

SEISMIC SHIFTS IN KENYA'S DEMOCRACY

2027 Electoral Conflict Risk Mapping & Strategic Diagnostic

Seismic Shifts in Kenya's Democracy

Electoral Conflict Risk Mapping Assessment Report

2026


MUHURI
MUSLIMS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
VOTE
KIONGOZI BORA
JUKUMU LANGU
Urban
Hope

The Electoral Conflict Risk Mapping Assessment Report, 2026 provides a comprehensive assessment of the electoral conflict landscape across selected counties in Kenya ahead of the 2027 General Election.

The report analyses key conflict drivers, emerging risks, institutional preparedness, and community resilience and examines public perceptions of electoral integrity, trust in democratic and electoral institutions, and national cohesion. The findings provide an evidence base to inform conflict-sensitive programming, strengthen early warning and response mechanisms, and support the REDI Programme's goal of fostering a stable and inclusive Kenya with trusted democratic institutions and active citizen participation.

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FOREWORD



As Kenya advances toward the 2027 General Election, the dynamics of electoral competition are undergoing a profound transformation. A rapidly expanding and politically assertive youth population, the accelerating influence of digital technologies, and persistent deficits in institutional trust are converging to redefine both the opportunities and risks within the electoral landscape. These shifts present not only a test of democratic resilience but also a critical moment to reimagine and reinforce the foundations of peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections.

This Electoral Conflict Risk Mapping Assessment Report, commissioned under the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) and the Resilience, Peace, and Stability (RPS) programmes, provides a timely and strategic evidence base to navigate this complexity. It goes beyond diagnosing traditional drivers of electoral conflict by integrating emerging risks, particularly digital disinformation and misinformation, evolving patterns of political mobilisation, and weakening confidence in electoral institutions into a comprehensive analysis of vulnerability and resilience.

The findings presented here serve as a strategic compass for Act Change Transform (Act!) and its partners. They underscore the urgent need to modernise peace infrastructure, strengthen institutional credibility, and invest in citizen-centred approaches that bridge the gap between high electoral participation and low civic trust. Importantly, the report calls for a shift from reactive crisis response to proactive, data-driven prevention that is inclusive, locally grounded, and adaptive to Kenya's changing realities.

It is our conviction that the insights and recommendations contained in this report will inform coordinated action among state and non-state actors alike. By anchoring interventions in evidence and encouraging inclusive engagement, we can collectively safeguard the integrity of the 2027 electoral process and guarantee it reflects the aspirations, agency, and diversity of all Kenyans.

Tom Were,
Chief Executive Officer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



This assessment was made possible through the generous support and collaborative efforts of numerous individuals and institutions committed to advancing peace, stability, and democratic governance in Kenya. Sincere appreciation is extended to the Embassy of Sweden and the Embassy of Denmark for their visionary partnership and financial support through the **Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) and Resilience, Peace and Stability (RPS)** programmes, respectively.

The technical skills, professionalism, and dedication of the consulting teams from **Richent Consulting Limited** and **Oron Collaborative Limited** were instrumental in the design and implementation of this rigorous examination and are gratefully acknowledged. Particular appreciation is extended to the core technical team, including Felesia Muyia as Technical Lead, Irene Opondo as Principal Investigator, Richard Orenyo in charge of Quality Control and Reporting, Fred Wafula and Perpetual Gakeni as Data Analysts, and Randy Isaac Newton, who provided support in knowledge management and logistics. Their collective leadership and commitment were instrumental in ensuring the quality and integrity of this work.

The efforts of the core technical team were further strengthened by a dedicated field team of supervisors and enumerators who conducted data collection across the selected counties with diligence and professionalism. Deepest gratitude is also extended to the 688 household respondents, focus group discussion participants, and key informants drawn from government institutions, civil society organisations, and community leadership across the 15 target counties (Baringo, Bungoma, Garissa, Isiolo, Kajiado, Kilifi, Kisumu, Migori, Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Nyeri, Samburu, Uasin Gishu and Wajir), whose valuable contributions made this study possible. Their willingness to share their lived experiences, insights, and perspectives provides the critical local context that underpins this analysis and enables the translation of findings into actionable strategies for electoral conflict prevention and democratic strengthening.

In conclusion, I would also like to acknowledge the Act! internal team Francis Dume, Khalid Ngamau Dorah Wawuda, and Sandra Jumba, under the leadership of Elizabeth Atieno, Manager, Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation (PBCT), Platform for their exceptional coordination of this assignment through to the successful validation of the study findings and publication. Their dedication, professionalism, and commitment in coordinating both the consultancy team and the diverse stakeholders engaged throughout the process were instrumental to the successful completion of this assignment.

Michael Karanja, PhD.
Adviser – Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Reporting

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Act!	Act Change Transform
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMAYA	Amaya Triangle Initiative
ASAL	Arid and Semi-Arid Land
CMD-Kenya	Centre for Multi-Party Democracy - Kenya
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
Danida	Danish International Development Agency
DCP	Democracy for the Citizens Party
ECRI	Electoral Conflict Risk Index
EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
ECWD	Education Centre for Women in Democracy
ELOG	Elections Observation Group
EOM	Election Observation Mission
EWER	Early Warning and Early Response
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FIDA	Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IEBC	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission
IPOA	Independent Policing Oversight Authority
JCE	Judiciary Committee on Elections
KECOSCE	Kenya Community Support Centre
KEWOPA	Kenya Women Parliamentary Association
KHRC	Kenya Human Rights Commission
KII	Key Informant Interview
KNCHR	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
MCK	Media Council of Kenya
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
NLC	National Land Commission
NPS	National Police Service
ODM	Orange Democratic Movement
ORPP	Office of the Registrar of Political Parties
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities

REDI	Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion
RPS	Resilience, Peace, and Stability
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIGs	Special Interest Groups
SLDF	Sabaot Land Defence Force
TFGBV	Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence
TJRC	Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission
TOC	Theory of Change
UDA	United Democratic Alliance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Act Change Transform (Act!) is currently implementing the Resilience, Peace, and Stability (RPS) and the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) programmes, funded by the Embassy of Denmark and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), respectively. Both initiatives aim to foster credible, peaceful, and inclusive electoral processes in Kenya by strengthening public trust, improving early warning and response systems, enhancing digital literacy, and promoting a culture of non-violence.

This *Electoral Conflict Risk Mapping Assessment Report* serves as a strategic guide for Act! to refine its theory of change, results frameworks, and implementation approaches. The study establishes baseline indicators to monitor institutional and community-level mitigation capacities by identifying geographic hotspots and emerging drivers of conflict. Ultimately, it provides a comprehensive, evidence-based roadmap for preventive and inclusive interventions ahead of the 2027 General Election.

Methodology

The assessment employed a conflict sensitive, mixed methods research design grounded in Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) principles. The methodology integrated a comprehensive document review and a quantitative household survey of 688 respondents across 15 purposively selected counties. This data was triangulated with robust qualitative inquiry comprising 48 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), 18 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and 15 in-depth county case studies.

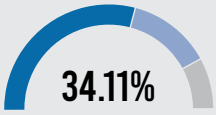
To address the fast changing political landscape, the team conducted a digital ecosystem analysis focusing on misinformation and coordinated influence campaigns. Data analysed using STATA and MAXQDA tools were used to develop the Electoral Conflict Risk Index (ECRI), ensuring all findings strictly adhere to 'Do No Harm' ethical standards and the Kenya Data Protection Act 2019.

Summary of the Key Findings

Institutional Performance and Public Trust Deficits

1 IEBC CREDIBILITY CRISIS



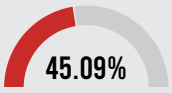


PUBLIC CONFIDENCE in the IEBC's ability to deliver a free and fair election

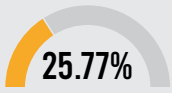
2 POLICE LEGITIMACY DEFICIT



PUBLIC DISTRUST IN NPS



PUBLIC COOPERATION



3 JUDICIARY & LOCAL PILLARS



+41.54%

Strong public trust: positions the Judiciary as a key anchor for peaceful electoral dispute resolution

Thematic Drivers of Conflict & Normalisation of Malpractice

HIGH EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

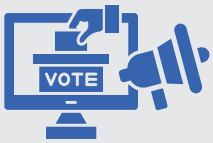


The assessment shows that

75.7%

of respondents have experienced electoral malpractice or violence

RESULTS ANNOUNCEMENT AS A FLASHPOINT



The results announcement phase remains the most volatile stage of the electoral cycle

74%

of respondents cited it as primary trigger for violence

ORGANIZED GOONISM & ECONOMIC DRIVERS



Political elites are identified as the primary drivers of violence in

90.84%

of cases

Electoral Inclusion and Protection

TARGETED DIGITAL ABUSE OF WOMEN



55.7%

of women candidates experience Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)

EXCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Inclusion remains largely inadequate



18.4%

of rural polling stations sea physically inaccessible

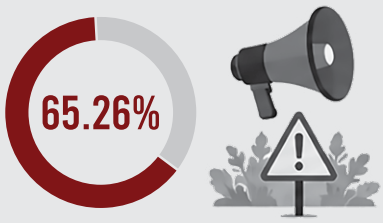
SHIFTING YOUTH AGENCY



While economically vulnerable youth are often mobilised as instruments of violence, they are increasingly asserting independent political agency

Peace Architecture, EWER, and Awareness Ecosystems

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM GAPS



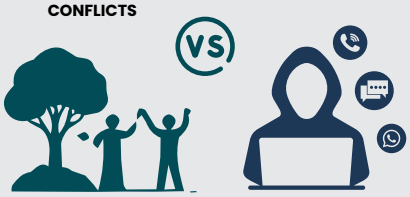
UNAWARE of formal early warning and reporting systems (EWER)

DIGITAL CAPACITY GAP

Existing EWER systems are largely rural-focused and lack the capacity to monitor emerging digital threats

EFFECTIVE IN TRACKING TRADITIONAL CONFLICTS

UNABLE TO DETECT DECENTRALISED MOBILISATION ONLINE



LOW CIVIC AWARENESS



73.94%

NO EXPOSURE to voter or civic education in the past two years

Digital Frontiers and Corporate Platform Accountability

HIGH SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE



84%

Social media penetration

PRIMARY INFORMATION CHANNELS

WhatsApp **90%**

Facebook **82%**

TikTok **70%**

ALGORITHMIC POLARISATION

Digital platforms amplify divisive political messaging, manipulated content, and identity-based narratives, often driven by engagement-based algorithms



Summary of Main Recommendations



IEBC Operational Clarity

Parliament is urged to amend the IEBC Act, 2011 to separate the Commissioners' roles from the Secretariat's functions



Legislative Finality of Polling Results

Parliament is urged to harmonise the Elections Act, 2011 with the Maina Kiai and Supreme Court rulings, to affirm the finality of polling station results



Intra-Party Primaries Accountability

The Office of the Registrar of Political Parties must strictly enforce candidate integrity requirements



Digital Platform Accountability

The National Cohesion and Integration Commission is advised to establish an Electoral Tech-Ethics partnership with the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management, the Media Council of Kenya, and global platform providers (e.g., Meta, TikTok, Google)



Targeted AI-Driven Monitoring

Electoral and peace oversight institutions are urged to deploy advanced technology systems to monitor online spaces for coded hate speech and synthetic media



Permanent Election Security Framework

The IEBC, the National Police Service, and the Judiciary are advised to reform the Election Security Assistance Programme into a permanent, multi-agency operating across the full electoral cycle



CSO Thematic Lead Model

Civil Society Organisations are urged to abandon localised rivalry and instead adopt a systematic "thematic lead" strategy based on core competencies



Donors' Strategic Funding Portfolios

Development partners are urged to establish a long-term Democratic Resilience Fund, shifting from short-term, event-based funding to sustained multi-year investments



Specialised Hate Speech Courts

The Judiciary is advised to establish dedicated fast-track courts for electoral and incitement-related offences, similar to those for anti-corruption cases



Accountable Police Crowd Control

The NPS must ensure that all officers deployed for crowd control wear clearly visible identification badges and use appropriately marked police vehicles

The 2027 election will ultimately be shaped by trust and inclusion. By leveraging the ECRI framework and shifting from event-driven interventions to a full electoral cycle approach, Act!'s REDI and RPS programmes have a strategic opportunity to strengthen Kenya's peace infrastructure and support a more credible, inclusive, and stable electoral process.



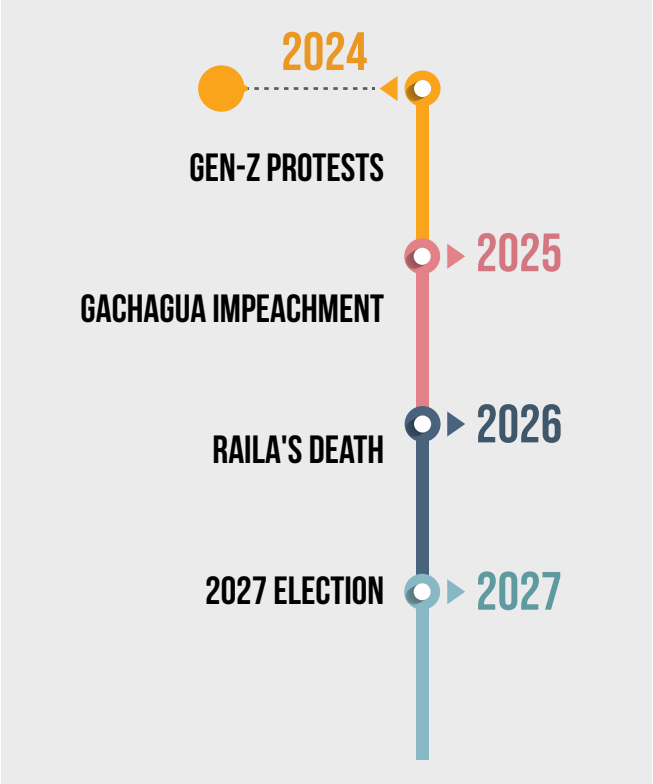


CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

1.1. Background

Kenya's electoral history is marked by persistent cycles of violence, shifting from large-scale national ethnic clashes to localised conflicts at the county level. The current political landscape is defined by a profound socio-economic crisis, characterised by a 67% youth unemployment rate (Generation Kenya, 2025) and a high debt-to-GDP ratio, which fuelled the unprecedented, leaderless, and tribeless Generation-Z protests of 2024. This shift, combined with the death of veteran political leader Hon. Raila Odinga in late 2025 and the high-profile impeachment of Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, has fragmented traditional political alliances and given rise to a prevailing narrative of 'politics of betrayal'. These dynamics threaten to mobilise disempowered voters along both class and ethnic lines, creating a volatile environment as the country prepares for the 2027 General Election.



67%
Youth Unemployment

80%
of population under 35

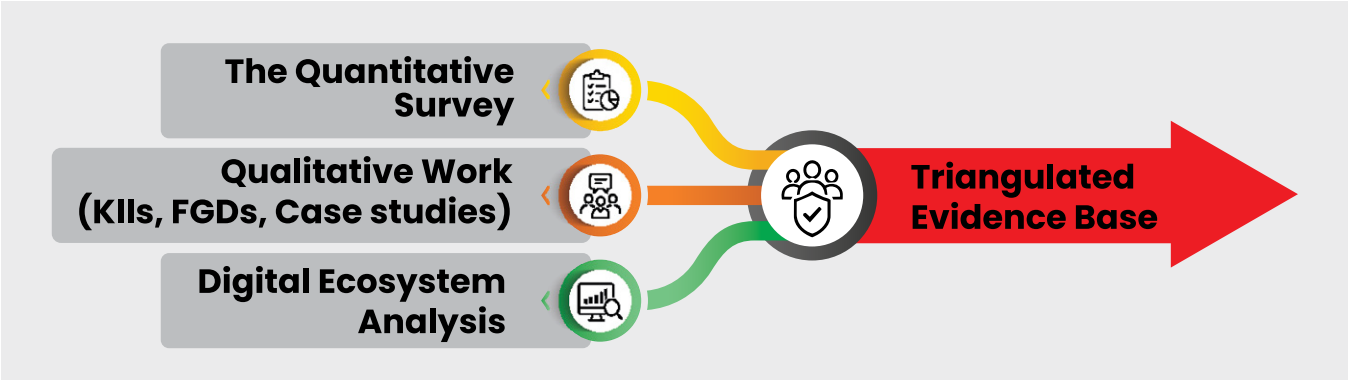
Accompanying this political volatility is a critical trust deficit in key democratic institutions, with public confidence in the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and the National Police Service (NPS) remaining low due to perceptions of Executive influence and past operational loopholes. The conflict environment has expanded into the digital frontier, where industrialised disinformation, AI-generated deep fakes, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence are increasingly used to suppress leadership and delegitimise the electoral process. With 80% of the population aged 35 and below, the combination of economic exclusion, state-led repression, and digital warfare creates a high-risk environment where traditional peacebuilding infrastructures must rapidly adapt to handle spontaneous, decentralised unrest that bypasses traditional ethnic or clan structures.

Comprehensive mapping is required to identify evolving conflict triggers in an environment fundamentally altered by transformative youth activism and the growing risk of using digital technology to fuel electoral conflict. This study provides the real-time data needed to navigate the unique risks of the 2027 cycle, ranging from contested boundary delimitation to the commercialisation of violence through political gangs. Traditional early-warning models are typically ill-equipped to capture these developing trends.

The REDI and RPS programmes are uniquely positioned to address these risks by bridging the gap between institutional reform and community resilience. These programmes provide the necessary infrastructure to strengthen the IEBC's credibility (REDI) by aligning Swedish and Danish development priorities with local realities, while simultaneously bolstering the grassroots peace networks (RPS) required to mitigate localised triggers before they escalate. The findings from this mapping will facilitate the development of a localised Electoral Conflict Risk Index (ECRI), shifting the peacebuilding approach from reactive crisis management to proactive prevention.

1.2. Purpose and Objectives of the Conflict Risk Mapping Exercise

The primary purpose of this mapping exercise is to generate a comprehensive, evidence-based analysis of electoral conflicts and risks in Kenya in preparation for the 2027 General Election. The assessment examined the complex interplay between long standing structural grievances, such as land injustice and ethnic mobilisation, and emerging proximate triggers, including digital disinformation, artificial intelligence, and generational political realignments, while moving beyond traditional historical analysis.



The study established a robust evidence base through a rigorous mixed methods approach that identified not only where violence was likely to manifest, but also the specific underlying mechanisms that threatened to ignite unrest or could be leveraged to mitigate it. Ultimately, this exercise has provided a diagnostic roadmap for preventive and inclusive interventions, ensuring that peacebuilding efforts were contextually grounded and strategically timed to address the unique pressures of the upcoming electoral cycle.

The assessment is intended to serve a wide array of stakeholders, functioning as a key strategic resource for Act! and its donors, Sida and Danida, in the implementation and management of the REDI and RPS programmes. For these stakeholders, the study provides immediate decision-making value by facilitating data-driven prioritisation of electoral hotspots, enabling the targeted allocation of technical and financial resources to counties where the risk-to-capacity ratio is most critical.

Furthermore, the analysis is intended to validate and refine the programmes' Theory of Change (ToC), ensuring that the logic of intervention, whether focused on institutional reform or community resilience, remain relevant in a political environment increasingly influenced by decentralised youth movements and synthetic media threats. The findings provide institutional actors such as the IEBC and the NCIC with a diagnostic assessment of public trust and gaps in early warning systems that extends beyond the immediate programme cycle. They also offer CSOs a localised roadmap to guide advocacy efforts and strengthen community-led resilience.



Objectives of the Study

1. To map primary conflict drivers, actors and triggers in fifteen counties.
2. To evaluate the differential impact of electoral instability on marginalised groups, applying a GESI lens to understand the unique barriers faced by women, youth and persons with disabilities.
3. To evaluate the existing peace architecture, from formal state-led EWER systems to informal community connectors.
4. To examine how technological evolution and coordinated misinformation campaigns shaped voter sentiment and undermined institutional credibility.

The final phase of the mapping exercise focused on the practical application of these findings, specifically through the evaluation of existing legal frameworks, peace agreements, and codes of conduct to determine their continued efficacy for the 2027 cycle. The assessment produced a justified roadmap for county-level interventions by synthesising these diverse data streams and identifying high leverage entry points that aligned with the specific mandates of the REDI and RPS programmes. The study provided concrete policy recommendations and programmatic changes that will enable stakeholders to transition from reactive crisis management to proactive conflict prevention. These insights are intended to safeguard the democratic process, ensuring it remains inclusive, transparent, and resilient for all Kenyans.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The Electoral Conflict Risk Mapping and Analysis study used a conflict sensitive, mixed methods research design integrating quantitative, qualitative, and digital analytical tools to gain a comprehensive understanding of electoral conflict dynamics before the 2027 General Election. The study used Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to account for the unique experiences, exposures, and vulnerabilities of women, youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and other minority groups.

Kenya's political landscape has undergone significant shifts, including heightened youth activism, intensified digital political contestation, and declining trust in public institutions. The study design combines statistical tools with in-depth qualitative inquiry to generate evidence that is both analytically rigorous and programmatically actionable for the REDI and RPS programmes.

2.1. Study Design

The study adopted a mixed methods approach because electoral conflict in Kenya appears to be a complex, interconnected political, social, economic, and digital process that requires both breadth and depth of analysis. A thorough document evaluation was conducted to inform the development of data collection tools. The quantitative component provided population-level estimates of public perceptions, trust in institutions, conflict exposure, and risk indicators, enabling county-level comparisons and demographic disaggregation. However, because many conflict factors, such as political incentives, clan structures, informal norms, digital manipulation, and institutional weaknesses, were difficult to observe using a survey alone, the study integrated a robust qualitative component. The study captured experiential insight, local nuance, and contextual interpretation of conflict triggers and community resilience mechanisms through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and county case studies.

In addition, the study conducted a digital ecosystem analysis, acknowledging that political mobilisation, misinformation, hate speech, and coordinated digital influence campaigns had increasingly become central features of Kenya's electoral environment. Finally, the tools were tailored to consider both immediate voting experiences and larger governance knowledge, while acknowledging the distinction and interconnection between civic and voter education.

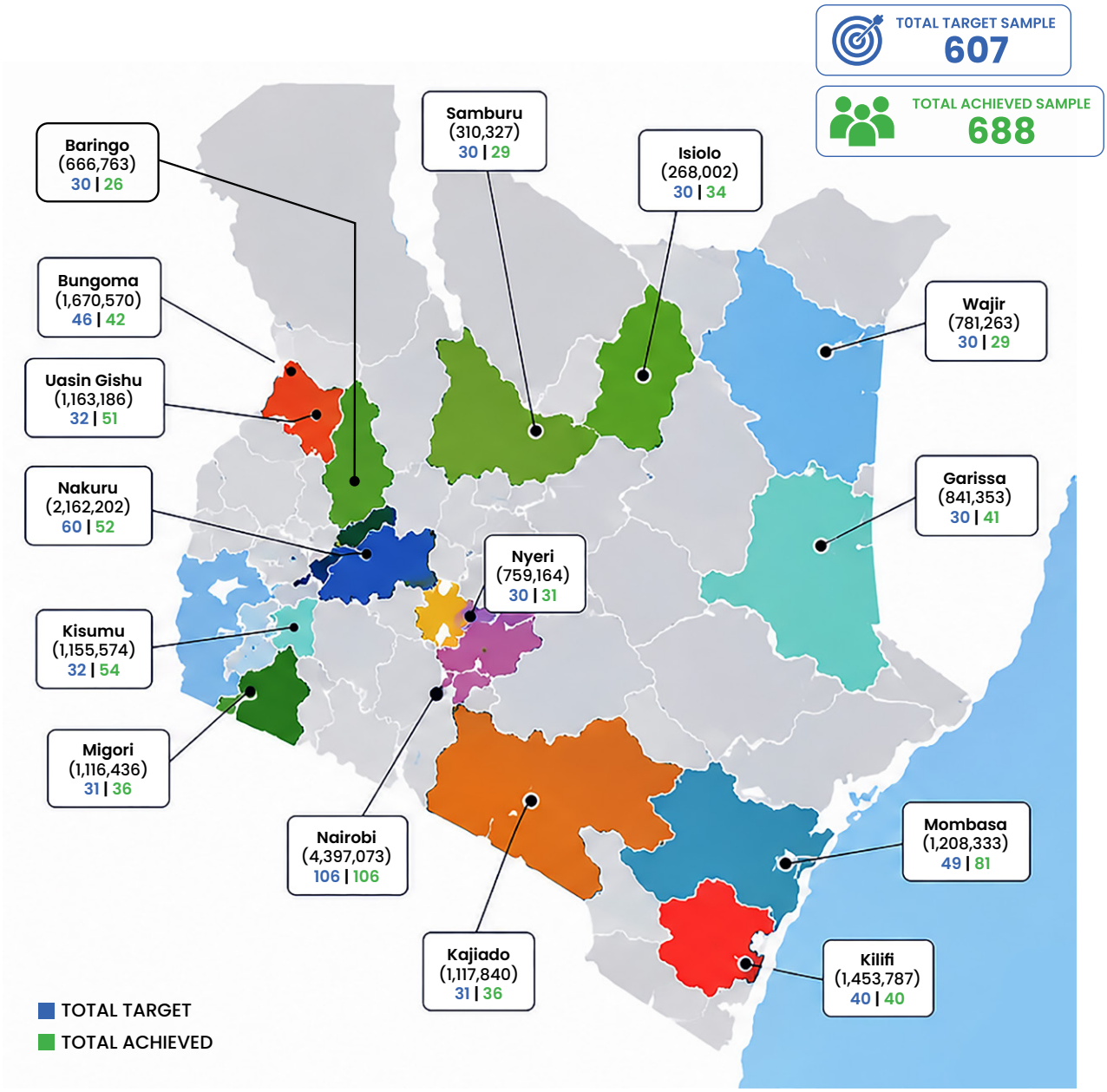
2.2. Data Collection Methods

2.2.1. Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative component consisted of a structured household survey administered to 688 respondents across 15 counties. These counties were selected purposively because they reflected varied levels of electoral risk: high, medium, and emerging, as indicated by earlier conflict analysis, the NCIC hotspot mapping, human rights monitoring, and political dynamics pertinent to the REDI and RPS programmes. The map below shows the target sample and the number of samples collected per county.

Survey Sample Distribution by County

Comparison of target and achieved sample sizes across the 15 study counties.



Survey Coverage at a Glance		
Counties 15	Target 607	Achieved 688
113% Achievement		
Exceeded Target	7 Counties	Mombasa, Uasin Gishu, Kisumu, Migori, Kajiado, Garissa, Isiolo
Met Target	2 Counties	Nairobi, Kilifi
Below Target	6 Counties	Nakuru, Bungoma, Wajir, Nyeri, Baringo, Samburu

Table 1: Samples Achieved

The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula for large populations. To allow for the multi-stage sampling approach, a minimum of 385 respondents was calculated and adjusted for a design effect of 1.5. An additional 5% was added to account for anticipated non-response, resulting in a final target of 607 respondents. The survey adopted a disproportionate stratified design that combined population-based allocation with minimum county-level quotas to guarantee adequate representation across all project counties. During fieldwork, sample sizes varied slightly per county due to differences in accessibility, response rates, and the availability of eligible respondents. In several counties, additional interviews were conducted to improve the reliability of county-level estimates and subgroup analysis. This resulted in an overall sample size of 688 respondents, exceeding the minimum statistical requirement of 607 respondents.

Sampling was conducted using a stratified multi-stage cluster approach. Counties served as primary strata. Within each selected county, sub-counties and wards were sampled proportionally to population size and contextual risk factors. Villages or enumeration areas were then selected randomly within each ward. At the household level, systematic random sampling was applied using skip intervals of 7 (urban), 5 (semi-urban), and 3 (rural), depending on settlement density. Respondent selection emphasised PWDs, followed by women and adolescents, before using the next birthday method to eliminate selection bias in households with multiple eligible respondents.

While this approach introduced a purposive element at the respondent selection stage, it was adopted to ensure sufficient analytical power for assessing outcomes among groups that are often underrepresented in household surveys.

All survey data were digitally collected using KoboToolbox, which was programmed with internal validation checks, skip patterns, and error flagging protocols. Each submission was automatically tagged with GPS coordinates and timestamps to enhance quality assurance and to enable geospatial trend mapping during analysis.

2.2.2. Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative research enabled more in-depth analysis of emerging themes, actor behaviour, and contextual dynamics that quantitative data alone could not fully represent. The study carried out 48 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), 18 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and 15 county case studies.

KIIs were conducted with respondents purposely selected on the basis of institutional relevance, domain expertise, and their roles in electoral operations or peace and security architecture. These included senior officials from the IEBC, the ORPP, the NCIC, the NPS, the Judiciary, digital rights experts, CSOs, local peace committees, religious leaders, boda boda and matatu associations, university student leaders, and development partners. These interviews provided critical insight into institutional preparedness, accountability gaps, political realignments, EWER functionality, and the evolving nature of digital influence and disinformation.

FGDs were held with demographically homogeneous groups to facilitate candid dialogue, especially on sensitive topics such as intimidation, exclusion, sexual or gender-based violence, online harassment, and state-community relations. The groups included adult women, adult men, female youth, male youth, digitally active Gen Z participants, persons with disabilities, and mixed community groups. These debates shed light on people's lived experiences with conflict, altering intergroup relations, perceptions of state actors, and local coping techniques.

County	FGD Category	Number of FGDs
Baringo	Male Youth	1
Bungoma	Female Youth/Mixed Group	2
Garissa	Females	1
Isiolo	Male Youth	1
Kajiado	Males	1
Kilifi	Female Youth	1
Kisumu	Male Youth	1
Migori	PWDs	1
Mombasa	Digitally Active Gen-Z	1
Nairobi	Females/Digitally Active Gen-Z	2
Nakuru	Females/Digitally Active Gen-Z	2
Nyeri	Mixed Group	1
Samburu	Males	1
Uasin Gishu	Female Youth	1
Wajir	Males	1
Total		**18**

Table 2: Distribution of the FGDs per County

County case studies were conducted in high-risk locations such as Nairobi, Nakuru, Kisumu, Uasin Gishu, and Mombasa, alongside selected medium-risk counties. These case studies synthesised local histories of conflict, land grievances, boundary tensions, political competition, identity dynamics, youth mobilisation patterns, resource pressures, and the roles of connectors such as interfaith networks, peace committees, and cross-ethnic markets. This produced contextually grounded narratives that informed county-level risk classification and intervention mapping.

2.3. Data Management

2.3.1. Data Management and Quality Assurance

Data management procedures adhered to high standards of validity, reliability, and data protection. All data collection instruments were pre-tested and refined to ensure clarity, logical flow, and contextual appropriateness. Enumerators and qualitative researchers received intensive training on tool administration, ethics, informed consent, probing techniques, and conflict-sensitive interviewing.

Throughout fieldwork, supervisors conducted daily reviews of all Kobo submissions, verifying completeness, skip logic performance, and consistency. Random back checks and spot checks were conducted to validate the data collection authenticity. Qualitative data were recorded with respondents' consent, transcribed verbatim, anonymised, and securely archived. All datasets were encrypted and handled in compliance with the Kenya Data Protection Act 2019, ensuring confidentiality and safeguarding respondent information.

2.3.2. Contextual Fluidity

Users of this report must interpret the data through the perspective of dynamic conflict analysis. The quantitative and qualitative datasets were collected during a period of acute elite political realignments following significant changes in opposition and ruling coalition organisations. However, Kenya's electoral landscape remains highly volatile. Shortly after fieldwork was completed, the nation experienced a wave of spontaneous, widespread protests sparked by unexpected fuel price increases, which immediately affected local tension levels and security postures across multiple index counties. This demonstrates that socio-economic shocks can quickly overpower or interact with political risk drivers.

Furthermore, upcoming symbolic dates, specifically the anniversary of the leaderless Gen Z-led protests and the customary Saba Saba governance commemorations, present extremely unpredictable windows for sudden mass mobilisation. Baseline indicators must therefore be interpreted as a starting point, necessitating regular, iterative conflict monitoring to inform adaptive, real-time programmatic responses by REDI and RPS stakeholders.

2.4. Data Analysis Strategy

Quantitative data was analysed using STATA, starting with descriptive statistics to determine frequencies, distributions, and patterns across demographic and geographic strata. Cross-tabulations allowed interrogation of relationships between variables such as institutional trust, exposure to violence, youth participation, and perceptions of electoral integrity. Correlation analyses were used where applicable to explore relationships between conflict drivers, institutional dynamics, and digital behaviour. Weighting was used to account for the non-proportional stratified sampling design.

Qualitative data was analysed in a structured thematic manner using MAXQDA. The analysis was guided by a hybrid coding framework that combined deductive themes (derived from the study objectives) and inductive themes (emerging from field data). This offered a systematic understanding of conflict drivers, institutional perceptions, GESI vulnerabilities, community coping mechanisms, local connectors, and EWER gaps.

Triangulation was conducted across all data sources, survey findings, KIIs, FGDs, case studies, digital analysis, and secondary literature.

This process enabled the research team to validate converging patterns, interrogate inconsistencies, and strengthen causal explanations. Insights from this synthesis informed the development of the Electoral Conflict Risk Index (ECRI), which aggregated multiple indicators into county-level risk scores.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

INFORMED CONSENT
Participation is voluntary with full understanding

ANONYMITY
All responses are anonymised to protect identities

DO NO HARM
We avoid harm and minimise risks to all participants

FIELD SAFETY
Safety of participants and field staff is a priority



CHAPTER 3

KEY FINDINGS

3.1. Respondent Profile

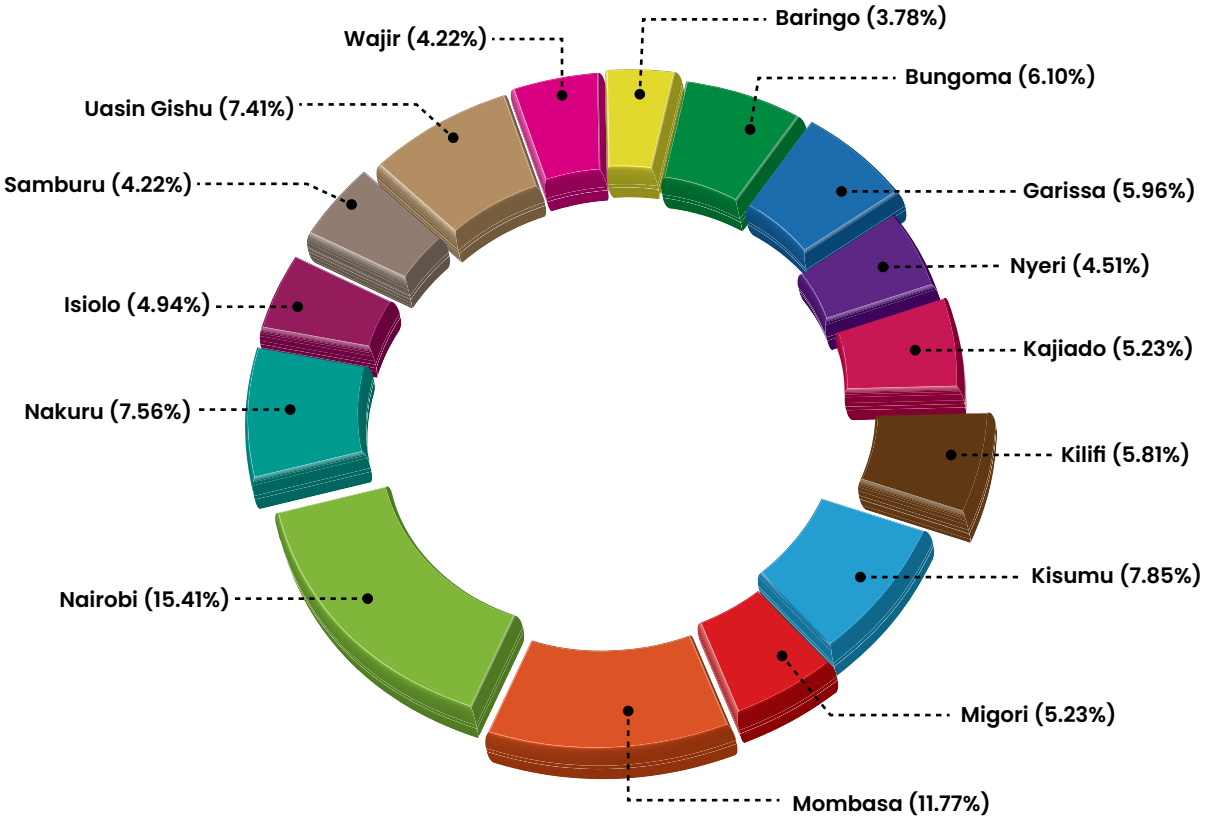
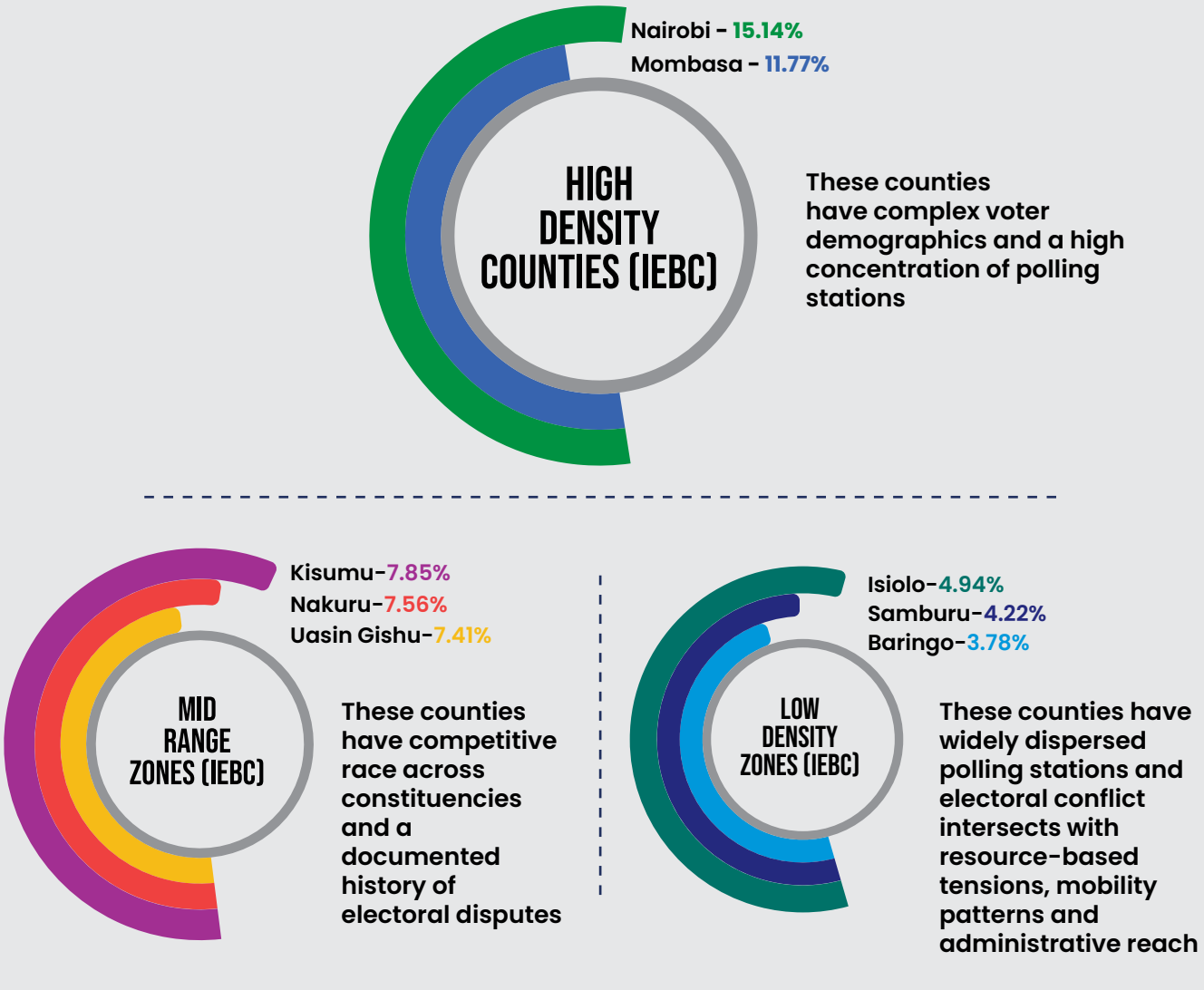


Figure 1: Distribution by County

Sample (n=688), fairly spread across 15 counties, with fair geographic diversity

The sample distribution was designed to balance population size and urban significance (higher weights for major cities), conflict history and electoral competitiveness (moderate weights for known hotspots), and geographic and socio-cultural diversity (inclusion of peripheral and marginalised counties). This balance strengthens the study's capacity to generate comparative, generalisable, and conflict-sensitive insights into electoral dynamics across Kenya, while remaining consistent with administrative and electoral boundary frameworks used by the IEBC.

