



SEISMIC SHIFTS IN KENYA'S DEMOCRACY

**2027 Electoral Conflict
Risk Mapping & Strategic
Diagnostic**

The Electoral Conflict Risk Mapping Assessment Report,

2026

Policy Brief

This policy brief presents key findings from the 2026 Electoral Conflict Risk Mapping Assessment, highlighting electoral risks, institutional trust, civic participation, and democratic resilience, while offering recommendations to support peaceful, inclusive, and credible 2027 elections.

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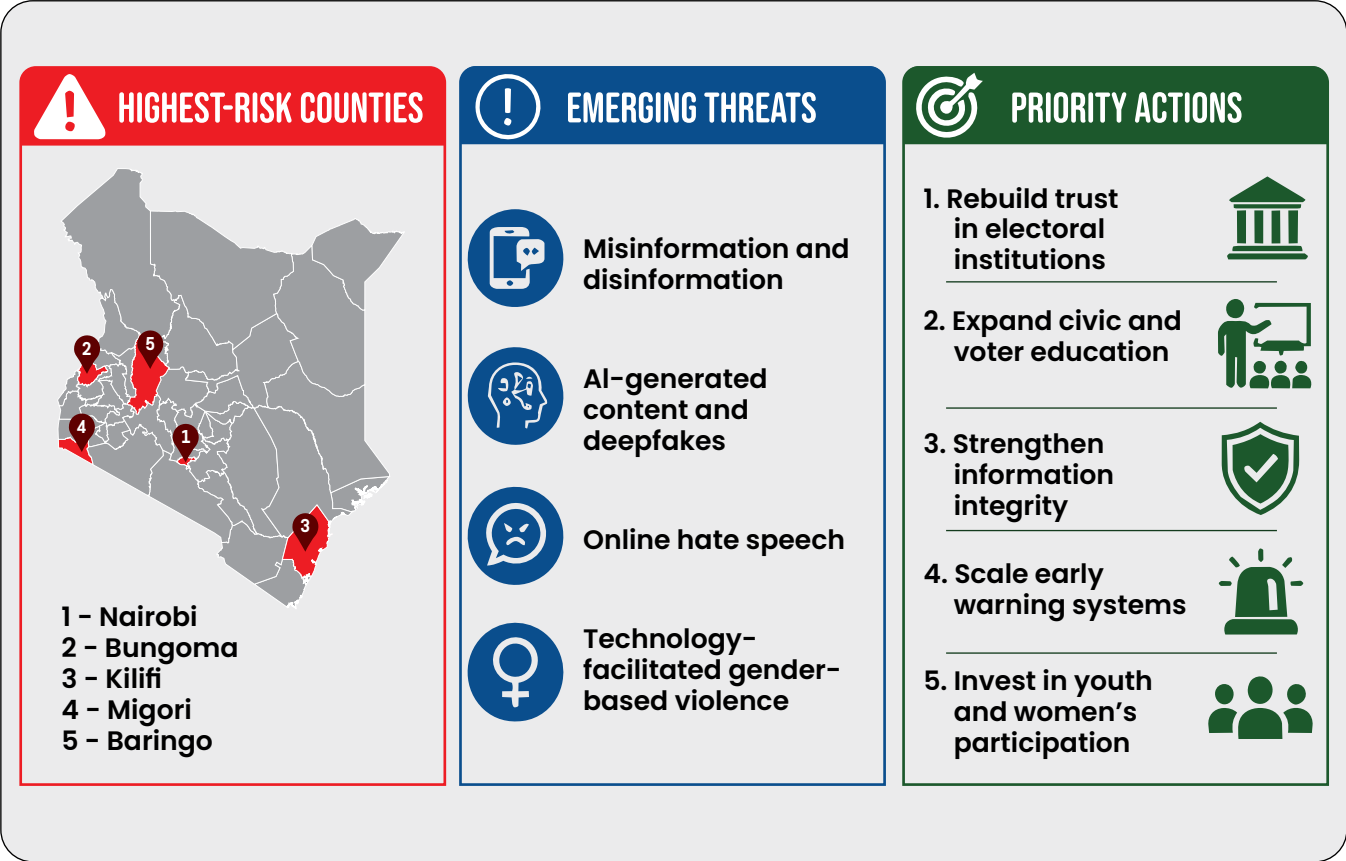
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Executive Dashboard



1 | Background

Kenya's Democratic Progress Amid Persistent Electoral Challenges.

