional political participation
| Uganda | 2002-2024

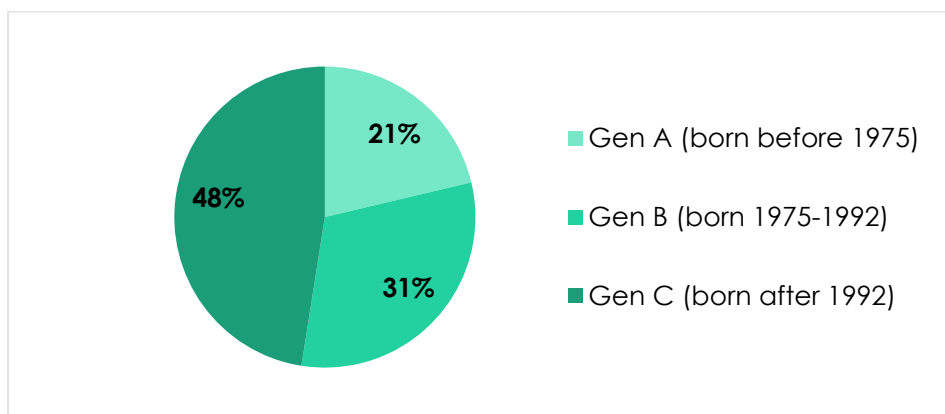


Respondents were asked: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Participated in a demonstration or protest march? (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "often")

4.1.3. Generational cohorts

Nearly half (48%) of surveyed respondents belong to Gen C (Figure 3). They were born in 1993 or later and were at least 12 years old by 2005, when Uganda adopted a multiparty political system. This is the youngest adult cohort, socialised entirely during Museveni's regime and the era of multiparty politics. About one-third (31%) are in Gen B, born between 1975 and 1992, who grew up under the political stability of Museveni's early years but before the reintroduction of multiparty competition. The smallest share (21%) comprises Gen A, adults born before 1975, who were at least 12 years old by 1986 and thus experienced earlier turbulent political transitions, including the violent changes of government. This generational structure suggests that a majority of Uganda's adult population has been socialised in a context of relative political stability under a single, long-term regime, with only a minority having lived their formative years during periods of political upheaval.

Figure 3: Generational cohorts | Uganda | 2024



Respondents were asked: How old are you?

4.1.4. Conventional political participation across generational cohorts

Table 1 provides a comparison of the level of political participation in three generational cohorts across the measures of conventional political actions.

A small proportion of Ugandans report engaging directly with political leaders, with older generations more active than younger ones. About one-quarter of Gen A (22%) say they contacted an MP at least once in the previous year, compared to 18% of Gen B and only 14% of Gen C. Contact with political party officials shows a similar pattern, with 25% of Gen A, 24% of Gen B, and 18% of Gen C reporting at least one interaction.

Voting shows the largest generational divide: Almost all Gen A (93%) and most Gen B (86%) respondents report having voted in the 2021 national election, but a slim majority of Gen C (53%) did so.

In sum, we see a decline in conventional political participation across generations, with the youngest cohort consistently less engaged in both electoral and contact-based forms of participation.

Table 1: Conventional forms of political participation across generational cohorts
| Uganda | 2024

	Gen A	Gen B	Gen C	Average
Voted in the 2021 election	93%	86%	53%	73%
Contacted political party official	25%	24%	18%	21%
Contacted MP	22%	18%	14%	17%

Respondents were asked:

During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A member of Parliament? A political party official? (% who contacted "only once," "a few times," or "often")

In the last national election, held in 2021, did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can't you remember whether you voted? (% who say they voted; respondents who were too young to vote are excluded.)

4.1.5. Unconventional forms of participation across generational cohorts

Table 2 presents a comparison of the level of participation across four measures of unconventional political participation. A striking feature of the table is that non-participation is the dominant response across all activities and all cohorts. For each measure of unconventional participation, a clear majority of respondents report that they never engaged in the activity during the previous year, indicating that these behaviours remain relatively uncommon overall.

