



A BASELINE PUBLIC PERCEPTION SURVEY

**REFORMED ELECTIONS FOR ENHANCED DEMOCRACY AND
INCLUSION (REDI) PROGRAMME**

THE SYSTEM DYNAMICS DRIVING ELECTORAL FRAGILITY IN KENYA AHEAD OF 2027

DISCLAIMER

This Baseline Public Perception Survey Report presents a comprehensive overview of the prevailing public perceptions, electoral dynamics, and governance challenges shaping Kenya's democratic landscape. The report establishes a baseline against which the REDI Programme will measure progress in strengthening trust in electoral institutions, promoting national cohesion, enhancing inclusive citizen participation, and supporting credible election monitoring and observation.

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FOREWORD



Kenya's democratic journey has been marked by significant milestones in advancing constitutional governance, electoral reforms, and citizen participation. As the country prepares for the 2027 General Election, it faces a rapidly evolving political and electoral landscape characterised by declining public trust in institutions, the spread of misinformation, rising socio-economic pressures, and emerging risks that could undermine peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections.

In this context Act Change Transform (Act!), through the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) Programme, commissioned this Public Perception Survey. The study provides an evidence-based assessment of citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity, institutional trust, civic participation, inclusion, social cohesion, and electoral conflict risks across eighteen counties. It also establishes a baseline against which future progress can be measured and informs adaptive programming and strategic decision-making throughout the electoral cycle.

The findings present a compelling picture of Kenya's democracy. They reveal a citizenry that remains strongly committed to democratic participation despite growing scepticism about the credibility of electoral institutions and processes. While this commitment is an important source of democratic resilience, the study also highlights persistent structural vulnerabilities, including, declining institutional trust, the exclusion of marginalised groups, technology-facilitated misinformation and online abuse, economic grievances, and evolving conflict dynamics. These require sustained attention from government institutions, civil society, development partners, and citizens alike.

These insights underscore the need to strengthen public confidence in democratic institutions, expand meaningful civic engagement, and promote inclusive electoral processes that leave no one behind. This report will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, electoral management bodies, development partners, civil society organisations, researchers, the media, and other stakeholders committed to advancing democratic governance in Kenya.

Act! remains committed to collaborating with government, civil society, development partners, and citizens to strengthen democratic institutions, promote national cohesion, and foster active citizen participation. Through the REDI Programme, we will continue to support evidence-informed interventions that contribute to a stable, peaceful, and inclusive Kenya, where democratic processes are trusted, and every citizen can participate meaningfully in shaping the nation's future.

We express our sincere appreciation to all respondents, partners, researchers, and stakeholders whose contributions made this study possible. We are equally grateful to the Embassy of Sweden for its continued partnership and support in advancing democratic governance and inclusive development in Kenya.

Tom Were

Chief Executive Officer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



This study was made possible through the invaluable support, collaboration, and commitment of numerous individuals and institutions whose contributions are sincerely appreciated.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all respondents who participated in both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study across the 18 counties of

Bungoma, Embu, Homa Bay, Isiolo, Kajiado, Kakamega, Kisii, Kisumu, Laikipia, Lamu, Makueni, Mandera, Marsabit, Mombasa, Murang'a, Nairobi, Nakuru, and Trans Nzoia. Their willingness to generously share their time, experiences, and perspectives forms the foundation of this report and provides rich insights into the political, electoral, and governance dynamics shaping Kenya's democratic landscape.

We also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of civil society organisations, community and religious leaders, youth representatives, women's groups, and persons with disabilities who participated in the interviews, focus group discussions, and stakeholder consultations. Their diverse perspectives have enriched this study, ensuring that it reflects the lived experiences, aspirations, and concerns of different communities across the country.

Our sincere appreciation goes to the research team, field coordinators, enumerators, facilitators, and data analysts whose professionalism, commitment, and technical expertise ensured the successful design, implementation, analysis, and validation of this study. We are equally grateful to the Act! team; Elizabeth Atieno, Programme Manager, Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation, Francis Dume, Sandra Jumba, and Dorah Wawuda, for their leadership, coordination, and unwavering support throughout the assignment. Their effective coordination of the consultants, partners, and stakeholders was instrumental in the successful delivery of this study.

Finally, we acknowledge the generous support of the Embassy of Sweden through the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) Programme. Their partnership has made this important work possible and reaffirmed a shared commitment to strengthening democratic governance, promoting peaceful and inclusive elections, and enhancing citizen participation in Kenya.

It is our hope that the findings and recommendations presented in this report will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, electoral management bodies, civil society organizations, development partners, researchers, and citizens, contributing to informed dialogue, evidence-based programming, and collective efforts to advance peaceful, credible, and inclusive electoral processes in Kenya.



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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Act!	Act Change Transform
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EWER	Early Warning and Early Response
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender – Based Violence
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEBC	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
NDA	Non-Disclosure Agreement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPS	National Police Service
OR	Odds Ratio
ORPP	Office of the Registrar of Political Parties
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PWDs	Persons With Disabilities
REDI	Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIGs	Special Interest Groups
TFGBV	Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Kenya approaches the 2027 General Elections, its electoral landscape is defined by a critical paradox: strong and sustained citizen commitment to voting exists alongside declining confidence in electoral institutions and processes. While participation remains high, trust in the system's ability to deliver credible, transparent, and fair outcomes continues to erode. This tension reflects not only the legacy of contested elections, but also emerging risks – including the rapid spread of digital misinformation, growing youth disengagement from formal processes, and persistent socio-economic pressures that shape political behaviour and perceptions.

It is against this background that Act Change Transform, through the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) Programme, commissioned this baseline public perception study to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the key drivers shaping Kenya's electoral environment. The study examines electoral integrity, civic participation, institutional trust, inclusion, and, conflict dynamics as one connected system, capturing both national trends and lived experiences at the community level.

The findings reveal a democratic system that remains active and participatory, yet increasingly fragile. The findings highlight both the enduring resilience of Kenya's democratic culture and the structural weaknesses particularly around trust, credibility, and inclusion that threaten the legitimacy and stability of future elections.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining a large-scale quantitative survey with qualitative research to capture both breadth and depth of citizen perspectives. A nationally representative household survey of 2,290 respondents across 18 counties generated statistically robust insights on participation, trust, and perceptions. This was complemented by focus group discussions and participatory workshops with approximately 70 participants, enabling deeper exploration of lived experiences and the underlying drivers behind observed trends.

This integrated approach ensures that the findings go beyond describing patterns to explaining the structural, behavioural, and perception-based dynamics shaping Kenya's electoral environment

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This report presents an integrated analysis of electoral integrity, civic engagement, and social cohesion ahead of the 2027 elections. Together, the findings point to a democratic system that remains active and participatory, yet increasingly strained by falling trust, weak institutional credibility, and rising risk factors.

High Participation, Fragile Confidence:

The findings reveal a fundamental paradox at the heart of Kenya's democracy: high electoral participation exists alongside weakening confidence in the system. An overwhelming **93.5% of respondents are registered voters**, with **81.2% reporting participation in the 2022 elections** and **84.2% expressing intention to vote in the 2027 General Election**. These figures reflect a deeply entrenched culture of electoral participation and a continued belief in the importance of voting as a civic duty.

However, this participation is increasingly procedural rather than confidence-driven. Qualitative insights indicate that many citizens vote out of habit, obligation, or fear of exclusion, rather than trust in the system's ability to deliver credible outcomes. This growing disconnect between participation and belief indicates a fragile democratic equilibrium, where engagement persists even as legitimacy declines.

System-Wide Trust Deficit:

Trust in key electoral and governance institutions is critically low and structurally embedded. The survey shows that **67.2% of respondents report low trust in the IEBC**, while **69.0% express low trust in the police**, and **62.6% in the judiciary**.

Qualitative findings deepen this picture, revealing that citizens generally trust the act of voting, but not the management of results, where concerns about manipulation, lack of transparency, and political interference are most pronounced. Importantly, this distrust is cumulative and systemic rooted in past electoral disputes and unresolved grievances. Citizens do not assess institutions in isolation; rather, they perceive them as part of an interconnected governance system. As such, distrust in one institution reinforces scepticism in others, making isolated reforms insufficient to restore public confidence

Participation Remains High but Increasingly at Risk:

Despite strong turnout indicators, early signs of disengagement are emerging. Approximately **13.2% of respondents indicated they were unlikely to vote**, while **28.2% believed that voting does not make a difference**.

These figures suggest a growing sense of political disillusionment, particularly among citizens who perceive electoral outcomes as predetermined or unresponsive to their participation.

Qualitative insights attribute this disengagement to limited feedback from civic processes, weak accountability, and economic pressures that shift attention toward immediate livelihood concerns. This points to a transition from a challenge of access to one of perceived efficacy, where citizens question whether participation translates into meaningful change.

Youth Engagement Paradox:

Youth, who made up **47.2% of the survey population**, represented both a major opportunity and a critical vulnerability for Kenya's democratic future. The findings reveal a clear paradox; while youth are highly politically aware and actively engaged in digital and informal spaces, their participation in formal civic and governance processes remains limited.

This gap is driven by political disillusionment, fear of electoral violence, and deep distrust in institutions. As a result, youth engagement is often expressive but not institutionalised, limiting its impact on governance outcomes. This mismatch between awareness and sustained participation not only weakens youth influence but also represents a broader structural fragility within the democratic system.

Electoral Integrity Under Pressure:

Electoral integrity emerges as a central concern, shaped by three interrelated threats:

1

Vote Buying:
Widely reported and treated as normal, with both the survey and qualitative data showing it is driven by economic hardship and has become embedded in how elections are run.





Misinformation:
Highly widespread, particularly through digital platforms, contributing to confusion, polarisation, and a sense that outcomes are already decided.

2

3

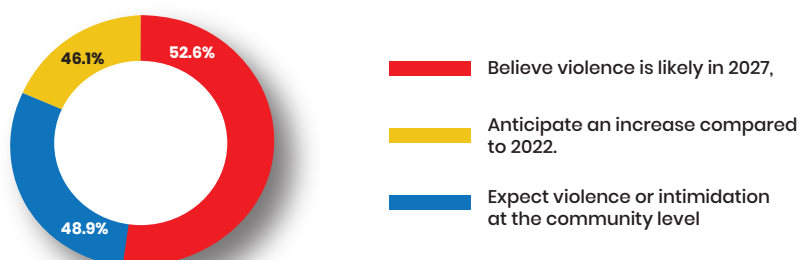
Process Gaps:
Weak civic education, limited transparency, and ineffective complaint and redress mechanisms undermine both trust and participation.



Together, these factors create a credibility gap in which electoral processes may function procedurally, but are not widely perceived as fair, transparent, or trustworthy.

High and Rising Conflict Risk:

The study identifies a moderate-to-high and increasing risk of electoral violence. A majority **52.6% believe violence is likely in 2027**, while **48.9% expect violence or intimidation at the community level**, and **46.1% anticipate an increase compared to 2022**. Importantly, the nature of electoral conflict is evolving. Qualitative findings indicate a shift from large-scale ethnic violence to more localized, networked, and digitally amplified forms of conflict. Youth mobilisation, misinformation, economic incentives, and intensified micro-level political competition are emerging as key drivers, pointing to a more complex and less predictable conflict landscape.



Fragile but Functional Social Cohesion:

Social cohesion presents a mixed and uneven picture. While **58.4% of respondents report positive inter-group relations**, indicating a degree of coexistence at the community level, **61.5% believe that ethnicity continues to influence voting behaviour**, reflecting persistent political polarisation. Qualitative findings further highlight that cohesion is not uniformly experienced. Women and persons with disabilities often face exclusion even in relatively peaceful contexts, while youth perceive growing divisions and tensions. This suggests social cohesion, while present, remains fragile and easily disrupted by political manipulation during elections.

Civic Education Gap as a Systemic Weakness:

One of the most critical structural gaps identified is in civic education. A significant **72.7%** of respondents report not having received any civic education in the past year. At the same time, citizens demonstrate limited understanding of electoral processes and high exposure to misinformation. This creates a dangerous imbalance: without credible, accessible information, misinformation spreads quickly and shapes public opinion. Moreover, evidence suggests that civic education alone does not directly drive participation, it must operate through rebuilding institutional trust, highlighting the need for a fundamental redesign of civic engagement approaches.

Key System-Level Insight:

Together, the findings point to a self-reinforcing cycle of high participation, low trust, and rising risk, resulting in fragile electoral integrity. While electoral processes remain active and formally inclusive, their legitimacy is increasingly undermined by distrust, misinformation, and socio-economic pressures. Electoral integrity therefore emerges as the central “hinge” variable within the system shaping trust, participation, and ultimately, the potential for stability or conflict.

Tackling these connected challenges requires a system-wide approach centred on rebuilding trust:

✓ **Rebuild institutional trust**

Through coordinated reforms, transparency in results management, and strengthened accountability across electoral, judicial, and security institutions.

✓ **Redesign civic education**

To focus on rebuilding trust and engagement, while integrating digital literacy to counter misinformation.

✓ **Strengthen electoral integrity**

Systems, particularly around results transmission, dispute resolution, and enforcement against malpractice such as vote buying.

✓ **Invest in digital resilience**

Including partnerships with media and technology actors, to tackle misinformation and support credible information ecosystems.

✓ **Deepen inclusion efforts**

Ensuring women, youth, and persons with disabilities participate meaningfully not just formally in electoral and governance processes.

✓ **Modernise conflict prevention systems**

Including expanding awareness and trust in early warning mechanisms and strengthening community-level peace infrastructure.

The REDI baseline perception survey reports highlight a democratic system that remains highly participatory, yet structurally fragile. Citizens continue to engage in elections, but with declining trust, limited influence, and growing concerns over credibility and safety. The challenge ahead is therefore not to increase participation, but to restore trust, deepen meaningful engagement, and ensure that participation leads to credible, inclusive, and peaceful outcomes. Addressing these challenges will require a system-wide approach that simultaneously strengthens institutions and empowers citizens, ensuring that Kenya's electoral processes are not only active, but also trusted, inclusive, and resilient.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context



Electoral processes in Kenya have historically played a central role in shaping the country's political stability, democratic development, and social cohesion. While elections provide a critical mechanism for citizen participation and leadership selection, they have also been associated with episodes of contestations, mistrust, and, at times, violence.

Over successive electoral cycles, concerns around electoral integrity, institutional credibility, and inclusiveness have remained central to both public discourse and policy engagement.

As Kenya approaches the 2027 general elections, these concerns are evolving within a changing socio-political environment. Increasing political awareness, particularly among young people, coexists with persistent economic inequality, rapid digitalisation, and expanding access to information. At the same time, the rise of digital platforms has increased exposure to misinformation, shaping public opinion and political engagement. These current dynamics continue to interact with historical experience of disputed elections, which still shapes how citizens understand and relate to electoral institutions and processes.

It is within this evolving context that the credibility, inclusiveness, and stability of electoral processes become increasingly critical. Ensuring that elections are not only participatory, but genuinely trusted, transparent, and inclusive processes, remains a central challenge as the country prepares for the next electoral cycle.

This study was commissioned by Act Change Transform (Act!) through the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) Programme to generate timely, evidence-based insights that can inform efforts to strengthen electoral integrity, enhance civic engagement, and promote social cohesion ahead of the 2027 general elections.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

This study was undertaken at a critical pre-election period to deepen understanding of the intersection between electoral integrity, civic engagement, and social cohesion. Although reforms have been introduced in Kenya's electoral systems and governance frameworks, public confidence in these systems remains inconsistent. At the same time, emerging risks, such as misinformation, shifting patterns of political mobilisation, and localised forms of electoral competition and tension, are reshaping the electoral landscape in new and complex ways.

There is therefore a need for grounded, context-sensitive insights that go beyond formal institutional analysis to capture how electoral processes are experienced at the community level and the attendant contextual imperatives. In particular, understanding the perspectives of different social groups, including youth, women, persons with disabilities, civil society actors, and community leaders, is essential for identifying both the risks and opportunities shaping electoral processes ahead of 2027.

This report draws on both quantitative and qualitative data, using findings from the REDI baseline public perception survey alongside in-depth qualitative research. The quantitative component provides broad, population-level insights into patterns of participation, trust, and perceptions of electoral processes, while the qualitative component offers deeper understanding through the exploration of lived experiences, social dynamics, and the underlying drivers shaping these trends. By combining these two approaches, the study adopts a mixed-methods design that strengthens the overall analysis, enabling a more nuanced, holistic, and triangulated understanding of electoral dynamics in Kenya.

The findings are intended to inform policymakers, development partners, and civil society actors by providing evidence-based insights and practical entry points for strengthening democratic processes, improving public confidence, and supporting peaceful and inclusive elections.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- » Assess trust in electoral and governance institutions.
- » Identify key electoral integrity challenges (*e.g. vote buying, misinformation*)
- » Examine patterns of civic participation, especially among youth and marginalized groups.
- » Analyse inclusion and barriers to participation.
- » Explore emerging conflict risks and drivers of tension.
- » Inform evidence-based programme design and reform priorities.

1.4 Analytical Lens

The analytical framework behind this study treats electoral integrity as the central outcome, shaped by connected political, economic, and social drivers that act as risk factors, enabling conditions, or structural influences within the electoral environment, as shown in Figure 1.

Electoral Integrity Analytical lens

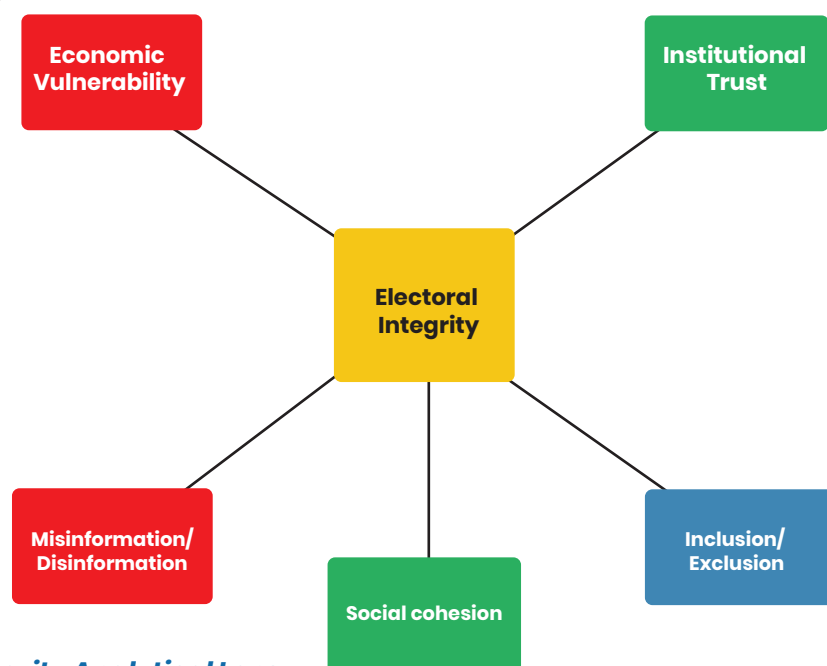


Figure 1. Electoral Integrity Analytical Lens

At the core of this framework is electoral integrity, understood as the extent to which democratic processes are credible, transparent, and inclusive. Around this sit three connected sets of drivers.

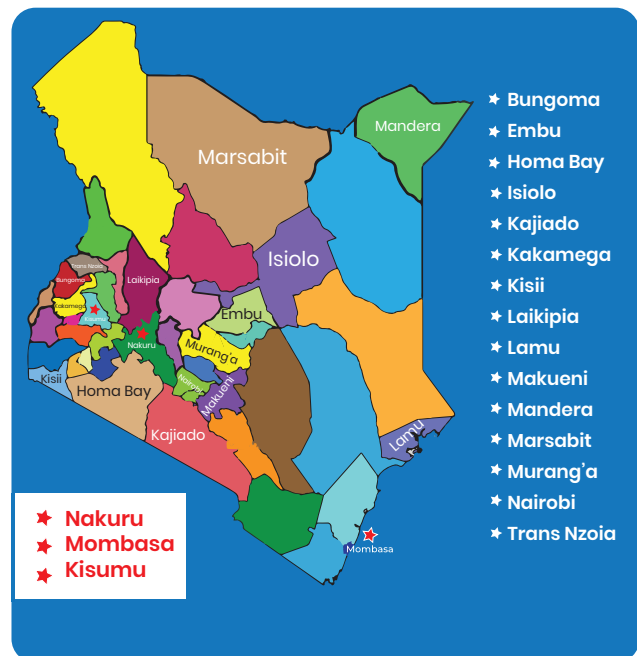


This integrated perspective highlights that electoral integrity is not determined by technical processes alone, but by the interaction of socio-economic conditions, institutional performance, and social relations. It provides a framework for understanding both the risks and opportunities shaping electoral processes ahead of the 2027 elections.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of electoral dynamics in Kenya.

