



SEISMIC SHIFTS IN KENYA'S DEMOCRACY

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

Seismic Shifts in Kenya's Democracy

Electoral Conflict Risk Mapping Assessment Report

2026

Abridged Version

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

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

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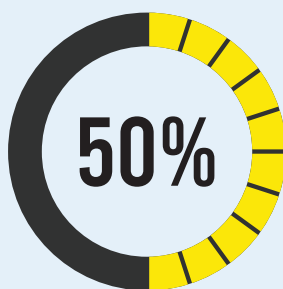
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Executive Summary

Kenya's electoral landscape in the lead-up to the 2027 General Election is undergoing a profound transformation driven by evolving youth demographics, mounting economic pressures, and persistent deficits in public trust towards state institutions. The country's political history is marked by continuous cycles of violence that have progressed from large-scale national clashes to highly localised conflicts at the county level. The pre-election context of 2026 is further shaped by a severe socio-economic crisis, as evidenced by a 67% youth unemployment rate and a high debt-to-GDP ratio, which previously fueled the decentralised, leaderless Generation Z protests of 2024 and 2025.

This volatility is further complicated by a fragmented political landscape following the 2024 impeachment of former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, the passing of veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga in 2025, and the subsequent division of the opposition coalition. These political realignments have contributed to the emergence of a volatile "politics of betrayal" narrative, which has the potential to mobilise disaffected voters along both socio-economic and ethnic lines, creating a fragile pre-election environment as Kenya prepares for the 2027 general election.

The core problem addressed in this assessment is that **unresolved structural weaknesses, legal and institutional gaps, and declining public trust in state institutions pose a significant threat to Kenya's democratic resilience.**



The report reveals a significant breakdown in the social contract, demonstrated by a 50% of public credibility crisis for the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and a legacy of over-policing by the National Police Service (NPS).

This institutional vulnerability is further complicated by the evolving digital environment, where industrialised disinformation, automated bot farms, AI-generated deepfakes, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) are deployed to manipulate voter opinion and undermine the rule of law. The potential for electoral unrest remains alarmingly high, with **75.73%** of respondents reporting direct exposure to electoral violence or electoral malpractices.

In response, Act Change Transform (Act!) is implementing the Sida-funded REDI and Danida-funded RPS programs, using this comprehensive diagnostic roadmap to provide the strategic evidence base to support a transition from reactive crisis mitigation to proactive, sustained conflict prevention.

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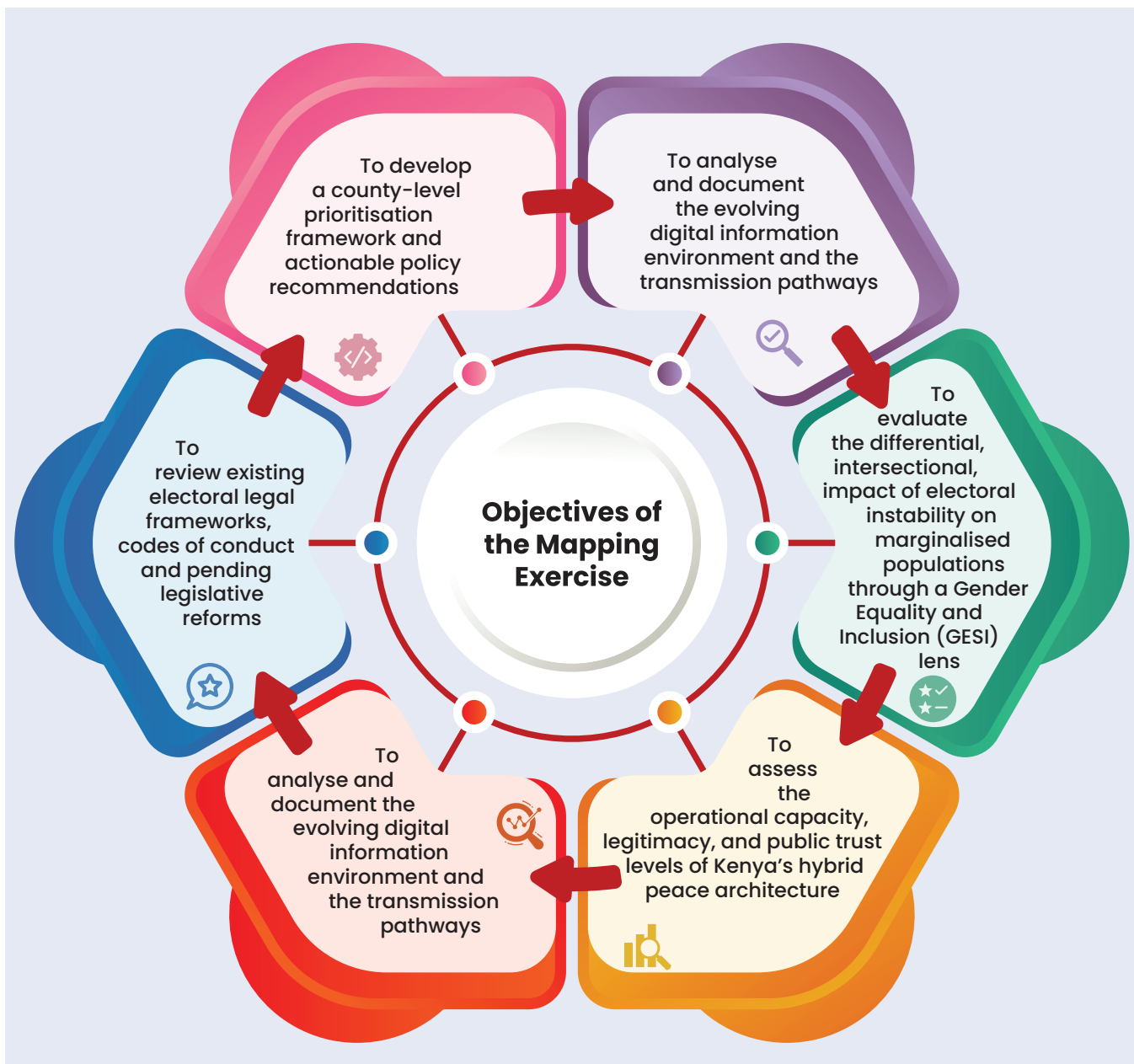
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Act!	Act Change Transform
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
Danida	Danish International Development Agency
ECRI	Electoral Conflict Risk Index
ELOG	Elections Observation Group
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FIDA	Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
IEBC	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission
IPOA	Independent Policing Oversight Authority
JCE	Judiciary Committee on Elections
KEWOPA	Kenya Women Parliamentary Association
KHRC	Kenya Human Rights Commission
KII	Key Informant Interview
KNCHR	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
MCK	Media Council of Kenya
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
NLC	National Land Commission
NPS	National Police Service
ODM	Orange Democratic Movement
ORPP	Office of the Registrar of Political Parties
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
REDI	Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion
RPS	Resilience, Peace, and Stability
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIGs	Special Interest Groups
SLDF	Sabaot Land Defence Force
TFGBV	Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence
TJRC	Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission
TOC	Theory of Change
UDA	United Democratic Alliance

Purpose and Objectives of the Mapping Exercise

The primary purpose of this mapping exercise is to generate a comprehensive, evidence-based diagnosis of electoral risks and conflict dynamics in Kenya to guide strategic programming ahead of the 2027 General Election. Moving beyond historical analysis, this study systematically examines the intersection between long-standing structural grievances, including unresolved land injustices and marginalisation, and emerging proximate triggers such as digital manipulation, algorithmic polarisation, and generational shifts in political realignments. Ultimately, this assessment establishes a robust baseline indicator framework to strengthen the protection of democratic processes and promote electoral systems that are participatory, inclusive, and transparent.



This conflict mapping study adopted a conflict-sensitive, mixed-methods research design that integrated quantitative field data, qualitative expert consultations, and digital ecosystem monitoring. The methodological framework was explicitly anchored in Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) principles to ensure the inclusive documentation of experiences among structurally vulnerable populations.

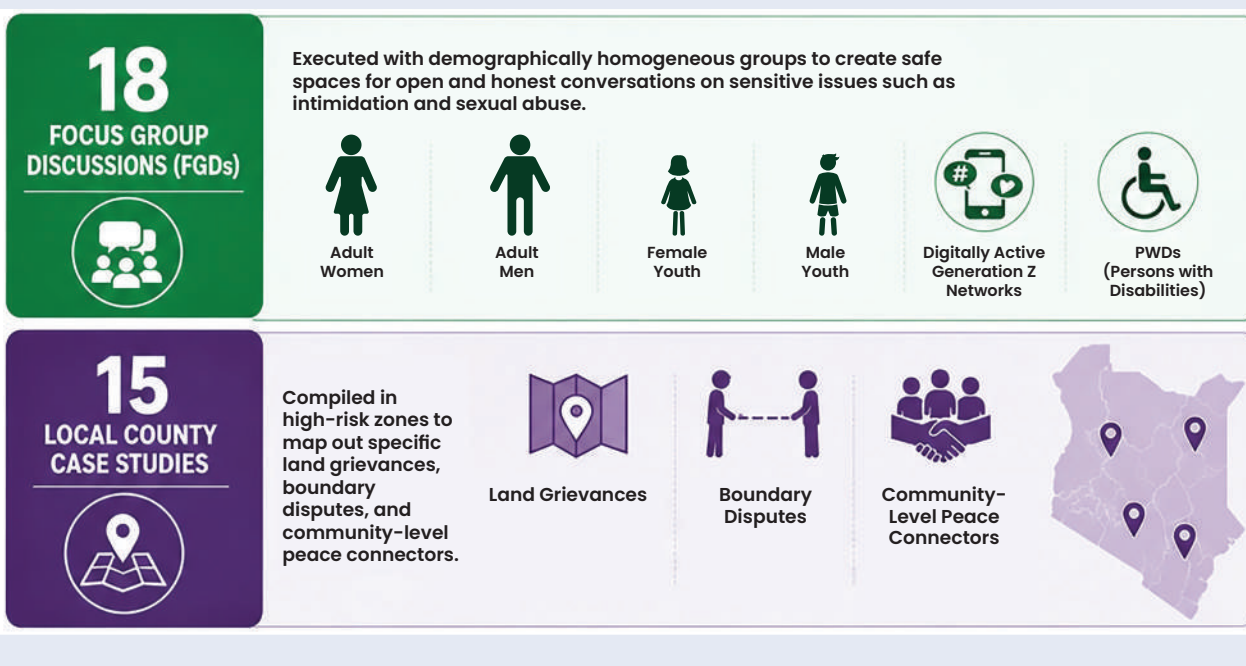
2.1 Geographic Scope and Sampling Criteria