Over the past two decades, Kenya has made significant progress in strengthening democratic governance, expanding political participation, and deepening constitutionalism. The promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 marked a transformative moment in the country's democratic development, introducing far-reaching reforms aimed at promoting devolution, enhancing accountability, protecting fundamental rights, and strengthening democratic institutions. Since then, Kenya has undergone multiple electoral cycles that have highlighted both the country's democratic progress and its enduring vulnerabilities. Elections continue to serve as a key mechanism through which citizens exercise their political choices and hold leaders accountable.

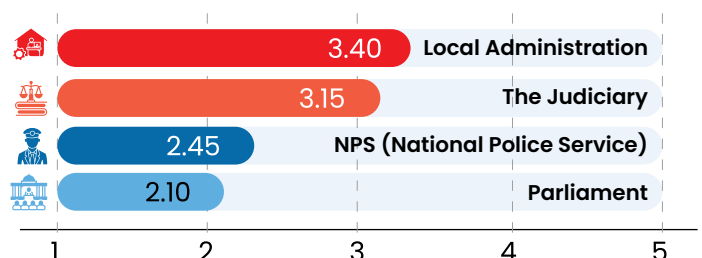
However, electoral periods have also frequently been accompanied by heightened political tensions, disputes, misinformation, violence, and challenges to institutional legitimacy. The 2007–2008 post-election crisis remains one of the most significant reminders of the consequences of unresolved electoral grievances and institutional failures. While subsequent reforms have helped reduce large-scale electoral violence, tensions over electoral credibility, political competition, inclusion, and governance continue to shape Kenya's electoral landscape.

Trust and Institutional Legitimacy: Kenya's Greatest Electoral Vulnerability

2 | The most significant risk facing Kenya ahead of the 2027 General Election is not electoral violence itself, but declining public confidence in the institutions responsible for managing, securing, and adjudicating electoral processes. The assessment reveals a highly fragmented trust landscape. While citizens continue to place relatively high confidence in local administrative structures and the Judiciary, trust in national governance and electoral institutions remains fragile. This creates a potentially destabilising environment in which electoral disputes are more likely to be perceived through the lens of suspicion, manipulation, and political bias. Institutional trust is a critical component of electoral stability. Elections are assessed not solely by whether established procedures are followed, but also by whether citizens perceive those processes as fair, transparent, and impartial. Where public confidence in institutions is weak, even minor administrative shortcomings can escalate into broader crises of legitimacy.

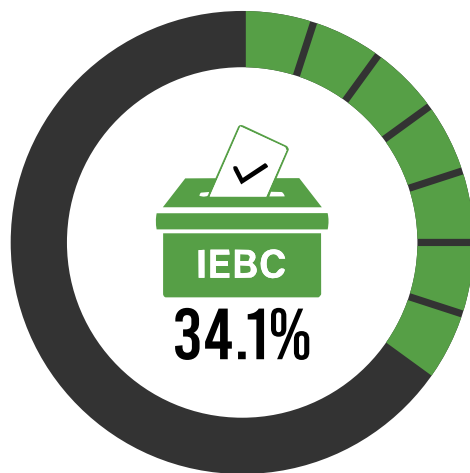
A Hierarchy of Trust

The findings reveal a clear hierarchy of public confidence. Local administration structures, including chiefs and assistant chiefs, emerge as the most trusted institutions nationally, receiving an average trust score of 3.40 out of 5. The Judiciary follows closely with a score of 3.15. In contrast, Parliament (2.40) and the National Police Service (2.45) attract the lowest levels of public trust, while confidence in the IEBC remains only moderate at 2.80.



This pattern suggests that citizens place greater confidence in institutions perceived as accessible, community-oriented, and less politically contested. Trust declines sharply where institutions are viewed as politicised, unaccountable, or vulnerable to external influence. As one respondent observed: *“The problem is not the institutions themselves, as they have rules to guide them; the problem is the people who run them.”* This distinction is key. The findings suggest that the primary challenge lies not in the formal architecture of Kenya’s democratic institutions, but in public perceptions of their independence, integrity, and effective implementation.

The Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission Credibility Challenge



Respondents expressed confidence in the IEBC's ability to conduct free and fair elections

Confidence in the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) remains one of the most significant concerns emerging from the assessment. Only 34.1 percent of respondents expressed confidence in the IEBC's ability to conduct free and fair elections, while 36.9 percent actively expressed distrust. A further 27.7 percent remained neutral, indicating substantial uncertainty regarding the Commission's credibility. Qualitative findings point to several drivers of this trust deficit, including perceptions of political interference, unresolved electoral disputes, concerns about institutional independence, operational weaknesses, and doubts regarding results transmission systems. Importantly, confidence in the IEBC is highly uneven across counties. Trust is strongest in Garissa and Uasin Gishu, while distrust is particularly pronounced in Nairobi and Kajiado. This geographical polarisation suggests that perceptions of electoral credibility are increasingly shaped by local political experiences and relationships with state institutions. The implications are clear: restoring confidence in the IEBC before 2027 must be regarded not only as an electoral management priority but also as a fundamental conflict prevention imperative.