The qualitative component focuses on three counties, Mombasa, Nakuru, and Kisumu, selected to reflect diverse political, social, geographical, and historical contexts. Data was collected through Focus Group Discussions and participatory workshops, capturing the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders, including youth, women, persons with disabilities, civil society actors, and community leaders. These engagements provide in-depth, context-rich insights into how electoral processes are experienced at the community level.



Complementing this, the quantitative component draws on the REDI baseline public perception survey conducted across 18 counties (Bungoma, Embu, Homa Bay, Isiolo, Kajiado, Kakamega, Kisii, **Kisumu**, Laikipia, Lamu, Makueni, Mandera, Marsabit, **Mombasa**, Murang'a, Nairobi, **Nakuru** and Trans Nzoia) providing broader, population-level insights into patterns of participation, trust in institutions, perceptions of electoral integrity, and barriers to engagement. This survey offers a wider geographic and demographic perspective, enabling the identification of national trends and comparative patterns across different regions.

While the qualitative findings are not statistically representative, they offer nuanced understanding and explanatory depth, helping to interpret and contextualise the trends identified in the quantitative data. These approaches provide a balanced and triangulated analysis, combining breadth and depth to strengthen the overall evidence base and support a more comprehensive understanding of electoral processes ahead of the 2027 elections.

1.6 Structure of the Report

The report is organised in a logical sequence, building from methodology through to analysis and recommendations.

Following this introductory section, Section 2 outlines the methodology and research approach, detailing how both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed

The subsequent sections present integrated findings across key thematic areas, including political context, trust in institutions, electoral integrity challenges, civic engagement, inclusion, and conflict risk. These sections combine narrative insights with broader trends to provide a comprehensive analysis of the electoral environment.

Later sections synthesize cross-cutting drivers and identify key risks and opportunities ahead of the 2027 elections. The report concludes with strategic recommendations aimed at strengthening electoral integrity, enhancing civic participation, and promoting social cohesion.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of electoral dynamics in Kenya. The approach combines the strengths of each method: the quantitative component provides broad, generalisable insights into patterns and trends, while the qualitative component offers deeper, context-driven understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and underlying drivers shaping these trends.

By combining these approaches, the study was able to move beyond descriptive analysis to provide a more holistic and explanatory understanding of electoral integrity, civic engagement, and social cohesion. The mixed-methods design also enables triangulation of findings, enhancing the credibility and robustness of the overall analysis.

2.2 Quantitative Component

The quantitative component is based on the perception survey, which was conducted across 18 counties, Bungoma, Embu, Homa Bay, Isiolo, Kajiado, Kakamega, Kisii, Kisumu, Laikipia, Lamu, Makueni, Mandera, Marsabit, Mombasa, Murang'a, Nairobi, Nakuru and Trans Nzoia and involved a sample of 2,290 respondents.

The survey was designed to capture population-level insights into key thematic areas, including electoral participation, trust in institutions, perceptions of electoral integrity, civic engagement, barriers to participation, and conflict risk. The inclusion of counties across different regions, coastal, northern frontier, urban, and agriculturally productive areas, ensured geographic diversity and enabled the analysis to reflect varied socio-political contexts across the country.

A structured questionnaire was used to ensure consistency in data collection, covering demographic characteristics, civic behaviour, institutional trust, and perceptions of governance and social cohesion. The survey gave a broad, representative overview of trends and patterns across different regions and demographic groups, making it possible to identify key areas of strength, vulnerability, and emerging risk within the electoral environment.

The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistical methods to identify patterns and trends across key indicators, forming the basis for understanding the scale and distribution of issues within the broader population.

2.3 Qualitative Component

The qualitative component was designed to give in-depth, context-specific insights into how electoral processes are experienced at community level.

Data was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and participatory mini-workshops conducted in three counties, Mombasa, Nakuru, and Kisumu, selected to reflect diverse political, social, geographic and historical contexts.

A total of approximately seventy (70) participants were engaged across the three locations, representing a wide range of stakeholders, including youth, women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), civil society actors, religious leaders, and community representatives. This diversity ensured that the study captured multiple perspectives and reflected the lived realities of different social groups.

Structured discussion guides were used to facilitate consistency across sessions, while allowing flexibility for locally relevant issues to emerge. The interactive nature of FGDs enabled participants to share experiences, build on each other's perspectives, and surface both shared concerns and divergent views.

2.4 Data Collection Approach

Data collection was conducted using complementary tools tailored to each component of the study.

For the quantitative survey, trained enumerators administered structured questionnaires to respondents, ensuring standardised data collection across all locations. The survey approach enabled the capture of measurable indicators related to participation, trust, and perceptions.

For the qualitative component, trained facilitators conducted Focus Group Discussions and workshops using guiding questions aligned with the study objectives. These sessions encouraged open dialogue and reflection, creating space for participants to share both personal experiences and collective perspectives.

This combined approach allowed the study to capture both breadth and depth, combining measurable indicators with narrative evidence.

2.5 Data Analysis

The analysis followed an integrated approach, combining quantitative and qualitative findings to generate comprehensive insights.

Quantitative data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to identify patterns, trends, and distributions across key indicators. Inferential analysis comprised seven regression models. This gave a broad, top-level understanding of the electoral environment and allowed comparison across different demographic groups and regions.

Qualitative data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach, where responses were systematically reviewed, coded, and organised into key themes such as electoral integrity, institutional trust, civic engagement, misinformation, inclusion, and conflict risk.

Comparative analysis was conducted across regions and participant groups to identify both common patterns and context-specific variations.

The integration of both datasets enabled the study to link statistical trends with lived experiences, providing deeper explanation of observed patterns and strengthening the overall analytical framework.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study followed key ethical principles to protect the dignity, safety, and rights of all participants. Participation in both the survey and qualitative discussions was voluntary, and participants were informed of the purpose of the study prior to engagement. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were free to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Personal identifiers were not linked to responses in the analysis, ensuring that participants could share their views openly without fear of reprisal.

Special attention was given to creating inclusive and respectful participation environments, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities. Facilitators were trained to encourage balanced participation and ensure that all voices were heard.

2.7 Strengths of the Approach

One of the key strengths of this study lies in its mixed-methods design, which allows for the integration of large-scale survey data with context-rich qualitative insights. This approach enhances both the depth and breadth of analysis, providing a more comprehensive understanding of electoral dynamics.

The quantitative component offers strong empirical grounding, while the qualitative component captures perspectives that are often under-represented in formal data collection processes. Together, they enable triangulation of findings and strengthen the credibility of the conclusions.

In addition, involving a diverse range of participants ensures the study reflects a wide range of experiences, contributing to a more inclusive and balanced analysis.



2.8 Study Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged.

1

The qualitative component is not statistically representative and is limited to three counties. While these counties were selected for diversity, the findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than fully generalizable across all regions.

2

The study relied partly on self-reported data, which may be influenced by personal perceptions, recall bias, or prevailing narratives, particularly in politically sensitive contexts.

3

Group dynamics within FGDs may have influenced responses, with some participants potentially more vocal than others. Efforts were made to ensure inclusive participation, but some perspectives may be under-represented.

4

The study was conducted within a specific pre-election context, and perceptions may evolve as political dynamics change.

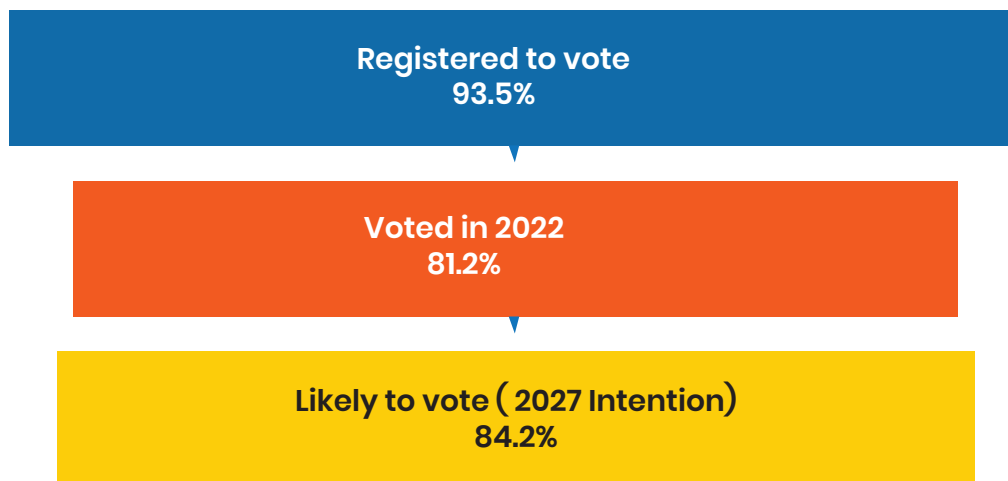
Despite these limitations, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data provides a strong and balanced evidence base for understanding electoral processes and risks ahead of the 2027 elections.



CHAPTER 3

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

Electoral Participation Funnel



Stage 3 reflects stated future intention, not a subset of those who voted in 2022 – hence the uptick from Stage 2.

Figure 2: Electoral Participation by Stage (Source: Perception Survey (n = 2,449))

Figure 2 shows that electoral participation in Kenya remains structurally strong, with survey findings indicating high levels of engagement across key stages of the participation cycle. Of all respondents who participated in the baseline public perception survey, **93.5% are registered voters**, while **81.2% reported participating in the 2022 general elections**, demonstrating a deeply embedded culture of electoral participation. Looking ahead, **84.2% of respondents indicate that they are likely to vote in future elections**, reflecting sustained commitment to electoral processes.

The participation funnel highlights a noticeable drop between registration and actual turnout, followed by only partial recovery in future voting intentions. This indicates that while participation remains strong overall, a segment of the population disengages at the point of action. The issue, therefore, lies not in inclusion, but in converting registered voters into active and consistent participants. These patterns suggest that access to the electoral system is largely not a constraint. The system is broadly inclusive and effective at enrolling citizens into the formal democratic process. However, a closer look at participation dynamics reveals a critical gap between registration and actual electoral engagement.

Qualitative findings provide important insight into this gap. While participants consistently stressed the importance of voting, they described engagement as largely limited to election periods, with little interaction with governance processes beyond voting.

Civic participation is therefore experienced as occasional and event-based, rather than continuous.

As one participant explained:

“
People come out to vote, but after that, there is very little engagement... it is like participation ends at the ballot.
”

This perception is reinforced by a broader sense that opportunities for engagement outside elections are limited or ineffective.

Participants noted:

“
That public participation forums are either inaccessible, poorly communicated, or perceived as having little influence on decision-making processes.
”

Another participant observed:

“
You attend meetings and give your views, but nothing changes. Over time, people stop going.
”

Economic pressures further shape participation patterns. Many participants highlighted that livelihood concerns take precedence over civic engagement, particularly when participation does not produce immediate or tangible benefits.

As one respondent noted:

“
People are busy looking for income... they don't have time for meetings that don't help them directly.
”

This reflects a broader structural limit:

Citizens are formally included in the system, but practical realities limit how consistently they engage. As a result, participation stays concentrated around the act of voting, rather than extending into wider civic processes such as accountability, dialogue, and governance.

These findings show that the central challenge for electoral participation in Kenya is not access, but depth and continuity. The system succeeds in registering and mobilising voters, but struggles to sustain meaningful engagement beyond elections. This results in a form of participation that is widespread but shallow, where citizens are active during electoral moments but less engaged in the ongoing processes that strengthen democratic accountability.

CHAPTER 4

TRUST IN ELECTORAL AND GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS



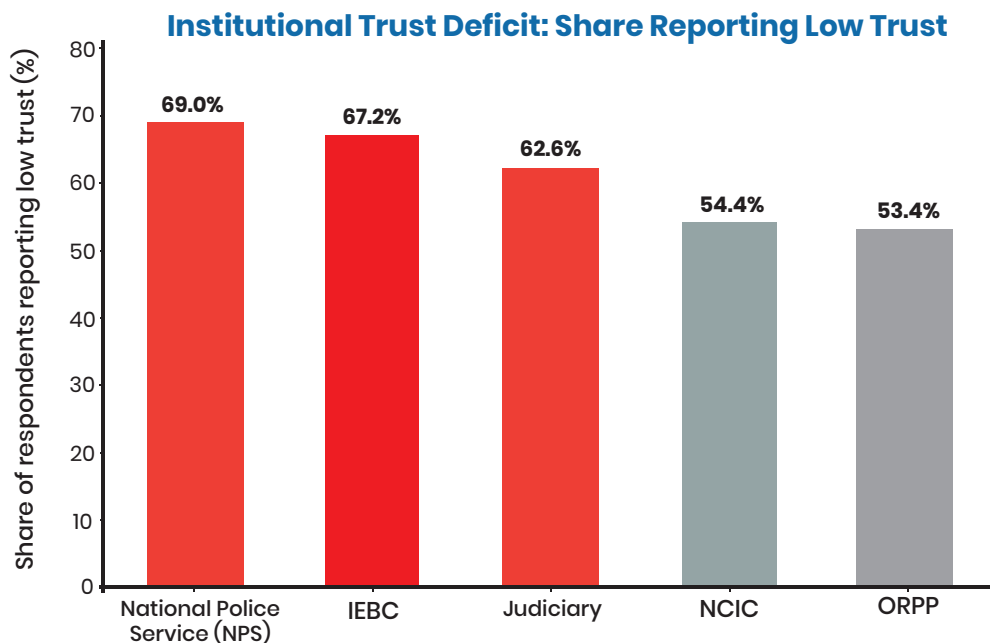
Trust in electoral and governance institutions is a fundamental pillar of electoral integrity and democratic legitimacy. Findings from the baseline public perception survey indicate a widespread and systemic deficit in public confidence across all key institutions involved in the management, oversight, and security of elections.

Trust levels are consistently low across institutions, with a majority of respondents expressing limited confidence in bodies responsible for administering elections, maintaining peace, adjudicating disputes, and promoting cohesion. While levels of distrust vary in intensity, no institution commands majority public confidence, pointing to a broader structural challenge within the governance ecosystem.

4.1 Comparative Overview of Institutional Trust

A comparative analysis of low trust levels across institutions reveals a clear hierarchy of public confidence. The National Police Service (NPS) records the highest levels of distrust, with **69.0% of respondents expressing low trust**, followed closely by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) at **67.2%**. The judiciary performs slightly better but still reflects a significant trust deficit, with **62.6% reporting low trust**.

Other institutions, including the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP), also exhibit majority low trust levels at **54.4% and 53.4%, respectively**.



Source : perception survey. All five institutions register majority low trust.

Figure 3: Low Trust in Electoral and Governance Institutions

The comparison shows a clear hierarchy of institutional trust deficits across the electoral and governance landscape. The NPS emerges as the least trusted institution, raising serious concerns for electoral security and public confidence in peace enforcement. The IEBC follows closely, with high distrust directly threatening the legitimacy of electoral processes, particularly acceptance of results. The judiciary, while relatively more trusted, still faces challenges in being perceived as an impartial and authoritative dispute-resolution mechanism. Meanwhile, the NCIC and ORPP exhibit lower but still majority distrust, compounded by gaps in visibility and public understanding.

4.2 Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC)

The IEBC has notably low levels of public trust, with **67.2% of respondents expressing low confidence** and only **29.3% expressing high trust**. This means more than two-thirds of the population lack confidence in the institution responsible for running elections.

The high proportion of respondents reporting **“not very much” (43.2%)** and **“none at all” (24.0%)** suggests that scepticism is both widespread and deeply rooted. This level of distrust presents a major challenge to electoral credibility, as the acceptance of election outcomes is heavily dependent on confidence in the electoral body.

Qualitative findings deepen this perspective by revealing a critical distinction between trust in the voting process and trust in results management.

As one participant explained:

“
Voting itself is okay, but what happens after, that is where people lose trust.
”

This indicates that concerns are concentrated in the post-voting phase, including results transmission, verification, and announcement. Delays and lack of transparency in these stages further exacerbate suspicion.

Another respondent noted:

“When results delay, people start thinking something is being changed behind the scenes.”

4.3 Judiciary (Courts and Tribunals)

The judiciary demonstrates relatively higher levels of trust compared to other institutions, yet still reflects a majority deficit. A total of **62.6% of respondents express low trust**, compared to **33.2% who report high trust**. While this indicates a degree of confidence in judicial processes, the persistence of majority distrust highlights concerns around impartiality, consistency, and effectiveness. These concerns are particularly significant in the context of electoral dispute resolution.

Qualitative insights suggest that while the judiciary is seen as an avenue for redress, its credibility is not universally assured.

As one participant observed:

“People go to court, but they are not always convinced the outcome is fair.”

This perception weakens the judiciary’s role as a final arbiter in electoral disputes and limits its ability to conclusively resolve contested outcomes.

4.4 National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC)



The NCIC reflects a mixed trust profile, with **54.4% of respondents expressing low trust**, compared to **26.5% reporting high trust**, alongside a notable **18.4% who indicate uncertainty**. The relatively large “don’t know” category suggests that public awareness and understanding of the institution’s mandate remain limited.

This lack of clarity reduces the NCIC's perceived relevance and effectiveness in addressing issues of cohesion and preventing conflict.

Qualitative findings reinforce this, highlighting uncertainty about the institution's visibility and tangible impact.

As one participant stated:

You hear about them, but you don't really see what they are doing on the ground.

This suggests that improving public engagement and strategic communication outlook could be key to strengthening both awareness and trust.

4.5 Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP)



The ORPP exhibits a similar pattern to the NCIC, with **53.4% low trust, 25.7% high trust, and 20.0% of respondents indicating uncertainty**. This distribution reflects not only moderate distrust, but also limited public familiarity with the institution. A significant proportion of respondents appear unsure about its role and effectiveness, which constrains its influence in overseeing political party conduct and promoting accountability.

Qualitative accounts point to gaps in visibility and engagement as key constraints.

As noted by one participant:

Most people don't know what they actually do, so it's hard to trust them.

4.6 National Police Service (NPS)

The NPS registers the lowest levels of trust among all institutions, with **69.0% of respondents expressing low confidence**. Notably, **31.7% report “none at all”, indicating deep and entrenched distrust**. This places the police at the centre of the broader institutional trust deficit. Given their critical role in maintaining law and order during elections, low trust in the police represents a significant risk factor for electoral security and public confidence in peaceful processes.

Qualitative findings highlight concerns around impartiality, consistency, and responsiveness, particularly in politically sensitive contexts.

As one participant explained:

“
People don't feel the police are neutral during elections, they think they take sides.
”

Another added:

“
Even when issues arise, people are not sure the police will respond fairly.
”

These perceptions undermine both preventive and responsive roles of law enforcement during electoral periods.

4.7 Key Drivers of Distrust

Across institutions, several recurring drivers of distrust emerge, reflecting both structural weaknesses and perception-based challenges that collectively shape public confidence.

A perceived lack of independence and political interference, is one of the most prominent drivers of distrust, particularly for institutions closely linked to elections. Many respondents worry that institutions are influenced by political actors, undermining their neutrality and credibility. This erodes confidence even before processes begin, since outcomes are seen as potentially already decided or influenced from outside.

As one participant noted:

“
People feel these institutions are not independent... decisions are made somewhere else and just announced.
”

This perception is particularly critical for bodies such as the IEBC and the NPS, where neutrality is fundamental to public trust.

Limited transparency and weak communication further deepen distrust across institutions. Respondents repeatedly pointed to gaps in the availability, clarity, and timeliness of information, particularly during sensitive election periods. When processes are not clearly explained, or information is not shared openly, citizens are more likely to assume manipulation or wrongdoing.

As one participant explained:

“
If people don't understand what is happening, they start to suspect something is wrong.
”

Another added:

“
There is no clear communication... people are left guessing, and that creates doubt.
”

This lack of transparency limits institutions' ability to build credibility and reinforces negative perceptions.

Delays and inconsistencies in decision-making processes also play a significant role in shaping distrust. Participants frequently associated delays, particularly in results announcement or dispute resolution, with potential manipulation. Even where delays may be procedural, they are often interpreted as deliberate actions to alter outcomes.

As one respondent stated:

When results delay, people don't see it as a process issue, they think something is being changed.

Inconsistent application of rules, or uneven responses to similar situations, deepens distrust further, creating perceptions of bias and unfairness.

