

POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS

Reformed Elections for Enhanced
Democracy and Inclusion
Programme

August 2026



Disclaimer

This Political Economy Analysis Report presents a comprehensive assessment of the political, institutional, and socio-economic dynamics shaping Kenya's democratic and electoral landscape. The report analyses the formal and informal structures, actors, incentives, and power relations that influence governance, electoral processes, and citizen participation, providing strategic evidence to guide adaptive programming, strengthen conflict-sensitive implementation, and inform policy engagement under the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) Programme.

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FOREWORD

By the CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO)



Kenya has made significant strides in strengthening its democratic governance architecture since the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya 2010. Constitutional, legal, and institutional reforms have enhanced electoral management, devolved governance, and mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes. Despite this progress, electoral processes continue to be characterised by recurring challenges, including declining public trust in electoral institutions, political polarisation, electoral violence, misinformation and disinformation, exclusion of marginalised groups, and persistent contestation of election outcomes. These challenges underscore the reality that strengthening democratic institutions alone is insufficient without addressing the underlying political, economic, and social incentives that shape electoral behaviour and governance.

It is against this background that Act Change Transform (Act!), through the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) Programme, commissioned this Political Economy Analysis (PEA). The study provides an indepth examination of the formal and informal institutions, power dynamics, incentives, and relationships that influence electoral governance in Kenya. More importantly, it identifies opportunities for adaptive programming that can strengthen democratic resilience, enhance citizen participation, and contribute to peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections ahead of the 2027 General Election.

The analysis demonstrates that Kenya's electoral challenges are not solely institutional but are deeply embedded in political incentives, elite bargaining, patronage networks, socio-economic inequalities, and evolving digital ecosystems. At the same time, it identifies promising opportunities for reform through locally grounded, politically informed, and conflict-sensitive interventions that strengthen accountability, promote public trust, and promote meaningful citizen engagement.

This report is intended to serve as a strategic resource for policymakers, electoral institutions, civil society organisations, development partners, academia, and other governance actors. Its findings provide practical insights that will inform REDI's adaptive implementation while contributing to broader national dialogue on electoral reforms, democratic governance, conflict prevention, and inclusive political participation.

Act! remains committed to promoting evidence-based programming and collaborative partnerships that advance democratic governance, national cohesion, and active citizen participation. We believe that the recommendations contained in this report will support collective efforts to strengthen Kenya's democratic institutions and ensure that future elections are peaceful, credible, transparent, and inclusive.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the Embassy of Sweden for its continued partnership and support to the REDI Programme. We also thank all institutions, stakeholders, and individuals who generously contributed their knowledge, experience, and perspectives to this analysis. Their contributions have enriched this report and will continue to inform efforts to strengthen democratic governance in Kenya.

Tom Were
Chief Executive Officer



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

By the Advisor



This Political Economy Analysis was made possible through the generous support and collaboration of numerous individuals and institutions whose contributions are sincerely appreciated. We express our profound gratitude to the Embassy of Sweden for its continued partnership and support through the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) Programme. This study reflects our shared commitment to strengthening democratic governance, promoting peaceful and inclusive electoral processes, and enhancing citizen participation in Kenya.

Our sincere appreciation goes to all key informants who generously shared their time, expertise, and insights during interviews, focus group discussions, expert consultations, and stakeholder validation processes. We are particularly grateful to representatives from government institutions, electoral management bodies, political parties, civil society organisations, development partners, academia, the media, security agencies, community leaders, and citizens whose diverse perspectives enriched this analysis and strengthened its findings.

We acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the research team; **Prof. Karuti Kanyinga, Francis Aywa, and Sonia Rasugu** whose technical expertise, professionalism, and commitment ensured the successful design, implementation, analysis, and validation of this Political Economy Analysis (PEA). Their thoughtful interpretation of Kenya's evolving political and electoral landscape has provided an important evidence base for adaptive programming under the REDI Programme.

Special appreciation is extended to the Act! Programme team; **Elizabeth Atieno**, Manager, Peace building and Conflict Transformation, together with **Francis Dume, Khalid Kyule, Sandra Jumba, and Dorah Wawuda** for their exemplary coordination of the assignment and their leadership in facilitating collaboration between the consultants, programme partners, and key stakeholders throughout the research process.

Finally, we thank all institutions and individuals who participated in the validation of the findings and provided constructive feedback that strengthened the quality and relevance of this report. It is our hope that the insights and recommendations presented herein will inform policy dialogue, programme design, and collective action aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, fostering public trust, preventing electoral conflict, and promoting peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections in Kenya.

Michael Karanja, PhD
Advisor; Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Act!	Act Change Transform
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EACC	Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission
EDR	Election Dispute Resolution
EWER	Early Warning and Early Response
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
IEBC	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission
IPOA	Independent Policing Oversight Authority
KII	Key Informant Interview
KNCHR	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
ORPP	Office of the Registrar of Political Parties
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
REDI	Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After the 2007/08 post-election crisis, the country made major changes to its constitution, laws, institutions and technology to improve the fairness of elections, reduce violence, strengthen accountability and build public confidence in democracy. These changes led to the Constitution of Kenya 2010, new independent institutions, and new ways of resolving election disputes. The country has also invested heavily in election technology.

Despite these reforms, and large investments by the Government, Development Partners, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Electoral Institutions, many problems continue to affect Kenya's elections

Challenges Affecting Kenya's Elections

- › Electoral contests remain highly polarised along ethno-regional lines (among others) and contested
- › Public trust in electoral institutions remains fragile
- › Political violence and tensions continue to emerge around electoral periods
- › Women, youth, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups remain underrepresented
- › Disputes over electoral outcomes continue to dominate.

It is against this background that Act Change Transform (Act!), through the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) Programme, commissioned this Political Economy Analysis (PEA). The aim is to understand the deeper political, institutional and social factors that shape how elections are governed and that affect the chances of democratic reform in Kenya. The findings will help shape how REDI is designed and delivered between 2025 and 2028.

Given the problems that keep affecting Kenya's elections, this study uses a problem-driven Political Economy Analysis (PEA). The main question guiding the analysis is: Why do electoral problems persist despite sustained investments in electoral reforms, laws, institutions and electoral management systems?

Purpose and Objectives of the Political Economy Analysis

The Political Economy Analysis was designed to look at the underlying incentives, interests, power relations and informal institutions that shape political behaviour. In particular, the study aimed to:

Aims of Political Economy Analysis

- i) **Analyze the political, institutional, economic and social context** that affects how elections are governed and how democracy works in Kenya
- ii) **Examine the interests, incentives, ability, relationships and influence** of the main people and groups involved in elections and governance, at both national and county level
- iii) **Assess the formal and informal rules, power structures and political deals** that shape how elections are contested, how leaders are held accountable, how citizens take part, and how reform happens
- iv) **Identify the main causes** of election conflict, exclusion, misinformation and distrust in institutions, as well as the factors that help make elections peaceful and credible
- v) **Explore the opportunities, risks and realistic starting points** for strengthening the fairness of elections, accountability, citizen involvement and inclusion
- vi) **Test and improve the assumptions behind REDI's Theory of Change**, and give recommendations for flexible programming and strategic engagement

The study also aims to give practical recommendations to strengthen REDI's Theory of Change and its flexible approach to programming.

Methodology

The study used a problem-driven PEA approach, combining a review of existing documents, interviews with key people, focus group discussions, expert consultations and checks with stakeholders. The analysis covered a wide range of issues:

Issues covered by Political Economy Analysis

- i) Deals between political elites and what they mean for elections and accountability
- ii) How formal and informal institutions interact
- iii) The interests, power and incentives of key people and groups
- iv) How election-related conflict develops
- v) Inclusion and participation
- vi) Digital information and election technology

Fieldwork included interviews with electoral institutions, government agencies, political parties, civil society organisations, development partners, media, academics, security agencies and community leaders. Focus group discussions were held in Nairobi, Uasin Gishu, Murang'a and Kajiado counties to capture a range of different election experiences and views.

Key Findings

i) Kenya's electoral politics is still organised mainly along ethnic and regional lines, and elections are a high-stakes contest for state power

The study finds that Kenyan elections remain high-stakes because political power is widely seen as the main way to access state resources, public jobs, development projects, economic opportunities and influence. As a result, elections are less about competing policy ideas and more about who controls power and resources. This raises the political and economic stakes of winning elections – especially the presidential election – and increases competition at both national and county level

ii) Ethnicity continues to drive how people vote, but because rival ethnic and regional blocs are of roughly equal size, presidential elections tend to be won by narrow margins.

Kenya's electoral competition still centres on ethnic and regional coalitions, with political parties acting more as vehicles for mobilising elite support than as organisations built around ideas or policy. Because the main ethno-regional blocs are of similar size, presidential races are usually close.

New forms of mobilisation are emerging – around governance, accountability, economic grievances and Gen Z activism – but they have not yet replaced ethnicity as the main organising force in elections

iii) Electoral reforms have improved institutions, but not the underlying incentives that drive behaviour

The study's central finding is that Kenya's reforms have strengthened the formal side of elections – laws, institutions, procedures, dispute mechanisms and technology – without changing the political incentives that shape how people behave during elections. Kenya now has an elaborate system for managing elections, but reforms have largely left patronage politics, ethnic mobilization, elite bargaining, high campaign costs, weak democracy within parties, unequal competition and incentives for manipulation untouched. As a result, election administration has improved, but the deeper political and economic conditions in which elections happen remain largely the same

iv) Informal institutions often override formal rules

The analysis shows that Kenya's election outcomes are shaped by the interaction between formal laws, regulations and institutions on one hand, and informal political rules on the other. These informal rules include ethnic mobilisation, patronage networks, informal campaign funding, political brokering, elite coalition deals and negotiated political settlements. The key problem is that these informal rules often determine how formal institutions actually work, and in many cases override or distort them. This helps explain why repeated legal and institutional reforms have led to only limited change in how political actors actually behave

v) Elite bargains help stabilize politics, but weaken democratic accountability

Kenya's political system has repeatedly relied on deals between elites to manage election crises, including the 2008 Grand Coalition Government, the 2018 Handshake, and the 2024/25 Broad-Based Government arrangement. These deals have often reduced political tension and brought short-term stability, but they come at a democratic cost: they weaken opposition oversight, reduce electoral accountability, move political negotiations outside formal institutions, and reinforce the idea that elections do not fully decide political outcomes. Overall, elite deals may stabilize governance, but they can also weaken public confidence in democratic competition

vi) Public trust in electoral and governance institutions remains fragile

A persistent lack of trust is one of the biggest challenges facing Kenya's democracy. Religious organizations and traditional leaders tend to enjoy relatively high public trust, but confidence in electoral institutions, political parties, Parliament and political elites remains comparatively low. The legitimacy of elections therefore depends not just on how well institutions perform, but on whether people across the country see electoral institutions as impartial, independent, accountable and trustworthy

vii) Inclusion remains a structural challenge

Women, youth, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups continue to face structural barriers to taking a full part in Kenya's election cycle. These barriers include high campaign costs, weak internal party democracy, political violence and intimidation, limited access to campaign funding, social and cultural exclusion, and online harassment and abuse. The study finds that legal reforms alone are not enough to overcome these barriers; genuine inclusion requires tackling the political, economic and social obstacles that stop disadvantaged groups from taking part on equal terms

viii) Digital technology brings both opportunities and risks

Digital platforms are increasingly shaping how elections are contested, how political messages are communicated, and how citizens engage in Kenya. They create new opportunities for civic education, youth participation, citizen monitoring and fast information-sharing, but they also spread mis and dis information, hate speech, manipulated stories and political polarisation. Digital space has therefore become a key arena for electoral competition, public accountability and democratic risk



Reform Feasibility and Pathways for Change

A key conclusion of the study is that whether a reform is realistic matters just as much as whether it is desirable. Big reforms that threaten powerful political interests are unlikely to succeed in the short term. The best opportunities are reforms that are politically realistic, that fit the interests of key players, and that gradually build stronger democratic accountability

The most realistic reform paths include:

1. Strengthening Institutional Trust

- › Improved transparency in electoral management;
- › Enhanced stakeholder engagement by IEBC
- › Better communication around electoral technology and results management
- › Consistent enforcement of electoral rules

2. Strengthening Citizen Agency

- › Expanded civic education
- › Youth engagement initiatives
- › Citizen monitoring and accountability mechanisms
- › Support for community-based peace building initiatives

3. Improving Inclusion

- › Targeted support for women, youth, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups
- › Reducing barriers to participation and candidacy
- › Enhancing access to political information and civic spaces

4. Strengthening Accountability Ecosystems

- › Supporting independent media
- › Enhancing election observation
- › Strengthening civil society oversight
- › Improving coordination among accountability institutions

5. Addressing Electoral Conflict Risks

- › Investing in early warning and early response systems
- › Building local peace infrastructures
- › Strengthening community mediation mechanisms

Implications for the REDI Programme

The findings suggest that REDI's Theory of Change is broadly sound but needs more detail. It correctly identifies the main routes to peaceful, credible elections, but should be refined to show that results depend on five key conditions:



Five key conditions of REDI Programme

01

Institutions need both the **Capacity** and the **Incentive** to act independently and enforce the rules

02

Citizen Mobilisation must build real civic confidence, not just awareness: it must overcome poverty, bribery, fear, apathy and distrust, not simply provide information

03

Media Engagement must include managing digital risks, especially misinformation, AI manipulation and real-time online mobilisation

04

Election Observation must cover the whole election cycle and use technology, rather than focusing narrowly on election day or checking results

05

Adaptive Learning must keep testing the political assumptions behind REDI's work.

On programming, the findings suggest REDI should not treat election problems mainly as technical issues. Electoral reform is fundamentally political, so programming needs to be politically informed and aware of what is realistic in the short, medium and long term

Prioritising reforms by risk and impact to guide where to focus and how to start

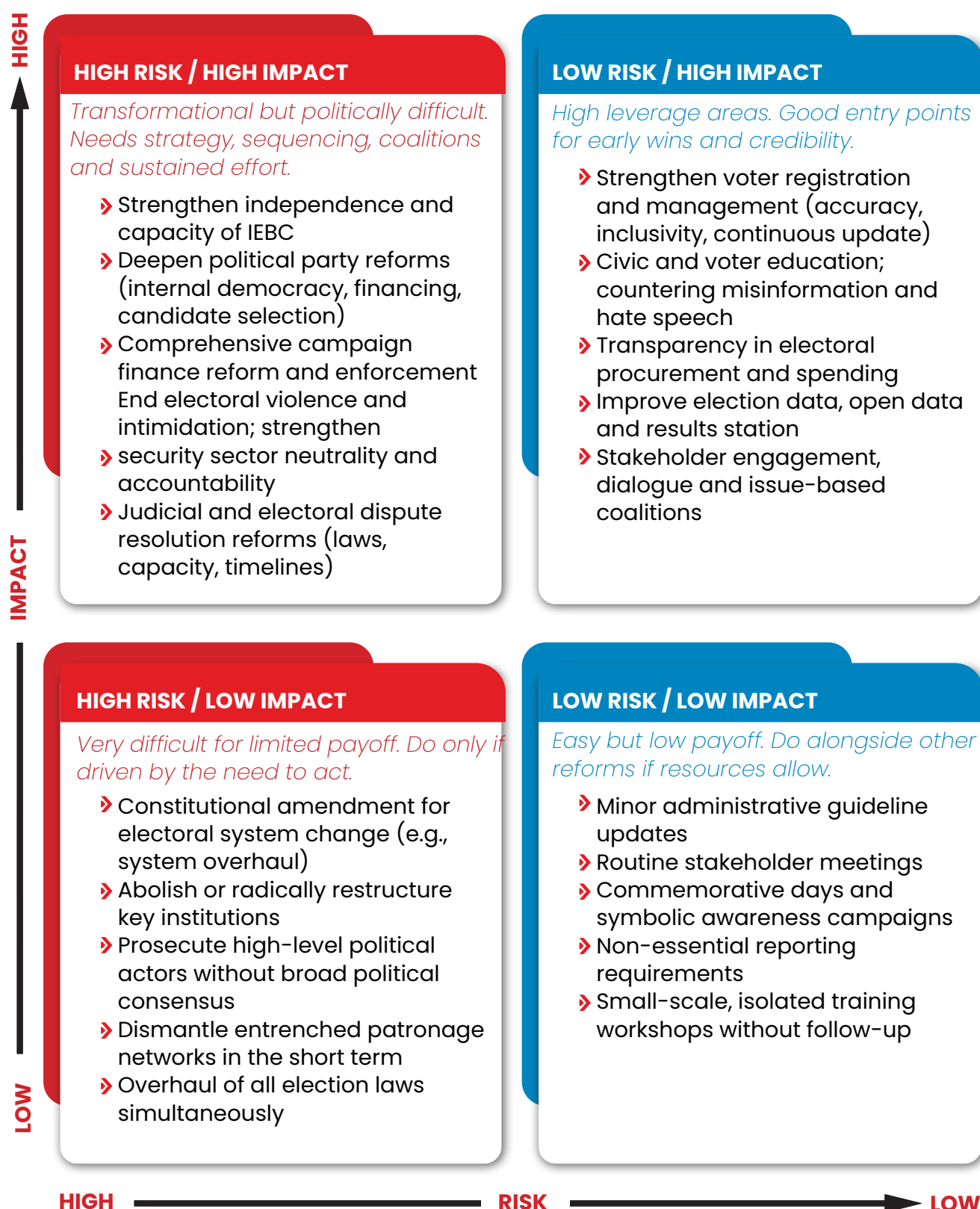


Figure 1: Prioritising reforms by risk and impact

The programme should therefore focus on five strategic areas:



Rebuilding Trust in Electoral Institutions

Support work that strengthens transparency, accountability and public engagement by electoral institutions.



Supporting Engagement Across the Whole Election Cycle

Go beyond election-day activities and engage throughout the cycle, including voter registration, party nominations, campaigns, dispute resolution, transparency around new technology, and accountability after elections.



Investing in Youth and Citizen Engagement

Support youth-led civic engagement, democratic participation and accountability work, recognising that younger generations are a major force for democratic renewal.



Strengthening Accountability Around Elections

Support civil society, media, election observers and oversight bodies that can increase transparency and accountability throughout the election cycle.



Thinking and Working Politically, and Adapting as Needed

Given how fast Kenya's political situation can change, REDI should keep monitoring political developments, the incentives of key actors and emerging risks, and adjust its work as conditions change. Ongoing Political Economy Analysis of key issues will help build understanding of a particular problem and provide solutions for the programme, or a coalition of like-minded partners, to act on.

Overall, this study concludes that Kenya's election problems continue because, among other things, reforms have not changed the underlying incentives, interests and informal power relations that shape political behaviour. These reforms are held back by patronage politics, contests between ethnic and regional groups for power, and deals between elites.