The Police Legitimacy Crisis

The assessment identifies a significant trust deficit in the National Police Service. Nationally, active distrust in the police reaches 45%, substantially exceeding levels of public confidence. These findings are consistent with broader concerns regarding corruption, excessive use of force, political bias, and limited accountability mechanisms. Particularly concerning is the fact that distrust extends across demographic groups, suggesting that skepticism toward policing institutions is no longer confined to specific regions or constituencies. In electoral contexts, public trust in security institutions is essential. The National Police Service is responsible for maintaining public order, protecting voters, responding to electoral incidents, and enforcing electoral laws. When these institutions are perceived as partisan or unaccountable, their interventions may escalate rather than de-escalate electoral tensions. As one participant from Nairobi noted: *“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.”* Such perceptions undermine confidence in electoral security arrangements and increase the likelihood that citizens may seek alternative mechanisms for addressing grievances.



Overall public trust in the NPS remains low

Trust as a Conflict Prevention Strategy

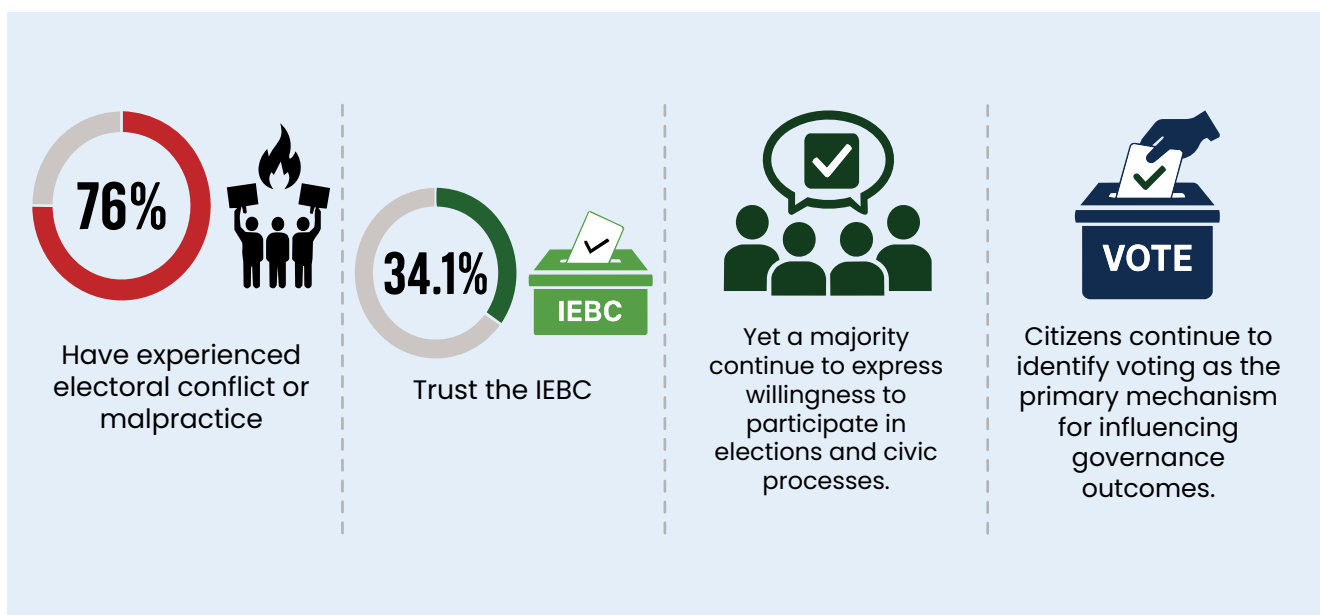
The findings suggest that rebuilding institutional legitimacy should be treated as a central pillar of Kenya's electoral preparedness agenda. Considerable attention is often directed towards election-day logistics, security deployments, and conflict response mechanisms. However, the evidence indicates that public confidence in institutions may be a more critical determinant of electoral stability than operational preparedness alone. Where trust in institutions is strong, citizens are more likely to accept electoral outcomes, utilise formal dispute resolution mechanisms, and reject incitement to violence. Consequently, where trust is absent, misinformation, rumors, and political manipulation are more likely to gain traction.