COUNTY SAMPLING ALLOCATIONS



The sampling strategy was not only geographically and politically representative but also institutionally aligned with IEBC data structures, enabling integration with official electoral data (e.g., voter registers, polling station distribution, and constituency-level results) and strengthening the study's utility for electoral conflict mapping and early warning analysis.

The age distribution of the sample was purposely designed to reflect the demographic and functional profile of the population most actively involved in electoral processes and most exposed to electoral conflict dynamics, including both physical and digital arenas of political interaction. The concentration of respondents within the 25–34 years (33.28%) and 35–44 years (29.07%) cohorts captures the economically active, politically engaged, and digitally connected population, which forms the core of voter turnout, campaign participation, and community-level political mobilisation.

Distribution by age categories: the majority were the economically active population of young to middle-aged adults (25-34 yr; 33.28%) and (35-44yr, 29.07%).

What is your Age Group?

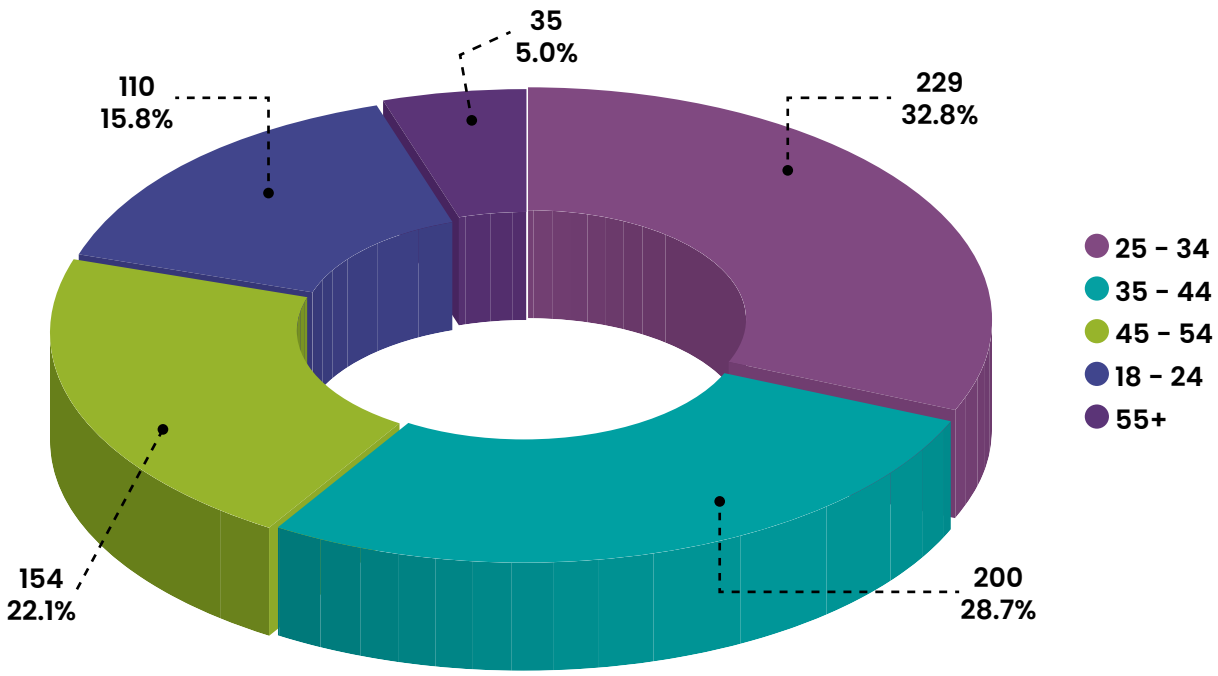


Figure 2: Distribution by Age Categories

These age groups are particularly relevant in electoral conflict mapping because they participate not only in offline political activities such as rallies, party organisation, and local advocacy but also in online platforms, where political narratives are increasingly shaped. Their high levels of digital activity, as seen by their use of social media, messaging platforms, and online news consumption, place them at the centre of the circulation of political information, misinformation, and mobilisation cues, all of which can impact the escalation or mitigation of electoral tensions.

The inclusion of younger respondents aged 18–24 years (15.99%) ensures representation of first-time and digitally native voters, which is particularly important in modern election dynamics. This demographic is highly engaged on mobile and social media platforms, making them particularly susceptible to digital campaigning, influencer-driven narratives, and rapid information dissemination. Their participation is thus crucial for understanding how electoral conflict emerges and spreads via online networks.

Respondents aged 45–54 years (16.57%) provide perspectives from more experienced voters, who often play stabilising roles within communities. While less digitally savvy than younger generations, many in this group still use digital platforms, particularly for news consumption and communication, providing insight into how online and offline information ecosystems intersect to shape perceptions of electoral integrity and conflict.

The smaller proportion of respondents aged 55 years and above (5.09%) reflects both demographic realities and relatively lower levels of direct participation in fast-paced political and digital spaces. Nonetheless, their involvement is critical because they provide institutional memory and long-term perspectives, and increasingly interact with mediated forms of political communication, including radio-digital hybrids and messaging platforms.

The sample distribution by age guarantees that the study captures age-differentiated and digitally mediated electoral process experiences while also balancing highly connected and active cohorts with intergenerational perspectives. This strengthens the study's ability to map not only the physical manifestations of electoral conflict but also its digital drivers, transmission pathways, and amplification mechanisms, all of which are becoming increasingly important to electoral dynamics in Kenya.

Gender: *The sample was well balanced by gender, with a slight female majority*

What is your Gender?

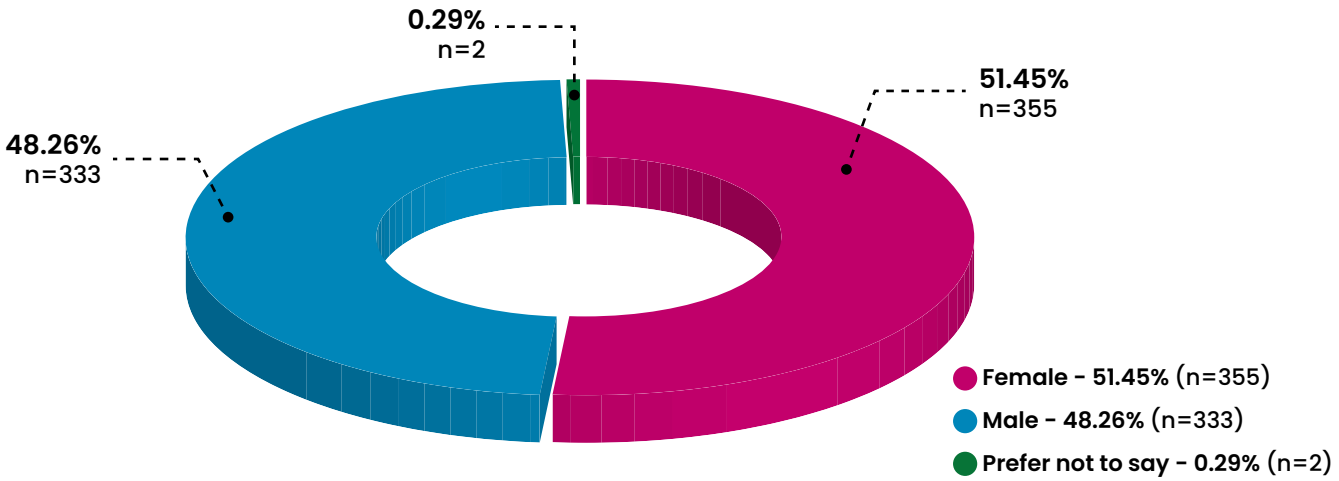


Figure 3: Gender Distribution

The gender distribution of the sample is fairly balanced, with a slight female majority (51.45% female; 48.26% male), reflecting broader demographic patterns and ensuring that the study captures gender-inclusive perspectives on electoral processes and conflict dynamics. This balance increases the representativeness of the findings and reduces gender bias in the analysis.

The slight overrepresentation of women is analytically justified, given their critical but often under documented roles in electoral contexts. Women participate not only as voters but also as community mobilisers, peace actors, and key stakeholders in households and local networks. At the same time, they may have diverse experiences in electoral conflict, such as increased exposure to indirect violence, intimidation, economic disruption, and gender specific risks, all of which necessitate deliberate inclusion in conflict mapping.

Male respondents, who make up 48.26% of the sample, remain critical for capturing perspectives from groups that are frequently more directly involved in frontline political engagement and, in some cases, conflict escalation dynamics, such as participation in rallies, political organisation, and security related interactions. Including both male and female perspectives allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how electoral conflict is perceived and acted upon across gender lines.

The inclusion of respondents who prefer not to disclose their gender (0.29%), though small, reflects a commitment to ethical research practices and respondent autonomy, as well as recognition of gender diversity beyond binary categories.

Overall, the gender composition improves the study's potential to provide inclusive, intersectional, and policy relevant insights, ensuring that electoral conflict mapping reflects the experiences and roles of all genders in both the escalation and mitigation of electoral tensions.

The sample distribution across special group categories reflects an intentional effort to reconcile demographic significance with the inclusion of structurally vulnerable communities in electoral conflict mapping. The strong representation of youth (48.69%) is analytically justified, as young people constitute a significant proportion of the population and are key actors in electoral processes as voters, mobilisers, campaign participants, and increasingly as digital influencers. Their visibility in both physical political activities and online interaction spaces makes them particularly important for understanding patterns of political mobilisation, information dissemination, and potential conflict escalation.

Distribution by special group categories: *strong representation of youth (48.69%), with a relatively small representation of minority groups and persons with disability (10.76% & 7.56%)*

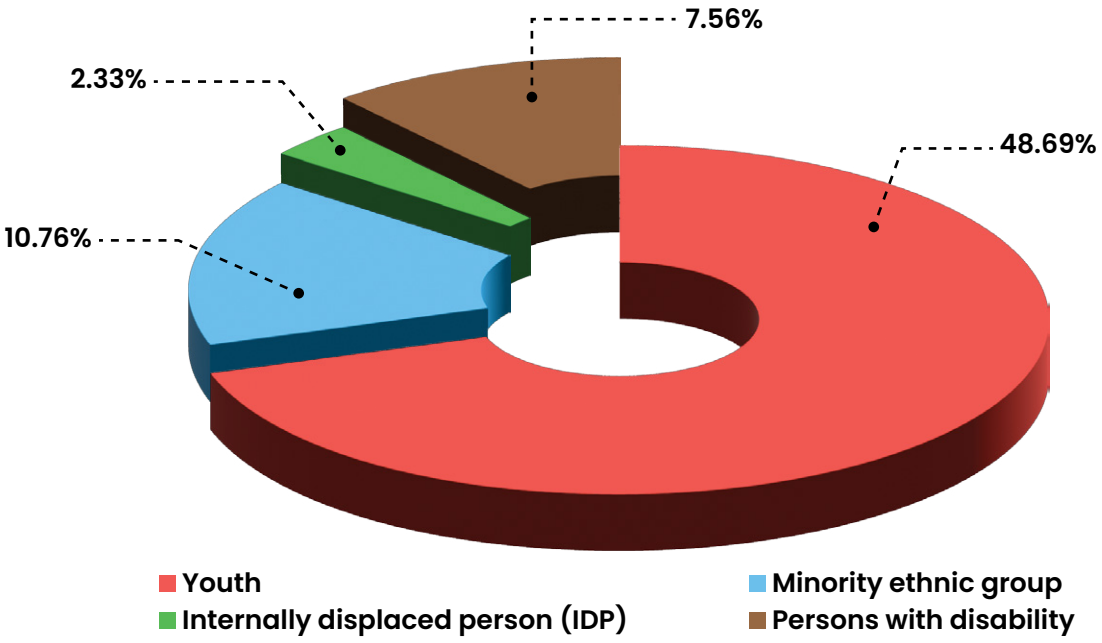


Figure 4: Distribution by Special Group Categories

Youth are also disproportionately affected by unemployment, economic exclusion, and political marginalisation, making them more vulnerable to political manipulation or participation in conflict-related activities. Their inclusion at scale improves the study's potential to identify the drivers and transmission mechanisms of electoral tensions, especially in rapidly evolving digital and grassroots environments.

The inclusion of respondents identifying as minority ethnic groups (10.76%) guarantees that the study captures perspectives from populations that may experience political exclusion, marginalisation, or increased vulnerability during electoral periods. In many cases, political rivalry can exacerbate ethnic tensions; it is critical to include minority voices to evaluate localised conflict risks and perceptions of representation and fairness.

Despite its small proportion, the representation of persons with disabilities (7.56%) is important and demonstrates an attempt toward an inclusive and rights-based study research. Persons with disabilities often face barriers to political participation, access to information, and physical safety during elections. Their inclusion provides insight into how electoral processes and conflict dynamics intersect with accessibility, exclusion, and protection issues.

Similarly, the inclusion of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (2.33%), while small, is analytically significant. IDPs often have heightened sensitivity to political instability and conflict, given their prior experiences of displacement. Their perspectives are critical for understanding the long-term effects of electoral violence, patterns of resettlement, and trust in electoral institutions, even if their smaller numbers reflect their relative proportion within the broader population or challenges in contacting this group.

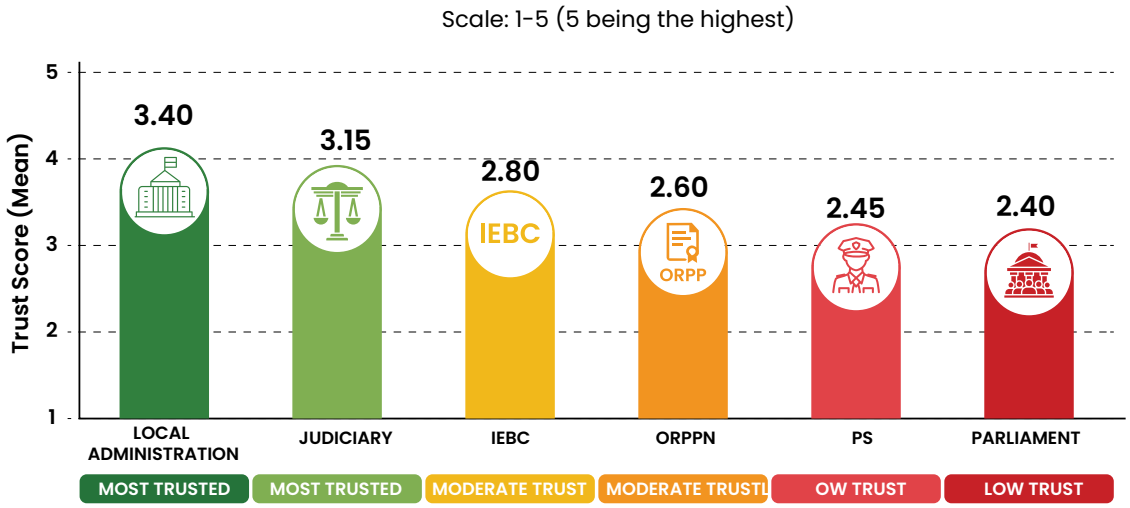
3.2. Institutional Performance and Public Trust

The desktop study reveals an array of divided institutional trust and systemic governance gaps that define the pre-2027 electoral environment. The IEBC faces a major credibility problem, with 50% of the public lacking confidence in its integrity following a contentious 2025 reconstitution and the decision to forgo the constitutionally mandated boundary review (TIFA Research, 2025; IEBC, 2026). This is worsened by a severe lack of trust in the NPS, where public confidence has stagnated at 36% due to a legacy of over-policing and the rise in state-led violence against youth activists in 2024 and 2025 (Afrobarometer, 2025; Missing Voices, 2026).

While the Judiciary is still considered a necessary neutral arbitrator for election disputes, its perceived neutrality is under significant strain from sustained executive pressure and a chronic budget constriction that hampers its capacity to deliver justice (KHRC, 2024; Afrobarometer, 2025). These institutional vulnerabilities are further aggravated by the persistent lack of internal democracy within political parties, where opaque nomination processes and intra-elite fallouts, such as the recent "politics of betrayal" narratives, continue to serve as primary triggers for localised inter-ethnic and inter-clan violence (ELOG, 2022; Gathara, 2025).

Trust Hierarchy and Institutional Breakdown

The study findings show that people mostly trust the local administration



The study findings indicate that men have slightly more trust in electoral actors than women. For example, men report a trust level of 2.47 in the Parliament, while women report 2.34. A similar gap exists for the ORPP (Men: 2.65/Women: 2.54) and the IEBC (Men: 2.81/Women: 2.76). Interestingly, the NPS is the only institution where women (2.48) report more trust than men (2.45). The Judiciary maintains a high and relatively similar level of trust among both genders, with scores of 3.16 for men and 3.14 for women. The most significant finding is that men and women have equal trust in the local management, with each receiving a score of 3.4. This is the highest-rated category overall. The table below shows the breakdown of trust in electoral actors by gender.

What is your gender	Trust Parliament	Trust NPS	Trust ORPP	Trust IEBC	Trust Judiciary	Trust Local Administration
Prefer not to say	3	3	3	3	3	4
Male	2.47	2.45	2.65	2.81	3.16	3.4
Female	2.34	2.48	2.54	2.76	3.14	3.4

Table 3: Mean Public Trust in Electoral Actors by Gender

Local communities appear to have the highest level of public confidence. Both men and women tend to perceive chiefs and local officials as more accessible and less politicised than national figures. It appears that local administration is the most gender-neutral bridge for peacebuilding, because this is the only score on which men and women agree. In contrast, the lower trust among women regarding national electoral actors may be due to their historical underrepresentation in Parliament and party leadership. Women may regard these systems as male-dominated or unresponsive to their needs, leading to a deeper sense of isolation.

According to the findings, electoral governance and peacebuilding actors should focus on addressing women's confidence issues with electoral actors to increase their participation in election processes as voters and aspirants.

Trust in Electoral Actors by Age

While analysing trust by age, the study found that the 45–54 age group consistently had the lowest trust score levels. The group gave parliament an average score of 2.25, the police 2.23, the ORPP 2.39, and the IEBC 2.68. Their highest score for local administration was 3.33. These low ratings indicate a deep dissatisfaction with how systems function, most likely because this group has lived through many political cycles and interacts the most with the economy and government.

The findings show that people aged 55 and older have the highest trust in local administration, with a score of 3.54, and the lowest trust in the Judiciary at a score of 2.96. In contrast, people aged 35–44 are more confident in legal systems, rating the Judiciary at 3.28 and the parliament at 2.52.

Additionally, study findings show that the youth aged 18-24 have higher trust levels in the police at a score of 2.53 and the local administration at a score of 3.50. These findings indicate that the best way to reach the elderly is through local administration. Meanwhile, more effort is required to address the lack of trust among middle-aged people in electoral institutions.

The table below summarises the different trust levels by age.

Age Group	Trust Parliament	Trust NPS	Trust ORPP	Trust IEBC	Trust Judiciary	Trust Local Administration
35–44	2.52	2.51	2.68	2.81	3.28	3.43
18–24	2.52	2.53	2.56	2.78	3.14	3.5
55+	2.39	2.38	2.6	2.83	2.96	3.54
25–34	2.34	2.53	2.63	2.81	3.13	3.33
45–54	2.25	2.23	2.39	2.68	3.01	3.33

Table 4: Mean Public Trust in Electoral Actors by Age

Trust in Electoral Actors by County

Analysing the data by county reveals various processes that influence trust in the local electoral actors. The findings indicate that certain counties retain high levels of confidence across practically all peacebuilding pillars. Kisumu County, for example, has the highest trust in both the local administration (3.96) and the parliament (2.96). Despite its history as an opposition stronghold, the high trust in the Judiciary (3.57) and local administration indicates that the public places a high value on both official and community-based dispute resolution.

Uasin Gishu County has the most confidence in the IEBC (3.67). This is frequently associated with political alignment; trust in the "referee" is higher in regions that believe the current administration adequately represents them.

Wajir County stands out for its NPS trust (3.18) and Local Administration (3.93). In frontier or border counties, the state is often represented by chiefs and police officers, resulting in a functional dependency on these individuals. In contrast, major cities exhibit a strong mistrust towards national institutions. For example, Nairobi County reports some of the lowest trust in the IEBC (2.15) and the NPS (2.09). Urban residents are frequently exposed to political friction, protests, and police-civilian confrontation, which erodes trust in electoral and enforcement agencies.

> *"I don't trust the police. They handle your case according to how deep your pocket is. You can't get justice if you don't have money".*
>
> **FGD, Nairobi/Kibera**

Mombasa County reflects this trend, with particularly low trust in the ORPP (1.94) and the NPS (2.15). Study findings reveal that in urban centres, institutions are often perceived through the lens of political contestation rather than service delivery, leading to a trust deficit.

In contrast, Nyeri County has the most trust in the Judiciary (3.86) and the ORPP (3.18), according to the total dataset. However, the county has the lowest level of trust in the NPS (1.81). Residents of Nyeri appear to place a high value on the rule of law and formal legal processes, but their relationships with those who implement them are strained. This implies that, while they trust a judge's decision, they do not trust the conduct of a police officer.

Samburu County has the lowest trust in the Parliament (1.79) and the ORPP (1.90), indicating a complete detachment from national political discourse. Kajiado County has extremely low trust in the local administration (2.86) and the IEBC (2.25). When trust in local administration is low, as it is in Kajiado and Samburu, it indicates a breach of the most fundamental level of the social contract. These regions require targeted peacebuilding efforts for the local administration to regain its position as a trusted mediator.

County	Trust Parliament	Trust NPS	Trust ORPP	Trust IEBC	Trust Judiciary	Trust Local Administration
Baringo	2.5	3.08	2.83	3.12	3.43	3.27
Bungoma	2.65	2.67	2.59	3.26	2.97	3.8
Garissa	2.5	3.05	2.92	3.23	2.92	2.92
Isiolo	2.03	2.47	2.87	2.55	3.26	3.06
Kajiado	2.12	2.03	2.3	2.25	2.86	2.86
Kilifi	2.47	2.21	2.65	2.54	2.85	3.08
Kisumu	2.96	2.37	2.29	2.93	3.57	3.96
Migori	2.29	2.69	2.64	2.56	2.88	3.69
Mombasa	2.38	2.15	1.94	2.39	3.16	3.28
Nairobi	2.43	2.09	2.74	2.15	3.12	3.31
Nakuru	2.44	2.92	2.86	3.25	3.43	3.25
Nyeri	2.38	1.81	3.18	3.14	3.86	3.74
Samburu	1.79	2.29	1.9	2.54	2.67	3
Uasin Gishu	2.3	2.88	2.74	3.67	3.35	3.84
Wajir	2.48	3.18	2.48	3.38	2.63	3.93

Table 5: Mean Public Trust in Electoral Actors by County

Nyeri County has the most trust in **the Judiciary (3.86)** and **the ORPP (3.18)**, according to the total dataset. However, the county has the lowest level of trust in **the NPS (1.81)**. Residents of Nyeri appear to place a high value on the rule of law and formal legal processes, but their relationships with those who implement them are strained. This implies that, while they trust a judge's decision, they do not trust the conduct of a police officer.

Trust in the IEBC

Study findings show that overall confidence in the IEBC is fragile, with only 34.11% of respondents expressing trust in the institution to conduct free and fair elections, compared to 36.88% who express active distrust, and 27.70% who remain neutral, as shown in the figure below.

What is your gender?	Agree	Disagree	Don't know / Not sure	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Female	97	80	3	98	23	52	353
	27.48%	22.66%	0.85%	27.76%	6.52%	14.73%	100.00%
Male	87	75	5	91	27	46	331
	26.28%	22.66%	1.51%	27.49%	8.16%	13.90%	100.00%
Prefer not to say	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Total	**184**	**155**	**9**	**190**	**50**	**98**	**686**
	26.82%	**22.59%**	**1.31%**	**27.70%**	**7.29%**	**14.29%**	**100.00%**
Pearson Chi2 = 39.41 Prob = 0.0000							

Table 6: Public Trust in the IEBC to Conduct Free and Fair Elections by Gender

The study shows that confidence levels in the IEBC by gender are almost identical. Specifically, 34% of females and 34.44% of males trust the commission to conduct free and fair elections. Despite their similarity, both groups remain sceptical; distrust levels (37.39% for women and 36.56% for men) outweigh trust in both demographics.

> *"Unresolved boundaries and electoral disputes remain a primary trigger; there is a general mistrust in electoral actors following a contentious reconstitution".*
>
> **KII, Civil Society Leader**
>
> *"How can we trust a commission that is underfunded and lacks the technology for secure transmission at the grassroots level?".*
>
> **FGD, Wajir County**

However, confidence in the IEBC is highest among people aged 55 and older, at 45.71%. In contrast, younger adults are more cautious, with trust levels at 34.87% for the 18–24 age group and a study low of 30.26% for those aged 25–34. Middle-aged groups report intermediate confidence levels of 36.50% (35–44) and 33.33% (45–54). This indicates that while older citizens are more optimistic, a significant trust deficit exists among the primary voting-age population.

Trust in the IEBC is also split along geographic lines. Confidence is highest in Garissa County (68.3%) and Uasin Gishu County (52.9%), while strong distrust dominates urban regions like Nairobi County (62.3%) and Kajiado County (55.6%). This division is further complicated by the fact that many people remain neutral in counties like Kilifi (60%) and Wajir (58.6%), suggesting that the commission has yet to convince the majority of its impartiality or impact in many regions.

County	Agree	Disagree	Don't know / Not sure	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Baringo	6	4	1	8	4	3	26
	23.08%	15.38%	3.85%	30.77%	15.38%	11.54%	100.00%
Bungoma	19	8	0	7	3	5	42
	45.24%	19.05%	0.00%	16.67%	7.14%	11.90%	100.00%
Garissa	24	4	0	5	4	4	41
	58.54%	9.76%	0.00%	12.20%	9.76%	9.76%	100.00%
Isiolo	15	7	0	6	0	6	34
	44.12%	20.59%	0.00%	17.65%	0.00%	17.65%	100.00%
Kajiado	4	7	0	10	2	13	36
	11.11%	19.44%	0.00%	27.78%	5.56%	36.11%	100.00%
Kilifi	4	3	1	24	0	8	40
	10.00%	7.50%	2.50%	60.00%	0.00%	20.00%	100.00%
Kisumu	15	23	0	15	0	1	54
	27.78%	42.59%	0.00%	27.78%	0.00%	1.85%	100.00%
Migori	8	9	0	14	0	5	36
	22.22%	25.00%	0.00%	38.89%	0.00%	13.89%	100.00%
Mombasa	11	24	2	30	4	9	80
	13.75%	30.00%	2.50%	37.50%	5.00%	11.25%	100.00%
Nairobi	20	43	0	17	3	23	106
	18.87%	40.57%	0.00%	16.04%	2.83%	21.70%	100.00%
Nakuru	20	6	2	9	5	9	51
	39.22%	11.76%	3.92%	17.65%	9.80%	17.65%	100.00%
Nyeri	4	3	2	8	8	6	31
	12.90%	9.68%	6.45%	25.81%	25.81%	19.35%	100.00%
Samburu	14	4	1	6	1	3	29
	48.28%	13.79%	3.45%	20.69%	3.45%	10.34%	100.00%
Uasin Gishu	11	7	0	14	16	3	51
	21.57%	13.73%	0.00%	27.45%	31.37%	5.88%	100.00%
Wajir	9	3	0	17	0	0	29
	31.03%	10.34%	0.00%	58.62%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Total	**184**	**155**	**9**	**190**	**50**	**98**	**686**
	26.82%	**22.59%**	**1.31%**	**27.70%**	**7.29%**	**14.29%**	**100.00%**
Pearson Chi2 = 266.30 Prob = 0.0000							

Table 7: Mean Public Trust in the IEBC to Conduct Free and Fair Election by County

Further analysis of findings reveals that mistrust stems from ongoing concerns that the IEBC manipulates presidential results to benefit the incumbent government, lacks independence, and is vulnerable to capture.

> *"Trust in the IEBC is only about 40 percent. They are influenced by the government and do not act independently".*
>
> **KII, Civil Society Representative, Nairobi County**

> *"The IEBC should be transparent, as people are more peaceful when they feel their votes truly count"*
>
> **FGD, Kisumu County**

Operational challenges such as transparency issues, long delays in announcing election results, and the use of faulty biometric kits were further identified as factors that could lead to mistrust. A significant challenge is the IEBC's weak financial position, which stakeholders perceive as jeopardising the entire electoral process.

Trust in the National Police Service

Public trust in the police is consistently low, with active distrust (45.09%) far outweighing trust (25.77%). Distrust is highest among those aged 55 and older at 54.29%. Meanwhile, the 35–44 age group is the most disillusioned, recording the lowest trust levels (21.61%) and the highest number of neutral responses (33.67%). This indicates a significant challenge in building cooperation across different generations.

Trust levels are similar across genders, with about 45% of both men and women reporting a lack of confidence in the police. While women (26.91%) show a slightly higher trust margin than men (24.69%), the high number of neutral responses and strong disagreement from both groups highlight a broad crisis in police-community relations that affects everyone regardless of gender.

The study shows that confidence levels in the IEBC by gender are almost identical. Specifically, **34% of females and 34.44% of males** trust the commission to conduct free and fair elections. Despite their similarity, both groups remain sceptical; distrust levels **(37.39% for women and 36.56% for men)** outweigh trust in both demographics.

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of these trust levels by gender.

What is your gender?	Agree	Disagree	Don't know/ Not sure	Neutral	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	Total
Female	85	112	1	98	10	47	353
	24.08%	31.73%	0.28%	27.76%	2.83%	13.31%	100.00%
Male	72	99	6	92	9	50	328
	21.95%	30.18%	1.83%	28.05%	2.74%	15.24%	100.00%
Prefer not to say	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Total	**157**	**211**	**8**	**191**	**19**	**97**	**683**
	22.99%	**30.89%**	**1.17%**	**27.96%**	**2.78%**	**14.20%**	**100.00%**
Pearson Chi2 = 46.99 Prob = 0.0000							

Table 8: Mean Public Trust Levels by Gender in the Police Service

The geographic data reveal a deeply divided landscape where trust varies significantly by county, suggesting that the history of the local security and policing styles is the main driver of public perception.

Garissa is the only county where a clear majority (58.54%) trusts and cooperates with the police. Wajir County also shows relatively high trust (37.93%), though many residents (48.28%) remain neutral. The police are often seen as a source of security against external threats in these border regions.

In contrast, urban regions such as Nairobi and Kajiado counties are in difficult situations. In Nairobi County, 68.87% of respondents express distrust, followed by Kajiado County at 66.67%. In these growing cities, residents often view the police as a source of harassment rather than a useful service, which is worsened by memories of police brutality during the 2024 and 2025 Gen Z-led protests.

Nyeri County has the highest level of active rejection in the study, with 41.94% of respondents saying they "strongly disagree" with trusting the police. This indicates a deeper breakdown in authority beyond a simple lack of trust.

> *"People were attacked in church by police officers; the police are often seen as the ones causing the conflict rather than stopping it".*
>
> **FGD, Nyeri County**

In counties like Migori (57.14%), Bungoma (45.24%), and Kilifi (37.5%), many responses were neutral. This "wait-and-see" attitude suggests that while these populations do not feel supported by the police, they are not in open conflict with them either, offering an opportunity for peacebuilding efforts to improve trust.

The qualitative data confirms that corruption is a prevalent matter. Many citizens believe the police take bribes and decide cases based on money rather than merit. Law enforcement is also perceived as politically biased, deploying excessive force and brutality against youth during campaigns. This is fuelled by a culture of impunity where human rights are often ignored.

> *"There is a profound trust deficit in the police, where public confidence has stagnated at 36% due to a legacy of over-policing and state-led violence".*
>
> **KII, National Oversight Body**

Trust in the Judiciary

The Judiciary holds the highest mean trust score among national institutions, with 41.54% of respondents confident in its ability to handle electoral disputes fairly. This positioning makes it a critical safety valve for national stability. Trust levels are consistent across genders: 41.24% of women (30.79% agree, 10.45% strongly agree) and 42.12% of men (31.21% agree, 10.91% strongly agree) view the courts as a credible arbiter. Women, however, show slightly more caution, with 31.92% remaining neutral. Overall, the Judiciary maintains a significant trust surplus, as its combined positive sentiment (41.54%) far outweighs active distrust (23.18%).

When analysed by age, the 18–24 cohort is the most optimistic, with 50.91% total trust (36.36% agree, 14.55% strongly agree) against 24.54% distrust. In contrast, the 25–34 age group is the most sceptical, recording the study's highest active distrust at 29.39%. Middle-aged respondents (35–44) show solid support at 42.22% trust, though many (34.67%) remain neutral. Among older Kenyans, those aged 45–54 report 28.95% agreement and the highest neutrality at 37.72%, while the 55+ group shows 37.14% trust and the highest uncertainty, with 11.43% "don't know."

What is your age group?	Agree	Disagree	Don't know / Not sure	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
18-24	40	19	4	23	16	8	110
	36.36%	17.27%	3.64%	20.91%	14.55%	7.27%	100.00%
25-34	68	46	8	64	21	21	228
	29.82%	20.18%	3.51%	28.07%	9.21%	9.21%	100.00%
35-44	62	28	8	69	22	10	199
	31.16%	14.07%	4.02%	34.67%	11.06%	5.03%	100.00%
45-54	33	17	6	43	10	5	114
	28.95%	14.91%	5.26%	37.72%	8.77%	4.39%	100.00%
55+	9	3	4	13	4	2	35
	25.71%	8.57%	11.43%	37.14%	11.43%	5.71%	100.00%
Total	**212**	**113**	**30**	**212**	**73**	**46**	**686**
	30.90%	**16.47%**	**4.37%**	**30.90%**	**10.64%**	**6.71%**	**100.00%**
Pearson Chi2 = 24.15 Prob = 0.2358							

Table 9: Public Trust in the Judiciary to Handle Electoral Disputes Fairly

Trust varies greatly by geography. Garissa County has the highest confidence at 85.37% trust, with only 7.32% expressing distrust. High support is also evident in Kisumu County (57.41%) and Nyeri County (48.39%). Conversely, Migori County is a site of major scepticism, where distrust (44.44%) is double the trust level (22.22%). Urban and coastal regions exhibit a "wait-and-see" attitude, with high neutral rates in Kilifi (55%) and Nairobi counties (39.62%). Mombasa County is split, with both trust and distrust at 25.93%, indicating that the Judiciary's perceived impartiality is still influenced by local political situations.

> *"Communities trust legal remedies in theory, but in practice, the budgetary shortfall forces the Judiciary to mobilise external resources, which compromises the perceived independence".*
>
> **KII, National Oversight Body**
>
> *"The Judiciary is still regarded as a vital neutral arbiter, but its perceived neutrality is under significant strain from sustained executive pressure".*
>
> **KII, Legal Expert**

Emerging Patterns on Trust in Electoral Institutions

Public trust in the country is deeply fractured, characterised by a strong reliance on grassroots structures, including chiefs, elders, and religious organisations, in stark contrast to a profound lack of trust in national institutions such as the Parliament and the NPS. This breach in the social contract is fuelled by a widespread "pay-for-justice" perception, where respondents across multiple counties believe that state protection and institutional efficiency are favours sold to the wealthy and the politically influential. Notably, many citizens regard these governance gaps as human failures rather than systemic ones, shifting the blame from institutional design to the individuals in leadership who are seen as prioritising private interests, ethnic bias, and systemic corruption over their duty to the public.

Ahead of the 2027 elections, an atmosphere of heightened concern prevails, fuelled by the "rigging narrative" and the IEBC's perceived lack of impartiality. Past failures, such as technical challenges with biometric kits and delays in the transmission of findings, are mainly interpreted by the public, particularly the youth, as evidence of wilful manipulation rather than a simple operational failure.

This scepticism is further intensified by a history of over-policing and the use of lethal force during civil demonstrations, resulting in a fragile environment in which any contradiction between official announcements and social media updates could serve as an acute trigger for localised or national unrest.