Historical experiences of contested elections continue to shape current perceptions of institutions. Trust is not only influenced by present performance, but also by cumulative experiences over time. Past electoral disputes, unresolved grievances, and perceived injustices have created a lingering scepticism that carries forward into subsequent electoral cycles.

As one participant reflected:

People have seen what has happened before, so they don't easily trust what they are told now.

This historical dimension means that even improvements in processes may take time to translate into increased public confidence.

Low visibility and limited public awareness of institutional roles are particularly evident for institutions such as the NCIC and the ORPP. A significant proportion of respondents indicated uncertainty about what these institutions do, how they operate, or how they impact electoral processes. This lack of familiarity limits opportunities to build trust and reduces perceived relevance.

As one participant explained:

Most people don't know what these institutions actually do, so they don't trust them.

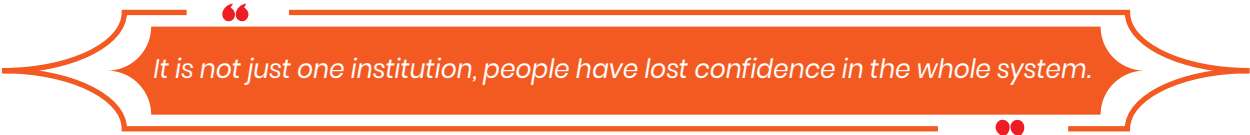
Another added:

You only hear about them occasionally, but you don't see their impact.

These drivers reinforce one another, creating a cycle in which gaps in institutional performance and perception problems interact to keep public confidence low. Weak communication deepens concerns about independence; delays reinforce perceptions of manipulation; and past experience shapes how current actions are read. As a result, distrust becomes entrenched and self-reinforcing, and addressing it needs coordinated, sustained effort on both the structural and perception sides.

4.8 Implications

The findings point to a systemic trust deficit across electoral and governance institutions, rather than isolated weaknesses within individual bodies. This indicates that challenges of credibility are embedded within the broader institutional ecosystem, driven by a combination of structural limitations, performance gaps, and entrenched public perceptions. As reflected in qualitative insights, this erosion of confidence is experienced holistically by citizens:



It is not just one institution, people have lost confidence in the whole system.

This pervasive lack of trust has direct implications for electoral integrity and stability. Even in a context where electoral participation remains high, declining confidence in institutions can weaken the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. It reduces the likelihood that results will be accepted by the public, increases the potential for disputes and contestation, and heightens susceptibility to misinformation and mobilisation around perceived grievances. Collectively, these dynamics elevate the risk of electoral tension and potential conflict.

The implications therefore extend beyond institutional performance to the overall resilience of the democratic system. Addressing this challenge will require a comprehensive and coordinated approach that not only strengthens institutional effectiveness, but also actively rebuilds public confidence. This includes enhancing transparency in electoral processes, improving communication with citizens, reinforcing accountability mechanisms, and promoting inclusive participation. Without deliberate efforts to restore trust, the gap between participation and legitimacy is likely to widen, undermining the credibility and stability of future elections.

Logistic regression (**M7, n=2,030, Pseudo-R²=0.374**) reveals the most important structural finding of this study: citizens evaluate electoral and governance institutions as one interconnected system, not as separate bodies. Trust in the Judiciary is the strongest predictor of IEBC trust (**OR=7.17, p<0.001**), followed by NPS trust (**OR=4.87, p<0.001**) and NCIC trust (**OR=2.25, p<0.001**). IEBC trust cannot be rebuilt through IEBC-specific interventions alone. Citizens who distrust the police or the courts will distrust the IEBC regardless of IEBC reforms. Multi-institution coordination is not supplementary, it is structurally essential. Urban settlement remains a significant negative predictor of IEBC trust even after controlling for all institutional trust levels (**OR=0.48, p<0.001**), confirming a persistent urban credibility deficit beyond institutional spill-over effects. This finding structurally validates the multi-institution coordination approach of Output 2.1 [M7, The Institutional Trust Bundle].

CHAPTER 5

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND CREDIBILITY

This section examines citizen perceptions of electoral integrity across five critical dimensions: fairness of elections, credibility of results, institutional independence, reform progress, and the prevalence of electoral malpractice.

These factors form the core foundation of trust, participation, and conflict risk within the electoral system.

The combined findings reveal that electoral integrity in Kenya is perceived as weak, contested, and unevenly trusted, with concerns cutting across both institutional performance and citizen experience. Table 1 provides an overview of electoral integrity profile.

Table 1: Electoral Profile – Summary of Key Indicators

Dimension	Indicator	Quantitative Finding	Interpretation
Electoral Fairness	2022 elections free and fair	45.6% disagree vs 32.3% agree	More citizens reject than accept electoral credibility, indicating a legitimacy gap
Electoral Reforms	Progress since 2022	37.9% disagree vs 29.3% agree; 32.7% uncertain	Reform process is weakly perceived and poorly communicated
Results Credibility	Results reflect votes cast	50.0% disagree vs 25.9% agree	Majority distrust election outcomes, critical integrity concern
IEBC Independence	Free from political interference	57.6% disagree vs 22.2% agree	Strong perception of political interference undermining credibility
IEBC Capacity (2027)	Ability to deliver credible elections	56.0% capable vs 39.5% not capable	Technical capacity acknowledged but credibility remains fragile
Vote Buying (Perception)	Vote buying is common	77.0% agree	Electoral malpractice widely normalized
Vote Buying (Experience)	Personally, experienced vote buying	53.3% experienced	Malpractice is not abstract, it directly affects citizens
Overall Integrity Signal	Combined perception	Multiple indicators show majority distrust	Electoral integrity is weak, contested, and structurally embedded

Table 1 highlights a consistent pattern across all dimensions of electoral integrity: negative perceptions outweigh positive ones, while confidence remains fragmented and uncertain. The strongest deficits are observed in trust in results, perceptions of independence, and the normalization of vote buying. While some level of confidence exists in institutional capacity, it is not sufficient to offset broader concerns about credibility. This indicates that electoral integrity in Kenya is challenged not only at the procedural level, but also at the level of public perception and lived experience.

Electoral integrity : Perception Profile Across Five Dimensions

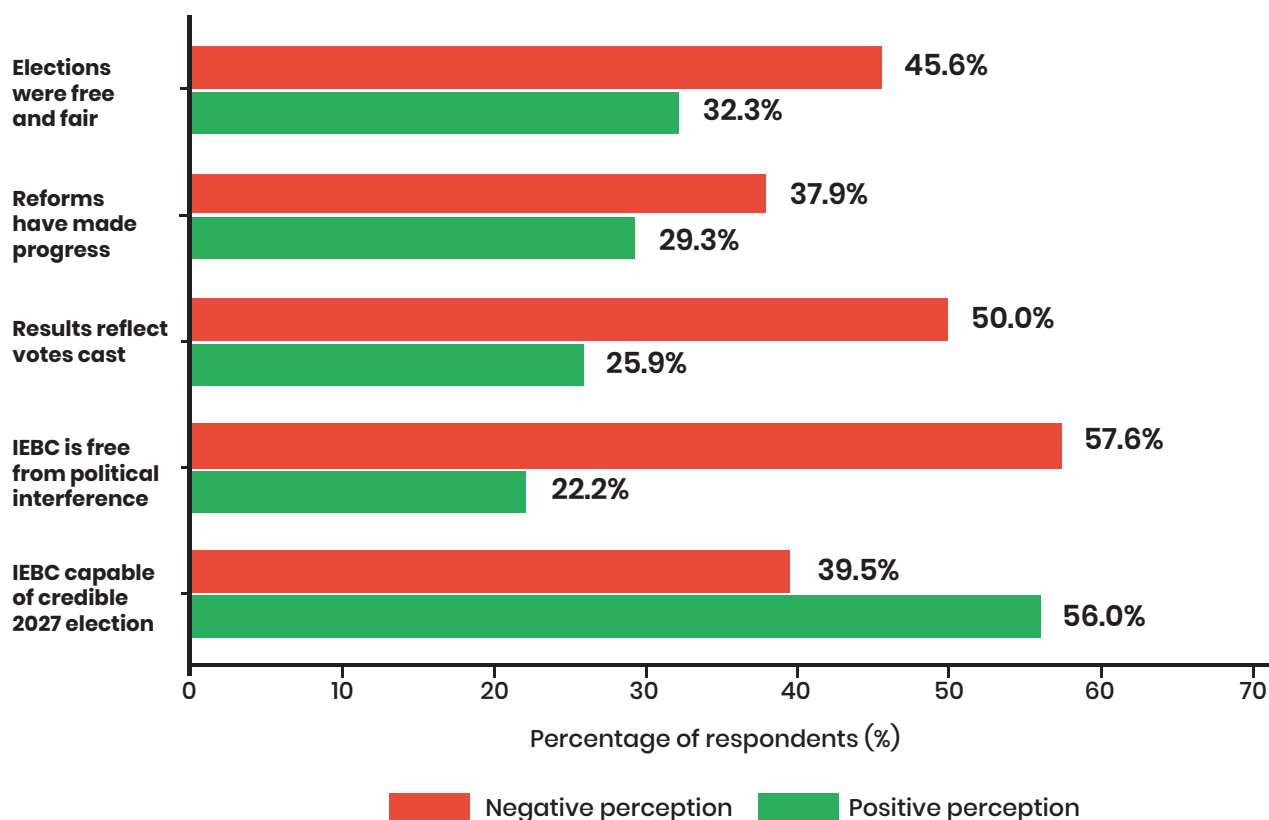


Figure 4: Electoral Integrity: Perception Profile Across Five Dimensions (Source: Perception Survey, Table 1)



5.1 Perceptions of Electoral Fairness



Public perception of the 2022 general election reflects a divided but predominantly negative assessment. A combined **45.6% of respondents disagree that the election was free and fair**, compared to **32.3% who believe it was credible, while the remainder are neutral or uncertain**.

This distribution highlights a critical legitimacy gap: more citizens reject than accept the credibility of elections. Although a segment of the population retains confidence, it is outweighed by scepticism.

Qualitative findings reinforce this perception, revealing that doubts are not always based on direct observation, but are shaped by broader narratives of mistrust.

As one participant explained:

“
Even if the process looks okay, people already believe the outcome will not reflect the real vote.
”

This indicates that perceptions of fairness extend beyond visible procedures to include expectations about outcomes and institutional behaviour. Elections are therefore judged not only by how they are conducted, but by whether they are believed to produce genuine representation.

5.2 Perceptions of Electoral Reforms

Perceptions of electoral reform since 2022 remain weak and uncertain, with **37.9% of respondents indicating no meaningful progress**, compared to **29.3% who believe reforms have been achieved**. Notably, a large proportion (**32.7%**) remain neutral or unsure. This suggests that reform efforts lack both visibility and credibility in the public eye.

Even where reforms may have been implemented, they have not translated into broad public confidence. Qualitative insights highlight this gap between reform processes and public perception

As one participant observed:

We hear reforms are happening, but people on the ground don't see the change.

Another added:

If changes are not visible, people will assume nothing has improved.

These findings point to a gap in both communication and trust, where reforms are either not well understood or not having enough impact to shift public opinion.

5.3 Trust in Election Results

Trust in election outcomes represents one of the most critical weaknesses in the electoral system. A combined 50% of respondents disagree that election results accurately reflect votes cast, while only 25.9% express confidence.

This indicates a majority rejection of outcome credibility, making distrust in results one of the strongest findings in the dataset.

Qualitative findings provide deeper insight into this distrust, highlighting widespread suspicion of the results management process.

As one participant noted:

People don't trust the counting and announcement of results, it is where things are believed to change.

Another explained:

Once the votes leave the polling station, that is where trust is lost.

These perceptions reinforce a critical pattern: while the act of voting is generally accepted, confidence declines sharply in the stages that determine final outcomes.

5.4 Perceptions of IEBC Independence

Perceptions of the IEBC's independence are largely negative. A total of **57.6% of respondents believe the Commission is not independent**, compared to only **22.2% who view it as free from political influence**. This reinforces the perception that political interference shapes electoral processes, undermining confidence in institutional neutrality.

Qualitative findings strongly echo this sentiment.

As one participant explained:

People don't believe the IEBC is neutral, they think it is influenced by political interests.

This perception of compromised independence directly weakens trust in both the process and outcomes of elections, reinforcing broader legitimacy challenges.

5.5 Institutional Capacity vs Credibility

Assessment of the IEBC's capacity to manage future elections presents a more nuanced picture. A majority **56.0% consider the Commission to be capable to some degree**, while **39.5% express doubts about its capacity**. However, qualitative findings reveal a critical distinction between technical capacity and institutional credibility.

As one participant noted:

“
They can run the process, but people are not sure it will be fair.
”

This reflects a pattern of conditional confidence, where citizens acknowledge that the IEBC can organise elections, but question whether it will do so transparently and fairly.

This gap between capacity and trust highlights that electoral integrity is not purely a technical issue – it is fundamentally about credibility.

The capacity–credibility gap described here is confirmed and quantified by Model M1. Of all demographic factors tested, only settlement type predicts trust in the IEBC; gender and age do not. This implies that even technically competent IEBC performance is filtered through a systemic credibility deficit, particularly pronounced in urban areas, that is not reducible to demographic targeting. The gap is structural and systemic, not primarily communicative.

5.6 Vote Buying and Electoral Malpractice

Vote buying is both widely perceived and widely experienced, emerging as one of the most entrenched challenges to electoral integrity. A combined **77.0% of respondents believe vote buying is common**, while **53.3% report having personally experienced it**. These figures indicate that electoral malpractice is not only visible, but directly affects a majority of citizens. Qualitative findings highlight the normalization of vote buying, particularly in contexts of economic hardship.

As one participant stated:

“
It has become part of elections, people even expect it.
”

Another added:

“
When people are struggling, they take what they are offered.
”

These insights show that vote buying is driven not only by political strategy, but also by socio-economic vulnerability, blurring the line between choice and necessity.

Vote Buying: Widely Perceived, Personally Experienced

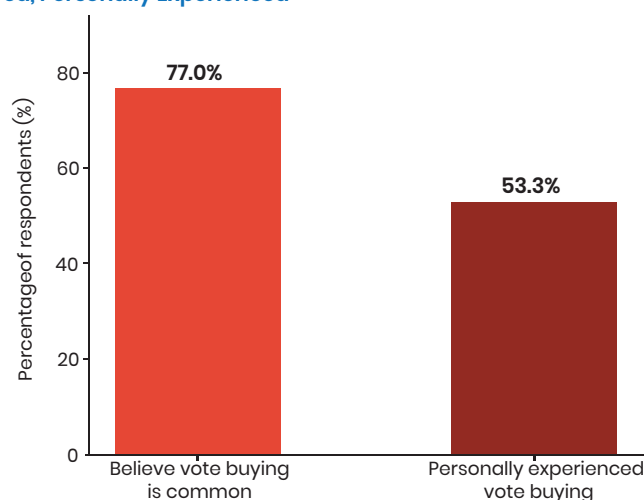


Figure 5: Vote Buying: Widely Perceived, Personally Experienced (Source: Perception Survey)

5.7 Misinformation and Information Disorder

Misinformation is a growing, increasingly influential challenge within the electoral environment. Qualitative findings point to widespread circulation of unverified and misleading information, particularly through digital platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook. Participants emphasised that misinformation shapes perceptions of candidates, distorts understanding of electoral processes, and amplifies mistrust in institutions.

As one respondent explained:

“Most people get their information from social media, and a lot of it is not true.”

Another noted:

“Messages spread very fast, and people believe them without verifying.”

The rapid spread of misinformation creates confusion and polarisation, while reinforcing existing biases and fears. It also contributes directly to distrust in electoral outcomes, as conflicting narratives weaken confidence in official information. In this context, misinformation acts not only as a communication challenge, but also as a driver of instability and tension.

5.8 Process Gaps and Weak Accountability Mechanisms

Beyond behavioural challenges, structural gaps in electoral processes also undermine integrity. Participants highlighted confusion around electoral procedures, limited understanding of processes, and weak or ineffective complaint/grievance and redress mechanisms. These gaps reduce confidence in the system's ability to manage disputes and address grievances fairly and quickly.

As one participant explained:

“People don't fully understand how the process works, especially when it comes to results.”

Another added:

Even when you have a complaint, it is not clear where to take it or whether it will be handled fairly.

Weaknesses like these feed the perception that the system lacks accountability and responsiveness. Without clear, trusted ways to resolve issues, grievances are more likely to escalate into wider disputes or public dissatisfaction.

5.9 Integrated Interpretation: Electoral Integrity as a System Driver

The findings confirm that electoral integrity functions as a central system driver, shaping the relationships between institutional trust, citizen participation, and conflict risk. As outlined in the analytical lens (Section 1.4), electoral outcomes are influenced by the interaction of structural conditions, risk drivers, and enabling factors. The evidence presented in this study demonstrates how weaknesses in electoral integrity activate and reinforce these dynamics, producing system-wide effects.

a) Electoral Integrity and Institutional Trust

Electoral integrity is a primary driver of institutional trust. Perceptions of unfair elections, inaccurate results, and political interference collectively erode confidence in IEBC and related governance institutions. Where electoral processes are perceived as compromised, institutions lose their legitimacy as neutral and credible arbiters.

As one participant observed:

If the process cannot be trusted, then the institution managing it cannot be trusted either.

This loss of trust weakens one of the essential enabling drivers within the electoral system. Without confidence in institutions, even well-functioning processes struggle to gain acceptance, and institutional authority is significantly diminished.

b) Electoral Integrity and Civic Participation

Weak electoral integrity also undermines civic engagement by reducing the perceived value of participation. While access to voting remains high, confidence in the impact of participation is increasingly constrained by beliefs that electoral outcomes are predetermined or manipulated.

As one participant noted:

If the result is already decided, why should people vote?

This reflects a shift from a problem of access to a problem of confidence. Citizens may remain formally included in the electoral process, but their motivation to engage meaningfully is weakened.

Over time, this contributes to a form of participation that is present but shallow, where voting occurs without sustained engagement or confidence in outcomes.

c) Electoral Integrity and Conflict Risk

Electoral integrity also plays a critical role in shaping conflict dynamics. When people question the legitimacy of elections, political competition is more likely to spill over into dispute and instability. In such contexts, electoral outcomes are less likely to be accepted, particularly by losing candidates and their supporters.

As one respondent explained:

When people don't trust the process, they will not accept the results.

This dynamic highlights how risks associated with political competition, misinformation, and identity-based mobilisation can be amplified in environments where electoral integrity is weak. In this way, electoral integrity acts as either a stabilizing or destabilising force within the political system.

d) Electoral Integrity as a System “Hinge Variable”

The findings illustrate that electoral integrity operates as a “hinge variable” within the broader governance system, connecting structural conditions, risk drivers, and enabling factors to key democratic outcomes.

Weak electoral integrity – shown through perceptions of unfairness, compromised independence, and widespread malpractice – sets off a reinforcing cycle:

- » It erodes institutional trust, weakening confidence in electoral and governance bodies.
- » It reduces the perceived value of participation, contributing to disengagement and apathy.
- » It heightens conflict risk, as contested legitimacy fuels dispute and instability.

These effects do not occur in isolation. Instead, they interact dynamically: declining trust discourages participation, weak participation undermines legitimacy, and low legitimacy increases the likelihood of contestation and conflict.

As one participant summarised:

When the system is not trusted, everything around elections becomes a problem.

Importantly, the findings also demonstrate that restoring electoral integrity requires addressing both structural and socio-economic drivers. Institutional reforms alone may not be sufficient if underlying incentives, such as economic vulnerability and the normalization of vote buying, continue to shape behaviour. Similarly, improvements in technical processes must be accompanied by visible transparency, accountability, and communication to rebuild public confidence. In this context, electoral integrity is not simply one dimension of the electoral process, it is the central mechanism through which trust, participation, and stability are either strengthened or undermined. Strengthening electoral integrity is therefore foundational to improving not only electoral outcomes, but the overall resilience and legitimacy of the democratic system.

CHAPTER 6

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Civic engagement in Kenya presents a complex and evolving picture, characterised by high levels of political awareness but limited sustained participation beyond electoral moments. Both quantitative and qualitative findings show a significant gap between how much citizens engage with politics in principle and how much they actually take part in institutional processes.

Quantitative data shows that **73.6% of respondents rarely or never take part in civic activities beyond voting**, showing that participation is largely limited to election events rather than ongoing involvement in governance. In addition, **28.2% of respondents believe voting makes no difference**, showing growing disillusionment about whether participation actually works.

These figures point to a broader challenge not of access, but of engagement depth and perceived efficacy. While citizens are formally included in democratic processes, their interaction with governance structures remains limited and often occasional.