Among the four activities, getting together with others to request action is the most prevalent form of participation. Even so, most respondents report no involvement, particularly among the youngest cohort. Non-participation increases monotonically across cohorts, from 57% among Gen A to 60% among Gen B and 69% among Gen C. While a substantial minority in each cohort report having participated at least once, repeated participation (several times or often) is more common among older respondents, suggesting that sustained collective action is more characteristic of older Ugandans.

Across all cohorts, more than nine in 10 respondents report never having contacted the media. Nevertheless, a modest generational pattern is observable: Gen C is somewhat more likely than older cohorts to report having contacted the media at least once. Although the absolute differences are small, they are substantively meaningful given the low overall prevalence of this activity, suggesting that younger Ugandans may be marginally more inclined to engage with media when opportunities arise.

Finally, participation in demonstrations or protest marches is the least common activity. Across all cohorts, fewer than 5% of respondents report participating even once, and reports of frequent participation are virtually absent. This pattern suggests that protest participation is exceptional rather than routine, with little evidence of pronounced generational divergence.

Taken together, Table 2 indicates that generational differences in unconventional forms of participation are modest. Older cohorts tend to report more sustained involvement in collective action, while younger cohorts are more concentrated in non-participation or occasional engagement. These patterns are consistent with interpretations that emphasise life-cycle effects and structural barriers, rather than sharply distinct generational political behaviours.

Table 2: Unconventional forms of political participation across generational cohorts
| Uganda | 2024

		Generational cohorts			
		Gen A (born before 1975)	Gen B (born 1975- 1992)	Gen C (born after 1992)	Total
Got together with others to request action	No	57%	60%	69%	64%
	Yes, once or twice	17%	17%	15%	16%
	Yes, several times	22%	16%	12%	16%
	Yes, often	4%	6%	4%	5%
Contacted media	No	92%	92%	89%	91%
	Yes, once or twice	3%	3%	6%	4%
	Yes, several times	3%	3%	4%	3%
	Yes, often	1%	2%	2%	1%
Posted about politics or comm. affairs on social media	No	98%	96%	95%	96%
	Yes, once or twice	1%	2%	2%	2%
	Yes, several times	1%	2%	2%	2%
	Yes, often	1%	1%	1%	1%
Attended a demonstration or protest march	No	98%	97%	96%	97%
	Yes, once or twice	1%	2%	3%	2%
	Yes, several times	0%	1%	1%	1%
	Yes, often	1%	0%	1%	0%

Respondents were asked: For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. [If yes:] Was this often, several times, or once or twice?

4.2. Drivers of political participation

Tables 4 and 5 present the findings pertaining to the role of generational cohorts in predicting the likelihood of taking part in conventional and unconventional forms of political participation, respectively. In the model without control variables, only generational cohorts are included as a single predictor of the outcome variables. The aim is to examine the direct and unadjusted relationship between cohorts and citizens' involvement in political activities. This approach is vital in identifying whether the explanatory variable alone is associated with the outcome of interest without the influence of other variables. Covariates are then introduced in the second model to control for potential confounding factors that might influence the explanatory and the outcome variable, to allow for a clearer assessment of the independent influence of generational cohorts on taking part in conventional and unconventional forms of political participation.

4.2.1. Generational cohorts and conventional political participation

In the models without control variables in Table 4, the values of the odds ratios for Gen B and C are lower than 1, meaning that belonging to these cohorts is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of engaging in the three conventional forms of political participation. In the model with control variables, there are no differences between adults in Gen B and those in the reference group (Gen A) in contacting MPs and political party officials. However, we do see clear differences between Gen B and Gen A when it comes to voting, with those in Gen B less likely to turn out in both the uncontrolled and controlled models (OR=0.448-0.445).

Gen C demonstrates stronger disengagement. Individuals in this cohort are significantly less likely to contact MPs (OR=0.576 without controls; OR=0.629 with controls) and are also less likely to contact party officials in the baseline model. The results continue to consistently emphasise generational differences as a dividing line in influencing the probability of voting, with Gen C membership associated with decreased odds of turning out to vote in both specifications (OR=0.079 without controls; OR=0.083 with controls).