Sustainable democratic progress will depend more on changing the political incentives that drive election competition. REDI's biggest contribution will be to support this by strengthening trust in institutions, accountability, inclusion and citizen engagement, while working within the realities of Kenya's political settlement



01

CHAPTER
ONE

Background

Chapter 1: Provides an overview of Kenya's electoral and political context and introduces the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) Programme and the Political Economy Analysis (PEA). It outlines the key challenges affecting Kenya's elections, including declining public trust, political competition and polarisation, election-related conflict, exclusion of women, youth and marginalised groups, and the influence of money, political elites and digital platforms.

The chapter explains REDI's purpose of strengthening national cohesion, electoral institutions, citizen participation, and election monitoring and observation, while highlighting the programme's focus on promoting peaceful, credible and inclusive elections. It also sets out the purpose and objectives of the PEA, which seeks to understand the political, institutional, economic and social factors, as well as the actors, interests, incentives, power relations and formal and informal rules that shape Kenya's electoral processes and prospects for reform.

CHAPTER 01

“
Understanding
the political
economy
of Kenya’s
elections
is essential
to building
credible,
peaceful and
inclusive
democratic
processes
”

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Act Change Transform (Act!) designed the Reformed Elections for Enhanced Democracy and Inclusion (REDI) programme to rebuild confidence in elections, strengthen electoral institutions, promote peaceful political participation, and improve inclusion, especially for youth, women and marginalised groups. The programme is funded by the Embassy of Sweden for three years (December 2025 to October 2028) and will be delivered by Act! together with national and county-based Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in selected counties across Kenya.

Given the realities of Kenya’s political landscape, Act! has built a Political Economy Analysis (PEA) into the programme as a core early activity. The PEA helps identify the key actors, interests and incentives in Kenya’s political and electoral space, particularly those that affect whether elections are free, fair and credible. The findings will help shape the strategic design, sequencing and flexible delivery of REDI, based on a detailed understanding of the political economy of Kenya’s elections at national and county level. This section gives an overview of the electoral system the programme will work within, and explains the purpose and objectives of the PEA.



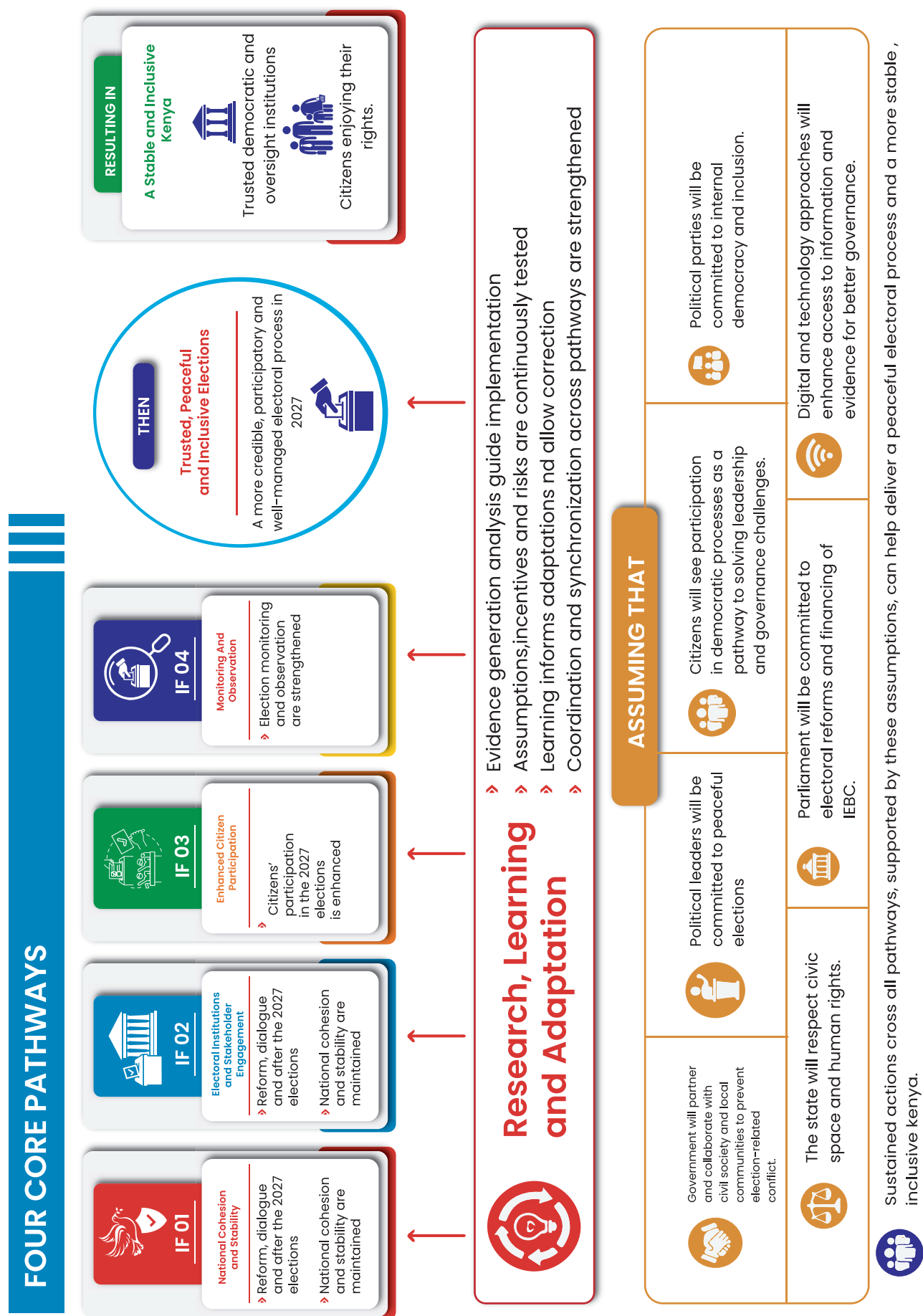


Figure 2: REDI Theory of Change

REDI's Theory of Change can be summarised as : IF national cohesion and stability are maintained before, during and after the 2027 elections; AND IF electoral institutions and stakeholder engagement are strengthened; AND IF citizens' participation in the 2027 elections is improved; AND IF election monitoring and observation is strengthened, THEN Kenya will be more stable and inclusive, with trusted democratic and oversight institutions and citizens enjoying their rights.

Its Key Assumptions are that:

- i) The government will work with civil society and local communities to prevent election-related conflict
- ii) Political leaders will be committed to peaceful elections
- iii) Citizens will see taking part in democratic processes as a way of solving the country's leadership and governance problems
- iv) Political parties will be committed to internal democracy and inclusion
- v) The state will respect civic space and human rights
- vi) Parliament will be committed to electoral reform and to funding the IEBC
- vii) Digital technology will improve access to information and encourage citizens to take part

1.1. Key Issues in Kenya's Electoral General Elections

Kenya's electoral history since 1992 has been shaped by competitive multiparty politics, repeated institutional reform, and ongoing disputes over whether election results are credible and legitimate. Since the 2007/2008 post-election crisis, a series of reforms have strengthened the legal, institutional and technological basis of elections, including the 2010 Constitution, new independent commissions, court-based dispute resolution, devolution and better election administration. These reforms have helped stabilise some traditionally difficult aspects of election competition. However, elections remain high-stakes political events, because they decide who gets executive power, public resources, regional influence and political power, both nationally and at county level.

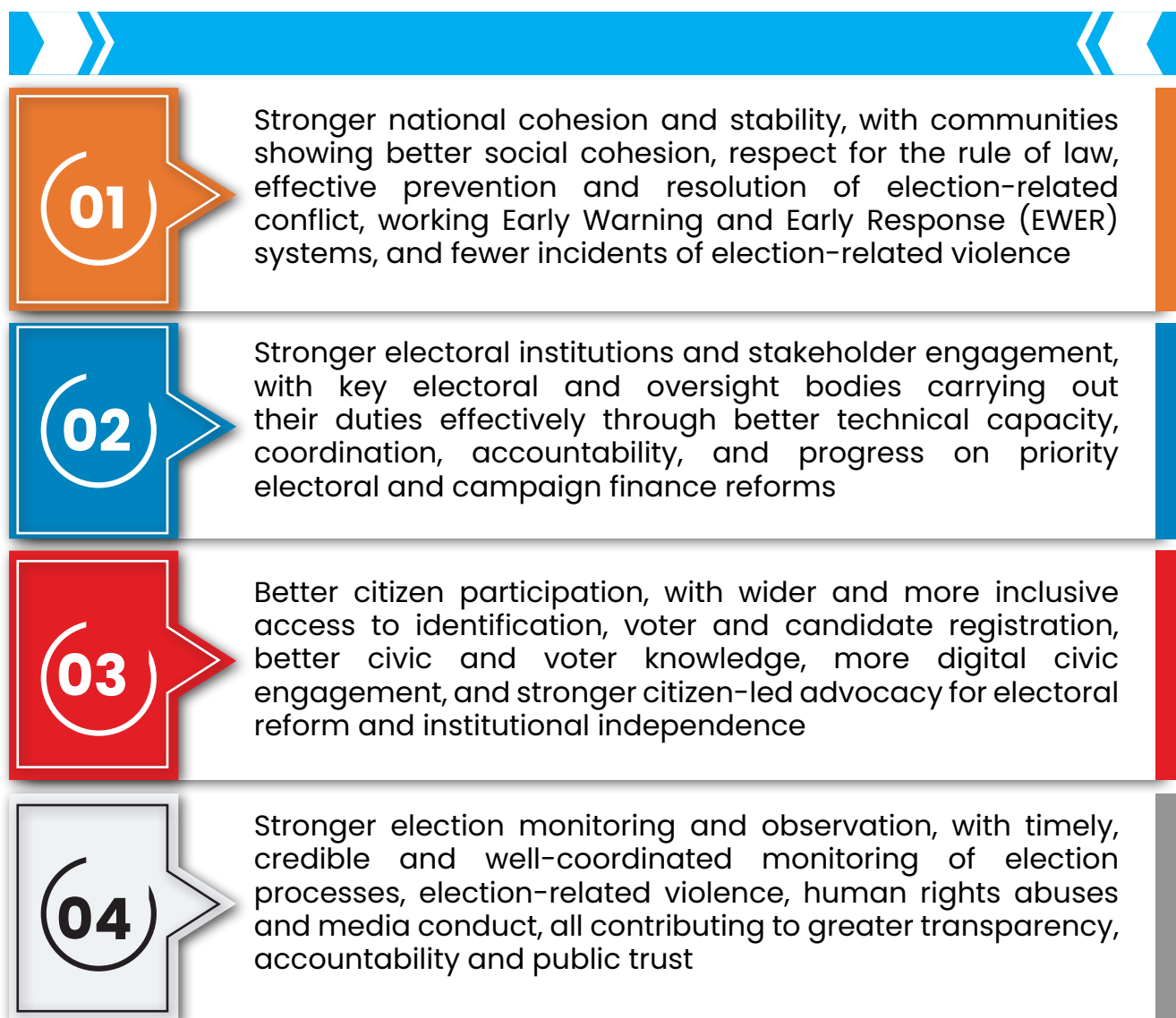
The 2022 General Election showed both the progress made and the fragility that remains in Kenya's electoral system. The election was largely peaceful and confirmed the continuing importance of the courts and other institutions in resolving disputes. But it also exposed weaknesses in public trust, election management, results transmission, institutional unity, political messaging and acceptance of results.

Disputes over the presidential vote count, divisions within the IEBC, court cases before the Supreme Court, and continuing concerns about transparency all reinforced the sense that technical fixes alone cannot solve deeper political problems. These problems centre on competition between elites, weak enforcement of election rules, uneven trust in institutions, the role of money in politics, the exclusion of women, youth and persons with disabilities, and the growing influence of digital platforms on election narratives.

Looking ahead to the 2027 election cycle, the context includes renewed debate on reform, a late reconstitution of the IEBC, questions about voter registration, delayed boundary changes, greater public awareness, youth-led political mobilisation, and continuing public concern about governance, accountability and the cost of living.

The electoral reform agenda sits within a wider political settlement, in which formal rules, informal incentives, institutional capacity, the interests of key actors, and public trust all interact in complex ways. For REDI, this means a PEA is needed not just to describe the electoral landscape, but also to identify the actors, incentives, risks, opportunities and realistic starting points for strengthening electoral democracy, institutional accountability, citizen participation and peaceful competition.

1.2. Purpose of REDI



1.3. Purpose and Objectives of the PEA Study

This PEA aims to give a full picture of the formal and informal political, institutional, economic and social factors that shape Kenya's electoral landscape. It seeks to identify the actors, interests, incentives, power dynamics, opportunities and constraints that affect election governance, democratic participation, conflict dynamics and the prospects for reform. It is meant to inform how REDI is designed and delivered, by grounding programme strategy in a realistic understanding of the context in which electoral and governance reforms take place

Objectives of The PEA

01

Analyse the political, institutional, economic and social context that shapes electoral governance and democratic processes in Kenya

02

Examine the interests, incentives, capacity, relationships and influence of key electoral and governance actors at national and sub-national level

03

Assess the formal and informal rules, power structures and political settlements that shape election competition, accountability, citizen participation and reform

04

Identify the main causes of election conflict, exclusion, misinformation and distrust in institutions, as well as the factors that support peaceful, credible elections

05

Explore the opportunities, risks and realistic starting points for strengthening electoral integrity, democratic accountability, citizen engagement and inclusive participation

06

Test and refine the assumptions behind REDI's Theory of Change, and give recommendations for flexible programming and strategic engagement



CHAPTER TWO

Analytical Framework and Methodology

Chapter Two presents the analytical framework and methodology used in the Political Economy Analysis (PEA) to understand why electoral challenges in Kenya persist despite continued legal and institutional reforms. It explains the problem-driven PEA approach, focusing on political settlements and elite bargains, formal and informal electoral rules, the power and incentives of key actors, conflict dynamics, inclusion and civic engagement, and the digital information environment.

The chapter also outlines the study methodology, which combined desk research, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, observation and expert consultations across selected counties, while applying an inclusive and ethical approach to data collection. The findings were analysed thematically and validated through stakeholder consultations to identify realistic reform opportunities and inform REDI's programming and strategic engagement

CHAPTER TWO

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Problem-driven PEA Approach

This study uses a “problem-driven” PEA approach, guided by the main question: Why do challenges in Kenya’s elections persist despite investments in electoral reforms, including improvement of policies, laws and practice?

The PEA used a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to draw on the strengths of both. To make the PEA as useful as possible for the REDI programme, we focused on the following issues:

- i. **Political Settlements and Elite Bargains:** We looked at the main factors behind political coalitions and alliances, emerging patronage patterns, and the use of ethnicity to mobilise political support.
- ii. **Rules of The Game:** We looked at the electoral laws and policies in place, the challenges they create for running elections, and the mandates and challenges facing institutions responsible for them. We also looked at how electoral laws and regulations interact with informal factors such as ethnicity and ethno-regional interests. This included analysing the voter registration process under way at the time, and how well it was reaching young people and other marginalised groups.
- iii. **Actor Power Mapping:** We mapped the power and influence of key actors in Kenya’s electoral space, along with their interests, incentives and motives. We looked at what drives these actors to either hold back or support the electoral process, and in particular whether there were actors with enough power to ensure credible elections but no real interest in doing so, and why.
- iv. **Conflict Integration:** We looked at the triggers and drivers of electoral conflict, to help identify any early warning signs the programme should address. Because a separate conflict mapping and analysis exercise was running alongside the PEA, we kept this part light to avoid unnecessary overlap.
- v. **Inclusion Lens:** We analysed gender, youth, disability, marginalisation and barriers across the election cycle.

Because different groups experience election politics differently, we made sure our analysis considered how these factors overlap.

- vi. **Digital Ecosystem:** Our analysis covered platform dynamics, online narratives, cyber harassment, and the spread of mal, mis and disinformation. We paid particular attention to public debate about election technology and how it will be used in the 2027 election cycle, and to what this debate – especially where political parties disagree – means for the conduct of credible elections.

2.2. Core Analytical Issues

The core issues examined by the study were as follows:

- » **Political Settlements and Elite Bargains:** Kenya's elections are shaped by how political elites negotiate, contest and redistribute power before, during and after elections. This includes the formation and collapse of pre and post election coalitions, elite accommodation, patronage networks, ethnic and regional mobilisation, and the use of elections as moments for renegotiating access to state power and public resources.
- » **Rules of The Game – Formal Versus Informal Institutions:** Election competition is governed by formal rules, including the Constitution, electoral laws, regulations, court rulings and institutional mandates. However, these formal rules often operate alongside informal norms and practices such as patronage, ethnic bargaining, political mobilisation, elite influence, negotiated compliance and selective enforcement. The analysis examined how the interaction between formal and informal rules affects electoral credibility, institutional performance and reform feasibility.
- » **The Power, Interests and Incentives of Key Actors:** The main actors in Kenya's electoral system include election management bodies, political parties, candidates, state institutions, security agencies, courts, civil society, media, development partners, religious groups, the private sector and citizens. The analysis assessed who has the power to enable or block credible elections, why they act as they do, and how REDI can engage strategically with different groups.
- » **Conflict Dynamics:** Kenya's elections carry a recurring risk of conflict linked to high-stakes political competition, distrust in institutions, inflammatory mobilisation, disputed results, local grievances, exclusion, and disputes over land, resources and representation.



Kenya's electoral credibility is shaped not only by the rules of the game, but by the power, interests and bargains that determine how those rules are applied.



The PEA assessed the political and institutional drivers of election-related tension, while remaining complementary to the separate conflict risk mapping exercise. The focus was on how conflict risks connect with actor incentives, institutional behaviour and opportunities for prevention.

- » **Inclusion and Civic Engagement:** The analysis looked at how women, youth, persons with disabilities, marginalised communities and other special interest groups take part in, influence and experience election processes. It considered barriers to voter registration, civic information, representation, political voice, safety, campaign participation and access to electoral justice. The PEA also assessed the quality of civic engagement, including citizen trust, political awareness, issue-based participation and opportunities to strengthen inclusive democratic accountability throughout the election cycle.

2.3. Study Methodology

This section outlines the methodology used for the PEA, combining the approach proposed by South Consulting with agreements reached during the inception meeting with the REDI team. The methodology was adjusted to reflect the resources available and to coordinate with two other studies carried out over the same period – the National Electoral Conflict Risk Mapping and Analysis, and the Public Perception Study.

All three studies were treated as complementary but separate pieces of work, with the PEA focused on the wider political economy of electoral governance, actor incentives, institutional behaviour and realistic entry points for reform.