Table 2: Civic Engagement and Youth Participation Overview

Indicator	Finding	Interpretation
Engagement beyond voting	73.6% rarely/never engage	Civic participation is largely limited to elections
Perceived value of voting	28.2% say voting doesn't matter	Growing disenchantment with impact of participation
Youth turnout	40%	Youth underrepresented in formal participation
Youth engagement pattern	High online activity	Shift toward informal/digital engagement

Together, these indicators point to a significant engagement gap, where citizens – particularly youth – are highly aware and politically active in informal spaces, but less engaged in formal democratic processes. This backs up the wider finding of a “participation paradox”.

Civic Engagement Beyond the Ballot

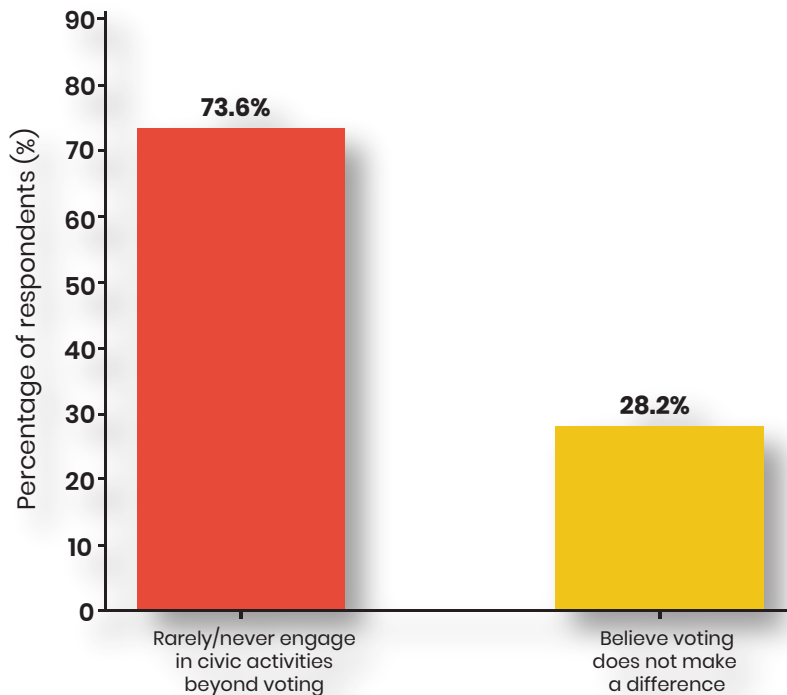


Figure 6: Civic Engagement Beyond the Ballot (Source: Perception Survey, Table 2)

6.1 Patterns of Civic Engagement

The data indicates that civic participation in Kenya is largely occasional concentrated around election periods rather than sustained over time. Voting time. For many citizens, voting remains the main – and often the only – form of engagement.

Qualitative insights back this up, with participants repeatedly describing civic engagement as tied to events and short-lived.

As one participant explained:

“People come out during elections, but after that, there is very little engagement with leaders.”

This suggests a disconnect between electoral participation and broader democratic engagement. Mechanisms such as public participation forums, community dialogue platforms, and accountability processes are either underutilised or perceived as ineffective. Another participant noted:

“You attend meetings, but nothing changes. Over time, people stop participating.” This sense of limited impact reduces people's motivation to keep engaging, and contributes to falling civic participation outside election periods.

6.2 Youth Engagement: Awareness vs Participation

Youth represent a critical demographic within Kenya's political landscape, characterised by high levels of political awareness and digital engagement, but relatively lower participation in formal electoral and governance processes.

Qualitative findings indicate that youth are highly active on digital platforms, where they engage with political content, debates, and campaigns. However, this online engagement does not consistently translate into offline participation, particularly in voting and formal civic processes. In some contexts, youth voter turnout has been estimated at approximately 40%, significantly lower than overall participation levels. This creates a distinct engagement gap: youth are informed and expressive, but not fully integrated into formal democratic processes.

As one participant observed:

“
Young people are very active online, but many do not vote or attend public meetings.
”

Logistic regression confirms and quantifies the youth engagement gap described above. On voter registration (**M2, n=2,290, Pseudo-R²=0.065**), youth aged 18–35 are 65% lower odds to be registered than those aged 36–60 (**OR=0.35, p<0.001**), controlling for gender, settlement, and education. On voting intention for 2027 (**M3, n=2,290**), youth are **29%** less likely to intend to vote (**OR=0.71, p<0.01**). These are structural disadvantages that persist after all demographic controls. Furthermore, civic education does not moderate youth voting intention in M3 (**OR=0.90, ns**), confirming that information provision alone will not close the youth participation gap. The pathway to youth participation runs through institutional trust, not knowledge transfer.

6.3 Drivers of Youth Disengagement

The findings point to several key drivers behind youth disengagement, combining both perception-based and structural factors.

Disillusionment with political processes is a major factor. Many young people perceive elections as predetermined or influenced by powerful actors, reducing confidence in their ability to effect change.

As one youth participant stated:

“
They feel the outcome is already decided, so their vote will not change anything.
”

Fear and perceived risk also play a role, particularly where elections are linked to tension or violence. Concerns about personal safety can discourage participation in both voting and wider civic activities. Limited inclusion in decision-making processes further reinforces disengagement. Youth often perceive that their contributions are not taken seriously or do not influence outcomes, reducing motivation to engage.

Finally, economic pressures significantly constrain participation. Many young people prioritise livelihood activities over civic engagement, particularly where participation does not yield immediate or tangible benefits.

As one participant explained:

“
Young people are focused on survival, they don't have time for processes that don't help them directly.
”

6.4 Civic Engagement and Trust Linkages

Civic engagement is closely linked to broader patterns of trust and electoral integrity identified in earlier sections. Where trust in institutions is low and electoral integrity is questioned, citizens are less likely to engage in governance processes.

This relationship is particularly evident in the perception that participation does not meaningfully influence outcomes. The finding that 28.2% of respondents believe voting does not matter reflects a deeper erosion of confidence in the responsiveness and accountability of the system. As one participant summarized: “People participate less because they don’t see results from their participation.”

This creates a reinforcing cycle: weak trust reduces engagement, and low engagement further weakens institutional accountability and legitimacy.

Model M3 (**voting intention, $n=2,290$**) provides direct statistical evidence for the trust–participation linkage described above and reveals a critical programme design implication. IEBC high trust is a significant positive predictor of voting intention (**$OR=1.52, p<0.01$**). However, civic education does not independently predict voting intention (**$OR=0.90, p=ns$**). The civic education — participation pathway assumed in many electoral programmes does not operate directly. It requires an intermediate step: civic education – institutional trust – participation. Programmes that deliver information without rebuilding institutional credibility will not move the participation needle. This is the civic education mediation gap: the missing link between information and democratic action.

6.5 Integrated Insight: The Participation Paradox

These findings reveal a defining feature of Kenya's civic landscape:

A “participation paradox” – high political awareness but low institutional engagement.

Citizens, particularly youth, are increasingly informed, engaged in political discourse, and active in digital spaces. However, this awareness does not consistently translate into participation in formal democratic processes or sustained civic engagement.

This paradox has important implications. It suggests that the challenge is not a lack of interest in politics, but a lack of confidence in the effectiveness and responsiveness of institutional participation channels. In this context, civic engagement is shifting from structured, institutional forms to more informal and issue-based expressions, particularly online.

At the same time, this gap represents both a risk and an opportunity. If disengagement continues, it may contribute to declining participation and weakened democratic legitimacy. However, the high levels of awareness and interest, especially among youth, also indicate a strong foundation for re-engagement, provided that institutional trust, responsiveness, and inclusivity are strengthened.

CHAPTER 7

INCLUSION (WOMEN, YOUTH, PWDS)



Inclusion within Kenya's electoral processes remains a critical but uneven dimension of democratic participation.

While quantitative findings suggest relatively broad formal inclusion across the population, qualitative evidence reveals that women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and youth experience distinct and layered barriers that limit meaningful engagement.

These groups are not uniformly excluded from the system; rather, their participation is shaped by structural, social, and institutional constraints that affect their ability to influence outcomes, access opportunities, and participate with dignity.

Table 3: Summary of Inclusion-Related Statistics (Women, Youth, PWDs)

Dimension	Indicator	Statistic	Interpretation for Inclusion
Women	Gender distribution (female)	48.9%	Indicates near parity in representation (formal inclusion achieved)
	Gender distribution (male)	50.5%	Confirms balanced sampling baseline
	Participation gap	Not quantified	Suggests disconnect between representation and influence
Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)	Disability/health barrier	8.7%	Indicates targeted structural exclusion affecting a specific group
	Discrimination barrier (primary)	2.5%	Reflects smaller but concentrated exclusion pressures
Youth	Youth population (18 – 35)	47.2%	Largest demographic → high systemic importance for inclusion
	Youth disengagement risk	13.2% unlikely to vote	Signals emerging participation gap among youth
	Turnout gap (registered vs voted)	12% percentage points	Reflects conversion problem (awareness → action)

Cross-cutting Barriers	Fear of violence	24.5%	Major deterrent affecting women and youth disproportionately
	Distrust in process	21.0%	Links to perceived exclusion and low legitimacy
	Lack of civic education	26.0%	Core informational barrier affecting all groups
	Belief vote doesn't matter	28.2%	Largest barrier → deep political disillusionment
System-Level Participation	Registered voters	93.5%	High formal inclusion at access level
	Voted (2022)	81.2%	Strong participation but not universal
	Likely to vote	84.2%	Indicates sustained but fragile engagement

7.1 Women: Participation Without Power

Quantitative findings indicate that women are not excluded from the electoral system at the level of access or representation. The survey achieved near gender parity, with **women accounting for 48.9%** of respondents compared to **50.5% men**, suggesting that women are present in civic and electoral spaces in broadly comparable numbers. However, this numerical inclusion does not translate into equal participation in leadership or decision-making processes, revealing a persistent gap between presence and power. In other words, women are “in the room” but remain largely absent from the spaces where agendas are set and resources are allocated.

Qualitative insights demonstrate that women face multiple and intersecting constraints that limit their substantive participation. Political spaces are widely perceived as unsafe, with one participant stating that “politics is not a safe space for women”. These concerns are reinforced by experiences of intimidation, harassment, and broader insecurity during electoral periods. These risks discourage women from contesting for office, speaking publicly, or taking visible roles in campaigns, even when they are active voters or community mobilisers. As a result, women’s engagement is often cautious and defensive, shaped by the need to navigate threats rather than exercise agency.

Beyond insecurity, entrenched patriarchal norms continue to shape who is seen as a legitimate political actor. Participants repeatedly noted that women are positioned primarily as supporters, mobilisers, or “crowd fillers,” while decision-making roles are reserved for men. This dynamic is captured in the observation that “women are welcomed as supporters but not decision-makers,” highlighting that acceptance is conditional and limited to roles that do not disturb existing power hierarchies. Such norms operate at household, community, party, and institutional levels, reinforcing a ceiling on women’s political authority even when formal rules appear gender-neutral.

Financial constraints further compound these barriers. The high cost of political participation, including campaigning, mobilisation, and networking, media visibility, limits women's ability to compete effectively, particularly in a context of broader economic inequality. Women often have less access to independent income, assets, and financial networks, which narrows the pool of those who can realistically contest or sustain a political career. This economic exclusion is reinforced by unequal access to information and political processes, with some respondents noting that "information is intentionally withheld... just to lock women out of democratic processes," underscoring gatekeeping practices within parties and institutions.

Taken together, these findings indicate that while women are formally included in electoral processes and appear in the numbers, their participation remains constrained by structural, socio-cultural and economic factors. Their role is often limited to symbolic or supportive engagement, with restricted access to agenda setting, negotiation, and enforcement power. This produces a form of inclusion that is visible but not transformative: parity in participation metrics can coexist with persistent inequality in influence, leaving the gendered architecture of power essentially intact.

Logistic regression on election observer awareness (*M6, n=2,290, Pseudo-R²=0.040*) confirms a significant gender gap: **women are 34% less likely** to be aware of election observer organizations than men (*OR=0.66, p<0.001*), after controlling for education and settlement. Crucially, settlement type is not a significant predictor of observer awareness (ns), meaning this gender gap is not explained by urban–rural differences, it is an independent, access-based exclusion from civic information. Education is the strongest positive predictor (*Tertiary OR=3.13***, Secondary OR=1.44****). Women are less likely to hold tertiary education and less likely to have received civic education, compounding their informational exclusion. This is an access problem, not an attitudinal one.

7.2 Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) : Structural Exclusion

For persons with disabilities, the gap between formal inclusion and lived experience is even more pronounced, as exclusion is embedded in the physical and institutional design of the electoral system. Quantitative data shows that 8.7% of respondents identify disability or health-related issues as a barrier to participation. While smaller in proportion compared to other barriers, this figure reflects a concentrated and systemic challenge affecting a specific group disproportionately. Qualitative findings provide clear evidence of how these barriers operate in practice. Many participants highlighted the physical inaccessibility of polling stations, describing environments that are not designed to accommodate diverse needs.

As one respondent explained,

“Stairs only... which automatically excludes many people.”

Such structural limitations prevent independent participation and effectively exclude individuals from exercising their rights on equal terms.

Even where participation is possible, it is often compromised. PWDs frequently rely on others for assistance during voting, undermining both privacy and autonomy. This is reflected in the observation that “sometimes you are forced to depend on strangers to vote, which affects privacy and independence.” In addition, the lack of accessible materials, such as braille ballots or large-print information, further restricts participation. Participants noted that “large prints and braille [are] still a gap,” highlighting the incomplete implementation of inclusion measures.

At a broader level, PWDs emphasized that the electoral system itself is not designed with their needs in mind. Civic education and communication processes often fail to accommodate different forms of disability, reinforcing exclusion from both information and decision-making.

As one participant explained,

“Most voter education is designed for people without disabilities... we are expected to adjust instead of the system adjusting for us.”

These findings illustrate that exclusion for PWDs is fundamentally structural. It is not driven by lack of willingness to participate, but by systems that fail to enable full and independent engagement. As a result, participation is often conditional, dependent, and unequal, raising critical questions about fairness and accessibility within the electoral process.

7.3 Youth: Mobilised but Marginalised

Youth represent the largest and most dynamic segment of the electorate, yet their inclusion is characterized by a paradox of high engagement and low influence. Quantitative data shows that individuals aged 18–35 account for 47.2% of respondents, making youth the dominant demographic group in electoral processes. This demographic weight positions youth as a critical constituency with significant potential to shape electoral outcomes.

However, qualitative findings suggest that this potential is not fully realised within formal decision-making structures. Youth are highly active in political discussion particularly through digital platforms and civic movements,

With one participant noting that:

“Young people are very active online... speaking about issues affecting the country.”

This reflects strong political awareness and engagement outside formal institutions.

Despite this visibility, youth remain largely excluded from leadership roles and decision-making processes. Their participation tends to be concentrated in mobilisation rather than governance, limiting their influence on policy and political direction. At the same time, economic vulnerability creates conditions in which youth are susceptible to political manipulation. This dynamic is captured in the statement that “joblessness... they are used as goons during elections,” highlighting how exclusion can translate into instrumentalization within electoral processes.

Disillusionment further reinforces this exclusion. Many young people express scepticism about the value of participation, questioning whether their engagement leads to meaningful change.

This sentiment is reflected in the question “why vote if nothing changes?” Such perceptions undermine motivation to engage in formal electoral processes, contributing to gaps between awareness and participation.

The result is a clear participation–power disconnect. Youth are highly mobilised and visible within the electoral space, yet remain peripheral to formal structures of influence. This imbalance not only limits their representation, but also creates broader risks, including disengagement, frustration, and vulnerability to manipulation.

The regression analysis provides a critical analytical upgrade on the youth inclusion findings. Youth (18–35) are the only group to appear as a significant negative predictor across three separate regression models simultaneously: voter registration (**M2: OR=0.35, $p<0.001$**), voting intention (**M3: OR=0.71, $p<0.01$**), and EWER awareness (**M4: OR=0.78, $p<0.01$**). No other demographic group shows this multi-model convergence pattern. Youth face compounding structural disadvantages across registration, participation, and peace infrastructure simultaneously. The analysis affirms that youth should be treated as the bellwether demographic for Outcome 3, not as one Special Interest Group among three. Failing to close the youth registration, intention, and EWER gaps together will systematically undermine both participation and conflict prevention targets.

7.4 Integrated Conclusion: Inclusion and Electoral Legitimacy

a) Inclusion is Structurally High but Substantively Uneven

The data demonstrates that Kenya’s electoral system has achieved high levels of structural inclusion, particularly in terms of access. With **93.5% voter registration** and **81.2% turnout**, most citizens are formally integrated into electoral processes, indicating that administrative and access barriers are relatively low. Similarly, the near parity in gender representation (**48.9% women**) suggests that inclusion at the level of presence has been largely achieved.

However, this structural success conceals deeper inequalities. The findings show that being present in the system does not equate to meaningful participation or influence. Women, youth, and persons with disabilities are formally included but face barriers that limit their ability to engage effectively, safely, and equitably. This reveals a critical distinction between access-based inclusion (who is in the system) and outcome-based inclusion (who has power, voice, and agency within it).

In practice, this means that elections may appear broadly inclusive on the surface, while still reproducing underlying social and political inequalities. Participation is therefore widespread, but not equally empowering, resulting in a system where inclusion exists in form but remains uneven in function.

b) Each Group Faces a Distinct Type of Exclusion

The analysis highlights that exclusion is not uniform but group-specific and structurally differentiated, affecting each group in distinct ways.

For women, the primary challenge lies in power and participation gaps. While women are well represented numerically, they face socio-cultural barriers, including patriarchy, political violence, and financial constraints, that limit their transition into leadership and decision-making roles. Their participation is often visible but peripheral, concentrated in support roles rather than positions of influence. This indicates that gender inclusion challenges are less about access and more about redistribution of power within political spaces.

For persons with disabilities (PWDs), exclusion is primarily structural and design-based. The figure of **8.7% identifying disability** as a barrier reflects barriers that are not incidental but embedded in the system itself. Inaccessible polling stations, lack of assistive materials, and poorly adapted civic education systems mean that participation is often conditional and dependent. Unlike other groups, PWDs are not only disadvantaged within the system, they are often excluded by its design, raising fundamental questions about equity, dignity, and independence in participation.

For youth, the challenge is a representation and trust gap, despite their demographic dominance (**47.2% aged 18–35**). Youth are highly engaged, particularly in informal and digital spaces, yet remain underrepresented in formal political structures and decision-making processes. This creates a paradox where youth are central to electoral mobilisation but peripheral to governance outcomes. Combined with growing disillusionment and distrust, this gap increases the risk of disengagement or, in some cases, manipulation within political processes. These patterns show that inclusion is not a single issue but a multi-dimensional challenge, where each group experiences exclusion through different mechanisms – social, structural, or institutional.

c) The Biggest Barriers Are Attitudinal and Systemic, Not Logistical

A critical insight from the data is that the most significant barriers to participation are not logistical, but rather attitudinal, informational, and systemic. While the electoral system has made substantial progress in expanding access, evidenced by high registration and turnout, many citizens remain constrained by deeper issues of confidence, knowledge, and trust that shape how they engage with the process.

Political Disillusionment : “Voting Does Not Make a Difference”

At the heart of these barriers is a widespread sense of political disillusionment, reflected in the finding that 28.2% of respondents believe voting makes no difference. This perception points to a fundamental challenge in the democratic system: participation is no longer limited by whether people can vote, but by whether they believe voting has value.

Qualitative findings reinforce this sentiment, with participants expressing frustration and resignation, asking, “why vote if nothing changes?” This reflects a deeper erosion of electoral efficacy, where citizens feel disconnected from outcomes and perceive elections as predetermined or unresponsive. In such contexts, participation becomes symbolic rather than meaningful, leading to disengagement even among those who are formally included in the system.

Civic Education Deficit : Limited Knowledge and Awareness

Closely tied to this disillusionment is a significant civic education deficit, with 26.0% of respondents identifying lack of information as a major barrier. While the electoral framework provides opportunities for engagement, many citizens lack a clear understanding of how the system works, how their participation contributes to outcomes, and how to exercise their rights effectively. Qualitative evidence highlights this gap,

With participants noting that :

“

People are not fully taught how the process works.

”

and that many are unaware of when or how to engage in civic spaces. This lack of knowledge limits meaningful participation and creates fertile ground for misinformation, which further distorts perceptions and undermines trust. As a result, participation often occurs without sufficient understanding, reducing its impact and quality.