Strengthening transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and communication across electoral institutions must therefore be viewed as a core conflict prevention strategy rather than simply a governance objective. The central challenge facing Kenya ahead of 2027 is not only to conduct a credible election, but to ensure that citizens believe it is credible.

Civic Engagement and Democratic Resilience: Kenya's Untapped Democratic Asset

- 3** Despite widespread exposure to electoral conflict, declining trust in key institutions, and growing concerns regarding misinformation, citizens remain strongly committed to democratic participation. This resilience represents one of Kenya's most important assets ahead of the 2027 General Election and provides a critical foundation for strengthening democratic stability. The assessment reveals a striking paradox. Although **76% of respondents reported having experienced electoral conflict or malpractice**, citizens continue to express a strong willingness to participate in elections, engage in civic activities, and support peaceful democratic processes. This suggests that democratic participation remains resilient despite declining public confidence in institutions. For policymakers and development partners, this finding carries significant implications. Kenya's principal challenge in the lead-up to the 2027 General Election is not the mobilisation of citizen participation, but rather ensuring that such participation takes place within an environment characterised by public trust, inclusivity, institutional credibility, and access to accurate and reliable information.

Democratic Participation Remains Strong



Persistent Citizen Engagement Amid Declining Institutional Trust One of the most encouraging findings of the assessment is the continued willingness of citizens to participate in democratic processes. Despite concerns regarding institutional performance, respondents consistently expressed their intentions to vote in future elections, participate in community dialogue forums, engage in peacebuilding activities, report electoral incidents, and support peaceful elections. This finding is particularly significant when considered alongside the broader evidence of public trust. Although only **34.1% of respondents expressed confidence in the IEBC's ability to conduct free and fair elections**, citizens have not withdrawn their participation from democratic processes. Rather, many continue to view participation as an important avenue for influencing governance outcomes and holding leaders accountable. The findings therefore challenge assumptions that declining trust automatically leads to political disengagement. However, citizens appear increasingly willing to participate while simultaneously demanding greater accountability from institutions.



Policy Insight: *Democratic commitment remains stronger than institutional trust.*

Kenya Faces a Civic Education, Not Participation Deficit

74%

of respondents have not received civic education in the last two years.

The assessment identifies a significant gap between citizens' willingness to participate and their access to civic information. Nearly **74% of respondents reported that they had not received civic education within the previous two years**, leaving only about one-quarter of citizens with recent exposure to voter education or civic awareness programs. This finding has significant implications for electoral resilience. Limited civic education increases citizens' vulnerability to misinformation, reduces awareness of electoral procedures, weakens understanding of dispute resolution mechanisms, erodes public confidence in institutions, and creates greater opportunities for electoral manipulation.

The assessment further found that awareness of Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) mechanisms remains low, with only **35% of respondents aware of available reporting systems, and 65% lacked awareness** of how to report electoral incidents or access response mechanisms. These gaps create situations in which misinformation and rumours can spread rapidly, particularly during politically sensitive periods.

65%

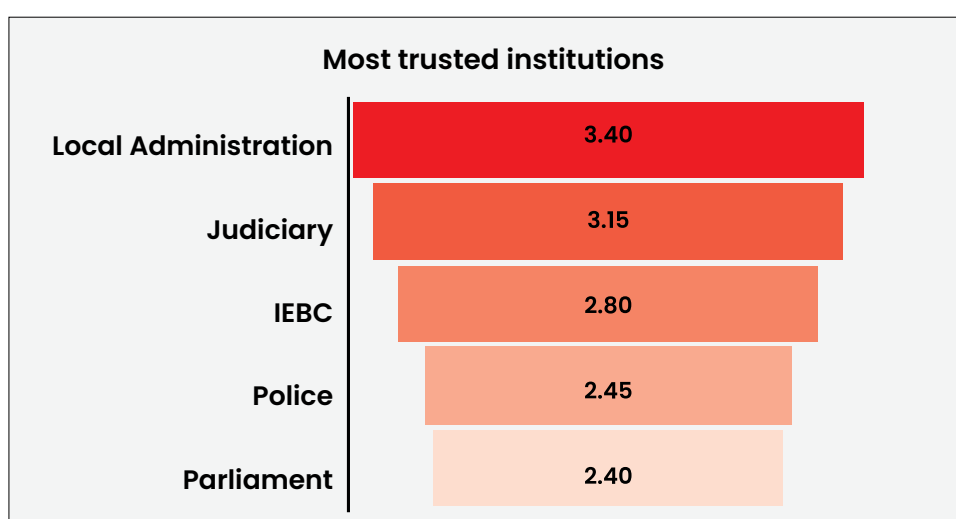
are unaware of available electoral early warning and response mechanisms



Policy Insight: Participation remains high, but citizens lack access to information needed to participate effectively.