To address these vulnerabilities, peacebuilding strategies must prioritise mediation decentralisation by empowering accessible local anchors, such as Nyumba Kumi leaders, to serve as the first line of de-escalation.

3.3. Thematic Drivers of Electoral Conflict

Electoral conflict in Kenya remains a multi-faceted dilemma driven by fundamental structural causes, primarily historical land injustices and substantial socio-economic inequality. Land remains the major structural trigger, with the National Land Commission reporting that 70% of national historical land injustice claims originate in the coastal region, frequently weaponised by political entrepreneurs to incite identity-based clashes (NLC, 2025; Rohwerder, 2015).

These structural tensions are ignited by proximate triggers, such as the "politics of betrayal" following the 2024 impeachment of Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua and the leadership vacuum created by the death of Raila Odinga in late 2025 (EISA, 2022; Gathara, 2025). Furthermore, the uncertainty surrounding electoral boundaries and the IEBC's incapacity to conduct a boundary revision before 2027 have emerged as acute localised triggers for ethnic and clan-based competition over devolved resources (ELGIA, 2026; IEBC, 2026).

Exposure to Electoral Conflict and Malpractice by Age and Gender

The study found that 75.7% of respondents experienced electoral violence or malpractice, including physical violence, threats, intimidation, hate speech, voter bribery, property destruction, sexual or gender-based violence, and online harassment. This demonstrates that violence and malpractice are major problems in Kenya's election system, and their root causes must be fixed to ensure peaceful elections and restore trust.

Have you experienced conflict or malpractice during elections?

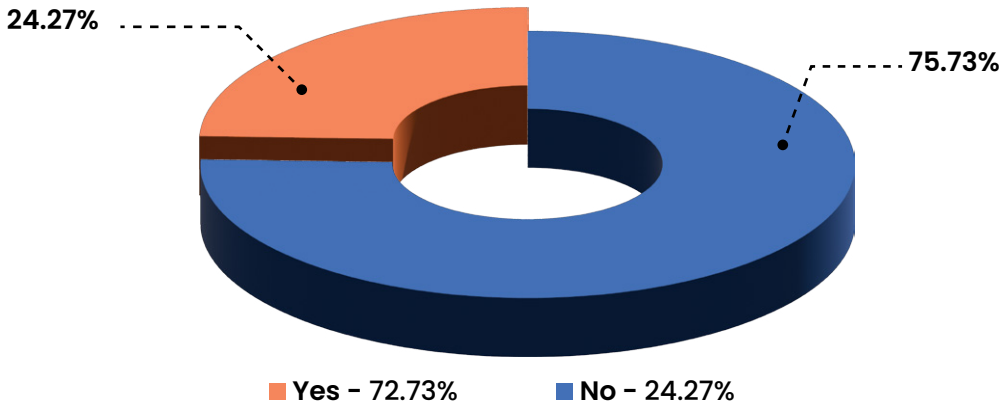


Figure 5: Overall Violence Exposure

The study found no significant difference between men and women regarding exposure to electoral violence. About 72.6% of women reported being exposed to violence, compared to 78.9% of men.

However, age does play a role. Young people aged 18–24 reported less exposure at 65% compared to other age groups, as shown in the figure below.

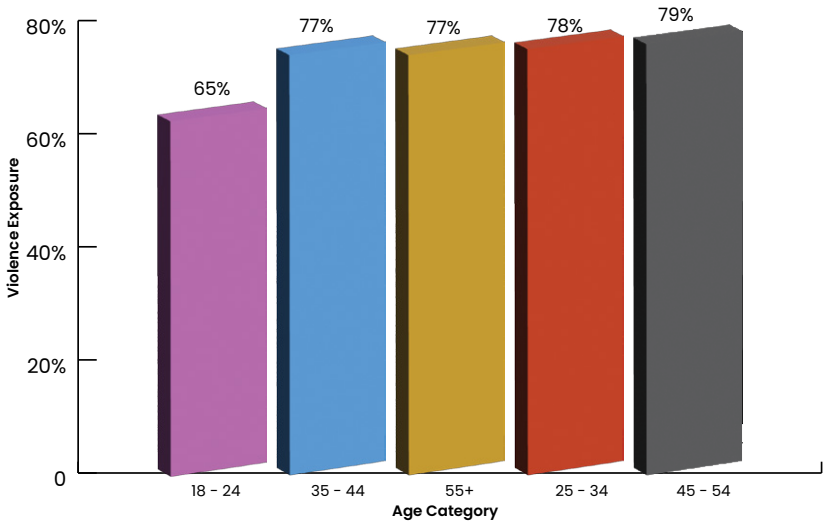


Figure 6: Electoral Violence Exposure by Age Group

This low exposure is mostly because they have participated in fewer election cycles. Despite this, they remain highly vulnerable.

> *"Youth often become victims during police interventions because they are frequently on the front lines of the fighting".*
>
> **FGD, Migori County**
>
> *"Politicians actively exploit the energy of the youth by paying them to act as gangs or militias to violently disrupt the electoral process".*
>
> **KII, Local Administrator**

Political and voter education are essential in equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to participate positively in elections, particularly given their heightened vulnerability to electoral violence.

Exposure to Electoral Conflict and Malpractice by County

The study reveals that exposure to electoral violence and malpractice varies greatly by county. The highest rates are in Bungoma County (97.62%), Garissa County (97.56%), and Migori County (94.44%), with nearly all respondents reporting exposure. In contrast, Wajir County has the lowest rate at 27.59%, while Nyeri County has 51.61%. This variation indicates that electoral conflict is highly localised and thus, peacebuilding efforts must focus on these high-risk counties where most of the population has been affected by past conflicts.

County	Have you experienced conflict or malpractice during elections (Yes)	County	Have you experienced conflict or malpractice during elections (Yes)
Baringo	69.23%	Mombasa	72.84%
Bungoma	97.62%	Nairobi	64.15%
Garissa	97.56%	Nakuru	88.46%
Isiolo	85.29%	Nyeri	51.61%
Kajiado	77.78%	Samburu	86.21%
Kilifi	82.50%	Uasin Gishu	72.55%
Kisumu	72.22%	Wajir	27.59%
Migori	94.44%		

Table 10: Violence Exposure by County

Types of Electoral Conflict and Malpractice

The study findings reveal a concerning situation in which multiple factors undermine electoral integrity. The most prevalent challenge is voter bribery, reported by 51.74% of respondents, suggesting that financial incentives often carry more influence than policy issues in the political process. Hate speech follows closely at 48.26%, indicating that electoral campaigns are frequently characterised by incitement, defamation, and propaganda aimed at discrediting or excluding particular groups or candidates.

The data also reveal widespread use of direct coercion and violence during elections. Threats and intimidation (41.86%) and physical violence (37.79%) combine to create an atmosphere of fear, likely intended to discourage voter participation and intimidate political opponents. The prevalence of property destruction (33.72%) further underscores the significant risks many individuals face to their personal safety and property during electoral periods. Collectively, these findings suggest that political participation carries substantial personal and economic costs for many citizens.

Finally, the study shows that electoral interference is evolving, with online harassment affecting 19.62% of cases, indicating that social media has become an increasingly significant platform for political attacks. Although sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has the lowest reported prevalence at 10.76%, it remains a serious concern that can discourage political participation. Overall, the findings reveal an electoral environment in which bribery, verbal abuse, intimidation, and physical risks undermine public confidence and the credibility of the voting process.

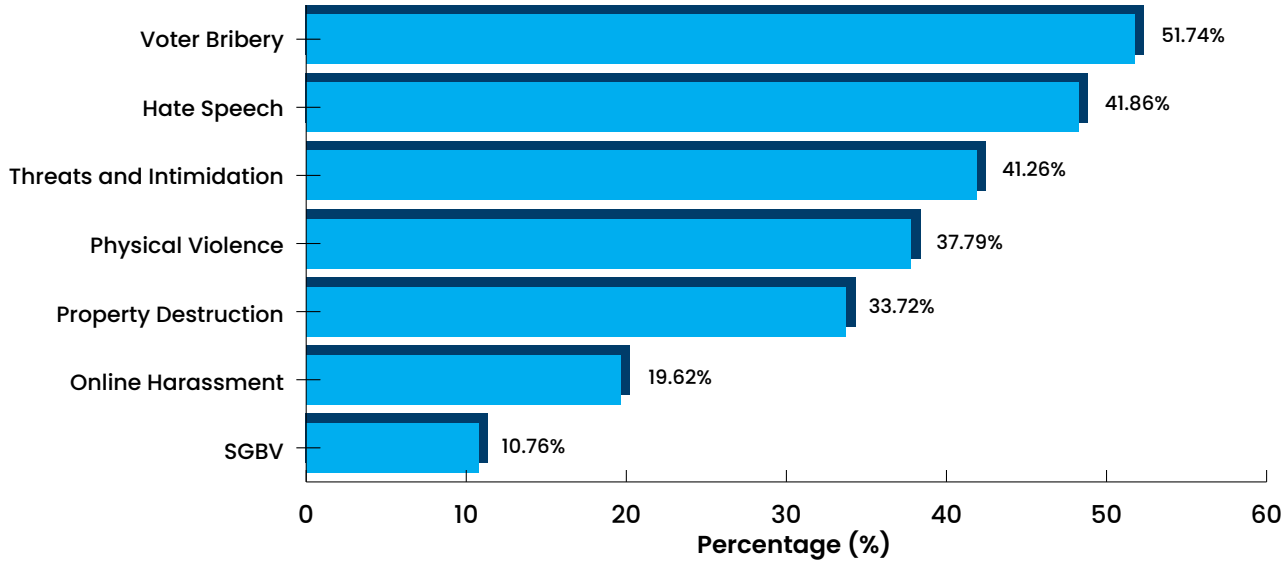


Figure 7: Types of Electoral Violence and Malpractice

Types of Electoral Conflict and Malpractice Experienced by Age and Gender

When the data are disaggregated by gender, a consistent pattern emerges, with men reporting higher incidences of nearly all forms of electoral conflict and malpractice. Voter bribery remains the most prevalent issue among both groups, although it is notably higher among men (55.42%) compared to women (48.31%). The findings also indicate that men experience significantly higher levels of physical violence (43.98%) and property destruction (38.25%) than women, who report 31.92% and 29.38%, respectively.

Interestingly, although sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is often associated with female victims, the data show relatively similar levels among men (11.45%) and women (10.17%). This suggests that gender-targeted violence and intimidation are used as tools of political repression across different groups.

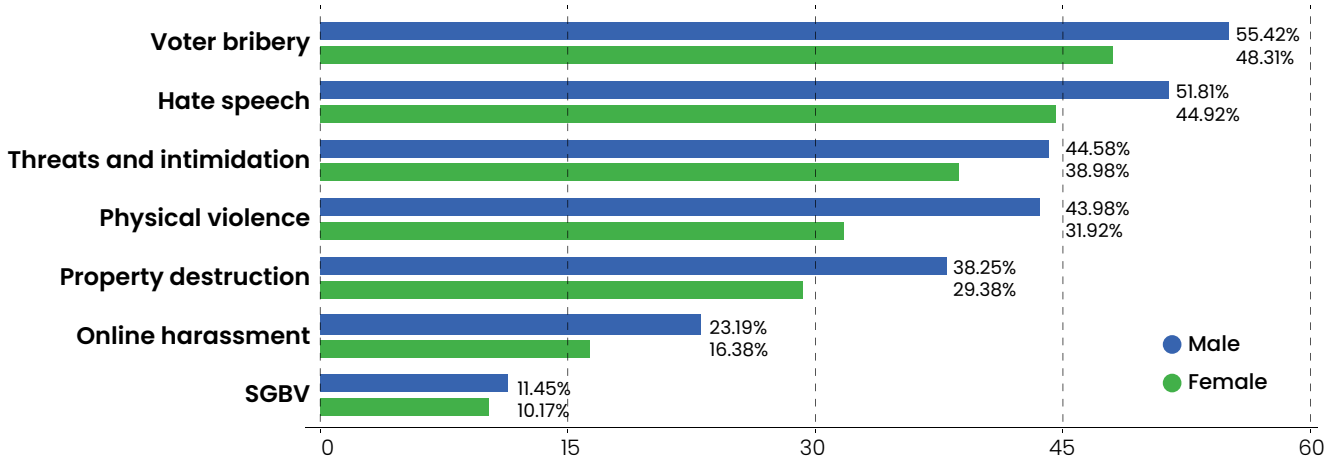


Figure 8: Types of Violence by Gender

The age-disaggregated data reveal that different generations are targeted through distinct forms of electoral intimidation and malpractice. The 55+ age group reports the highest levels of hate speech (57.14%), physical violence (54.29%), and threats and intimidation (48.57%), suggesting that older individuals may be perceived as high-priority targets for traditional forms of coercion.

In contrast, younger voters in the 25–34 and 18–24 age groups experience higher levels of online harassment, with the highest prevalence recorded among the 25–34 group at 25.33%. This highlights a clear digital divide: while older voters are more likely to experience physical and verbal forms of aggression, younger voters are increasingly targeted through digital platforms and social media.

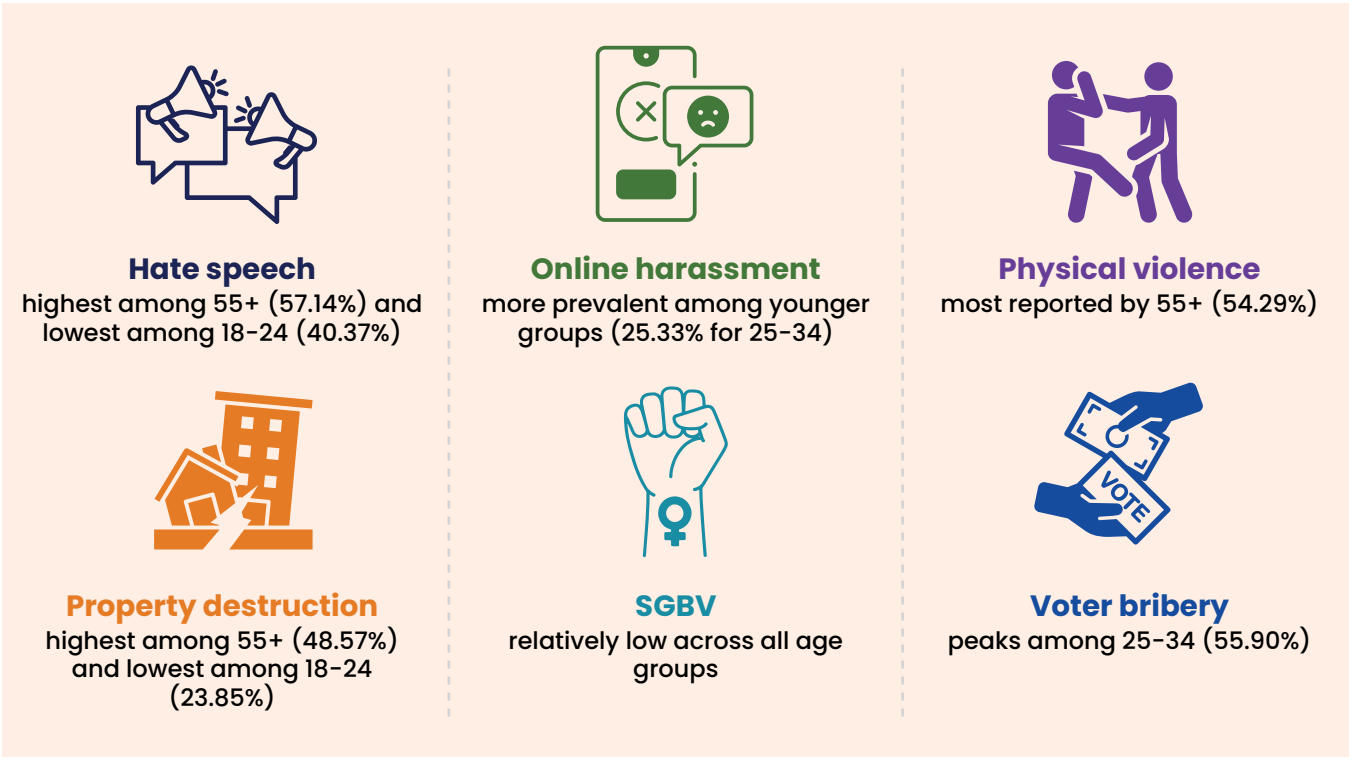


Figure 9: Types of Violence by Age Category

The data analysis shows that while the electoral cycle is hostile for everyone, the method of hostility depends on who you are. Men and older citizens are more likely to face physical and "traditional" forms of intimidation, while younger citizens are the primary targets for digital harassment and financial incentives.



VOTER BRIBERY PEAKS AT MID-CAREER
25-34 age group is most targeted (55.90%)



YOUNG AND OLD ARE TARGETED LESS
18-24 and 55+ report the lowest bribery (-45%)

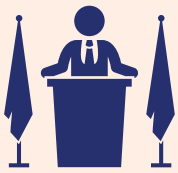


HATE SPEECH IS EVERYWHERE
Above 40% across all ages-the most universal threat

Electoral Conflict Actors

Based on observations from the quantitative data respondents, the analysis identifies a clear hierarchy of power, with political elites serving as key drivers of conflict, and youth groups and criminal gangs acting as the physical agents of disruption in specific regions. The most significant finding is the near universal agreement on the role of political elites. Political leaders are identified as the primary actors in 90.84% of cases nationally. This high percentage implies that electoral conflict is not a spontaneous grassroots issue but is systematically orchestrated from the top.

Key Drivers of Electoral Conflict



POLITICAL ELITES



YOUTH GROUPS & ACTIVIST MOVEMENTS



CRIMINAL GANGS



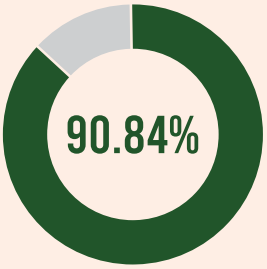
STATE SECURITY AGENCIES



DIGITAL ACTORS (INFLUENCERS & BOT FARMS)



125
POLICE KILLINGS RECORDED IN 2025



of respondents nationally identify **POLITICAL ELITES** as the primary actors in electoral conflict

> *"Politicians actively hire and deploy youth to protect their interests, often paying them to start conflicts during the results announcement period".*
>
> **KII, Local Administration**
>
> *"The major conflict risks are driven by the use of money and the inciting rhetoric of politicians who use project launches to campaign".*
>
> **FGD-Mombasa County**

Interestingly, electoral officials (56.10%) and youth groups (56.98%) are cited with almost identical frequency, indicating that the public perceives institutional failures and youth mobilisation as equally key components of the conflict landscape. Community members also play a substantial role at 49.27%, showing that while conflict is driven by leaders, it effectively permeates the social fabric of the neighbourhood.

Who are the main actors responsible for electoral conflict?

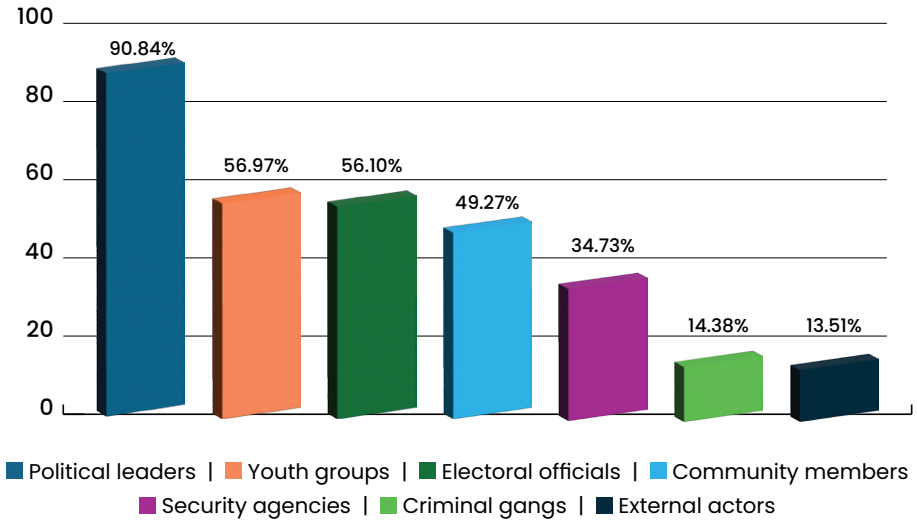


Figure 10: Actors Involved in Conflict

While the national mean for criminal gangs is reported at 14.39%, the county-level data reveals a much more alarming reality in specific hotspots. In Bungoma County, for example, criminal gangs are cited in a staggering 80.95% of incidents, followed closely by Kajiado County (72.22%), Nakuru County (69.23%), and Kisumu County (68.52%). This indicates that in these specific counties, gangs are the primary agents for political interests. Similarly, youth group involvement is exceptionally high in certain areas, reaching 89.66% in Samburu County, 86.11% in Migori County, and 75.86% in Wajir County. These figures highlight a strategic exploitation of young people, likely driven by economic vulnerability and high unemployment in these regions.

County	Political Parties	Youth Groups	Security Forces	Criminal Gangs	Community Leaders	External Actors	Others
Baringo	42.31	19.23	19.23	15.38	11.54	15.38	0
Bungoma	61.9	69.05	38.1	80.95	30.95	19.05	0
Garissa	70.73	21.95	9.76	4.88	7.32	0	0
Isiolo	23.53	41.18	26.47	67.65	11.76	20.59	0
Kajiado	44.44	30.56	55.56	72.22	13.89	19.44	0
Kilifi	72.5	50	37.5	57.5	32.5	17.5	2.5
Kisumu	57.41	74.07	25.93	68.52	1.85	3.7	0
Migori	80.56	86.11	41.67	44.44	19.44	2.78	0
Mombasa	30.86	46.91	50.62	65.43	12.35	4.94	0
Nairobi	77.36	34.91	43.4	61.32	5.66	8.49	0.94
Nakuru	36.54	28.85	30.77	69.23	11.54	38.46	0
Nyeri	77.42	58.06	35.48	58.06	22.58	25.81	0
Samburu	44.83	89.66	44.83	62.07	37.93	20.69	0
Uasin Gishu	56.86	47.06	21.57	56.86	11.76	17.65	1.96
Wajir	72.41	75.86	10.34	6.9	13.79	3.45	0

Table 11: Actors Involved in Conflict by County

The role of security agencies and political parties varies significantly across different geographical contexts. Nationally, security agencies are cited in 34.74% of cases, with their involvement particularly pronounced in urban and coastal areas. Kajiado County (55.56%) and Mombasa County (50.62%) report the highest levels of security force involvement, suggesting a more heavy-handed state response or heightened police citizen confrontations in these regions.

On the other hand, political parties emerge as the most prominent conflict actors in Migori (80.56%), Nyeri (77.42%), Nairobi (77.36%), and Kilifi counties (72.5%). The high level of party involvement in Migori and Nairobi counties aligns with qualitative findings on "political zoning" and intra-party divisions, where party structures and machinery are used to assert territorial influence and maintain political dominance.

The study findings reveal that electoral conflict is highly targeted and varies significantly across counties. In Samburu and Migori counties, conflict dynamics are largely characterised by the mobilisation of youth groups, while in Bungoma and Kajiado counties, they are shaped by the involvement of criminal gangs. The presence of external actors remains relatively low at the national level (13.51%) but rises significantly in Nakuru (38.46%), indicating that some conflicts are influenced by interests beyond the immediate local context.

Overall, the findings indicate a system in which political leaders (90.84%) play a central role in shaping conflict dynamics, employing different strategies, including the mobilisation of youth groups, the use of gangs, or the deployment of party machinery, depending on which approach is most effective within a particular county.



Case Study of Electoral Conflicts in Nyeri County

Emerging Electoral Tensions and Importance of Early Intervention

Kieni, Mathira and Nyeri Town

Key themes

a. Localised political competition conflicts

b. Online misinformation

c. Intervention of community peace-keeping committees

Why this case matters

- Highlights the growing role of digital misinformation in emerging hotspots
- Demonstrates how localised political rivalry can rapidly escalate tensions
- Shows the effectiveness of early intervention and community coordination
- Illustrates the preventive role of trusted local actors and dialogue mechanisms



Political Leaders

90.5%

role in shaping CONFLICT dynamics including YOUTH mobilisation

Stakeholder Mapping: Spoilers and Connectors

The landscape of electoral conflict for the 2027 cycle is defined by a dramatic power shift from traditional institutional gatekeepers to decentralised, digitally empowered networks. This requires a stakeholder analysis based on their impact, incentives, and the "digital speed" of operation.

2027 Electoral Cycle Connectors

While political competition frequently exploits ethnic and class fractures, the study identifies several powerful connectors social, institutional, and economic assets that serve as a safety net against widespread electoral violence. These connectors transform individual interests into collective resilience.



Constitutionalism and Respect for Rights

The Constitution of Kenya, 2010, remains the ultimate national rulebook, respected by a majority of Kenyans as the primary framework for fairness.



The Judiciary as an Arbiter

The study reveals a confidence gap between the IEBC and the Judiciary; nearly 70% of respondents agree that the Judiciary has effective and accountable processes to resolve election disputes.



Moral Authority and Multi-Faith Networks

The study reveals that religious leaders are considered impartial messengers capable of reducing elite-level tensions. In hotspots like Kilifi and Mombasa counties, interfaith dialogue serves as a critical buffer.



Economic Interdependence

Qualitative findings revealed that shared economic interests frequently override political tribalism.

Cross-Clan Economic Ties: Local markets and Chamas (savings groups) are vital connectors.

SACCO Accountability: Boda-Boda and Matatu SACCOs are emerging as organised peace actors.



Council of Elders

Groups like the Kiama Kia Ma (Central) and Njuri Ncheke (Eastern) act as first responders where there is tension.



Nyumba Kumi and Peace Committees

When revitalised and adequately supported with logistical resources, peace committees can serve as effective early warning hubs. The committees should include meaningful youth representation, and utilise appropriate EWER systems incorporating digital technologies.



Sheng as a Linguistic Connector

Among Gen Z (who constitute the majority of the 67% youth demographic), the use of Sheng creates a tribe-less identity, making it harder for politicians to incite youth against each other.



The Power of Sports

National and local-level sports serve as unifying events. FGD participants felt that Sports for Peace tournaments throughout the high-risk campaign period (June December) are critical to keep idle youth occupied and integrated.

2027 Electoral Cycle Spoilers

This study identified actors who are financially or politically incentivised to disrupt the electoral process or institutionalise exclusion.



Digital Mercenary Influencers

These actors use coordinated inauthentic behaviour on TikTok and WhatsApp to profit from outrage.



Political Mobilisation and Zoning

A critical spoiler tactic identified is the labeling of regions as "One-Term" or "Two-Term" zones. This rhetoric serves as a direct trigger for violence.



Irregular Political Party Nominations

Within political parties, elites who bypass internal democracy rules to conduct irregular nominations act as spoilers.



Partisan Security Factions

These passive spoilers include security actors who resist oversight from the Independent Police Oversight Authority (IPOA) or fail to use visible identification during crowd control.

Electoral Conflict Drivers in the 2027 Electoral Cycle

This study strongly implies that no single conflict driver functions independently. Instead, a combination of historical disputes, economic hardships, political opportunism, and security gaps creates a volatile environment in some regions. This study indicated that the conflict drivers in the 2027 electoral cycle were as follows:

a. New Political Alignments and Intra-Party Conflicts

The study identified new political alignments and rising intra-party conflicts as major conflict drivers for the 2027 electoral cycle. For example, the death of former Prime Minister Raila Odinga in October, 2025 created a leadership vacuum that split the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) into two rival factions. The "Linda Ground" wing, led by current ODM leader Oburu Oginga, wants a formal alliance with the government. In contrast, the "Linda Mwananchi" faction, led by ODM Secretary General Edwin Sifuna and Siaya Governor James Orengo, remains in opposition to maintain the party's reformist identity. This internal disunity and the resulting legal battles for party control have reinforced the public perception of a fractured political elite.

Similarly, respondents identified a volatile rift within the ruling United Democratic Alliance (UDA) and the emergence of a new opposition front as a major conflict threat. The 2024 impeachment of Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua sparked divisions within the ruling coalition, particularly in the Mt. Kenya region. Gachagua has since formed the Democracy for the Citizens Party (DCP) and is building a new opposition alliance to challenge President Ruto in 2027. This front comprises leaders such as Kalonzo Musyoka, Fred Matiang'i, and Eugene Wamalwa. Consequently, regions such as Central Kenya, which were not previously considered conflict hotspots, are now viewed as areas requiring urgent intervention.

The ODM's division, along with the co-opting of its major leadership into a "broad-based" government following the 2024 Gen-Z protests, has created a sense of betrayal among activists and opposition supporters. According to study participants, these alterations support the perception of the political class as a self-serving elite. Furthermore, the dissolution of these alliances motivates regional leaders to employ ethno-nationalist rhetoric to safeguard their political and financial interests ahead of the 2027 elections. The major role that politicians and political parties play in causing electoral conflict explains why respondents identified political leaders as the primary actors behind electoral conflict at 90.84%, as seen in the table below.

	Mean (%)	Std.Err.	[95%_Conf	Interval]
Political leaders	90.84	.0110038	.8868251	.9300354
Youth groups	56.98	.0188896	.5326792	.6068557
Community members	49.27	.0190742	.4552819	.5301832
Security agencies	34.74	.0181658	.3117165	.3830509
Electoral officials	56.10	.0189335	.5238721	.5982209
Criminal gangs	14.39	.0133909	.1176034	.1701873
External actors	13.51	.0130447	.1095622	.1607866
Other	0.44	.0025138	-.0005753	.0092962

Mean estimation Number of obs = 688

Table 12: Actors Behind Electoral Conflicts

Respondents identified a lack of internal democracy and opaque nomination processes within shifting political alliances as major drivers of conflict. Unfair primary nominations are likely to spark violence between ethnic groups or clans during the general election. The UDA party is particularly vulnerable to a heated nomination process due to its large number of aspirants. This tension could spark local violence or a wave of independent candidates, resulting in localised conflicts at the county level.

b. Inflammatory Language as a Catalyst for Escalation of Conflict

This study's key finding is that aggressive language, hate speech, rumours, and disinformation all contribute to political tension and violence. Respondents stated that politicians frequently use provocative language during rallies to insult or discredit their opponents, causing friction among supporters of opposing factions.

> *Politicians are using provocative language to attack or spoil the names of their opponents, labeling regions as 'one-term' or 'two-term' zones".*
>
> **FGD, Nairobi County**

> *"The resurgence of negative ethnic rhetoric aimed at balkanising the country is a significant concern for 2027".*
>
> **KII, National Stakeholder**

c. Ethnic and Clan Mobilisation

Ethnic and clan-based politics have emerged as primary drivers of election-related tension and violence. While politicians mobilise voters along these lines to create divisions, many voters prefer to see leaders from their local communities in power. Deep-seated ethnic divisions shape how communities perceive and interact with one another; for instance, some respondents admitted they prefer not to engage with people from certain tribes. During elections, these divisions often lead factions to mobilise around ethnic identity rather than policy issues.

> *"Political competition relies on an 'ethnic census' rather than issues. Politicians calculate victory based purely on which tribes ally together".*
>
> **KII, National Stakeholder**

Ethnic and clan-based rhetoric tends to focus on pre-existing conflict drivers, such as unresolved land disputes and marginalisation. This demonstrates how unaddressed historical injustices resurface during political contests.

Qualitative findings of the study revealed that, under normal circumstances, inter-community relations are overwhelmingly positive. Respondents describe a state of "Pre-election Peace" where tribes identify as "brothers or sisters" and recognize their reliance on one another since they collaborate and conduct business together. This shared identity is most evident in public markets and social gatherings where ethnic differences do not prevent cooperation. However, this harmony is episodic. As the election season approaches, relationships become strained, and the everyday coexistence is replaced by a contrived "otherness." In hotspots like Kibera, cosmopolitan diversity oscillates between peace and episodic inter-ethnic conflicts, while in Isiolo, tribalism rises dramatically, particularly before and during elections.

From the study findings, political actors are the primary disruptors of community relations because they actively construct animosity by stirring their supporters and marginalising specific clans or tribes. By framing leadership contests as ethnic survival battles, politicians transform neighbours into enemies, leading individuals to suddenly view one another through a divisive lens. This manipulation is particularly severe for minority populations in informal settlements such as Kibera in Nairobi, who are often targeted when dominant ethnic blocs clash.

d. Political Ambition and Interests

The study respondents identified political ambition and self-interest as major drivers of electoral conflict. Electoral contests are often perceived as a "life-or-death" struggle, compelling candidates to employ any means necessary to secure victory, including spending substantial sums on their campaigns. This challenge is compounded by the difficulty of monitoring campaign financing, partly due to a deeply entrenched culture of transactional politics. Political actors exploit this environment by distributing cash directly and openly to influence voters, reinforcing the growing role of money in electoral competition.

Interactions with electoral violence and malpractice (Yes)

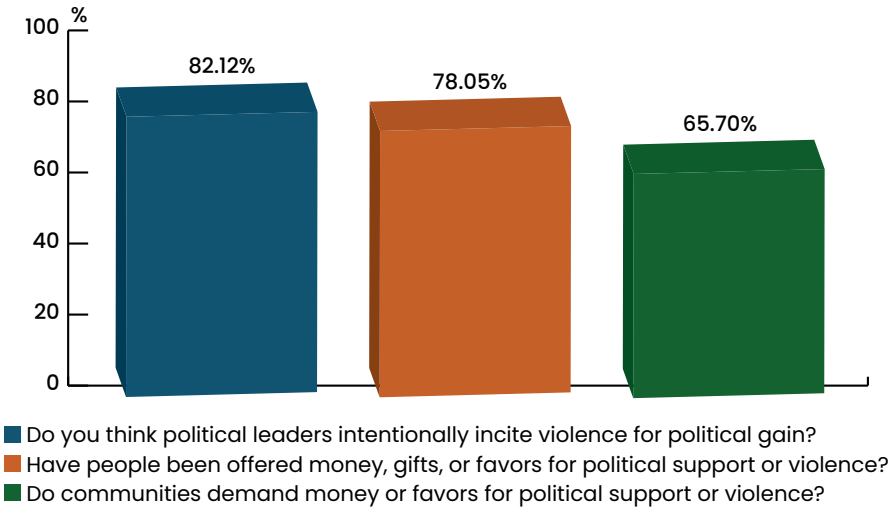


Figure 11: Perceptions of the Role of Political Leaders in Electoral Conflict and Malpractice

Political ambitions are often motivated by a desire to protect wealth, status, and influence. When asked whether political leaders intentionally incite communities to violence, 82% of study participants agreed. Furthermore, 78% of respondents reported being offered or witnessing others being offered money, gifts, or favors in exchange for political support or engaging in violence. While much emphasis is focused on politicians distributing money, the study discovered that transactional politics is a two-way street, with 66% of respondents indicating that communities themselves demand money or favors from politicians in exchange for their votes.

While not explicitly historical, the description of politicians' motivations as driven by greed and a desperate need for power suggests a consistent pattern of behavior. The massive financial stakes with election spending often exceeding five years' salary suggest a long-standing system where political office is seen as a means to accumulate wealth and influence, rather than solely public service.

The study also found that tensions are further aggravated by leaders who believe they are entitled to power and marginalise those who do not support them.

e. Youth Activism, Mobilisation and Exploitation

According to the study findings, young people are both victims and perpetrators in the escalation of electoral violence, while increasingly emerging as agents of change through civic activism. Politicians exploit their socio-economic vulnerabilities, particularly high levels of unemployment and entrenched poverty, making them more susceptible to manipulation and recruitment into political violence. These vulnerabilities are further compounded by Kenya's youth bulge, with 67% of people aged 15–34 reported to be unemployed (Generation Kenya, 2025).

This economic exclusion, combined with extreme wealth inequality (the richest 125 Kenyans hold more wealth than 77% of the population) (Oxfam Kenya, 2025; Act!, 2025), creates a volatile environment where "Elite vs. Citizen" narratives easily take hold and fuel spontaneous unrest.

The study's continuous portrayal of youth mobilisation and exploitation suggests that this is a recurring pattern. For example, young *bodaboda* riders are paid to escort political leaders at rallies or to provide security.

Furthermore, while young people have not been widely exposed to electoral violence, partly due to lower participation in electoral cycles because of age, their socio-economic vulnerabilities make them highly susceptible to manipulation into engaging in violence.

> *"Youth are targeted as tools for aspirants to fight one another; they are idle and seek survival mechanisms, making them susceptible to accepting offers".*
>
> **FGD, Migori County**
>
> *"A youth that cannot even afford a meal is given a new panga and a few shillings to go and cause chaos; this is systemic exploitation".*
>
> **KII, Civil Society**

Unlike in past elections, the recent Gen Z protests show that young people are questioning political leaders and demanding better governance. They have successfully organised around issues like rejecting the 2024 Finance Bill, ending police brutality, and promoting voter registration through the "Niko Kadi" campaign. However, sustaining this momentum has proved challenging. Study respondents noted that although young people are increasingly emerging as agents of change, there is a growing risk that their frustration and anger could escalate into unrest. If their concerns remain unaddressed, this heightened level of political awareness, activism, and vigilance could contribute to further instability during the 2027 electoral cycle.

Drivers of Conflict by Age Group

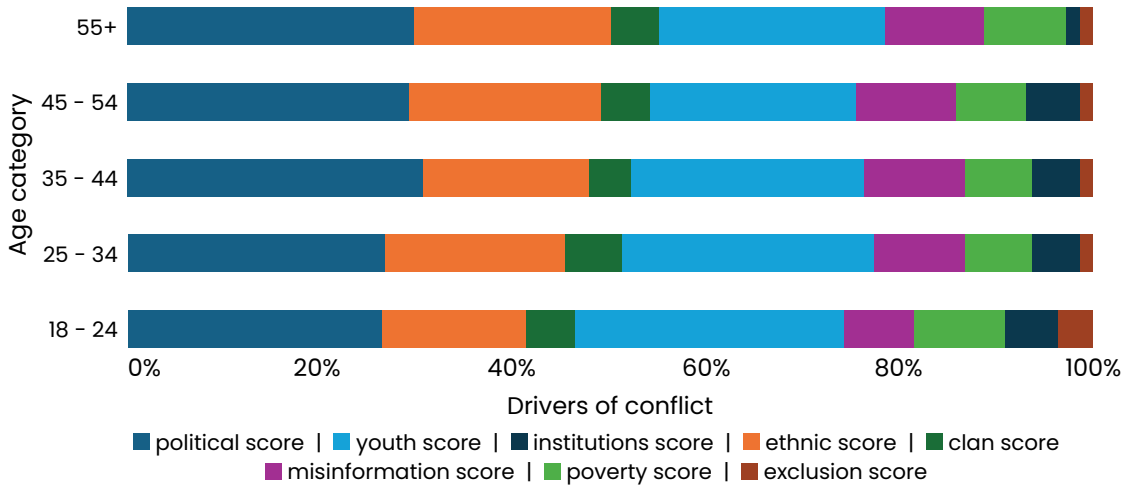


Figure 12: Drivers of Electoral Conflict by Age Group

As shown in the figure above, respondents aged 18–34 years view high political competition and youth vulnerabilities as the leading drivers of conflict. This shows that the risks faced by young people in highly competitive political contexts are a significant threat to electoral violence.

f. Rising Goonism Culture

A disturbing trend linked to youth exploitation is the increasing commercialisation of violence, whereby political actors take advantage of economic vulnerabilities to recruit informal criminal groups and youth militias (Saferworld/ISS, 2024). These groups are frequently used to intimidate voters, protect candidates' interests during opaque nomination processes, and threaten political opponents at rallies and other political events. Often recruited from informal settlements where socio-economic vulnerabilities are already widespread, these groups, including existing juvenile gangs, are easily mobilised and frequently operate with apparent impunity, particularly during by-elections.