Field data collection was conducted across 15 stratified, purposively selected counties representing diverse conflict histories, demographic densities, and levels of electoral competitiveness. The quantitative component was based on a structured household survey administered through KoboToolbox, with a final achieved sample of 688 respondents. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula for large populations, which established a minimum sample requirement of 385 respondents. This figure was adjusted to account for a multi-stage cluster design effect of 1.5 and an anticipated non-response rate, resulting in a revised target sample of 607. Field teams achieved an oversampled final pool of 688 to maximise subgroup analytical power. To minimise selection bias, systematic random sampling intervals were tailored to settlement density, with skip intervals of 7 households in urban centres, 5 in semi-urban areas, and 3 in rural settings, prioritising the next-birthday method at the household level to eliminate respondent selection bias.

2.2 Qualitative Inquiry and Triangulation Framework

Qualitative data streams were designed to capture local nuance, experiential insights, and institutional operational realities that numbers alone cannot provide. The qualitative scope comprised the following:





2.3 Data Management, Analysis, and Protection

The quantitative component consisted of a structured household survey administered to 688 respondents across 15 counties. These counties were selected purposively because they reflected varying degrees of electoral risk: high, medium, and emerging, as determined through prior conflict analysis, the NCIC hotspot mapping, human rights monitoring, and political dynamics relevant to the REDI and RPS programmes. Quantitative datasets were cleared, weighted, and analysed using STATA software to identify descriptive frequencies and cross-tabulations across demographic chapters. The table below shows the target sample and the samples achieved per county.

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

Table 1: Samples Achieved

Qualitative research enabled more in-depth analysis of emerging themes, actor behaviour, and contextual dynamics that quantitative data alone could not fully represent. The study conducted 48 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), 18 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and 15 county case studies. Qualitative audio files were transcribed verbatim, anonymised, and coded inside MAXQDA using a hybrid framework of inductive and deductive themes.

Below is the distribution of the FGDs per county.

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

Table 2: Distribution of FGDs per County

All information was triangulated across secondary legal reviews and literature to inform the final ECRI framework. Field teams operated on strictly “Do No Harm” ethical boundaries, secured informed consent, and enforced full compliance with the Kenya Data Protection Act 2019.

Key Findings

3.1 Institutional Performance and Public Trust Deficits

According to the study, people have a strong distrust of practically all government institutions. This skepticism stems from past failures, systemic corruption, and political interference. This section explores the severe institutional trust deficit and systemic governance shortcomings that define the pre-election environment. It describes public perceptions across demographic and geographical divides.

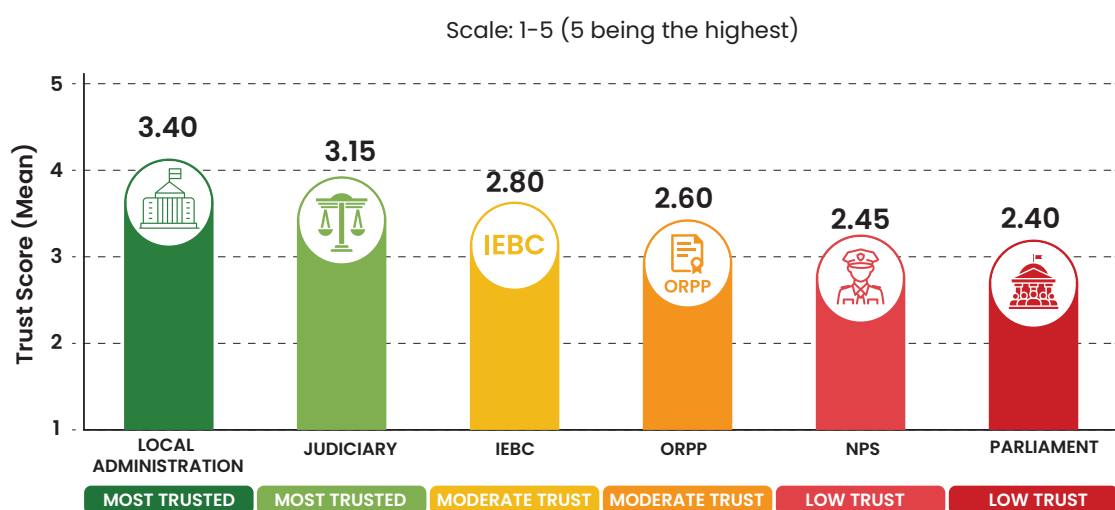


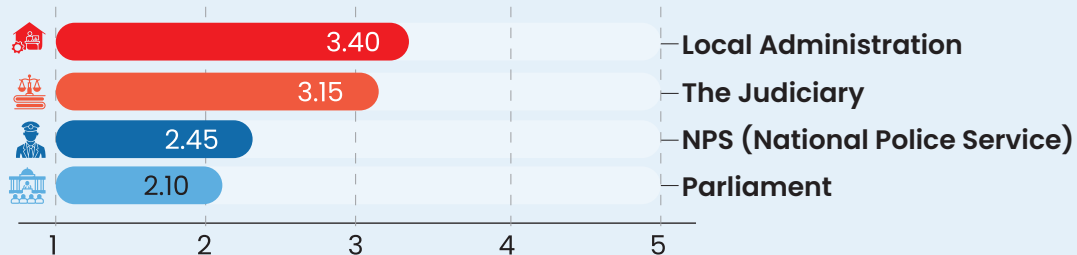
Table 3: Mean Public Trust in Electoral Institutions or Actors by Gender

“The problem is not the institutions themselves, as they have rules to guide them; the problem is the people who run them.”

Qualitative KII, Institutional Respondent

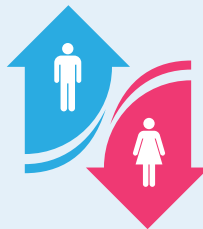
Summary of Trust Dynamics and Institutional Breakdown

The National Trust Hierarchy – Public Confidence on a Scale of 1-5



Gender-Differentiated Alienation

Men have a higher level of trust in national institutions



Women have a lower level of trust in national institutions

Frontline Administration as a Peace Bridge



Chiefs and village elders are perceived as highly accessible and less partisan than national institutions

The NPS Legitimacy Crisis

Women report higher levels of confidence in the NPS than men.



Overall public trust in the NPS remains low

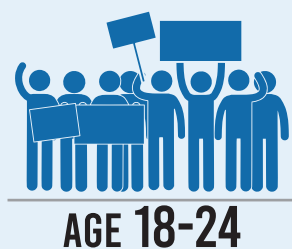
Peace Skepticism Among Middle Age Adults



Respondents aged 45-54 consistently reported the lowest level of trust in public institutions.

AGE: 45-54

Moderate Youth Optimism



Young citizens aged 18–24 demonstrate higher levels of trust in the NPS and the local administration than middle-aged cohorts

Geographic and Regional Trust Nuances

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

Table 4: Public Trust in Electoral Institutions by County



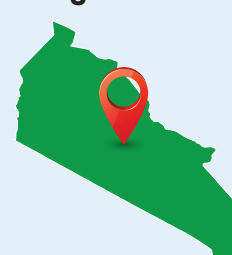
NAIROBI COUNTY

Recorded low levels of trust in the IEBC and the NPS, attributed to encounters between citizens and state security during demonstrations



SAMBURU COUNTY

Residents of Samburu County recorded the lowest levels of trust in Parliament and the ORPP



KAJIADO COUNTY

Kajiado County residents recorded the lowest trust scores in local administration and the IEBC

The Nyeri Policing Divide



NYERI COUNTY

Residents of Nyeri County reported the highest level of confidence in the Judiciary and the ORPP, yet they register the lowest trust in the NPS

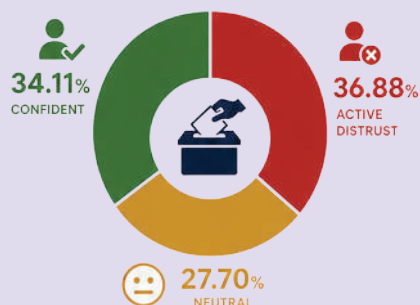
“People were attacked in church by police officers... the police are often seen as the ones causing the conflict rather than stopping it.”