- » **Inception/Kick-Off:** the assignment began with a structured start-up process involving South Consulting, the REDI team and the team carrying out the conflict risk mapping and analysis. The kick off meeting clarified the scope, methodology, tools, report structure, work plan, coordination arrangements and contracting issues. This stage ended with an inception report, including the implementation plan and field research tools.

- » **Desk Review:** the desk review looked at relevant existing literature and institutional documents to establish the electoral and governance context and sharpen the focus of data collection. Sources included academic and policy literature on Kenya's elections, previous PEAs, election observer reports, by-election assessments, institutional reports from electoral and accountability bodies, civil society and media monitoring, Act! programme documents, election petition judgments, Afrobarometer data, and South Consulting's public opinion data. Evidence from the desk review was organised by theme and used to identify gaps, refine interview questions, guide the choice of respondents and sharpen the lines of enquiry for fieldwork. It also provided a foundation for checking primary data against other sources and placing emerging findings within wider debates on electoral reform and governance.

- » **Data Collection and Analysis:** Primary data collection combined national-level key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) in selected counties, limited observation and expert consultation. KIIs were designed to engage actors from electoral management, justice and accountability institutions, political parties, security and oversight bodies, civil society, media, academia, observer groups, community leadership structures, special interest groups and development partners.

FGDs were held in Nairobi, Uasin Gishu, Murang'a and Kajiado to reflect regional diversity, political competitiveness, urban-rural differences, conflict risk, barriers to participation, and where Act! and its partners are present. The process took an inclusive approach, making sure that women, youth, persons with disabilities and other structurally excluded groups took part both as participants and as sources of information on barriers, risks and workable solutions.

Data Analysis, Validation and Ethical Safeguards

- » All fieldwork followed principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, secure data handling and “do no harm”, with particular attention to political sensitivity and the safety of participants.
- » Data were analysed by theme, using REDI's Theory of Change and the core dimensions of political economy analysis – interests, incentives, institutions, ideas, power relations and shocks. Findings were checked against documentary sources, KIIs, FGDs, observation notes and expert feedback to test competing explanations, confirm high-stakes claims, and produce politically informed recommendations for REDI's flexible programming

- » **Consultative Forum:** After fieldwork and initial analysis, we presented findings at a consultative forum convened by Act! on 22 May 2026, as a step for making sense of the findings and checking them against other evidence. This was an invitation only round table bringing together Embassy of Sweden representatives, Act! staff, and the teams that conducted the conflict analysis and the public perception survey. The forum was used to test and refine emerging ideas, bring together different perspectives, identify blind spots, improve cross-checking, and help prioritise the large volume of findings from the PEA and the other two studies.

It also helped sharpen the practical implications of the analysis for REDI, and its outputs fed into programme ready recommendations, including realistic reform entry points, options for stakeholder engagement, risk considerations and priority areas for flexible programming.



Draft PEA Report: Following fieldwork, analysis and the consultative forum, the team prepared a draft PEA report for the client to review. The report set out the methodology, key findings, stakeholder engagement strategy, an assessment of how realistic different reforms are, and the logic behind county prioritisation. The reform feasibility assessment identifies what is possible, with whom, under what conditions and with what risks, while the county prioritisation logic explains where REDI should focus its efforts and why. The draft report was submitted to the client for review and feedback, and the team presented it at a validation workshop to discuss the draft findings, explain the evidence behind them, and clarify what they mean for programme design and delivery



Validation Workshop and Stakeholder Engagement: The stakeholder validation workshop gave a structured opportunity to test the team's interpretation of the evidence, confirm the core findings, and refine the recommendations before finalising the report. The aim was to confirm what is credible and actionable, surface any important gaps or disagreements, and turn the analysis into practical decisions for REDI on targeting, sequencing, partnerships, stakeholder engagement and risk management.

Validation, Prioritisation and Integration of Findings

- » All three studies were presented in a one-day, hybrid-friendly session combining plenary presentations with participant feedback. The consulting teams gave concise, evidence-based summaries of their emerging findings, key hypotheses and implications for programming, while clearly flagging areas of uncertainty. Participants questioned the findings and proposed refinements.
- » Feedback from the workshop was used to confirm findings, prioritise recommendations – including “must-do” and “nice-to-have” actions – and clarify what they mean for REDI's programme design and delivery, including who should be engaged, what safeguards are needed, and what should trigger a change in approach. These outputs were built into the final report.

The consultative process turned evidence into action— challenging assumptions, refining findings and identifying realistic pathways for electoral reform

Finalisation and Submission of Final Outputs: After the validation workshop, the team built the feedback and agreed decisions into the final report, finalised the analysis, strengthened the evidence, and checked all outputs for clarity, consistency and usefulness in guiding programme decisions

Final Deliverables and Knowledge Products

- › The assignment concluded with the electronic submission of two final reports: A Final Comprehensive PEA Report presenting the full methodology, findings, political economy and risk analysis, and detailed, actionable recommendations; and an Abridged Version designed for rapid uptake by senior decision-makers, highlighting key messages, priority risks and practical implications for REDI.
- › The team also developed an Elections Policy Brief suitable for publication, translating the most policy-relevant findings into a concise audience-facing product with clear problem framing, evidence-backed options and targeted calls to action.
- › All outputs have been submitted in accessible digital formats and prepared for wider circulation in line with agreed branding and publication rules. Anonymised data from the assessment will also be submitted to the client as required by the terms of reference, to protect respondents' privacy and preserve the integrity and usefulness of the evidence.



03

CHAPTER
THREE

Overview of Kenya's Electoral Context

Chapter Three examines Kenya's electoral context, focusing on the key political, economic and social factors that shape electoral competition and governance. It explores the country's political economy, including regional inequalities, ethnicity, patronage, access to state resources and the high stakes associated with political power, as well as how political bargains and elite coalitions influence governance and electoral outcomes. The chapter also considers how elections affect economic performance and public confidence, highlighting the interaction between formal institutions and informal political practices in shaping democratic participation, accountability and the credibility of elections



CHAPTER 03

CHAPTER THREE

3. OVERVIEW OF KENYA'S ELECTORAL CONTEXT

Kenya's electoral politics have developed within a history shaped by colonial rule, ethnic mobilisation, and struggles over political power. During the colonial period, the administration discouraged broad-based nationalist political organisations and instead allowed political associations organised along ethnic and regional lines to form. This laid the foundation for a political system in which ethnicity became a main basis for political mobilisation.

At independence in 1963, political competition revolved around two broad political formations representing different ethnic and regional interests. Although Kenya initially adopted a multiparty system, political pluralism gradually declined as the ruling party consolidated power and weakened opposition parties. By the late 1960s, Kenya had effectively become a one-party state, limiting political competition for more than two decades.

The return of multiparty politics in 1991 reopened political space but, did not fundamentally transform the underlying structure of political competition. Political parties re-emerged mainly as vehicles for ethnic elites seeking to mobilise support from their respective communities. Electoral competition therefore became increasingly organised around ethnic constituencies, with political leaders competing to assemble coalitions capable of winning national power.

Over the last three decades, Kenya has undertaken significant constitutional, legal, and institutional reforms aimed at improving democratic governance and electoral integrity. The most far-reaching of these reforms was the adoption of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, which sought to address historical grievances relating to exclusion, concentration of power, weak accountability, and regional inequalities in development. The Constitution introduced devolution, strengthened checks and balances, expanded political representation, and established independent institutions to support democratic governance.

Despite these reforms, elections have remained highly contested at both national and local level. The 2007–2008 post-election violence was the most severe expression of these tensions, and led to international mediation that eventually produced the 2010 Constitution, among other outcomes.

Yet later elections have continued to generate disputes over the credibility of elections, the impartiality of institutions, and political inclusion.

Recent political developments, including the nationwide Gen Z protests of 2024, have further highlighted growing public concern about governance, accountability, corruption and how responsive public institutions are. These developments suggest that Kenya's electoral politics is increasingly shaped not only by traditional identity-based mobilisation, but also by new demands for accountability, inclusion and better governance.

3.1. Features of Kenya's Political Economy and Electoral Politics

Several interrelated features continue to shape Kenya's electoral politics and political economy

- » **First, Kenya's political competition takes place against a backdrop of long-standing regional inequality in development.** Colonial policies concentrated infrastructure, basic services and economic opportunities in certain regions, particularly those linked to the settler economy. The post-colonial state largely inherited these gaps, and they have persisted over time. Because regional administrative boundaries broadly match ethnic settlement patterns, gaps in development have taken on an ethnic dimension. As a result, many communities still see political power as a key way to access development resources and public investment.
- » **Second, ethnicity remains the main basis for political mobilisation.** Political elites organise support around ethnic constituencies and build alliances based on numbers. Because no single ethnic group has enough numbers to win national power on its own, electoral success depends on building broad coalitions across several communities. Elections therefore tend to be contests between competing ethnic and political alliances, rather than between parties defined by ideology or policy.
- » **Third, Kenya's recent presidential elections have been decided by narrow margins (all under 10%).** Election competition often involves coalitions with roughly similar levels of support, producing highly competitive contests in which both sides believe they can win. These narrow margins contribute to persistent disputes over election results, with losing coalitions often blaming manipulation or fraud rather than accepting the result as legitimate.
- » **Fourth, election competition is shaped by the belief that political power brings access to state resources, public appointments, economic opportunities and development projects.** Elections are therefore seen as high-stakes contests, where the outcome decides not just political leadership but also access to resources and influence. This drives intense political mobilisation and reinforces the fear of exclusion among groups that do not hold state power.

GPD and Agricultural Growth

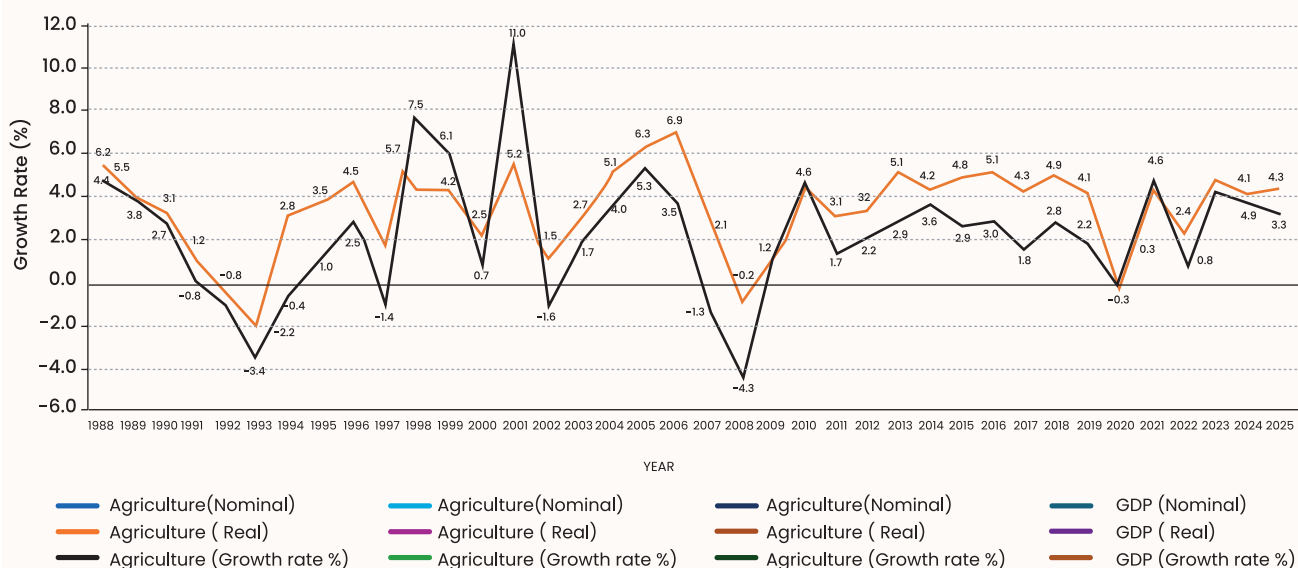


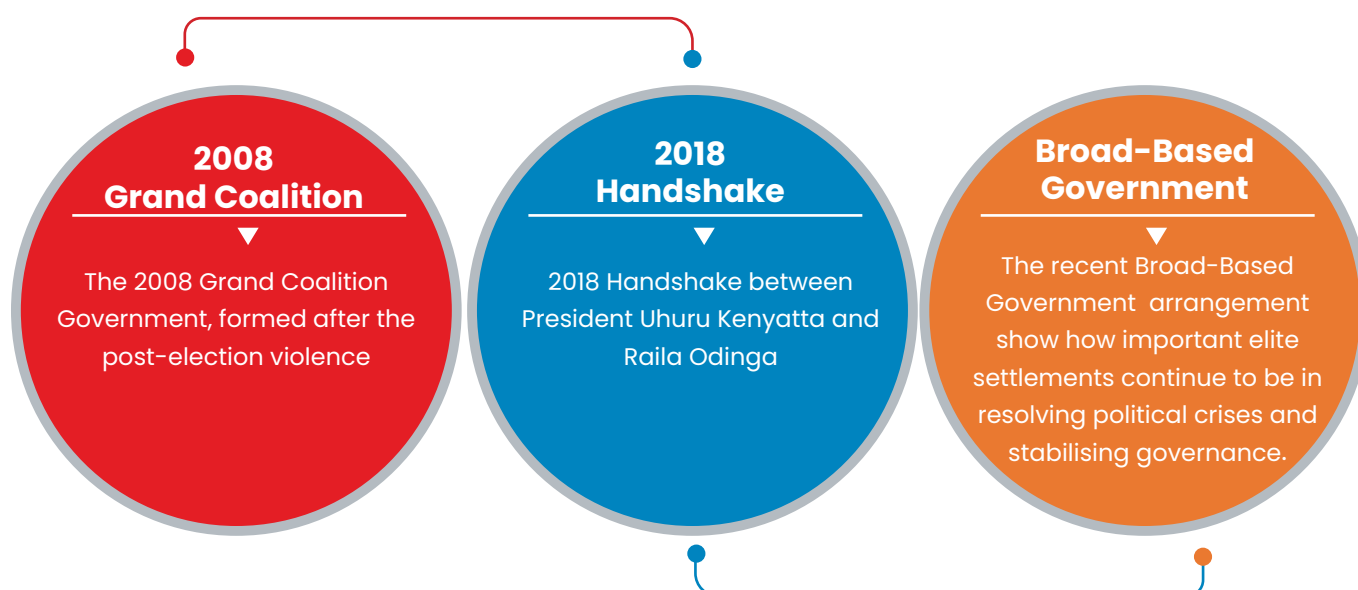
Figure 3: Correlation between Elections and Economic Growth

Finally, elections tend to affect economic performance. Growth slows in almost every election year, and recovers soon after the election once elite deals are settled. Agriculture, the backbone of Kenya's economy, also performs worse in election years, largely because of fears of violence in high-potential farming areas.

Figure 2 shows this pattern of growth

3.2. Political Bargains: Implications for Governance

Political bargains are one of the most important features of Kenya's electoral politics. Throughout Kenya's history, political elites have negotiated alliances before elections and renegotiated power-sharing arrangements afterwards. These deals are often driven by concerns about political stability, legitimacy, inclusion, and access to state resources



Elite bargains often emerge because electoral outcomes produce narrow victories and leave significant sections of the political elite outside formal power structures. Where electoral winners lack broad national legitimacy or face sustained opposition mobilisation, political settlements become mechanisms for reducing tensions and broadening political support.

These bargains can generate positive outcomes. They frequently



Positive Outcomes Of Elite Bargains

- Reduce political tension,
- Lower the risk of violence,
- Promote political inclusion, and
- Create conditions for economic recovery and policy continuity

Kenya's experience does show that periods of political accommodation are often followed by renewed economic stability after election-related disruption.

One important feature of elite deals is that they do not last. Political alliances often break apart after elections, as political actors reposition themselves ahead of the next contest. New coalitions form while old ones fall away, creating a political landscape that keeps shifting at both national and county level.

At the same time, elite deals carry real costs for governance, as they reduce public trust and confidence in elections. Political settlements are usually negotiated outside formal institutions and involve a relatively small group of political elites. As a result, they tend to weaken democratic accountability, reduce the effectiveness of opposition oversight, and reduce the role of formal institutions in resolving political disputes. Bringing opposition leaders into government arrangements often reduces scrutiny of government actions and weakens checks and balances, with consequences for public trust and confidence in governance institutions.