The informal settlements and slums combine high population density, economic hardship, and often a lack of formal governance, making them fertile ground for political exploitation and hiring of goons. It also emerged from the study that there is a resurgence of criminal gangs in regions like Mombasa that pose a threat to electoral violence, as these gangs are available for hire by politicians.

> *"The country faces major electoral conflict risks marked by the issue of 'goons' and political intolerance; this is building a volatile environment".*
>
> **KII, Human Rights Defender**

> *"The problem is the presence of gangs, goons, and general chaos, which has emerged as a pattern across areas associated with strong political competition".*
>
> **KII, Religious Leader**

As shown in the table below, criminal gangs are prominent in Bungoma (81%), Kajiado (72%), Kisumu (69%), Nakuru (69%), Isiolo (68%), Mombasa (65%), Samburu (62%), and Nairobi counties (61%).

County	Political parties	Youth groups	Security forces	Criminal gangs	Community leaders	External actors	Others
Baringo	42.31	19.23	19.23	15.38	11.54	15.38	0
Bungoma	61.9	69.05	38.1	80.95	30.95	19.05	0
Garissa	70.73	21.95	9.76	4.88	7.32	0	0
Isiolo	23.53	41.18	26.47	67.65	11.76	20.59	0
Kajiado	44.44	30.56	55.56	72.22	13.89	19.44	0
Kilifi	72.5	50	37.5	57.5	32.5	17.5	2.5
Kisumu	57.41	74.07	25.93	68.52	1.85	3.7	0
Migori	80.56	86.11	41.67	44.44	19.44	2.78	0
Mombasa	30.86	46.91	50.62	65.43	12.35	4.94	0
Nairobi	77.36	34.91	43.4	61.32	5.66	8.49	0.94
Nakuru	36.54	28.85	30.77	69.23	11.54	38.46	0
Nyeri	77.42	58.06	35.48	58.06	22.58	25.81	0
Samburu	44.83	89.66	44.83	62.07	37.93	20.69	0
Uasin Gishu	56.86	47.06	21.57	56.86	11.76	17.65	1.96
Wajir	72.41	75.86	10.34	6.9	13.79	3.45	0

Table 13: Rising Goonism Culture

g. Digital Technology and Information Threats as a Conflict Driver

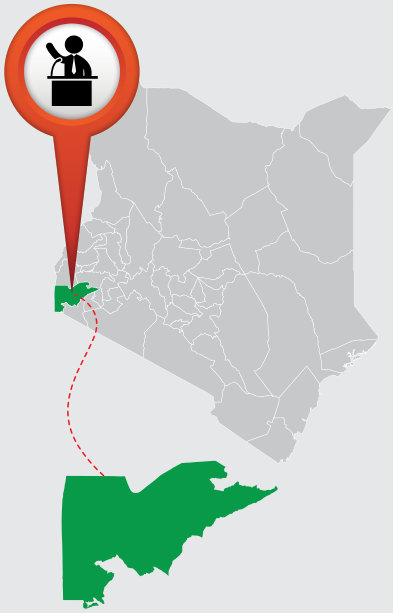
Study respondents identified the evolving digital technology space as a conflict driver. This risk emanates from using social media to incite conflict, the rapid spread of false content, and attacks aimed at key institutions and vulnerable people. Specific threats identified include:

- **Misinformation and Disinformation:** The irresponsible use of social media and the quick spread of misinformation, malinformation, and fake news are major threats that can lead to violence.

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Deepfakes:** The rise of AI and deepfakes worsens this challenge by enabling the creation of highly believable but false content, making it hard to tell propaganda from the truth.

Furthermore, politicians and their representatives, bloggers and influencers, actively invest in and exploit social media.

Youth are easily manipulated into becoming "keyboard warriors" who spread hate and misinformation. The digital space is also used to target female candidates through TFGBV, misinformation, and disinformation. Finally, attacks on judicial officers and judges on social media threaten judicial independence and the rule of law, especially in highly contested electoral cycles such as the 2027 election.



Case Study of Misinformation as a Conflict Driver in Migori County

Misinformation, Political Polarisation, and Youth Mobilisation

Migori Town, Awendo, Rongo, Suna

Key themes

a. Localised political violence

b. Digital misinformation

c. Youth mobilisation

Why this case matters

- Demonstrates the growing role of misinformation in electoral conflict
- Highlights how delayed results and political narratives amplify mistrust
- Shows the link between youth unemployment and political mobilisation
- Illustrates the importance of local peace initiatives during recovery

h. Election Preparedness and Legal Loopholes

Election irregularities are a major driver of electoral violence. The management and announcement of election results represent a significant risk factor that could trigger conflict during the 2027 electoral cycle. In fact, 74% of study participants identified the announcement of results as the most critical and high-risk stage of the electoral process, followed by the post-election period at 64%, as illustrated in the figure below.

Election violence trigger periods

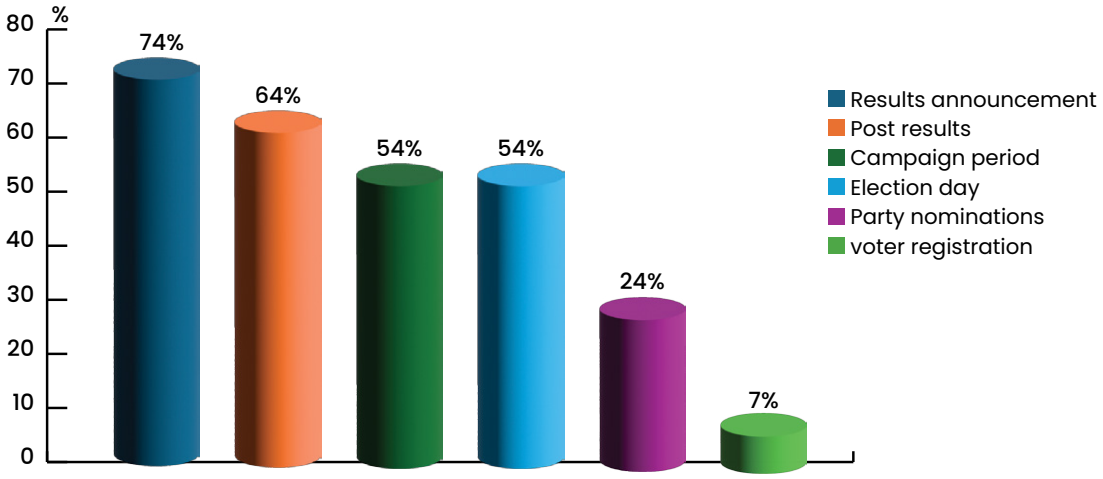


Figure 13: Election Violence Trigger Periods

One key informant explained that the entire results management process, including counting, tallying, transmission, and declaration of results, carries the highest risk of triggering conflict. Historically, disputes over the management and declaration of presidential election results have been a primary catalyst for post-election violence in Kenya, a trend that is evident since the 2007 elections. These tensions are further intensified by limited public trust in the electoral system, particularly when there are perceptions of irregularities such as inaccurate tallies, delayed announcements, or manipulation of results.

Disputed nominations were also frequently cited as flashpoints, particularly when there are accusations of favouritism, irregularities, or "boardroom deals" that bypass democratic processes.

Respondents identified systemic weaknesses in institutional and legal frameworks as factors that could significantly heighten the risk of conflict by undermining public trust and reinforcing a culture of impunity.

Key institutions, such as the IEBC, continue to face chronic underfunding, alongside perceptions of politicisation and dependence on the Executive. These challenges are further compounded by legal gaps, including the absence of a comprehensive Campaign Finance Act, which creates opportunities for the misuse of state resources by political actors.

In addition, existing laws and court directives, particularly those relating to candidate integrity and corruption, are often inadequately enforced. Stakeholders cautioned that failure to provide sufficient funding for the IEBC could jeopardise the entire electoral process, with one respondent noting:

> *"The IEBC is requesting significant funding, yet the government does not offer the full amount. This is the referee for our elections, and we are not providing the resources they need to do their job".*
>
> **FGD, Kisumu County**

i. Role of Security Agencies and Police Response

The conduct of security agencies, particularly the police, often worsens tensions during elections. Respondents noted that police brutality and perceived bias can turn peaceful protests into chaotic scenes. For example, during the 2024–2025 Gen Z-led protests, security forces specifically targeted young people. Data shows that police killings during the mid-2025 protests accounted for 54% of all police killings that year (Missing Voices, 2026). Furthermore, respondents claimed that internal security management occasionally makes strategic decisions to delay police responses, implying political intervention or deliberate inaction.

Participants highlighted security challenges in informal settlements, noting a shortage of officers; thus, security agencies do not respond to incidents in these areas. These challenges are worsened by the difficulties police face in tracking down and apprehending offenders in heavily populated regions. This history of brutality and bias continues to erode the public's trust in law enforcement. Only 20% of the study's respondents said police responded quickly to reported crimes, while 23% trusted the police.

j. Economic Uncertainty and Unemployment

The study identified economic factors, particularly unemployment and poverty, as underlying issues that exacerbate tensions during campaigns. Economic uncertainty makes business difficult because political tension, often coupled with police brutality, creates an unpredictable operating environment.

> *Kenyans are taxed more, and you're not seeing more services; this economic frustration is being channelled into political anger".*
>
> **FGD, Baringo County**
>
> *High rates of unemployment make young people desperate for money and vulnerable to manipulation by political elites".*
>
> **KII, Academic**

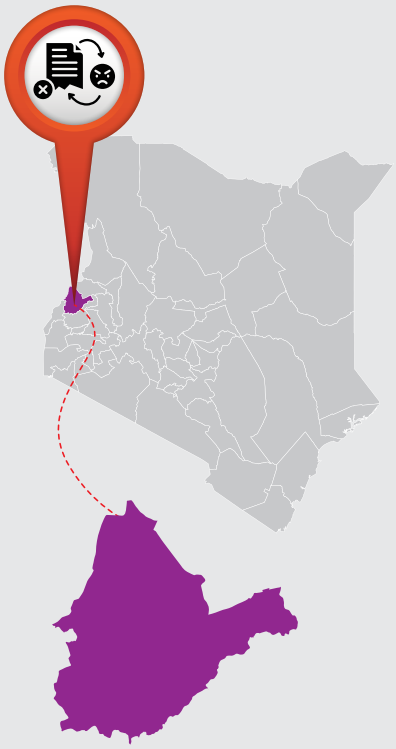
Furthermore, unemployment leads to frustration among young people, making them vulnerable to manipulation into violent behaviour. This persistent socio-economic vulnerability is consistently exploited during political periods, implying that economic factors have historically played a major role in driving political dynamics and potential for unrest.

k. Pre-existing Conflicts and Competition over Resources

The study revealed that numerous regions possess a verified legacy of election-related unrest, ethnic confrontations, and disputes surrounding land and water access. Disputes over resources are significant drivers of conflict, particularly in areas where different communities or informal settlements compete for scarce basic needs.

> *"The primary conflict risks are resource-based, stemming from historical injustices involving water, grazing land, and agricultural resources".*
>
> **KII, Samburu County**
>
> *"Historical land grievances are frequently reactivated during election periods and exploited by political actors to build 'us versus them' narratives".*
>
> **KII, Bungoma County**

The proximity of diverse ethnic populations, mainly in border areas or cosmopolitan centres, serves as a major indicator of potential friction.



Case Study-Conflicts Over Resources in Bungoma County

Historical Grievances and Cycles of Electoral Violence

Mt. Elgon

Key themes

a. Unresolved land grievances
b. Historical trauma and exclusion
c. Youth vulnerability in election conflict

Why this case matters

- Demonstrates how unresolved land grievances sustain electoral conflict vulnerability
- Shows how historical trauma and exclusion continue to shape political tensions
- Highlights youth vulnerability as a driver of political mobilisation
- Illustrates the continued importance of community peace structures

I. Illicit Activities

Areas with high rates of illicit brewing or high rates of drug abuse are associated with increased vulnerability and social disorder, contributing to an ideal environment for exploitation during elections.

Heightened tensions are not random but are concentrated in specific geographical areas due to a complex interplay of historical, socio-economic, and political factors. Addressing these tensions requires a multi-faceted approach that includes targeted interventions to improve security, create economic opportunities for youth, foster inter-ethnic dialogue, and hold political actors accountable for incitement. The localised nature of these issues demands context-specific strategies rather than broad, generalised solutions.

County-Specific Nuances Around Electoral Conflicts and Malpractices

The study findings reveal that the electoral environment in Kenya is highly tense, with voter bribery (51.74%) and hate speech (48.26%) as the primary drivers of malpractice. Geographically, these dynamics manifest most acutely in high-risk hotspots.

County	Online Harassment	Voter Bribery	Threats & Intimidation	SGBV	Violence Property Destruction	Violence Physical	Hate Speech
Baringo	7.69%	46.15%	15.38%	11.54%	3.85%	7.69%	26.92%
Bungoma	42.86%	85.71%	71.43%	30.95%	54.76%	57.14%	78.57%
Garissa	0.00%	46.34%	36.59%	0.00%	17.07%	75.61%	31.71%
Isiolo	35.29%	50.00%	32.35%	2.94%	26.47%	20.59%	70.59%
Kajiado	11.11%	47.22%	25.00%	8.33%	55.56%	33.33%	61.11%
Kilifi	25.00%	67.50%	32.50%	12.50%	42.50%	35.00%	62.50%
Kisumu	18.52%	57.41%	59.26%	5.56%	29.63%	35.19%	40.74%
Migori	5.56%	69.44%	80.56%	11.11%	50.00%	72.22%	80.56%
Mombasa	25.93%	51.85%	38.27%	6.17%	19.75%	34.57%	38.27%
Nairobi	16.04%	43.40%	35.85%	10.38%	32.08%	30.19%	33.02%
Nakuru	30.77%	59.62%	42.31%	25.00%	53.85%	53.85%	55.77%
Nyeri	16.13%	12.90%	25.81%	0.00%	16.13%	9.68%	45.16%
Samburu	20.69%	65.52%	62.07%	24.14%	51.72%	41.38%	62.07%
Uasin Gishu	23.53%	50.98%	50.98%	11.76%	41.18%	29.41%	56.86%
Wajir	0.00%	13.79%	6.90%	0.00%	6.90%	24.14%	3.45%

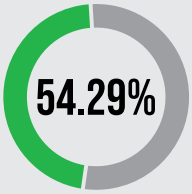
Table 14: Types of Violence by County

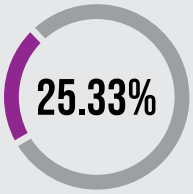
Nairobi County continues to be the centre for state-citizen confrontations, recording the highest number of police killings in 2025 (Missing Voices, 2026). In cosmopolitan urban centres like Kibera, the atmosphere is described as "unpredictable," with a complex, interdependent relationship among major tribes often shifting from peaceful coexistence to tense political competition. Qualitative findings indicate that during these shifts, vulnerable ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected.

In the Rift Valley, counties such as Nakuru and Uasin Gishu remain volatile due to unresolved land disputes and a recent rise in protest-related disappearances (NCIC, 2022; Missing Voices, 2026). Statistically, these counties have significantly higher rates of property destruction (over 41%) and threats and intimidation (over 42%). This volatility is reflected in the North Rift and Upper Eastern regions, where emerging hotspots are fuelled by climate-induced resource competition (UN Women, 2023; AMAYA, 2025). In Isiolo County, KIIs highlight that tribalism is "very high, and especially during elections," which aligns with the high reported rates of hate speech (70.59%) in the county.

Bungoma and Migori counties have the strongest statistical and qualitative evidence of conflict. Bungoma County reports a staggering 85.71% voter bribery rate and 71.43% for threats and intimidation. Qualitative research from Mt. Elgon explains this as "deep-rooted land and displacement grievances" that are frequently rekindled by political actors. In Migori County, where physical violence is at 72.22%, the conflict is often fuelled by intra-party divisions and disputes over political zoning.

55+ age group experiences the most traditional **physical violence**





younger voters **(18–34)** are the primary targets of **online harassment**

One respondent stated that youth are *"targeted as tools for aspirants to fight one another,"* often because they are idle and lack alternative livelihoods. Simultaneously, the digital space has become a platform for harassment and defamation, with KIIs pointing to the emergence of AI-generated deep fakes used to shame candidates. This digital violence complements the deep systemic mistrust of institutions; in Nyeri, this resulted in tragic outcomes, with 2 Gen Z protestors shot dead in Karatina, further deepening the divide between the state and the younger generation.

Despite these challenges, community-led peace connectors provide an important counter-narrative. The qualitative findings show that elders and religious leaders are still the most trusted figures for mediation. In Nyeri, for example, the church is viewed as the most reliable bridge for peace talks, despite incidents of state interference.

Furthermore, economic interdependence serves as a stabilizer; many participants noted that the need to conduct business in shared markets often outweighs political animosity. This implies that while the drivers of conflict are multi-layered, ranging from elite incitement and historical land conflicts to modern digital harassment, local social capital remains the bedrock of sustainable peace, as expressed by a respondent who stated:

3.4. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis

Women candidates in Kenya navigate a hostile political environment marked by physical harassment, pervasive stigmatisation, and the failure to implement the two-thirds gender rule (EU, 2022; CMD-Kenya, 2026). Beyond structural barriers, technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) has emerged as a primary site of trauma, with 55.7% of women candidates reporting online abuse in 2022, often leading to self-censorship or total withdrawal from political discourse (Policy, 2023; Paradigm Initiative, 2025). These barriers are worsened by economic constraints, as displacement and the loss of male breadwinners to electoral violence disproportionately push women into financial ruin (NLC, 2025; Missing Voices, 2026).

Barriers to Electoral Participation

The study identified multiple barriers to electoral participation, with clear patterns emerging across both the general population and specific age groups. Overall, the most frequently reported barriers were threats and intimidation (52.21%), political interference (48.53%), and fear of violence (47.79%), indicating that insecurity and political pressure were the dominant constraints on participation. In contrast, structural and administrative barriers such as lack of identification (13.24%), lack of information (11.03%), and gender-related barriers (8.09%) were reported less frequently, though still significant for specific sub-groups as shown below.

What Barriers Did you Face During Elections?

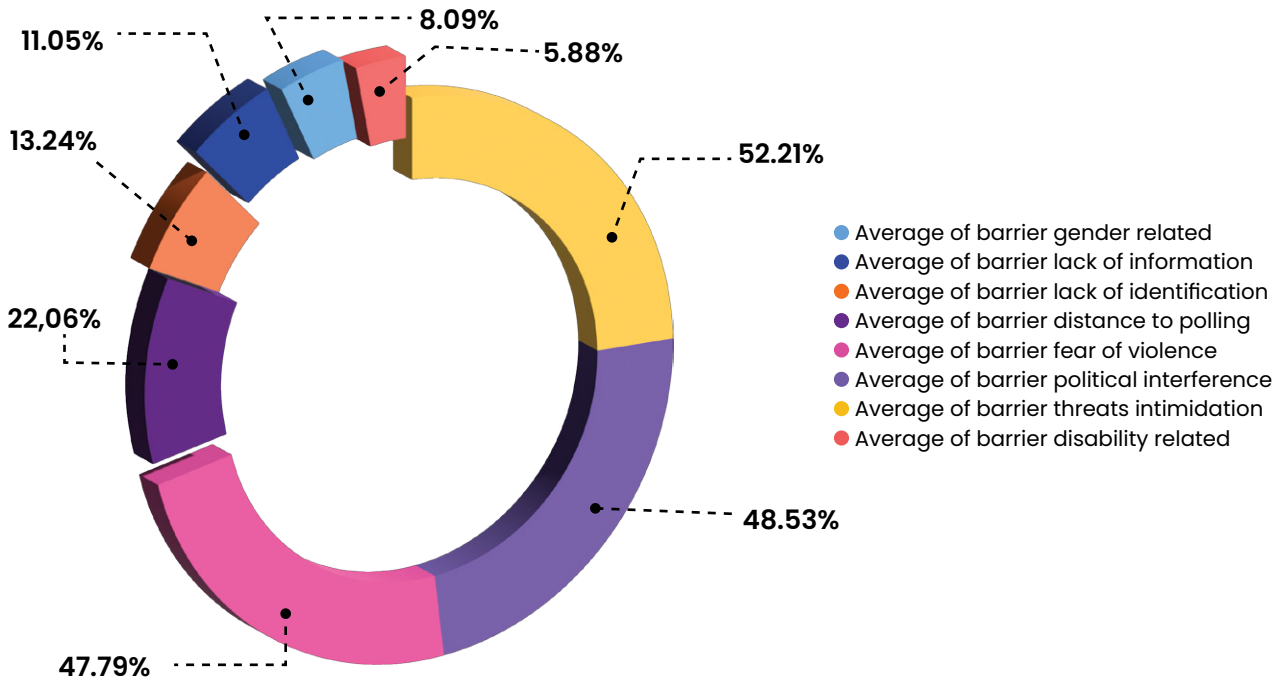


Figure 14: Barriers Faced During Election

These findings indicate that electoral participation was influenced more by the political and security environment than by logistical or administrative obstacles. The prevalence of intimidation and political interference points to a context in which participation is both a civic act and a risky decision, particularly in highly competitive or conflict-prone areas.

Barriers to Participation for Women Candidates and Voters

Although the data suggests that electoral barriers are not explicitly gender-driven in isolation, women emerge as one of the most vulnerable groups in electoral contexts. A significant proportion of respondents (75.73%) identified women as being at risk during elections, with particularly high vulnerability reported in urban and politically competitive counties such as Nairobi, as illustrated below.

Which Groups are Most at Risk During Elections?

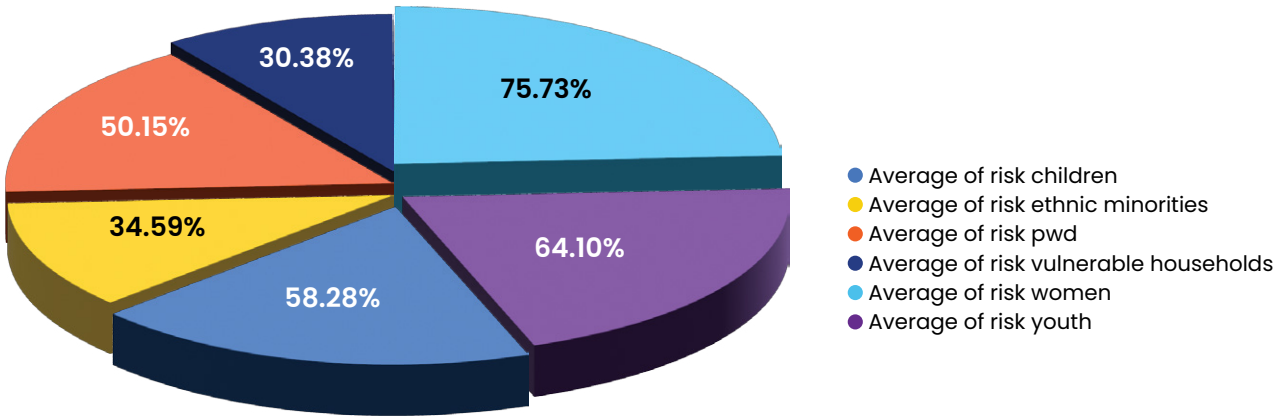


Figure 15: Groups at Risk of Electoral Violence by County

Vulnerability is geographically uneven; Bungoma County, very high across all groups, Nairobi County, very high for women (94%) but lower for households, Uasin Gishu County, consistently high, Wajir County, generally low except for women.

County	Children	Women	Youth	PWD	Vulnerable households	Ethnic minorities
Baringo	46.15%	76.92%	42.31%	34.62%	34.62%	30.77%
Bungoma	92.86%	88.10%	59.52%	76.19%	64.29%	57.14%
Garissa	34.15%	73.17%	56.10%	43.90%	19.51%	34.15%
Isiolo	52.94%	79.41%	55.88%	55.88%	20.59%	26.47%
Kajiado	75.00%	63.89%	55.56%	55.56%	22.22%	27.78%
Migori	38.89%	38.89%	83.33%	52.78%	25.00%	22.22%
Mombasa	46.91%	65.43%	43.21%	48.15%	17.28%	20.99%
Kilifi	55.00%	67.50%	67.50%	52.50%	40.00%	40.00%
Kisumu	61.11%	88.89%	77.78%	51.85%	24.07%	18.52%
Nairobi	75.47%	94.34%	67.92%	48.11%	25.47%	37.74%
Nakuru	65.38%	67.31%	55.77%	36.54%	21.15%	30.77%
Nyeri	48.39%	67.74%	83.87%	35.48%	35.48%	45.16%
Samburu	48.28%	62.07%	82.76%	44.83%	34.48%	51.72%
Uasin Gishu	72.55%	88.24%	76.47%	76.47%	68.63%	62.75%
Wajir	13.79%	79.31%	65.52%	24.14%	13.79%	17.24%

Table 15: Groups at Risk of Electoral Violence by County

This increased exposure is directly related to greater insecurity in the electoral context, where fear of violence, political interference, and intimidation remain major concerns.

> *"Women face electoral vulnerability through intimidation, gender-based harassment, voting pressure, and limited political voice, resulting in reduced and limited autonomy and participation".*
>
> **FGD Nairobi**

Furthermore, their influence on women is compounded by safety concerns and a perceived lack of protection while reporting electoral violations. Overall, only one-third of respondents believe they are safe reporting electoral violence, with women slightly less likely than men.

Do you Feel Safe Reporting Electoral Violence?

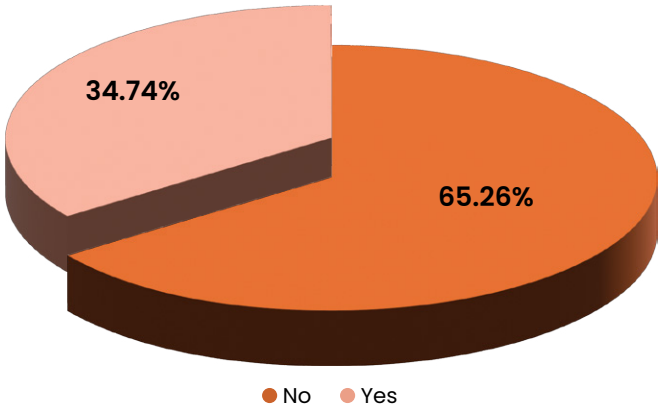


Figure 16: Do you Feel Safe Reporting Electoral Violence?

This was reiterated in some of the focus group discussions, where women face significant challenges in safe reporting due to a lack of secure reporting spaces and a widespread fear of retaliation and lack of confidentiality. These barriers are compounded by the high financial and time costs of reporting, requests for unofficial payments, and a "conspiracy of silence" around gender-based violence, all of which discourage women from pursuing justice, despite the existence of some supportive organisations.

> *"Women are limited by lack of safe reporting spaces".*
>
> **FGD Uasin Gishu County**
>
> *"Even for serious abuse, most victims stay silent. In Majengo/Kiawara slums, GBV goes unreported due to a conspiracy of silence".*
>
> **FGD Mombasa County**

This demonstrates that, even when formal involvement (such as voting) is not explicitly banned, informal barriers, particularly those linked to security and confidence, continue to hinder meaningful engagement.

Qualitative findings revealed standard security setups often fail to protect women from targeted physical and emotional abuse. To address this, the IEBC intends to establish a Women's Situation Room ahead of the 2027 election. This center will serve as an early warning and rapid-response hub specifically for women. This platform, which brings together law enforcement, civil society, and local leaders, will track and respond to threats against women in real time. Creating this space is an important step towards closing the inclusion gaps highlighted in this study, making the election environment safer for female candidates and voters.

Age-Based Disparities in Experienced Barriers

Disaggregation by age group revealed important differences in how barriers were experienced. Respondents aged 45–54 reported the highest overall incidence of barriers (25.44%), followed by those aged 35–44 (22.61%) and 25–34 (20.09%). In contrast, younger respondents aged 18–24 reported the lowest incidence (9.17%), indicating that while youth are often considered vulnerable, they may face fewer direct barriers to voting compared to older cohorts, as shown below.

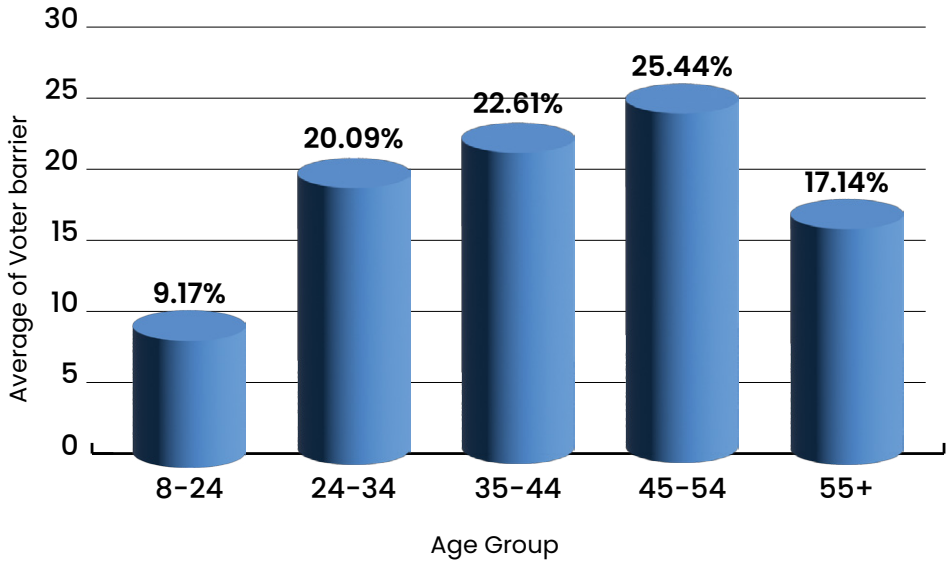


Figure 17: Proportion that Faced Barriers During Voting by Age Group

However, a closer look at the types of barriers they experienced reveals a more complicated picture.

Barrier Profiles by Age Group

Youth (18–24) reported extremely high levels of disability-related barriers (80%), despite representing a relatively small proportion of PWDs in the sample. This shows that young PWDs face disproportionately high accessibility challenges. At the same time, youth reported relatively low exposure to fear-based and political barriers, implying that their constraints were more structural than security driven. Young adults (25–34) experienced a broader mix of barriers, with relatively high levels of distance to polling (46%), lack of information (43%), disability-related barriers (39%), and political interference (26%). This group appears to confront both logistical and political constraints, reflecting their active engagement in electoral processes.

Mid-age groups (35–44 and 45–54) reported the highest levels of information-related barriers (51% and 55%, respectively), alongside distance to polling stations (56%) and political interference. These findings indicate that access to timely and reliable electoral information remains a critical gap, even among more established and economically active populations.

Older respondents (55+) faced the most significant logistical barriers, including distance to polling stations (67%) and lack of information (50%), as well as relatively high levels of political interference (50%). This indicates that both accessibility and political environment constraints converge for older populations, potentially limiting their participation, as highlighted in the table below.

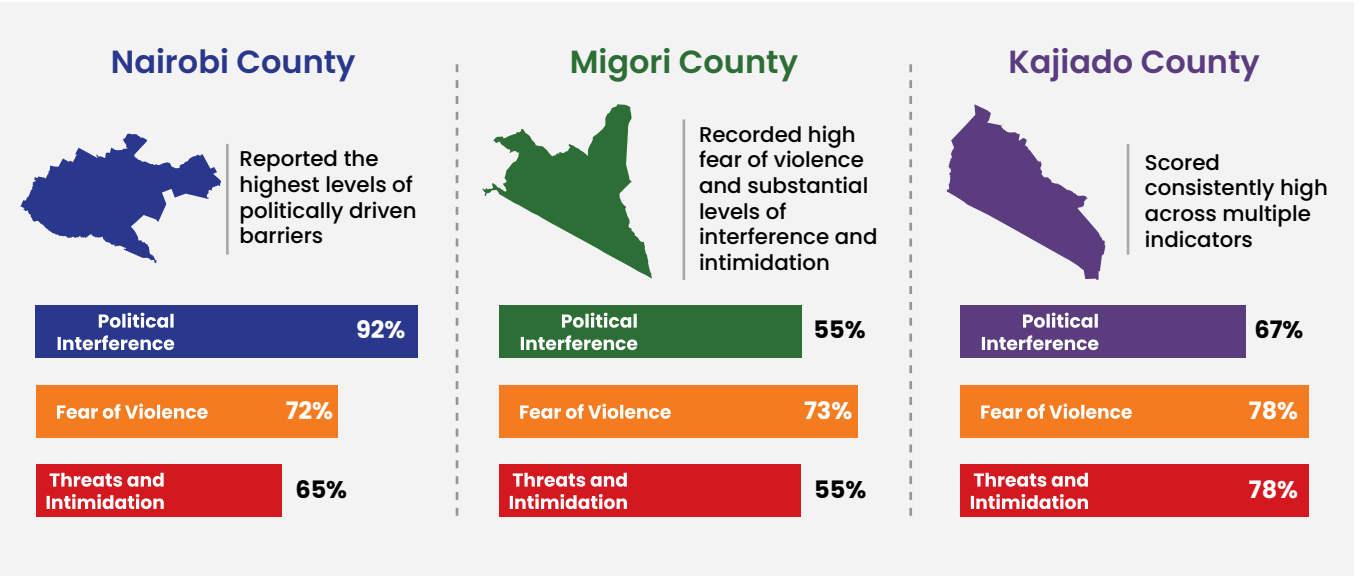
Age Group	Disability Related	Distance to Polling	Fear of Violence	Gender Related	Lack of ID	Lack of Information	Political Interference	Threats and Intimidation
18-24	80%	40%	20%	10%	0%	30%	20%	0%
25-34	39%	46%	7%	9%	7%	43%	26%	4%
35-44	60%	56%	9%	16%	13%	51%	13%	7%
45-54	48%	41%	17%	21%	7%	55%	24%	10%
55+	67%	67%	17%	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%

Table 15: Barrier Profiles by Age Group

Several cross-cutting patterns emerged from the analysis. First, security-related barriers (fear, intimidation, and political interference) were dominant at the aggregate level, although their intensity varied by age groups. Second, structural and accessibility barriers, particularly those related to disability and distance, were markedly different among age groups. The disproportionately high disability related barriers among youth indicate serious gaps in inclusive electoral design. Third, information gaps existed across all age groups, but were most evident among respondents aged 35 and above. This indicates that access to electoral information remains a systemic issue, not limited to traditionally marginalised populations.

Barriers by County

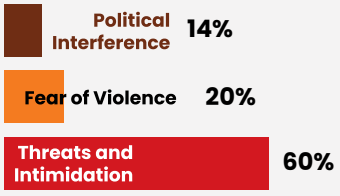
The analysis revealed significant geographic variation in the types and intensity of barriers to electoral participation, underscoring the importance of context-specific dynamics. While national-level trends pointed to insecurity and political interference as dominant barriers, county-level patterns showed distinct configurations shaped by local political, socio-economic, and infrastructural conditions.