FGD, Nyeri County

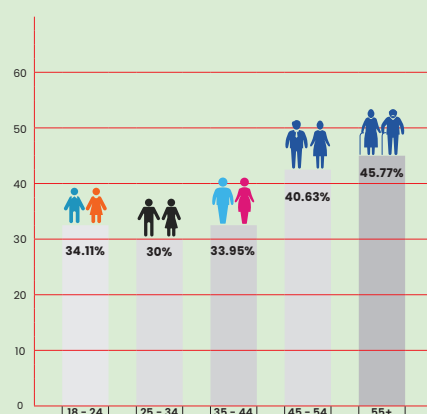
The IEBC Credibility Deficit Metrics

FRAGILE NATIONAL CREDIBILITY BASE

Only 34.11% of Kenyans express confidence in the IEBC to conduct a free and fair election, while 36.88% express active distrust, and 27.70% remain neutral

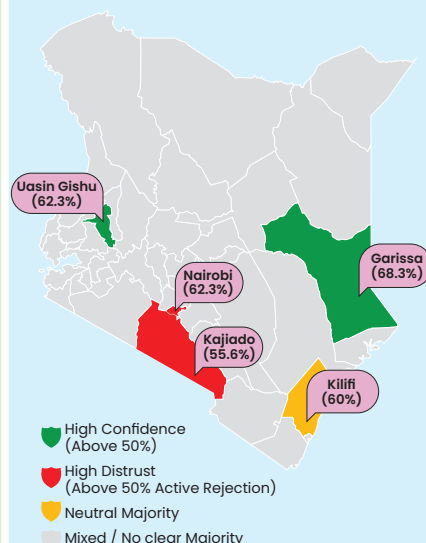


GENERATIONAL TRUST GAPS AT THE POLLS



Confidence in the electoral management referee drops to a study low of 30.26% among young adults aged 25-34, who represent the primary voting demographic.

GEOGRAPHIC POLARIZATION OF THE REFEREE



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

Table 5: Public Trust in the IEBC to Conduct Free and Fair Elections by Gender

3.2 Thematic Drivers of Electoral Conflict

Background

Electoral conflict in Kenya is a multi-dimensional crisis shaped by long-standing structural vulnerabilities and immediate political or economic triggers. No single conflict driver operates in isolation; rather, a volatile mix of historical grievances, economic pressures, political competition, and security challenges creates high risks of violence in specific counties. As Kenya approaches the 2027 General Election, these cross-cutting themes demonstrate how local vulnerabilities interact with evolving political alliances and digital transformation to challenge democratic stability.

The study found that 75.7% of respondents experienced electoral violence or malpractice, including physical violence, threats, intimidation, hate speech, voter bribery, property destruction, sexual or gender-based violence, and online harassment. These findings demonstrate that violence and malpractice remain significant challenges within Kenya's election system, and their root causes should be addressed to restore trust and promote peaceful elections.

Have you experienced conflict or malpractice during elections?

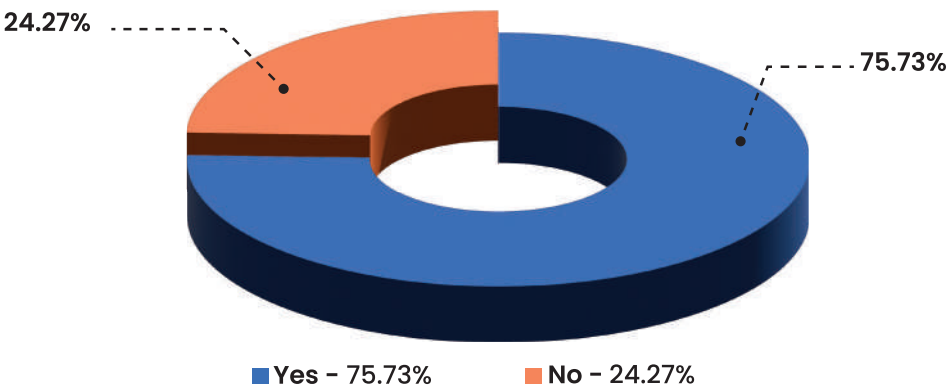


Figure 1: Overall Exposure to Electoral Violence

Approximately 72.6% of women reported exposure to electoral violence or related malpractices, compared to 78.9% of men. Conversely, respondents aged 18–24 reported lower levels of exposure at 65% relative to other age cohorts, as illustrated in the figure below.

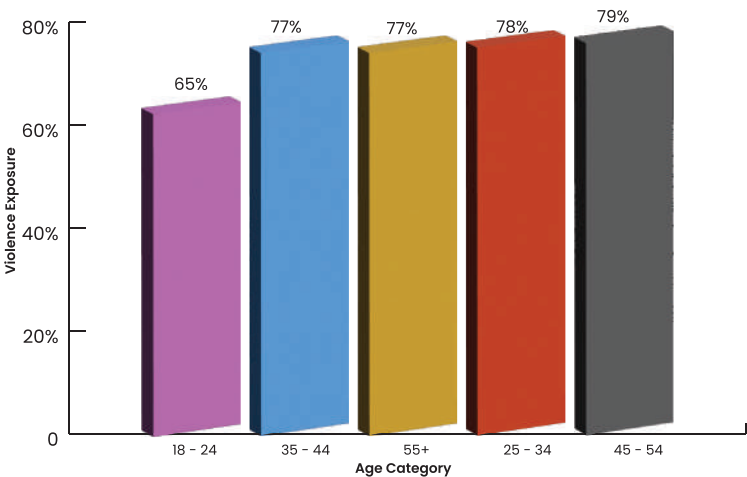


Figure 2: Electoral Violence Exposure by Age Group.

This lower exposure is attributed to the limited number of election cycles experienced by this age group. However, despite reporting lower levels of direct exposure, young people remain highly vulnerable to electoral risks.

“Politicians actively exploit the energy of the youth by paying them to act as gangs or militias to violently disrupt the electoral process.”

KII, Local Administrator

The study reveals significant variations in exposure to electoral violence and malpractice across counties. The highest levels of reported exposure were recorded in Bungoma (97.62%), Garissa (97.56%), and Migori (94.44%), where nearly all respondents indicated having experienced or witnessed electoral violence or related malpractices. In contrast, Wajir County recorded the lowest reported exposure at 27.59%, followed by Nyeri County at 51.61%.

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

Table 6: Violence Exposure by County

2027 Electoral Conflict Drivers

- a. Structural Gridlock of Land Grievances:** Longstanding historical land injustices remain a significant driver of electoral conflict in Kenya. The National Land Commission has noted that approximately 70% of submitted land-related claims originate from the Coast.

“These land disputes are reactivated by political actors during election cycles to build divisive narratives.”

KII Bungoma

- b. Proximate Triggers of Elite Realignment:** High-profile political developments, including the 2024 impeachment of former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua and the passing of opposition leader Raila Odinga in 2025, have contributed to significant shifts within traditional political alliances. These realignments have intensified narratives of political betrayal and uncertainty.

Key Drivers of Electoral Conflict



**POLITICAL
ELITES**



**YOUTH GROUPS
& ACTIVIST
MOVEMENTS**



**CRIMINAL
GANGS**



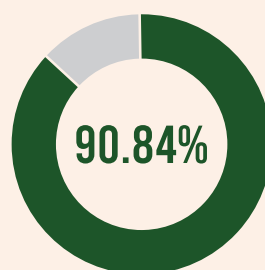
**STATE SECURITY
AGENCIES**



**DIGITAL ACTORS
(INFLUENCERS &
BOT FARMS)**



125
**POLICE KILLINGS
RECORDED IN 2025**



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

- c. Widespread Prevalence of Electoral Malpractice:** A staggering 75.73% of all respondents have experienced direct electoral malpractice or violence, proving that instability is heavily normalised within the system. Exposure is highest in Bungoma (97.62%), Garissa (97.56%), and Migori (94.44%), as shown in the table below.

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

Table 7: Exposure to Electoral Violence or Malpractice

- d. Transactional Politics and Voter Bribery:** Transactional voter bribery was reported as the most common form of malpractice at 51.74%, followed closely by identity-based hate speech at 48.26%.