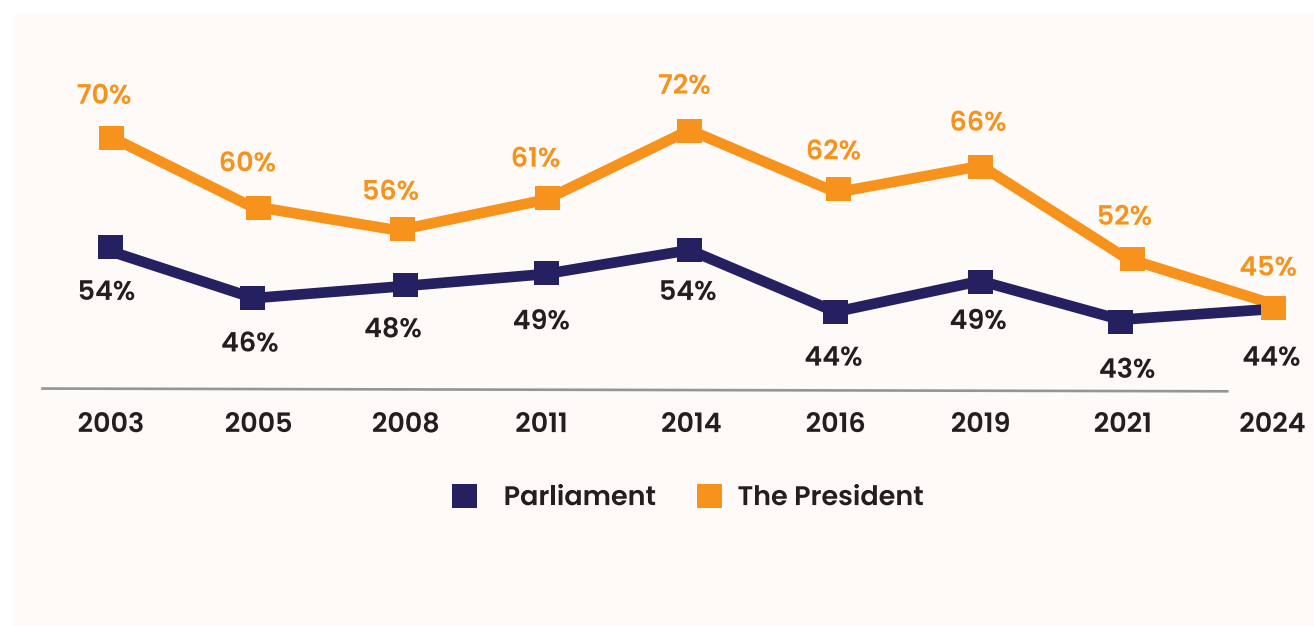


Figure 4: Trust deficit in institutions

Overall, public trust in institutions has declined over time. Public trust in key governance institutions was high in 2003, following an election won by the opposition. The ruling party lost to an opposition alliance that brought together elites from different ethnic and regional groups and campaigned on a platform of better governance. Trust declined after the new government failed to deliver on its promise of a new constitution, and the government-backed draft constitution was defeated in the 2005 referendum. Trust in institutions improved again after the 2010 Constitution was adopted, but disputes over presidential elections have continued to affect public trust, especially in regions that support the opposition. Even so, some institutions enjoy high levels of trust regardless of political competition – religious leaders and traditional leaders are good examples

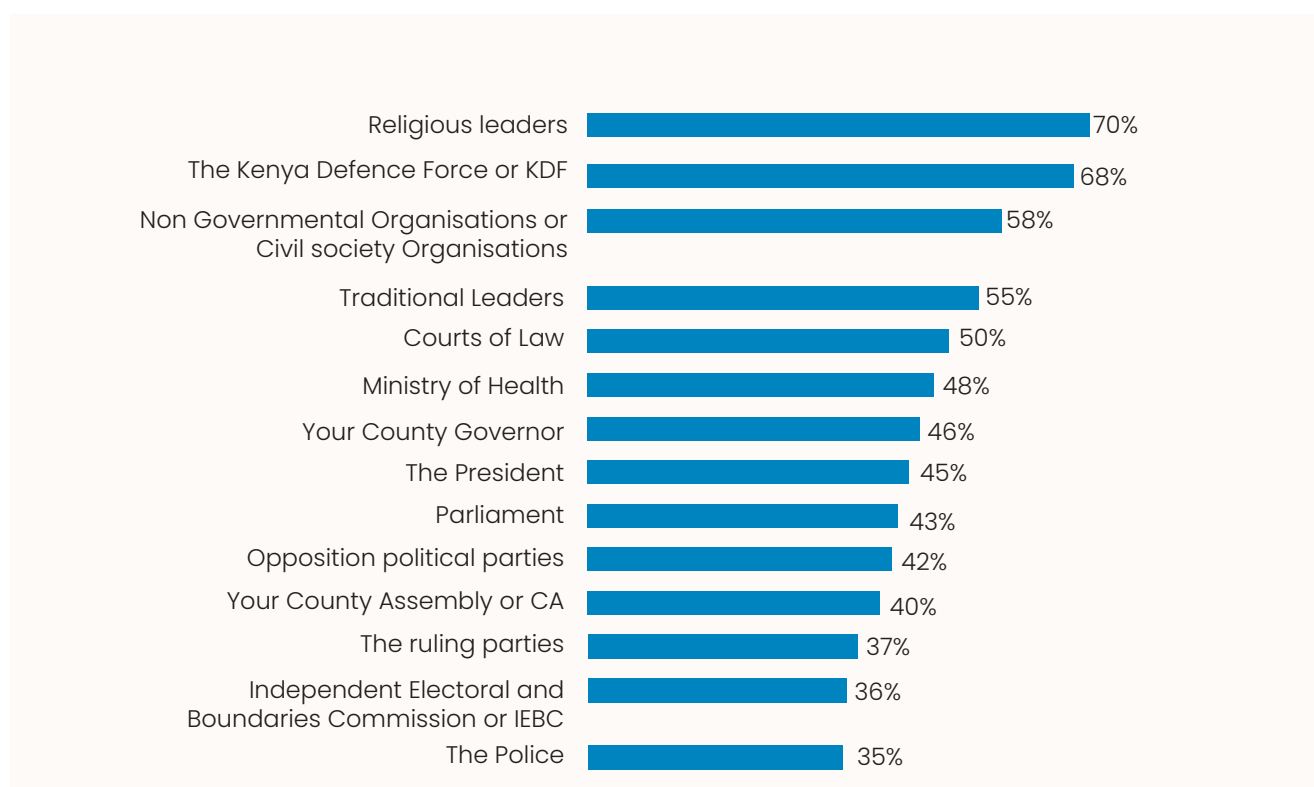


Figure 5: Trust in Institutions

Political bargains can calm tensions and broaden political inclusion, but when power is negotiated outside formal institutions, they can weaken democratic accountability and erode public trust.



CHAPTER FOUR

Institutional Context Of Electoral Politics

Chapter Four examines the institutional context of electoral politics in Kenya, focusing on how formal rules and institutions interact with informal political practices to shape electoral governance. It reviews the constitutional and legal framework established through the 2010 Constitution and subsequent electoral laws, as well as the roles of institutions such as the IEBC, Judiciary, Parliament, political parties, security agencies and oversight bodies.

The chapter also highlights the influence of informal practices, including ethnicity, patronage, elite bargaining, campaign financing, political networks and selective enforcement, which often shape voter behaviour, party nominations, campaigns and electoral outcomes. Overall, it shows that while Kenya has developed a strong formal electoral framework, the effectiveness of these institutions remains constrained by informal incentives, political interests, weak enforcement and low public trust, meaning that sustainable electoral reform must address both the formal system and the underlying political practices that influence how it operates

CHAPTER
04

Kenya's 2027 elections will be shaped not only by the rules and institutions governing electoral competition, but also by the informal deals, political incentives and power dynamics that influence how those rules work in practice.



CHAPTER FOUR

4. INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF ELECTORAL POLITICS

Kenya's electoral politics is shaped by a dense set of institutions that have developed through repeated episodes of political contest, constitutional reform, disputed elections, court intervention and negotiated elite settlements. The 2010 Constitution sought to address the historical concentration of power in the presidency, weak election management, exclusionary politics and repeated election-related violence, by building stronger checks and balances, devolving power to the counties, protecting rights, and creating independent institutions to manage and oversee democratic competition.

In the years immediately after 2010, Parliament also passed many laws to put various parts of the electoral process into effect. Yet the institutional context remains highly contested. Election outcomes are still shaped not only by the formal mandates of institutions such as the IEBC, the Judiciary, Parliament, political parties, security agencies and oversight bodies, but also by the political incentives, informal deals, competition for resources and lack of public trust that influence how these institutions actually perform. Understanding this institutional context is therefore essential for assessing the prospects for credible, peaceful and inclusive elections in 2027.

4.1. The Formal Frameworks

4.1.1. Formal Rules

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 provides the foundation how elections are governed in Kenya. It sought to address to long-standing problems of exclusion, concentration of power, weak accountability, and uneven development. Key reforms included the introduction of devolution, separation of powers, expansion of representation, protection of rights, and creation of independent constitutional commissions.



The Constitution set out principles meant to guide elections, including transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, fairness and credibility. It strengthened judicial oversight of elections and introduced requirements designed to ensure presidential candidates have broad national support.



Elections are also governed by a number of laws, including the Elections Act 2011, the Political Parties Act 2011, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission Act 2011, the Campaign Financing Act 2013, the Leadership and Integrity Act 2012, the Publication of Electoral Opinion Polls Act 2012, and related regulations

4.1.2. Formal Institutions

While the IEBC is the main body responsible for managing elections, credible elections depend on a wider network of formal institutions. These are responsible for regulating political parties and resolving nomination disputes; resolving disputes after elections; making laws, providing oversight and financing; election security and the investigation and prosecution of election offences; candidate vetting; and other supporting functions. Together, these institutions work with the IEBC to support its work throughout the election cycle. The key ones are discussed below.



The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) is the main body responsible for managing elections. It runs and oversees referendums and elections; registers voters; keeps the voter register; sets constituency and ward boundaries; regulates party nominations; carries out voter education; manages polling, counting, tallying and the declaration of results; and settles certain disputes before elections.



The Judiciary adjudicates electoral disputes and provides constitutional oversight of electoral processes. This includes the Political Parties Disputes Tribunal (PPDT), which resolves disputes involving political parties, party members, candidates, coalitions and party nominations



The Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) registers and regulates political parties; keeps party membership records; oversees party compliance; manages the Political Parties Fund; and supports the regulation of coalitions, party governance and party nomination processes.



Parliament enacts and amends election laws, approves election-related budgets, oversees the IEBC and other public institutions, and considers reforms affecting electoral management, political parties, campaign finance, electoral offences and representation.



The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) monitors and responds to hate speech, ethnic incitement, inflammatory political rhetoric and threats to national cohesion at any point in the election cycle.



Security Agencies provide election security before, during and after polling; protect voters, candidates, election officials, materials and polling centres; manage public order during campaigns and demonstrations; and respond to election-related violence and intimidation. When providing election security and detecting election offences, they act under the direction of the IEBC



The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) directs and undertakes prosecution of election offences and related crimes, including bribery, violence, intimidation, misuse of public resources and other offences under the election-law framework.



The Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) deals with integrity and anti-corruption issues involving candidates and public officers, including misuse of public resources, bribery, abuse of office and compliance with Chapter Six of the 2010 Constitution.



The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC) regulates the handling of relevant voter data, party membership data, campaign data, biometric information, digital campaigning and election technology involving personal data protection obligations.



The National Treasury finances the electoral process through budget allocations to IEBC, security agencies, the Judiciary and other relevant institutions. Treasury resourcing directly affects election preparedness and operations.

Together, these and other institutions are meant to provide the legal and administrative framework needed to run credible, peaceful and inclusive elections.

4.2. Informal Institutions and Practices

Alongside Kenya's formal electoral rules and institutions is a powerful set of informal institutions and practices that shape how election competition is actually organised, experienced and contested. These practices often operate outside formal policy and legal frameworks, but they strongly influence party nominations, coalition-building, voter behaviour, campaign conduct, pressure on institutions, and how disputes are handled.

Understanding these informal institutions and unwritten rules is essential, because they explain why formal reforms do not automatically lead to credible, inclusive and peaceful elections unless the underlying incentives, deals and power relations that drive political behaviour are also addressed.

- » **Ethnicity** remains the most powerful informal institution shaping political behaviour, whether openly or not, although it is now mixing with newer forms of mobilisation based on issues, generation and digital platforms. Political alliances, voter mobilisation, candidate selection and the distribution of resources often follow ethnic and regional lines rather than formal democratic principles. The clearest evidence is not always open ethnic hate speech; it is more often seen in regional vote-bloc strategies, ethnic arithmetic, “kingpin” politics, bargaining over running mates, control of “home turf”, and institutional warnings about ethnic rhetoric and conflict between communities. This suggests that the 2027 election environment may combine old-style ethnic and regional bloc politics with newer grievances over economic hardship, corruption, public debt, policing, civic space and accountability.
- » **Patronage** networks reinforce these dynamics by linking political support to access to public appointments, contracts, development projects, and other benefits. Political leaders often use state resources and appointments to maintain loyalty among supporters and coalition partners. Patronage therefore serves as an important mechanism through which political alliances are sustained.
- » **Political Financing** is another important informal part of election competition. Elections are expensive, and candidates often depend on private financiers, business interests and informal funding networks. Studies of the cost of politics show that Kenyan elections are highly monetised, and that weak enforcement of campaign-finance rules increases candidates’ reliance on private money, wealthy individuals and informal funding networks.
- » **Business Elites** often maintain relationships with several political actors at once, to secure favourable policies and access to state opportunities regardless of who wins. This creates an incentive for political and economic elites to help each other, and raises concerns about state capture, preferential access to public resources through procurement, and weaker accountability.

This relationship works through campaign financing, policy bargaining, advocacy for peace and stability, and access to state-linked economic opportunities. Organised business groups also engage presidential candidates directly, as seen in KEPSA’s 2022 private-sector economic manifesto discussions with presidential candidates. At the same time, business has a strong interest in peaceful, stable elections, reflected in the KEPSA-led Mkenya Daima initiative and presidential peace pledges. But the business community is not all the same: large corporate and business associations tend to prioritise stability, predictability and investor confidence, while politically connected businesses and contractors may have more direct interests in procurement, regulation, public contracts and access to state power. This means business elites are not simply neutral economic bystanders in presidential elections; they are part of the political economy of election competition, both as financiers and agenda-setters, and as actors whose own economic interests may be affected by who holds the presidency.

Formal institutions do not operate in isolation from political power

Political elites often seek to influence appointments, institutional priorities, enforcement decisions, and resource allocation. As a result, institutions that are formally independent can still be vulnerable to political pressure and informal influence. Informal actors often shape how institutions carry out their mandates, especially during periods of intense political competition

Beyond the formal rules of Kenya's electoral system lies an equally powerful world of unwritten rules—ethnicity, patronage, political financing and elite interests—that can shape political competition and influence how institutions

4.3. Interaction Between Formal and Informal Institutions

Kenya's election governance is marked by a constant interaction between formal constitutional rules and informal political practices. At key moments, formal institutions have shown they can restrain political actors and uphold constitutional standards. But how effective they are depending heavily on whether institutional actors have enough independence, whether enforcement is credible, and whether the political cost of following the rules is lower than the cost of breaking them.

The Supreme Court's annulment of the 2017 presidential election remains the clearest example of a formal institution exercising its authority under intense political pressure. By invalidating the presidential result on procedural and constitutional grounds, the Court demonstrated that electoral outcomes could be subjected to judicial scrutiny and that even the presidency was not beyond constitutional control. The 2022 presidential election petition further confirmed the Judiciary's central role in resolving election disputes, even though it reached a different outcome by upholding the declared result.

At the same time, evidence shows that formal rules are frequently weakened when compliance threatens powerful political and economic interests. Kenya's electoral politics continues to be shaped by informal practices that often operate alongside, – and sometimes override – formal procedures. Ethnic and regional bloc mobilisation remains central to how coalitions are formed, with presidential alliances often built around calculations of voter registration numbers, voter turnout, regional bargaining power and expected access to state resources. The 2002 NARC coalition, the 2007 PNU–ODM contest, the 2013 Jubilee–CORD alignment, the 2017 Jubilee–NASA contest, the 2022 Kenya Kwanza–Azimio contest, and the later broad-based government arrangement all show how important elite coalition bargaining continues to be in shaping election competition, both openly and behind the scenes.

Patronage politics also remains a powerful informal institution. Political office is widely perceived as a route to public appointments, procurement opportunities, development projects, protection and influence over the distribution of state resources.

It also helps explain why political elites bargain over cabinet positions, senior public appointments, parliamentary leadership, parastatal boards and access to public programmes as part of pre-election and post-election coalition management. This raises the stakes of elections and reinforces the belief that communities must be “inside government” to gain development benefits. The politics of being a “shareholder” in government, public rows over cabinet appointments, and debate over the make-up of independent commissions all show how deeply questions of access, inclusion and reward are built into election competition.

Informal campaign financing further weakens the regulatory framework. Although Kenya has enacted campaign finance legislation, political competition remains extremely expensive, and enforcement of spending limits has been weak. Candidates are expected to finance rallies, transport, mobilisation networks, agents, party primaries, local brokers, media visibility, social media operations, community contributions and direct voter inducements (read, voter bribery). This gives wealthy candidates, incumbents and well-connected political networks a major advantage. It also narrows the space for women, youth, persons with disabilities and reform-minded candidates, who may have public legitimacy but limited access to campaign finance. Party nominations are particularly vulnerable to these dynamics because nominations often determine the real winner in party strongholds and therefore attract intense competition, bribery, violence and elite interference.

Uneven or selective enforcement of the rules is another recurring feature of the political economy of Kenya’s elections. Laws exist on election offences, hate speech, campaign finance, misuse of public resources, party nominations, leadership integrity and public order, but enforcement often appears uneven, delayed or shaped by political considerations. Institutions such as the IEBC, ORPP, PPDT, EACC, NCIC, IPOA, ODPP, the police and the courts all have formal roles in protecting the integrity of elections, but how effective they are depending on political will, institutional independence, resources, public confidence and coordination between agencies.

There is a persistent weak enforcement of election-offence enforcement, making it difficult to assess deterrence, consistency of prosecution or accountability outcomes across election cycles. Candidate vetting provides clearer evidence of the limited enforcement effect of integrity rules than prosecution data.



Kenya’s electoral rules are only as strong as the political incentives and institutional independence that determine whether those rules are respected, enforced or bypassed

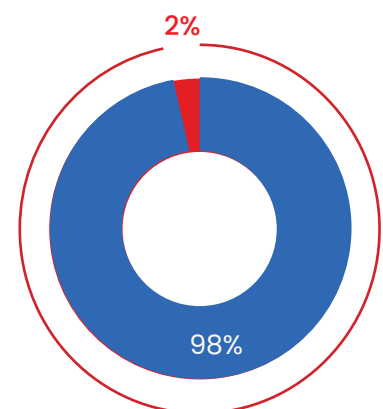


21,863

Number of aspirants vetted in compliance with integrity standards

241

Number of aspirants with outstanding integrity issues



- Disqualified aspirants
- Qualified aspirants



Elected leaders from Isiolo, Samburu, Baringo and Laikipia signed a raft of resolutions that included keeping peace. They did this during a meeting that NCIC and CEED convened with MPs and MCAs in Laikipia

In the 2022 General Election, EACC reported that it vetted 21,863 aspirants for compliance with Chapter Six and related integrity standards. It subsequently identified 241 aspirants with outstanding integrity issues and forwarded their names to IEBC. However, public reporting indicates that IEBC disqualified only five aspirants (2%) from that list, reflecting the narrow legal threshold for excluding candidates and the limited practical effect of integrity vetting where concerns had not resulted in convictions, completed legal findings or other legally enforceable disqualification grounds. This points to a persistent enforcement gap: integrity screening can identify risks, but it does not automatically prevent politically exposed or integrity-flagged aspirants from appearing on the ballot. Where enforcement is perceived to be selective, political actors are incentivised to test institutional boundaries, mobilise supporters against adverse decisions, or treat compliance as negotiable.

These informal practices shape electoral behaviour at every stage of the electoral cycle. During voter registration, citizens may be mobilised through ethnic, regional or generational appeals rather than purely civic arguments. During party nominations, local elites and brokers influence candidate selection through patronage networks, clan structures, money and proximity to party leaders. During campaigns, development promises, public appointments, state projects and political protection become part of the language of mobilisation.

In addition, during polling and tallying, suspicion of institutional bias is heightened by memories of previous disputed elections and by fears that technology, security agencies or administrative structures may be used to favour one side. After elections, elite settlements such as the 2008 Grand Coalition, the 2018 Handshake, and later broad-based governance arrangements show how negotiated political bargains can stabilise the country while also raising questions about accountability, opposition oversight and the formal role of electoral competition.