Fear of Violence : Participation Under Risk

At the same time, fear and insecurity remain significant barriers that shape participation decisions. A substantial proportion of respondents identify fear of violence as a deterrent, with around a quarter citing it as a barrier.

Qualitative findings illustrate how this fear is experienced, particularly by vulnerable groups. Women, for example, emphasized that political environments are characterized by “insecurity and hostility... propaganda and social media bullying,” while youth noted that electoral periods expose them to both involvement and risk. In such conditions, participation is no longer a neutral civic act but a calculated risk, where individuals must weigh the potential benefits of engagement against concerns for personal safety. This dynamic not only discourages participation but can also alter it, as those most vulnerable are more likely to withdraw.

Institutional Distrust : Low Confidence in Electoral Processes

Interlinked with fear is a broader climate of institutional distrust, affecting approximately **20–25% of respondents and further reducing confidence in electoral processes**. This distrust is reinforced by qualitative narratives suggesting that electoral processes lack transparency or are influenced by external interests,

With some participants asserting that :

“

Results are already decided... before voting.

”

Such perceptions undermine the legitimacy of the system and weaken the incentive to participate. When citizens believe that outcomes are predetermined or manipulated, engagement loses its purpose, and abstention becomes a rational response rather than apathy.

Reinforcing Cycle of Disengagement and Low Legitimacy

These barriers do not operate in isolation. Instead, they interact to form a self-reinforcing cycle of disengagement and declining legitimacy. Disillusionment reduces motivation to participate; limited civic knowledge prevents meaningful engagement; fear discourages active involvement; and distrust reinforces the perception that participation is ineffective.

Qualitative insights reflect this cumulative effect, with citizens feeling excluded not by barriers to access, but by a system that appears unresponsive and unreliable. As a result, the electoral process risks becoming one where citizens are present but disengaged, participating out of habit or obligation rather than confidence or belief.

Three Distinct Pathways Of Exclusion

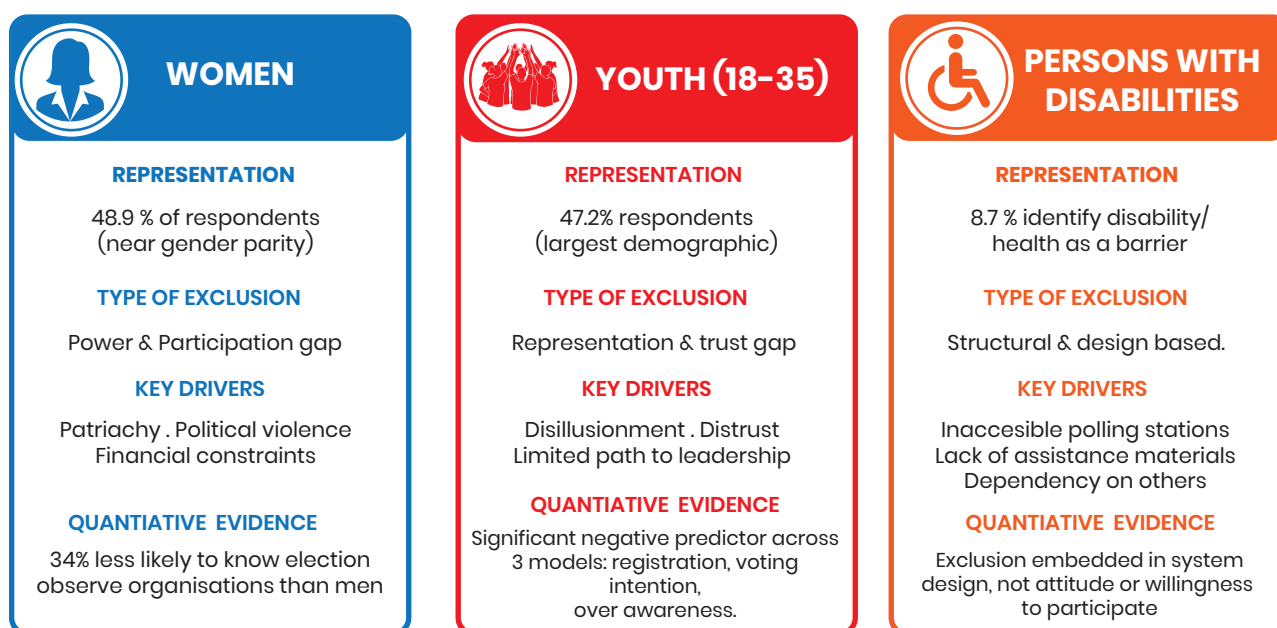


Figure 7: Three Distinct Pathways to Exclusion (Source: Perception Survey and logistic regression models, Section 7)



CHAPTER 8

CONFLICT RISK & SOCIAL COHESION



This section examines conflict risk and social cohesion across four key dimensions:

Perceptions of electoral violence, Community-level risk, drivers of conflict, and the broader social cohesion environment. The findings reveal a high and evolving risk landscape, shaped by a combination of political competition, identity dynamics, institutional trust deficits, and emerging forms of localized and perception-driven conflict.

Table 4: Conflict Risk and Social Cohesion.

Dimension	Indicator	Statistic	Interpretation / Implication
Perceived Electoral Violence (2027)	Likely/Very likely	52.6%	Majority expect violence → high perceived national risk
	Likely peaceful	28.7%	Minority confidence → trust deficit in institutions
	Uncertain	18.7%	Indicates information and confidence gaps
Community -Level Violence Risk	Likely/Very likely	48.9%	Violence perceived as localised and personal
	Unlikely	34.5%	Limited confidence in safety mechanisms
	Uncertain	16.6%	At-risk group influenced by narratives
Comparative Risk (2027 vs 2022)	Expect increase	46.1%	Perception of worsening security situation
	Same	29.8%	Indicates persistent instability
	Decrease	24.1%	Limited optimism
Primary Drivers of Conflict	Political competition	34.7%	Elections seen as high - stakes contests for power/resources
	Ethnic tensions	27.2%	Continued importance of identity politics
	Political incitement	18.5%	Role of rhetoric and elite behaviour in escalation
	Weak law enforcement	9.6%	
	Other factors (land, inequality, etc.)	<5% each	Secondary but context - specific drivers
Inter-group Relations	Positive (agree)	58.4%	Moderate social cohesion at interpersonal level
	Neutral/negative	41.6%	Indicates fragile and uneven cohesion
Change in Cohesion (since 2022)	Improved	42.7%	Some progress, but not dominant
	Not improved	30.4%	Persistent divisions
	Neutral	26.9%	Uncertainty → weak cohesion awareness
Ethnic Influence in Voting	Agree	61.5%	Strong identity-based political alignment
	Disagree	19.8%	Minority shift toward issue - based politics
	Neutral	18.7%	Mixed perceptions
Cross - group Interaction	Comfortable	63.8%	Strong everyday coexistence

8.1 Perceived Risk of Electoral Violence (2027)

A majority of respondents **52.6% believe that election-related violence is likely or very likely during the 2027 elections**, indicating a strong sense of concern and anticipation of instability. This outweighs the **28.7% who expect elections to be peaceful**, revealing a significant confidence gap in the ability of institutions and electoral processes to manage tensions effectively.

These perceptions are shaped by past experiences of electoral violence, ongoing political competition, and persistent institutional distrust. Importantly, such perceptions are not neutral, they actively influence behaviour. When citizens expect violence, they may withdraw from participation, adopt defensive behaviour, or become more open to being mobilised.

At the same time, **18.7% of respondents remain unsure**, pointing to gaps in information and confidence. This group is a fluid part of the population, whose views can shift quickly depending on political developments or misinformation. Overall, these findings place the electoral environment in a medium–high risk category, underscoring the need for early interventions focused on trust-building, communication, and conflict prevention.

8.2 Likelihood of Community-Level Violence

The perception of conflict risk is not only national but deeply localized. Nearly one in two respondents **48.9% believe that people in their community are likely to experience physical violence or intimidation**, while only **34.5% consider such violence unlikely**.

This indicates that the threat of electoral violence is personalized and immediate, rather than abstract. Citizens are not simply concerned about instability at a national level, they anticipate that they or their neighbours could be directly affected.

The 16.6% who are unsure further reflect gaps in awareness and trust, representing another group whose views could easily shift.

Qualitative findings reinforce this localised dimension of risk, with participants describing how tensions manifest within communities and are often linked to local political competition, youth mobilisation, and social divisions.

These findings confirm that electoral conflict is increasingly experienced as a community-level phenomenon, requiring targeted, localised prevention strategies rather than exclusively national-level approach interventions. Continued analysis and proactive conflict/violence prevention approaches will be critical in REDI program interventions.

Electoral Violence Risk Perception : National vs Community

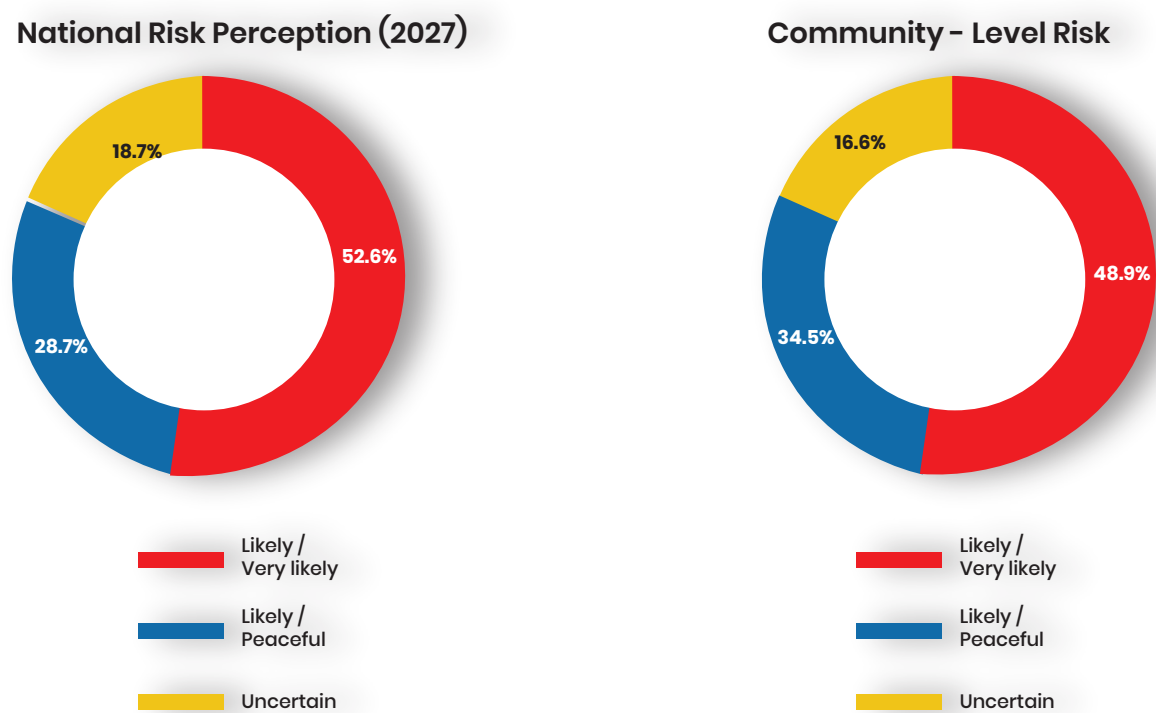


Figure 8: Electoral Violence Risk Perception: National vs Community (Source: Perception Survey)

8.3 Comparative Risk Trend (2027 vs 2022)

Perceptions of conflict are not only high but worsening over time. Nearly **46.1% of respondents expect electoral violence to increase in 2027 compared to 2022**, signalling a deteriorating risk outlook.

This trend reflects unresolved grievances from past elections, persistent mistrust in institutions, and ongoing political tensions. For many respondents, elections are not becoming safer but increasingly volatile.

While **29.8% believe the situation will remain unchanged**, this is not necessarily positive, it reflects expectations of continued instability rather than improvement. Only **24.1% anticipate a reduction in violence**, indicating limited optimism.

Qualitative insights provided context for this trend, pointing to emerging dynamics such as:

- » Increased mobilisation of youth into politically driven violence, often linked to economic vulnerability.
- » Rising influence of misinformation, shaping perceptions and triggering panic or hostility.
- » Intensifying local-level competition, particularly for devolved political positions.

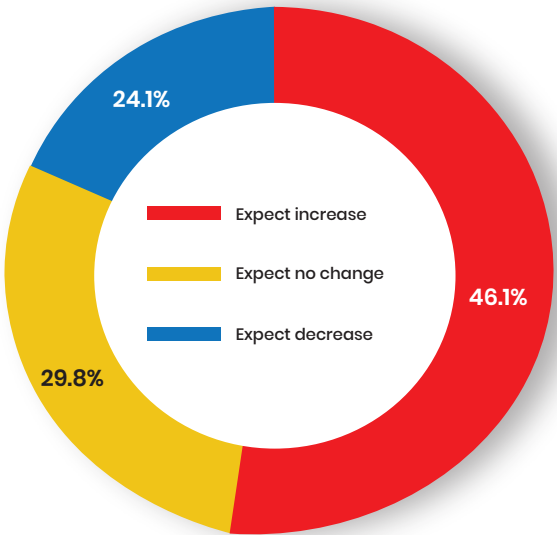


Figure 9: Expected Trend in Electoral Violence Risk: 2027 vs 2022 (Source: Perception Survey)

8.4 Main Drivers of Electoral Violence

The data shows that the risk of electoral violence is overwhelmingly driven by political and identity-related factors. The main drivers are:



These three factors alone account for 80.4% of the drivers identified, highlighting the central role of political processes and identity dynamics in shaping conflict risk. Political competition emerges as the dominant driver, reflecting the high-stakes nature of elections, where access to power, resources, and influence is intensely contested. This competition often intersects with ethnic identities, reinforcing group-based mobilisation. Qualitative evidence illustrates how these dynamics play out in practice.

Participants noted that economically vulnerable youth are often recruited into violence, observing that

“Joblessness... they are used as goons during elections.”

This highlights the intersection between economic vulnerability and political manipulation. Misinformation also plays a critical role, with participants describing how rumours and false narratives spread rapidly and trigger instability, noting that

“Rumours can quickly cause panic and divisions.”

These dynamics suggest that conflict is increasingly shaped by information ecosystems as much as by physical mobilisation.

Main drivers of Electoral Violence

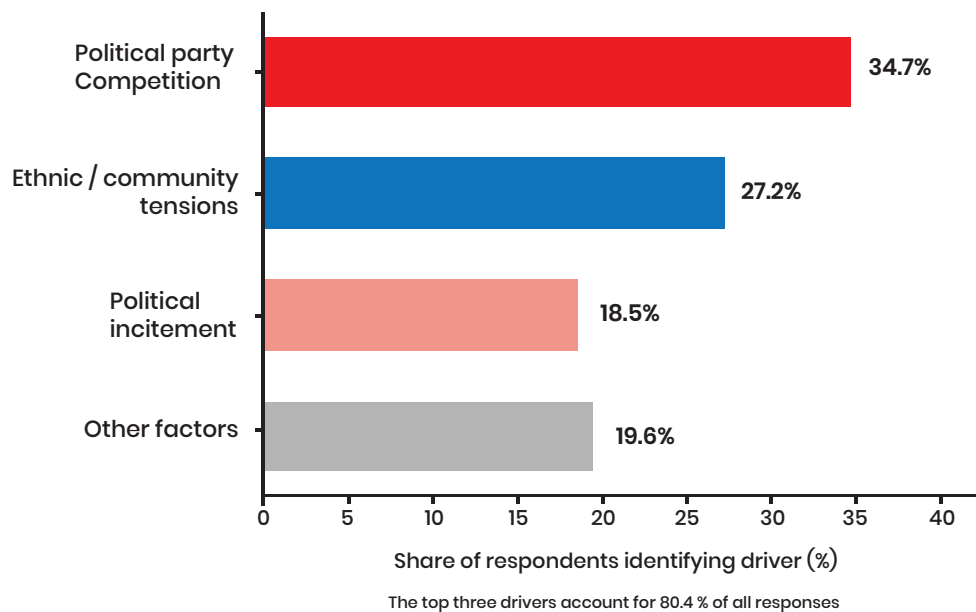


Figure 10: Main Drivers of Electoral Violence (Source: Perception Survey)

8.5 Social Cohesion Indicators

Inter-group Relations

A majority of respondents (75.0%) agree that people from different ethnic or community backgrounds generally get along well, indicating moderate interpersonal cohesion.

However, this cohesion is uneven. A combined 41.6% (neutral and negative responses) suggests significant pockets of mistrust and social distance. This indicates that while coexistence threshold obtains, it is fragile and potentially reversible, particularly during politically sensitive periods.

Inter-group Interaction

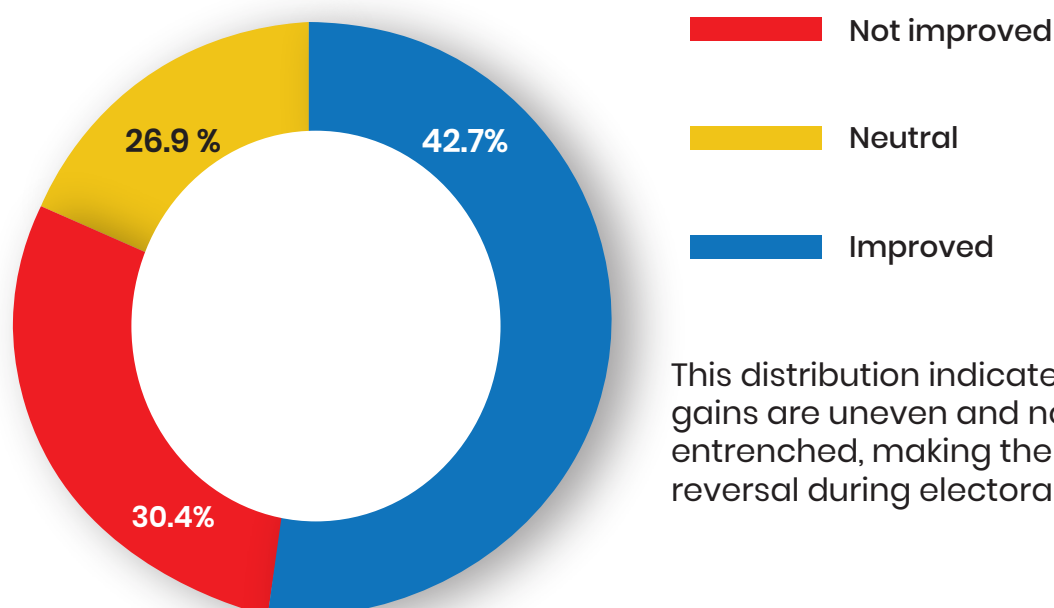
While 63.8% report being comfortable interacting across groups, this interpersonal cohesion does not fully translate into political cohesion. This suggests a disconnect between social coexistence and political behaviour, where everyday interactions remain peaceful, but electoral competition activates divisions

Perceived Change in Cohesion

Perceptions of improvement in inter-community relations are mixed:



Perceptions of improvement



This distribution indicates that cohesion gains are uneven and not deeply entrenched, making them vulnerable to reversal during electoral stress.

Figure 11: Perceptions of improvement in inter-county relations (Source: Perception Survey)

Ethnic Influence on Voting

A clear majority (61.5%) believe that ethnic identity influences voting behaviour. This highlights the continued dominance of identity politics, where electoral competition is framed along group lines rather than policy issues. Such dynamics significantly increase the risk of polarisation and conflict.

Perception of Equality Before the Law (Critical Risk)

The most significant social cohesion concern emerging from the data relates to perceptions of fairness and equality before the law. Nearly half of respondents (49.2%) believe that laws are not applied equally, while only 29.6% express confidence that the legal system operates fairly. This imbalance reflects a substantial breakdown in institutional trust, with far-reaching implications for both governance and stability.

When citizens perceive the justice system as unequal or biased, confidence in the state is undermined, weakening its legitimacy as a neutral arbiter. Over time, such perceptions can lead to the accumulation of grievances, as individuals and communities feel excluded or unfairly treated. In the absence of trust in formal systems, people may increasingly turn to informal or confrontational means to resolve disputes, including community-based or retaliatory actions. This in turn weakens peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms, reducing institutions' ability to manage tensions and increasing the risk that conflicts escalate rather than being resolved through lawful, constructive means.

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression on a composite social cohesion score (M5, $n=2,033$) identified two statistically significant predictors: female gender (+0.055, $p<0.05$) and urban settlement (-0.067, $p<0.05$). However, $R^2=0.008$, these predictors collectively explain less than 1% of variance in social cohesion scores.