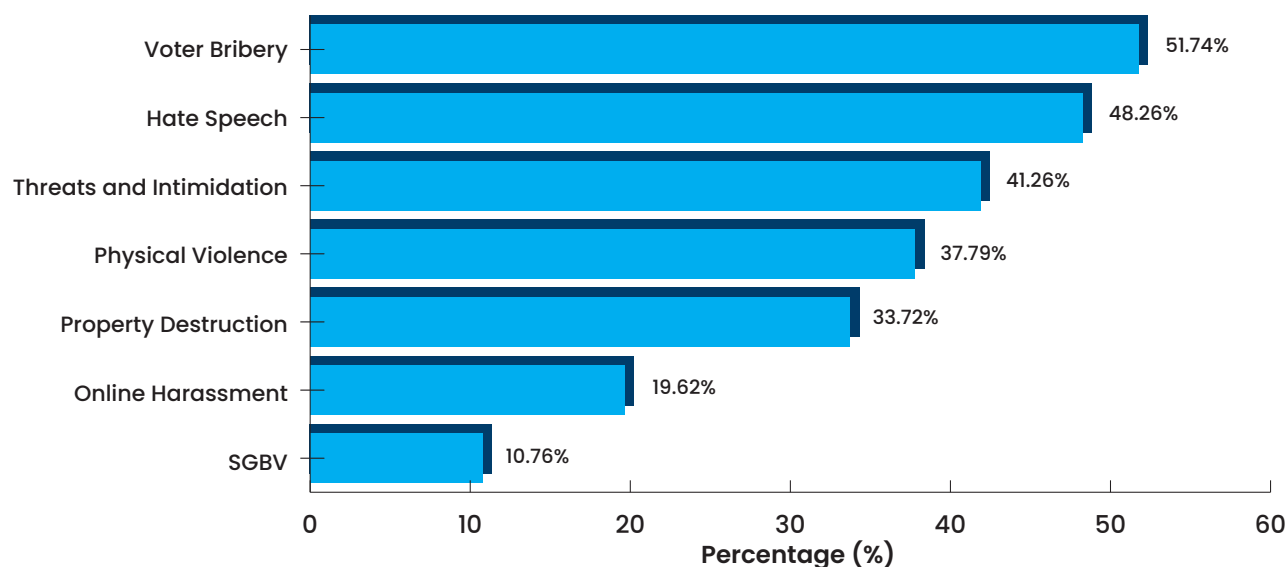
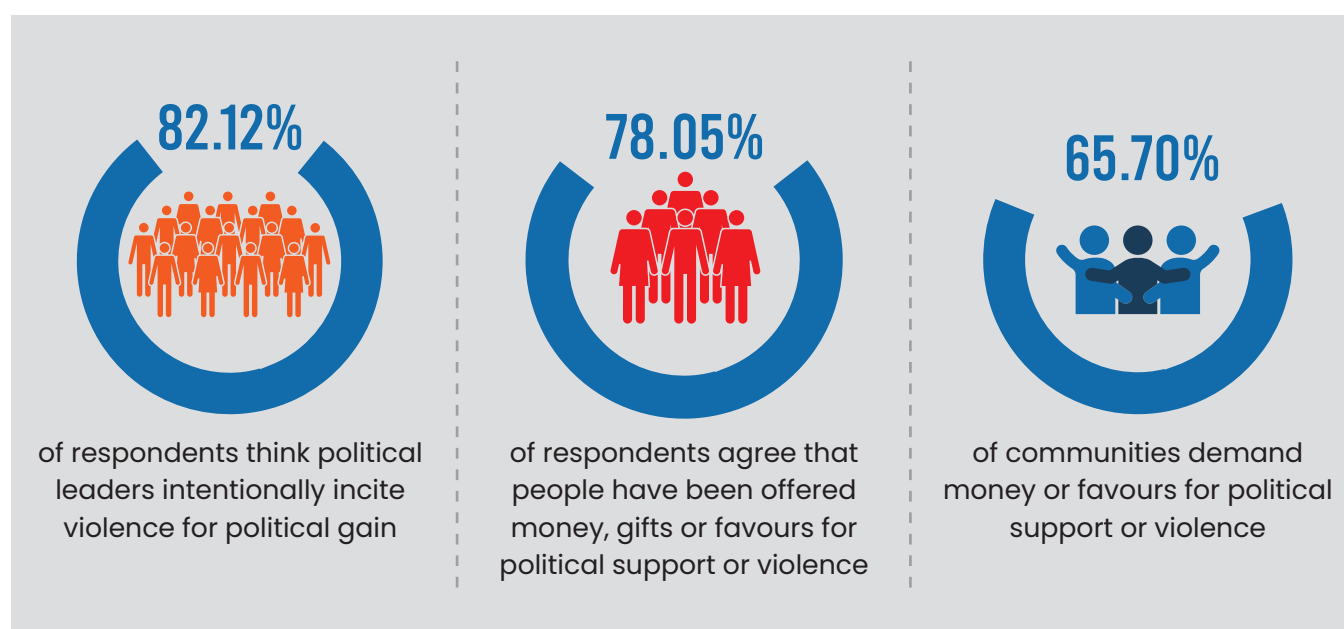


Figure 3: Types of Electoral Violence and Malpractice

Financial manipulation disproportionately targets economically active young adults aged 25–34, with bribery exposure at a high of 55.90%. The findings further indicate that transactional politics operates as a reciprocal exchange: 66% of communities expect money or favors from political candidates in exchange for support, as shown below.

Interaction with Electoral Violence and Malpractice



- e. **Socio-Economic Desperation of the Youth Bulge:** Kenya's youth bulge faces a severe unemployment rate of 67% (Generation Kenya, 2025), resulting in widespread livelihood insecurity and economic exclusion. This contributes to the alienation of young people from state institutions, increasing their vulnerability to recruitment as perpetrators of politically motivated violence (FGD Baringo).

"On unemployment, Migori youth wake up with nothing to do and resort to drugs and alcohol because there are no jobs. A leader who needs people to cause trouble only needs to call one of them, buy them what they are taking and give them 1,000 shillings. Someone with no provision can do anything."

FGD Respondent, Migori County

"A youth that cannot even afford a meal is given a new panga and a few shillings to go and cause chaos; this is systemic exploitation."

KII Civil Society Respondent, Bungoma County

- f. **The Culture of Commercialised Urban Goonism:** Political actors systematically exploit youth poverty by recruiting informal criminal gangs to enforce territorial dominance. This commercialised form of political violence, commonly referred to as "goonism," is most prevalent in Bungoma (80.95% gang involvement), Kajiado (72.22%), Nakuru (69.23%), and Kisumu counties (68.52%) (KII, Human Rights Defender).

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

Table 8: Rising Goonism Culture.

- g. The Results Announcement Phase Flashpoint:** The vote-counting and results declaration phase contributes the most critical period within the electoral cycle, with 74% of participants identifying it as the primary trigger for electoral violence. This is followed by the immediate post-election period, which was cited by 64% of respondents as a high-risk phase for the outbreak of violence.

Election violence trigger periods

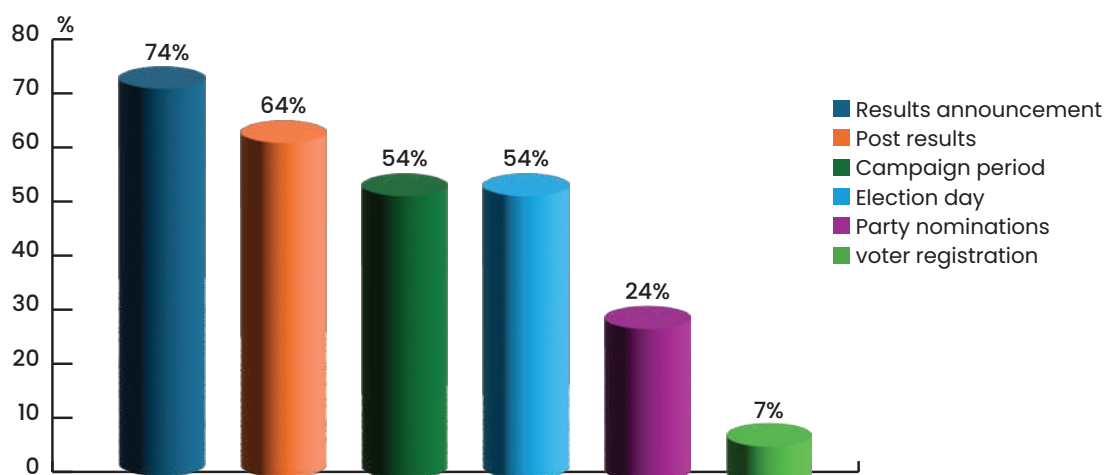


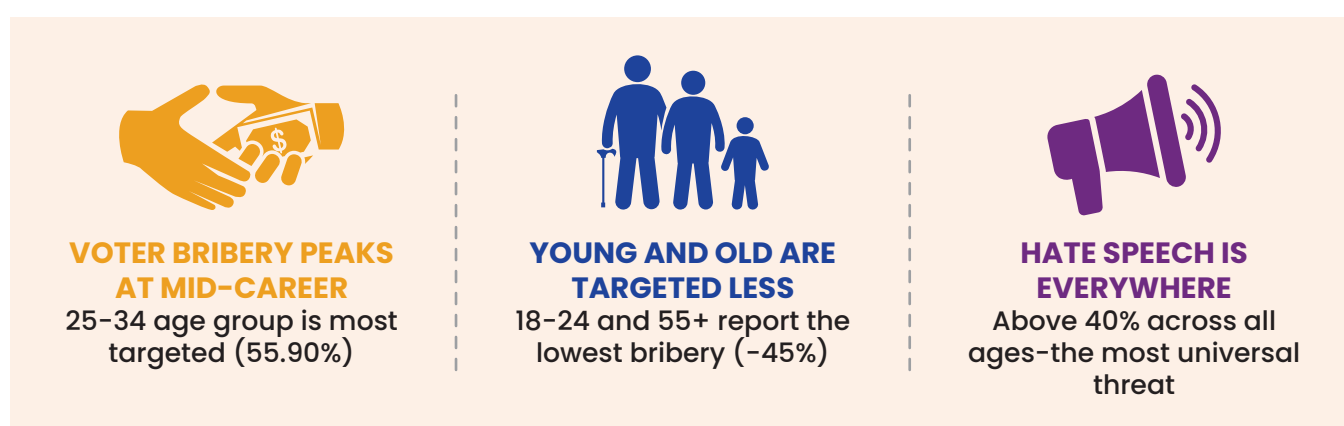
Figure 4: Election Violence Trigger Periods.

- h. Inflammatory Language and Division:** Provocative rhetoric used during political rallies serves as a direct catalyst for social divisions and vilification of political opponents. In this study, citizens identified hate speech (48.26%) and intimidation (41.86%) as among the primary drivers contributing to the perpetuation of electoral violence.
- i. Highly Monetised Political Ambition:** Political actors often frame election campaigns as high-stakes contests, centered on the protection of private wealth and political power. The findings indicate that 82% of participants believe political leaders intentionally incite violence, while 78% report witnessing the open distribution of cash and gifts as a strategy to secure political loyalty and electoral support.
- j. Industrialised Disinformation and Digital Threats:** Social media platforms are increasingly exploited by sponsored online actors to disseminate coordinated misinformation and fake content aimed at influencing public perceptions and political outcomes. The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and deepfake technologies has further intensified these risks, with such technologies being weaponised to facilitate gendered attacks against women candidates and undermine the credibility and legitimacy of judicial actors.
- k. Aggressive Security Sector Responses:** Excessive use of force, perceived bias, and police brutality during public demonstrations have contributed to a widening trust deficit between law enforcement agencies and citizens. The fact that police killings accounted for 54% of protest-related fatalities in mid-2025 has further eroded public confidence, with only 20% of citizens expressing trust that security forces will act and uphold their responsibilities fairly.