Garissa County



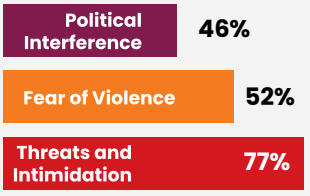
Reported the highest amount of intimidation



Kisumu County



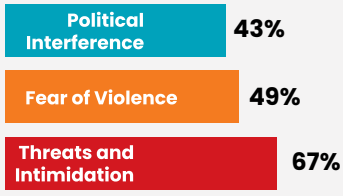
Recorded elevated levels of intimidation



Mombasa County



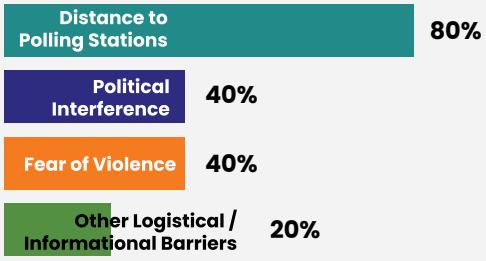
Recorded high intimidation



Wajir County



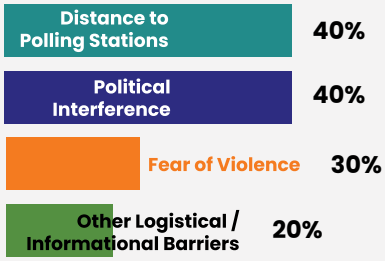
Recorded extremely high levels of distance to polling stations



Isiolo County



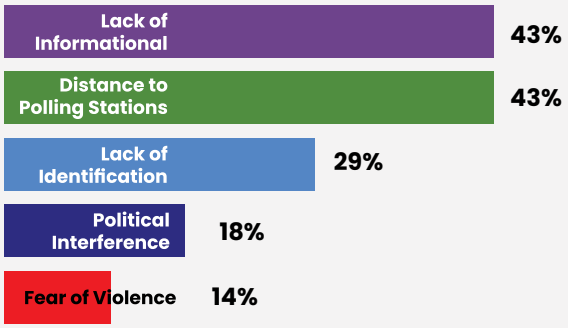
Had a similar pattern, with distance to polling stations and political interference emerging as key barriers



Nakuru County



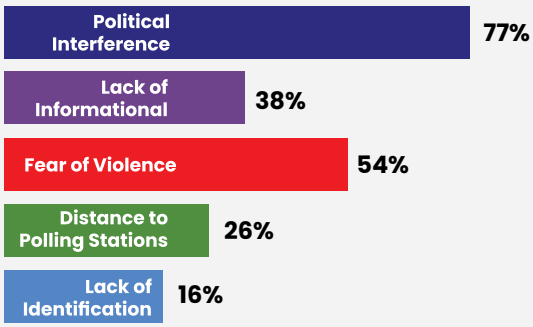
Respondents reported relatively high levels of lack of information and distance to polling stations

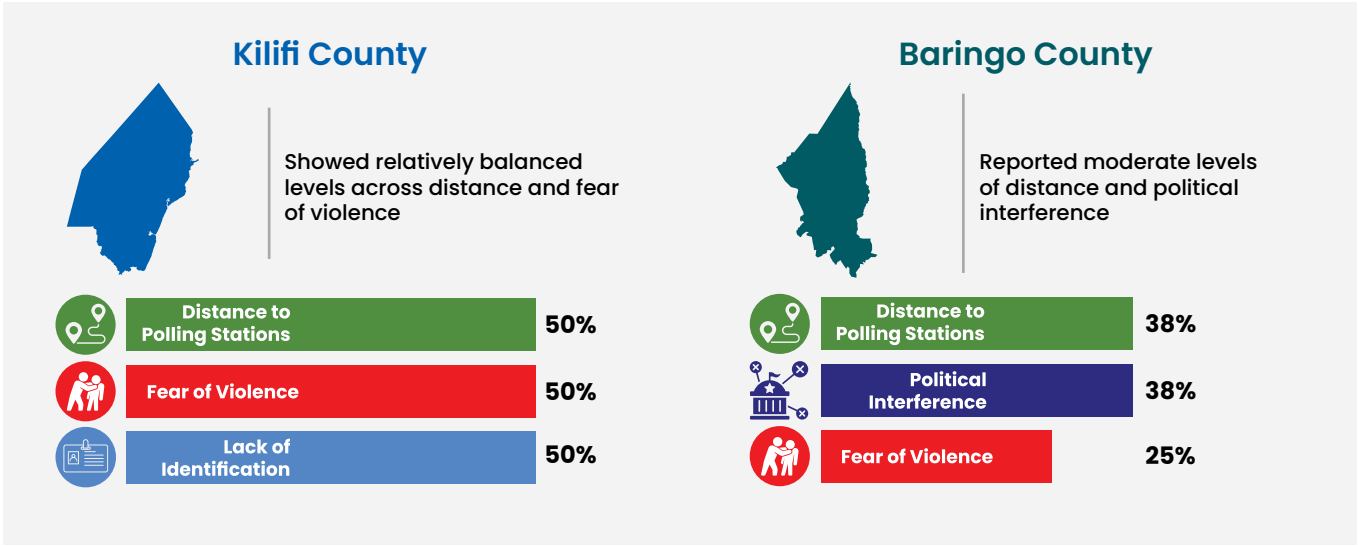


Bungoma County



Recorded high levels of political interference



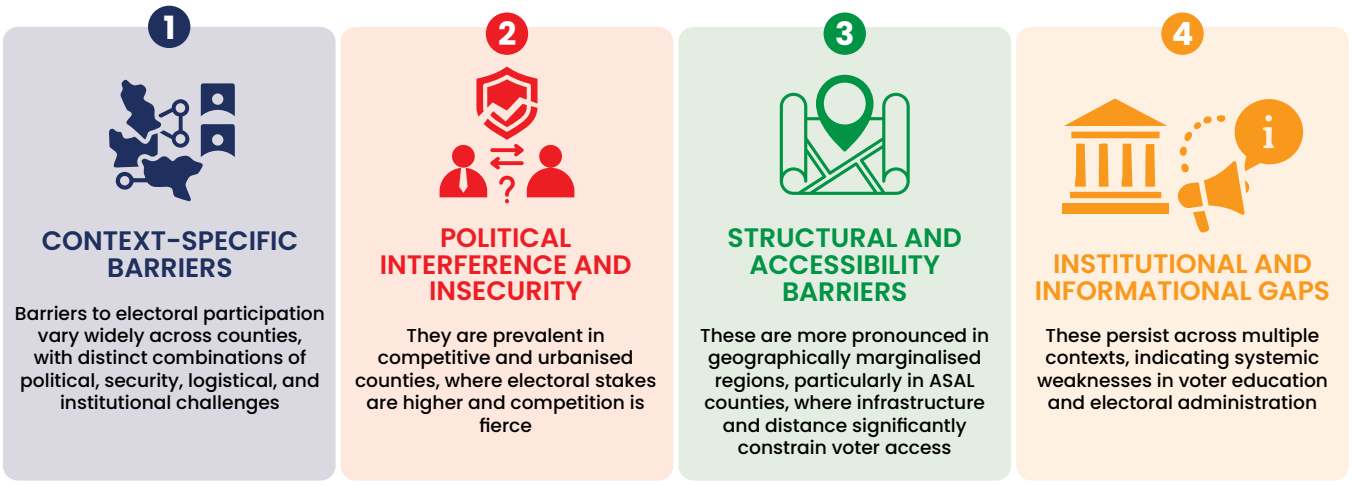


Inclusion Gaps for PWDs and Minority Groups

Despite constitutional guarantees, the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) remains largely tokenistic, with significant physical and institutional barriers continuing to limit their meaningful participation. On polling days, nearly 18.4% of polling stations have historically been inaccessible, while the widespread reliance on assisted voting often compromises the constitutional right to a secret ballot (ELOG, 2022). Ethnic and clan-based minorities face similar forms of exclusion, particularly in counties dominated by a single large clan, where they are frequently excluded from "negotiated democracy" arrangements brokered by community elders.

The study highlights significant inclusion gaps affecting PWDs and minority ethnic groups, reflected in their relatively low representation in the sample (7.56% and 10.76%, respectively). This underrepresentation itself points to broader systemic challenges in ensuring inclusive participation.

Four key insights emerge from the county-level analysis of barriers to electoral participation.



Both the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that PWDs face significant structural barriers to electoral participation. Disability-related challenges emerged as particularly pronounced, especially among younger respondents, suggesting that accessibility constraints are widespread and persistent across age groups. These barriers include limited physical access to polling stations, inadequate availability of assistive services, and broader institutional shortcomings that hinder meaningful and effective participation in the electoral process.

> *"In these areas, infrastructure has not been improved for PWDs to access them, e.g., schools, which are also used as polling stations. This discourages PWDs from attending schools and also voting".*
>
> **FGD Samburu County**
>
> *"In case of polling violence, PWDs may have extreme challenges, encouraging most of them to boycott the exercise".*
>
> **FGD Migori County**

In addition, PWDs report higher perceptions of exclusion as a driver of electoral conflict compared to respondents without disabilities. This suggests that exclusion is not only an outcome of existing inequalities but also a contributing factor to broader electoral tensions. When groups perceive themselves as systematically marginalised, confidence in the legitimacy of electoral processes may be weakened, thereby increasing the risk of conflict.

Minority ethnic groups face multiple vulnerabilities that vary geographically. In some counties, ethnic minorities report moderate to high levels of risk, often linked to underlying ethnic or clan-based divisions that influence local political competitiveness. These findings underscore the importance of localised approaches to inclusion, as national-level trends may mask significant sub-national disparities.

> *"Ethnic minorities in Migori County often face renewed threats and exclusion from the voting process; they feel uncomfortable in such crowds, as some people use hate speech against them".*
>
> **FGD Migori County**

Overall, inclusion gaps for PWDs and minority groups are both structural (access, representation) and perceptual (feelings of exclusion and marginalisation), reinforcing their vulnerability within electoral processes.

Evolving Youth Engagement and Implications on Elections

Kenya's youth demographic, comprising 80% of the population, is currently the most volatile and victimised group, with a shocking 67% unemployment rate making them susceptible to recruitment into political gangs. While the 2024 Gen-Z protests demonstrated a leaderless and tribeless movement employing digital technologies for accountability, they were met with severe state repression, with 69 young people dead in 2025 (MCK, 2024; Missing Voices, 2026). This disillusionment contributed to a record-low youth voter turnout of 40% in 2022, leaving a civic vacuum often filled by online misinformation and spontaneous unrest.

Youth constitute nearly half of the sample (48.69%), making them a key demographic in understanding electoral dynamics. However, their role is complex and evolving. On one hand, youth are identified as highly vulnerable to electoral conflict (64.10%), but they are also commonly implicated as key actors within conflict dynamics, with over half of respondents identifying youth groups as participants in electoral violence.

Which Groups are Most at Risk During Elections?

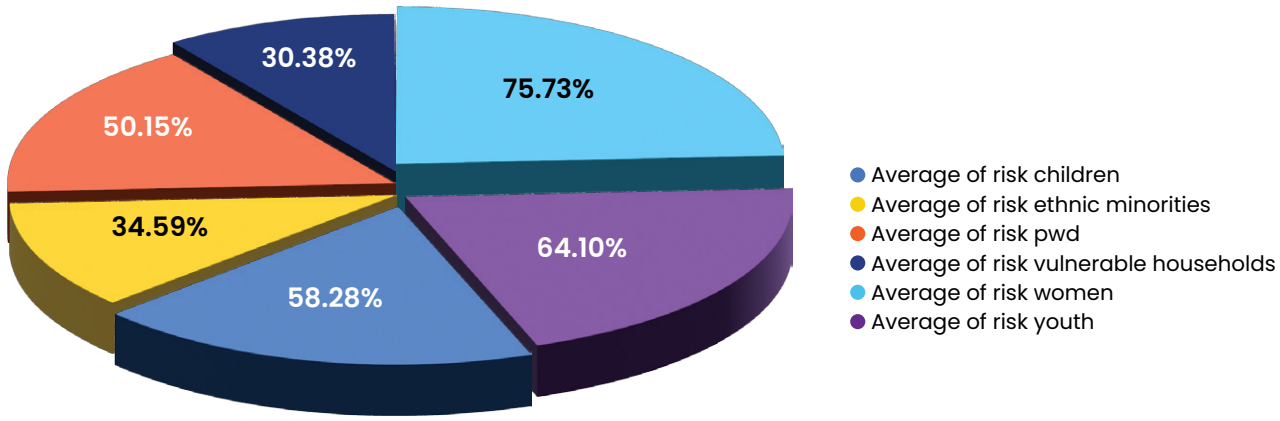


Figure 18: Evolving Youth Engagement and Implications on Elections

Similarly, the qualitative interviews confirm the quantitative findings and their role as participants in electoral violence.

> *"Most youth are used as mobilisers during that period since most are idle, and once it is for money, they are willing to do it".*
>
> **FGD Nakuru County**

Intersectionality in Electoral Conflict Contexts

In Kenya, intersectionality refers to overlapping identities such as gender, disability, and economic class, which increase vulnerability to violence and exclusion. For instance, a woman political aspirant from a patriarchal minority clan who also has a disability challenge faces a triple blow of cultural, accessibility, and financial barriers. Similarly, poor urban youth with limited education are frequently stigmatised as criminals by security forces, making them the most vulnerable group for extrajudicial killings (Missing Voices, 2026). Addressing these overlapping concerns is crucial, as the exclusion of such multi-vulnerable groups directly contributes to voter apathy and decentralised instability.

The qualitative research revealed that vulnerabilities in electoral contexts were not experienced in isolation but were shaped by the interaction of multiple identity factors, such as gender, age, disability status, and geographic location. These intersecting dimensions resulted in context-specific patterns of risk and exclusion.

For example, women in highly competitive counties such as Nairobi were identified as facing significantly higher levels of risk than women in less contested regions, illustrating the interaction between gender and geography. Similarly, youth with disabilities experienced compounded barriers, as disability related constraints intersected with broader youth specific challenges such as limited access to resources and information.

> *"Sexual violence, including threats of rape and gang rape, is frequently used to discourage women from seeking leadership or to punish them for their political affiliations".*
>
> **FGD Nairobi County**

> *"People with disabilities are also affected because they cannot run away from the scene of risk, and no one is willing to evacuate them to safe places during these conflict times".*
>
> **FGD Isiolo County**

> *"Youth are targeted as tools for aspirants to fight one another; in turn, most of them get injured, jailed, and some even end up losing their lives".*
>
> **FGD Kisumu County**

People with disabilities expressed higher feelings of exclusion as a source of conflict, emphasising how structural marginalisation is linked with broader political processes. Information access and risk are also affected by age. Younger respondents are more active on digital platforms, but are also more vulnerable to misinformation and online conflict, whereas older respondents are more focused on political and ethnic drivers of conflict.

> *"The disabled are completely vulnerable, and they are mostly excluded from society".*
>
> **FGD Wajir County**

The findings further revealed that barriers to electoral participation were not exclusively gender-driven but were shaped by broader structural, institutional, and security-related factors affecting multiple population groups. In arid and semi-arid counties, distance to polling stations was more prominent, while in urban and politically competitive areas, fear of violence and political interference were more dominant.

3.5. Peace Architecture and Early Warning and Response Systems

Kenya's peace architecture is a hybrid model that combines formal state-led systems such as the NCIC's Uwiano Platform with informal grassroots structures such as peace committees, the Chiefs' Forum, and non-state actors such as the Kenya Community Support Center (KECOSCE) and Act! (Rohwerder, 2015; ELOG, 2022). While community-enforced frameworks such as the Mabanga Accord, the Nabilatuk Resolution, and the Amaya Agreement have successfully managed localised power-sharing and resource-based tensions, national stability is frequently undermined by jurisdictional overlaps and friction between key agencies such as the IEBC and the NPS (Rohwerder, 2015; EU EOM, 2022).

Despite the effectiveness of Conflict Management Panels (CMPs) in reducing electoral tensions, systemic gaps remain ahead of the 2027 elections. High-level political agreements, such as the 2018 Handshake, have failed to address the entrenched "winner-takes-all" political system or implement the long-neglected recommendations of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) on historical injustices (Rohwerder, 2015; NLC, 2025). In addition, existing peace infrastructures remain inadequately equipped to address Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) and often relegate young people and women to tokenistic roles, excluding these vulnerable groups from meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Critical Connectors of Peace

Religious Leaders
Leverage moral authority to settle disputes

Private sector
Leverage economic interests to settle disputes

GAPS in EWER System
EWER system is rural-centric and rural dependent, lacking the technical capacity to monitor modern online platforms such as Tiktok and Whatsapp.

Awareness of Electoral Early Warning and Reporting Systems

The findings revealed low levels of public awareness of electoral early warning and reporting systems (EWER). Overall, 65.26% of respondents reported they were unaware of any electoral early warning or reporting systems, and only 34.74% indicated their awareness of such mechanisms, as shown below.

Are you aware of any electoral early warning/reporting systems?

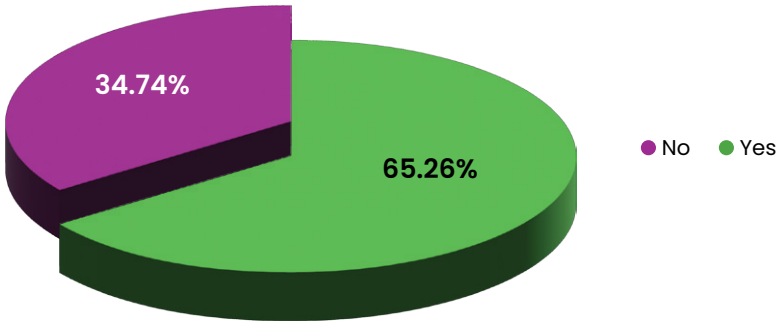


Figure 19: Early Warning/Reporting System Awareness

These findings imply that although electoral peace and conflict prevention structures may exist, their visibility and public reach are limited. The low level of awareness indicates that a sizeable proportion of the population may not know where or how to report electoral threats, violence, intimidation, or emerging tensions during electoral periods. Limited awareness of EWER systems undermines the effectiveness of broader peace-building and conflict prevention efforts. Early warning systems are strongly reliant on timely community reporting, public trust, and active citizen engagement. When awareness is low, incidents may go unreported, response mechanisms may be underutilised, and opportunities for early intervention may be lost.

The findings also point to potential communication and outreach gaps within the existing electoral peace-building mechanisms. This may reflect insufficient public sensitisation, weak community engagement strategies, or uneven dissemination of information across counties and population groups. Importantly, the low awareness levels raise concerns about the inclusivity and accessibility of existing reporting mechanisms, particularly for marginalised populations, rural communities, youth, and first-time voters who may face barriers to participation and access to information.

Awareness by Gender

The findings showed consistently low levels of awareness of electoral early warning and reporting systems among both male and female respondents. Among women, 67.51% reported that they were not aware of any electoral early warning or reporting systems, while only 32.49% indicated awareness. Similarly, among men, 62.65% reported being unaware, compared to 37.35% who reported awareness.

Are you aware of any electoral early warning/reporting systems?

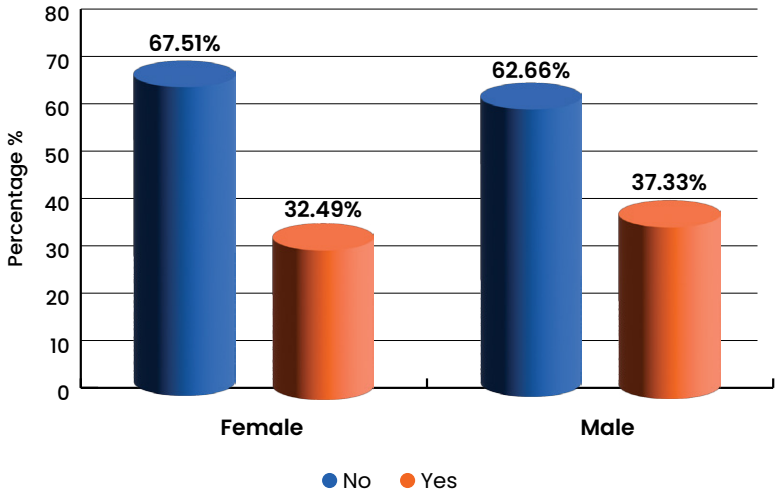


Figure 20: Early Warning/Reporting System Awareness by Gender

Although awareness levels were low in both groups, male respondents demonstrated slightly higher levels of awareness than female respondents. This difference implies that women may face relatively greater barriers to accessing information related to electoral reporting and conflict prevention mechanisms. The findings indicate that limited awareness of early warning systems is not confined to a single gender group but reflects a broader gap in public outreach and civic sensitisation. However, the comparatively lower awareness among women may point to underlying structural or informational inequalities, including differences in access to civic education, public information channels, or participation in political and community processes.

These patterns are important because awareness is a key factor for effective use of reporting and response systems. Where individuals are unaware of existing mechanisms, they are less likely to report incidents of electoral violence, intimidation, or emerging tensions. This may weaken the responsiveness of early warning systems and limit opportunities for timely intervention.

The findings further indicate that existing awareness and outreach initiatives may not be reaching all segments of the population equally. Strengthening gender-responsive communication approaches, expanding community-level sensitisation, and using more accessible and localised information channels may all contribute to increased public awareness and utilisation of electoral early warning mechanisms.

Awareness by Age Group

The findings indicate relatively moderate levels of awareness of EWER systems across all age groups, with only slight variations observed. Respondents aged 35–44 years recorded the highest level of awareness at 37.19%, closely followed by those aged 55 years and above (37.14%). Awareness among respondents aged 18–24 years stood at 33.94%, while those aged 25–34 years reported 33.62% awareness. The 45–54 years age group recorded the lowest awareness level at 33.33%.

Are you aware of EWER, by age-group

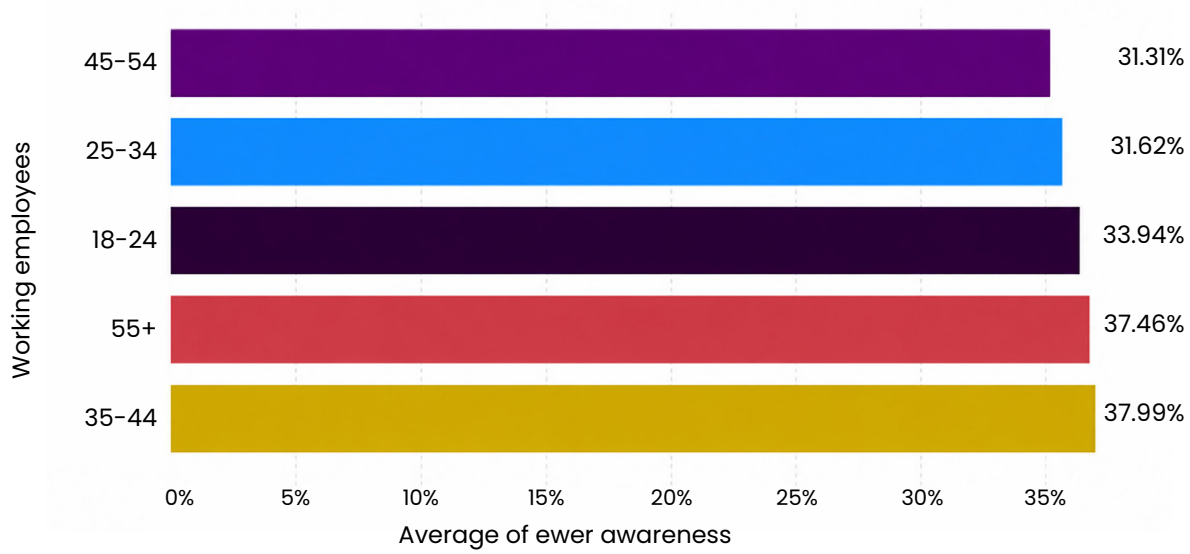


Figure 21: Early Warning/Reporting System Awareness by Age Group

Overall, the differences across age categories are minor, indicating that public awareness of EWER systems is fairly uniform. However, the slightly higher awareness among middle-aged and older respondents may reflect greater involvement in community structures, local leadership, peace committees, or governance processes where early warning mechanisms are more commonly debated and utilised.

The lower awareness levels among younger respondents, particularly those aged 18–34 years, may indicate gaps in youth-targeted outreach and communication strategies. This is particularly significant given the critical role young people often play in political mobilisation, information dissemination, and electoral dynamics, both online and offline.

The findings indicate a need for increased public awareness and civic education initiatives on EWER systems, with a focus on youth-friendly communication approaches, including digital platforms and social media engagement. Enhancing community understanding of available reporting and response mechanisms is important for strengthening early detection, prevention, and mitigation of electoral tensions under the RPS and REDI programmes. Peace committees must be reconstituted to ensure youth representation and peer-to-peer youth engagement in local peacebuilding.

Awareness by County

The findings revealed considerable county-level variations in awareness of electoral early warning and reporting systems (EWER), indicating uneven reach and visibility of existing peace and conflict prevention mechanisms across the country.

The highest levels of awareness were recorded in Baringo (57.69%) and Samburu (51.72%), followed by Nakuru (48.08%) and Uasin Gishu counties (47.06%). These findings indicate that these counties have a relatively stronger public exposure to peace-building, reporting systems, or community sensitisation initiatives. The higher level of awareness may also reflect stronger local peace structures, previous engagement with conflict mitigation initiatives, or more active civic outreach efforts.

Moderate levels of awareness were observed in counties such as Bungoma (45.24%), Kilifi (42.50%), Garissa (39.02%), and Kisumu (38.89%). While awareness in these counties was comparatively better, the findings still indicate that a substantial proportion of respondents remained unaware of available electoral reporting and response mechanisms.

Lower awareness levels were reported in Wajir (34.48%), Mombasa (33.33%), Isiolo (29.41%), and Kajiado counties (27.78%). Particularly low levels of awareness were observed in Migori (25.00%), Nyeri (22.58%), and especially Nairobi counties, where only 13.21% of respondents reported awareness of EWER systems.

County	Are you Aware of EWER
Baringo	57.69%
Bungoma	45.24%
Garissa	39.02%
Isiolo	29.41%
Kajiado	27.78%
Kilifi	42.50%
Kisumu	38.89%
Migori	25.00%
Mombasa	33.33%
Nairobi	13.21%
Nakuru	48.08%
Nyeri	22.58%
Samburu	51.72%
Uasin Gishu	47.06%
Wajir	34.48%

Table 16: Early Warning/Reporting System Awareness by County

The low awareness levels in densely populated and politically significant counties such as Nairobi raise concerns regarding the visibility and accessibility of electoral early warning and reporting mechanisms. Limited public awareness may reduce the likelihood of timely reporting of electoral tensions, violence, or emerging risks, thereby weakening the effectiveness of conflict prevention and response efforts.

Overall, the findings indicate that awareness of EWER systems varies by county, reflecting disparities in outreach, civic education, institutional presence, and local peace infrastructure. These variations underline the need for more localised and targeted awareness strategies, particularly in counties where awareness remains critically low.

> *"Reporting channels exist through police complaint systems and existing community EWER systems, but awareness and access remain uneven, with many community members unclear on how to use them or follow procedures".*
>
> **FGD Kilifi County**

Electoral Early Warning and Reporting (EWER) Mechanisms

According to the findings, respondents utilised a variety of formal and informal electoral early warning and reporting (EWER) mechanisms, including chiefs, police, community reporting structures, media channels, social media, religious institutions, CSOs, and digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp. Chiefs and police emerged as the most prominent and widely recognised mechanisms across most demographic groups and counties, demonstrating the continued importance of formal authority structures in local peace and conflict response systems.

Similarly, the qualitative findings revealed that peacebuilding and electoral early warning and response systems in Kenya are highly decentralised and operate through a combination of formal institutions, community-based actors, religious leaders, civil society organizations, youth groups, and informal local structures. Throughout the interviews, respondents consistently identified chiefs, assistant chiefs, elders, Nyumba Kumi structures, peace committees, religious institutions, youth leaders, and community policing mechanisms as some of the most visible and trusted actors involved in conflict prevention and peacebuilding at the local level. These actors were regarded as playing critical roles in mediation, rumor management, information sharing, and de-escalation of tensions during politically sensitive periods in various counties.

The qualitative findings further revealed that local peace structures were often more accessible and responsive than national institutions, particularly in rural and marginalised areas where community trust in formal state systems remained limited. Respondents emphasised that local administrators, elders, and faith leaders frequently served as first responders during emerging tensions because of their proximity to communities and their understanding of local political and ethnic dynamics. In some counties, community-based peace structures were described as instrumental in facilitating dialogue between rival groups and reducing the escalation of localised disputes.

> *"In Isiolo County, there's a Joint Operation Center where the public can report on electoral malpractices freely. This has aided in curbing electoral crimes. A toll-free number has also been provided for reporting, which makes it easier for the community".*
>
> **FGD Isiolo County**

Despite the existence of these structures, the findings revealed significant weaknesses within the broader early warning and response ecosystem. Respondents identified challenges related to weak coordination among institutions, delayed response mechanisms, insufficient funding, political interference, and limited sustainability of peace initiatives. In many cases, peacebuilding interventions were described as reactive rather than preventive, with institutions becoming more active only during election periods instead of maintaining continuous engagement throughout the electoral cycle.

> *"Coordination is excellent in counties where NGOs actively operate and facilitate Multi-Sector Forums. However, in counties without these interventions, government agencies such as the police and the local administration work in complete silos, severely hindering conflict prevention".*
>
> **KII, County Stakeholder**

> *"Lack of coordination is a significant problem that needs appraisal, characterised by competition and duplication of efforts among civil society actors; disagreements between government agencies, such as the IEBC and the National Registration Bureau, often arise from role and budget considerations rather than a focus on efficiency and complementary roles."*
>
> **KII National Stakeholder**

Overall, the qualitative findings demonstrate that Kenya's peace architecture and EWER systems are multi-layered and deeply embedded within both formal and informal community structures. However, significant gaps remain in coordination, institutional trust, sustainability, and preventive response capacity. The findings indicate that strengthening electoral peace infrastructure will necessitate more coordinated multi-stakeholder engagement, continuous community-based peacebuilding, increased public trust in reporting systems, and improved integration of digital early warning approaches within existing conflict prevention frameworks.

EWER Mechanisms by Age Group

The findings further showed notable age-related differences in the use and awareness of EWER mechanisms. Older respondents, particularly those aged 35–54 years, were the most reliant on formal and community-based structures such as chiefs, police, and community reporting systems. Among respondents aged 45–54 years, awareness and use of chiefs was recorded at 76.32%, while police reporting stood at 65.79%. Similarly, respondents aged 35–44 years reported high levels of engagement with chiefs (71.62%), police (60.81%), and community reporting mechanisms (62.16%). These findings imply that older age groups are more connected to traditional and formalised community governance and reporting structures. Their stronger engagement with chiefs and police may reflect higher institutional trust, greater familiarity with local administrative systems, or stronger integration into established community networks.

In contrast, younger respondents aged 18–24 years demonstrated substantially lower engagement with formal mechanisms such as chiefs and police, while showing more balanced use of media reporting and social media channels. Among this age group, media reporting and social media reach recorded 35.14%, while community reporting stood at 40.54%. This indicates that younger populations are more inclined to use hybrid or digitally mediated modes of information sharing and reporting rather than relying exclusively on formal authority structures.

Respondents aged 25–34 years emerged as the most diversified users of EWER mechanisms, showing moderate-to-high engagement across formal, community, and digital platforms. This group recorded relatively high use of toll-free systems (33.77%), WhatsApp (23.38%), social media (35.07%), and chiefs (61.04%). The findings suggest that this age cohort is highly adaptive across both traditional and digital reporting environments.

The oldest age group (55+) demonstrated strong reliance on chiefs (61.54%) and media reports (38.46%), but indicated relatively little use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp and social media. This demonstrates older respondents' preference for traditional reporting over digital integration.

Age group	Community Reporting	Chiefs	Police	Tollfree	WhatsApp	CSOs	Religious Institution	Media Reporting	Social Media
18-24	40.54%	62.16%	56.76%	18.92%	16.22%	24.32%	13.51%	35.14%	35.14%
25-34	49.35	61.04%	50.65%	33.77%	23.38%	19.48%	28.57%	29.87%	35.07%
35-44	62.16%	71.62%	60.81%	22.97%	16.22%	20.27%	32.43%	28.38%	33.78%
45-54	60.53%	76.32%	65.79%	13.16%	15.79%	15.79%	26.32%	23.68%	15.79%
55+	38.46%	61.54%	30.77%	15.39%	0	0	23.08%	38.46%	15.39%

Table 17: EWER Mechanisms by Age Group

These findings indicate a generational shift in how electoral tensions and risks are communicated and reported. While older groups continue to rely heavily on formal and community-based structures, younger populations increasingly engage with media and digital platforms, highlighting the need for multi-channel early warning and response systems that accommodate diverse communication preferences across age groups.

EWER Mechanisms by Gender

The findings revealed relatively similar patterns in the use of EWER mechanisms among male and female respondents, though differences emerged in relation to preferred reporting channels and institutional reliance. Women reported slightly higher reliance on formal authority structures, particularly chiefs (68.70%) and police (58.26%), compared to men, who reported 65.32% and 54.03%, respectively. Female respondents also demonstrated moderate engagement with community reporting mechanisms (47.83%) and media reporting channels (29.57%). These findings suggest that women place relatively greater trust in structured and formalised reporting systems, potentially due to perceptions of legitimacy, accountability, or protection associated with recognised authority institutions.

Male respondents, on the other hand, demonstrated stronger engagement with community reporting systems (58.07%), religious institutions (32.26%), and social media platforms (34.68%) compared to female respondents. This indicates a broader reliance on informal or socially networked mechanisms among men.

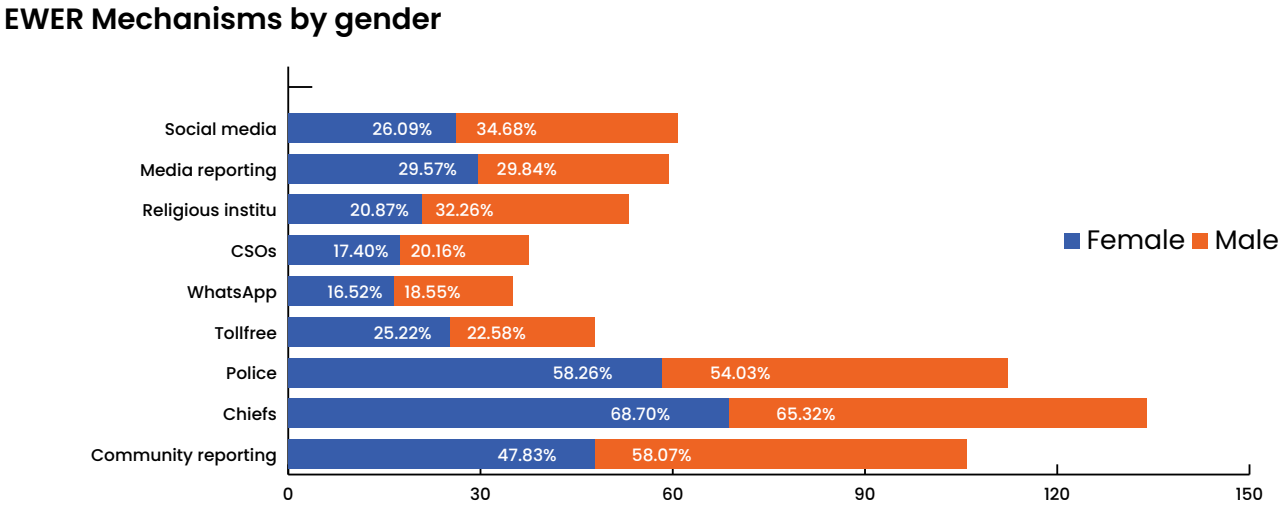


Figure 22: EWER Mechanisms by Gender

Despite these variations, the overall similarities between male and female respondents suggest that EWER systems are broadly shared across genders, with chiefs, police, and community mechanisms remaining central across both groups. However, the differences in reliance patterns highlight the importance of maintaining multiple reporting pathways to ensure accessibility and responsiveness for diverse populations.

EWER Mechanisms by County

The findings showed county-level variation in the use of EWER mechanisms, reflecting differences in local peace infrastructure, institutional presence, communication systems, and community dynamics. In most counties, chiefs and police emerged as the major means for representation (93.33%), with Migori (88.89%) and Baringo (86.67%). Similarly, police reporting mechanisms were most prevalent in Nyeri (100%), Uasin Gishu (91.67%), and Migori counties (88.89%). Strong reliance on community reporting mechanisms was observed in Wajir (90%), Isiolo (80%), Mombasa (77.78%), and Kisumu counties (76.19%). These findings suggest the continued importance of locally embedded and community-driven systems in electoral conflict monitoring and response.

Digital and media-based mechanisms were more unevenly used across counties. Social media engagement was highest in Nyeri (85.71%) and Uasin Gishu counties (62.50%), whereas WhatsApp usage remained low in most counties except Nakuru (36%) and Uasin Gishu (37.50%). These variations may reflect differences in digital access, media engagement, and local communication cultures.

Religious institutions played particularly significant roles in counties such as Migori (88.89%), Isiolo (50%), and Nairobi (50%), implying that faith-based actors remain important components of local peace architecture in some contexts.

The findings also revealed inconsistencies in the use of formal systems across counties. For example, respondents in Wajir reported no reliance on police or toll-free systems, while counties such as Garissa recorded very low engagement across several reporting channels. These gaps may indicate institutional accessibility challenges, limited awareness, weak trust, or infrastructural constraints.

County	Community Reporting	Chiefs	Police	Tollfree	WhatsApp	CSOs	Religious Institutions	Media Reporting	Social Media
Baringo	20.00	86.67	80.00	20.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	66.67	26.67
Bungoma	52.63	57.90	73.68	26.32	10.53	26.32	5.26	26.32	21.05
Garissa	25.00	43.75	18.75	6.25	0.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	0.00
Isiolo	80.00	70.00	80.00	50.00	20.00	50.00	50.00	20.00	20.00
Kajiado	70.00	50.00	50.00	40.00	0.00	0.00	30.00	10.00	30.00
Kilifi	70.59	76.47	76.47	23.53	23.53	23.53	17.65	35.29	17.65
Kisumu	76.19	71.43	28.57	4.76	23.81	23.81	33.33	19.05	38.10
Migori	66.67	88.89	88.89	44.44	0.00	11.11	88.89	11.11	33.33
Mombasa	77.78	81.48	29.63	22.22	11.11	25.93	3.70	22.22	25.93
Nairobi	28.57	57.14	50.00	35.71	14.29	28.57	50.00	50.00	21.43
Nakuru	40.00	48.00	40.00	28.00	36.00	20.00	44.00	32.00	32.00
Nyeri	42.86	42.86	100.00	85.71	14.29	28.57	28.57	42.86	85.71
Samburu	73.33	93.33	73.33	6.67	20.00	20.00	20.00	20.00	26.67
Uasin Gishu	12.50	58.33	91.67	20.83	37.50	12.50	33.33	50.00	62.50
Wajir	90.00	80.00	0.00	0.00	20.00	0.00	40.00	20.00	30.00

Table 18: EWER Mechanisms by County

Overall, the findings demonstrate that electoral early warning and response systems in Kenya operate through a complex combination of formal, informal, community-based, and digital mechanisms. However, the effectiveness and accessibility of these systems vary significantly across counties and demographic groups, highlighting the need for localised and context sensitive approaches to strengthen electoral peace infrastructure.

Perceptions of Safety in Reporting Electoral Violence

The findings revealed a lack of confidence in the safety of reporting election violence. Overall, 65.26% of respondents reported feeling unsafe when reporting electoral violence, while just 34.74% felt secure doing so.

Do yo feel safe reporting electoral violence?

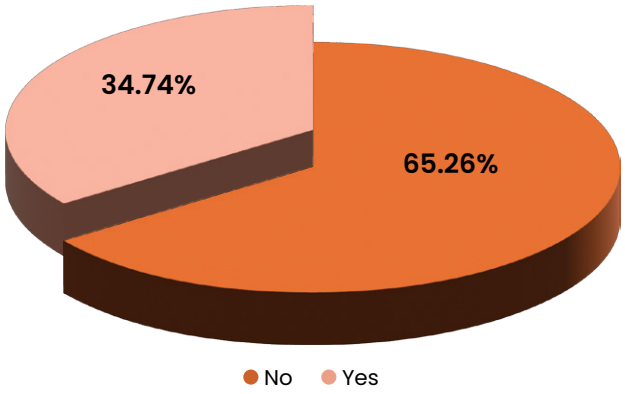


Figure 23: Perceptions of Safety in Reporting Electoral Violence

These findings indicate that a sizeable section of the population may be reluctant to report incidents of electoral violence, intimidation, threats, or political tensions due to fear of retaliation, insecurity, lack of protection, or limited confidence in reporting systems. The low perception of safety raises concerns about the effectiveness and accessibility of existing electoral early warning and response mechanisms, which rely heavily on timely public reporting and community participation.