The analysis classifies M5 as statistically significant but practically trivial. It should not be cited as a priority finding. Social cohesion is overwhelmingly determined by factors not captured in this demographic model, likely community-level, political, and historical variables outside the survey instrument.

Social cohesion Dashboard : Five Indicators at a Glance

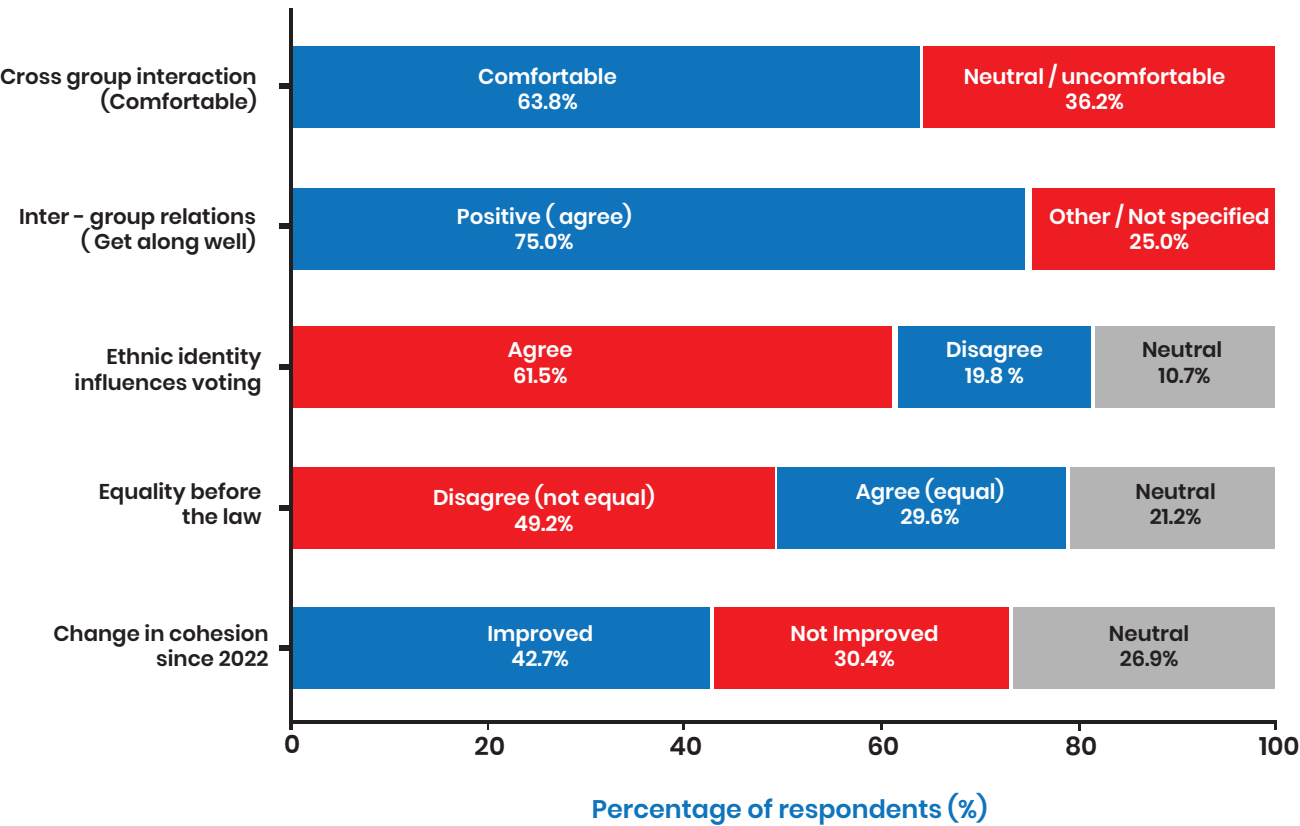


Figure 12: Social Cohesion Dashboard:

Five Indicators at a Glance (Source: Perception Survey, Section 8.5 and Table 4. Note for council: several Section 8.5 / Table 4 figures (cross-group interaction, ethnic influence on voting, equality before the law) differ from the corresponding figures in the Abridged Report and in the master dataset (S3) for the same survey items – recommend the analytical team re-verify Section 8.5 against source data)

8.6 Integrated Insight: A Changing Conflict Landscape.

Risk is Both High and Localised.

The data reveals a strong convergence between national-level perceptions of conflict and experiences at the community level. A majority of respondents anticipate electoral violence in 2027, and this is closely mirrored by the proportion who expect violence within their own communities. This alignment indicates that conflict is not perceived as a distant or abstract threat, but as something immediate and personal. Citizens are not simply concerned about instability in general, they are anticipating that they, their families, or their neighbours may be directly affected.

This localisation of risk is critical. When individuals perceive violence as likely in their immediate environment, their behaviour changes in ways that can amplify instability. Some may withdraw from participation, particularly voting or public engagement.

Others may adopt defensive strategies, such as aligning with identity groups or responding to perceived threats pre-emptively. In this way, perception itself becomes a driver of risk, reinforcing anxiety, shaping behaviour, and potentially increasing the likelihood of conflict escalation

Conflict Anticipations Are Worsening.

Beyond current perceptions, the data points to a clear shift toward pessimism about future electoral cycles. A significant proportion of respondents expect violence to increase compared to the previous election, indicating that confidence in the trajectory of electoral peace is declining. Rather than viewing elections as gradually becoming safer, many citizens perceive a worsening environment.

This expectation of increasing violence is not neutral, it has important behavioural and systemic implications. When citizens believe that future elections will be more volatile, they may disengage further from formal processes, lowering participation and weakening democratic accountability. At the same time, political actors and local groups may respond strategically to this expectation by mobilizing early, entrenching positions, or preparing for confrontation.

In this sense, expectations of worsening violence can become self-reinforcing, contributing to a cycle where anticipated conflict shapes actions that make instability more likely. This underscores the importance of addressing not only actual risks, but also perceptions and narratives about the future.

Drivers Are Overwhelmingly Political and Identity-Based.

The distribution of conflict drivers highlights the central role of political and identity dynamics in shaping risk. The dominance of political competition, ethnic tensions, and political incitement indicates that electoral violence is primarily rooted in how power is contested and mobilised, rather than in purely structural or economic grievances.

Elections are widely perceived as high-stakes contests, where access to resources, influence, and opportunities is tied directly to political outcomes. In such a context, competition can easily escalate beyond normal democratic rivalry into confrontation. This is especially true where political mobilisation intersects with ethnic or community identities, reinforcing group-based loyalties and divisions.

Qualitative insights deepen this understanding by showing how these dynamics play out at grassroots level. Political actors often mobilise support along identity lines, while economically vulnerable youth are drawn into these processes, sometimes as instruments of conflict. Misinformation further amplifies tensions by shaping perceptions, spreading rumours, and creating environments of fear and hostility. Together, these factors create a volatile mix where political incentives align with social divisions, increasing the probability of conflict.

Social Cohesion is Mixed and Fragile.

The social cohesion indicators present a nuanced picture.

On one hand, there is a relatively strong foundation of interpersonal relations, with many respondents indicating that they are comfortable interacting across ethnic and community lines. This suggests that, in everyday life, there is a baseline level of coexistence, tolerance, and social interaction that can support peace.

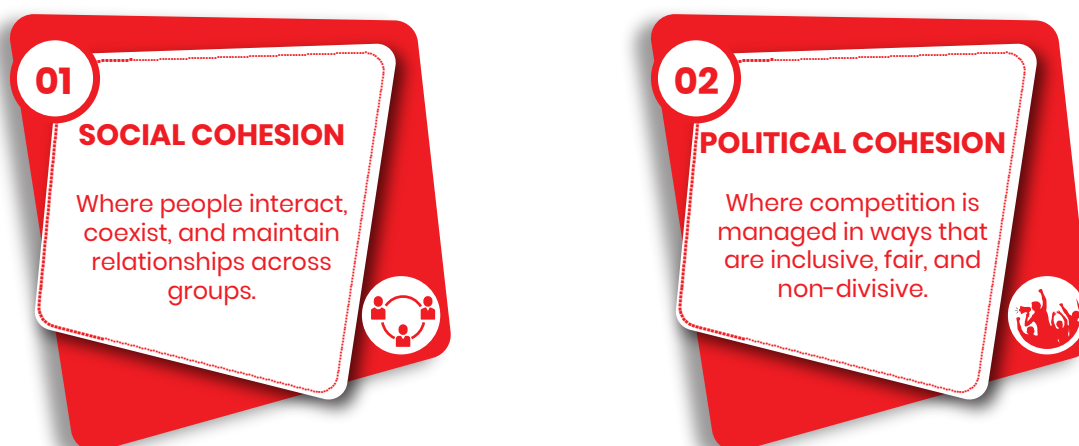
However, this interpersonal cohesion is not matched by institutional trust or perceptions of fairness. A substantial share of respondents' express doubts about whether laws are applied equally, indicating a lack of confidence in the institutions responsible for managing conflict and ensuring justice. This imbalance creates a fragile cohesion structure, where communities may coexist peacefully under normal conditions, but lack the institutional safeguards needed to manage tensions when they arise.

In such contexts, even moderate levels of social cohesion can be quickly undermined, particularly during high-pressure periods like elections. Without trusted institutions to mediate disputes and enforce rules, grievances can accumulate and escalate into conflict.

Key Structural Tension: Social Cohesion vs Political Division.

A central analytical insight emerging from the data is the tension between social cohesion and political division. While individuals may coexist peacefully in their daily interactions, electoral processes often introduce dynamics that activate underlying differences.

This tension reflects a distinction between two forms of cohesion:



In Kenya's case, social cohesion appears relatively stronger than political cohesion. However, during elections, political competition tends to mobilise identity-based loyalties, transforming social differences into political divisions. Voting behaviour influenced by ethnic identity reinforces this pattern, as electoral competition becomes closely tied to group affiliation.

As a result, elections act as a trigger that exposes and amplifies latent tensions. Even where communities are socially cohesive, the absence of strong, trusted institutions and inclusive political processes means that this cohesion is not always sufficient to prevent conflict.

Emerging Conflict Pattern: From Mass Violence to Localized, Networked Instability.

Perhaps the most important shift highlighted by the data is the changing nature of electoral conflict. While past electoral cycles in Kenya have been marked by large-scale, ethnically driven violence, current trends point toward more localised, decentralised forms of instability.

These emerging patterns are marked by conflicts that are:



Concentrated in specific communities or local political contests



Driven by organised groups and micro-level competition



Amplified by misinformation and digital communication networks

Qualitative evidence emphasizes the growing role of misinformation in shaping conflict dynamics. False information spreads rapidly through social and digital channels, creating panic, reinforcing divisions, and sometimes triggering immediate reactions. At the same time, economic vulnerability, particularly among youth, creates conditions in which individuals can be mobilised into localised conflict events.

This shift has significant implications. Localised, and networked conflicts may not reach the scale of past violence, but they can be more frequent, less predictable, and more difficult to manage. Traditional conflict prevention strategies, which are often designed to address large-scale events, may be less effective in addressing these more diffuse and rapidly.

CHAPTER 9.

CIVIC EDUCATION & INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

This section examines the reach, quality, effectiveness, and system-level impact of civic education, integrating both quantitative and qualitative evidence. The findings point to a highly effective but severely under-scaled system, where civic education has strong impact when delivered, but limited reach undermines its overall influence.

Table 5: Civic Education

Dimension	Indicator	Statistic	Interpretation / Implication
Exposure	Received civic education	27.3%	Very limited reach → majority excluded
	No exposure	70.8%	Large coverage gap (core system weakness)
	Don't know	1.8%	Low awareness of civic education
Quality & Accessibility	Good/Very good	46.6%	Civic education is effective where delivered
	Fair	37.8%	Functional but could improve
	Poor/Very poor	13.1%	Quality issues exist but are limited
Content Effectiveness	Rights covered & understandable	81.7%	Very strong impact at individual level
	Partial gaps (access/content)	12.9%	Minor limitations
	Neither	3.7%	Very small failure rate
Participation Link	Lack of civic education barrier	26.0%	Major driver of disengagement
	Believe vote doesn't matter	28.2%	Indicates low perceived efficacy
	Likely to vote	84.2%	High intent but low confidence gap
Trust Link	Low trust in IEBC	67.2%	Significant institutional distrust
	Low trust in judiciary	62.6%	Weak confidence in dispute resolution
	Relationship	,	Civic education → higher understanding and trust
Conflict Risk Link	Expect electoral violence	52.6%	High - risk context needing information clarity
	Fear of violence	24.5%	Environment psychologically primed for instability
	Role of civic education	,	Reduces misinformation, fear, and incitement
Systemic Insight	Coverage vs effectiveness	27.3% vs 81.7%	Core imbalance: low reach, high impact
Multiplier Effect	Participation	,	Reduces disengagement
	Trust	,	Builds institutional confidence
	Conflict risk	,	Mitigates misinformation and fear
	Social cohesion	,	Promotes tolerance and understanding

9.1 Exposure to Civic Education

The data reveals a substantial gap in civic education coverage. Only 27.3% of respondents report having received civic education in the past 12 months, while a large majority, 70.8%, have not been exposed to any recent initiatives. A small proportion (1.8%) remain uncertain, suggesting limited awareness even of what constitutes civic education.

This distribution highlights a major structural weakness in the system. Despite the importance of civic education in supporting democratic participation, nearly three out of four citizens remain unreached, leaving a significant portion of the population without access to reliable information about electoral processes, rights, and responsibilities.

Qualitative findings reinforce this pattern, indicating that civic education efforts are often irregular, short-term, and concentrated around election cycles, rather than sustained over time. Participants described a lack of continuous engagement, suggesting that civic education is not embedded as an ongoing public good but rather delivered intermittently. This weakens its ability to build long-term awareness and resilience.

The implications of this gap are particularly serious in a context already characterized by high perceived risk of electoral violence, strong identity-based politics, and low institutional trust. Without adequate civic education, citizens are less able to understand electoral processes, critically assess political messaging, or engage constructively in democratic participation. As a result, the absence of civic education becomes a foundational driver of wider democratic vulnerabilities.

Exposure to Civic Education (Past 12 Months)

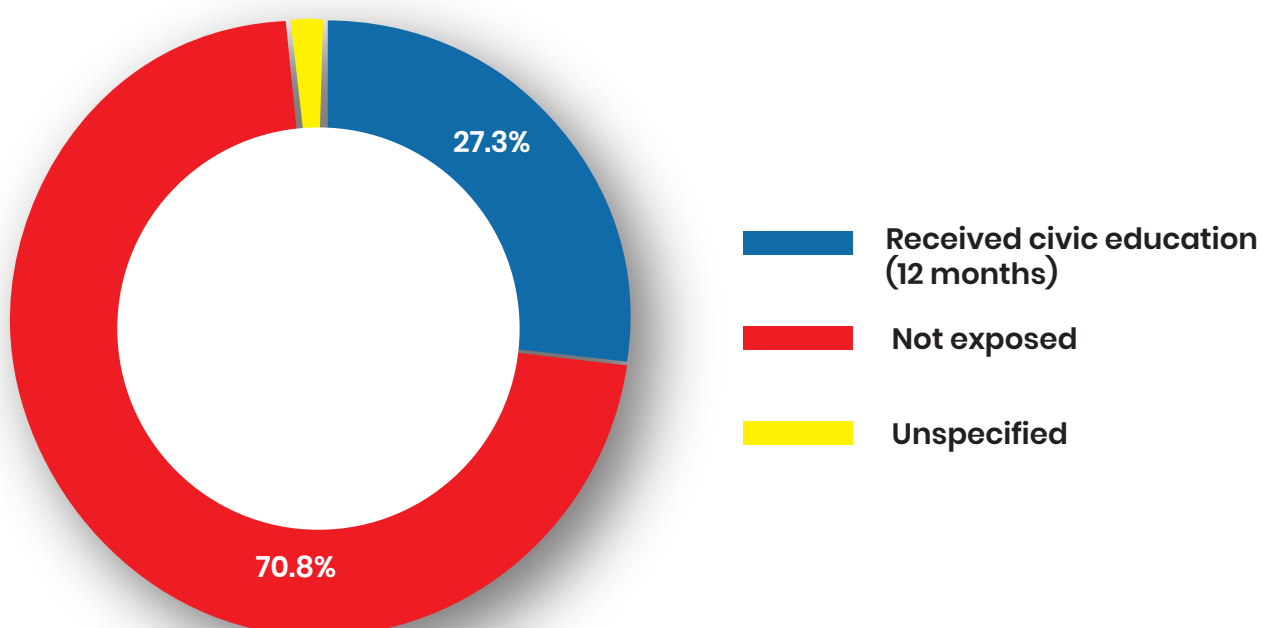


Figure 13: Exposure to Civic Education (Past 12 Months) (Source: Perception Survey)

9.2 Quality and Accessibility of Civic Education

Among those who have accessed civic education, perceptions of quality and accessibility are moderately positive. Nearly 46.6% rate it as good or very good, while an additional 37.8% rate it as fair, indicating that the majority find the content at least adequate and usable. Only a relatively small proportion (13.1%) perceive it as poor.

This suggests that quality is not the primary constraint. When civic education is delivered, it is generally understandable, relevant, and accessible to participants. Qualitative findings support this, with participants noting that sessions are often helpful and informative, even if not consistently available.

However, when considered alongside the low exposure rate (27.3%), a critical insight emerges: the core challenge is coverage, not effectiveness. Civic education systems are working where they reach people, but they are not reaching enough of the population to have a system-wide impact.

This imbalance results in a situation where a minority is well-informed, while the majority remains under-informed, creating uneven levels of awareness, participation, and resilience across communities.

Perceived quality of Civic Education (Among those reached)



Figure 14: Perceived quality of Civic Education (Among those reached) (Source: Perception Survey)

9.3 Content Effectiveness (Rights Awareness)

The findings show that civic education is highly effective in delivering content, particularly in relation to rights awareness. Among those reached, an overwhelming 81.7% report that civic education both covered their rights and was easy to understand.

Only small proportions report gaps, whether in accessibility (6.7%), completeness of rights coverage (6.2%), or both (3.7%), indicating that content limitations are minimal and not widespread. This reinforces the conclusion that civic education, when provided, successfully equips citizens with the knowledge needed to engage in democratic processes.

Qualitative data further supports this, with participants describing civic education as useful in helping them understand their rights, question information, and navigate electoral processes more confidently.