These findings are compatible with prior studies (such as Wass, 2005; Yun, 2024; Huttunen & Christensen, 2024; Trachtman, Anzia, & Hill, 2023) that found significantly lower voter turnout among the youngest generation than among older generations. In fact, although odds ratios should not be interpreted as direct probability differences, they indicate substantially larger generational gaps between Gen A and Gen C than between Gen A and Gen B. Specifically, Gen B's odds of voting are approximately 56% lower than Gen A's, whereas Gen C's odds are reduced by about 92%.

Where the gap in participation between the eldest generation and Gen B is narrower, this may be explained by the latter's transitional positioning in political socialisation. In the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, when the NRA captured power, some members of Gen B were alive. While they had not yet reached Piaget's 12-year threshold for formal operational thinking or the cognitive maturity to fully deliberate on political events, some members of this cohort likely retain emotional or second-hand awareness of Uganda's earlier political crises – unlike Gen C, which grew up in a comparatively more stable political environment, limiting both their experiential and vicarious exposure to past upheavals. This generational distinction may account for the low level of conventional political participation observed among Gen C.

When the same models were replicated in Tanzania (Appendix Table A.4), similar generational ordering emerged, particularly for Gen C, which is again significantly less likely than Gen A to engage in all three forms of participation. However, the magnitude of these effects is systematically smaller in Tanzania. For example, while Gen C in Uganda is about 92% less likely to vote than Gen A (OR=0.074), the comparable figure in Tanzania indicates a reduction of 83% (OR=0.170).

Likewise, the odds of contacting MPs and party officials among Gen C are lower in both countries, but the declines are steeper in Uganda (e.g. OR=0.629 for contacting MPs) than in Tanzania (OR=0.568). This pattern suggests that although lower conventional participation among younger cohorts is consistent across both contexts, pointing to age-related or life-cycle effects, the stronger suppression of participation in Uganda, especially in voter turnout, indicates that national political context amplifies generational differences. In this way, the comparative analysis not only provides evidence against interpreting cohort effects by default, but also demonstrates how political environments may condition the magnitude and form of generational participation in East Africa.

Turning to the control variables, the probability of contacting MPs, contacting political party officials, and turning out to vote is significantly lower among women compared to men. This can be explained by socio-cultural barriers, lower political mobilisation among women, and institutional challenges that limit women's participation in the political landscape. These results are consistent with studies in other settings (P Franzelt & Spies, 2018; Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2016) that find an effect of gender on political engagement.

Table 4: Results of ordinal and binary logistic regression with odds ratios for conventional forms of political participation | Uganda | 2024

	Contacted MP (1)	Contacted party official (2)	Voted (3)
Model without control variables			
Generation cohort (Ref.=Gen A)			
Gen B (born 1975-1992)	0.738 (0.128)	0.903 (0.146)	0.448** (0.114)
Gen C (born after 1992)	0.576** (0.102)	0.660** (0.107)	0.079** (0.0186)
Model with control variables			
Generation cohort (Ref.=Gen A)			
Gen B (born 1975-1992)	0.877 (0.165)	1.013 (0.175)	0.445** (0.121)
Gen C (born after 1992)	0.629* (0.138)	0.749 (0.137)	0.083** (0.021)
Women	0.627** (0.098)	0.555** (0.073)	0.775* (0.106)
Rural residence	1.081 (0.185)	1.126 (0.176)	1.456* (0.221)
Digital news consumption	0.994 (0.030)	0.991 (0.029)	0.955* (0.027)
Traditional news consumption	1.039 (0.033)	1.070* (0.030)	0.999 (0.028)
Deprivation index	1.179 (0.116)	1.055 (0.082)	1.219* (0.105)
Level of education (Ref.=No formal education)			
Primary level	0.619 (0.172)	0.669 (0.146)	1.148 (0.311)
Secondary level	0.633 (0.193)	0.649 (0.159)	0.917 (0.265)
Post-secondary level	0.881 (0.309)	0.635 (0.192)	1.484 (0.530)
Feel close to a political party	1.134 (0.186)	1.905** (0.282)	1.795** (0.2349)
Constant			6.487** (2.562)
Intercept 1	1.376 (0.392)	1.506 (0.346)	
Intercept 2	2.107 (0.395)	2.200 (0.346)	
Intercept 3	3.148 (0.381)	3.239 (0.357)	
Observations	2,236	2,242	2,154
Wald chi2	35.44	66.37	234.9494
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo R2	0.019	0.0299	0.1846

Note: Cells report regression odds ratios. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. ** and * represent statistical significance at $p \leq 0.01$ and $p \leq 0.05$, respectively. The models exclude cases with missing, refused, and "Don't know" responses. Models 1 and 2 are estimated using ordinal logistic regression, while Model 3 is estimated using a binary logistic regression.