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

Table 9: Public Trust in Police by Gender

- n. Historical Land and Resource Scarcity:** Climate-induced drought and resource scarcity over water or grazing land keep border transit corridors highly volatile. These long-standing grievances are reactivated during campaigns by politicians who build toxic “us versus them” narratives to secure local power.
- o. Social Disorder from Illicit Activities:** Areas characterised by high levels of drug abuse and illicit brewing activities demonstrate heightened vulnerability to social disorder and instability. These non-governance environments create conditions in which economically marginalised and idle individuals can be easily recruited for political activities, including during periods of intense electoral campaigns.



3.3 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis

- Barriers to Electoral Participation: This study identified multiple barriers to electoral participation, with the most frequently reported barriers being threats and intimidation (52.21%), political interference (48.53%), and fear of violence (47.79%), implying that insecurity and political pressure were the dominant constraints on participation. In contrast, structural and administrative barriers such as lack of identification (13.24%), lack of information (11.03%), and gender-related barriers (8.09%) were reported less frequently, though still significant for specific sub-groups.

What Barriers Did you Face During Elections?

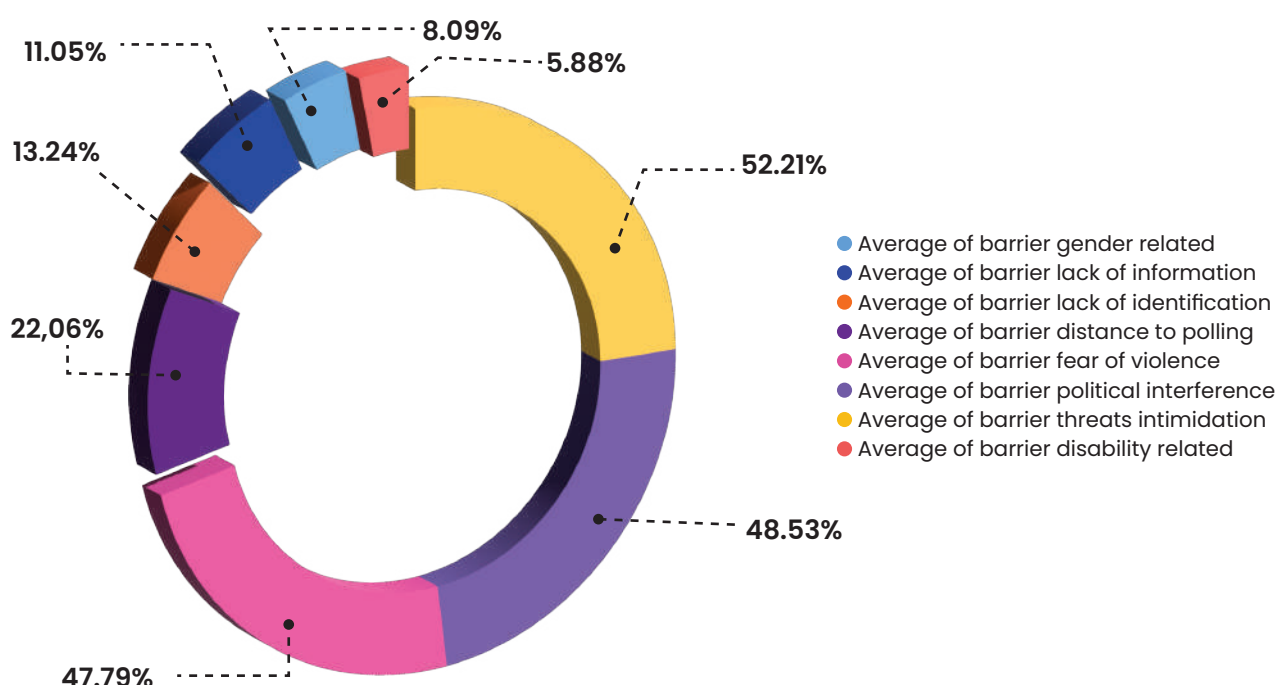
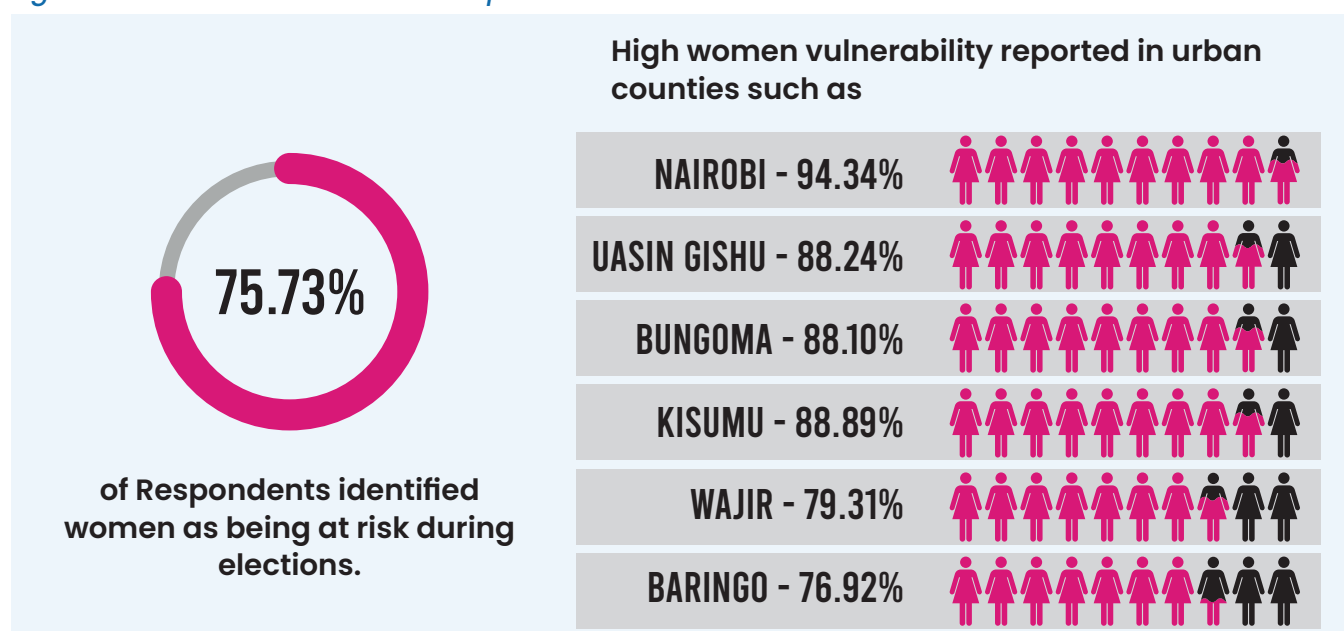


Figure 5: Barriers to Electoral Participation



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

Table 10: Groups at Risk of Electoral Violence by County

- Hostile Frontiers and Digital Weaponisation against Women:** While physical forms of coercion affect both men and women, women leaders face disproportionate risks within the digital environment. Women candidates experience significantly higher levels of online abuse, with 55.7% reporting exposure to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). These attacks include AI-manipulated images, sexualised misinformation, and defamatory content intended to intimidate them and discourage their continued participation in political processes (FGD Nakuru).
- The Severe Reporting Safe Space Deficit for Women:** Women face significant informal barriers when reporting electoral-related crimes, including limited access to safe and confidential reporting mechanisms and the persistence of cultural norms that discourage disclosure. In many informal settlements, a prevailing “conspiracy of silence” contributes to underreporting by creating environments where witnesses may fear stigma or social exclusion.
- Administrative and Physical Exclusion of Persons with Disabilities:** Inclusion of PWDs remains largely symbolic, with significant structural barriers continuing to limit their meaningful participation in electoral processes. Approximately 18.4% of polling centres remain physically inaccessible due to challenging terrain and inadequate adaptation of school-based voting infrastructure. Furthermore, reliance on assisted voting mechanisms may compromise the constitutional right to a secret ballot, thereby contributing to voter apathy and reduced electoral participation among PWDs (FGD Migori).



“Layered intersectional vulnerabilities for young PWDs: Disability-related barriers intersect heavily with age, with young PWDs aged 18–24 reporting a peak structural barrier rate of 80%. They suffer a double blow of physical inaccessibility paired with deep information gaps.”

FGD Samburu

- **Generational Shifts in Youth Civic Consciousness:** Although economically disadvantaged youth are often portrayed as the primary perpetrators of electoral unrest, the findings indicate a significant shift in youth political engagement. Increasingly, young people are leveraging digital platforms to scrutinise political leadership, moving beyond traditional ethnic mobilisation to organise around shared socio-economic grievances.
- **The Compounded Vulnerability of Minority Clans:** In counties dominated by a single clan or ethnic group, minority communities frequently experience exclusion from informal power-sharing arrangements and “negotiated democracy” processes mediated by community elders. This structural marginalisation limits their political representation and participation; consequently, many members of minority communities feel unsafe in large gatherings on polling days, contributing to reduced voter participation and electoral disengagement (FGD Migori).

3.4 Peace Architecture, Early Warning Systems, Civic and Voter Education

- **The Critical National EWER Visibility Gap:** The findings reveal a substantial lack of public awareness regarding formal EWER mechanisms, with 65.26% of respondents reporting no knowledge of any established conflict reporting or early warning systems. This visibility gap is particularly pronounced in densely populated and politically volatile urban centres such as Nairobi, where only 13.21% of respondents indicated that they knew how to access an appropriate reporting channel.