Content Effectiveness of Civic Education (Rights Awareness)

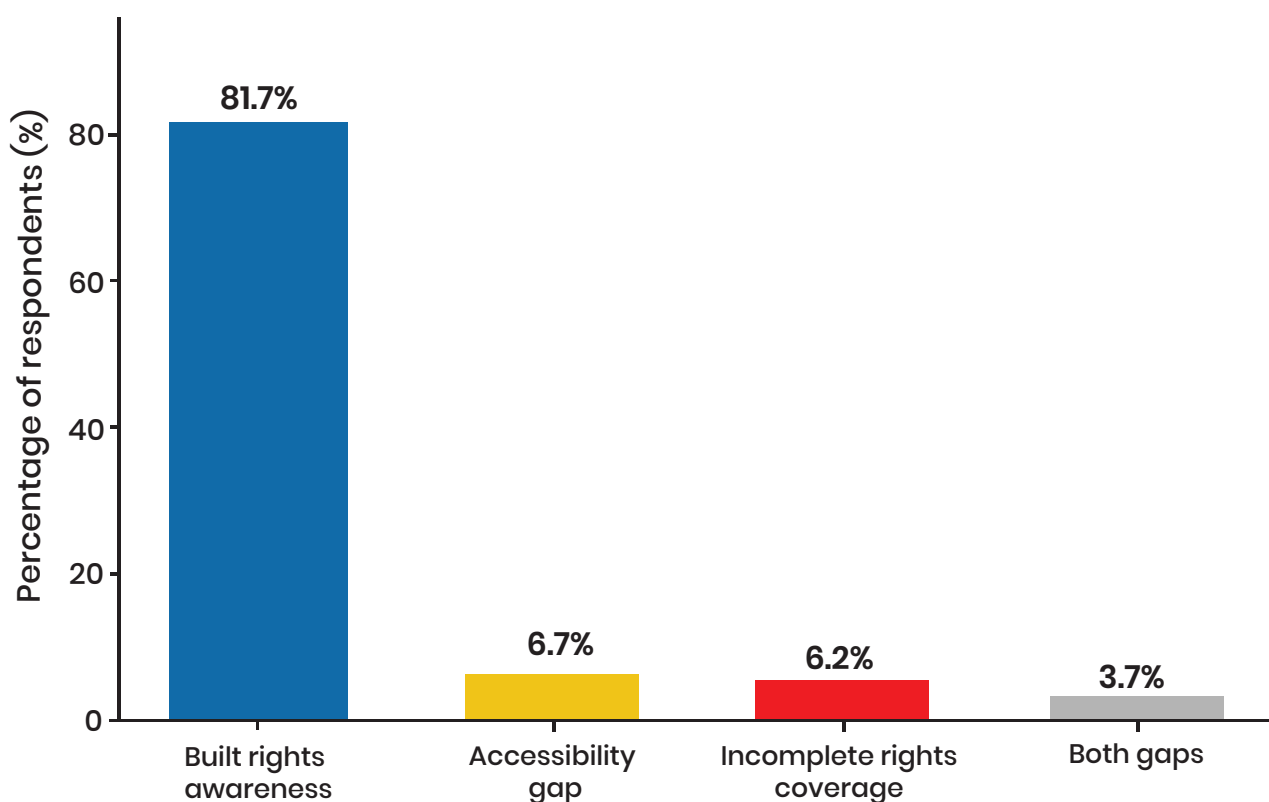


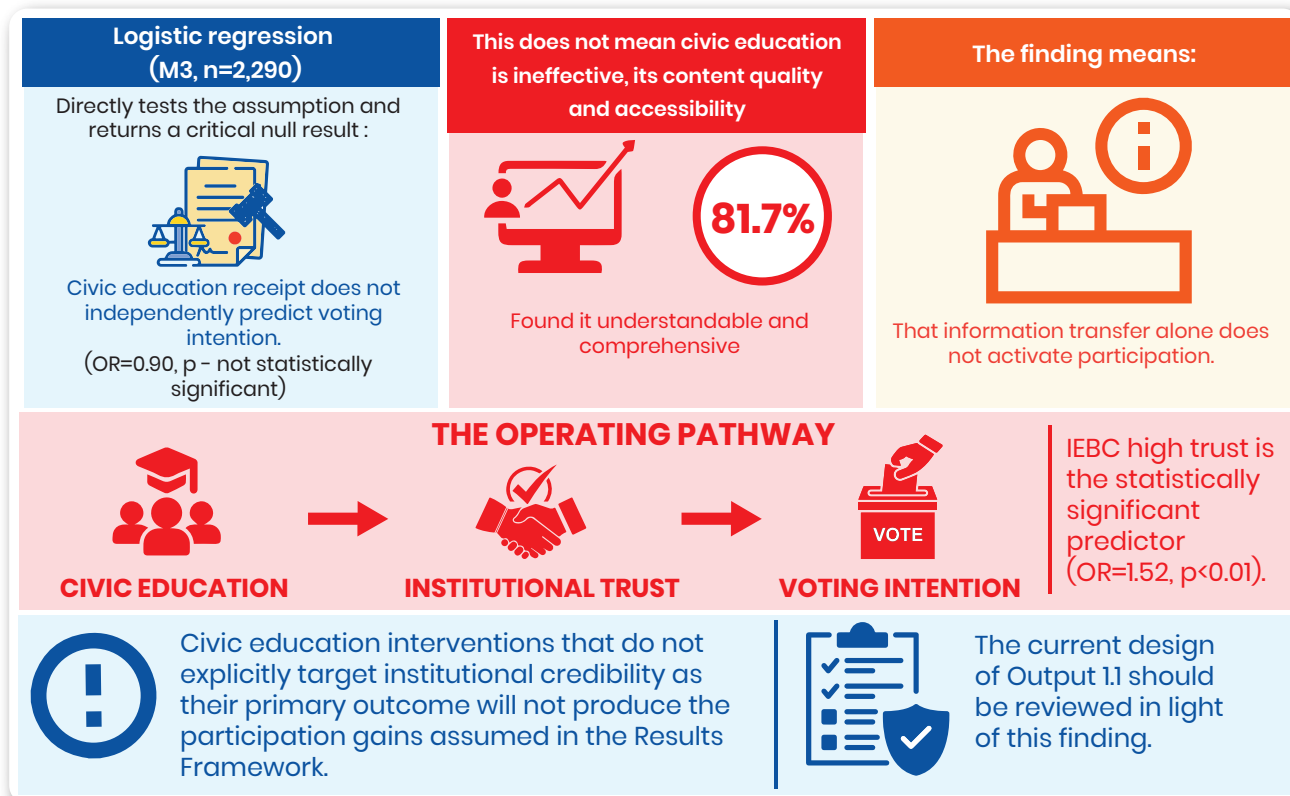
Figure 15: Content Effectiveness of Civic Education (Rights Awareness) (Source: Perception Survey)

9.4 Link to Participation

Civic education plays a critical role in shaping participation outcomes; however, regression analysis (M3, $n=2,290$) indicates this relationship is mediated by institutional trust, civic education does not independently predict voting intention ($OR=0.90$, $p=ns$). The data shows that lack of civic education is the second-largest barrier to participation (26.0%), highlighting its direct influence on engagement.

At the same time, there is a notable disconnect between willingness to participate and belief in the system. While 84.6% indicate that they are likely to vote, a significant 28.2% believe that voting does not make a difference. This gap points to a form of participation that is high in intention but low in confidence and meaning. In the absence of civic education, individuals may participate out of habit or obligation rather than informed conviction. Qualitative insights reflect this dynamic, with participants questioning the value of participation and expressing uncertainty about how their vote influences outcomes.

This suggests that civic education is critical not only for increasing participation rates, but for ensuring that participation is informed, meaningful, and empowered, thereby strengthening democratic accountability.



9.5 Link to Institutional Trust

The findings highlight significant deficits in trust toward key democratic institutions, including the electoral commission and the judiciary. Civic education plays a central role in addressing these deficits by improving understanding of how institutions function and how processes are managed

The relationship between civic education and trust can be understood as follows:



This suggests that institutional distrust is not solely a result of performance failures, but is also strongly linked to an information gap. Without clear and accessible information, citizens may assume bias, manipulation, or unfairness, particularly in politically sensitive contexts.

Strengthening civic education can therefore play a critical role in rebuilding informed trust, improving not only perceptions but also the legitimacy of institutions.

9.6 Link to Conflict Risk

Civic education also has a direct connection to conflict dynamics. With over half of respondents expecting electoral violence and a significant proportion expressing fear, the environment is already psychologically primed for instability.

Qualitative findings highlight how misinformation, rumours, and uncertainty can escalate tensions rapidly. In this context, civic education becomes a key tool for conflict prevention, as it:



Without this kind of intervention, misinformation can fill the information gap, amplifying anxiety and fuelling conflict dynamics.

9.7 Key Systemic Findings

Coverage Gap is the Core System Weakness.

The most critical takeaway from the data is that the primary limitation of civic education is not its quality, but its limited reach. With only 27.3% of respondents reporting exposure, compared to 70.8% who have received none, the system is failing to reach the majority of the population. This creates a significant structural gap in public knowledge and awareness.

This gap has far-reaching consequences. Large parts of the population remain uninformed or under-informed about electoral processes, rights, and responsibilities, which weakens the overall effectiveness of democratic participation. It also creates an uneven landscape, where a relatively small share of citizens' benefit from accurate information, while the majority rely on informal or unreliable sources.

In practical terms, this uneven access to civic knowledge creates information inequality, where gaps in awareness translate into gaps in participation, trust, and resilience. As a result, systemic challenges such as misinformation, disengagement, and distrust persist – not because civic education is ineffective, but because it is not reaching enough people to shift the wider system.

High Effectiveness Indicates Strong Intervention Potential.

Despite limited coverage, the data clearly demonstrates that civic education is highly effective when delivered. With 81.7% of participants confirming that content is both understandable and informative on rights, civic education initiatives are successfully achieving their intended outcomes at the individual level.

This is a critical insight, as it suggests that the problem is not one of design or delivery quality, but of scale. The system already possesses a proven, working intervention model that enhances knowledge, awareness, and confidence among participants.

This positions civic education as a high-potential lever for systemic change. If scaled effectively, the same high-quality content and approaches could produce widespread improvements across the population. Unlike many interventions that require redesign, civic education in this context requires expansion and consistency, rather than reinvention.

Civic Education as a Driver of Meaningful Participation.

The findings show that civic education plays a central role in shaping not just whether people participate, but how and why they participate. The data highlights a critical disconnect: while a large majority intend to vote, a significant proportion believe that voting does not make a difference.

This gap reflects a form of participation that is procedural rather than empowered. Citizens may engage in electoral processes, but without a clear understanding of their impact or value, participation risks becoming symbolic rather than meaningful.

Civic education helps to bridge this gap by reinforcing the link between participation and outcomes. It enables citizens to understand how their actions influence governance, how accountability works, and why engagement matters. Without this knowledge, disengagement is likely to grow over time, as repeated cycles of participation without perceived impact erode motivation and belief in the system.

Central Role in Rebuilding Institutional Trust.

Another key takeaway is the strong relationship between civic education and institutional trust. The data shows widespread distrust in key democratic institutions, which undermines the credibility of electoral processes and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Civic education addresses this challenge by improving understanding of how institutions function, clarifying processes, and reducing misconceptions. Where knowledge is absent, citizens are more likely to interpret institutional actions negatively or assume bias and manipulation. This suggests that a significant portion of distrust is linked not only to institutional performance, but also to information deficits.

By closing this gap, civic education can contribute to rebuilding informed trust, where citizens base their perceptions on a clearer understanding of processes and systems. This is particularly important in electoral contexts, where trust in institutions directly influences acceptance of outcomes and the likelihood of peaceful engagement.

Critical Role in Reducing Conflict Risk.

The connection between civic education and conflict risk is a major finding. In an environment where many citizens expect electoral violence and where misinformation is widespread, the absence of reliable information creates a fertile ground for fear, rumours, and escalation.

Civic education serves as a preventive mechanism, equipping citizens with the knowledge and confidence needed to navigate electoral periods peacefully. It helps individuals:



Without this foundation, misinformation can easily dominate the information space, amplifying tensions and increasing the likelihood of conflict. Civic education is therefore not just a tool for engagement, but also a peacebuilding instrument that directly contributes to stability.

Civic Education as a System Multiplier.

One of the most important insights is that civic education operates as a cross-cutting system multiplier, with positive effects across multiple domains. It simultaneously influences participation, trust, conflict risk, and social cohesion. By strengthening knowledge and awareness, civic education:



This interconnected impact means that investments in civic education generate compound benefits, addressing several system weaknesses at once. Few interventions offer this level of breadth and impact, making civic education a particularly strategic entry point for strengthening democratic systems.

Core System Imbalance: Information Gap vs Misinformation Exposure.

At the heart of the findings is a critical imbalance: low civic education coverage versus high exposure to misinformation. While only a minority of citizens receive structured civic education, a large majority are exposed to informal and often unreliable information sources.

This imbalance creates a situation where misinformation can fill the vacuum left by weak civic education systems. Without the tools to critically evaluate information, citizens are more likely to absorb misleading narratives, which can distort perceptions, weaken trust, and increase polarisation.

This dynamic reinforces many of the challenges identified in earlier sections, including:



Addressing this imbalance is therefore essential. Expanding civic education coverage is not just about increasing awareness, it is about rebalancing the information ecosystem, ensuring that credible, accurate, and empowering information can compete effectively with misinformation.



CHAPTER 10

EARLY WARNING AND PEACE INFRASTRUCTURE

10.1 Under-Known: Limited Public Awareness of Early Warning Systems

A central weakness in the early warning and peace infrastructure system is its limited visibility among the public. With **50.2%** of respondents unaware of early warning and early response (**EWER**) mechanisms, a significant portion of the population is excluded from systems designed to detect and prevent conflict.

This lack of awareness undermines the very foundation of early warning systems, which depend on community participation, information flow, and local reporting. When citizens are not aware of these mechanisms, they are less likely to recognize early warning signs, report incidents, or engage in preventive action. In effect, the system becomes passive rather than proactive, reacting only after tensions escalate rather than preventing them.

Qualitative findings reinforce this dynamic, suggesting that engagement with peace infrastructure is often limited to those already connected to community or civil society structures, while the wider public remains disconnected. This creates an uneven system in which early warning mechanisms exist in principle but are not embedded in everyday community awareness.

As a result, the early warning system operates below its potential, with critical signals of conflict risk either going unnoticed or unreported, reducing its ability to function as an effective preventive tool.

Logistic regression on EWER awareness (M4, $n=2,290$, Pseudo- $R^2=0.015$) provides a precise demographic targeting map. Tertiary education is the strongest positive predictor ($OR=1.72$, $p<0.001$): tertiary-educated respondents are 72% more likely to be EWER-aware. Urban respondents are 35% less likely to be EWER-aware than rural respondents ($OR=0.65$, $p<0.001$); peri-urban respondents 29% less likely ($OR=0.71$, $p<0.01$). Youth (18–35) are 22% less likely to be EWER-aware than those aged 36–60 ($OR=0.78$, $p<0.01$). Critically, this pattern, urban populations being less EWER-aware than rural, indicates that the challenge is not primarily a communications failure.

Urban citizens, who are more information-saturated, are systematically less engaged with EWER, suggesting that the credibility and perceived relevance of these systems, not awareness of their existence, is the core constraint in urban contexts. EWER under-use reflects a legitimacy and resource crisis, not a visibility problem.

10.2 Under-Trusted: Low Confidence in Effectiveness

Beyond awareness, there is a significant deficit in trust and confidence in early warning and peace infrastructure. Only 13.7% of respondents believe these systems are effective, indicating that even among those who may be aware of them, confidence remains low.

This lack of trust has important implications. For early warning systems to function effectively, communities must believe that:

- » Reporting issues will lead to timely and meaningful .
- » Institutions will act impartially and effectively.
- » Engagement will produce tangible outcomes .

When this confidence is absent, individuals are less likely to engage with formal systems and may instead rely on informal mechanisms or disengage entirely. This weakens both the preventive capacity and the legitimacy of the system. Qualitative insights suggest this distrust is often linked to:

- » Perceived delays or in action following reported incidents.
- » Limited visibility of successful interventions.
- » Weak feedback loops between communities and responding institutions.

In such contexts, early warning systems risk being seen as symbolic or ineffective, rather than as credible tools for conflict prevention. This perception gap further reduces engagement, reinforcing a cycle of low trust and limited use.

Early Warning Systems: Known by Few, Trusted by Fewer

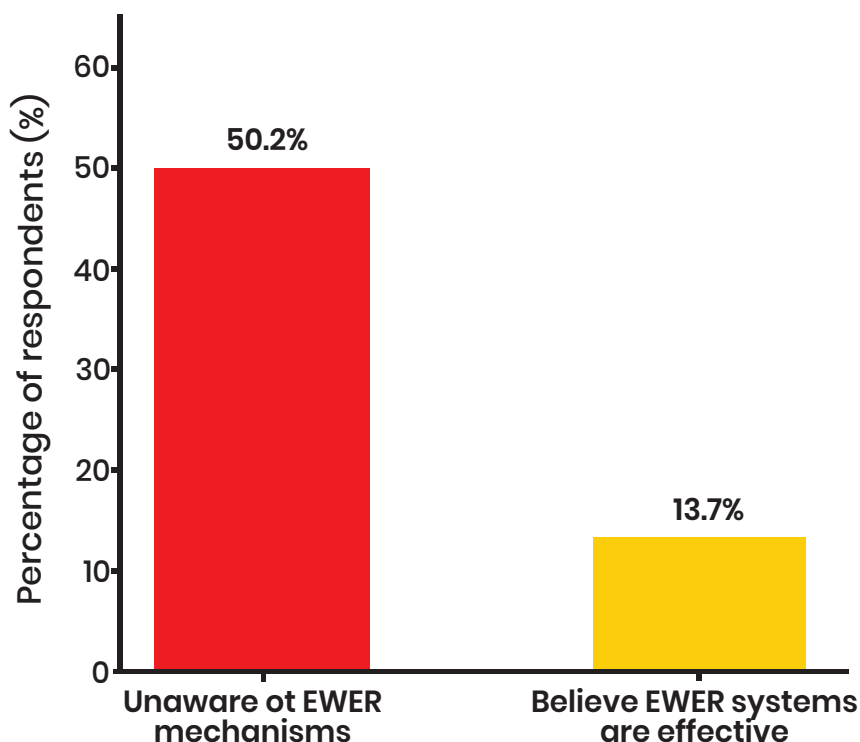


Figure 16: Early Warning Systems: Known by Few, Trusted by Fewer (Source: Perception Survey)

10.3 Under-Used: Limited Engagement and Utilisation

The combination of low awareness and low trust ultimately leads to limited utilisation of early warning and peace infrastructure. Systems that are not widely known or trusted are naturally under-used, and this significantly constrains their overall impact.

Early warning systems are intended to be active, community-driven mechanisms, where citizens, local leaders, and institutions work together to identify and respond to emerging risks. However, when utilisation is low:

- » Early signals of tension are missed or delayed.
- » Response mechanisms are activated too late.
- » Preventive interventions are weakened .

Qualitative findings indicate that while local peace structures do exist and are valued, their engagement is often limited to specific actors rather than the broader community. These structures, such as peace committees and community mediators, are seen as relevant and effective at the local level, but their reach remains constrained.

This under-utilization reflects not only awareness and trust deficits, but also system design and resourcing challenges, including inconsistent engagement, lack of integration, and limited operational capacity.

10.4 Under-Supported: Capacity Constraints in Local Peace Structures

Another critical dimension emerging from the qualitative findings is that local peace infrastructure, while valued, is under-supported and under-resourced. Community-based peace mechanisms are often the first line of defence in preventing and managing conflict, yet they operate with limited financial, technical, and institutional backing.

Participants highlighted that these structures often lack:



This results in a situation where local peace actors have high legitimacy but low capacity. They are trusted within communities and well-positioned to intervene, but lack the resources needed to operate effectively at scale or respond consistently to emerging risks.

Without adequate support, these structures remain reactive rather than proactive, limiting their potential to provide sustained conflict prevention.

10.5 Integrated Interpretation: A Constrained Prevention System

The findings reveal a conflict prevention system that is present but constrained. Early warning and peace infrastructure exist across multiple levels – community, civil society, and institutional – but is weakened by gaps in awareness, trust, use, and support.

This results in a system that:

- Has structural presence but limited functional reach.
- Possesses local legitimacy but insufficient capacity .
- Offers preventive potential but inconsistent impact .

In a context where conflict risks are high and evolving, particularly toward localised and misinformation-driven dynamics, these limitations significantly reduce the system's effectiveness.



CHAPTER 11

CROSS-CUTTING DRIVERS AND SYSTEM-LEVEL DIAGNOSIS

The analysis highlights that electoral risk is not driven by isolated issues, but by a system of interdependent forces that continuously reinforce one another. Economic vulnerability, weak institutional trust, misinformation, exclusion, and low accountability combine to produce a system characterized by high engagement but weak confidence, strong perceptions but low trust, and converging risks that reinforce instability. These three dynamics are not separate observations, they are the visible outcomes of how the five core drivers interact within the electoral system.

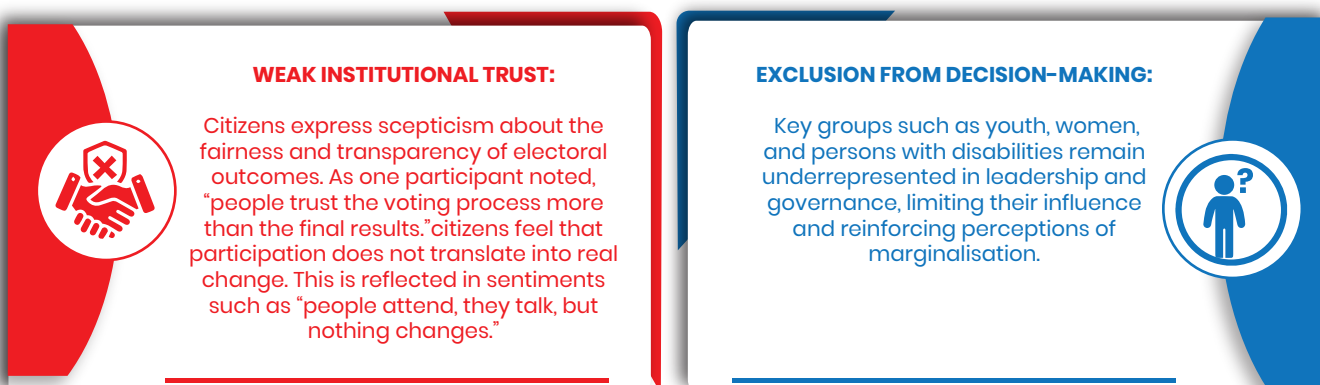
11.1 High Engagement but Weak Confidence

Kenya's electoral processes continue to demonstrate strong formal participation, with citizens registering, voting, and remaining engaged in political processes. However, this engagement is not matched by confidence in institutions or belief in outcomes.