Community-Based Resilience Remains Strong

While confidence in national institutions remains mixed, the assessment identifies strong trust in locally embedded governance structures. Local administration structures emerged as the most trusted institutions nationally, recording an average trust score of **3.40 out of 5**, substantially higher than Parliament (**2.40**) and the National Police Service (**2.45**). Respondents consistently identified Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs, religious leaders, Community elders, Nyumba Kumi structures, and community peace committees as trusted actors capable of preventing tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence.



These findings suggest that democratic resilience is often strongest at the community level, where institutions maintain regular contact with citizens and are perceived as accessible and responsive.

The Critical Role of Religious Leaders and Peace Structures

Across counties, religious leaders were consistently identified as among the most trusted actors in promoting peace, dialogue, and conflict resolution. Participants frequently cited faith-based institutions as important sources of civic education, mediation, community mobilisation, and electoral peace messaging. Similarly, community peace committees and local mediation structures continue to play a central role in resolving disputes before they escalate into broader conflicts. For policymakers and development partners, these findings reinforce the importance of investing in existing community-based peace infrastructure rather than relying exclusively on national-level interventions.

Youth as Democratic Actors: From Vulnerability to Leadership

Youth remain central to Kenya's electoral future. Traditionally, electoral conflict discussions have focused on young people primarily as a population vulnerable to recruitment into violence. The assessment presents a more nuanced picture. The findings suggest that youth are simultaneously vulnerable to economic exclusion, active participants in civic processes, influential actors in digital spaces, and emerging leaders in democratic accountability movements. The 2024 Generation-Z protests demonstrated young people's ability to organise around governance issues, transparency, accountability, and public participation. Importantly, the assessment indicates that investments in youth civic engagement may generate significant returns for both democratic governance and conflict prevention.



Policy Insight: *Young people should not be viewed solely as potential perpetrators of electoral violence. They represent one of Kenya's most important constituencies for strengthening democratic resilience, countering misinformation, and promoting peaceful political participation.*

Democratic Resilience Is Kenya's Comparative Advantage

The assessment identifies significant vulnerabilities ahead of the 2027 General Election, including institutional mistrust, misinformation, political polarisation, and socio-economic grievances. However, it also highlights a less visible but equally important reality: citizens remain willing to participate in democratic processes. Communities continue to place trust in local leaders, religious institutions retain significant legitimacy, local peace structures remain active, and young people continue to engage in civic and democratic processes. These findings suggest that Kenya's greatest opportunity lies not only in mitigating electoral risks, but also in strengthening and leveraging the existing resilience assets embedded within communities.

Programmatic Implications and Strategic Priorities: The evidence suggests that investments ahead of 2027 General Elections should prioritise:



By addressing both participation and conflict prevention simultaneously, these interventions offer some of the highest potential returns for strengthening democratic resilience before the 2027 General Election.

4 Digital Risks, Information Integrity and the New Electoral Battleground

Kenya's electoral conflict landscape is increasingly being shaped by digital technologies that are transforming how political information is created, disseminated, contested, and manipulated. While traditional drivers of electoral conflict, including political competition, ethnic mobilisation, and historical grievances, remain relevant, digital misinformation, artificial intelligence (AI)-generated content, online hate speech, and technology-facilitated violence are emerging as significant threats to electoral integrity and democratic stability.

The assessment indicates that digital platforms have become central arenas of political contestation. Electoral tensions that were previously confined to rallies, community meetings, and traditional media now spread rapidly through social media platforms, encrypted messaging applications, and online networks, often reaching large audiences before corrective information can be provided. For policymakers and electoral stakeholders, this represents a fundamental shift in electoral conflict.



Electoral violence is no longer solely a physical phenomenon; it increasingly begins in digital spaces where misinformation, manipulation, and polarisation can undermine trust in democratic institutions and electoral processes.