The principal challenge facing Kenya's electoral system is therefore not simply a lack of formal rules. The deeper challenge is the persistent tension between these formal arrangements and the informal incentives that shape political behaviour. Electoral reforms have strengthened the legal architecture, expanded judicial oversight, improved political party regulation, institutionalised devolution and created more avenues for dispute resolution. Yet they have been less successful in transforming the underlying political economy of elections: the perception that power provides access to resources, the high cost of politics, elite bargaining over state positions, weak internal party democracy, ethnic bloc mobilisation, selective enforcement and low public trust in institutions.

Sustainable electoral reform will therefore require more than technical improvements to laws, technology, procedures and institutional mandates. It will require attention to the incentives, interests and power relations that determine whether formal rules are respected in practice. This includes strengthening institutional independence, enforcing rules consistently, reducing the cost of political participation, improving transparency in campaign finance, protecting civic space, supporting internal party democracy, safeguarding the neutrality of security agencies, and rebuilding public confidence in electoral institutions. Without addressing these deeper informal rules of the game, formal reforms may continue to improve the architecture of electoral governance without fully changing the political behaviour that undermines credible, peaceful and inclusive elections.





05

CHAPTER FIVE

Actors, Power, and Interests

Chapter Five examines the actors, power and interests that shape Kenya's electoral processes, recognising that stakeholders differ significantly in their ability and willingness to influence electoral reforms and outcomes. It maps actors according to their levels of power and interest, highlighting key political and institutional actors such as the President, IEBC, Judiciary, political parties, security agencies, ODPP, ORPP, EACC and major media and business interests, alongside citizens, youth, women, persons with disabilities, civil society and other groups with high interest but more limited influence.

The chapter assesses the roles, incentives, relationships and constraints of these actors, showing that those with significant power do not always support credible electoral reforms, while groups most affected by electoral challenges often have limited capacity to influence change. It therefore emphasises the importance of understanding stakeholder interests and power relations when designing realistic strategies for strengthening electoral integrity, accountability, citizen participation and inclusive, peaceful elections

CHAPTER
05

CHAPTER FIVE

5. ACTORS, POWER, AND INTERESTS

5.1. Interests and Behavior in the Electoral Process

The power and interests of actors in shaping the process and outcomes of credible elections vary, and are not always aligned: those with high power do not necessarily facilitate conduct of credible elections and those interested in credible elections do not always have the power to influence the pace and direction of change. Within specific stakeholder groups, there may be much heterogeneity, rendering broad categorisations and classifications problematic. In this sub-section, we provide a summary of the approach to analysing the power and interests of the stakeholders.

High Power / High Interest are the core political economy actors. They can materially shape outcomes and care deeply because reforms, election credibility, or electoral results directly affect their authority, legitimacy, resources, or survival. These actors include: the incumbent President; the IEBC; the Judiciary and the wider election-justice system; political parties and presidential coalitions; the National Police Service and other security agencies; the ODPP; the ORPP; the PPDT; the EACC; major national media houses and dominant digital platforms; and politically connected business elites and major campaign financiers.

High Power/Low Interest actors are usually those who have enough influence to shape reform outcomes but have limited incentive to support reforms because the current system protects their interests, discretion, networks, or bargaining advantage. Their motivations are typically not “anti-reform” in the abstract; rather, they resist reforms that threaten their power, rents, alliances, or room for manoeuvre. Examples include National Treasury; Parliament and the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee–JLAC; executive bureaucracies/county administrations; large corporates and major business associations; democracy and governance development partners.

Actors with Low Power / High Interest are those who care deeply about electoral reform because they are directly affected by exclusion, violence, weak accountability, opaque processes or unfair competition, but they lack sufficient authority, money, institutional access or bargaining power to shape outcomes on their own. This group includes: citizens and voters; youth and Gen Z movements; women, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups; CSOs and domestic election observers;



Interests in Kenya's Elections

Indicative interests associated with actors in each power / interest quadrant



Figure 6: Indicative interests associated with actors in each power / interest quadrant

Key message: Electoral behaviour is shaped not only by who holds power, but by the interests and incentives each group brings to the process.

Note: Positioning is indicative. Interests reflect the incentives, priorities and concerns that shape behaviour around electoral credibility.

faith-based and peace actors; journalists, community media and fact-checkers; the NCIC; IPOA; the KNCHR; the NGEC; and SMEs, informal traders and local business associations.

Actors with Low Power / Low Interest are usually peripheral to the reform arena. They have limited ability to shape electoral outcomes directly, and they are not strongly motivated to engage unless the issue affects them personally, locally, or materially. Examples of these actors include the general business community not tied to state contracts; academia and think tanks; international observers outside peak election periods; apathetic or disengaged citizens.

5.2. Key Electoral Actors and their Role in Elections

State and non-state actors are both active and important stakeholders in how Kenya's elections are conducted, monitored and adjudicated. The Constitution of Kenya specifically establishes and mandates independent state agencies to conduct and adjudicate on elections

5.2.1. Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission

The IEBC is a high-power/high-interest actor in Kenya's electoral politics. Its power comes from its constitutional mandate to conduct and supervise elections and referendums, register voters, regulate nominations, register candidates, facilitate voter education and observation, enforce elements of the electoral code, and manage key parts of the electoral process. Its interest is equally high, because its institutional legitimacy depends on delivering elections that are credible, transparent, efficient and impartial.

The IEBC's authority also makes it a focal point of political pressure, litigation and public mistrust. The 2017 annulment of the presidential election demonstrated that IEBC's decisions and procedures can determine the validity of electoral outcomes, while also showing that its performance is subject to constitutional standards of transparency, verifiability, accountability and accuracy.

Stakeholders broadly agree that the IEBC has successfully run several elections, in line with legal provisions that have enabled transfer of power every five years. However, IEBC faces challenges in building and maintaining public trust on account of recurring concerns. Among the concerns are adequate preparedness, particularly about the elections calendar; procurement and reliability of technology; logistical challenges during voting; transparency in vote tallying and results transmission; procedural irregularities that reflect on its performance shortcomings and preparedness; institutional independence from political influence; stakeholder engagement as well as timely and open communication with the public; and management of electoral disputes. For REDI, the IEBC should be treated as a key player whose capacity, independence, transparency, technology management, stakeholder communication and public trust are central to credible and peaceful elections.

KENYA ELECTORAL GOVERNANCE ECOSYSTEM: NUANCED POWER/ INTEREST SCATTER GRAM

Indicative positions based on formal power, informal influence and effective enforcement capacity

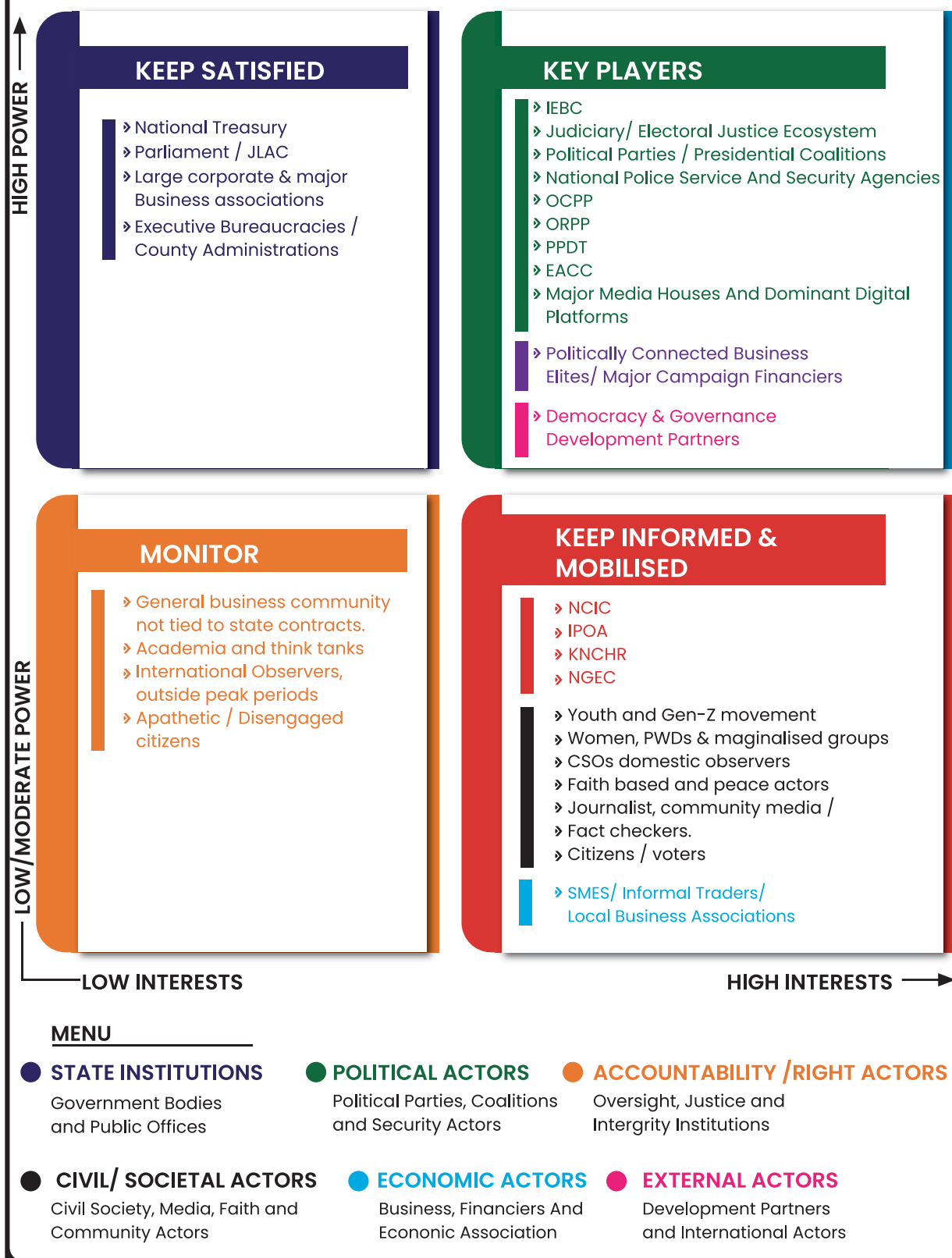


Figure 7: indicative interests associated with actors in each power / interest quadrant in electoral governance ecosystem

5.2.2. The Judiciary

The electoral justice ecosystem is a high-power, high-interest actor in Kenya's electoral politics. Its power lies not only in the Judiciary's authority to determine presidential, parliamentary and county election petitions, but also in the wider institutional architecture that supports electoral dispute resolution. The electoral ecosystem comprises the Supreme Court, High Court, Court of Appeal and designated election courts determine the legality and validity of electoral outcomes; the Judiciary Committee on Elections coordinates judicial preparedness, training, rules, manuals, case management and stakeholder engagement; and the Political Parties Disputes Tribunal plays a critical pre-election role in resolving party nomination, coalition, membership and party-list disputes.

This system matters politically because it provides the formal route through which election grievances are channelled away from violence, street protest and elite bargaining, and into legal proceedings. Its influence was demonstrated most clearly by the Supreme Court's annulment of the 2017 presidential election and its determination of the 2022 presidential petition, while PPDT's pre-election role is especially important because party nominations often determine electoral viability in party strongholds

For REDI, the electoral justice system should be treated as a key player whose independence, preparation, coordination, security, accessibility and public credibility are central to peaceful and credible elections. Concerns about the Judiciary's performance centre on delays in hearing and deciding cases; for example, in a dispute over the winner of an election, including appeals, a ruling may not come until two to three years into the term. There is also criticism of the high cost of pursuing election petitions, and a sense of political pressure in highly contested cases. In some cases, electoral stakeholders feel that access to justice is unequal between different candidates and voters.

5.2.3. Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is a high-power electoral accountability actor because it holds constitutional authority to institute and undertake criminal proceedings, direct investigations and prosecute offences, including election offences. Its role is especially important in addressing electoral violence, intimidation, bribery, undue influence, misuse of public resources and other criminal conduct that undermines credible elections.



Electoral justice provides a vital pathway from political grievance to peaceful resolution – but its credibility depends on independence, timely decisions, accessibility and public trust.



The ODPP's practical influence depends on timely investigations by the police and the DCI, evidence from IEBC and other oversight bodies, witness cooperation, and coordination with the Judiciary. Public evidence points to a persistent gap between enforcement and transparency: observer reports have noted limited public information on the number and status of election-offence cases, while post-election reporting often describes incidents as "under investigation" without clear public follow-up on prosecution outcomes. For REDI, the ODPP should be treated as a key institution for election accountability, whose effectiveness, transparency and coordination with other agencies are central to deterrence, the rule of law and public confidence in electoral justice.

5.2.4. Independent Policing Oversight Authority

IPOA is a high-interest but only moderately-to-highly powerful actor in Kenya's election accountability system. Formally, it is an independent civilian oversight body with authority to monitor and investigate police conduct and promote accountability within the National Police Service. This gives it an important role in safeguarding rights-respecting election security, particularly during campaigns, protests, public-order operations and incidents involving excessive force or police inaction.

IPOA's practical power is limited by its vulnerability to political interference and its dependence on other institutions: it does not command the police, does not prosecute cases directly, and relies on police cooperation, access to evidence, witness protection, action by the ODPP, and political respect for oversight. In politically sensitive election contexts, these limits can reduce its ability to deter abusive or selective policing. For REDI, IPOA should be treated as a critical but vulnerable accountability actor, whose independence, resources, speed of investigation, public reporting and coordination with the ODPP, KNCHR, IEBC and Judiciary are central to credible and peaceful elections

5.2.5. Office of the Registrar of Political Parties

The ORPP is a high-interest and moderately-to-highly powerful actor in Kenya's electoral governance system. Its formal mandate is to register and regulate political parties and administer the Political Parties Fund, but its political significance goes beyond simple administrative registration. Because political parties are the main vehicles for candidate nomination, coalition-building, voter mobilisation and elite bargaining, the ORPP shapes the pre-election environment through party registration, membership records, coalition documentation, party compliance, funding oversight and internal party governance.

The ORPP role is especially important where disputes arise over party membership, defections, coalition agreements, nomination rules, party lists and compliance with the Political Parties Act. However, ORPP's effective power is constrained by the political sensitivity of regulating powerful parties, weak internal party democracy across all political parties, opaque elite bargains, last-minute coalition manoeuvres and litigation. For REDI, the ORPP should be treated as a critical pre-election governance actor, whose transparency, independence, coordination with the IEBC and PPDT, and enforcement of party compliance are central to credible, inclusive and peaceful election competition

5.2.6. Ethics & Anticorruption Commission

The EACC is a high-interest and moderately-to-highly powerful actor in Kenya's electoral governance system. Its formal mandate to combat and prevent corruption, economic crime and unethical conduct puts it at the centre of electoral integrity, particularly around Chapter Six vetting, candidate integrity, misuse of public resources, bribery, abuse of office and corruption in election-related procurement. Its influence was visible in the 2022 election cycle, when it vetted 21,863 aspirants and flagged a subset with outstanding integrity issues for the IEBC to consider.

The EACC's effective power is limited by the fact that it does not directly determine most electoral eligibility questions or prosecute cases; it depends on the IEBC, the ODPP and the courts to translate integrity concerns into enforceable consequences. The reported gap between aspirants flagged by EACC and the much smaller number disqualified by IEBC illustrates this enforcement limitation. For REDI, EACC should therefore be treated as a critical but constrained integrity actor whose effectiveness depends on timely investigations, credible information-sharing, consistent enforcement, prosecutorial follow-through and public confidence in Chapter Six implementation.

5.2.7. National Gender & Equality Commission

The NGEC is a high-interest but moderate-power actor in Kenya's electoral governance ecosystem. Its constitutional and statutory mandate to promote gender equality and non-discrimination gives it direct relevance to electoral inclusion, particularly for women, youth, persons with disabilities, minorities and marginalised groups. Its role is important because credible elections require not only accurate voting and results management, but also equal access to voter registration, candidacy, party nomination processes, campaign space, political representation and protection from discrimination and violence. However, the NGEC's effective power is largely advisory, monitoring and advocacy-oriented; it depends on IEBC, ORPP, political parties, Parliament, courts and other enforcement institutions to translate equality standards into binding electoral outcomes. For REDI, the NGEC should therefore be treated as a critical inclusion actor, whose evidence, monitoring, advocacy and coordination can help strengthen gender-responsive and disability-inclusive electoral governance, even though its direct enforcement leverage is limited.

5.2.8. Political Parties Dispute Tribunal

The Political Parties Disputes Tribunal is a high-interest and moderate-to-high power actor in Kenya's electoral governance ecosystem, especially during the pre-election period. Its power derives from its mandate to resolve disputes involving political parties, party members, candidates, coalitions, party nominations, party lists and related party processes. This role is politically consequential because party nominations often determine electoral viability, particularly in party strongholds where securing the dominant party ticket may be tantamount to winning the election. PPDT therefore provides an important institutional pathway for resolving disputes that might otherwise produce defections, parallel nominations, litigation, violence or rejection of party outcomes.

However, its effectiveness is constrained by compressed electoral timelines, high caseloads, weak internal party dispute-resolution mechanisms, poor party records, elite interference and non-compliance by political parties. For REDI, the PPDT should be treated as a critical pre-election dispute-resolution and conflict-prevention actor whose preparedness, accessibility, coordination with ORPP, IEBC and the Judiciary, and credibility are central to peaceful and inclusive electoral competition.

5.2.9. National Cohesion and Integration Commission

The NCIC is a high-interest and moderately-to-highly powerful actor in Kenya's electoral governance system. Its electoral relevance lies in monitoring and responding to hate speech, ethnic incitement, political intolerance, conflict hotspots, inflammatory rhetoric and online mobilisation that may threaten peaceful participation. However, the NCIC's effective power is limited by the fact that it investigates and monitors but does not itself prosecute hate-speech cases; enforcement depends on the ODPP, police, digital platforms and political cooperation. For REDI, the NCIC should be treated as a critical but constrained actor for peace and cohesion, whose early-warning capacity, digital monitoring, coordination with enforcement institutions and credibility across political divides are important for preventing election-related violence and strengthening public confidence in peaceful election competition.



Businesses shape the economic stakes of elections, while citizens determine their democratic legitimacy—making stability, inclusion, trust and participation essential to Kenya's electoral future

5.2.10. Civil Society Organisations

Civil society organisations active in Kenya's elections space are high-interest but moderate-power actors. They do not directly administer elections, declare results, prosecute offences or determine petitions, but they play a critical role in strengthening electoral accountability, public participation and institutional responsiveness. Their influence lies in civic and voter education, domestic election observation, human-rights monitoring, documentation of violence and malpractice, advocacy for electoral reforms, litigation, digital accountability, peace messaging and mobilisation of excluded groups. Platforms such as ELOG provide structured domestic observation and evidence-based engagement, while civic education actors such as Uraia support citizen awareness, voter registration, participation and accountability.