Another factor that is associated with greater involvement in conventional politics is traditional news consumption. Individuals who rely more on traditional news outlets (radio, newspapers, and television) are more likely to take part in the three forms of conventional

political activities, but this reaches statistical significance only for contacting political party officials.

Individuals experiencing greater material deprivation are also more likely to participate in elections. This could be because economic struggles make people more reliant on government policies and services, prompting them to engage politically in hopes of improving their conditions. Turnout is also higher among rural residents, while digital news consumption is associated with lower turnout, suggesting that online political information may not translate into electoral participation. Most importantly, feeling close to a political party is the strongest predictor, nearly doubling the odds of contacting a party official, as well as increasing the odds of voting, underscoring the centrality of partisan attachment in elite-directed participation.

4.2.2. Generational cohorts and unconventional political participation

To examine the role of generational cohorts in explaining citizens' involvement in unconventional modes of political participation, separate ordinal logistic regression models are estimated for the frequency of a. getting together to raise an issue, b. contacting media, c. posting about politics or community affairs on social media, and d. attending a demonstration or protest march (Table 5).

Relative to Gen A, Gen B shows no statistically significant differences in getting together with others to request action, contacting the media, or posting on social media, but is more than twice as likely to participate in demonstrations once controls are introduced (OR=2.512). Gen C exhibits a sharper contrast: While this cohort is about 40% less likely to engage in collective requests for action (OR=0.599 in the model with covariates), we find that neither contacting the media nor posting online is significantly driven by membership in Gen C once controls are introduced in the multivariate models (OR=1.195 and OR=0.907, respectively), indicating that these forms of participation are not structured by cohort. By contrast, Gen C is more likely to participate in demonstrations, with the odds of protest more than four times higher than for Gen A in the controlled model (OR=4.040).

These findings support the second hypothesis by demonstrating that the younger generation, which lacks direct experience of the country's past conflicts, leans more toward unconventional forms of participation, particularly demonstrations and protests – an assertion that aligns with Kintu (2024) and Kakumba and Sanny (2021). This generational divide has led to a shift in political engagement, as evidenced by events such as the 2009 Buganda riots, the Walk to Work protests of 2011 (Musaaizi, 2011; Mutyaba, 2011; Mpuga, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2016), and the violent election-season protests of November 2020 (Butagira & Wandera, 2021).

Replicating the analysis in Tanzania yields both similarities and major contrasts in magnitude. As in Uganda, Tanzania's Gen C is significantly less likely than Gen A to engage in collective action (OR=0.533 with controls), confirming a common decline in this form of participation among the youngest cohort. However, the magnitude of participation in other unconventional modes differs markedly. In Tanzania, both Gen B and Gen C display significantly higher odds of political expression via social media, surpassing the statistically insignificant effects observed in Uganda. Conversely, while participation in protests is strongly associated with Gen C in Uganda (OR=4.040), the corresponding estimates in Tanzania are smaller and statistically weak (OR=1.013), indicating little generational differentiation in demonstrations with Gen A. These results show that while younger cohorts in both countries are less inclined toward collective action relative to Gen A, Uganda's Gen B and Gen C exhibit higher odds of participating in protests compared to Gen A, whereas in Tanzania, generational differences play a more limited role in shaping protest participation.

The findings further show that media contact does not vary across generational cohorts in either country. By contrast, while generational cohort is not a key determinant of online political expression in Uganda, it plays a major role in shaping online political engagement in Tanzania. The contrasting magnitudes across countries demonstrate that political-context

conditions not only explain whether younger citizens participate unconventionally, but are also vital in determining which specific forms become the dominant channels of generational political engagement.