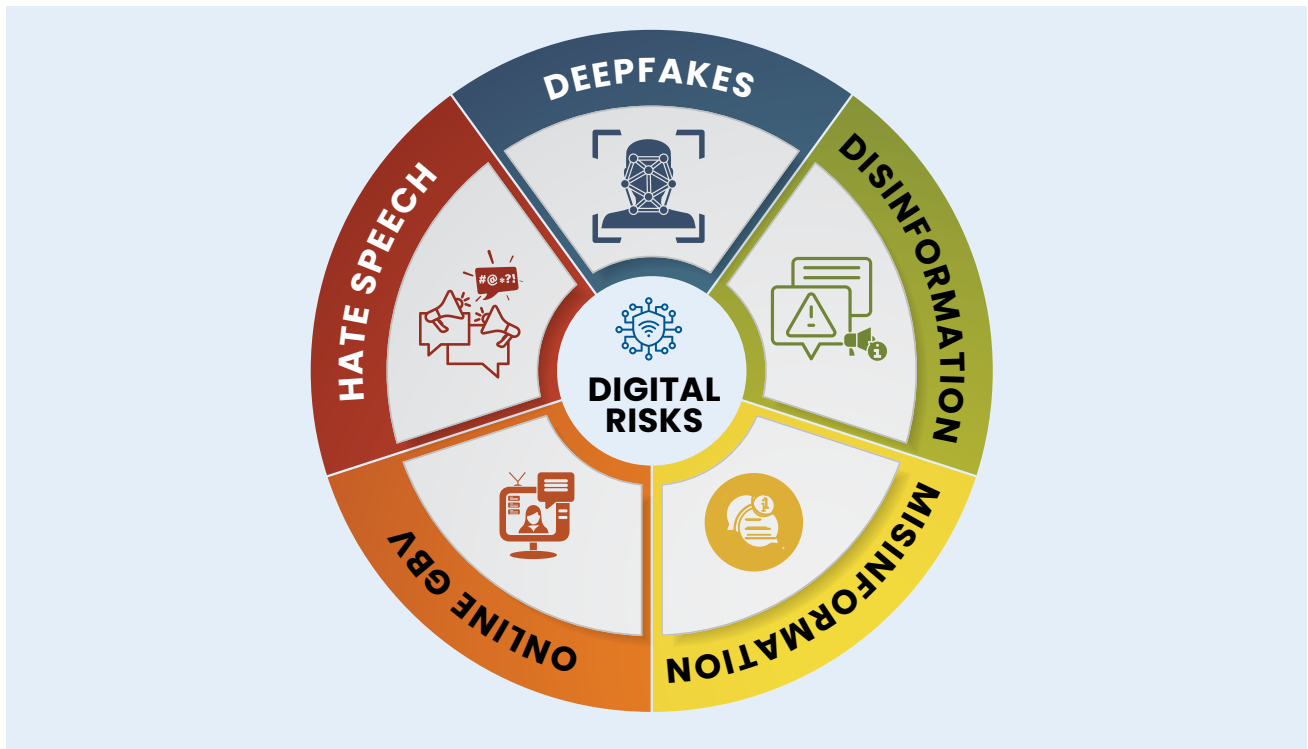
The Digital Transformation of Electoral Competition

The assessment highlights the growing influence of digital platforms on political participation and electoral discourse. Citizens increasingly rely on social media platforms, WhatsApp groups, online news sources, digital influencers, and community messaging networks for political information and election-related updates. While these technologies have expanded access to information and created new opportunities for civic engagement, they have also introduced significant vulnerabilities. Participants across counties expressed concerns about false information, manipulated content, political propaganda, hate speech, rumours, and coordinated online influence campaigns. The findings suggest that information ecosystems have become increasingly fragmented, making it difficult for citizens to distinguish credible information from misinformation.



Policy Insight: *The challenge facing Kenya is no longer simply access to information. It is access to trustworthy information.*

Misinformation and Disinformation: A Growing Electoral Threat



The assessment identifies misinformation and disinformation as among the most frequently cited emerging risks to electoral integrity. Respondents expressed concern that false information could intensify political tensions, increase polarisation, undermine public trust in electoral institutions, influence voter behavior, and trigger conflict during critical electoral periods. Of particular concern is the potential for misinformation to exploit existing trust deficits. Where confidence in institutions is already weak, citizens may be more susceptible to false narratives relating to electoral fraud, vote manipulation, or political conspiracies. The report suggests that misinformation poses the greatest risk when it reinforces pre-existing grievances or perceptions of injustice. Low levels of institutional trust create fertile ground for the spread and acceptance of misinformation.

In such environments, false information can spread rapidly because citizens already question the credibility of official institutions.



Policy Insight: Misinformation is not merely an information problem – it is a trust problem.

Artificial Intelligence and Deepfake Risks

One of the most forward-looking findings of the assessment concerns the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) –generated content as a potential threat to electoral integrity. Participants expressed growing concern regarding the proliferation of deepfake videos, synthetic audio recordings, manipulated images, and AI-generated political propaganda.