Human-rights and governance organisations such as the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) document abuses, monitor state conduct and press for reforms. For REDI, CSOs should be treated as essential accountability and mobilisation actors whose evidence, reach, local legitimacy and reform advocacy can strengthen credible and peaceful elections, even though their impact depends on access, coordination, protection of civic space, funding, and responsiveness by formal institutions.

5.2.11. Media Actors

We analysed the media and social media as an integrated electoral information ecosystem, but disaggregated into distinct actor categories. Mainstream media, community and vernacular media, social media platforms, influencers, bloggers, fact-checkers and regulators all shape how citizens receive, interpret and act on electoral information. Their interaction is politically consequential because narratives move fluidly between television, radio, newspapers, online news platforms, WhatsApp, TikTok, X, Facebook and community networks. However, their incentives and risks differ: mainstream media have agenda-setting power and professional obligations; community media have local trust and vernacular reach; social media platforms and influencers have speed, virality and mobilisation power; fact-checkers provide corrective accountability; and regulators such as MCK, CA, NCIC and ODPC provide formal oversight. For REDI, the analytical focus should therefore be on the wider electoral information ecosystem, while distinguishing the specific power, interests, vulnerabilities and intervention opportunities of each media actor category.

5.2.12. The Business Community

We analysed the business community as part of an integrated community, but disaggregated into distinct categories because business actors do not share the same power, interests or exposure to electoral risk. Large corporates, financial institutions, foreign investors and national business associations tend to prioritise stability, macroeconomic predictability, investor confidence and continuity of policy, and therefore often operate as high-power but cautious actors. Politically connected firms, contractors and regulated sectors may have more direct interests in electoral outcomes because government formation affects procurement, licensing, taxation, appointments and regulatory protection. SMEs, informal traders, transport operators and local business associations have less formal power but are highly exposed to election-related disruption, violence, protests, police action and market closures. For REDI, the analytical focus should therefore distinguish between business actors whose primary concern is stability, those whose interests are tied to access to the state, and those whose livelihoods are most vulnerable to electoral disorder.

“Businesses shape the economic stakes of elections, while citizens determine their democratic legitimacy-making stability, inclusion, trust and participation essential to Kenya’s electoral future”



5.2.13. Ordinary Voters

We analysed ordinary citizens of voting age as a differentiated electoral constituency rather than a single homogeneous actor. While individual citizens generally have limited formal power beyond voting, their aggregate power is decisive because registration, turnout, vote choice, protest, civic engagement and acceptance or rejection of results determine both electoral outcomes and democratic legitimacy. Their interests include credible voter registration, peaceful campaigns, secure polling, transparent results management, accountable leadership, service delivery, inclusion and respect for rights. However, citizens differ significantly by registration status, age, gender, disability, geography, livelihood, digital access and level of political engagement. Youth and Gen Z voters may be especially responsive to cost-of-living, corruption, jobs, policing and digital-rights concerns; women and persons with disabilities face additional barriers to participation and representation; informal workers and the urban poor are highly exposed to electoral disruption and economic stress; while unregistered and apathetic citizens represent latent but unrealised democratic power. For REDI, citizens should therefore be treated as a high-interest actor group whose mobilisation, protection, information access and trust in institutions are central to credible, peaceful and inclusive elections.

5.2.14. Incumbent President



Youth and community stakeholders participate in a civic engagement dialogue, reflecting the importance of inclusive participation and citizen voices in Kenya's electoral and political processes.

The incumbent president is a very high power and very high interest actor in Kenya's electoral politics. Formally, the President is Head of State and Government, exercises executive authority, chairs the National Security Council and serves as Commander-in-Chief, giving the office significant influence over the national political and security environment. Politically, incumbency provides agenda setting power, national visibility, control over Cabinet and senior public appointments, influence over development priorities, and capacity to shape elite coalition bargains. The President's interest in the electoral process is also very high because the presidency is the central prize of national electoral competition and the incumbent's legitimacy depends on both performance in office and the credibility of the next election. For REDI, the incumbent president should therefore be treated as a key player whose incentives, coalition strategy, use of incumbency, security posture, respect for institutional independence and public messaging will significantly affect whether the 2027 elections are perceived as credible, peaceful and inclusive.

5.2.15. National Treasury

The National Treasury is a high power and moderate-to-high interest actor in Kenya's electoral governance ecosystem. Although it does not administer elections, prosecute offences or resolve disputes, it exercises significant influence through budget preparation, resource allocation, cash flow management and fiscal control. Its decisions affect the preparedness of IEBC, the Judiciary, security agencies, ORPP, PPDT, ODPP, EACC, NCIC, IPOA and other election related institutions. Timely and adequate financing is essential for voter registration, electoral technology, procurement of election materials, recruitment and training of polling officials, voter education, election security, dispute resolution preparedness and institutional coordination. However, the Treasury must balance these needs against fiscal constraints, debt pressures, and competing public expenditure priorities (including pressures from the rest of the Executive Branch). For REDI, the National Treasury should therefore be treated as a strategic enabling actor whose budgetary decisions can either strengthen or constrain credible, peaceful and well-managed elections

5.2.16. Major Development Partners/Donors

Democracy and governance development partners are high power but moderate to high interest actors in Kenya's electoral governance ecosystem. They have no formal authority over elections, but they influence the electoral environment through financing, technical assistance, diplomatic engagement, election observation, reform followup, support to civil society, institutional capacity building and convening power. Their role is visible in electoral assistance, election observation and follow-up missions, and specialised support to institutions and civil society. However, they should not be treated as a homogeneous donor community. Their mandates, risk appetite, funding models and political priorities differ: some focus on technical election support, others on civic space and accountability, others on women's and youth participation, and others on stability, security or diplomatic engagement.

Recent geopolitical shifts—including foreign-aid cuts, the global funding squeeze on civil society, strategic competition, fiscal pressures and Kenya’s growing regional-security significance—are likely to reduce the predictability and assertiveness of democracy support.

For REDI, democracy-and-governance partners/donors should therefore be analysed as a differentiated set of enabling actors whose influence depends on funding continuity, coordination, political will, diplomatic positioning and willingness to support both formal institutions and independent civic accountability across the full electoral cycle.

5.2.17. Kenya National Commission on Human Rights

The KNCHR is a high-interest but moderate-power actor in Kenya’s electoral governance ecosystem. Its mandate makes it central to monitoring the human-rights conditions under which elections are conducted, including electoral violence, police conduct, civic space, protest rights, discrimination, intimidation and attacks on journalists, observers and human-rights defenders. Its power lies in independent monitoring, investigation, documentation, public reporting and recommendations, rather than direct enforcement. For REDI, the KNCHR should therefore be treated as a critical accountability and early-warning actor whose evidence can inform prevention, advocacy, litigation and institutional reform, but whose impact depends on whether enforcement agencies, Parliament, courts and electoral institutions act on its findings

From presidential power and public financing to donor support and human-rights oversight, Kenya’s electoral environment is shaped by actors whose decisions can either strengthen or constrain credible, peaceful and inclusive elections.





CHAPTER SIX

Contemporary Political Dynamics and Challenges

Chapter Six examines the contemporary political dynamics and challenges affecting Kenya's electoral process, highlighting the gap between extensive formal reforms and the underlying political incentives that continue to shape electoral behaviour. It shows how informal practices such as patronage, vote buying, ethnic and regional bargaining, negotiated democracy, selective enforcement and incumbency often influence elections more strongly than formal rules, while fragile public trust, elite bargains, conflict risks and structural barriers continue to limit meaningful citizen participation and inclusion.

The chapter also highlights the growing political engagement of youth and Gen Z, the dual opportunities and risks presented by digital platforms and misinformation, and the need for election observation to cover the entire electoral cycle and incorporate technology. Overall, it argues that successful electoral reform must go beyond legal and institutional changes to address the political incentives, power relationships, trust deficits, exclusion and informal practices that continue to undermine credible, peaceful and inclusive elections

CHAPTER
06



Kenya's challenge is not a lack of electoral laws, but the persistent political incentives, weak enforcement and unmet public expectations that undermine reform and erode trust in elections.



CHAPTER SIX

6. CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES

6.1. Electoral Reform Has Not Changed the Underlying Incentives

The evidence consistently shows that Kenya has a dense legal and institutional framework for elections, but the deeper political incentives remain largely unchanged. The recurring problem is not simply that reforms are absent; it is that formal reforms are undermined by weak implementation, weak enforcement, elite resistance, poor party institutionalisation and low accountability.

Respondents repeatedly describe elections as high-stakes contests in which winning office provides access to state power, appointments, procurement opportunities, protection, visibility and wealth. This creates strong incentives to bend rules, resist reforms, manipulate party processes, mobilise money, influence institutions and contest unfavourable outcomes. The recent disruption of a post-budget review meeting at the All Saints Cathedral signals that the 2027 electoral environment may be shaped not only by contestation over votes, parties and the IEBC, but also by coercive struggles over civic space, public finance scrutiny, protest legitimacy and the right of citizens to question the state. If left unresolved, and as witnessed at the height of the reform struggles in the 90s, such incidents can normalise outsourced political violence, weaken public participation, intimidate accountability actors, and increase mistrust in both government and security institutions.

The focus group discussions describe these reform struggles as lived frustration. Elections are associated with promises of a lower cost of living, jobs, school fees, bursaries, roads, water, electricity and better services. When those promises are not kept, voting becomes linked to disappointment, fatigue and a sense of betrayal.

People who follow governance are few, money overpowers all those things. Things to do with reforms and changes and all those things don't count when election comes." –Uasin Gishu FGD

As a result, reform programming must address incentives, not just institutions. Legal and procedural reforms will remain fragile unless they reduce the benefits of manipulation and increase the cost of not complying.

6.2. The Effective Rules of the Game are often Informal

Evidence from Kenya's electoral history supports the conclusion that the rules that actually govern election competition are often informal, even where formal constitutional and statutory rules exist. Respondents consistently draw a distinction between the formal rules of elections and the informal practices that shape how people actually behave. Formal rules set out calendars, procedures, candidate requirements, routes for litigation, nomination systems and dispute timelines. But informal rules often determine who stands, who is funded, who is endorsed, who is intimidated, who is excluded, and whose votes are seen as politically useful.

The electoral process is largely informed by informal laws, where people who are active players but not recognised by the law... influence the elections.
–KII



Raila Odinga's absence from the 2027 General Election should be seen in this light. The likely effect is a more open but less stable 2027 political landscape, as many seek to take up his mantle. His absence weakens the opposition's old centre of gravity built around protest politics, gives Ruto a short-term advantage until the opposition regroups, intensifies the contest over who succeeds him within ODM, and makes coalition-building more transactional. But it also creates space for a new opposition line-up, mobilisation of a new generation, and politics based more on issues.

Evidence from focus group discussions shows that citizens recognise these informal rules. Campaigns are associated with handouts, transport, mobilisation money, payments to crowds, violence following unequal distribution of money, and an expectation that politicians must "give something" during campaigns.

The implication of all this is that formal compliance is necessary but not enough on its own for credible elections. REDI should therefore map the informal incentives around nominations, campaign finance, party lists, local brokers, security actors and political financiers as part of its intervention strategies.

6.3. Public Trust in Electoral Institutions is Fragile and Uneven

Public trust in electoral institutions matters because it is the foundation on which electoral legitimacy, peaceful participation and acceptance of outcomes rest. In Kenya's high-stakes electoral environment, trust in the IEBC, the Judiciary, security agencies and electoral accountability bodies determines whether citizens and political actors believe that votes will be counted fairly, disputes will be resolved lawfully, and rights will be protected. Where trust is weak, technical errors, delays, technology failures or adverse rulings can easily be interpreted as evidence of bias or manipulation, increasing the risk of rejected results, protest, elite bargaining and violence.

Trust in electoral institutions is one of the most important cross-cutting issues from the KIs and FGDs.



I have a bit of trust in all institutions, but I don't have trust in the people at the top
—Uasin Gishu FGD



IEBC:

The Electoral Management Body is the focal point of credibility concerns because its associated with voter registration, technology, appointment and deployment of election officials, procurement, results transmission, enforcement and dispute triggers. Concerns include perceived political influence, opaque appointments, weak communication, secretariat credibility, technology mistrust, results management and inadequate enforcement.



Judiciary

The Judiciary and Election Dispute Resolution Mechanisms are generally viewed as important credibility anchors, but they are not immune from pressure—both political and otherwise. The evidence highlights strict timelines, heavy caseloads, resource constraints, technology needs, public expectations, media pressure, misinformation, consistency of decisions and perceptions of independence.



SECURITY AGENCIES

Security Agencies are viewed with mixed feelings. They are necessary for order, but are also seen as a possible source of fear, violence, bias or intimidation. Public confidence depends on whether security actors are seen as neutral, restrained, accountable, well trained and clearly respectful of rights.

INSTITUTION / ISSUE	MAIN CONSTRAINTS IDENTIFIED	TRUST EFFECT
IEBC	Political Perceptions; communication gaps; secretariat concerns; funding deficits; procurement and HR gaps; enforcement limitations	The central credibility battle ground
Judiciary / JCE	Strict Timelines; resource gaps; inconsistency risks; political pressure; misinformation; conflicts of interest; political perceptions	Relatively credible but politically exposed
Security Agencies	Executive Influence; weak training; poor equipment; bribery risks; violent policing; weak oversight	Can reassure voters or intensify fear and mistrust
Oversight Bodies	Budget Cuts; Weak Independence; political appointments; limited enforcement	Oversight credibility is weakened
Voter Participation	Apathy; Fear of Chaos; youth disillusionment; mistrust of counting and transmission; weak belief in electoral payoff	Reduced legitimacy and higher susceptibility to elite mobilisation
Information Ecosystem	Misinformation; poor official communication; social media attacks; sensational reporting	Institutional actions are interpreted through partisan narratives

Table 1: How institutional weaknesses shape public confidence in the electoral system

FGD evidence strongly reinforces these concerns. Citizens often associate elections with rigging, predetermined outcomes, police violence, unfairness, political manipulation and lack of trust in results. Gen Z-focused evidence shows low trust in electoral institutions, political parties and dispute processes, with concerns about transparency, manual systems, political affiliation of officials and the credibility of results management.

Two implications arise from this fragility and unevenness of public trust in electoral institutions. First, trust-building should be treated as a substantive electoral intervention worthy of investment.

Secondly, trust building requires transparency, timely communication, public explanation of procedures, open data, visible enforcement, credible stakeholder engagement and accessible dispute information.

6.4. Elite Bargains Weaken Voter Agency

The evidence shows that elite bargains shape electoral outcomes before and after elections: in party strongholds, securing nomination is as good as winning the election. These bargains influence coalition formation, zoning, resource flows, appointments, party lists, nominations, regional expectations and post-election accommodation. While they can reduce open confrontation among elites, they often weaken citizen agency by shifting politics away from voter choice and towards negotiated elite advantage—or “negotiated democracy” as some respondents call it.

The bargains have undermined the power of the vote... People get contented with the representation based on the slots promised.—KII

In the FGDs, this appears as frustration with party mergers, coalition shifts, broken promises and the sense that voters are left “hanging” when parties or leaders reposition themselves after elections. Youth-oriented evidence suggests a shift away from loyalty to parties and towards individual candidates or issue-based judgement.

For REDI, this means that elite bargains should be analysed as informal institutions. REDI should ask what each bargain protects, who is included, who is excluded, and how it affects reform feasibility, violence risk, inclusion and voter confidence.

6.5. Conflict Risk is Organised, Incentivised and Cumulative

Kenya’s electoral conflict is rooted in high-stakes competition for state power, ethnic and regional mobilisation, weak enforcement of rules, and grievances over land, exclusion and unequal development. Since the 1990s, elections have periodically triggered violence, with the 2007–08 crisis marking the most severe episode and prompting major constitutional and institutional reforms.

While the 2010 Constitution strengthened electoral management, judicial review and dispute resolution, later subsequent elections in 2013, 2017 and 2022 show that mistrust, contested results and coercive practices persist. The key lesson is that violence is not inevitable, but the risk remains where institutional distrust, elite mobilisation, and weak accountability converge.

The data shows that, electoral conflict is not simply spontaneous. It is often organised, financed, incited or enabled. Key drivers include winner-takes-all politics, desire for state power, youth unemployment, poverty, campaign handouts, ethnic mobilisation, inflammatory rhetoric, misinformation, police behaviour, goons, weak prosecution and impunity.



The FGDs provide concrete conflict indicators. These include sudden deployment of the regular police or the General Service Unit (GSU), tear gas, ethnic clustering, unfamiliar voters, unequal distribution of campaign money, use of goons, fear around party nominations, violence after perceived rigging, claims of stolen results, and intimidation of political teams.

A major pattern is that youth are both a mobilising force and a risk category. Economic strain, unemployment and anger can be channelled into civic agency, but they can also be exploited through handouts, the recruitment of goons, online mobilisation or ethnic messaging.

The use of goons by politicians has been worsening... These goons develop their own dynamics and live beyond the elections, and come alive during the elections. –KII

As a result, electoral violence prevention must begin before the polling day. Priority areas include party primaries, campaign finance, youth mobilisation, misinformation, police conduct, local grievance mapping, monitoring incident escalation, and prosecution of electoral offences.

6.6. Youth and Gen Z Are Politically Alert, Not Simply Apathetic

A common theme in discussions about Kenya's elections is that young people are apathetic: they are often portrayed in public debate as uninterested in the country's politics. Across the key informant interviews and focus group discussions, there was strong evidence to the contrary. Young people are not all the same, and they are not uniformly disengaged: many are frustrated, sceptical and distrustful, but they are also politically alert, active online, and increasingly aware of their constitutional rights. The experience of the 2024 protests appears to have sharpened young people's political awareness, especially around taxation, unemployment, public spending, police violence, accountability, and the idea that politics affects everyday life.

Youth participation is motivated by the desire to remove old or under-performing leaders, achieve meaningful change, protect constitutional rights, and respond to cost-of-living pressures. However, participation is discouraged by recycled candidates, poor vetting, lack of issue-based leaders, perceived stealing of elections, long queues, agent intimidation, weak party trust and the belief that voting may not improve daily life.

They are seriously interested. These guys are yearning for change, that's the truth.
–Nairobi FGD

The evidence also shows a risk of youth capture.

01 >>

Political Actors

Movements started by young people can be taken over by older political actors

02 >>

Mobilisation

Youth mobilisation can also fracture along ethnic lines.

03 >>

Handouts

Handouts can distort youth choices.

04 >>

Digital Platforms

Digital platforms can mobilise but also misinform.

REDI should therefore treat youth as a strategic constituency across the entire electoral cycle, not only as registration targets. Programming should include civic education, digital literacy, candidate vetting, issue-based organising, protection from violence, party engagement and platforms for youth-led accountability.