Table 5: Results of ordinal logistic regression with odds ratios for unconventional forms of political participation | Uganda | 2024

	Got together with others to request action (1)	Contacted media (2)	Posted about politics or comm. affairs on social media (marginal effects) (3)	Attended a demonstration or protest march (4)
Model without control variables				
Generation cohort (Ref.=Gen A)				
Gen B (born 1975-1992)	0.877 (0.123)	0.958 (0.251)	0.007(0.005)	2.268 (1.014)
Gen C (born after 1992)	0.593** (0.080)	1.422 (0.338)	0.009(0.005)	2.868* (1.258)
Model with control variables				
Generation cohort (Ref.=Gen. A)				
Gen B (born 1975-1992)	0.837 (0.126)	0.990 (0.272)	0.004(0.007)	2.512* (1.167)
Gen C (born after 1992)	0.599** (0.090)	1.195 (0.321)	-0.001(0.006)	4.040** (2.008)
Women	0.847 (0.095)	0.411** (0.086)	-0.014** (0.004)	0.426** (0.133)
Rural residence	1.324* (0.172)	1.315 (0.283)	0.002(0.004)	1.530 (0.520)
Digital news consumption	0.999 (0.025)	1.100** (0.038)	0.004** (0.001)	1.000 (0.055)
Traditional news consumption	1.061** (0.024)	1.143** (0.044)	-0.001(0.001)	1.055 (0.059)
Deprivation index	1.191** (0.078)	1.067 (0.106)	0.001(0.002)	1.043 (0.183)
Level of education (Ref.=No formal education)				
Primary level	1.272 (0.257)	0.946 (0.370)	-0.006(0.009)	0.370 (0.198)
Secondary level	1.193 (0.260)	1.104 (0.472)	0.005(0.010)	0.227** (0.128)
Post-secondary level	0.985 (0.272)	0.755 (0.365)	-0.001(0.010)	0.045** (0.035)
Feel close to a political party	1.394** (0.169)	1.435 (0.295)	0.000(0.005)	2.218* (0.781)
Intercept 1	1.366 (0.299)	3.566 (0.572)	3.616 (1.054)	4.161 (0.833)
Intercept 2	2.201 (0.308)	4.252 (0.587)	4.164 (1.074)	5.080 (0.875)
Intercept 3	3.844 (0.328)	5.497 (0.600)	5.652 (1.244)	6.203 (0.857)
Observations	2,247	2,248	2,246	2,248
Wald chi2	54.37	62.92	96.580	38.61
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.0001
Pseudo R2	0.0189	0.0618	0.132	0.0639

Note: Cells report odds ratios (with robust standard errors in parentheses) except for "Posted on political or community affairs on social media," where average marginal effects are reported due to extreme sparsity in higher outcome categories, particularly in Tanzania, which resulted in unstable odds ratios. ** and * represent statistical significance at $p \leq 0.01$ and $p \leq 0.5$, respectively. The models exclude cases with missing, refused, and "Don't know" responses. The four models are estimated using ordinal logistic regression.

As highlighted in the conventional forms of participation, we continue to find that women are significantly less likely than men to be involved in any form of unconventional political

participation, particularly contacting media, posting about politics on social media, and attending a demonstration or protest march. Key factors identified in the literature as contributing to limited participation of women in the political sphere include low levels of education, limited income, and the disproportionate burden of household responsibilities that restrict women's leisure time far more than men's (Yerkes, Roeters, & Baxter, 2020; Economic Policy Research Centre, 2021).

Getting together to request action is significantly more common in rural areas than urban centres. However, location ceases to be an important factor in explaining other forms of unconventional political participation. Level of education is significant only in relation to protest: Individuals with higher levels of education are less likely to join demonstrations than their less educated counterparts.

Identification with a political party has a strong effect. Ugandans who feel close to a political party are 1.5 times as likely to get together to raise an issue and more than twice as likely to participate in a protest (OR=2.21, $p<0.01$) as those with no party affiliation, underscoring the role of partisan attachments in mobilising citizens, though the same cannot not be said for contacting media and posting on social media. Material deprivation, as estimated by the Lived Poverty Index, is only associated with getting together to request action. Traditional news consumption is a driving factor in explaining getting together with others to request action and contacting media. In contrast, increased use of digital platforms to access news increases the chances of contacting media and posting about politics on social media, highlighting the enabling role of online platforms.