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

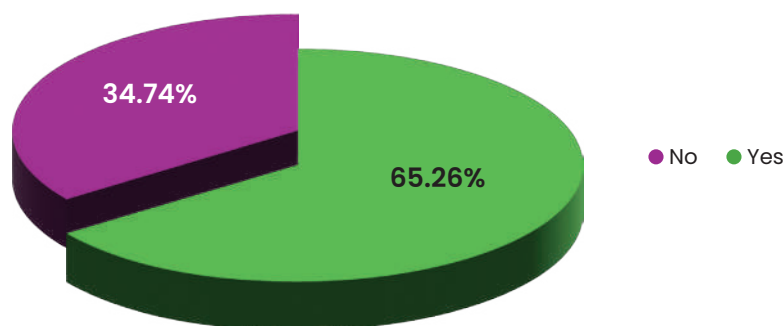


Figure 6: Early Warning/Reporting System Awareness

The findings showed consistently low levels of awareness of electoral early warning and reporting systems among both male and female respondents. Among women, 67.51% reported being unaware of any electoral early warning or reporting systems, while only 32.49% indicated awareness. Similarly, among men, 62.65% reported being unaware, compared with 37.35% who reported awareness. The findings indicated relatively moderate levels of awareness of EWER systems across all age groups.

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

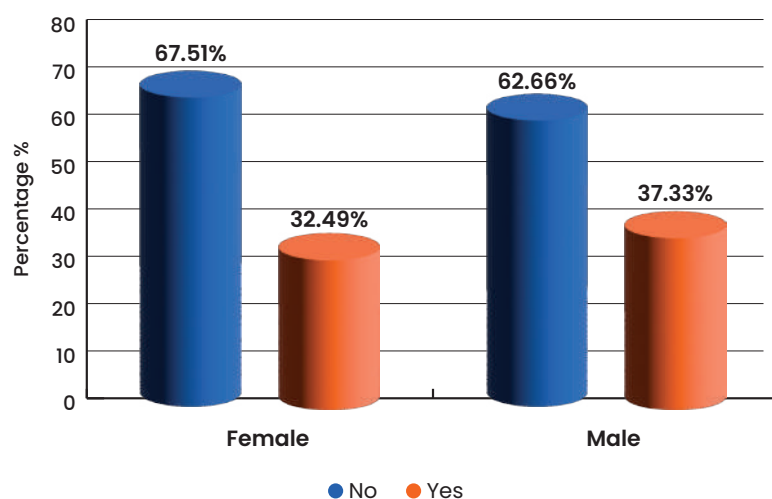


Figure 7: Awareness of EWER Systems by Gender

- Pervasive Public Reporting Safety Fear:** Fear of retaliation undermines the effectiveness of early warning and response mechanisms. The findings indicate that 65.26% of Kenyans do not feel safe reporting incidents of electoral violence due to concerns about potential reprisals. Public confidence in the safety of reporting is particularly low in Nairobi County, where only 10.38% of respondents expressed confidence that they could report electoral violence without fear of retaliation.

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

Table 11: Perceptions of Safety in Reporting Electoral Violence by County

“Fear of retaliation and lack of confidentiality, including concerns about compromised handling by some security agents and administrators, further discourage reporting, as individuals worry about being identified by perpetrators or political actors, exposed to intimidation, or subjected to escalation of harm, including serious violence, and mishandling of complaints.”

FGD Respondent, Mombasa County.

- **The Usability Crisis and Digital Speed Mismatch:** Existing early warning infrastructures remain largely rural-oriented and are insufficiently adapted to the evolving dynamics of electoral conflict in urban and digital environments. These systems often lack the technical capacity to detect and monitor emerging conflict triggers, including the spontaneous and decentralised mobilisation of young people through encrypted digital platforms such as WhatsApp.
- **Severe Deficits in Continuous Voter Sensitisation:** Public access to electoral awareness has collapsed, with 73.94% of all respondents receiving absolutely no voter or civic education over the last two years. This substantial information gap leaves the electorate increasingly vulnerable to political incitement, misinformation, and disinformation.
- **Strong Civic Engagement and Electoral Participation Intent:** The findings indicated a strong level of civic engagement and electoral participation intent among respondents, with 88.2% reporting that they were willing to vote in the 2027 General Elections. The respondents noted that despite prevailing concerns around electoral processes and governance, elections continued to be viewed by the majority of citizens as an important mechanism for exercising civic responsibility and influencing public leadership.

Willingness to Vote in the 2027 Elections

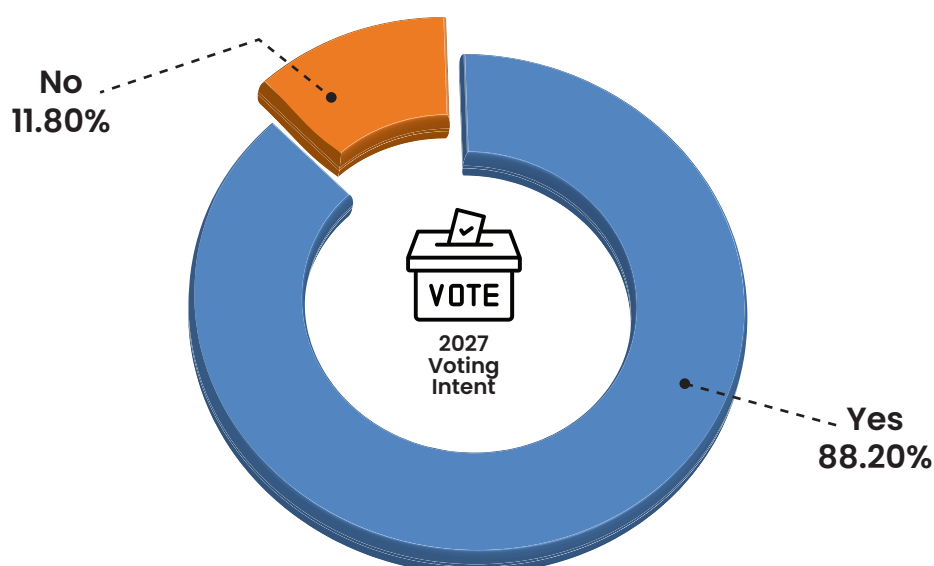


Figure 8: Willingness to Vote in the 2027 Elections

However, the findings also revealed a modest level of electoral disengagement among a segment of respondents, with 11.8% indicating they were unwilling to participate in the forthcoming elections. The reasons cited reflect broader challenges relating to public trust, perceived political efficacy, and citizens' confidence in the value and impact of electoral participation.

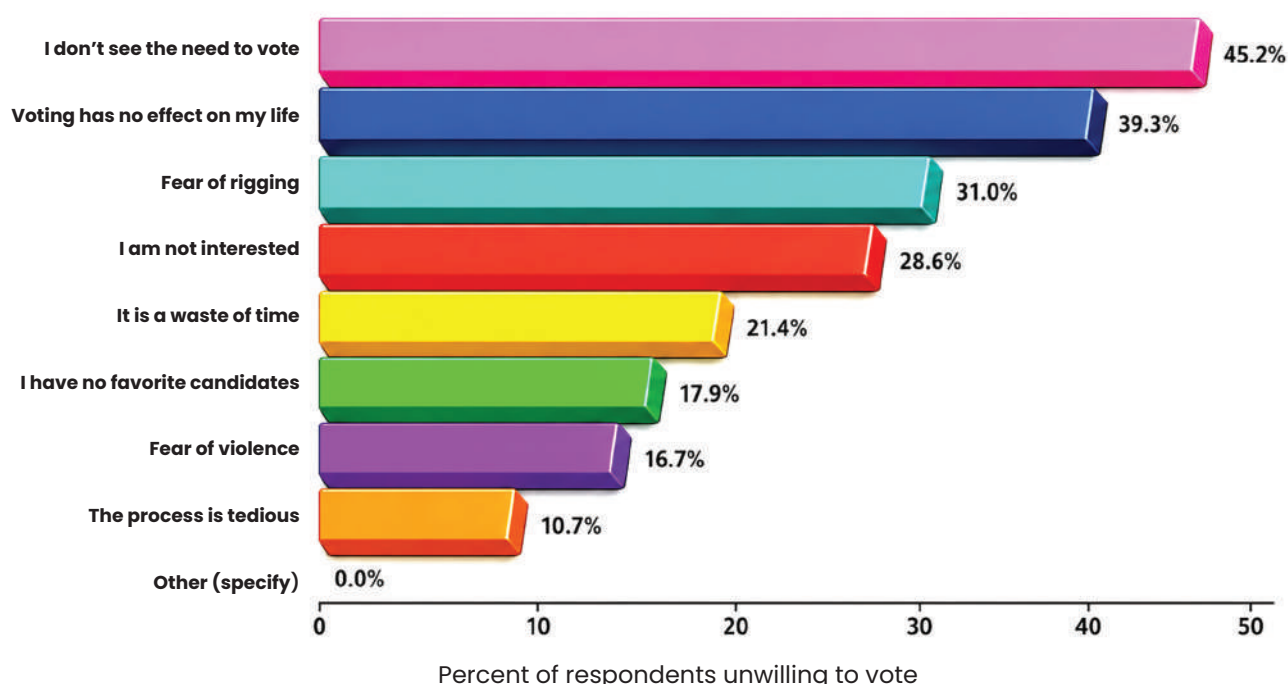


Figure 9: Reasons for Unwillingness to Vote in the 2027 Elections.

- The Generational and Regional Information Divide:** The findings reveal a generational divide in access to civic and electoral information. Citizens aged 55 years and above mostly rely on traditional community forums, such as *barazas*, as their primary source of civic education, whereas young voters aged 18–24 primarily depend on social media platforms, with 50% identifying these as their principal source of electoral information. This trend indicates that younger citizens are obtaining civic and electoral information outside formal institutional channels, including those provided by the IEBC.

