



◀ Top: Carol poses for a photo during the outreach event at her university.  
Middle: Ugandan Musician and TV personality Crystal Panda performs during the university outreach event.  
Bottom: Students at the event.

# The Youth Vote Revolution

## Shaping Uganda's Democracy

It is often said that bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.

As common as that saying is, voter turn-up has been declining in Uganda over the years, with barely half of the eligible voters turning up in the last election, especially young people shying away from elections and associated processes.

"I used to think voting was for older people," says Carol Kembajju, a 3rd-year undergraduate student at Makerere University, Kampala. "I didn't see how elections impacted my personal life, or why my single vote mattered against the millions of votes".

Having one of the youngest populations in the world, the trend of young people proactively avoiding elections is specifically worrying for Uganda's democracy as this means most of the people won't have a say on their representation across the different levels.

"That however changed for me when I 'happened on' the Youth Vote '26 Project", says Carol, her soft laughter warm and contagious, her confidence unmistakable.

Implemented by African Youth Development Link (AYDL) with funding from USAID/Uganda Civil Society Strengthening Activity (CSSA), the Youth Vote '26 Project targets young people aged 16 to 30 in high schools, universities, and ghetto communities, specifically in Kampala and Wakiso—districts that had some of the lowest voter turnouts in the last general elections. The project seeks to increase civic engagement and voter participation among young people ahead of the 2026 general elections.

For Carol, it started with a campus outreach event. "They made it very exciting", she says, "There was good vibes. Some top musicians, and a lot of dancing", she says, "Oh, and there was Carole Casiita (a Ugandan celebrity and influencer), so my friends and I could not miss that plot".

"While there, they helped me to understand my individual impact on democracy. I got to know that every vote counts, especially in close elections. I learned how voting shapes policies and leadership".





Top; Students having a fun moment during one of the high school outreaches.

Below: Dancers entertain students during the university outreach event.

Bottom: A student poses for a photo after registering for the National Identity card.



Beyond providing civic awareness, the project also facilitated on-site National ID registrations, ensuring students could take the first step toward becoming voters, bringing onboard the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) and the Electoral Commission.

“I made sure all my friends and siblings registered”, Carol smiles proudly.

Across Kampala and Wakiso, the project hosted youth dialogues with state actors, organized radio and TV campaigns, and ran an X-space with over 10,000 live listeners. The “Amplify Youth Civic Awareness” social media campaign garnered over 700 million engagements, igniting nationwide youth conversations about governance and democracy, with close attention to the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the electoral process.

Carol says that inspired by the project, she has become a campus advocate for voter engagement.

“We started organizing debates on the importance of voting and political involvement,” she says. “Campusers are now discussing elections more openly, and even posting about it on their handles”.

“The project has improved my confidence and critical thinking. I can now articulate my opinions clearly, especially about politics and other issues affecting the student community.”

Seventeen-year-old Roline Tusiime who just finished senior four from Kiira Secondary School says he was encouraged and supported by the project to get a national ID. “They made what seemed like a hard process very easy. They helped me to register, and I got the national ID without the financial challenges I assumed were associated”.

“Before those guys came to my school, I wasn’t even thinking about the whole voting and elections thing,” he says. “But they nicely explained how elections affect things that affect me directly”.

Beyond the school walls, many young people in the ghettos have also been inspired to register to vote, such as Alfred Okumu, a resident of Kinawataka in Kampala.

“The experience was very inspiring and I decided to be a peer ghetto educator on issues related to electoral democracy and human rights protection. I have since been coordinating youth dialogues in my neighborhood through the community youth parliaments and encouraging voter registrations within the ghetto communities”, Alfred says.

“I hope to contest for Member of Parliament for my home district in the future. In the upcoming elections, I want to be an independent electoral observer for my constituency”, he says. “Many young people here in the ghetto are also willing to contest as local council leaders after realizing the importance of having more youth representatives”.

“I now realize that getting involved in the electoral process is not just about voting. We Gen-Zs have incredible power to shape the future by engaging in political conversations and using our handles to talk about the issues that matter”, Carol says.