Participation Without Trust

At the surface level, participation appears robust. However, deeper analysis reveals that this engagement is often procedural rather than meaningful. Citizens participate, but many do not believe that their participation leads to fair or impactful outcomes.

This disconnect is driven by:



11.2 Strong Perceptions but Low Trust (Perception Crisis)

Alongside weak confidence, the system is characterized by a perception crisis, where citizens hold strong views about elections but lack trust in the processes that underpin them.

Misinformation as a Perception Driver

Misinformation plays a central role in shaping how citizens understand elections. Narratives such as "results are already decided before voting" are widely circulated, reinforcing perceptions that the system is predetermined or manipulated

Other narratives contribute to fear and anxiety, for example:

“Messages spread saying there will be attacks, and people become afraid.”

These narratives are particularly influential because they:

- Spread rapidly through digital and informal networks
- Often go unchallenged due to low civic education reach
- Reinforce existing distrust in institutions

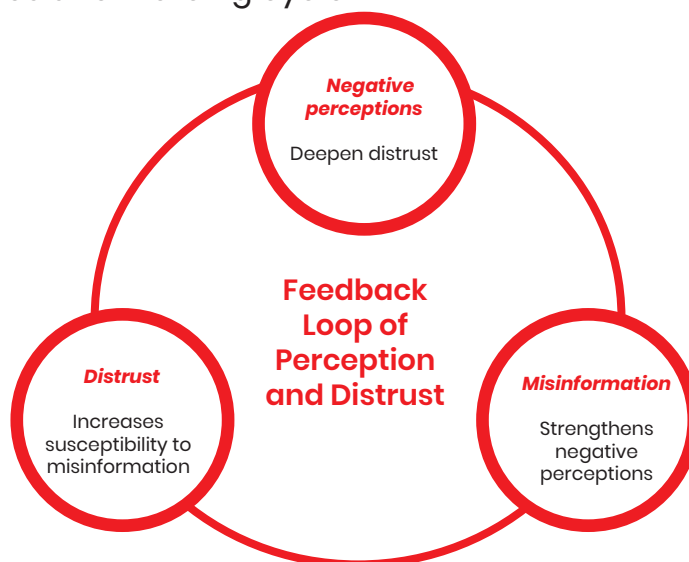
Interaction with Institutional Distrust

Misinformation is more powerful in environments where trust is already weak. When citizens do not trust institutions, they are more likely to:

- Believe unverified information
- Reject official explanations or results
- Interpret events through a lens of suspicion

Feedback Loop of Perception and Distrust

This creates a reinforcing cycle:



System of Interconnected Drivers

11.3 Converging Risks that Reinforce Instability

The most critical finding is the convergence of multiple risks into a self-reinforcing system of instability. The five drivers do not act independently, they interact and amplify one another.

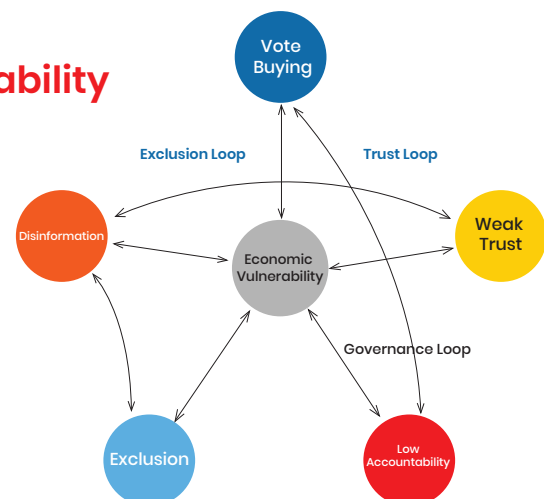


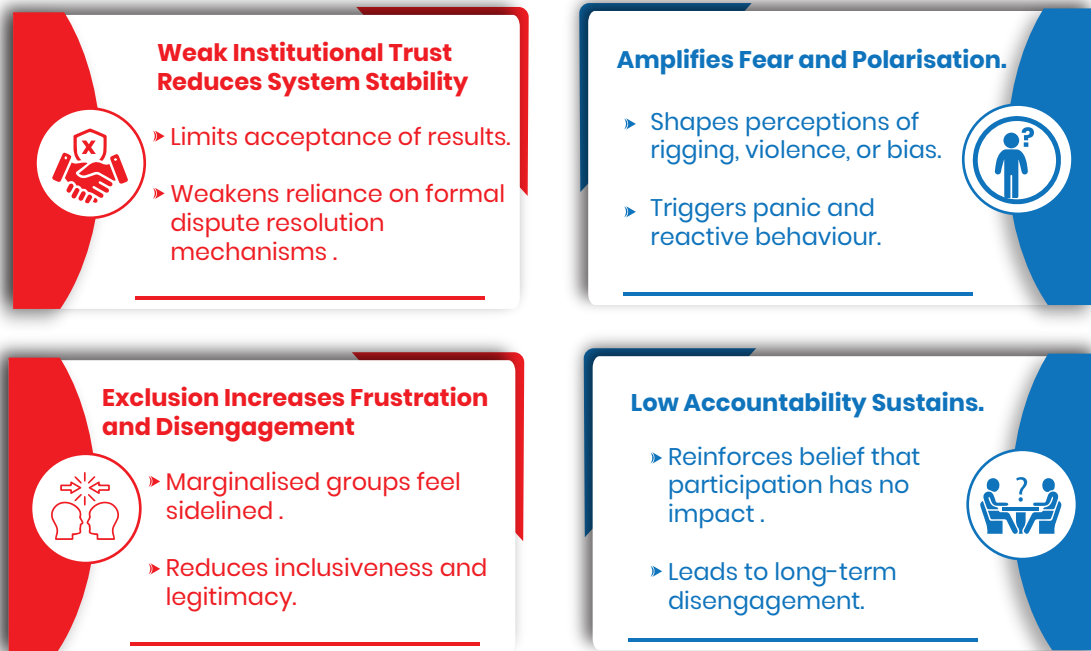
Figure 17: System of Interconnected Drivers Behind Conflict Risk (Source: Synthesis of qualitative and quantitative findings, Section 11.3)

Economic Vulnerability as the Entry Point

Economic hardship, especially among youth, creates the foundation for risk. As participants noted, “because of lack of jobs, many people accept money even if they know it is wrong.”

This leads to:

- › Vote buying and transactional politics
- › Increased susceptibility to political mobilisation
- › Reduced emphasis on long-term governance outcomes Misinformation



11.4 Strategic Implication: Breaking the Cycle

The interconnected nature of these challenges means that isolated interventions will have limited impact. Addressing electoral risk requires a system-wide approach that targets both the drivers and their interactions.

Strengthen Trust and Accountability

- › Improve transparency in electoral processes
- › Strengthen post-election accountability mechanisms

Expand Civic Education and Information Integrity

- › Counter misinformation with sustained, credible civic education
- › Improve public understanding of electoral systems

Address Economic Vulnerability

- › Reduce youth vulnerability to political manipulation
- › Promote economic inclusion as part of stability efforts

Promote Inclusion and Representation

- Increase participation of women, youth, and PWDs in decision-making
- Ensure more equitable representation

11.5 The Five Cross-Cutting Regression Findings

The regression analysis generates five cross-cutting findings that operate across the entire analytical framework of this report. These findings provide the evidential spine for programme design and adaptation.

a) The Trust Bundle: Institutions Are Evaluated as One System (M7).

Citizens do not evaluate electoral and governance institutions in isolation, they evaluate them as one interconnected system. Judiciary trust (OR=7.17***) and NPS trust (OR=4.87***) are the strongest predictors of IEBC trust, far outweighing any demographic factor (Pseudo- $R^2=0.374$). No single institution can rebuild public confidence in isolation. Multi-institution coordination (Output 2.1) is structurally essential, not supplementary.

b) Settlement is the Master Demographic Variable (significant across all major models).

Settlement type (urban / peri-urban / rural) is statistically significant across every major regression model and chi-square analysis in this study: IEBC trust (M1***), voter registration (M2***), EWER awareness (M4***), media trust ($\chi^2=346.8^{***}$), information channels ($\chi^2=283.7^{***}$), and ethnic voting patterns ($\chi^2=92.8^{***}$). A single, undifferentiated national programme strategy is analytically indefensible given this evidence.

c) The Civic Education Mediation Gap.

Civic education does not independently predict voting intention (OR=0.90, ns). It operates only through institutional trust (IEBC Trust OR=1.52**). The verified programme pathway is: Civic Education → Institutional Trust → Participation. Knowledge transfer without trust-building will not drive participation. Output 1.1 must be redesigned to target institutional credibility as its primary mechanism, not information delivery alone.

d) Universal Distrust and Universal Fear, Both Require Systemic Responses.

Distrust in the IEBC does not vary by gender or age (M1: both ns). Fear of electoral violence does not vary by demographic group ($\chi^2=26.9$, ns). Neither problem has a high-risk subgroup that can be targeted. Both require population-level, systemic responses, not demographic segmentation strategies

e) Youth are Structurally Behind on Three Fronts Simultaneously.

Youth (18–35) are significantly disadvantaged in voter registration (M2) $OR=0.35^{***}$, voting intention (M3) $OR=0.71^*$, and EWER awareness (M4) $OR=0.78^{**}$). These three deficits hold simultaneously after controlling for all other demographic variables. No other group shows this multi-model convergence. Youth are not one Special Interest Group among three, they are the bellwether demographic for Outcome 3.

Key Regression Findings: Odds Ratios Across the Study

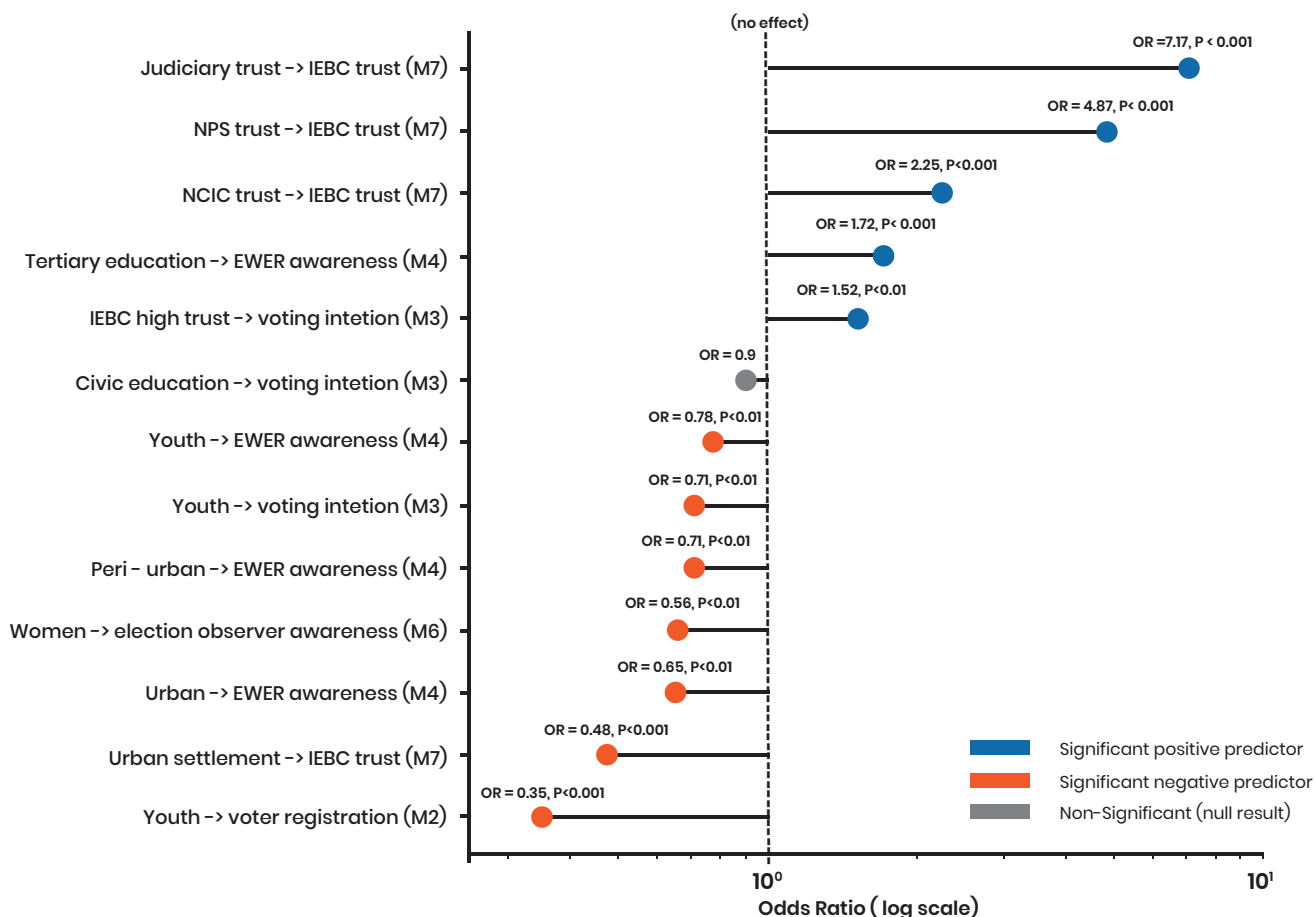


Figure 18: Key Regression Findings: Odds Ratios Across the Study (Source: Logistic regression models M2-M7 reported throughout this study)



CHAPTER 12

STRATEGIC PILLARS FOR STRENGTHENING ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

The combined findings from both the **quantitative and qualitative analysis** point to an electoral system **that is broadly participatory but structurally fragile**. Addressing the underlying drivers of **low trust, misinformation, exclusion, and conflict risk** requires a coordinated and systemic response. The following five strategic pillars provide a comprehensive framework for strengthening electoral integrity, improving confidence, and enhancing stability.

12.1 Civic Education Targeted Scale-Up

Expanding civic education coverage is the most immediate, high-impact intervention, particularly since a substantial majority of citizens remain unreached. Although civic education is highly effective where delivered, its limited scale creates a situation where most citizens lack access to reliable information about electoral processes, rights, and responsibilities.

To address this gap, civic education must move beyond short-term, election-focused initiatives and transition toward sustained, continuous engagement. This requires scaling through widely accessible channels such as mass media, including radio and television, which remain critical for reaching large segments of the population. At the same time, digital platforms and social media offer opportunities to engage younger and urban populations more effectively. Community-based structures, such as local leaders, civil society organizations, and faith-based institutions, should also play a central role in delivery, as they are often more trusted and locally embedded.

Equally important is the content of civic education. It should prioritize practical and relevant knowledge, including understanding the value and impact of voting, clarity on electoral processes and results management, and reinforcement of peaceful participation. By addressing these areas, civic education can strengthen informed engagement, reduce susceptibility to misinformation, and gradually rebuild trust in democratic processes.

12.2 Electoral Integrity Reform

Strengthening electoral integrity is essential to addressing the persistent gap between participation and confidence. While citizens continue to engage in the voting process, doubts about transparency and fairness undermine trust in outcomes.

Improving transparency is therefore a critical priority, particularly in vote counting, tallying, and results transmission processes. Clear and timely communication of results, coupled with accessible verification mechanisms, can help address widespread perceptions that electoral outcomes are manipulated or predetermined.

Ensuring that these processes are visible, understandable, and verifiable is key to restoring confidence.

At the same time, there is a need for stronger enforcement against electoral malpractice, especially vote buying and other forms of manipulation. This needs not just stronger legal frameworks, but visible, consistent enforcement that demonstrates accountability. When citizens see that violations are addressed decisively, confidence in the system is more likely to increase.

These reforms can strengthen the credibility of electoral processes, reduce disputes and challenges, and improve overall trust in outcomes.

12.3 Trust and Accountability

Rebuilding trust in institutions is central to improving electoral legitimacy and breaking cycles of disillusionment. The findings indicate that distrust is both widespread and deeply embedded, often reinforced by perceptions of weak accountability.

Strengthening institutional credibility, particularly that of electoral management bodies, is therefore essential. This involves improving transparency in decision-making, ensuring independence, and enhancing communication with the public. Institutions must not only perform effectively but also be seen to do so in a clear and consistent manner.

Equally important is the development of accessible and responsive complaint and feedback systems. Citizens need to know that their concerns can be raised and addressed promptly. Effective grievance mechanisms, coupled with clear feedback loops, can reduce frustration and build confidence in the system's responsiveness. Post-election accountability is another critical area.

When citizens perceive that elected leaders do not follow through on commitments, trust in the entire electoral process declines. Strengthening mechanisms for tracking commitments and enabling continued citizen engagement beyond elections can help restore the link between participation and outcomes.

12.4 Inclusion

Strengthening inclusion is essential not only for equity but also for the legitimacy and stability of the electoral system. Although participation may be broadly accessible, significant groups, particularly women, youth, and persons with disabilities, continue to face barriers that limit meaningful engagement.

For women, improving safety in political spaces is a critical priority. Addressing political violence, harassment, and structural barriers can enable more active participation and leadership. Financial and social constraints that limit engagement must also be addressed to create more equitable opportunities.

For persons with disabilities, the focus must be on ensuring full accessibility across all stages of the electoral process. This includes improving physical access to polling stations, providing appropriate voting materials such as braille or assistive technologies, and ensuring that civic education is inclusive and accessible.

Youth participation requires particular attention given their demographic significance. While youth are highly mobilised, they remain underrepresented in decision-making processes. Creating structured pathways for meaningful engagement, beyond election periods, can reduce their vulnerability to manipulation and enhance their role as constructive participants in governance.

Enhancing inclusion across these groups will improve representation, reduce grievances, and strengthen the perceived fairness and legitimacy of elections.

12.5 Disinformation and Conflict Prevention

Managing the information environment and strengthening conflict prevention systems are increasingly critical in the context of evolving electoral risks. High levels of misinformation, combined with underlying distrust and vulnerability, create conditions where perceptions can quickly escalate into instability.

Expanding digital and media literacy is a key priority, enabling citizens to critically assess information and distinguish between credible and misleading content. This is particularly important given the rapid spread of misinformation through digital platforms.

Strengthening fact-checking mechanisms and establishing rapid response systems to counter false narratives can help reduce the impact of misinformation during critical periods. Collaboration with media organizations, civil society, and technology platforms will be essential in this regard.

At the same time, early warning and response systems must be strengthened. Increasing public awareness of these systems, improving their responsiveness, and enhancing trust in their effectiveness are crucial steps. Local peace structures, which are often trusted within communities, should be supported and better integrated into broader conflict prevention frameworks.

These measures can reduce fear, improve resilience to misinformation, and strengthen the capacity to detect and respond to emerging risks before they escalate.

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSION

Kenya's electoral landscape ahead of 2027 shows a democracy at a critical turning point. Citizens remain strongly committed to voting, but many increasingly doubt whether the system delivers fair and credible outcomes. This mix of high participation and low trust is not temporary, it is a deeper structural weakness that could undermine electoral legitimacy and stability if not addressed.

At the heart of this challenge is a widespread lack of trust across institutions. Citizens see electoral bodies, the judiciary, and security agencies as part of one system, so when trust is low in one, it affects confidence in all. This means that isolated reforms are unlikely to make a difference unless they are coordinated, visible, and sustained across the entire system. Electoral integrity is central to this issue. When people question the fairness of elections, trust declines, participation becomes routine rather than meaningful, and the risk of disputes increases. The challenge is no longer just to hold elections, but to ensure that people believe in them. In this context, credibility matters just as much as technical capacity.

The study also highlights changing risks. Electoral tensions are becoming more local and increasingly shaped by digital spaces and misinformation. At the same time, key groups remain excluded in practice. Youth are active and aware but not fully included in formal processes, while women and persons with disabilities continue to face barriers that limit their meaningful participation. Importantly, the findings show that information alone is not enough. Civic education without trust does not lead to real engagement. What is needed is a shift from simply providing information to actively rebuilding trust, alongside broader, system-wide reforms.

In the end, Kenya is not facing a crisis of participation, but a crisis of confidence. Strengthening electoral integrity, rebuilding trust in institutions, and ensuring meaningful inclusion must go hand in hand. If addressed together, they can support elections that are not only peaceful and participatory, but also credible, trusted, and truly reflective of the will of the people.





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