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

Table 12: Sources of Civic and Voter Education by Age.

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

On civic education, study findings demonstrate that Kenya operates within an evolving information environment shaped by both traditional community structures and rapidly expanding digital communication spaces. Strengthening civic education will therefore require sustained multi-stakeholder collaboration, expanded grassroots outreach, improved digital literacy initiatives, and greater integration of peacebuilding and conflict prevention within civic engagement programming.

3.5 Digital Technologies and Media

Digital technologies have fundamentally transformed Kenya's political landscape, serving as dual-edged tools for civic empowerment, repression, and the manipulation of public discourse. The digital sphere has emerged as a site of harm, particularly through technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), where online abuse, harassment, and digitally manipulated content contribute to psychological trauma and the exclusion of affected individuals from political participation.

- **High Social Media Concentration:** Social media usage is exceptionally high at 84%, with daily communication flows concentrated around three dominant channels: WhatsApp (90%), Facebook (82%), and TikTok (70%).

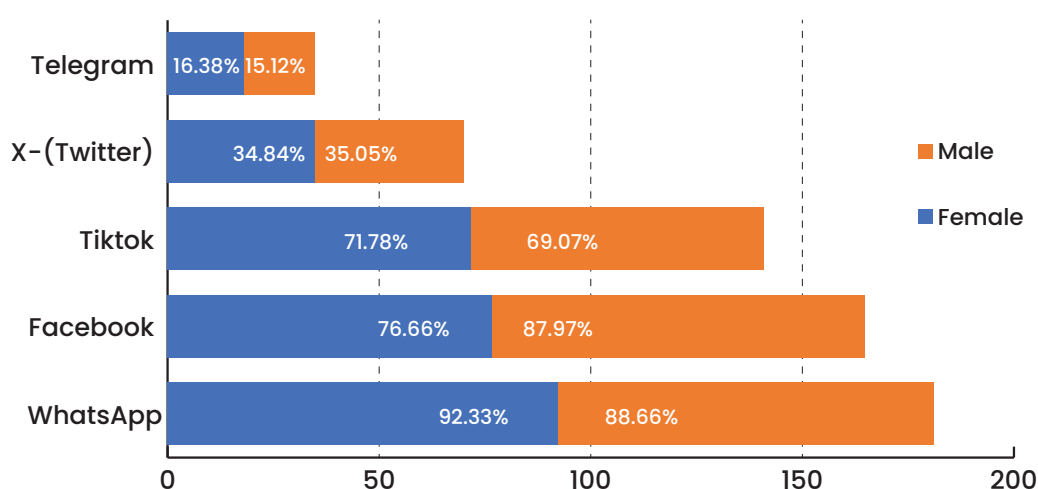


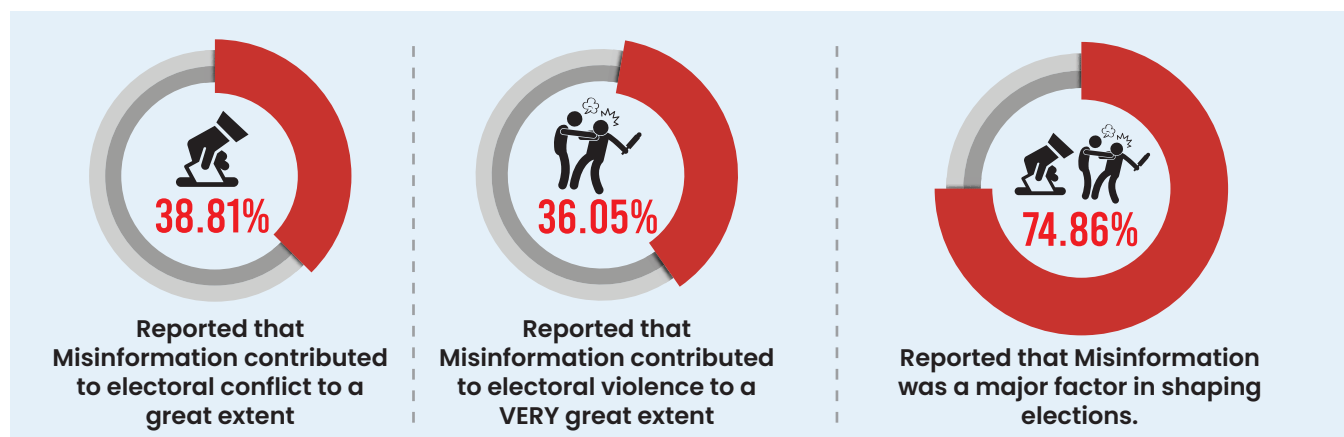
Figure 10: Social Media Platform Usage

The dominance of WhatsApp is particularly significant, due to its facilitation of closed-group communication and rapid dissemination of forwarded content, making it challenging to monitor or verify information once it begins to circulate. Similarly, Facebook remains a major platform for accessing news and political content, while the rapid growth of TikTok reflects an emerging shift toward short-form, highly engaging digital content, particularly among younger users.

“Facebook and WhatsApp are mainly used to post and spread threats. Some youth will post messages and make politician images using AI. So, some people will take it seriously because they don't know how to verify AI information.”

FGD Youth Participant, Nairobi County.

- **Emerging Digital Threats: AI, Deepfakes, and Synthetic Media Panic:** Digital platforms have become key channels for amplification of adversarial political messaging, manipulated videos, and fabricated electoral materials, including false tally sheets, often through mechanisms that monetise public outrage and heightened emotional engagement. The rapid spread of AI-generated content makes it extremely difficult for citizens to distinguish between political propaganda and authentic information (FGD Kisumu).



3.6 The 2027 County Electoral Conflict Risk Index

The Electoral Conflict Risk Index (ECRI) framework assesses county-level electoral risks by analysing key dimensions, including exposure to violence, governance deficits, digital threats, and the strength of local peace and response capacities. Counties characterised by high levels of conflict exposure and limited institutional capacity to respond to risks recorded the highest vulnerability scores. Overall, the findings demonstrate that electoral conflict risk is shaped by the interaction of violence, governance gaps, and weak response systems.

Three main scenarios emerge from the index: historical hotspot scenario; emerging hotspot scenario; and persistent high-priority counties.

- **Historical Hotspot Scenario:** Under the historical hotspot scenario, greater weight was assigned to violence severity, vulnerability, and institutional trust deficits. Counties traditionally associated with recurrent electoral tensions ranked highest under this scenario. Bungoma, Nyeri, and Uasin Gishu emerged prominently, reflecting the influence of long-standing governance challenges, conflict histories, and institutional mistrust.
- **Emerging Hotspot Scenario:** Under the emerging hotspot scenario, greater emphasis was placed on digital misinformation, coordination gaps, and local response capacity. The pattern of prioritisation shifted considerably with Baringo and Migori rising substantially in the rankings, indicating growing exposure to dynamic and evolving forms of conflict risk. These counties may not consistently appear as traditional hotspots, yet they face increasing vulnerabilities linked to weak coordination systems, limited effectiveness of early warning mechanisms, and changing information ecosystems.
- **Persistent High Priority Counties:** Some counties remained consistently high priority across both simulations. Bungoma, Nairobi, and Kilifi maintained high rankings regardless of the weighting structure applied. This pattern suggests the presence of both structural and emerging risks within the same counties. Conflict vulnerability in these areas appears to be reinforced by historical tensions, governance concerns, digital exposure, and institutional coordination gaps.

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

2027 Election Scenarios

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

Table 13: Integrated County Prioritisation and Electoral Hotspot Scenarios

The research team emphasises that the ECRI rankings represent a contextual snapshot rather than fixed, permanent assessments of electoral risks. The baseline data was collected during a specific period characterised by high-level political realignments. However, the Kenyan electoral environment remains fluid, with emerging economic shocks and historical triggers rapidly altering local conflict risk thresholds.


High Priority Counties


Social Economy


Electoral Competition


Political Incitement


Bungoma County

Bungoma County exhibits a persistently high risk, particularly in Mt. Elgon areas such as Cheptais and Chepyuk, where land disputes and historical grievances remain unresolved. Electoral periods tend to reactivate these tensions through local political contests.


Migori County

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



High Priority Counties

Key Drivers of Conflict



Social Economy



Electoral Competition



Political Incitement

Nairobi County

Nairobi County remains a high-risk electoral conflict hotspot, with key areas of concern including Kibera, Mathare, and Huruma where high population density, youth unemployment, and political mobilisation converge. Qualitative findings indicate that tensions in these areas can escalate rapidly during campaigns and the announcement of results periods. The main drivers of conflict include economic exclusion, political incitement, and intensified electoral competition.

Nyeri County

Nyeri County reflects a high but largely latent conflict risk, with key hotspots around Nyeri Town and neighbouring settlements such as Majengo where political tensions remain largely subdued outside election periods but have the potential to escalate during periods of heightened political competition. The primary drivers include political rivalry and underlying divisions linked to electoral contests.

Samburu County

Samburu County's risk is concentrated in areas such as Baragoi and Maralal, where inter-communal conflict and resource competition remain central drivers. These tensions are often linked to pastoral livelihoods and territorial disputes. Samburu's high-risk ranking is heavily driven by its borders with neighboring communities, including Pokot regions. Fights over grazing land and water tend to worsen during election cycles. Political periods often escalate these existing tensions.



Medium Priority Counties

Key Drivers of Conflict



Social Economy



Electoral Competition



Historical Conflicts

Kajiado County

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

Kilifi County

Kilifi County presents moderate but increasingly significant electoral conflict risk, particularly in areas such as Kilifi Town and Mtwapa where socio-economic vulnerabilities intersect with political dynamics and rapid urbanisation. The main drivers include poverty, exclusion, and localised political competition.