These technologies create new opportunities for political manipulation by enabling the rapid production and dissemination of highly convincing yet fabricated content. During electoral periods, such material could be used to falsify statements attributed to political leaders, incite violence, damage reputations, shape voter perceptions, and undermine confidence in electoral outcomes. Unlike conventional forms of misinformation, AI-generated content is often difficult for citizens to identify, allowing it to spread rapidly and extensively before verification and fact-checking mechanisms can effectively respond.

Implications for the 2027 General Election: The 2027 General Election may be the first electoral cycle in Kenya in which AI-generated content is widely accessible to political actors, social media influencers, and online networks. However, existing regulatory frameworks and institutional response mechanisms remain inadequately equipped to address this rapidly evolving threat.

Online Hate Speech and Political Polarisation

The assessment indicates that digital platforms continue to facilitate the dissemination of inflammatory political narratives and hate speech. Participants expressed concerns regarding the prevalence of ethnic stereotyping, political incitement, coordinated attacks against opponents, and polarising political messaging. Online hate speech presents a distinct challenge because digital content can spread rapidly across geographical boundaries, reaching audiences beyond the scope of traditional monitoring systems. The findings further suggest that online polarisation is increasingly influencing offline behaviour, creating pathways through which digital tensions can escalate into real-world conflict.



Policy Insight: Electoral conflict prevention systems that focus exclusively on physical incidents risk overlooking the online dynamics that often precede escalation.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

The assessment identifies technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) as an emerging threat to inclusive democratic participation. Women in politics are increasingly exposed to online harassment, character assassination, cyberbullying, gendered disinformation campaigns, and sexualised abuse on digital platforms. These forms of violence are often intended to intimidate women, discourage political participation, and restrict their visibility in public discourse. This has significant implications for electoral inclusion. Where women are subjected to online abuse, democratic participation becomes less equitable and representative.

Youth, Digital Citizenship and Information Integrity

Young people occupy a unique position within Kenya's digital ecosystem. As some of the most active users of digital platforms, they are both more exposed to misinformation and uniquely positioned to counter its spread. The assessment highlights opportunities to engage young people as digital peace ambassadors, fact-checking champions, civic educators, and information integrity advocates. Rather than viewing digital engagement solely through the lens of a risk, stakeholders should recognize the potential of youth-led initiatives to strengthen democratic resilience and promote responsible online participation. In digital environments, limited access to accurate and credible information increases vulnerability to misinformation and disinformation.



Implication for Programming: Civic education and digital literacy must increasingly be treated as complementary interventions.

Information Integrity as a Conflict Prevention Strategy

The findings suggest that safeguarding information integrity should become a core component of electoral preparedness and conflict prevention efforts. Traditional early warning systems were primarily designed to detect physical manifestations of conflict. However, the assessment demonstrates that many contemporary electoral risks originate within digital spaces before translating into offline tensions. Strengthening electoral resilience, therefore, requires digital misinformation monitoring, fact-checking partnerships, public awareness campaigns, AI and deepfake detection capabilities, digital literacy initiatives, collaboration with technology platforms, and integration of digital risk indicators into Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) systems.

Implications for Donor Support and Programming

For development partners, investments should prioritise:

1 ELECTION INFORMATION INTEGRITY INITIATIVES

Support fact-checking, anti-disinformation efforts and credible information ecosystems to promote transparent, peaceful and informed elections.

2 DIGITAL LITERACY AND CIVIC EDUCATION

Invest in digital literacy and civic education programs to empower citizens—especially youth—to engage safely and responsibly online.

3 INTEGRATION OF DIGITAL MONITORING INTO EWER PLATFORMS

Strengthen Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) systems by integrating digital tools and real-time data for timely, evidence-based action.

These interventions will address one of the fastest-growing electoral vulnerabilities while simultaneously strengthening democratic participation and public trust.

5 County Hotspots, Electoral Risk Corridors and Priority Areas for Preventive Action

Electoral conflict risks in Kenya are highly localised. While national trends such as institutional mistrust, misinformation, and political polarisation shape the overall electoral environment, the specific drivers of conflict vary significantly across counties. Effective prevention therefore requires geographically targeted interventions that address local conflict dynamics, strengthen existing resilience mechanisms, and respond to county-specific vulnerabilities. The assessment reveals key differences in levels of electoral conflict exposure, institutional trust, civic engagement, and conflict preparedness across the fifteen counties studied. While some counties demonstrate strong resilience despite exposure to electoral tensions, others face a convergence of political, social, economic, and institutional risks that could increase vulnerability ahead of the 2027 General Election. These findings underscore the importance of moving beyond one-size-fits-all approaches and approaching differentiated prevention strategies tailored to local context and realities.

