

FACTSHEET

Technology, artificial intelligence (AI), and civic engagement in Africa, with a special focus on youth and Nigeria

Evidence from seven African countries on civic-technology markets, policy framing, and the structural conditions that mediate AI's civic impact



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PREPARED FROM

Reimagining Civic Engagement in Africa: Technology, Artificial Intelligence and Civic Engagement - Issues and Emerging Framework

Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative (2026)

May 2026

1. Introduction

The Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative (2026) commissioned a study titled “Reimagining Civic Engagement in Africa: Technology, Artificial Intelligence and Civic Engagement – Issues and Emerging Framework.” This study covers all 54 African countries, with detailed analysis of seven: Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda, alongside the African Union’s Digital Transformation Strategy.

The central aim is to develop an evidence-based framework for leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to strengthen civic engagement systems, with a specific focus on youth. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining document analysis of 26 core policy strategies, corpus text analysis (using Voyant Tools), semantic network mapping, Automated Interest Mining (AIM) via Google Trends, contextual media analysis, and secondary interviews.

A citizen-level survey of Nigerians was also conducted to test relationships between AI awareness, barriers, and civic engagement, with data analysed using regression, moderation analysis, and descriptive statistics.

This factsheet draws key insights from the report ([Click to see the main report for details](#)).

2. Civic tech market in Africa: size and distribution

2.1 Addressable market and connectivity

131 million

Nigeria is the largest potential civic tech market

followed by:
Egypt (75.7 million),
Ethiopia (74.8 million)
South Africa (56.5 million),
DR Congo (59.6 million).

10–50 million

Medium markets

include Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Algeria, Morocco, Angola, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia, Senegal, Madagascar, Mali, Zimbabwe, Guinea, etc.

5 million

Small markets potential users

largely small island nations, micro-states, and Sahel countries, including Seychelles, São Tomé and Príncipe, Comoros, and Guinea-Bissau.

Population and mobile subscriptions track each other strongly; mobile phones are a good proxy for reachable users.

Total population does not predict internet penetration; several large countries have low connectivity.

The working-age population (18–64) does not significantly predict internet penetration, meaning stakeholders should not rely on this demographic alone to determine how citizens access the internet for civic engagement.

Mobile ownership is much higher than reliable internet access, so SMS/USSD are crucial channels.

2.2 Number of products and regional distribution

A total of 299 civic technology products were identified across Africa, with distribution heavily skewed toward West Africa, which hosts 53% of all products, followed by East Africa (more than 20%) and South Africa region (more than 10%), while North and Central Africa remain significantly underrepresented.

Nigeria stands out as the single largest civic technology market on the continent with more than 80 products out of 299, ahead of other dominant countries including South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana.

Product creation across the continent is episodic rather than sustained, clustering around specific years 2011, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2023, and 2025, with prolonged low-activity periods recorded in 1995, 2001, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, and early 2026, suggesting that innovation is driven by funding cycles, policy launches, or socio-political events rather than organic and consistent growth.

At the country level, Seychelles, São Tomé and Príncipe, Comoros, and Guinea-Bissau are identified as very small markets with near-zero local civic tech products, for whom the report recommends regional hub models over country-specific investments

West Africa's dominance is not merely a function of population size but reflects stronger civil society capacity, better donor funding access, and a more enabling policy environment, a pattern that underscores the need for deliberate investment in underserved regions to bridge the civic technology gap across the continent

3. Technology types, AI use, domains, funding and actors

3.1 Technology types by region

West Africa leads across the majority of technology types, especially web-based, mobile-integrated, AI-enhanced, and automation solutions, reflecting both quantity and technological sophistication

East Africa shows notable diversity, particularly in hybrid and experimental configurations such as	33.33% Web + Mobile + SMS	50% Web + Game App	50% USSD/WhatsApp multi-channel solutions
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South Africa occupies an intermediate position, contributing meaningfully to	25% Mobile App	17.60% Web App	and some hybrid bundles
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North Africa leads only in	66.66% Web App + Social Media	25% Web + Mobile + SMS	largely absent from advanced technology types
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Central Africa remains the most underrepresented region across virtually all technology categories, recording zero in most advanced types

Notably, West Africa does NOT dominate every multi-channel type in Web + Mobile + SMS, East (33.33%) and North (25%) outrank the West (8.33%), indicating East Africa's emerging capacity in complex multi-channel deployment

3.2 AI-driven vs AI-supported products

AI-driven: AI/ML is core functionality (NLP chatbots, prediction, recommendation, automated classification). AI-supported: conventional platforms enhanced by AI components (e.g. NLP for WhatsApp bots, speech-to-text, tagging, basic analytics).

Most civic tech products are AI-supported, not AI-driven.