The findings further indicate that fear and mistrust may hinder the responsiveness of electoral peace infrastructure. When people do not feel safe reporting incidents, critical information may remain unreported, reducing opportunities for early intervention and weakening the overall effectiveness of conflict prevention efforts. The low reporting confidence raises pertinent questions about institutional trust, accountability, and protection mechanisms. Even where reporting channels exist, they may be underutilised if communities perceive them as unsafe, ineffective, politically compromised, or unlikely to produce meaningful action.

These findings suggest that building public trust in reporting mechanisms is crucial to increase electoral early warning and response efficiency. Enhancing confidentiality, protecting reporters, enhancing institutional responsiveness, and building community confidence will be critical in encouraging public engagement in electoral conflict reporting and preventive processes.

Perceptions of Safety in Reporting Electoral Violence by County

The findings revealed substantial county-level differences in perceptions of safety when reporting electoral violence, indicating varied levels of trust, protection, and confidence in existing reporting and response systems across counties. The highest levels of perceived safety in reporting electoral violence were recorded in Baringo County, where 69.23% of respondents reported feeling safe, followed closely by Wajir (68.97%), Samburu (55.17%), Migori (52.78%), and Garissa counties (51.22%). These findings indicate relatively stronger confidence in local reporting systems, community protection mechanisms, or peace structures within these counties.

Moderate levels of perceived safety were observed in Uasin Gishu (45.10%), Mombasa (41.98%), Nakuru (38.46%), Isiolo (38.24%), and Kilifi counties (35.00%). While these counties demonstrated slightly more reporting confidence than the national average, a majority of respondents still indicated that they did not feel secure reporting electoral violence.

County	Do you feel safe reporting electoral violence?	
	NO	YES
Baringo	30.77%	69.23%
Bungoma	88.1%	11.9%
Garissa	48.78%	51.22%
Isiolo	61.76%	38.24%
Kajiado	86.11%	13.89%
Kilifi	65%	35%
Kisumu	74.07%	25.93%
Migori	47.22%	52.78%
Mombasa	58.02%	41.98%
Nairobi	89.62%	10.38%
Nakuru	61.54%	38.46%
Nyeri	80.65%	19.35%
Samburu	44.83%	55.17%
Uasin Gishu	54.9%	45.1%
Wajir	31.03%	68.97%
Total	**65.26%**	**34.74%**

Table 19: Perceptions of Safety in Reporting Electoral Violence by County

The lowest levels of perceived safety were recorded in Nairobi County, where only 10.38% of respondents reported feeling safe reporting electoral violence, while nearly nine in ten respondents (89.62%) indicated that they did not feel safe. Similarly, low levels of confidence were observed in Bungoma (11.90%), Kajiado (13.89%), and Nyeri counties (19.35%).

The low levels of reporting confidence in counties such as Nairobi and Kajiado raise important concerns given their political significance, population density, and potential exposure to electoral tensions. These findings indicate that fear, mistrust, or perceptions of insecurity may significantly discourage public reporting of electoral incidents in some of the country's most politically sensitive environments. The county-level variations further indicate that the effectiveness of electoral early warning and response systems is different across regions. In counties where reporting confidence is low, communities may be less willing to engage with formal reporting channels, thereby lacking opportunities for timely intervention and conflict prevention.

The findings demonstrate that perceptions of safety in reporting electoral violence remain low across most counties, despite significant local differences. These patterns highlight the need for county specific approaches to strengthening trust, improving protection mechanisms, and enhancing the accessibility and responsiveness of electoral reporting systems. Counties with particularly low reporting confidence require intensified community engagement, strong protection assurance, and improved coordination between local peace actors and formal institutions to rebuild public trust in electoral response systems.

Voter Participation and Education

The findings revealed a high level of civic engagement and electoral participation intent among respondents, with 88.2% reporting that they will vote in the 2027 General Election. This demonstrated that despite widespread concerns around electoral processes and governance, the majority of voters view elections as an important mechanism for exercising civic responsibility and influencing public leadership.

Willingness to Vote in the 2027 Elections

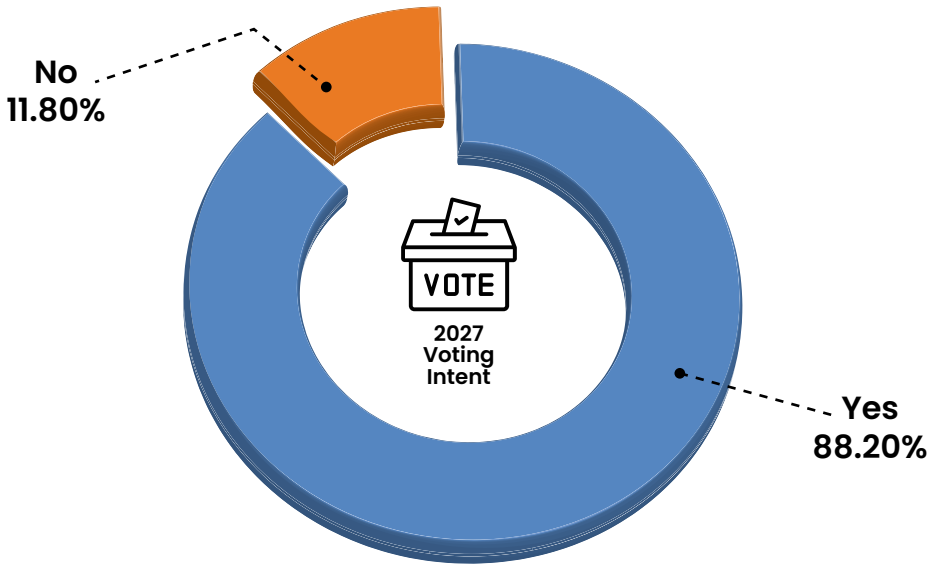


Figure 24: Willingness to Vote in the 2027 Elections

However, the findings also revealed a level of disengagement among some respondents, with 11.8% indicating that they will not participate in the next elections. The reasons provided were challenges related to trust, political efficacy, and citizens' perceptions of the value of electoral participation.

The most cited reason for unwillingness to vote was that respondents "did not see the need to vote" (45.2%), indicating declining confidence in elections to produce meaningful change. This was closely linked to the perception that "voting had no effect on my life" (39.3%), implying that some citizens did not perceive a clear connection between electoral outcomes and improvements in their everyday socio-economic conditions.

Concerns regarding electoral credibility also emerged as a significant barrier, with 31.0% citing fear of rigging. This reiterated concerns about electoral integrity and highlighted the importance of strengthening public confidence in electoral systems, transparency mechanisms, and accountability processes.

Similarly, 28.6% reported a lack of interest in elections, while 21.4% viewed voting as a waste of time, pointing to voter fatigue and reduced political enthusiasm among some groups.

Although reported by a smaller proportion, fear of violence (16.7%) remained a key factor affecting participation. This indicated that memories or expectations of electoral-related insecurity continued to shape citizens' willingness to engage in political processes.

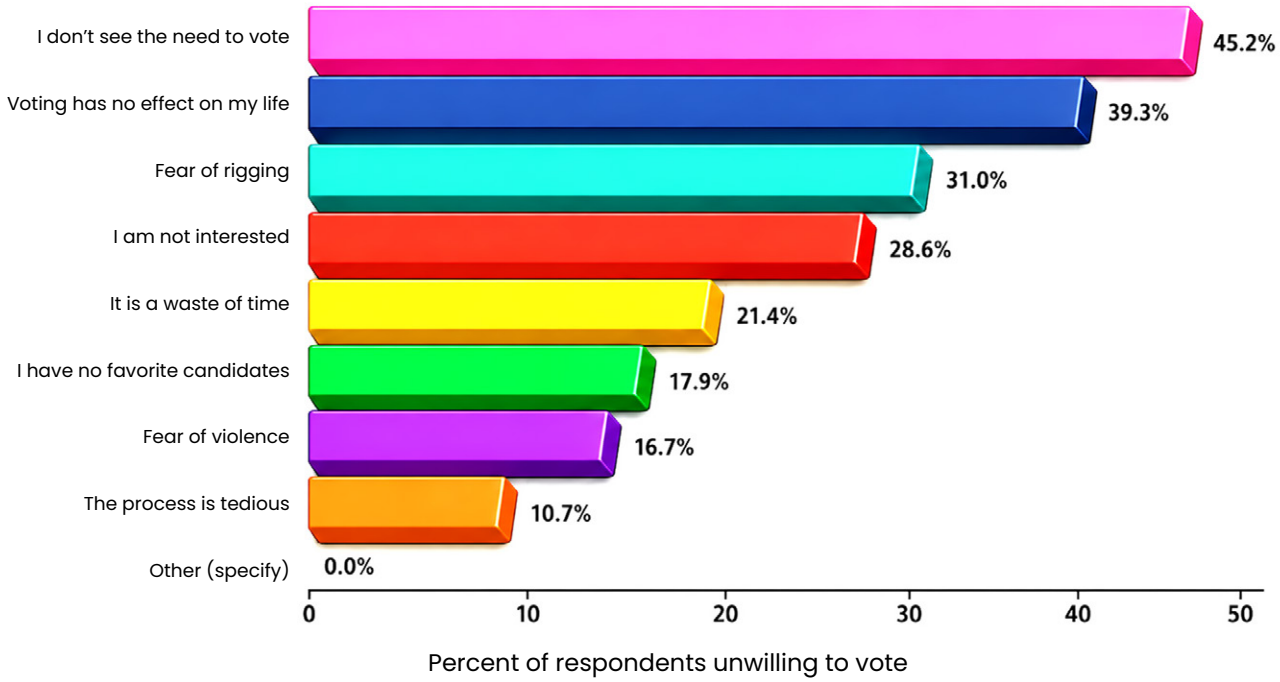


Figure 25: Reasons for Unwillingness to Vote in the 2027 Elections

Overall, the findings demonstrated that Kenya had a strong foundation for civic participation, but sustaining engagement requires addressing underlying issues of trust, inclusion, and the perceived effectiveness of democratic institutions. Strengthening civic education, improving communication on electoral processes, enhancing accountability, and ensuring peaceful electoral environments are critical to maintaining participation and reducing voter disengagement ahead of the 2027 elections.

County-Level Willingness to Participate in the 2027 Elections

The county-level research findings showed that the majority of people will participate in the 2027 elections. In most counties, more than 80% of respondents said they intended to vote, demonstrating sustained interest in electoral participation despite concerns around trust, effectiveness of elections, and electoral risks.

The highest levels of willingness to vote were recorded in Garissa County (100%), followed by Kilifi (96.9%), Kisumu (95.1%), Wajir (94.1%), Samburu (93.9%), and Uasin Gishu counties (93%).

These findings imply strong intentions for civic participation in these counties and reflect confidence in electoral participation as a mechanism for influencing governance outcomes.

High participation intentions were also observed in Nakuru (91.7%) and Bungoma counties (91.4%), indicating that even in counties with a history of political competition or electoral tensions, citizens continued to express interest in engaging through formal democratic processes.

Moderate levels of willingness were recorded in Migori (84.9%), Kajiado (84.8%), and Nairobi counties (83.3%). While the majority of respondents in these counties intended to vote, the relatively higher proportion of respondents unwilling to participate indicates potential challenges related to political trust, perceived exclusion, socio-economic pressures, or concerns about electoral processes.

The lowest levels of willingness were recorded in Nyeri (78.4%), Isiolo (78.4%), and Baringo counties (80%), with one in every five respondents indicating that they did not intend to vote. This suggests a need to further explore the factors influencing disengagement, including perceptions of political responsiveness, confidence in electoral systems, and local conflict dynamics.

County	Yes	No
Baringo	80	20
Bungoma	91.4	8.6
Garissa	100	0
Isiolo	78.4	21.6
Kajiado	84.8	15.2
Kilifi	96.9	3.1
Kisumu	95.1	4.9
Migori	84.9	15.1
Mombasa	80.6	19.4
Nairobi	83.3	16.7
Nakuru	91.7	8.3
Nyeri	78.4	21.6
Samburu	93.9	6.1
Uasin Gishu	93	7
Wajir	94.1	5.9

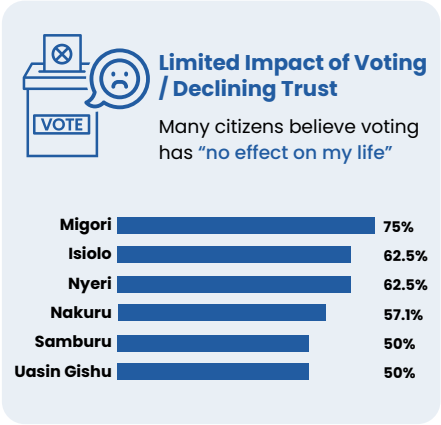
Table 20: Willingness to Participate in the 2027 Elections by County

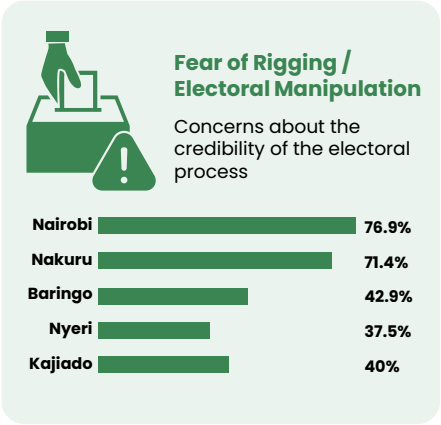
The findings indicate that electoral participation remained high across counties, with willingness to vote exceeding 78% in all study areas. However, the variation between counties highlights the need for county-specific interventions to address barriers to participation, including voter apathy, misinformation, concerns around electoral integrity, and insecurity. Although Kenya's outlook for electoral participation appears positive, sustaining this level of engagement ahead of the 2027 elections will require strengthening trust in electoral institutions, addressing local grievances, and ensuring that citizens perceive elections as meaningful avenues for influencing decisions that affect their lives.

County-Level Reasons for Unwillingness to Vote in the 2027 Elections

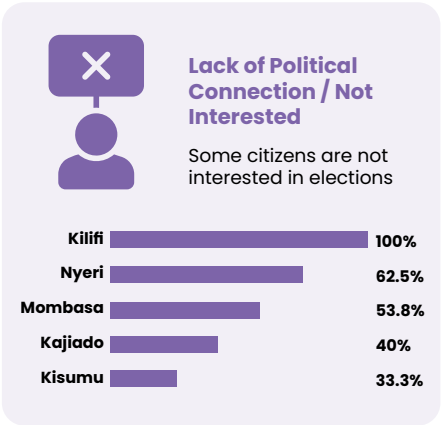
The county-level findings provide further insight into the factors influencing respondents who indicated that they were unwilling to vote in the 2027 elections. Although overall willingness to participate remained high across counties, the reasons for non-participation varied considerably, reflecting differences in political confidence, electoral perceptions, security concerns, and citizens' sense of political efficacy.

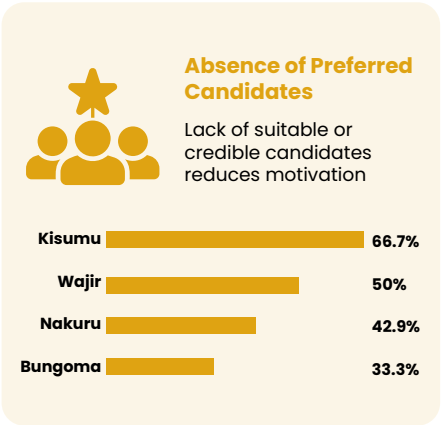
Findings from county-level analysis highlight multiple factors that discourage citizens from participating in elections.

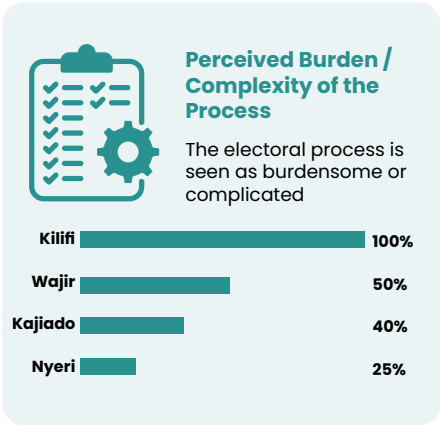












County	Not Interested	Fear of Rigging	No Favourite Candidate	No Effect on Life	Fear of Violence	No Need to Vote	Waste of Time	Process Tedious
Baringo	28.6	42.9	0	14.3	28.6	28.6	0	0
Bungoma	0	0	33.3	0	66.7	66.7	0	0
Garissa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Isiolo	0	0	25	62.5	0	50	12.5	12.5
Kajiado	40	40	20	20	20	80	20	40
Kilifi	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Kisumu	33.3	0	66.7	33.3	0	0	33.3	0
Migori	12.5	12.5	12.5	75	12.5	50	25	0
Mombasa	53.8	7.7	23.1	30.8	15.4	46.2	30.8	15.4
Nairobi	15.4	76.9	0	23.1	38.5	23.1	23.1	7.7
Nakuru	28.6	71.4	42.9	57.1	0	85.7	28.6	0
Nyeri	62.5	37.5	12.5	62.5	0	62.5	25	25
Samburu	0	0	0	50	0	50	0	0
Uasin Gishu	25	25	0	50	0	0	25	0
Wajir	0	0	50	0	50	50	50	0

Table 21: County-Level Reasons for Unwillingness to Vote in the 2027 Elections

The findings show that unwillingness to vote was not driven by a single factor but by a combination of political trust deficits, perceived lack of impact, concerns about electoral integrity, insecurity, and voter disengagement. Although participation intentions remained high, the results indicate the need for targeted interventions that address county specific barriers.

Key priorities for strengthening voter participation include:

- Improving public confidence in electoral processes and results management;
- Strengthening civic and voter education on the role and impact of civic participation and voting;
- Addressing misinformation and disinformation that may undermine trust;
- Enhancing mechanisms for peaceful electoral participation; and
- Improving citizen engagement between election cycles to rebuild trust and political interest.

Overall, the findings suggest that maintaining high participation in 2027 will depend not only on encouraging voter turnout but also on ensuring citizens believe that electoral participation is meaningful, safe, and capable of influencing governance outcomes.

Voter Education

The quantitative findings further demonstrated low levels of access to voter education among respondents over the past two years. Overall, 73.94% of respondents reported they had not received any voter education, while only 26.06% indicated that they had received voter education during the same period, as shown below.

Have you received any voter education in the past 2 years?

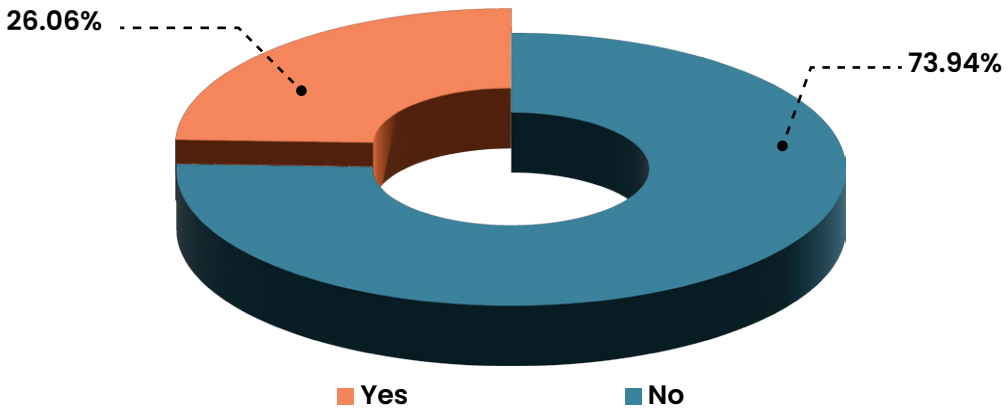


Figure 26: % of Respondents that have Received Voter Education in the Last Two Years.

These findings indicate substantial gaps in voter and public awareness outreach, with a majority of the population unreached by civic sensitisation initiatives. Limited access to voter education may weaken public understanding of electoral processes, democratic participation, citizens' rights and responsibilities, peacebuilding mechanisms, and channels for reporting electoral violence or tensions. The low levels of voter education also have important implications for electoral peace and democratic engagement. Limited civic awareness may increase vulnerability to misinformation and political manipulation, reduce trust in institutions, and limit public understanding of conflict prevention and response systems, including electoral early warning and reporting mechanisms.

The findings further indicate that existing education efforts may not be sufficiently extensive, accessible, or sustained across communities. This may disproportionately affect marginalised populations, rural communities, youth, first-time voters, and groups with limited access to formal information and engagement platforms. Importantly, the low levels of voter education are consistent with other findings in the study, such as low awareness of electoral early warning systems and low confidence in reporting electoral violence. These patterns suggest broader gaps in public engagement, information dissemination, and electoral preparedness.

In general, the findings suggest that civic and voter education programming should be extended and more inclusive, reaching out to diverse populations through both formal and community-based channels. Civic and voter education activities must be strengthened to improve informed participation, build trust in democratic institutions, and increase public engagement in electoral peace and conflict prevention procedures.

The qualitative findings revealed that both civic and voter education remain a critical but unevenly implemented component of electoral preparedness, democratic participation, and conflict prevention in Kenya. Respondents consistently emphasised the importance of civic education in strengthening public awareness of electoral processes, promoting peaceful participation, countering misinformation, and encouraging issue-based political engagement.

This implies that civic and voter education were considered not only as a voter sensitisation exercise but also as a conflict resolution approach. Respondents noted that communities with higher civic awareness levels were perceived to be less vulnerable to political manipulation, incitement, ethnic mobilisation, and misinformation during election periods. Civic and voter education were thus characterised as key mechanisms for strengthening democratic accountability, social cohesion, and informed citizen participation in governance and electoral processes.

> *"Targeted civic mobilisation campaigns, like the youth registration drive 'Niko kadi campaign', have successfully motivated people to "exercise your democratic right" and "register to vote".*
>
> **KII, National Stakeholder**
>
> *"Civic education has worked for us. There are places where a lot of civic education is done, and people understand what the law and civic duty are and what kind of a leader they should go for".*
>
> **KII, County Level Stakeholder**
>
> *"The involvement of people in the electoral processes and also training the young people on the importance of understanding the electoral processes and stop being used as goons and agents of violence".*
>
> **National Stakeholder**

Sources of Civic and Voter Education

The findings revealed that civic and voter education is delivered through a combination of formal and informal channels, reflecting the increasingly diversified nature of information dissemination within electoral and governance contexts. Among respondents who reported receiving civic and voter education, the IEBC emerged as the most frequently cited source at 51.51%, followed closely by social media platforms at 47.90%. Other prominent sources included media outlets (32.12%), religious institutions (24.84%), and CSOs (23.64%).

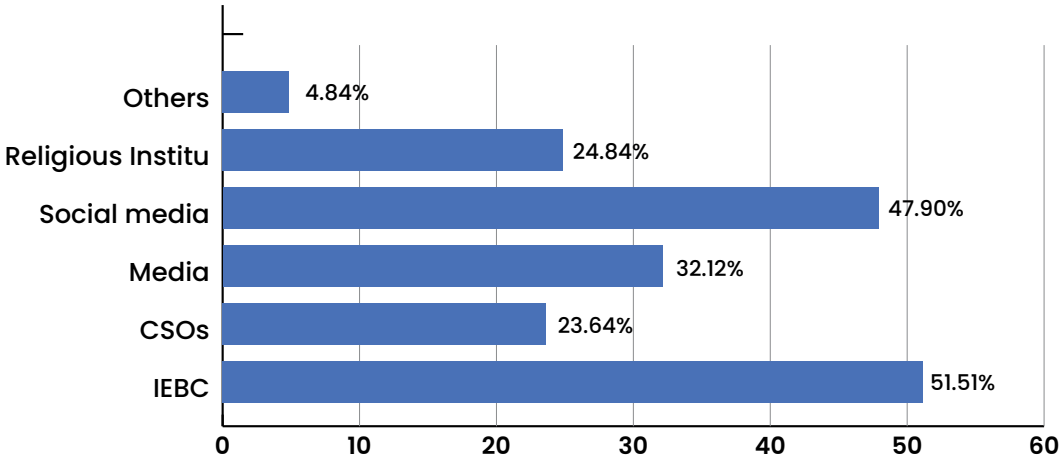


Figure 27: Sources of Civic Education

These findings indicate that while formal institutional actors such as the IEBC continue to play a central role in civic and voter education delivery, digital platforms are becoming increasingly influential channels for civic awareness and public engagement. The high dependence on social media indicates a growing shift toward digitally mediated civic information ecosystems, where online platforms compete with or supplement traditional civic education organisations. The findings further indicate that civic and voter education dissemination is becoming more decentralised and multi-actor driven. Media institutions, faith-based organisations, and CSOs continue to play complementary roles in expanding public access to civic and electoral information, particularly in contexts where formal institutional reach may be limited.

However, the increasing reliance on digital platforms also raises important concerns about the quality of information, exposure to misinformation, and uneven access to verified civic information. While social media expands the reach and accessibility of voter education, it can also expose citizens to politically manipulated or misleading content if not accompanied by strong digital literacy and fact-checking initiatives.

The findings demonstrate that civic and voter education in Kenya is increasingly delivered through a combination of official, informal, and digital communication systems, rather than only traditional institutional channels.

Sources of Civic and Voter Education by Age Group

The findings revealed clear age based differences in the sources from which respondents accessed civic education, highlighting generational transitions in information consumption patterns and engagement channels. Younger respondents aged 18–24 years relied predominantly on social media for civic education, with 50% identifying social media as a key source. In contrast, only 20% of this age group identified the IEBC as a primary civic and voter education provider. Engagement with the media and CSOs remained relatively moderate at 25% each.

These findings suggest that younger populations are more digitally oriented and increasingly depend on online and social networking platforms for civic and political information. The comparatively lower reliance on formal institutional channels among youth may reflect changing communication preferences, greater digital integration, or lower direct engagement with traditional civic outreach mechanisms.

Respondents aged 25–34 years demonstrated the highest levels of diversified civic information access. This group recorded strong engagement with IEBC-led civic and voter education (60.32%), social media (57.14%), and media platforms (44.44%). The findings indicate that this age group actively navigates both formal institutional and digital information spaces, making them one of the most civically connected demographic groups within the study.

Similarly, respondents aged 35–44 years continued to demonstrate strong reliance on IEBC-led civic and voter education (54.76%), alongside moderate engagement with social media (42.86%) and religious institutions (28.57%). Respondents aged 45–54 years showed relatively balanced use across multiple channels, including IEBC (46.67%), social media (43.33%), and religious institutions (36.67%). The oldest respondents aged 55 years and above relied most strongly on IEBC-led civic and voter education (60%) and religious institutions (40%), while engagement with digital platforms remained comparatively low. This pattern reflects a stronger preference for traditional and institution-based communication channels among older populations. The table below elaborates these findings.

Age group	IEBC	CSOs	Media	Social media	Religious institutions	Other
18-24	20.00	25.00	25.00	50.00	10.00	10.00
25-34	60.32	22.22	44.44	57.14	19.05	1.59
35-44	54.76	26.19	30.95	42.86	28.57	7.14
45-54	46.67	23.33	23.33	43.33	36.67	3.33
55+	60.00	20.00	0.00	20.00	40.00	10.00

Table 22: Sources of Voter Education by Age-Group

These findings demonstrate that civic and voter education delivery channels vary significantly across generations. Younger populations are increasingly dependent on digital and social media platforms, while older groups continue to rely heavily on formal institutions and traditional community structures. These patterns highlight the importance of adopting multi-channel civic and voter education strategies that are responsive to the communication preferences of different age groups.

Sources of Civic and Voter Education by Gender

The findings further revealed gender-based differences in civic and voter education sources, showing variations in how male and female respondents access civic and electoral information. Male respondents reported higher reliance on formal institutional and civil society channels, with 58.54% identifying the IEBC as a civic education source compared to 44.58% of female respondents. Similarly, engagement with CSOs was higher among men (29.27%) than women (18.07%). These findings indicate that male respondents may have comparatively greater exposure to formal civic engagement structures, institutional outreach programmes, or organised community engagement platforms.

Female respondents, on the other hand, reported slightly higher reliance on social media (49.40%), compared to male respondents (46.34%). Women also reported slightly higher reliance on media channels, with 33.74% identifying media as a source of civic education compared to 30.49% among men. This indicates that digital platforms play an increasingly important role in expanding access to civic information amongst women, potentially providing alternative channels where access to formal structures is more limited.

Religious institutions were also more influential among male respondents (29.27%) compared to female respondents (20.48%), implying possible differences in community participation patterns or institutional engagement across genders.

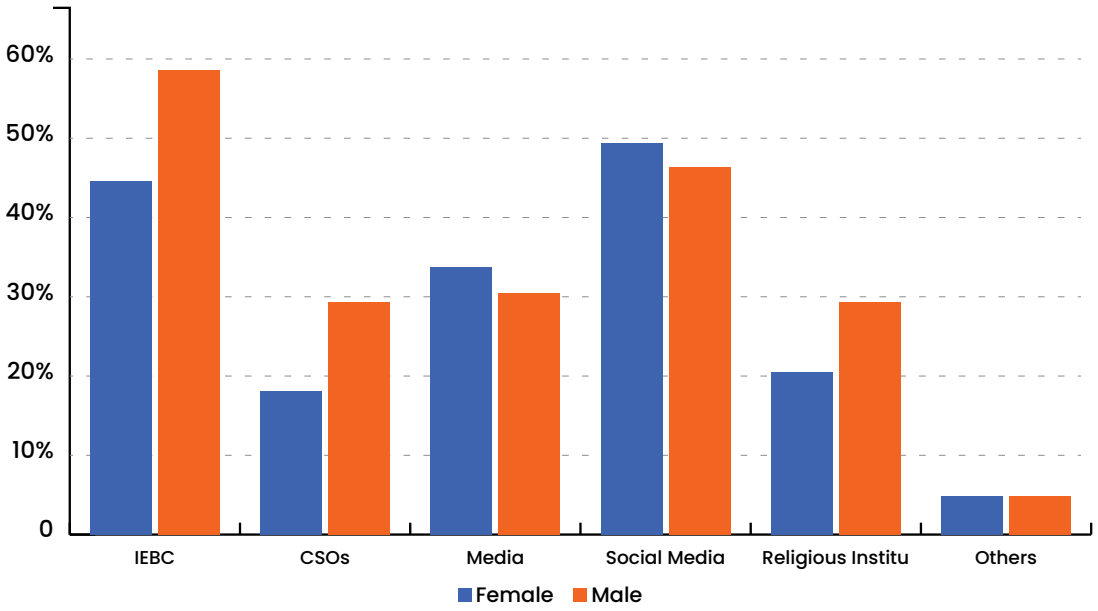


Figure 28: Sources of Civic Education by Gender

Despite these differences, the findings generally demonstrate that both men and women access civic education through a mix of institutional, digital, and community-based channels. However, the varying reliance patterns highlight the need for gender-responsive civic education strategies that utilise multiple communication platforms to ensure broader inclusivity and accessibility.

Sources of Civic and Voter Education by County

The findings revealed substantial county-level variation in civic education sources, demonstrating that access to civic information is highly localised and shaped by differing institutional presence, media access, digital engagement, and community structures.

The IEBC emerged as the dominant civic education provider in counties such as Samburu (100.00%), Nairobi (88.89%), and Uasin Gishu (78.26%). These findings suggest relatively stronger institutional visibility and formal civic education outreach within these counties.

Social media was particularly prominent in Kisumu (75.00%), Mombasa (76.47%), and Wajir counties (75.00%). The strong reliance on digital platforms in these counties reflects the growing importance of online spaces as civic information environments and public engagement platforms.

The CSOs played important roles in Garissa and Isiolo, with CSO engagement reaching 60.00% in both counties. This shows that non-state actors continue to play crucial roles in extending civic education services, particularly in circumstances where formal institutional reach is limited or community-based participation is prominent. Religious institutions emerged as influential civic education actors in Nyeri (66.67%) and Nakuru (60.00%). These findings indicate that faith-based institutions continue to serve as trusted spaces for public awareness, civic engagement, and peace messaging within certain counties.

County	IEBC	CSOs	Media	Social media	Religious institutions	Other
Baringo	20.00	20.00	40.00	40.00	20.00	20.00
Bungoma	60.87	17.39	39.13	47.83	13.04	8.70
Garissa	33.33	60.00	0.00	0.00	6.67	0.00
Isiolo	60.00	60.00	20.00	60.00	0.00	0.00
Kajiado	60.00	0.00	13.33	20.00	13.33	0.00
Kilifi	13.33	33.33	33.33	33.33	46.67	20.00
Kisumu	0.00	25.00	12.50	75.00	0.00	0.00
Migori	75.00	33.33	66.67	66.67	33.33	0.00
Mombasa	41.18	29.41	29.41	76.47	11.77	5.88
Nairobi	88.89	0.00	22.22	66.67	44.44	11.11
Nakuru	50.00	30.00	50.00	40.00	60.00	0.00
Nyeri	0.00	33.33	0.00	0.00	66.67	0.00
Samburu	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Uasin Gishu	78.26	8.70	52.17	65.22	34.78	0.00
Wajir	75.00	0.00	25.00	75.00	25.00	0.00

Table 23: Sources of Civic Education by County

The findings also identified counties where civic education ecosystems appeared relatively narrow or concentrated with limited actors. For example, respondents in Samburu county relied almost entirely on the IEBC, while counties such as Kisumu county demonstrated strong dependence on social media with minimal institutional engagement.

However, qualitative respondents also identified major gaps in civic education delivery across counties and population groups. One of the most prominent issues raised was that civic education activities were often irregular, underfunded, and concentrated around election periods rather than being implemented as continuous public engagement processes. Several respondents noted that many citizens lacked a basic understanding of electoral procedures, governance structures, conflict reporting mechanisms, and constitutional rights, leaving communities vulnerable to manipulation and disinformation.

> *"Issues like the lack of public participation/voter education contribute to low trust and understanding of the electoral processes".*
>
> **KII National Stakeholder**

The qualitative findings also indicated that civic education is increasingly delivered through a combination of formal and informal means. While the IEBC remained an essential source of civic information, respondents noted the increased role of social media, local radio stations, religious institutions, community forums, and civil society organisations in disseminating civic and electoral information.

Digital platforms emerged strongly in the findings, particularly among the youth. Respondents observed that younger citizens increasingly access civic and political information via WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, X (Twitter), and online influencers rather than traditional institutional outreach mechanisms. While this shift was recognised as increasing access to information, respondents also expressed concern regarding the rapid spread of misinformation, hate speech, political propaganda, and unverified content through digital spaces.

> *"There is an urgent need to close the gap in digital engagement by moving away from traditional media to digital platforms and influencers like TikTok to reach the youth with civic education".*
>
> **FGD, Isiolo County**

The findings also highlighted the important role played by religious institutions, community elders, boda boda associations, women's groups, and local civic forums in facilitating grassroots civic awareness and peace messaging. In several counties, respondents described churches, mosques, markets, and public transport spaces as important informal civic education spaces where communities exchanged political information and discussed electoral issues.

> *"Another gap is the need for stronger engagement with Muslim religious leaders to involve them in voter sensitisation and peacebuilding".*
>
> **FGD, Isiolo County**

Respondents further emphasised that civic education approaches often failed to adequately target marginalised groups such as youth, women, persons with disabilities, pastoralist communities, and rural populations. In some counties, civic education materials were described as inaccessible due to language barriers, literacy limitations, digital exclusion, or limited institutional outreach in remote areas.

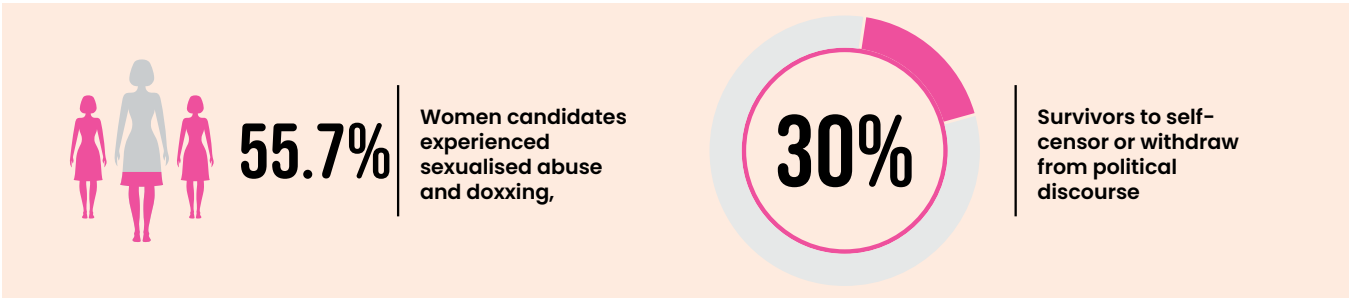
> *"Interventions targeting the youth face demographic-specific logistical hurdles because youth lack essential documentation, for example, the challenges they go through when applying for identity cards".*
>
> **KII, National Stakeholder**
>
> *"Interventions aimed to level the playing field struggle because the Elections Campaign Finance Act regulations remain stalled, giving an advantage to well-resourced competitors over youth, women, and PWDs".*
>
> **KII, National Stakeholder**

The findings additionally showed that a lack of civic education contributes to major electoral vulnerabilities, including low trust in institutions, poor understanding of reporting systems, increased susceptibility to misinformation, and limited engagement in peacebuilding initiatives. Respondents therefore emphasised the need for continuous, localised, and inclusive civic education approaches that go beyond election periods and incorporate digital literacy, peace messaging, constitutional awareness, and conflict prevention education.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that civic education in Kenya operates within an evolving information environment shaped by both traditional community structures and rapidly expanding digital communication spaces. While multiple actors are engaged in civic education and sensitisation efforts, significant gaps remain, such as consistency, inclusivity, coordination, and information quality. Strengthening civic education will therefore require sustained multi-stakeholder collaboration, expanded grassroots outreach, improved digital literacy initiatives, and greater integration of peacebuilding and conflict prevention within civic engagement programming.