Electoral Risk Corridors

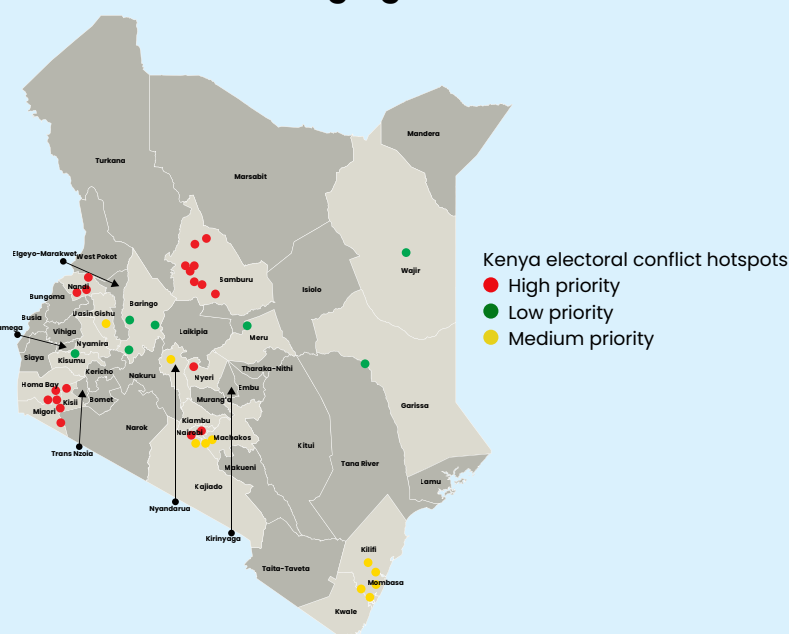
Corridor	Key Characteristics	Priority Response
Urban Political Contestation Corridor o Nairobi–Nakuru–Mombasa	Institutional mistrust, misinformation, political polarisation, youth grievances, high digital connectivity	Trust-building, digital resilience, civic education, youth engagement
Western Electoral Competition Corridor o Bungoma–Migori–Kisumu	Intense political competition, elite mobilisation, localised tensions	Dialogue, mediation, early warning systems, peacebuilding
Coastal Grievance Corridor o Kilifi–Mombasa	Historical marginalisation, land grievances, institutional mistrust	Inclusion, civic education, trust-building, dispute resolution
Northern Resilience Corridor o Garissa–Wajir–Isiolo	Strong community cohesion, traditional mediation systems, local peace structures	Strengthen and scale resilience mechanisms

2027 Hotspot Prioritization: Persistent vs. Emerging Risks

Persistent High Priority Bungoma, Nairobi, Nyeri, Uasin Gishu Driven by unresolved historical land injustices, deep institutional mistrust, and intense urban political mobilization.

Emerging Hotspots Migori, Baringo Vulnerabilities driven by rising intra-party divisions, digital misinformation, climate-induced resource competition, and acute EWER coordination gaps.

Stable Low Priority Garissa, Wajir Handled via existing clan-based mediation.





Implication for Programming: Electoral conflict prevention should combine corridor-based approaches with targeted county interventions. Development partners and policymakers should prioritise investments in high-risk counties while scaling lessons from counties demonstrating strong resilience and locally led conflict prevention.

6 Strategic Priorities and Policy Action Matrix (2026–2027)

Priority Area	Recommended Action	Lead Institution	Supporting Actors	Timeline
Electoral Trust	Public confidence campaign on electoral processes	IEBC	CSOs, Media, Development Partners	2026–2027
Information Integrity	Election Information Integrity Taskforce	IEBC, NCIC, CAK	Media Council, Tech Platforms	2026
Civic Education	National voter education campaign targeting youth and women	IEBC	CSOs, County Governments	2026–2027
Early Warning	Expand county-level EWER systems in hotspot counties	NCIC, Ministry of Interior	Peace Actors, County Governments	2026
Inclusion	Strengthen women's and youth participation platforms	IEBC, Political Parties	CSOs, Development Partners	2026–2027

7 Conclusion

Electoral tensions are often sustained by political and economic incentives that reward polarisation, misinformation, and identity-based mobilisation. Political actors may exploit existing grievances, institutional mistrust, and socio-economic frustrations to consolidate support or influence electoral outcomes. Effective conflict prevention therefore requires not only technical reforms but also efforts to address the incentives that drive divisive political behaviour.

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