87 AI-supported products: over 35% launched in 2011; other peaks in 2008, 2018, 2022.

47 AI-driven products: over 34% launched in 2020, with additional peaks in 2024 and 2025.

More than half of AI-driven products and over half of AI-supported products are in West Africa; East follows.

About 36.8% of AI-supported products are in citizen participation/public engagement.

About 39% of AI-driven products are in justice and human rights.

Other AI-driven domains include fact-checking, public service delivery, and transparency/accountability.

Democratic process tools (elections, parliamentary transparency, etc.) are relatively under-served by AI-driven tools.

3.3 Primary domains of civic tech products

Domain	Frequency (n)	Status
Transparency and accountability	74	Major focus
Citizen participation in public activities	47	Major focus
Justice and human rights	37	Major focus
Elections	37	Major focus
Public service delivery	36	Major focus
Fact-checking	23	Major focus
Health	10	Under-served
Legislative accountability	7	Under-served
Democracy & elections (distinct category)	5	Under-served
Citizen participation in elections & governance	5	Under-served
Engagement & community building	4	Under-served
Gender-based violence	3	Under-served

3.4 Funding models and lead actors

Funding models:

- Donors/grants: dominant (195 products), with smaller numbers using grants + services, donors + public, or other mixes.
- West Africa again leads in access to all identified funding models.

Lead actors developing products (by region):

- Private businesses, international development partners, and governments are the main creators.
- In West Africa, governments and international development partners have almost equal shares (difference \approx 0.95 percentage points).
- Hybrid models (co-creation between government, CSOs, and businesses) are especially visible in the South.

Scale and coverage:

- 195 of 299 products have national coverage; 77 have regional reach; 12 have global coverage.
- Very few products are district- or state-level; macro-level products dominate.
- West Africa has over 57% of nationally-scaled products and about half of regionally-scaled ones.
- Local/grassroots-level civic engagement via digital tools is relatively neglected.

4. Civic engagement, petitions and cluster analysis

4.1 Petition intensity and civic tech

Using Change.org petition mentions as a proxy for digital civic engagement:

South Africa has the highest petition mentions (4,719), followed by Nigeria (3,254) and Kenya (1,538), despite South Africa having a much smaller population than Nigeria or Ethiopia.

Youthfulness (low median age) alone does not translate into higher petition activity or more civic tech products.

Several conflict-affected or repressive states (Eritrea, South Sudan, Somalia, CAR) show low petition counts and minimal civic tech presence, indicating constrained civic space.

Some small, high-connectivity states (e.g. Mauritius, Libya, Botswana, Seychelles) show relatively high petition visibility compared to their population size.

4.2 Seven clusters of civic engagement and civic tech

Based on petition counts, population, median age, internet penetration, and number of civic tech products, seven clusters of countries emerge:

Cluster	Countries	Key Traits
Digitally mature civic engagement leaders	South Africa, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High internet penetration • Strong digital activism and petition culture • Media-amplified civic engagement • Civic tech present but not the primary driver
Youthful, high mobilisation, innovation dense	Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth-led mobilisation (e.g. #EndSARS) • High digital engagement despite constraints • Dense but fragmented civic tech ecosystems • Nigeria and Kenya as dominant hubs
Authoritarian pressured civic spaces	Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Sudan, Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate/high digital interest • Constrained civic tech innovation • State control and repression limit participation • Cautious or indirect civic engagement
Digitally constrained but civically expressive	Tanzania, Zambia, Senegal, Cameroon, Mali, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate infrastructure but structural barriers • Civic energy exists but is not fully enabled • Diaspora-driven tools common • Focus on monitoring/information over mobilisation
Low digital reach, low civic tech density	Niger, Chad, Burundi, CAR, South Sudan, Madagascar, Malawi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very low internet penetration • Minimal civic tech presence • Civic engagement largely offline and informal
Small state, high connectivity outliers	Botswana, Namibia, Seychelles, Cabo Verde, Gabon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small populations with relatively high connectivity • Civic engagement is personalised and issue-specific • Higher likelihood of state-led digital platforms • Limited but functional civic tech ecosystems
Digitally invisible or repressed civic spaces	Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Comoros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely limited civic space • Very low digital civic engagement • Strong state control and repression • Civic activity largely diaspora-driven

5. Policy frameworks, AI ecosystem and AIF-NICES

5.1 Policy instruments analysed (26 core documents)

Based on petition counts, population, median age, internet penetration, and number of civic tech products, seven clusters of countries emerge:

Country	Sample instruments (from 26 total)	Focus areas
Nigeria	National AI Strategy 2024; NDEPS 2020–2030; National Youth Policy 2019–2023; e-Government Plan 2023	AI, digital economy, youth, e-government
Ghana	National Youth Policy 2022–2032; National Digital Economy Policy; National AI Strategy 2023–2033	Youth, digital economy, AI
Kenya	AI Strategy 2025–2030; Digital Economy Blueprint 2019; Youth Policy 2019; Digital Master Plan 2022–2032	AI, digital, youth
South Africa	National Youth Policy 2020–2030; Strategic Plan 2025–2030; National AI Policy Framework 2024; Digital Transformation of Government	Youth, AI, e-government
Tanzania	Digital Economy Strategic Framework; National Youth Development Policy; AI Readiness Assessment; e-Government Strategy	Digital, youth, AI readiness
Uganda	Digital Transformation Roadmap 2023–2028; Vision 2040; Youth Action Plan 2016	Long-term vision, youth, digital
Egypt	Vision 2030; National AI Strategy 2025–2030; National Strategy of Youth and Sports 2025–2032	Vision, AI, youth
African Union	Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020–2030	Continental digital agenda

5.2 Cross-country thematic strengths

Theme	Most advanced countries	Indicators
AI ecosystem	Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa	Early national AI policy frameworks in place
Digital economy infrastructure	Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania	Detailed digital economy blueprints/master plans
Youth employment and skills	Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda	Multi-phase youth policies and skills focus
Long-term national vision	Egypt, Uganda	Vision 2030/2040 frameworks
E-government modernisation	South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania	Strong focus on digital public services

5.3 Nigeria's AI Framework for Strengthening Civic Engagement System (AIF-NICES)

The report develops AIF-NICES as an AI-driven framework for reinforcing civic engagement in Nigeria.

Core insight: AI strengthens civic engagement not through technology alone but via interaction with sociopolitical structures, including barriers, regulation, trust, access, and inequality.

The framework has four pillars:

Foundational capacity (digital skills, AI literacy, infrastructure).

Operational interface (platforms, tools, and product design).

Structural moderator (laws, institutions, socio-political context, power relations).

System output (actual civic engagement outcomes and feedback loops).

Gender, age, and education have relatively small explanatory power for civic engagement in the models; gender has the strongest but still modest influence.

Occupation, residential area, and internet access add limited extra explanatory power.

Implication: structural, technology-mediated factors (political interest, trust, perceived efficacy of civic tech) may matter more than classical socio-demographics.

6. Key strategic insights from the findings

Africa is currently a continent of AI-supported civic tools for broader participation, rather than deeply AI-driven civic systems.

West Africa (especially Nigeria) is both the quantitative and qualitative hub of civic tech: most products, most advanced multi-channel architectures, and most AI-use instances.

Civic tech creation is episodic, often triggered by crises or specific political moments (e.g. elections), not sustained over time.

Most products focus on transparency/accountability, citizen participation, justice/human rights and elections; domains like GBV, community building, legislative oversight and local-level engagement are under-served.

Policy documents recognise youth and digital, but rarely connect youth, AI and civic engagement in a coherent way; AI is still framed mainly as economic/modernisation infrastructure.

Effective civic engagement ultimately depends on how technology interacts with socio-political structures laws, power, inequality, and trust not just on the sophistication of tools.

Annex and References

Primary source

Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative (2026). Reimagining Civic Engagement in Africa: Technology, Artificial Intelligence and Civic Engagement - Issues and Emerging Framework. All product counts, regression coefficients, country trajectories, and the AIF-NICES framework cited in this brief are drawn from this report.

Key continental and national instruments referenced

African Union (2020). Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020–2030).

Egypt: Vision 2030; National AI Strategy (2025–2030); National Strategy of Youth and Sports (2025–2032).

Ghana: Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies; National Digital Economy Policy; National AI Strategy.

Kenya: Master Digital Plan; Digital Economy Blueprint; Kenya National Youth Policy.

South Africa: National Youth Policy 2020–2030; Strategic Plan 2025–2030; National AI Policy Framework 2024; Digital Transformation of Government.

Tanzania: Digital Economy Strategic Framework 2024–2034; National Youth Development Policy 2020–2030; AI Readiness Assessment Report 2025; E-Government Strategy 2022.

Uganda: Digital Transformation Roadmap 2023–2028; Uganda Vision 2040; National Youth Action Plan 2016.

Nigeria: National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy; National AI Strategy; e-Government Master Plan 2023; National Youth Policy.

Methods at a glance

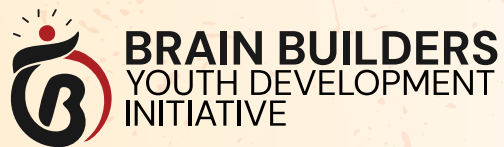
Document analysis of 26 national and continental instruments (Voyant Tools).

Corpus and contextual text analysis; semantic network analysis of document titles.

Automated Interest Mining via Google Trends (2021–2025).

Strategic group mapping and cluster analysis of 299 products in the African Civic Technology Product Database.

Survey of 382 Nigerians on AI awareness, knowledge, use, barriers, and civic engagement; regression with moderation analysis.



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