3.6. Digital Technologies and Media

Digital technologies have fundamentally reshaped Kenya's political landscape, serving as double-edged tools for both civic empowerment and state-sponsored repression. Digital platforms enabled "leaderless and tribeless" youth mobilisation through encrypted apps and community fundraising. However, this progress has been countered by an "industrialised disinformation ecosystem" in which mercenary influencers and bot farms have weaponised social media to delegitimise electoral authorities (MCK, 2024; ISS, 2025). Hate speech and negative political rhetoric remained pervasive, with emerging threats such as AI-generated deepfakes being identified as sophisticated "test runs" designed to trigger localised panic and erode institutional trust (NCIC, 2022; Oslo Center, 2025).



The Role of Digital Technology in Political Mobilisation and Citizen Engagement

Social Media Use and Digital Engagement

The findings showed that social media usage among respondents was exceptionally high, with 84% reporting that they were active users, compared to only 16% who were not. This indicates that digital platforms were widely accessible and embedded in everyday communication and information-sharing practices.

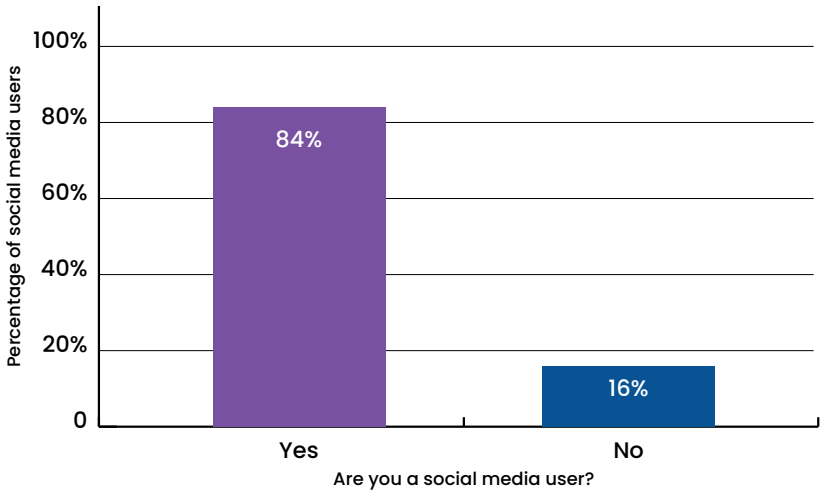


Figure 29: Social Media Use and Digital Engagement

Among social media users, platform use was highly concentrated on a few dominant channels. WhatsApp emerged as the most widely used platform (90%), followed by Facebook (82%), while TikTok showed rapidly growing uptake (70%). Other platforms, such as X (Twitter) and Telegram, recorded significantly lower usage levels. This distribution indicates that electoral information flows are likely to be highly centralised within a small number of platforms, particularly those that enable rapid, network-based sharing.

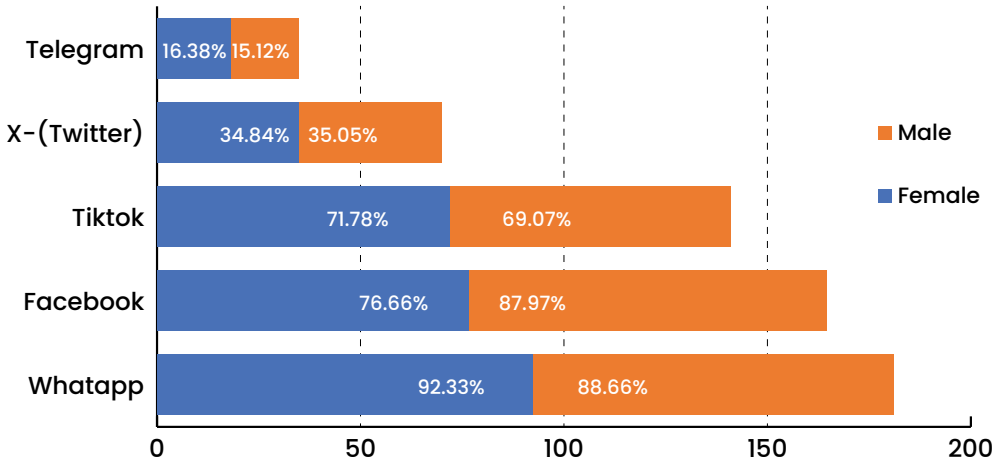


Figure 30: Which Platform do you Mostly Use?

WhatsApp's popularity is especially significant because it allows for closed-group communication and rapid message forwarding, making it difficult to monitor or verify information once it is circulated. Similarly, Facebook remains a key source of news and political content, while TikTok's rapid growth suggests an increasing shift toward short-form, highly engaging content, particularly among younger users.

Social Media Usage by Gender

The study showed that platform usage did not differ significantly by gender, with both male and female respondents reporting similar engagement patterns across major platforms. WhatsApp usage was slightly higher among women (92.33%) compared to men (88.66%), while men reported higher use of Facebook (87.97%) compared to women (76.66%). TikTok usage was also comparable across genders, with 71.78% of women and 69.07% of men reporting use.

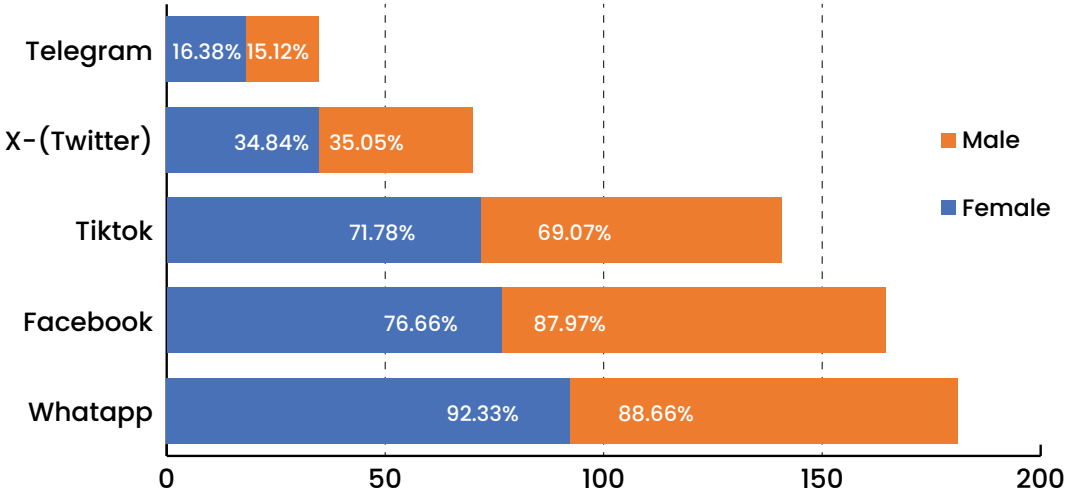


Figure 31: Social Media Usage by Gender

These findings show that access to and use of digital platforms is broadly equitable across gender, indicating that both men and women are similarly exposed to digital information environments. As a result, risks associated with misinformation, political messaging, and online conflict are likely to affect both groups in relatively similar ways.

However, while usage patterns are similar, this does not necessarily imply that experiences within these platforms are the same. Differences in exposure to online harassment or safety perceptions may still exist, even in the absence of significant variation in platform access.

Social Media Usage by Age Group

Disaggregation by age group revealed more pronounced differences in platform use. Respondents aged 25–34 emerged as the most digitally engaged group, with consistently high usage across all platforms, including WhatsApp (90.48%), Facebook (79.05%), TikTok (80.48%), and X (45.24%). This indicates that this cohort is highly connected and actively engaged across multiple digital spaces, positioning them as key actors in information dissemination and online political engagement. Younger respondents aged 18–24 also showed strong engagement, particularly on TikTok (84.76%), suggesting a preference for newer, more dynamic content formats.

In contrast, older age groups (45+) showed high reliance on WhatsApp and Facebook but significantly lower engagement with platforms such as TikTok and X. For example, TikTok usage among those aged 45–54 was only 38.67%, compared to over 80% among the young, as shown in the table below;

Age group	Whatsapp	Facebook	Tiktok	X (Twitter)	Telegram
45-54	97.33%	88.00%	38.67%	18.67%	5.33%
55+	94.74%	78.95%	63.16%	5.26%	0.00%
25-34	90.48%	79.05%	80.48%	45.24%	19.52%
35-44	89.94%	88.76%	63.91%	30.18%	13.02%
18-24	85.71%	75.24%	84.76%	39.05%	22.86%

Table 24: Social Media Usage by Age-Group

These patterns indicate a generational gap in digital behavior, with younger populations engaged across diverse and fast-growing platforms, whereas older groups rely on more established channels. This has significant implications for information dissemination, as different age groups may be exposed to and influenced by different types of content and communication styles.

Misinformation and Disinformation Risks

The findings revealed a strong perception among respondents that misinformation and disinformation contributed significantly to electoral conflict. Overall, 38.81% of respondents reported that misinformation contributed to conflict to a great extent, while an additional 36.05% indicated that it contributed to a very great extent. Combined, this represents 74.86% of respondents, indicating a consensus that misinformation was a major factor in shaping electoral tensions. In contrast, smaller proportions of respondents perceived its contribution as moderate (18.46%) or low (5.23%), while only 0.87% reported that misinformation did not contribute at all. Very few respondents (0.58%) indicated uncertainty or lack of knowledge regarding its impact. These findings suggest that awareness of misinformation as a driver of conflict was widespread and relatively well established among the population.

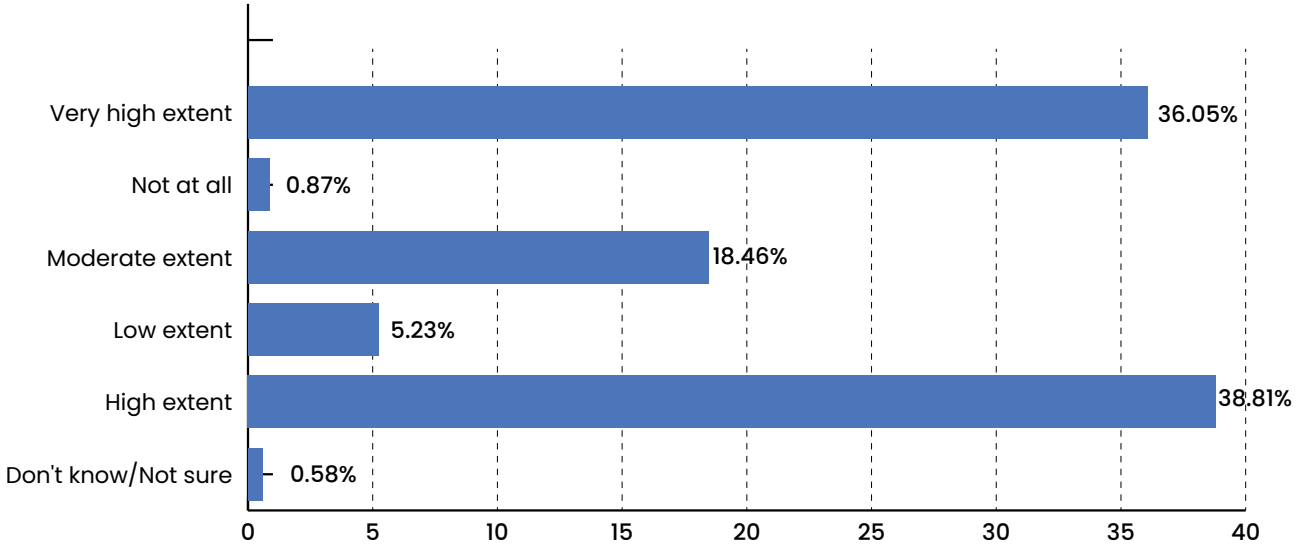


Figure 32: Misinformation and Disinformation Risks

The proportion of respondents identifying misinformation as a significant contributor to electoral conflict indicates that digital information environments are increasingly viewed as influential spaces in electoral processes. In regions characterised by widespread social media use and rapid information dissemination, misleading or false content can quickly shape perceptions, reinforce political or ethnic divisions, and amplify tensions.

The findings also suggest that misinformation is not viewed as an isolated issue but rather as part of a larger ecosystem of political communication and contestation. The strong recognition of its influence indicates a growing public awareness of the role that manipulated, misleading, or emotionally charged content can play in intensifying conflict dynamics.

Importantly, the combination of high digital engagement and strong perceptions of misinformation related risk highlights the vulnerability of online information ecosystems during electoral periods. Where information spreads rapidly across highly connected platforms, the absence of effective verification practices or trusted corrective mechanisms may allow harmful narratives to circulate widely before they are challenged.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that misinformation and disinformation were widely perceived as significant risks to electoral integrity and social cohesion. This underscores the importance of strengthening digital literacy, promoting responsible information sharing, and enhancing mechanisms for monitoring and responding to harmful online content during electoral processes.

Hate Speech and Negative Political Rhetoric

Although not explicitly measured as a standalone variable in the quantitative method, the findings show that exposure to online conflict and politically charged narratives was widespread, leading to negative political rhetoric and potential hate speech within digital spaces.

Respondents reported significant exposure to politically driven tensions, generally tied to ethnic and political divisions, which are commonly amplified by social media platforms. This pattern demonstrates that digital platforms are used not only to disseminate information, but also to support polarising narratives and antagonistic political discourse. In such circumstances, rhetoric that emphasises division, whether along political, ethnic, or social lines, can contribute to increased mistrust and polarisation among communities.

The interaction between political competition and digital amplification suggests that online discourse plays a role in escalating tensions, particularly where existing grievances or divisions are present. Although the findings do not directly quantify hate speech, the reported exposure to online conflict highlights the importance of addressing harmful narratives and inflammatory communication as part of broader electoral risk mitigation efforts.

The qualitative findings strongly support the quantitative evidence that politically charged narratives, inflammatory rhetoric, and hate speech are common in both online and offline electoral spaces. Respondents across KIIs and FGDs repeatedly identified provocative political language, ethnic incitement, propaganda, and divisive messaging as major drivers of electoral tensions and violence. Participants described politicians using *"inflammatory language to attack or spoil the name of opponents,"* spreading *"hate speech during campaigns,"* and mobilising supporters through ethnic and clan-based narratives.

> *"Online platforms escalate hate speech and identity-based narratives, entrenching hostility and increasing the risk of physical retaliation during election periods".*
>
> **FGD, Nakuru County**
>
> *"Politicians pass hate speech through X, leading to high tensions".*
>
> **FGD, Nairobi County**

Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and online blogs were frequently cited as key channels through which misinformation, rumours, edited content, and inflammatory narratives spread quickly. Respondents noted that misleading information about candidates, manipulated election results, and politically motivated propaganda often circulate widely before verification, creating panic, anger, and mistrust amongst communities. Participants in several counties noted that online platforms have become "major arenas for political contestation and hate speech," with youth and political influencers acting as "keyboard warriors" to increase tensions and hostility.

> *"Facebook and WhatsApp are mainly used to post and spread threats. Some youth will post messages and make politicians' images using AI. So, some people will take it seriously because they don't know how to verify AI information".*
>
> **FGD, Nairobi County**

The qualitative findings also show that online rhetoric is deeply linked to existing ethnic and political divisions. Elections are often portrayed as contests between communities rather than policy debates, promoting defensive voting patterns, mistrust, and polarisation. Participants observed that politicians use historical grievances, tribal affiliations, and fears of exclusion to mobilise support, with social media increasing the dissemination and reach of these narratives.

The interaction between political competition and digital amplification, therefore, suggests that online discourse plays a significant role in escalating tensions, particularly in situations where historical grievances, unemployment, and ethnic divisions already exist. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening monitoring, counter-messaging, digital literacy, and peace communication initiatives to mitigate the influence of harmful rhetoric and inflammatory online content during electoral periods.

> *"Kenyans on Twitter' and social media users spread misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. This online activity is highly volatile, as a small piece of misinformation can trigger riots, disrupt polling centres, and cause chaos around the declaration of results".*
>
> **KII, National level actor**

Emerging Digital Threats: AI, Deepfakes, and Synthetic Media Panic

Although the quantitative method did not directly capture evidence of AI-generated misinformation, deepfakes, or synthetic media, the qualitative findings show a digital environment highly vulnerable to these emerging threats. Respondents consistently described social media as spaces where misinformation, rumours, manipulated content, and unverified political narratives spread quickly and are often regarded as factual before verification. Participants emphasised that fake election results, edited videos, propaganda clips, and fabricated political claims contribute to the escalation of confusion, panic, and conflict during elections. In this context, the introduction of more sophisticated technologies such as AI-generated content and deepfakes could significantly intensify mistrust and information disorder. The rapid circulation of manipulated content in highly polarised political environments makes it difficult for citizens to distinguish between authentic and fabricated information.

> *"AI is the major trigger of election violence where fake result sheets are circulated as the final results before the final results are actually released by the IEBC. These fake results fuel immediate protests and claims of election rigging".*
>
> **FGD, Kisumu County**
>
> *"AI pictures are wrongly sent to mislead the community about rival politicians, hence causing character defamation, and the community tends to believe that misinformation".*
>
> **FGD, Mombasa County**

The findings further show that high emotional and ethnic polarisation, along with low trust in institutions and inconsistent fact-checking practices, create an ideal environment for synthetic media to influence public perceptions and electoral behaviour. Youth who are highly active online and frequently exposed to political content may be particularly vulnerable to manipulated digital narratives. Although these threats were not directly observed within the quantitative survey, the qualitative evidence suggests forward-looking preparedness measures, including digital literacy campaigns, stronger fact-checking systems, early warning mechanisms, and collaboration with technology platforms to detect and respond to manipulated content in future electoral cycles.

> *"Training Young Digital Peacebuilders to rapidly flag fake news and provide counter-narratives on social media".*
>
> **KII, National Level actor**

In addition to the primary data, a brief digital misinformation documentation was conducted. The documentation indicated that emerging digital threats such as AI-generated misinformation, deep fakes, impersonation accounts, and synthetic media are increasingly becoming common in Kenya's electoral information ecosystem. The supplemental misinformation review further reveals that these risks are becoming more sophisticated ahead of the 2027 elections. Fake endorsement graphics falsely branded as credible media content, fake statements attributed to IEBC leadership, manipulated voter registration narratives, doctored newspaper front pages, impersonation of official IEBC social media accounts, and circulation of altered tally forms are all documented cases intended to influence public trust in electoral processes.

Fake IEBC Chair Statement

Date: April 2026
Source: Africa Check
Description: Graphics falsely attributing election outcome statements to IEBC leadership.



Importantly, the report also documents the emerging use of AI-generated political videos and synthetic media designed to distort political messaging and manipulate public opinion. These developments significantly heighten the risk of information disorder, particularly in situations where political tensions, ethnic polarisation, and institutional mistrust already exist. Participants in the qualitative discussions noted that many citizens struggle to verify online information and frequently share politically charged content based on emotion, ethnic affiliation, or party loyalty rather than factual accuracy.

The combination of high social media usage, rapid information dissemination, and increasing sophistication of manipulated content creates a fertile environment for deepfakes and AI-generated misinformation to influence political perceptions, fuel panic, and escalate electoral tensions. Youth populations, who are among the most digitally connected groups, are particularly vulnerable both as consumers and amplifiers of synthetic political content.



Digital Risk Mitigation Strategies

1. Investment in digital literacy, fact-checking systems
2. Investment in early warning and rapid response mechanisms
3. Monitoring of synthetic media
4. Collaboration of electoral institutions, CSOs, media organisations, and technology platforms to safeguard information integrity.

Feedback from the May 2026 stakeholder validation workshop highlighted a critical imbalance in contemporary digital peacebuilding discourse, which places disproportionate emphasis on end-user behaviour while overlooking the structural role of technology companies. For digital risk mitigation to be sustainable, the diagnostic lens must shift from focusing solely on individual "keyboard warriors" to also encompass institutional platform accountability.

Civic literacy and user focused fact-checking initiatives are vital, though they address the symptoms rather than the architecture of information disorder. A truly comprehensive digital peacebuilding strategy requires holding global technology platforms such as Meta, Google, and TikTok accountable for how their algorithms commercialise outrage and accelerate the spread of harmful content. Effective risk mitigation ahead of the 2027 cycle relies on a robust multi-stakeholder governance model that bridges global tech firms, state regulators, electoral bodies, and civil society actors, principally the IEBC, the NCIC, and the MCK.

This collective infrastructure must shift towards co-creating context-specific, localised interventions. Rather than relying on generic, automated moderation algorithms that fail to understand Kenyan political idioms, vernacular languages, or localised Sheng expressions, interventions must be deeply grounded in Kenya's unique socio-political realities. Crucially, this framework must reject heavy-handed digital repression or arbitrary state censorship; instead, it should uphold the constitutional right to freedom of speech while ensuring that platform mechanics are actively optimised to prevent the real world escalation of electoral violence, systemic disinformation, and TFGBV.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)

Although TFGBV was not explicitly measured in the quantitative study, the qualitative findings highlighted significant risks of gendered online harassment, intimidation, and abuse within electoral contexts. Women participants and key informants described electoral environments characterised by hostility, online misinformation, harassment of women leaders, and the use of degrading rhetoric targeting female candidates and politically active women.

Respondents reported that women in politics are often subjected to body shaming, insults, sexualised attacks, character assassination, and online ridicule aimed at discouraging their political participation. Female aspirants were described as "soft targets" who face intimidation, manipulation, and public humiliation both online and offline. Participants also noted that women are disproportionately vulnerable to harassment in politically polarised online spaces, particularly during campaigns and nominations.

> *"Women in politics are targeted twice as often as men with online abuse. This includes AI-manipulated images, "sextortion," and deep-seated gendered disinformation designed to shame them into retreating from the public sphere".*
>
> **FGD, Nakuru County**

The larger environment of online conflict, misinformation, and hate speech identified in the qualitative findings further increases the likelihood of gendered digital abuse. Social media platforms were described as spaces where political attacks spread rapidly, often without accountability, creating an environment where women face disproportionate intimidation and psychological harm.

The findings also indicate that fear and insecurity may discourage women from fully participating in political processes, reporting violence, or publicly expressing political opinions. This underscores the importance of incorporating gender-sensitive digital safety measures, stronger online protections, and targeted monitoring of online abuse against women in future electoral programming and research.

> *"Women experience cyberbullying, like the other day I saw a woman representative from Kericho County on Facebook; someone took her photo and edited it with AI and changed the skirt to a very short mini-skirt; this creates a negative image and tension to women leaders".*
>
> **FGD, Kisumu County**

Digital Repression and Civil Space Surveillance

Although the study did not directly investigate digital repression or online surveillance, the qualitative findings reveal broader concerns regarding trust, safety, and confidence in civic participation and reporting systems. Across discussions, respondents expressed fear of retaliation, mistrust of institutions, and doubts about whether authorities would act fairly or protect those reporting violence or misconduct. Participants commonly mentioned circumstances in which people are hesitant to publicly express political opinions, particularly online, for fear of being intimidated, profiled, victimised, or facing retaliation from political actors and supporters. In some counties, respondents noted that online forums have become highly polarised and hostile, discouraging open dialogue and increasing self-censorship among citizens.

> *"Fear of retaliation and lack of confidentiality, including concerns about compromised handling by some security agents and administrators, further discourage reporting, as individuals worry about being identified by perpetrators or political actors and exposed to intimidation, or subjected to escalation of harm, including serious violence".*
>
> **FGD, Mombasa County**

The findings also indicate a lack of trust in institutions responsible for addressing electoral violence, hate speech, and misinformation. Some participants questioned the impartiality of law enforcement agencies and oversight institutions, while others expressed concerns that reporting violence or online abuse may expose individuals to retaliation or social targeting.

> *"Weak trust in institutions also undermines reporting, driven by perceptions that complaints are not addressed fairly or promptly, that oversight bodies may be politically influenced, and that past experiences of delayed or absent action reduce willingness to report".*
>
> **FGD, Mombasa County**

Although these patterns do not provide sufficient evidence to conclude the existence of formal digital repression or surveillance systems, they do suggest that perceived insecurity and lack of confidence in safe civic participation remain important challenges. The combination of online hostility, political polarisation, and limited trust in protection mechanisms may discourage citizens from engaging freely in digital civic spaces or reporting electoral misconduct. These findings highlight the need to strengthen safe reporting mechanisms, accountability systems, and protection of digital civic participation during electoral periods.

3.7. The 2027 County Electoral Conflict Risk Index

3.7.1. The ECRI Framework: Dimensions and Scoring Logic

Baseline Electoral Conflict Risk Patterns

The county prioritisation analysis reveals important differences in the nature and distribution of electoral conflict risk across the study areas. Using the ECRI framework, counties were assessed based on conflict severity, vulnerability of affected groups, institutional trust deficits, digital misinformation risk, coordination gaps, and existing local peace capacity. The resulting composite scores highlight persistent structural hotspots as well as counties facing emerging forms of electoral risk.

Under the baseline prioritisation model, counties with higher levels of conflict exposure, institutional weaknesses, and limited response capacity recorded the highest prioritisation scores. The findings show that electoral conflict risk is shaped by the combined influence of violence exposure, governance deficits, digital dynamics, and weaknesses in local response systems.

Historical Hotspot Scenario

The analysis further shows that county rankings change depending on the type of risk emphasised. Under the historical hotspot scenario, greater weight was assigned to violence severity, vulnerability, and institutional trust deficits. Counties traditionally associated with recurrent electoral tensions ranked highest under this scenario. Bungoma, Nyeri, and Uasin Gishu emerged prominently, reflecting the influence of long-standing governance challenges, conflict histories, and institutional mistrust.

Emerging Hotspot Scenario

Under the emerging hotspot scenario, greater emphasis was placed on digital misinformation, coordination gaps, and local response capacity. The pattern of prioritisation shifted considerably. Baringo and Migori Counties rose substantially in the rankings, indicating growing exposure to dynamic and evolving forms of conflict risk. These counties may not consistently appear as traditional hotspots, yet they face increasing vulnerabilities linked to weak coordination systems, limited effectiveness of early warning mechanisms, and changing information ecosystems.

Persistent High Priority Counties

Some counties remained consistently high priority across both simulations. Bungoma, Nairobi, and Kilifi counties maintained high rankings regardless of the weighting structure applied. This pattern suggests the presence of both structural and emerging risks within the same counties. Conflict vulnerability in these areas appears to be reinforced by historical tensions, governance concerns, digital exposure, and institutional coordination gaps. In contrast, Garissa and Wajir counties remained consistently low priority across the simulations. The findings suggest lower overall exposure to the combined risk factors assessed within the framework, although continued monitoring and preventive engagement remain necessary.

The scenario analysis demonstrates that electoral conflict dynamics are evolving and that prioritisation outcomes depend heavily on the type of risk being considered. Some counties continue to reflect characteristics of historical conflict hotspots. Others are increasingly shaped by emerging pressures associated with misinformation, coordination weaknesses, and uneven peace infrastructure. The findings highlight the need for differentiated peacebuilding approaches that respond to both structural grievances and evolving forms of electoral risk.

Indicator	Baseline / Most Likely Scenario (%)	Historical Hotspot Scenario (%)	Emerging Hotspot Scenario (%)
Conflict severity	25	35	15
Vulnerability of affected groups	20	25	15
Institutional trust deficit	20	20	15
Digital misinformation risk	10	5	25
Coordination gaps	15	10	20
Existing local capacity	10	5	10
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 25: ECRI Prioritisation Scenarios and Weighting Structure

2027 Election Scenarios

County	Baseline Priority	Historical Scenario	Emerging Scenario	Overall Classification	Programmatic Implication
Baringo	Low	Low	High	Emerging hotspot	Early warning and coordination
Bungoma	High	High	High	Robust hotspot	Integrated intervention
Garissa	Low	Low	Low	Stable low priority	Preventive monitoring
Kilifi	Medium	High	High	Emerging structural hotspot	Combined prevention and response
Migori	High	Medium	High	Emerging hotspot	Adaptive peacebuilding
Nairobi	High	High	High	Robust hotspot	Integrated intervention
Nyeri	High	High	Low	Historical hotspot	Structural peacebuilding
Uasin Gishu	Medium	High	Medium	Historical leaning hotspot	Governance and reconciliation

Table 26: Integrated County Prioritisation and Electoral Hotspot Scenarios

The research team clarifies that the ECRI rankings represent a contextual snapshot rather than static, permanent risk profiles. The baseline data was collected during a specific window heavily dominated by high-level political realignments. However, the Kenyan electoral environment is exceptionally fluid, with proximate economic shocks and historical triggers rapidly altering local risk thresholds. For instance, weeks after fieldwork, country-wide protests over fuel prices dramatically escalated tensions in urban and peri-urban areas, demonstrating how quickly socio-economic grievances can alter a county's stability.

Traditionally volatile counties like Kisumu and Nakuru may currently register lower baseline scores due to temporary, elite-level political alliances, but their underlying structural grievances (such as historical land disputes and high numbers of economically vulnerable youth) remain entirely intact. Upcoming milestones, including the anniversary of the 2024 Gen Z-led protests and the annual Saba Saba commemorations, serve as highly volatile focal points that could trigger rapid conflict escalation. Consequently, the report firmly emphasises that standalone, baseline mapping is insufficient; Act!'s REDI and RPS programmes must implement regular, cyclical conflict analysis to support truly adaptive programming ahead of 2027.

3.7.2. Regional Hotspot Analysis

The regional hotspot analysis presents county-level electoral conflict dynamics based on the baseline or most likely prioritisation scenario developed under the ECRI framework. The analysis combines composite county scores with qualitative insights from respondents to identify localised patterns of tension, conflict drivers, and institutional vulnerabilities across the study areas.

The findings show that electoral conflict risk varies considerably across counties in both intensity and shape. In some counties, risk is driven primarily by long-standing structural grievances such as land disputes, historical conflict, and political exclusion.

In others, emerging pressures linked to urbanisation, demographic change, political mobilisation, and localised competition are becoming increasingly significant.

The sections below present the county-level hotspot profiles grouped according to priority classification under the baseline scenario.

High Priority Counties

Bungoma County

Bungoma County exhibits a persistent high risk, particularly in Mt. Elgon areas such as Cheptais and Chepyuk, where land disputes and historical grievances remain unresolved. Electoral periods tend to reactivate these tensions through local political contestation. Respondents emphasised that *"land ownership conflicts and political interference trigger violence."*

Migori County

Migori County is an emerging hotspot, with areas such as Migori Town, Awendo, and Nyatike experiencing increasing political competition and localised tensions. Border dynamics and community interactions further heighten volatility during elections. The main drivers of conflict include economic exclusion, political incitement, and heightened competition during elections. Respondents observed that *"elections intensify divisions between communities."*

Nairobi County

Nairobi County remains a high-risk electoral conflict hotspot, with key areas of concern including Kibera, Mathare, and Huruma where high population density, youth unemployment, and political mobilisation intersect. Qualitative findings indicate that tensions in these areas can escalate rapidly during campaigns and the periods when results are announced. The main drivers of conflict include economic exclusion, political incitement, and heightened competition during elections. As one respondent noted, *"youth idleness and political incitement fuel unrest."*

Nyeri County

Nyeri County reflects high but more latent risk, with hotspots around Nyeri Town and surrounding settlements like Majengo, where political tensions remain largely subdued outside election periods but can intensify during political competition. The primary drivers include political rivalry and underlying divisions linked to electoral contestation. Respondents indicated that *"political rivalry still creates tension during elections."*

Samburu County

Samburu's risk is concentrated in areas such as Baragoi and Maralal, where inter-communal conflict and resource competition remain central drivers. These tensions are often linked to pastoral livelihoods and territorial disputes. Samburu's high-risk ranking is heavily driven by its borders with neighbouring communities, including the Pokot regions. Fights over grazing land and water tend to worsen during election cycles. If local early warning systems are underutilised or lack funding, these localised border arguments can quickly blow up into larger, coordinated ethnic clashes. Political periods often intensify these existing tensions. As one respondent noted, *"conflicts over grazing land escalate during political periods."*

Medium Priority Counties

Kajiado County

Kajiado County presents a moderate electoral conflict risk, particularly within the rapidly expanding peri-urban centres of Kitengela and Ongata Rongai, where resource pressures, demographic shifts, and political competition converge. The principal drivers of this risk include increasing pressure on natural and public resources, rapid demographic transformation, and localised political tensions. Respondents noted that *"competition in fast-growing towns creates political tension."*

Kilifi County

Kilifi County presents moderate but increasingly significant electoral conflict risk, particularly in areas such as Kilifi Town and Mtwapa where socio-economic vulnerabilities intersect with political dynamics and rapid urbanisation. The main drivers include poverty, exclusion, and localised political competition. As one respondent noted, *"poverty and politics combine to increase tensions."*

Mombasa County

Mombasa County exhibits a moderate but persistent electoral conflict risk, with hotspots such as Kisauni, Kongowea, and Likoni driven by urban density and political mobilisation. Although tensions are generally localised, they have the potential to escalate during election campaigns and the announcement of results. The principal drivers of conflict include socio-economic inequalities, urban congestion, and intensified political competition. As one respondent observed, *"crowded settlements and politics make violence more likely."*

Nakuru County

Nakuru County reflects a balanced risk profile, with known hotspots such as Kaptembwa, Bondeni, and Rhonda linked to historical ethnic tensions and urban pressures. Although relatively stable, underlying structural drivers remain present. While Nakuru's baseline classification is 'Medium Priority' due to a temporary cooling of overt political hostilities under current inter-ethnic alliances, the county retains deep structural vulnerabilities, particularly unresolved land grievances and pockets of marginalised urban youth in settlements. Spontaneous economic triggers, such as the mid-2026 fuel price shocks, proved that local micro-dynamics can decouple from national political narratives and escalate rapidly into physical property destruction or citizen-state confrontations. Respondents highlighted that *"ethnic divisions still influence tensions during elections."*

Uasin Gishu County

Uasin Gishu County carries a moderate risk, particularly in areas such as Langas and Burnt Forest, where historical conflict patterns persist. While land disputes conflict has reduced, latent tensions remain tied to land and political competition. Respondents indicated that *"past conflicts still shape current fears."*



Low Priority Counties

Baringo County

Baringo County presents a low but emerging electoral conflict risk. Key hotspots include Marigat and surrounding areas, where inter-community tensions and resource based competition occasionally intensify. Although the county is not currently classified as high risk, underlying tensions remain present and could contribute to increased vulnerability during periods of heightened political activity. Respondents observed that *"conflicts can arise quickly if not managed."*

Garissa County

Garissa County remains a relatively low-risk area, with limited evidence of widespread electoral conflict pressures. However, its international border with Somalia represents a significant security consideration, as cross-border movements and related security developments have the potential to rapidly alter local risk dynamics. Peacebuilding actors should maintain close monitoring of border areas to ensure that external security shocks do not undermine civic participation, disrupt electoral processes, or affect the accessibility and safety of polling centres.

Electoral tensions within the county are generally localised and comparatively less influenced by political competition than in other high-risk counties. The primary drivers of residual risk include occasional community disputes and localised resource related tensions. As one respondent noted, *"there is little election related violence here."*

Isiolo County

Isiolo County presents a moderate-to-low but stable risk, with localised tensions in areas such as Bulapesa and Wabera often linked to inter-community relations. Key hotspots include Bulapesa and Wabera, where clan and community dynamics occasionally generate tensions during political periods. The main drivers include localised identity based competition and political rivalry. Respondents noted that *"clan differences can cause tension but are usually managed."*

Kisumu County

Kisumu County's classification as a "Declining Hotspot" reflects improvements in institutional mitigation measures and evolving political alignments; however, this should not be interpreted as a complete elimination of electoral conflict risk. The county's underlying structures of protest-related mobilisation remain highly responsive to emerging grievances and triggering events. Historical flashpoints such as Kondele continue to exhibit heightened sensitivity to economic hardships, while localised triggers, including upcoming civic commemorations such as Saba Saba, have the potential to reactivate dormant networks of mobilisation and rapidly alter the county's risk profile. Current conditions indicate improved stability and strengthened local mechanisms for managing political tensions. Nevertheless, the principal drivers of residual risk remain political mobilisation and historical patterns of protest related unrest. Respondents indicated that *"violence has reduced compared to previous elections."*

Low Priority Counties

Wajir County

Wajir County remains low risk with relatively stable electoral conditions across the county. Tensions are localised and are often managed through existing community and clan-based mechanisms. The primary drivers include occasional inter-clan disagreements and localised political competition. Respondents noted that *"communities usually resolve disputes peacefully."*



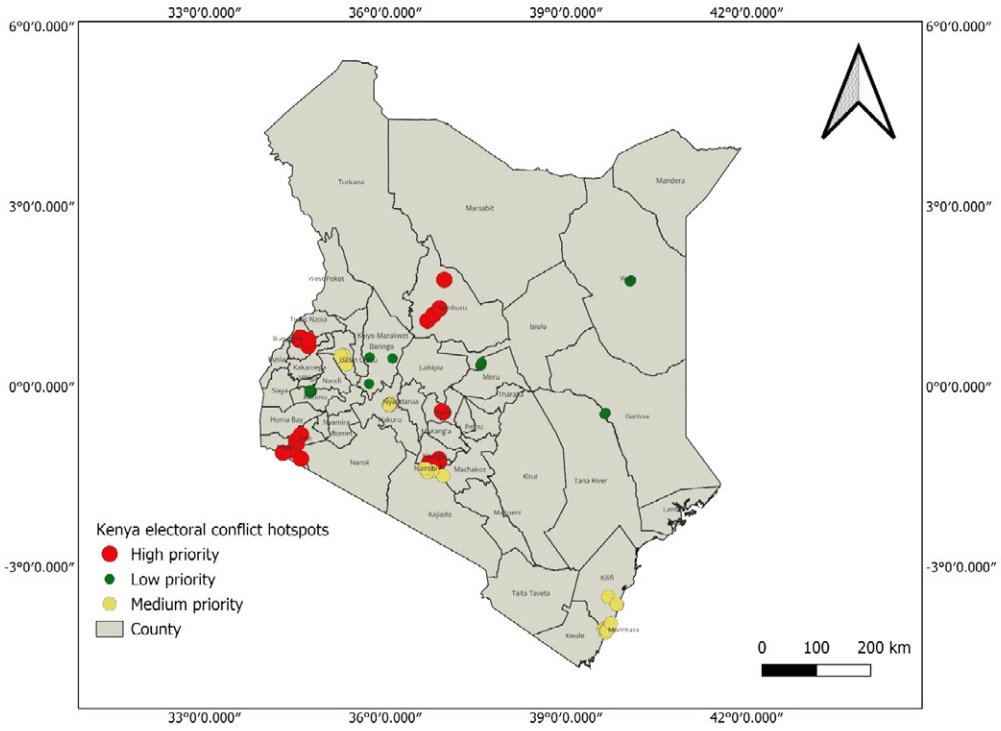


Figure 33: Distribution of the Selected Electoral Conflict Hotspots in Kenya

3.7.3 Conflict Risk Corridors and Emerging Patterns

Beyond county-level hotspot classification, the analysis identifies broader conflict risk corridors along which electoral tensions, political mobilisation, grievances, and misinformation may spread. These corridors cut across administrative boundaries and reflect the interaction between historical vulnerabilities, socio-economic pressures, political competition, population movement, and information dynamics. Understanding these corridors is critical for anticipating how localised tensions may escalate or spread during electoral periods.