6.7. Inclusion Barriers Remain Structural

The inclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities and marginalised communities remains central to the credibility and legitimacy of Kenya's elections. While the Constitution and electoral laws provide a strong framework for political rights, equality and representation, these groups continue to face practical barriers including limited campaign financing, weak party inclusion, violence and intimidation, inaccessible electoral processes, documentation challenges and social norms that restrict participation. Strengthening their participation as voters, candidates, party leaders, observers and civic actors is therefore essential to making the 2027 elections more inclusive, representative and trusted.

Women, youth, persons with disabilities, marginalised communities and less-resourced candidates continue to face barriers that are both formal and informal. From the data, financing is a central barrier. Other barriers include party patronage, nomination fees, male-centred party bargains, negotiated democracy, political violence, lack of assistive arrangements, limited voter education, social norms and weak enforcement of inclusion rules.

FGD evidence shows that inclusion also has a practical access dimension: polling station access, assistance for persons with disabilities, separate queues for pregnant women or women with small children, security around polling stations, and support to voters who may be excluded by technology or documentation barriers

“Youths, people with disabilities and women, it's very minimal. First the process itself, they don't have the resources. –Nairobi FGD

The gender dimension is especially clear around nominations and political party structures. Women may be formally eligible but practically disadvantaged by money, violence, male-dominated networks and informal agreements that determine who gets party support.

As a consequence, inclusion programming should focus on both representation and access: party nominations, campaign finance, voter registration, polling station accessibility, women candidate support, facilitation of persons with disabilities, youth participation, and public profiling of credible women and youth leaders.

6.8. Digital Space Is Both a Democratic Opportunity and a Risk Factor

The digital space has become a central arena for Kenya's electoral politics, offering citizens, especially young people, new opportunities for civic education, mobilisation, accountability, real-time reporting and direct engagement with political actors and institutions. At the same time, digital platforms create significant risks, including misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, online harassment, coordinated manipulation, AI-generated content and the rapid amplification of rumours that can undermine trust and inflame tensions. For the 2027 elections, strengthening digital literacy, fact-checking, platform accountability, rights-respecting regulation and timely institutional communication will be essential to harnessing the democratic potential of the digital space while reducing its conflict and integrity risks.

Digital platforms are central to the youth's political engagement. They are used for civic education, protest coordination, local-language explanation, constitutional awareness, mobilisation, fact-checking and political debate. Platforms such as X, TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp and webinars appear prominently in the Gen Z evidence.

Social media posts reduce the incidences because these people are afraid, they think they are being seen. –Kajiado FGD

However, digital space also creates risks: misinformation, parody accounts, impersonation, deep-fakes, AI-generated manipulation, ethnic baiting, online abuse, fake news sites, political bloggers, and rapid spread of unverified claims. Technology-related distrust is not limited to social media; it also extends to electoral technology, voter registers, biometric identification, servers, results transmission, Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and public access to electoral data.

They spread fear, intimidation and misinformation. –Kajiado FGD

The upshot of this is digital programming should combine civic opportunity and risk mitigation. REDI should support digital literacy, trusted explainers, rapid response to misinformation, civic tech partnerships, election technology transparency and youth-led accountability platforms.

6.9. Election Observation Should Be Full-Cycle and Technology-Capable

Election observation is one of the key accountability mechanisms through which citizens, institutions and stakeholders assess whether an electoral process meets constitutional, legal and democratic standards. In Kenya, its relevance extends beyond polling day because electoral credibility is shaped by the quality of preparations, the inclusiveness of participation, the conduct of political actors, the integrity of institutions, the information environment, the use of technology and the handling of disputes across the electoral cycle. A full-cycle and technology-capable observation approach is therefore essential for understanding not only what happens at the ballot box, but also the wider conditions that determine whether elections are credible, peaceful, inclusive and trusted.

There is broad support for election observation, but also strong concern that observation is often too late, underfunded, too concentrated on polling day, and insufficiently technical. A stronger model would cover voter registration, party primaries, campaign conduct, procurement, technology testing, data protection, misinformation, polling, counting, transmission, tallying, dispute resolution, and post-election follow-up.

Technology observation is a major priority. Issues raised by the KIIs and FGDs include register integrity, public inspection of the register, biometric identification failures, alternative identification pathways, power supply, connectivity, latency, server access, public APIs, logs, data protection, procurement transparency and results transmission

Focus on the entire process, and not just during elections. Before, check on the systems and the quality of data, and data protection regulations compliance. The actual date, and after the elections. –KII

FGD evidence shows that citizens want visible transparency: counting at polling stations, real-time transmission, clear registers, functioning systems, strong security and no interference around polling stations.

Based on this REDI should support an observation architecture that is full-cycle, citizen-facing, inclusive, technology-capable, and linked to accountability mechanisms.

6.10. Reform Feasibility is a Strategic Consideration

Electoral reform is not only a technical or legal exercise; it is also a political process shaped by interests, incentives, institutional authority and the distribution of power. In Kenya, the feasibility of any reform depends on whether it aligns with the priorities of key actors, whether it threatens entrenched advantages, whether it can command sufficient institutional and political support, and whether it can be implemented within the electoral calendar. Assessing reform feasibility is therefore essential for distinguishing reforms that are legally desirable from those that are politically achievable, strategically sequenced and capable of producing meaningful change before the 2027 elections.

The evidence suggests that reforms are most feasible where they improve efficiency, preparedness, transparency and inclusion without immediately threatening elite power. These include administrative reforms, voter education, communication, procurement transparency, voter registration improvements, election dispute training, legal research support, technology support, observation coordination and police/ODPP preparedness.

Reforms are likely to face resistance where they affect campaign finance, gender rules, party nominations, party lists, presidential petitions, national tallying arrangements, boundary delimitation, separate election dates or redistribution of political advantage.



*Procurement reforms and introducing reforms that are easier to reform...
The ones that are difficult to reform are where the politicians are involved –KII*



A practical reform strategy should therefore be sequenced. The immediate 2027-facing agenda should focus on operational credibility, trust-building, inclusion, communication, party primaries, election security, dispute readiness and technology transparency. Deeper structural reforms should be framed as a post-2027 agenda. As a matter of programme strategy, REDI should avoid treating all reforms as equally feasible. In other words, looking at reforms through the lens of political feasibility is essential to success





07

CHAPTER SEVEN

Reform Feasibility and Pathways For Change

Chapter Seven examines the feasibility of electoral reforms and the pathways for achieving meaningful change in Kenya's electoral system. It identifies reforms that are politically and practically achievable before the 2027 elections, including inclusive voter registration, support for women and youth participation, strengthened election dispute resolution, technology-capable election observation and greater youth engagement.

The chapter outlines key entry points for reform through institutions such as the IEBC, political parties, ORPP, Judiciary, security agencies, ODPP and citizen observers, while emphasising transparency, accountability, civic education, election technology and full-cycle observation. It also highlights major risks and constraints—including political resistance, weak institutional capacity, limited resources, misinformation, organised violence, trust deficits and resistance to reforms affecting political interests—arguing that successful reform requires realistic sequencing, coalition-building and strategies that address both technical challenges and the political incentives that shape electoral behaviour

CHAPTER SEVEN

7. REFORM FEASIBILITY AND PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

7.1. Politically Feasible Reforms

Programmatically, the path of least resistance is along the lines of politically feasible reforms—especially given the little time between now and the next general election. Determining which reforms are politically feasible requires three tests:

01

Does The Reform Threaten Political Money?

If yes, resistance is likely. Campaign finance is the clearest example

Does The Reform Redistribute Political Opportunity?

If yes, resistance is likely. Gender quotas, women-only zones, nomination reforms and party-list reforms fall here.

02

03

Can The Reform be Framed as Improving Efficiency, Trust or Preparedness Without Threatening Elite Control?

If yes, feasibility improves Administrative reforms, EDR capacity support, voter education, technology transparency and inclusive registration are more viable.

Campaign financing is not going well because it is a cultural issue... This will face resistance from the politicians, and it will be fought.” – KII

REFORM AREA	WHY IT APPEARS FEASIBLE
IEBC administrative efficiency	Improves delivery without directly changing political power arrangements.
Procurement transparency	Can be framed as integrity, value-for-money, and public confidence.
Voter register transparency	Addresses citizen mistrust and can be supported technically.
Voter education	Broadly acceptable and linked to peaceful participation.
Results access and open counting	Strong citizen demand and credibility value.
Technology testing and public demonstration	Builds trust without necessarily changing the legal framework.

Table 2: Feasible Reforms

Administrative And Operational Reforms are The Clearest Feasible Reforms:

There is strong agreement among key informants that administrative reforms are politically easier than structural ones. These include improving election efficiency, operational preparedness, procurement processes, voter education, technology assurance, results transparency and institutional coordination. One KII explicitly identifies “administrative reforms that result in the efficiency of elections” as feasible, while noting that campaign financing and the two-thirds gender rule remain major reform issues. This suggests that REDI can gain traction by supporting practical improvements in how elections are run, especially where these reforms can be framed as improving credibility rather than redistributing power.

Inclusive Voter Registration Is A Feasible and Visible Reform:

Inclusive voter registration appears as a practical reform already under way and capable of generating public confidence. The evidence points to enhanced voter registration, inclusive registration, measures for persons with disabilities and registration of historically marginalised communities as concrete steps. Youth-focused evidence also shows that registration of campaigns such as “tuko kadi” or “niko kadi” can mobilise young people, although such campaigns are vulnerable to political appropriation.

Party-Level Inclusion Reforms are More Feasible Than Broad Constitutional Reform:

The evidence suggests that party-level entry points are more promising than relying only on national-level statutory or constitutional change. Feasible measures include supporting women candidates during nominations, reducing nomination fees, profiling women as serious contenders, and engaging party structures and ORPP.

This is important because the two-thirds gender rule itself is repeatedly described as difficult or stalled, but practical reforms within parties may still be possible.

Election Dispute Resolution Capacity Support Is Feasible:

EDR-related support appears feasible where it strengthens capacity rather than changes politically sensitive rights or timelines. Practical support includes training, conference resources, travel support, ICT equipment, laptops and legal researchers. There is also evidence of active planning around media engagement, public understanding of election dispute settlement, engagement with police and DPP, special magistrates and faster handling of electoral offences. These are credible entry points because they improve institutional readiness and public confidence without necessarily requiring major legal change.

Observation and Technology-Capable Monitoring are Feasible and Important:

Election observation reforms appear feasible if framed around better training, wider coverage, technology capability and coordination. The KIIs propose well-trained observers, a community of practice among citizen observers, impartial reporting, thematic inclusion, sampling methods, crowd-sourced digital observation, access to server information, and collaboration with technical experts. The FGDs strongly support visible transparency: open counting, clear registers, parallel or credible transmission, no unexplained disruptions, technology improvements, backup power and security around polling stations.

Youth Participation Is A Politically Strategic and Feasible Reform Area:

Youth engagement appears both feasibly and strategically necessary. One KII identifies the best entry point as averting governance and security risks is by ensuring young people meaningfully participate in the electoral cycle, keeping them at the centre and making them feel valued. FGD evidence confirms that young people are motivated by the desire to remove old or non-performing leaders and see registration as a means of changing leadership.



“

The most practical path to electoral reform lies in making elections work better—through stronger administration, inclusive registration, party-level inclusion, effective dispute resolution, transparent observation and meaningful youth participation

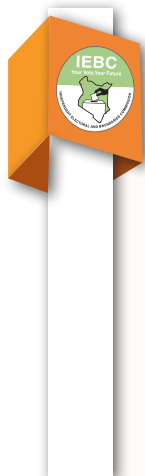
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7.2. Entry Points for Change

From the evidence, possible reform entry points revolve around six themes:

IEBC operational preparedness, transparency and communication:

IEBC is the most obvious institutional entry point, but the evidence suggests that the support should focus on visible credibility measures, not only internal capacity. Entry points include voter registration, voter register integrity, procurement transparency, technology testing, results transmission, enforcement of the code of conduct, and public communication. FGD participants also directly identify IEBC independence, recruitment, open polling-station results, and public access to information as needed reforms.



Practical Entry Points:

- › Public demonstration of election technology
- › Voter register inspection and audit
- › Transparent procurement communication
- › Accessible civic information on election procedures
- › Public dashboards or portals for key election milestones
- › Polling-station-level results transparency
- › Stronger public communication against misinformation

Political Parties, Primaries and ORPP:

Political parties emerge as one of the most important entry points because as many election outcomes are shaped before the polling day. Evidence points to party nominations, party lists, party primaries, zoning, candidate approval and internal party accountability as key areas for reform. The KII evidence identifies political party primaries, party structures and ORPP as realistic points of engagement, particularly for supporting women candidates, reducing nomination barriers and improving candidate seriousness. FGD evidence similarly says political parties should take responsibility for candidates who cause chaos and should reduce the use of goons.



Practical Entry Points:

- › Party nomination rules and dispute mechanisms
- › Party-list transparency
- › Women and youth candidate support
- › Nomination fee reform
- › Party codes of conduct
- › Sanctions against violent candidates
- › ORPP engagement on internal party democracy

Judiciary, PPDT and EDR Mechanisms:

Election dispute resolution is a strong entry point because it directly affects public confidence and post-election stability. The evidence identifies EDR training, ICT support, legal researchers, public education, media summaries, police engagement, DPP engagement and special magistrates as practical areas of support. However, reforms that change appeal pathways or judicial structure may face resistance. Limiting MCA appeals to the High Court, for example, is identified as likely to meet resistance.



Practical Entry Points:

- › EDR curriculum support
- › Legal researchers and ICT equipment
- › Public education on dispute pathways
- › Media summaries of major decisions
- › Ppdt capacity support
- › Coordination with police and DPP on electoral offences

Police, The ODPP and Electoral Offence Enforcement:

Security and enforcement are major entry points because conflict risk is linked to goons, bribery, police conduct, impunity and weak prosecution. The evidence identifies peace-building training, support to police investigations and ODPP engagement as practical reforms. FGDs also highlight the need for police to prevent voter bribery near polling stations and ensure security for marginalised voters.



Practical Entry Points:

- › Election security training
- › Violence incident escalation protocols
- › Police neutrality and human rights training
- › ODPP readiness for electoral offences
- › Rapid investigation of bribery and violence
- › Coordination between IEBC, police, ODPP, observers and CSOS

Citizen Observation, Civic Education and Technology Monitoring:

Election observation is repeatedly identified as an entry point, especially where it becomes full-cycle and technology-capable. Observers should understand mandates, processes, technology, data protection, disinformation and results verification. Another KII emphasises voter registration, audit of the voter register, transmission and monitoring of technology as areas observers should focus on.



Practical Entry Points:

- › Full-cycle domestic observation;
- › Voter register audit;
- › Technology observation;
- › Misinformation monitoring;
- › Crowd-sourced incident reporting;
- › Observer coordination platforms;
- › Public dissemination of observation findings.

Youth and Gen Z Civic Agency:

Youth are an entry point for both democratic renewal and risk prevention. KII evidence stresses that youth participation can reduce governance and security risks if young people are meaningfully included. FGD evidence shows that youth are motivated to “sweep off” old politicians, but also vulnerable to political appropriation of youth-led mobilisation



Practical Entry Points:

- › Youth-led voter education
- › Issue-based candidate vetting
- › Digital literacy and misinformation resilience
- › Youth observer networks
- › Safe spaces for youth political dialogue
- › Protection against mobilisation into goon networks
- › Safe spaces for youth political dialogue
- › Protection against mobilisation into goon networks



7.3. Risks and Constraints

The available data and analysis point to nine possible risks and constraints.

Political Resistance From Parliament, Aspirants and Political Elites:

The clearest constraint is political resistance where reforms affect money, nominations, declarations, gender inclusion or political discretion. The evidence notes that Parliament and aspirants are likely to block declarations around campaign finance, even if simplified. Campaign finance is repeatedly identified as highly resistant because it is tied to political culture, budgets, sources of money and politician interests. One KII states that campaign financing “will face resistance from the politicians, and it will be fought.” Another says politics and money are closely tied and campaign financing is “quite an uphill task.”

Reforms Involving Politicians are Harder Than Administrative Reforms:

A key political economy finding is that reforms become harder once they touch politicians directly. Procurement and IEBC managerial reforms are described as easier, while “the ones that are difficult to reform are where the politicians are involved.” This means reforms involving campaign finance, party nominations, zoning, tallying architecture, party lists or gender quotas will need careful sequencing, coalition-building and political negotiation.

Campaign Finance and Vote Buying Distort Both Reform and Voter Behaviour:

The FGDs show that campaign money is not an abstract reform issue; it directly shapes citizen behaviour, mobilisation and conflict. Participants describe elections as associated with campaign money, fighting after money distribution, and voter bribery near polling centres. This creates a major reform constraint: citizens may condemn vote buying but still participate in it because of economic pressure, while politicians rely on it as part of electoral mobilisation.

Gender and Inclusion Reforms Face Structural Resistance:

The two-thirds gender agenda is repeatedly identified as difficult. One KII argues that there is limited goodwill, including among elected women, and that political energy may go toward creating new elite offices rather than inclusion reforms.



Electoral reform faces a tough road: political resistance, money, weak capacity, low trust, insecurity and misinformation can all undermine progress toward credible and inclusive elections.



Another KII notes that reforms such as zoning areas for women and campaign financing would be resisted, while support to women candidates is more feasible at the party level.

Time Constraints Limit Major Structural Reforms Before 2027:

Some reforms are seen as important but not achievable within the 2027 timeline. Separate election dates are described as not doable for 2027, and boundary demarcation is constrained by the timeline. Similarly, more ambitious ideas such as separating presidential elections from other contests or eliminating the national tallying centre may be politically or legally difficult in the short term.

Institutional Capacity and Resource Constraints:

Resource constraints appear across institutions. The electoral management body faces funding, procurement, HR, system and communication challenges. The judiciary faces resource constraints, technology needs, a shortage of legal researchers, workload pressure and costs associated with moving judges across jurisdictions. These constraints matter because under-resourced institutions are more vulnerable to delays, mistrust, misinformation and political interpretation of administrative failures.

Trust Deficits May Reduce Reform Credibility:

Reforms may fail if citizens do not believe institutions are independent. FGD participants repeatedly call for IEBC independence, credible recruitment, open counting, and results declared at polling stations. Low trust also affects technology. Citizens want better technology, but mistrust officials and fear manipulation, while KIIs warn that technology itself is not always transparent or trusted.

Security, Goons and Political Violence Can Undermine Reform:

Reform implementation can be disrupted by violence, intimidation and organised goon activity. KII evidence identifies security-sector partisanship, goons, youth vulnerability and political beneficiaries of instability. FGD participants similarly point to parties using goons, stampedes, shop closures, voter bribery and the need for police to act around polling centres.