5. Conclusion

In Uganda, political participation appears to vary across generational cohorts defined by distinct periods of political socialisation, with the largest effects observed in voter turnout. Citizens socialised after the country's return to a multiparty system in 2005 (Gen C) are consistently less likely than the oldest generation (Gen A) to vote and to contact MPs. Gen B occupies an intermediate position, particularly differing from Gen A in electoral participation.

In contrast, unconventional participation exhibits a more differentiated pattern: While Gen C is less inclined toward getting together with others to request action, it is far more likely to engage in protest, with the odds of participation for Gen C more than four times higher than Gen A while members of Gen B are 2.5 times more likely to take part in protest compared to those in Gen A. Substantively, the findings indicate that in Uganda, the period of political socialisation is closely associated with how citizens participate.

As a robustness check, we replicated the same models for Tanzania. The results largely corroborate the Ugandan findings while also revealing important cross-national differences in the structuring of conventional participation (Appendix Table A.4). Like in Uganda, Gen C in Tanzania is significantly less likely than Gen A to contact MPs, to contact political party officials, and to vote, albeit with slightly smaller effect sizes than in Uganda. Unlike in Uganda, however, Tanzania's Gen B does not differ significantly from Gen A in voter turnout. The comparison is particularly instructive for unconventional participation. In both countries, Gen C is significantly less likely to get together for collective action, indicating a shared decline in organisation-based participation. Yet the modes through which generational differences are expressed tend to differ sharply across contexts. In Tanzania, generational cohorts are distinguished primarily by exceptionally large differences in online political expression, with both Gen B and Gen C exhibiting significantly higher odds of posting about politics compared to Gen A, while protest participation shows little cohort differentiation (Appendix Table A.5). In Uganda however, we find no generational differentiation in online political expression but pronounced cohort differences in protest participation, especially for Gen C (Table 5). These findings indicate that although generational patterns of participation show broad similarities across Uganda and Tanzania, particularly in conventional engagement, the specific unconventional repertoires through which generational differences manifest appear to be conditioned by political environments.

Overall, the core patterns observed in Uganda reappear in Tanzania with regard to direction and ordering across cohorts, particularly the lower engagement of Gen C in conventional participation and its divergence from Gen A in unconventional modes. This cross-national consistency suggests that the observed differences are unlikely to be purely cohort-specific effects rooted in Uganda's unique political history and may instead reflect age-related or life-cycle dynamics that structure participation. However, the replication also reveals contextual conditioning in the magnitude and form of participation: Uganda displays sharper declines in electoral participation and stronger cohort differentiation in protest, whereas Tanzania shows exceptionally large cohort effects in digital political expression and weaker differentiation in protest.

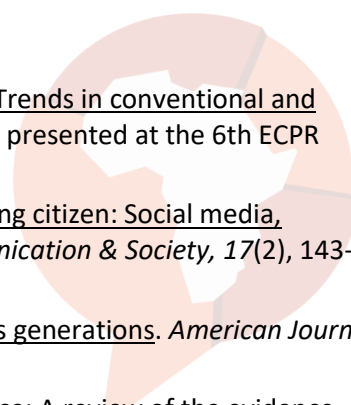
The comparative evidence leads to a twofold conclusion: Apparent generational differences in participation largely reflect life-cycle processes rather than distinct cohort imprints, but the political environment shapes which participatory repertoires become most salient. Methodologically, the findings demonstrate the value of comparative analysis in avoiding the misinterpretation of age-related patterns as cohort effects by default, while empirically clarifying how political context mediates participation across generations.