Medium Priority Counties

Key Drivers of Conflict



Social Economy



Electoral Competition



Historical Conflicts

Mombasa County

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

Nakuru County

Nakuru County reflects a balanced risk profile, with known hotspots such as Kaptembwa, Bondeni, and Rhonda linked to historical ethnic tensions and urban pressures. Although relatively stable, underlying structural drivers remain present.

Uasin Gishu County

Uasin Gishu County carries moderate risk, particularly in areas such as Langas and Burnt Forest where historical conflict patterns persist. Although land dispute conflict has reduced, latent tensions remain tied to land and political competition.



Low Priority Counties

Key Drivers of Conflict



Social Economy



Electoral Competition



Community Tensions

Baringo County

Baringo County presents a low but emerging electoral conflict risk, with key hotspots including Marigat and surrounding areas where inter-community tensions and competition over resources periodically intensify. Although the county is not currently classified as high risk, underlying social and resource-related tensions remain present and could contribute to increased vulnerability during periods of heightened political activity.

Garissa County

Garissa County remains a relatively low-risk area, with limited evidence of widespread electoral conflict pressures. However, its international border with Somalia represents a significant security consideration, as cross-border movements could rapidly alter local risk dynamics. Electoral tensions within the county are generally localised and less influenced by political competition compared to other counties. Other primary drivers include occasional community disputes and localised political competition.

Isiolo County

Isiolo County presents a moderate-to-low but stable electoral conflict risk, with localised tensions in areas such as Bulapesa and Wabera often linked to inter-community relations. These hotspots experience occasional strains arising from clan and community dynamics, particularly during political periods. The main drivers of conflict include localised identity-based competition and political rivalry.



Low Priority Counties

Key Drivers of Conflict



Social Economy



Electoral Competition



Community Tensions



Kisumu County

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



Wajir County

Wajir County remains a low-risk county, characterised by relatively stable electoral conditions. Existing tensions are largely localised and are often managed through established community and clan-based conflict-resolution mechanisms. The primary drivers of risk include occasional inter-clan disagreements and localised political competition.

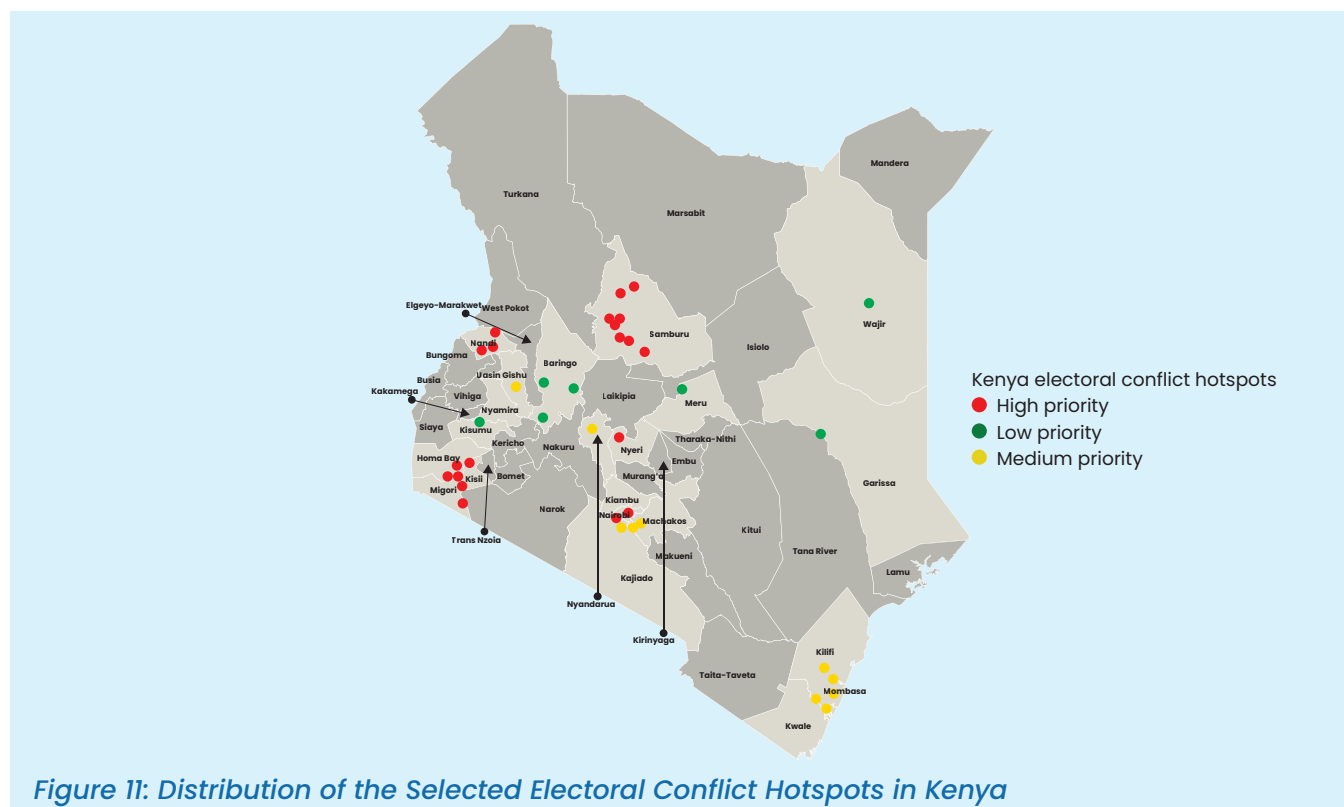


Figure 11: Distribution of the Selected Electoral Conflict Hotspots in Kenya

Electoral risks flow along admin boundaries, concentrated across paths like the Samburu-Pokot and Kericho-Muhoroni borders, where climate-induced resource scarcity over water and grazing land is rapidly politicised by elite actors during competitive campaign periods.

Recommendations for Peaceful and Credible Elections

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

The figure below presents a quadrant categorising the recommendations according to their respective levels of risk and potential impact.

4.1. National-Level Recommendations

The study identifies low public trust in electoral institutions as a key driver of electoral conflict. The following recommendations prioritise institutional reforms, digital safety, accountability and coordinated conflict prevention ahead of the 2027 General Election.

4.1.1. Electoral Institutional Integrity

01



- Amend the IEBC Act to clarify the separation of Commissioners' oversight and Secretariat operations.
- Harmonise the Elections Act, 2011 with relevant Supreme Court rulings on the finality of polling station results.
- Enforce transparent, verifiable and peaceful political party nomination processes through ORPP oversight and Political Parties Fund conditionality.

4.1.2. Digital Safety and Information Integrity

02



- Establish a localised Electoral Integrity Playbook with 24-hour monitoring, local-language moderation and rapid escalation of harmful electoral content.
- Audit and mitigate algorithmic amplification of polarising, misleading and unverified content ahead of the 2027 General Election.
- Institutionalise secure platform-civil society information-sharing and rapid response to technology-facilitated gender-based violence targeting women in politics.
- Resource youth-led digital literacy, fact-checking, counter-messaging and online peacebuilding initiatives.

4.1.3 Multi-Stakeholder Coordination, Security and Accountability

03



- Institutionalise the Election Security Assistance Programme (ESAP) as a permanent, multi-agency electoral coordination and conflict-prevention mechanism.
- Promote thematic coordination among civil society organisations to reduce duplication and strengthen complementary interventions.
- Prioritise multi-year donor funding for civic education, democratic resilience, institutional strengthening and post-election reconciliation.
- Establish expedited judicial mechanisms for electoral offences and hate speech.
- Strengthen police crowd-control training, officer identification, vehicle marking and accountability for excessive force.

4.2. County Level Recommendations



The national government is encouraged to provide adequate resources to sub-county peace committees to enhance their capacity for sustained conflict prevention and early response.



Local administrators and village elders must be integrated as recognised peace responders and equipped with training in human rights-compliant conflict prevention, early warning, and counter-messaging approaches.



Pastoralist communities, local peace secretariats, and religious leaders in traditionally vulnerable areas are encouraged to initiate formal peace agreements on shared water and grazing resources at least six months before polling.

4.3. Programmatic Recommendations



Act! and its downstream civil society partners are advised to transition from event-driven interventions to a comprehensive electoral cycle model that sustains programming throughout the five years between elections.



The REDI and RPS programmes ought to support the enhancement of existing EWER mechanisms by integrating bulk SMS platforms with advanced digital monitoring tools.



Youth-led Networks and Movements must be supported to train young citizens to be digital peacebuilders capable of identifying misinformation, reporting harmful content, and promoting verified information in locally relevant language.



Civil society organisations and digital innovators are encouraged to develop interactive, gamified, and animated civic education tools tailored to the preferences and communication habits of Generation Z voters.



Peace actors are urged to collaborate with transport sector stakeholders, including matatu operators and boda-boda networks, to deliver targeted peace education and conflict prevention messaging at public transport hubs.

4.4. Policy-level recommendation



The national government is urged to establish a state-funded National Peace Fund to provide sustainable financing for the implementation of the National Peace Policy.



Parliament, in collaboration with the IEBC, is advised to operationalise the Campaign Finance Act.



The national government and relevant independent commissions must adopt a phased implementation of the TJRC recommendations on historical land injustices, with priority given to historically volatile regions such as the Coast and Mt. Elgon.



The IEBC, in partnership with CSOs, is urged to replace episodic voter registration campaigns with a continuous, five-year civic and political education strategy that maintains a sustained presence within youth networks and community structures.



The REDI and RPS programmes must adopt a dual-track public awareness strategy that clearly distinguishes short-term voter education activities from continuous civic and political education initiatives.



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