- **Political Mobilisation Corridors**

  Political mobilisation corridors are regions where political actors, supporters, and organised networks interact to influence electoral outcomes. These corridors are characterised by high levels of political engagement, competitive contests, youth mobilisation, and political narratives' capacity to rapidly spread through community and digital networks.

  The **Nairobi informal settlement corridor**, particularly areas such as Kibera, Mathare, Mukuru, and Dandora, represents a key urban mobilisation corridor. High population density, youth unemployment, economic exclusion, and competition for political power all contribute to situations in which political grievances can quickly escalate into demonstrations, protests, or confrontations. The concentration of informal networks and rapid information flows accelerates the speed at which tensions can escalate.

  In **Western Kenya**, the corridor linking Bungoma, Kakamega, Busia, and parts of Trans Nzoia reflects the influence of identity based mobilisation, historical grievances, and intense local political competition. Electoral competition in these areas often interacts with longstanding perceptions of exclusion, land concerns, and community interests, creating pathways through which political disputes may become communal tensions.

The **Coastal political corridor**, which includes Mombasa, Kilifi, Kwale, and Lamu, is characterised by longstanding concerns over land ownership, socio-economic exclusion, and identity politics. Rapid urbanisation, resource competitiveness, and local political competition contribute to increased sensitivity during election periods.

- **Resource and Land Conflict Corridors**

  Resource-based conflict corridors are driven by competition over land, grazing areas, water resources, and livelihoods. These corridors often combine historical grievances with contemporary pressures, making them particularly vulnerable to escalation during politically sensitive periods.

  The **North Rift corridor**, which includes Laikipia, Baringo, Samburu, Turkana, and West Pokot, remains a source of resource-related conflict. Pastoralist–farmer relations, livestock movement routes, access to water and grazing land, and unresolved land disputes continue to influence conflict dynamics. During elections, political competition can amplify existing grievances by framing resource disputes through ethnic or community interests.

  The **Mt. Elgon and Western border corridor**, covering parts of Bungoma, Trans Nzoia, and neighbouring cross-border regions, is characterised by unresolved land ownership disputes, historical grievances, and perceptions of exclusion. These tensions often become politically activated when competing actors mobilise communities around land and identity narratives.

- **Border and Cross-Border Corridors**

  Border corridors reflect the influence of movement, trade, shared community networks, and security dynamics that extend beyond county boundaries. These regions are key since electoral tensions may be influenced by actors, narratives, or movements originating outside the immediate electoral area.

  The **Kenya–Somalia border corridor**, including Garissa, Wajir, and Mandera, is influenced by clan dynamics, cross-border mobility, security concerns, and local political competition. While existing community mechanisms resolve many disputes, political competition can introduce new pressures that challenge existing conflict management systems.

  The **Kenya–Uganda corridor**, including Busia, Bungoma, and Trans Nzoia, is characterised by trade routes, population movement, and close social and economic interaction across borders. Electoral narratives or tensions in one area may influence neighbouring communities through existing social networks.

  The **Kenya–Tanzania corridor**, including Kajiado, Narok, and Taita Taveta, reflects pastoral mobility, land pressure, and competition over natural resources. Changing land use patterns and demographic shifts continue to influence local tensions.

- **Urban Expansion and Demographic Pressure Corridors**

  Urban expansion corridors represent regions where rapid population growth, changing demographics, and competition for services create new forms of electoral vulnerability. These regions may not necessarily have historical conflict patterns, but can become emerging hotspots due to increased pressure on housing, employment, infrastructure, and political representation.

  The **Nairobi Metropolitan corridor**, connecting Nairobi, Kiambu, Machakos, and Kajiado, is characterised by rapid urban growth, informal settlements, changing voter demographics, and competition over land and services. These pressures can create grievances that political actors may mobilise during elections.

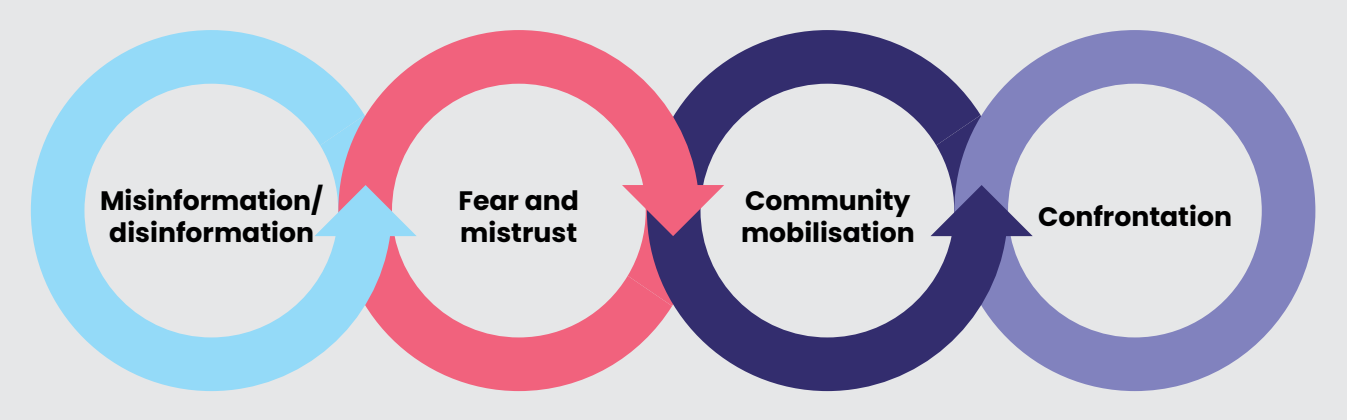
Similarly, the **Mombasa–Kilifi growth corridor** is experiencing rapid urbanisation linked to tourism, infrastructure development, and land conversion. Unequal access to economic opportunities, youth unemployment, and competition over development benefits may contribute to political tensions.

- **Information and Misinformation Corridors**

Unlike geographic corridors, information corridors refer to the pathways through which narratives, rumours, and political messages spread rapidly across communities. Digital platforms, social media networks, local communication channels, and community influencers increasingly shape perceptions of electoral legitimacy and security.

During elections, misinformation and disinformation can amplify existing grievances by spreading misleading information about electoral processes, political actors, or community threats. Examples include forged election results, rumours of attacks, claims of voter suppression, or manipulated images and videos.

The risk pathway can be understood as:



Preparedness, therefore, requires strengthening early warning systems to monitor information trends, improving access to trusted information sources, and establishing rapid communication mechanisms to counter harmful narratives before they escalate.

- **Economic Stress Corridors**

Economic stress corridors highlight areas where poverty, unemployment, and limited livelihood opportunities increase vulnerability to political mobilisation. Economic grievances do not automatically lead to violence, but can create conditions where communities are more susceptible to recruitment, patronage networks, and political manipulation.

Informal settlement belts in cities such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, and Nakuru demonstrate how unemployment, cost of living pressures, and competition for resources can intersect with political competition. Young people facing limited economic opportunities may become targets for mobilisation through promises of financial support, political inclusion, or access to opportunities.

Implication for Electoral Preparedness

These corridors demonstrate that electoral conflict risk is driven not only by past violence but also by how grievances, actors, information, and resources interact over time. Preparedness efforts should therefore move beyond fixed hotspot mapping toward continuous monitoring of emerging corridors, identifying escalation triggers, strengthening local peace structures, and improving rapid response mechanisms.

CHAPTER 4

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

• Governance and Institutional Trust

The qualitative findings reveal widespread concerns regarding the credibility, accountability, and responsiveness of institutions during electoral periods. Distrust in electoral processes was particularly mentioned during party nominations and announcement of results, which respondents consistently identified as high-risk stages of the electoral cycle. Participants described nominations as "unfair," "not free," and influenced by "boardroom deals, favouritism, and stolen nominations." Similar concerns emerged regarding vote tallying and delayed announcement of results, with respondents noting that perceptions of manipulation often trigger protests and localised unrest.

Security institutions also elicited mixed reactions. In several counties, respondents reported that police responses are often viewed as selective or politically motivated, particularly during demonstrations and youth protests. In some informal settlements, participants stated that "police attack groups without reason," while others believed that delayed security responses allow tensions to escalate further. At the same time, local peace committees, elders, and community-level coordination structures were viewed as important stabilising mechanisms, although many respondents noted that these organisations remain underfunded and inconsistent across counties.

• Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

The findings indicate that electoral violence and tensions disproportionately affect women, youth, persons with disabilities, and minority groups. Women frequently reported exposure to intimidation, online harassment, economic disruption, and gender-based violence during elections. Several respondents referenced incidents of sexual violence during previous electoral cycles, particularly within informal settlements and politically contested areas. Women candidates were also described as "easy to intimidate" and vulnerable to character attacks and online abuse.

Youth emerged simultaneously as victims, perpetrators, and targets of political manipulation. Across counties, respondents consistently linked youth unemployment to vulnerability to mobilisation by political actors. In hotspots such as Kibera, Mathare, Kondele, and Kisauni, unemployed youth were described as being "paid to cause chaos," "used as mobilisers," or recruited into gangs and protest groups during campaigns. However, respondents also noted increasing youth-driven civic engagement and political awareness beyond traditional ethnic mobilisation.

Persons with disabilities were identified as one of the most marginalised groups during elections. Respondents highlighted barriers related to inaccessible polling stations, lack of sign language interpretation, inability to escape violence during unrest, and limited inclusion in political processes. Similarly, minority groups reported experiences of discrimination, displacement, and targeted intimidation, particularly in ethnically polarised counties and informal settlements.

• Human Rights-Based Approaches

The study revealed recurring concerns regarding the protection of rights, equal participation, and accountability during electoral processes. Respondents mentioned excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, intimidation during protests, and weak accountability for electoral violence. In some counties, participants expressed concerns that political actors and security agencies operate with impunity, particularly during periods of heightened political contestation.

At the same time, respondents emphasised the value of civic education, peaceful participation, and equitable treatment under the law. Community-based peace initiatives, interfaith forums, and civic engagement programmes were often cited as key strategies for strengthening inclusion and reducing tensions. Several stakeholders highlighted the need for safeguarding freedom of expression while countering hate speech and misinformation, particularly on digital platforms.

• Youth Transitions from Protest to Civic Mobilisation

The findings suggest an important shift in youth political engagement across several counties. Although the youth remain highly vulnerable to manipulation through financial incentives, unemployment, and political patronage, respondents also described increasing civic consciousness among younger populations. The recent youth-led protests were repeatedly mentioned as evidence of growing demands for accountability, governance reform, and service delivery. Respondents observed that many young people are increasingly mobilising around shared socio-economic concerns rather than exclusively ethnic or partisan identities.

Social media emerged as a key platform shaping this transition. Although digital platforms were widely associated with misinformation, hate speech, and rapid escalation of tensions, respondents also acknowledged their role in civic awareness, youth organising, and the dissemination of information. Younger respondents in particular described online platforms as spaces for political expression, mobilisation, and engagement on governance issues.

• Climate/Resource Conflicts

Resource-based tensions have emerged as a major conflict driver, especially in pastoral and semi-arid counties. Respondents from Samburu, Baringo, Isiolo, Garissa, and parts of Migori reported ongoing clashes over grazing land, access to water, territorial boundaries, and livestock movement. In several counties, these tensions intensify during elections as political actors exploit existing community divisions and grievances.

Historical land disputes featured prominently in counties such as Bungoma, Uasin Gishu, and Nakuru, where respondents linked unresolved grievances to recurring electoral tensions. In Mt. Elgon, for example, land ownership disputes and historical displacement were repeatedly identified as underlying drivers of insecurity during election periods. Participants emphasised that elections often reactivate dormant disputes and deepen inter-community mistrust.

• Economic Vulnerability

Economic hardship and unemployment were identified as central structural drivers of electoral tension. Respondents linked poverty, rising living costs, and limited employment opportunities to vulnerability to political manipulation, voter bribery, and recruitment into violence. Informal settlements and densely populated urban areas such as Kibera, Mathare, Kondele, Kisauni, and Langas were frequently identified as hotspots due to high youth unemployment and economic exclusion.

Participants also cited the economic disruption associated with elections. Traders, transport operators, and small businesses reported reduced mobility, business closures, fear of looting, and declining income during the campaign and post-election periods. Women operating informal businesses were identified as vulnerable to economic shocks associated with unrest and instability. In several counties, respondents noted that prolonged campaigns and political uncertainty contribute to anxiety, disruption of livelihoods, and reduced economic activity.

Respondents' comments indicate that economic factors are indeed a cross-cutting theme in electoral violence. Several comments directly link economic conditions, particularly unemployment and poverty, to political instability and violence:

> *"On unemployment, Migori youth wake up with nothing to do and resort to drugs and alcohol because there are no jobs. A leader who needs people to cause trouble only needs to call one of them, buy them what they are taking, and give them 1,000 shillings. Someone with no provision can do anything."*
>
> *"Poverty and unemployment, people are just being used for that electioneering period, and after they are dumped, and they are left in poverty and unemployment, they will lack anything to do, and at the end they'll say, even if I do this, I have nothing to lose."*
>
> *"Historical injustice issues, such as land disputes, are known to be used for exploitation during electoral processes, but a highly explosive potential issue is the intersection of unemployment and the high cost of living. The cost-of-living issue could become highly explosive and politically motivated as campaigns ramp up toward the 2027 election."*

These quotes collectively demonstrate that economic issues such as unemployment, lack of economic empowerment, and poverty are significant underlying factors that contribute to and exacerbate electoral violence across different communities and demographics.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed to guide Act! and other stakeholders in addressing factors that could undermine the integrity of Kenya's next general elections and lead to conflict.

5.1. National Level Recommendations

A key finding from the study was the low level of public trust in key electoral actors. The recommended interventions are therefore designed to address the underlying structural weaknesses that contribute to this institutional trust deficit and to strengthen public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

Electoral Institutional Integrity

- **IEBC Strategic vs. Administrative Delineation:** Parliament is urged to urgently amend the IEBC Act to establish a permanent, legally binding separation between the strategic and policy oversight functions of the Commissioners and the administrative and operational responsibilities of the Secretariat. During the current pre-election period, the IEBC should strengthen its corporate governance framework by instituting clear internal governance procedures and effective dispute resolution mechanisms. Clarifying these institutional roles and lines of authority will help prevent the internal organisational conflicts witnessed in previous electoral cycles, safeguard staff from undue political influence, enhance institutional stability, and strengthen public confidence in the IEBC as an impartial and credible electoral management body ahead of the 2027 General Election.

- **Legislative Finality on Results: Harmonisation of the Elections Act, 2011 with Judicial Precedents:** The Elections Act, 2011 should be urgently harmonised with the principles established in the Maina Kiai and 2017 Supreme Court rulings to reinforce the finality and legal authority of polling station results. This reform is particularly critical given that 74% of Kenyans identify the results announcement period as a key trigger for electoral violence.

Clarifying that results declared at the polling station constitute the final determination, subject only to legally established dispute resolution mechanisms, would help reduce uncertainty, lower tensions, and mitigate the high-stakes contestation often associated with the National Tallying Centre.

Mandatory Internal Party Governance and Accountability: The Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) must consider withholding access to the Political Parties Fund from political parties that fail to conduct transparent, verifiable, and peaceful nomination processes. This measure would be critical in addressing concerns that opaque nomination practices, perceived manipulation of party primaries, and exclusionary decision-making contribute to intra-community tensions, political violence, and voter apathy, particularly among younger generations, including Gen Z.



Digital Safety and Information Governance

Establishment of a Localised Co-Moderation and Escalation Protocol: The NCIC and the MCK, in partnership with REDI/RPS civil society coalitions, should collaborate with major digital platforms, including Meta, Google, and TikTok, to develop a localised *Electoral Integrity Playbook*. This framework should establish a 24-hour rapid response mechanism during high-risk electoral periods, particularly the campaign and results declaration phases, supported by human moderators with proficiency in local languages and urban Sheng. The mechanism should enable the timely identification, escalation, and mitigation of harmful content, including incitement, deep-fakes, and coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

The framework could further explore the feasibility of implementing an "Electoral Integrity Delay" mechanism, involving a short delay period (10–20 seconds) for live political broadcasts and bulk campaign SMS dissemination, to allow for the review and moderation of potentially harmful content before widespread circulation.

Enforce Algorithmic and Algorithmic-Amplification Audits: The NCIC, with support from REDI/RPS civil society coalitions, are encouraged to engage digital platforms to implement targeted modifications to content amplification algorithms at least six months before the 2027 General Election. These interventions should aim to reduce the visibility and rapid dissemination of content identified as highly polarising, misleading, or unverified, particularly narratives linked to sensitive issues such as land disputes and historical grievances. By reducing the velocity of harmful information flows, such measures would help mitigate the spread of rumours and inflammatory narratives before they translate into real-world tensions or electoral violence.

Institutionalise Platform-CSO Information Sharing on TFGBV: A secure, encrypted data-sharing mechanism should be established between women's rights organisations, such as FIDA and KEWOPA, and digital platform safety teams to facilitate rapid reporting, response, and protection measures for female candidates facing online abuse. The mechanism should provide timely legal and digital support, including expedited review and removal of harmful content, within a defined response timeframe, particularly for non-consensual synthetic media, sexualised defamation campaigns, and doxing attempts aimed at intimidating, silencing, or excluding women from political participation.

Deploy Youth-Led Networks for Digital Peacebuilding: The IEBC and civil society partners are urged to provide targeted resources, capacity building, and advanced digital literacy training to youth-led networks and movements. Rather than viewing young people solely as passive consumers or drivers of harmful online discourse, they should be recognised as active contributors to the broader peacebuilding infrastructure. Empowering youth with digital literacy skills and supporting locally relevant counter-messaging initiatives will enhance their capacity to promote information integrity, counter misinformation, and foster constructive engagement within encrypted communication spaces such as WhatsApp and high-visibility digital platforms such as TikTok.

Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder and Institutional Coordination

Coordination mechanisms should transition from a reactive, crisis-driven approach to a permanent and systemic framework that enables continuous collaboration, timely information sharing, and proactive conflict prevention throughout the electoral cycle.

Rework and Formalise the Election Security Assistance Programme (ESAP): The IEBC, in collaboration with the NPS and the Judiciary, is advised to transform the ESAP into a permanent multi-agency coordination mechanism that operates throughout the electoral cycle. This framework should facilitate continuous collaboration, joint preparedness, and proactive risk mitigation across the five-year electoral cycle, rather than being activated only in the period immediately preceding elections.

Civil Society: Civil society organisations are urged to move away from competing for engagement within the same urban hotspots and adopt a thematic leadership model, whereby specific organisations take responsibility for defined areas of intervention, such as technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) monitoring and resource-based conflict prevention. This approach would strengthen coordination, reduce duplication of efforts, and address challenges arising from competition over programme ownership, visibility, and limited donor resources.

Donors- Five-Year Strategic Portfolios: Donors are advised to consider transitioning from short-term, election-cycle funding models to sustained, long-term investments that strengthen democratic resilience. One potential approach would be the establishment of a Democratic Resilience Fund to support post-election reconciliation and healing, continuous civic education initiatives, and the strengthening of democratic institutions and systems throughout the electoral cycle. Interventions that commence only nine months before elections provide insufficient time to implement meaningful behavioural change initiatives, particularly those aimed at addressing practices such as voter bribery and promoting informed political participation.



Security and Judicial Accountability

Specialised "Hate Speech" Courts: The Judiciary is advised to establish dedicated, expedited judicial mechanisms for handling electoral offences and hate speech cases, drawing lessons from the specialised approach adopted by anti-corruption courts. The current delays, with some cases taking two to three years to conclude, contribute to perceptions of impunity, particularly among political actors who engage in incitement to violence without facing timely accountability. Establishing fast-track processes would enhance deterrence, strengthen public confidence in the justice system, and promote accountability for violations that threaten electoral integrity and peaceful political participation.

Police Crowd Control Training and Accountable Policing: The NPS should mandate the visible identification of all officers and the clear marking of all official vehicles deployed during crowd control operations. Such measures would enhance accountability, transparency, and public confidence in law enforcement. Persistent distrust in security agencies, including the finding that only 1.4% of youth respondents in Nyeri County expressed high levels of trust in the police, is linked to concerns regarding the use of excessive force during public protests and other forms of civic engagement.

5.2. County Level Recommendations

These recommendations focus on localised conflict dynamics and strengthening community-level peace infrastructure.



Strengthening Peace Committees

Institutionalised Logistical Support: The National Government must provide adequate resources to County Commissioner offices to enable them to offer sustained logistical support to Sub-County Peace Committees. Many peace committees remain inactive until the onset of violence due to limited operational capacity, including inadequate transport and resources required to facilitate community outreach, early mediation, and conflict prevention efforts across villages.

Nyumba Kumi Mediation Hubs: The role of village elders within the Nyumba Kumi framework should be formally recognised and strengthened as a first line of response against the spread of rumours, misinformation, and inflammatory narratives. These community leaders should receive structured training in conflict mediation, early warning, and counter-messaging approaches to enable them to address local disputes before they escalate into broader inter-community or ethnic conflicts.



Resource-Based Conflict Prevention

- **Pre-emptive Resource Dialogue:** In pastoralist regions prone to resource-based conflicts, including Samburu, Isiolo, and Tana River, stakeholders should initiate structured peace dialogue processes and develop resource-sharing agreements on issues such as access to water and grazing areas at least six months before the election period. Early engagement would help address underlying grievances, build trust among competing groups, and reduce the likelihood of resource-related disputes escalating during periods of heightened political tension.

- **Continuous Conflict Mitigation:** Peace committees, religious leaders, and other community-based actors should be supported to maintain continuous engagement in identifying and addressing local disputes related to natural resources. Sustained conflict prevention efforts throughout the electoral cycle would help prevent community-level tensions from escalating into violent conflict.

5.3. Programmatic Recommendations (REDI/RPS)

These recommendations identify strategic entry points through which Act! can bridge the gap between institutional reform and societal resilience.

To ensure that the REDI and RPS programmes remain relevant, evidence-based, and responsive to a rapidly evolving context, Act! should revise its Results Frameworks and Theories of Change (ToCs) to reflect the findings of this study and the feedback generated through the validation process. The proposed revisions to the Theory of Change logic, together with the indicators recommended for inclusion or removal, are outlined below.



Recommendations on the Theories of Change and Their Justifications

- **Update the REDI Problem Statement to Incorporate Internal Governance and Operational Efficiency:** Act! should revise the baseline problem statement in the REDI ToC to explicitly recognise weaknesses in the IEBC internal governance and operational efficiency as critical institutional drivers of electoral risks.

    - ***Justification:*** The study findings, reinforced by feedback from the validation process, demonstrate that internal governance challenges and operational inefficiencies within the IEBC contribute to persistent perceptions of electoral manipulation, thereby undermining public confidence in the electoral process. Furthermore, delays in electoral boundary delimitation generate uncertainty and heighten local tensions, which political actors can exploit to incite ethnic or clan-based conflicts over political representation and the allocation of public funds.

Expand the RPS Conflict Pathways to Incorporate Accountability for Major Technology Platforms: Act! should revise the RPS Theory of Change (ToC) causal pathway to state: *"If peace infrastructure promotes algorithmic accountability among major global technology companies alongside responsible digital engagement by end-users, then the risk of digitally driven incitement can be reduced while preserving an open and inclusive civic space."*

- ***Justification:*** More than 74% of respondents identified online misinformation and disinformation as significant contributors to conflict. The study further found a strong perception that existing peacebuilding interventions emphasise regulating or educating individual users, while giving insufficient attention to the role of major technology platforms (Meta, TikTok, Google) in amplifying harmful content through their algorithms. Strengthening accountability mechanisms for these platforms would complement user-focused interventions and contribute to peacebuilding.

Incorporate Encrypted Digital Triggers into the RPS Action Path: Act! should revise the RPS Theory of Change (ToC) to explicitly recognise that contemporary conflict triggers increasingly emerge within encrypted and rapidly evolving digital spaces before manifesting as offline violence.

- ***Justification:*** The study found that electoral tensions frequently originate and spread through encrypted messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and highly viral social media platforms such as TikTok before escalating into physical unrest. This shift underscores the need for early warning and response systems to evolve beyond traditional, geographically focused approaches. Without integrating digital monitoring and response mechanisms that reflect the speed and dynamics of online information flows, existing early warning models are likely to overlook rapidly emerging threats and spontaneous outbreaks of violence.

Additional Indicators

Peer-Led Youth Voter Engagement (REDI Outcome 3): Number of sustained, peer-led creative arts campaigns (including street theater, spoken word performances, and Sheng music initiatives) as well as social media engagement activities launched by registered "youth voter champions" to promote peer-to-peer civic and political education throughout the five-year electoral cycle.

Technology Platform Accountability and Response Speed (RPS Outcome 1/ REDI Outcome 4): Average response and content removal time (with a target of less than two hours) by digital platform providers, including Meta, Google, and TikTok, in addressing flagged cases of non-consensual synthetic media, deep-fakes, and online gender-based violence (TFGBV) targeting female candidates.

Actionable Early Warning Systems (RPS Outcome 1/Framework OUT 4.2): Percentage of early warning alerts originating from encrypted networks such as WhatsApp successfully captured, verified, and referred to local response units including Chiefs and Nyumba Kumi elders within a two-hour response window, thereby operationalising the current 0% baseline.

Standardised Local Mediation (RPS Outcome 1): Percentage of local administration dispute resolutions that formally comply with non-discriminatory, human rights-based guidelines, protecting the safety of the 68.70% of female respondents who rely on chiefs for safety and reporting.

Indicators to Drop or Modify

Generic Activity Counters (REDI and RPS Output Levels): Act! should discontinue or replace indicators that solely measure the completion of activities, such as the "number of forums held," "number of days of short-term technical assistance provided," or "number of media monitoring toolkits developed." These indicators primarily capture activity completion and participation levels rather than assessing the extent to which supported institutions and communities apply the operational plans, tools, and capacities developed through the interventions.

Strategic Entry Points

Cycle-Based Peacebuilding: Act! should transition from an event-driven funding approach to a comprehensive electoral cycle model that supports sustained peacebuilding interventions throughout the entire electoral period. Initiating activities only a few months before elections limits the opportunity to achieve meaningful behavioural change, strengthen institutional capacity, and address underlying drivers of conflict.

Adaptive Early Warning: Modernise early warning systems by integrating mechanisms to monitor encrypted platforms, particularly WhatsApp, which respondents identified as both challenging to monitor and a frequent source of rumours and misinformation. REDI should promote the integration of reporting mechanisms, such as bulk SMS platforms for rural communities, alongside real-time digital monitoring tools to identify emerging risks, including coded hate speech, coordinated misinformation campaigns, and deep-fake content across platforms such as TikTok, WhatsApp, and Facebook.

Eighty-four per cent of Kenyans report that misinformation spreads rapidly, with emerging tensions originating within encrypted digital spaces, such as WhatsApp, before escalating into physical conflict. Consequently, early warning architectures should be expanded to incorporate digital conflict indicators alongside real-world socio-economic pressures, including fluctuations in food and fuel prices.

Act! should require sub-partners to establish routine weekly reporting mechanisms to monitor these emerging economic stressors and other contextual risk factors. This approach would enable the REDI and RPS teams to identify conditions under which socio-economic grievances may contribute to heightened tensions and potentially escalate into electoral violence.



Youth, PWD, and Women's Digital Safety and Participation

- **Digital Peace Ambassadors:** Act! should support the training of young "Digital Peace Ambassadors" who can leverage their online influence to counter misinformation, identify and report harmful content, and promote fact-checked information through locally relevant languages and cultural expressions. These youth-led initiatives would strengthen digital resilience and encourage responsible online engagement.

- **Gamified Civic Education:** Promote the development of interactive and gamified civic education content, including animated videos and other digital formats, tailored to Gen Z first-time voters. Given the increasing reliance of young people on social media platforms for information, civic education approaches should move beyond traditional long-form policy materials and traditional communication channels to adopt more accessible, engaging, and participatory formats.

- **Informal Sector Engagement:** Facilitate targeted peace sensitisation initiatives within informal youth spaces, including matatu stages and boda boda "maskanis," to raise awareness among young people on the long-term social and economic consequences of political manipulation and their exploitation as instruments of electoral violence.

- **Inclusive Infrastructure**: County governments should conduct accessibility audits of schools and other public facilities designated as polling stations to ensure compliance with inclusive design standards, including the provision of ramps, wider entrances, and other necessary accommodations for PWDs. These measures would contribute to reducing the historical 18.4% rate of inaccessible polling stations and promote equitable participation in electoral processes.

5.4. Policy Recommendations

The following high-level policy recommendations outline strategic interventions that will contribute to addressing the underlying drivers of electoral disputes and violence.



Financial and Economic Buffers

- **National Peace Fund:** The National Peace Policy should be fully operationalised through the establishment of a dedicated Peace Fund to reduce reliance on donor funding and ensure the sustainability of national peace infrastructure. This is particularly important given persistent funding constraints affecting key institutions, including the NCIC and the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management, which limit their ability to effectively implement planned interventions and strategic roadmaps.

- **Campaign Finance Act Enforcement:** The Campaign Finance Act should be urgently operationalised and enforced to address the commercialisation of electoral violence and reduce voter bribery, which 51% of respondents identified as a significant electoral malpractice. Parliament should prioritise adopting the pending 2021 regulations to establish clear campaign spending limits, strengthen mandatory disclosure of campaign funding sources, and prohibit direct foreign government financing to individual candidates.



Historical and Social Justice

TJRC Report Phasing: The TJRC recommendations on historical land injustices should be undertaken through a phased and structured approach, with particular attention to regions such as the Coast and Mt. Elgon. Unresolved land grievances continue to provide a foundation for ethnic mobilisation and can be exploited by political actors to reignite community tensions and conflict.

Youth Economic Inclusion: The Government and relevant stakeholders should establish labour-intensive "Sports for Peace" initiatives and informal employment hubs in urban conflict-prone areas to create opportunities for youth engagement and livelihoods. Such interventions would help reduce youth vulnerability to political exploitation and minimise the pool of individuals who can be recruited as instruments of electoral violence.



Strategic Entry and Cycle Engagement

Cycle-Based Peacebuilding: Peacebuilding interventions should transition from event-driven and short-term funding models to a continuous electoral cycle approach. This should include initiating post-election evaluations, dialogue processes, and community healing initiatives immediately after the 2027 electoral process to address unresolved grievances and prevent the accumulation of tensions that could resurface during subsequent electoral periods.

Localised Demand-Driven Programming: Peacebuilding interventions should be designed and implemented through community-based structures rather than relying on top-down supply-driven approaches. Ensuring that programming responds to locally identified priorities, cultural contexts, and community needs will enhance ownership, relevance, and sustainability, particularly in conservative pastoralist areas.

Continuous, Strategic Voter Registration: The IEBC, in collaboration with civil society actors implementing the REDI and RPS programmes, and other CSOs, should transition towards a continuous and strategic voter registration and civic engagement model that moves beyond traditional, event-driven administrative processes. This approach should promote sustained voter awareness, enhance public participation, address barriers to registration, and strengthen electoral preparedness throughout the entire electoral cycle:

- **Integration of Broad Political Education**: Move away from episodic, election-year voting instructions to a permanent, five-year curriculum that integrates robust political education. This framework must educate young people on their democratic rights, constitutional responsibilities, and the long-term governance impact of their choices, directly neutralising the socio-economic vulnerabilities that leave them exposed to elite manipulation and political "goonism".

- **Horizontal, Peer-led Voter Registration and Education:** Rather than relying on top-down institutional communication approaches, the IEBC should establish strategic partnerships with young registered voters and equip them to serve as democratic champions within their respective peer networks. By strengthening youth-led, peer-to-peer mobilisation approaches, the IEBC can foster more authentic and horizontal forms of civic engagement that build trust and credibility among young voters, particularly where traditional institutional communication mechanisms have limited reach.

- **Electoral Cycle Continuity via Digital and Creative Mediums:** The IEBC, in partnership with civil society actors, should maintain a sustained civic education and voter engagement presence throughout the entire five-year electoral cycle, rather than intensifying outreach only in the months preceding elections. Communication approaches should evolve beyond conventional methods, such as formal town hall meetings, to incorporate contemporary youth-oriented platforms and cultural expressions. This requires a continuous stream of accessible and engaging content disseminated through social media platforms and creative mediums, including interactive theatre, localised slang and Sheng messaging, music, spoken word, and collaborative street art. Such approaches would support sustained civic awareness and strengthen community-level resilience against electoral misinformation and manipulation.

Below is a quadrant categorising the recommendations by level of risk and impact.



CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Kenya stands at a critical juncture as it prepares for the 2027 General Election. The findings of this assessment reveal a political environment that has been fundamentally reshaped by demographic shifts, digital innovation, and persistent socio-economic grievances. While community-level relationships and interdependence remain vital stabilising factors, the structural foundations of Kenya's democratic system require urgent and coordinated interventions to prevent a recurrence of electoral instability.

Characteristics of 2027 Electoral Risk Cycle

Socio-economic crisis



Youth unemployment rate, with nearly half the population vulnerable to political exploitation

Institutional Trust Deficits



of the public lacks confidence in the IEBC

Digital Frontier



Disinformation, AI-generated deepfakes, and TFGBV are used to delegitimise election process



of respondents have experienced some form of electoral violence

To strengthen Kenya's democratic resilience and mitigate emerging risks, the following three priority areas require urgent attention:

- **Institutional Trust Building and Reform:** Rebuilding the credibility of the IEBC and NPS is paramount. This includes resolving legislative gaps regarding result transmission to ensure polling station results are final and mandating strict adherence to internal party democracy during nominations.
- **Modernisation of Early Warning and Response (EWER):** Traditional peacebuilding models must adapt to "digital speed" to capture decentralised, spontaneous unrest triggered on platforms like TikTok and WhatsApp. This requires empowering "Young Digital Peacebuilders" and establishing safe, trusted reporting mechanisms that protect citizens from retaliation.

- **Socio-Economic Inclusion for Youth:** Interventions must address the root causes of youth vulnerability. Providing economic alternatives and labour-intensive inclusion hubs can discourage the recruitment of young "keyboard warriors" or physical agents into political gangs and militias.

The REDI and RPS programmes are strategically positioned to address these emerging risks by bridging the critical gap between institutional reform and community resilience. By leveraging the Electoral Conflict Risk Index (ECRI) developed in this study, the programmes can transition from reactive crisis management to proactive, data-driven prevention.

The REDI programme serves as a key driver for strengthening the IEBC's operational capacity, institutional integrity and accountability mechanisms, while the RPS programme reinforces community-based peace networks required to identify and address localised conflict triggers before they escalate. Together, these programmes provide the strategic direction and peacebuilding infrastructure necessary to support a 2027 electoral process that is peaceful, inclusive, transparent, and reflective of the aspirations and rights of all Kenyans.





ANNEXES

List of Strategic Networks and Stakeholders

Based on the context of the REDI and RPS programmes, the following table outlines the key stakeholders and institutions that Act! can target to enhance electoral resilience, social cohesion, and institutional accountability ahead of the 2027 General Election.

Category	Targeted Institution / Group	Strategic Role and Potential Engagement Area
Government Agencies and Commissions	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC)	Support enhanced continuous voter registration, election operations planning, and strategic communications to rebuild public trust.
	National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC)	Partner on the '*Uchaguzi Bila Noma*' roadmap to mitigate hate speech, monitor conflict hotspots, and build peace clusters.
	National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding (NSC)	Collaborate on the Uwiano Platform for Peace for unified national early warning and response coordination.
	National Police Service (NPS)	Conduct joint forums on police reforms, accountability, and non-violent crowd control during protests.
	Judiciary and Judiciary Committee on Elections (JCE)	Advocate for the timely resolution of electoral disputes and promote Alternative Justice Systems (AJS) for land conflicts.
	Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP)	Support the enforcement of the Two-Thirds Gender Rule and internal party democracy reforms.
	Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA)	Strengthen oversight roles to ensure accountability for police conduct during the electoral cycle.
	National Land Commission (NLC)	Address historical land injustices that are weaponised as conflict triggers during elections.

Category	Targeted Institution / Group	Strategic Role and Potential Engagement Area
Civil Society and Religious Groups	Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK), NCCK, SUPKEM	Leverage high public trust to act as neutral mediators during high-level political fallouts.
	National and Local CSOs/ CBOs	Mobilise through sub-grants for localised civic education, results monitoring, and human rights watch.
	Women's Rights Organisations (e.g., KEWOPA, FIDA)	Focus on countering Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) and enhancing women's political participation.
	Youth-led Networks and Movements	Equip Gen Z actors with digital literacy skills to counter misinformation and lead peaceful civic mobilisation.
Private Sector and Media	Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA)	Engage business actors who have a direct economic interest in maintaining national stability.
	Media Council of Kenya (MCK) and Media Houses	Train journalists on conflict-sensitive reporting and co-create inclusive public information campaigns.
	Digital Platform Providers (e.g., Meta, TikTok)	Lobby for better regulation and real-time flagging of mercenary influencers and deep-fakes.
International and Local Partners	Sida, DANIDA, EU, USAID, FCDO, UNDP, Amkeni Wakenya	Coordinate funding and technical assistance to move from episodic election day events to sustained resilience support.

Table 27: List of Strategic Networks and Stakeholders

Prioritised List of Counties and Localities for REDI Programme interventions

Category	Counties
Overlap with model priority counties (high confidence hotspots)	Nairobi Kisumu Nakuru Mombasa Uasin Gishu Bungoma Migori Kilifi Isiolo Kajiado Nyeri Samburu
Additional frequently mentioned counties (not in model 15)	Kiambu Homabay Kisii Kakamega Trans Nzoia Narok Kericho Mandera Marsabit Busia
Moderately mentioned counties (emerging / secondary concern)	Siaya Nandi Laikipia Meru, Kwale Tana River Lamu
Rarely mentioned counties (low salience)	Embu Nyandarua Tharaka-Nithi, Turkana, West Pokot

Table 28: Prioritised List of Counties and Localities for REDI Programme Interventions

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