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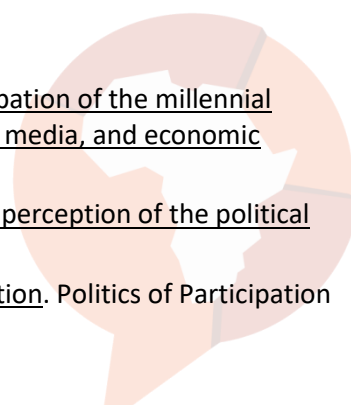
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Appendix

Table A.1: Descriptive statistics

	Level of measurement	Observations	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Generational cohorts ^μ	Nominal	2,400	1.26	0.79	0	2
Contacted MP ^α	Ordinal	2,383	0.30	0.73	0	3
Contacted political party official ^α	Ordinal	2,394	0.38	0.81	0	3
Voted in the most recent national election ^α	Nominal	2,400	0.70	0.46	0	1
Got together with others to request action ^α	Ordinal	2,398	0.98	1.36	0	4
Contacted media ^α	Ordinal	2,400	0.25	0.81	0	4
Posted about politics or community affairs on social media ^α	Ordinal	2,397	0.11	0.56	0	4
Attended a demonstration or protest march ^α	Ordinal	2,400	0.09	0.47	0	4
Gender	Nominal	2,400	1.49	0.50	1	2
Urban or rural	Nominal	2,400	1.70	0.46	1	2
Digital news consumption	Numeric	2,359	1.79	2.86	0	8
Traditional news consumption	Numeric	2,381	5.18	2.87	0	12
Deprivation index	Numeric	2,375	1.62	0.86	0	4
Close to political party	Nominal	2,313	0.63	0.48	0	1
Education	Nominal	2,400	1.45	0.81	0	3

Note: μ is the main independent variable. ^αare the dependent variables.

Table A.2: Collinearity diagnostics

Variable	Model with age and age-squared		Model without age and age-squared	
	VIF	1/VIF	VIF	1/VIF
Gen B	4.65	0.215	1.78	0.563
Gen C	13.62	0.073	1.92	0.521
Age	63.65	0.016		
Age-squared	44.02	0.023		
Gender	1.07	0.935	1.07	0.936
Rural	1.13	0.881	1.13	0.882
Digital news consumption	1.52	0.656	1.51	0.661
Traditional news consumption	1.39	0.717	1.39	0.717
Lived Poverty Index	1.08	0.924	1.08	0.925
Primary education	3.31	0.302	3.29	0.304
Secondary education	3.5	0.286	3.47	0.288
Post-secondary education	2.39	0.419	2.37	0.421
Feels close to a political party	1.05	0.954	1.04	0.964
Mean VIF	10.95		1.82	

Table A.3: Exploratory factor analysis for news consumption

	Factor	
	Digital news consumption	Traditional news consumption
Q65e. Other Internet news sources	0.947	
Q65d. Social media news	0.887	
Q65b. Television news		0.537
Q65c. Newspaper news		0.41
Q65a. Radio news		0.355
% of variance	49.064	21.239
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		
		0.659
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	2027
	df	10
	Sig.	0.000

Table A.4: Results of ordinal and binary logistic regression with odds ratios for conventional forms of political participation | Tanzania | 2024

	Contacted MP (1)	Contacted political party official (2)	Voted (3)
Model without control variables			
Generation cohort (Ref.=Gen A)			
Gen B (born 1975-1992)	0.721(0.169)	1.074(0.196)	0.685(0.186)
Gen C (born after 1992)	0.440**(0.115)	0.550**(0.116)	0.137**(0.036)
Model with control variables			
Generation cohort (Ref.=Gen A)			
Gen B (born 1975-1992)	0.768(0.176)	1.121(0.210)	0.789(0.213)
Gen C (born after 1992)	0.568*(0.164)	0.624*(0.149)	0.170**(0.044)
Women	0.463**(0.097)	0.437**(0.076)	0.954(0.161)
Rural residence	1.045(0.228)	1.502*(0.292)	1.107(0.207)
Digital news consumption	0.995(0.041)	1.033(0.035)	1.026(0.034)
Traditional news consumption	1.069*(0.036)	1.041(0.029)	1.064(0.035)
Deprivation index	1.131(0.167)	1.121(0.128)	1.258*(0.124)
Level of education (Ref.=No formal education)			
Primary level	1.333(0.499)	1.084(0.350)	0.843(0.208)
Secondary level	1.638(0.750)	1.438(0.554)	0.614*(0.167)
Post-secondary level	2.498(1.398)	1.505(0.748)	0.767(0.288)
Feel close to a political party	3.851**(1.038)	2.324**(0.406)	1.360*(0.209)
Constant			3.948**(1.347)
Intercept 1	3.815(0.587)	2.623(0.436)	
Intercept 2	4.543(0.620)	3.185(0.425)	
Intercept 3	6.094(0.626)	4.495(0.427)	
Observations	2,307	2,307	2,206
Wald chi2	59.12	87.12	141.72
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo R2	0.0711	0.0551	0.1298

