



# VOTING AND ETHNICITY;

Understanding  
Diversity

## REPORT

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MILLENNIALS SPEAK



GOVERNANCE PILLAR ORGANIZATION



"We the people... daring to invent the future."





*Most young people are unaware of where ethnic blocs come from. There is a need to have different narratives engaging in our political leadership.*





## Background

In the several topics of discussion that we host, one significantly stood out and it was the aspect of diverse ethnicity when it came to voting. Everywhere we turn messages of peace were being played during the election period. Yet no one outwardly speaks on challenges and/or opportunities they are facing when it comes to understanding the relation between tribe and voting. Let us be honest, why are we tribal? Several young people do not really know. Where are the origins of tribal voting and what are youth's thoughts on tribalism? Finally, what are our thoughts as a community on the current affairs in our nation?

Geared toward educating the populace, specifically the youth on how they can make a positive impact in terms of engaging each other on the available platforms, understanding the imperative need to do so while also liaising with the various accessible stakeholders.



## Introduction

There is no denying that Kenyan politics is ethnically driven yet for several young people do not quite understand why we vote in ethnic blocs. This is what this discourse was supposed to try and find answers to. Many young Kenyans find themselves grappling with tribalism that has been taught to them right from home. All of us come in contact and realization of tribe from our upbringing, which is investable. The discourse was to enable us unlearn negative tribalism which is what fuels Kenyan politics.

## Structure

At the entrance guests were given a white piece of paper that contained the name of a tribe. One was not permitted to switch papers and each participant had to receive a tribe that they are not a part of. It was an open discussion with a panel of experts

and youth leaders to give insights and a review of the current state of affairs. The audience was also given an opportunity to engage during the discussion with the piece of paper they received. They were asked to mention some of the stereotypes that they have heard about on the paper they had received.

## Objective

Understanding Diversity is intended to:

- To encourage more engaged citizenry irrespective of race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth. (Article 27 (4))
- Create a non-judgemental, non-competitive, open platform to learn and ask questions on current affairs and engage





## Where do I fit in?

Aleya Kassam was a panelist in the event and she shared her experience as a Kenyan on matters that a large majority often go through their days not noticing, "When I wanted to get an ID, I had to go with my parents birth certificates and marriage certificates. We need to have more of these conversations"

Aleya brings up, that there are still some communities that have to have proof of being a citizen by carrying their parent's birth certificates. This year, Kenyans of Indian descent were also declared citizens legally as the 44th tribe. However, to Aleya this inclusion did not come at a time that made her as an individual feel any more part of the country.

Culturally, Indians still seclude themselves as a community and even though they have been in the country for over a century during the construction of the railway in 1800s, it is a part of history that is often overlooked in our education system.

There have been innuendos that even the formality of identifying Indians as a tribe was political, due to the timing of the process. Utilizing tribe has been used as a weapon of politicking and politicians have learnt it as an art.

Often times the audience wants to relate with you as a person and tribe is the easiest niche to grasp them by. As one participant mentioned, "You may be a good person but when you run for a seat you have to bash your opponents. Otherwise your followers will not identify with you."

Aleya Kassam continues to illustrate that we can work on uniting the country because we recognize and understand that tribe divides us. "As youth what is our long game? What is the support that we can give? How do we use devolution? Because it all boils down to opportunity: A language of manipulation and they are masters at it. We need to understand our own history. We are here because stuff happened along the way."

Visible identification; where an individual is looked at such as an Indian Kenyan and quickly labeled. What about for those who are not that easy to identify? It is the name that carries the day. For instance, Samwella Lerno mentions, "I wish people would ask my name and not be concerned about where it comes from." This is extremely common amongst young people, where one is always asked their name and there is an emphasis in also mentioning their second name. Almost as though conversation cannot continue without adding a stereotype to the individual.



## Where does it come from?

From the discussion that several youth do not really understand where tribe comes from. For example, a participant mentioned the origin of 'Gikuyu' and it being a combination of dialects. Additionally, the non-existence of Kalenjin and its premise of formation being political. Dr. Njoki Ngumi speaks on, "the idea of fairness is from colonial times.

That everything only happened in Nairobi and Central. We need to analyze about how we are thinking about fairness." Basically meaning that when Kenya gained her independence, she relied on a central federal system. All finances came from the capital city, therefore it makes sense to see all development occur closer to the central business district.

Nearby communities also benefited from this nearness to resources. Therefore, counties that were "far" never received much resources, 2017 in some areas up north such as Wajir were witnessing their first tarmacked road in the area.

When leadership is closely associated to access to resources, the scramble for power becomes easily tribal because people genuinely believe that having "their own" means that they will also have access to opportunity.

## Whose fault/ who needs to take charge in efforts to change tribalism narrative?

Raphael Obonyo chimes into the conversation by saying that ethnicity is a global issue. In the aspect of tribalism, it is the greatest threat to progress in our country. However he seemed a lot more optimistic about the situation by saying that " we might be the last generation that is experiencing negative ethnicity"

"if we do not use merit to award people, then people will always use tribe to reward" We have made tribe a place of comfort and place our focus on issue based mobilization.

Amina Mohammed, "when I was denied my basic right to acquire a national ID I then realized what tribe was." The basic understanding of politics is resources. In my community we have moved from tribe. In fact, now we look at clans. And in those clans, there are majority clans who position themselves in power. We still work with negotiated democracy where elders decide who will lead the particular community.



## Conclusion

- We need to create spaces for youth, especially link them with opportunities. So that we do not have to feel like we must rely on our tribes to get us by in life – Amina Mohammed
- Inter-marriage relationships are building a diversity that needs to be encouraged – Raphael Obonyo
- Politics in Nairobi and politics in rural area may be very different. If we can break these boundaries by empowering people – Natasha Njenga
- The people who perpetuate are also the ones who are in power. Youth are not tribal but njaa ndio shida - Rachel Mwikali,
- “Because of my tribe and I support a political party that is the opposite, I am not trusted” yet we have seen political leaders eg. Passaris and Sakaja thrive in parties that they are not aligned to by tribe. Meaning that in our politics tribe can be fluid – James Kabugi
- Understanding our history and having these sort of conversations – Aleya Kassam

Most young people are unaware of where ethnic blocs come from. There is a need to have different narratives engaging in our political leadership. We are always wired to believe that the solution always lies in having a representative. In those very representatives, we need to strengthen different voices. Why is it that politicians find it easy to mobilize along tribal lines? We are moving from national tribalism into regional tribalism. Which makes one think, are we deepening tribes based on counties due to devolution?

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