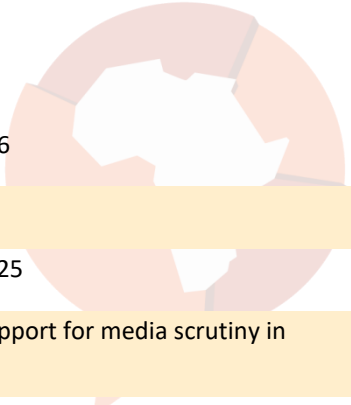
Note: Cells report odds ratios. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. ** and * represent statistical significance at $p \leq 0.01$ and $p \leq 0.05$, respectively. The models exclude cases with missing, refused, and "Don't know" responses. Models 1 and 2 are estimated using ordinal logistic regression, while Model 3 is estimated using a binary logistic regression.

Table A.5: Results of ordinal logistic regression with Odds ratios for unconventional forms of political participation | Tanzania | 2024

	Got together with others to request action (1)	Contacted media (2)	Posted about politics or comm. affairs on social media (marginal effects) (3)	Attended a demonstration or protest march (4)
Model without control variables				
Generation cohort (Ref.=Gen A)				
Gen B (born 1975-1992)	0.784 (0.173)	5.993** (3.654)	0.005*(0.002)	2.045 (1.303)
Gen C (born after 1992)	0.482** (0.111)	5.676** (3.438)	0.004*(0.002)	0.872 (0.627)
Model with control variables				
Generation cohort (Ref.=Gen A)				
Gen B (born 1975-1992)	0.751 (0.176)	5.961 (3.647)	0.005*(0.002)	2.184 (1.474)
Gen C (born after 1992)	0.533* (0.133)	4.485 (2.958)	0.005(0.003)	1.013 (0.790)
Women	0.598** (0.117)	0.185 (0.067)	-0.006**(0.002)	1.895 (1.112)
Rural residence	1.443 (0.297)	1.461 (0.581)	-0.001(0.002)	1.237 (0.726)
Digital news consumption	1.082* (0.043)	1.128 (0.083)	0.000(0.000)	1.046 (0.119)
Traditional news consumption	1.072 (0.038)	1.036 (0.057)	0.000(0.000)	1.040 (0.098)
Deprivation index	1.299* (0.159)	1.189 (0.305)	0.001(0.001)	2.110* (0.683)
Level of education (Ref.=No formal education)				
Primary level	1.014 (0.435)	1.591 (0.979)	0.003*(0.001)	1.076 (0.982)
Secondary level	0.977 (0.508)	3.173 (2.172)	0.004(0.003)	1.391 (1.576)
Post-secondary level	1.998 (1.326)	3.725 (3.001)	0.007(0.006)	0.000** (0.000)
Feel close to a political party	2.034** (0.419)	1.246 (0.422)	0.003(0.002)	4.630* (2.913)
Constant				
Intercept 1	3.382 (0.477)	6.383 (1.047)	35.500 (1.157)	8.128 (1.510)
Intercept 2	3.911 (0.482)	6.893 (1.045)	36.216 (1.297)	8.898 (1.423)
Intercept 3	4.885 (0.521)	8.105 (1.171)	38.219 (1.397)	9.510 (1.392)
Observations	2,309	2,311	2,311	2,310
Wald chi2	60.54	73.7	.	2338.04
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.000	.	0.000
Pseudo R2	0.0527	0.1203	0.1711	0.0816

Note: Cells report odds ratios (with robust standard errors in parentheses) except for "Posted on political or community affairs on social media," where average marginal effects are reported due to extreme sparsity in higher outcome categories, particularly in Tanzania, which resulted in unstable odds ratios. ** and * represent statistical significance at $p \leq 0.01$ and $p \leq 0.05$ respectively. The models exclude cases with missing, refused, and don't know responses. The four models are estimated using ordinal logistic regression.

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