Misinformation and Media Misreporting Can Destabilise Reform:

Misinformation, AI-generated content, parallel tallying narratives and sensational reporting are all identified as risks. Judicial evidence identifies media misreporting, parallel tallying and social media attacks on judicial officers as threats to independence and confidence. FGD evidence also notes that AI-generated content can mislead voters and influence perceptions.



08 CHAPTER EIGHT

Implications For The Redi Programme

Chapter Eight outlines the implications of the Political Economy Analysis for the REDI Programme, translating the study's findings into practical priorities for strengthening Kenya's electoral process ahead of the 2027 elections. It recommends focusing on feasible interventions that build trust, transparency, inclusion, preparedness and accountability, particularly by strengthening IEBC operational readiness and public communication, improving voter registration and register integrity, increasing transparency around electoral technology and results management, supporting full-cycle and technology-capable election observation, promoting meaningful youth and Gen Z participation, strengthening political party processes and inclusion, improving election security and dispute resolution, addressing misinformation and digital risks, and incrementally tackling campaign finance and vote buying.

The chapter also emphasises the importance of coordinated stakeholder engagement to build trust, identify risks early and secure support for realistic reforms, alongside flexible and adaptive programming supported by continuous research, learning, early-warning systems and a live electoral risk register

CHAPTER EIGHT

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REDI PROGRAMME

8.1. REDI's Theory of Change

The findings confirm that REDI is working on the right problem: Kenya's electoral challenges persist despite repeated legal and institutional reforms because the deeper political economy of elections has not changed sufficiently. The PEA evidence points to weak enforcement, elite bargains, patronage, winner-takes-all competition, low trust, exclusion, technology mistrust, and the influence of informal actors as continuing constraints. This supports the basic REDI logic that credible elections require work across cohesion, institutions, citizen participation, media, observation, and learning.

However, the findings also show that the ToC needs sharpening. It should not imply that strengthening institutions, mobilising citizens, engaging media, and supporting observation will automatically lead to peaceful and credible elections. These interventions will only work if they are designed to confront the incentives and informal practices that currently undermine formal rules. Here is what this means for each of the pathways:

1. National and Social Stability Pathway:

This is valid, but must be full-cycle: The evidence strongly supports the ToC's focus on national and social stability. FGDs describe elections as associated with money, tribalism, hatred, intimidation, manipulation and, in some places, direct violence. In Uasin Gishu, participants linked elections to tribal tension, campaign money, hatred before and after elections, targeted bloggers, voter apathy, and localised violence. This validates the ToC's concern with preventing violence and resolving disputes, but it also suggests that REDI should frame stability as a full electoral-cycle concern, not only as an election-day or post-results issue. The PEA notes that conflict risk emerges during voter registration, campaigns, party primaries, technology deployment, tallying, petitions, protests and post-election bargaining.

Therefore, the ToC is valid, but the EWER and cohesion pathway should explicitly cover early warning, early response, dispute prevention, rumour management, local mediation, digital triggers, and pre-election violence.

2. Institutional Strengthening Pathway: Valid, But Formal Capacity Is Not Enough:

The institutional pathway is also validated. KIs show that institutions such as the Judiciary are preparing early, reviewing legal frameworks, training magistrates, improving election dispute resolution systems, using e-filing, and planning stakeholder engagement with IEBC, ORPP, LSK, media and citizens. But the same evidence also shows why institutional strengthening must go beyond training and systems. The interviews identify budget constraints, disobedience of court orders, weak synergy, stakeholder apathy, media misreporting, pressure on judicial officers and social media attacks as serious risks. Weak implementation of laws, non-compliance with court rulings, poor enforcement by IEBC, violence and bribery in by-elections, weak political party institutionalisation, and barriers facing women, youth and persons with disabilities are also mentioned.

As a result, the institutional pathway in the Theory of Change is valid, but should include a stronger assumption: institutions will only deliver credible elections if capacity strengthening is matched by independence, incentives, enforcement, political protection, adequate resources and public accountability.

3. Citizen Participation Pathway: Strongly Valid, But Participation Is Politically Mediated:

The FGDs strongly validate REDI's citizen mobilisation pathway. Citizens, especially youth and Gen Z, are not simply apathetic. They are politically alert, angry, digitally active, and motivated by the desire to remove poor performers or "sweep off" old politicians. In Uasin Gishu, participants linked voter registration to the "Tuko Kadi/Niko Kadi" mobilisation and described Gen Z as potentially influential if they register and turn out. At the same time, participation is constrained by poverty, bribery, disillusionment, fear of manipulation, failed promises and distrust in vote transmission. Some participants described taking voter cards for instrumental benefits such as bursaries or money, while others said they were demotivated by leaders becoming worse than those they replaced or by doubts about the integrity of voter registration and results. Women, youth and persons with disabilities are disadvantaged by financing barriers and are less able to compete effectively as candidates.

The implication is that the ToC is valid, but citizen mobilisation should not be treated as generic civic education. It should target the actual barriers identified: ID access, voter registration, campaign finance barriers, candidate protection, voter bribery, misinformation, women's participation, the inclusion of persons with disabilities, youth political agency and confidence in the value of voting.

4. Media, Human Rights Monitoring and Observation Pathway:

Valid, but needs expansion to cover digital accountability: The findings validate the ToC's pathway on media and observation, but they also show that it should be broadened. Participants repeatedly described media and social media as sources of information, accountability, early warning and protection.

In Kajiado, social media was described as helping people know where violence was happening, reducing risk by exposing goons and police conduct, and enabling real-time reporting. But the same evidence shows that the digital space is also a risk factor. raised concerns about misinformation, rumours, propaganda, AI-generated content, manipulated information and differing levels of digital literacy. In Uasin Gishu, participants discussed the possibility of Gen Z using AI to influence older voters, while participants in Murang'a acknowledged exposure to misinformation and uneven ability to distinguish fake from real content. The observation pathway is also validated but needs reframing. The PEA notes that election observation is necessary but insufficient, and that observation should not only validate or question results but help deter malpractice during the process. It also highlights the need to broaden observation expertise to include ICT, communication, risk management and digital disinformation.

The upshot is that the ToC should explicitly include digital monitoring, misinformation response, AI/disinformation literacy, social media accountability, human rights documentation, and observation of electoral technology, procurement, transmission and tallying.

5. Research, Learning and Adaptation Pathway:

Not optional – it is the operating system: The findings strongly validate the ToC's cross-cutting emphasis on research, learning and adaptation. The political context keeps shifting elite pacts shift, informal actors adapt, technology mistrust evolves, Gen Z mobilisation is dynamic, and conflict risks vary by locality and stage of the electoral cycle. The PEA itself was designed to test REDI's assumptions, identify blockages, map power relations, and recommend politically informed and adaptive programming. Ultimately, research, learning and adaptation should be elevated from a support function to the central mechanism that keeps REDI politically relevant. The programme should continuously test whether its assumptions are holding, whether actors' incentives are changing, where risks are emerging, and whether interventions are producing unintended effects.



“REDI's success will depend not only on strengthening institutions and participation, but on addressing the political incentives and informal practices that continue to undermine Kenya's electoral system”

8.2. Priority Areas for Interventions

Based on the above, support could prioritise at least ten practical interventions focused on the 2027 elections, aimed at strengthening trust, transparency, inclusion, preparedness and accountability, rather than ambitious structural reforms that are unlikely to be completed or politically accepted before the next election.

8.2.1. IEBC Operational Preparedness, Transparency and Public Communication

This is the highest-priority intervention area. Respondents almost always identified IEBC as the central battleground for credibility, with concerns around trust, voter registration, procurement, technology, results management, enforcement, communication and operational capacity. The evidence also points to funding gaps, human resource gaps at constituency and county levels, procurement timelines, voter education constraints, and the need to communicate clearly with citizens, media, CSOs and other stakeholders.



Suggested Interventions:

Support IEBC public communication, election milestone dashboards, voter education, transparent procurement updates, public explanations of technology, county-level preparedness, stakeholder engagement, and rapid response to misinformation



Citizens legislative conference for public discourse

8.2.2. Voter Register Integrity and Inclusive Voter Registration

Credible elections depend heavily on confidence in the register. Evidence points to the need for inclusive voter registration, equitable access for young people, persons with disabilities and marginalised communities, and easier access to identity documentation. Voter registration is also one of the few areas where citizen mobilisation, institutional action and reform feasibility align.



Suggested Interventions:

Support voter register audit/inspection, public education on registration, youth registration campaigns, PWD-inclusive registration, marginalised community outreach, and transparency around ID and registration bottlenecks.

8.2.3. Election Technology Transparency and Results Management

Technology is both a trust-builder and a trust-risk. Respondents highlighted concerns around KIEMS performance, technology procurement, data protection, register access, server information, public APIs, connectivity, alternative power, biometric failure, transmission and the relationship between electronic and manual processes.



Suggested Interventions:

Support IEBC public communication, election milestone dashboards, voter education, transparent procurement updates, public explanations of technology, county-level preparedness, stakeholder engagement, and rapid response to misinformation

8.2.4. Full-Cycle, Technology-Capable Election Observation

Observation should not be limited to polling day. Respondents called for trained observers who understand institutions, mandates, electoral processes, technology, data, disinformation and inclusion. They also called for citizen observer communities of practice, sampling methods, crowd-sourced observation, technical experts, access to technology platforms, and stronger dissemination of findings.



Suggested Interventions:

Fund domestic observation, build a tech-observation workstream, train observers on electoral technology and misinformation, support observer coordination platforms, use sampling to manage funding gaps, and ensure reports are publicised and followed up.

8.2.5. Youth and Gen Z Civic Engagement

Youth are both a democratic opportunity and a conflict-risk constituency. There Evidence from key informant interviews and focus group discussions shows young people are politically alert, economically frustrated, digitally online, and increasingly central to mobilisation ahead of 2027.



Suggested Interventions:



Support youth-led civic education, issue-based candidate vetting, digital literacy, youth observer networks, safe dialogue platforms, youth participation in party processes, and protection against mobilisation into violence

8.2.6. Political Party Primaries, ORPP Engagement and Inclusion Reforms

Many election outcomes are shaped before election day, through party primaries, party lists, nomination fees, zoning, patronage and internal deals. Respondents suggested that reform at party level may be more achievable than broad constitutional reform, especially for the inclusion of women, youth and persons with disabilities. Support for women candidates, fairer nomination fees, serious public profiling of women candidates, and engagement with party structures and the ORPP are identified as realistic entry points.



Suggested Interventions:

Support party nomination transparency, party-list accountability, women and youth candidate support, ORPP engagement, internal party dispute resolution, sanctions for violent aspirants, and inclusive nomination

8.2.7. Election Security, Peace building and Accountability for Electoral Offences

Security is a credibility issue, not only a logistics issue. Respondents identified goons, police conduct, political violence, hate speech, ethnic clustering, handout-related fights, intimidation, impunity and weak prosecution as major risks. They also point to the need to engage police, ODPP, civil society and election actors to prevent mass arrests, investigate offences and deter perpetrators.



Suggested Interventions:

Support election security training, police neutrality and human rights training, electoral offence investigation, ODPP preparedness, violence incident referral pathways, peace messaging, and hotspot-specific early warning

8.2.8. Election Dispute Resolution Preparedness

Dispute resolution will be central to credibility. Respondents pointed to the need for training judicial officers, support for the EDR curriculum, ICT equipment, legal researchers, e-filing, transcription support, public education on how disputes are resolved, media summaries, and stronger coordination with police and prosecutors.



Suggested Interventions:

Support EDR training, PPDT capacity, legal researchers, ICT tools, public-facing dispute information, media engagement, court communication, and rapid handling of electoral offences

8.2.9. Digital Information Integrity and Misinformation Response

Respondents identified misinformation, fake news, AI, deep-fakes, fake websites, bloggers, social media attacks, competing narratives about tallying, and incitement as major risks. Digital space also offers opportunities for civic education, mobilisation, observation and accountability.



Suggested Interventions:

Support fact-checking networks, rapid rebuttal systems, digital literacy, trusted youth explainers, election misinformation monitoring, social media listening, and coordination between IEBC, media, CSOs and tech actors.

8.2.10. Campaign Finance, Vote Buying and Political Money – But Incrementally

Campaign finance is a high-impact but high-resistance reform area. There is evidence that campaign financing, vote buying and political money distort voter choice, fuel conflict and unfairly favour wealthy candidates. However, the evidence also shows this area is politically difficult, because politicians, aspirants and financiers are likely to resist reform.



Suggested Interventions:

Begin with simpler and more feasible actions: public education on vote buying, disclosure of funding sources, illegal-source screening, campaign finance monitoring, party-level commitments, and documentation of handout-related violence

8.3. Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

The purpose of stakeholder engagement is built, coordination, shared ownership and accountability required to support credible, peaceful and inclusive elections. It provides a structured way to align electoral actors, identify risks early, build consensus around feasible reforms, and ensure that citizens, institutions and political actors are meaningfully involved across the electoral cycle.

For REDI, stakeholder engagement should serve six practical purposes:

01

Build Trust and Legitimacy

Build confidence that election processes are transparent, inclusive, fair and responsive to public concerns.

02

Align Actors Around Shared Electoral Priorities

Help institutions, political actors, CSOs, observers, media, youth, women, persons with disabilities, and communities understand their roles, responsibilities and expectations across the electoral cycle.

03

Identify Risks Early

Surface emerging risks around voter registration, party primaries, campaign conduct, misinformation, security, technology, results management and dispute resolution before they escalate.

04

Create Coordination and Referral Pathways

Ensure that institutions and civic actors know how to escalate issues such as violence, hate speech, voter bribery, misinformation, exclusion or electoral offences.

05

Secure Buy-In for Feasible Reforms

Build support for reforms that are politically and operationally realistic, especially around transparency, voter education, technology assurance, party nominations, inclusion, observation and dispute resolution.

06

Strengthen Accountability

Make it harder for actors to ignore rules, manipulate processes, spread misinformation, sponsor violence or exclude vulnerable groups without scrutiny.



8.4. Risk Management and Adaptive Programming

For REDI to succeed in the challenging context in which it will be implemented, it requires effective risk management as well as flexible and adaptive programming. This can be achieved through the measures we suggest below.

1. Establish a Live Electoral Risk Register

REDI should maintain a regularly updated risk register covering political, institutional, security, operational, digital, reputational and safeguarding risks. It should not be a static annex to a work plan. It should be reviewed at least monthly, and more frequently during high-risk periods such as party primaries, voter registration, campaigns, polling, tallying and dispute resolution. It should detect risks early, interpret them politically, and adjust interventions quickly.



RISK CATEGORY	DEFINITION IN THE REDI ELECTORAL CONTEXT	EXAMPLES OF RISKS TO MONITOR
Contextual Risks	Risks arising from the broader political, social, economic, security and institutional environment in which REDI operates. These are largely outside the direct control of the programme but can significantly affect credible, peaceful and inclusive elections.	Electoral violence; elite resistance to reform; political polarisation; ethnic mobilisation; youth unrest; cost-of-living pressures; misinformation and disinformation; police conduct; public mistrust in electoral institutions; disputed results; court-order non-compliance; shrinking civic space; intimidation of candidates, observers or activists.
Programmatic Risks	Risks that REDI's interventions do not achieve their intended outcomes, are poorly targeted, are captured by political interests, or unintentionally contribute to harm. These relate to the design, implementation, adaptation and effectiveness of programme activities.	Weak uptake of voter education; limited influence on reforms; exclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities or marginalised groups; activities perceived as partisan; stakeholder engagement becoming symbolic rather than substantive; observation findings not acted upon; youth engagement being co-opted by political actors; technology-support activities failing to build public trust; insufficient adaptation to emerging electoral risks.
Institutional Risks	Risks affecting the institutions and partners responsible for delivering or supporting the programme, including governance, fiduciary, operational, safeguarding, reputational and compliance risks.	Weak partner capacity; delayed implementation; poor coordination among partners; fiduciary or procurement weaknesses; reputational exposure from association with contested actors; data protection failures; safeguarding risks for participants; inadequate

Embassy of Sweden RISK	DEFINITION IN THE REDI ELECTORAL CONTEXT	EXAMPLES OF RISKS TO MONITOR
		documentation; weak monitoring and learning systems; staff security risks; insufficient internal controls; donor compliance failures. support activities failing to build public trust; insufficient adaptation to emerging electoral risks.

Table 3: Electoral Risk Register

The evidence shows that risks are already visible across these areas: funding gaps, technology concerns, misinformation, weak enforcement, youth mobilisation, political violence and low trust in electoral institutions all recur across the KIIs and FGDs.

2. Create a Risk Monitoring and Early Warning Mechanism

REDI should develop a simple early warning system that gathers signals from partners, observers, youth networks, media monitors, county actors and digital platforms. The system should track both national and county-level risks. Useful indicators include:

- › Inflammatory political rhetoric;
- › Ethnic mobilisation;
- › Goon activity;
- › Sudden or heavy security deployment;
- › Campaign handout-related conflict;
- › Disputes over party nominations;
- › Misinformation spikes;
- › Attacks on electoral institutions;
- › Voter registration barriers;
- › Technology failure rumours;
- › Exclusion of women, youth or pwds;
- › Violence around rallies or polling centres.

The FGD evidence is particularly useful here because it shows the kinds of early warning signs citizens recognise: police escalation, goons, ethnic clustering, unequal campaign money distribution, violence after perceived rigging and intimidation around electoral activity.

Build adaptive decision points into the work plan

The programme should not lock itself into a rigid annual plan. It should identify pre-agreed adaptation points where activities can be revised based on changes in the context.

Recommended adaptation points include the following:

ELECTORAL PHASE	ADAPTIVE DECISION QUESTION
Voter Registration	Are youth, persons with disabilities or marginalised groups being excluded?
Party Primaries	Are nomination disputes, violence or exclusion risks increasing?
Technology Testing	Are public concerns emerging around KIEMS, register access or transmission?
Polling and Tallying	Are transparency, security or communication risks escalating?
EDR phase	Are disputes being communicated clearly and peacefully managed?

3. Use Scenario Planning

REDI should develop a small set of electoral scenarios and update them periodically. This helps the programme anticipate different political trajectories rather than reacting late.

Three useful scenarios would be:

01	Managed credibility scenario: Institutions communicate well, risks are contained, voter registration improves, and disputes remain manageable
02	Contested credibility scenario: Trust remains low, misinformation rises, technology is questioned, and party primaries or results management become flashpoints.
03	Escalating conflict scenario: Youth mobilisation, security responses, elite rhetoric, goons, ethnic framing and disputed results produce instability both localised and national.

Each scenario should have pre-agreed programme responses, such as shifting resources to peace messaging, misinformation response, legal support, observer coordination, youth dialogue or institutional communication.

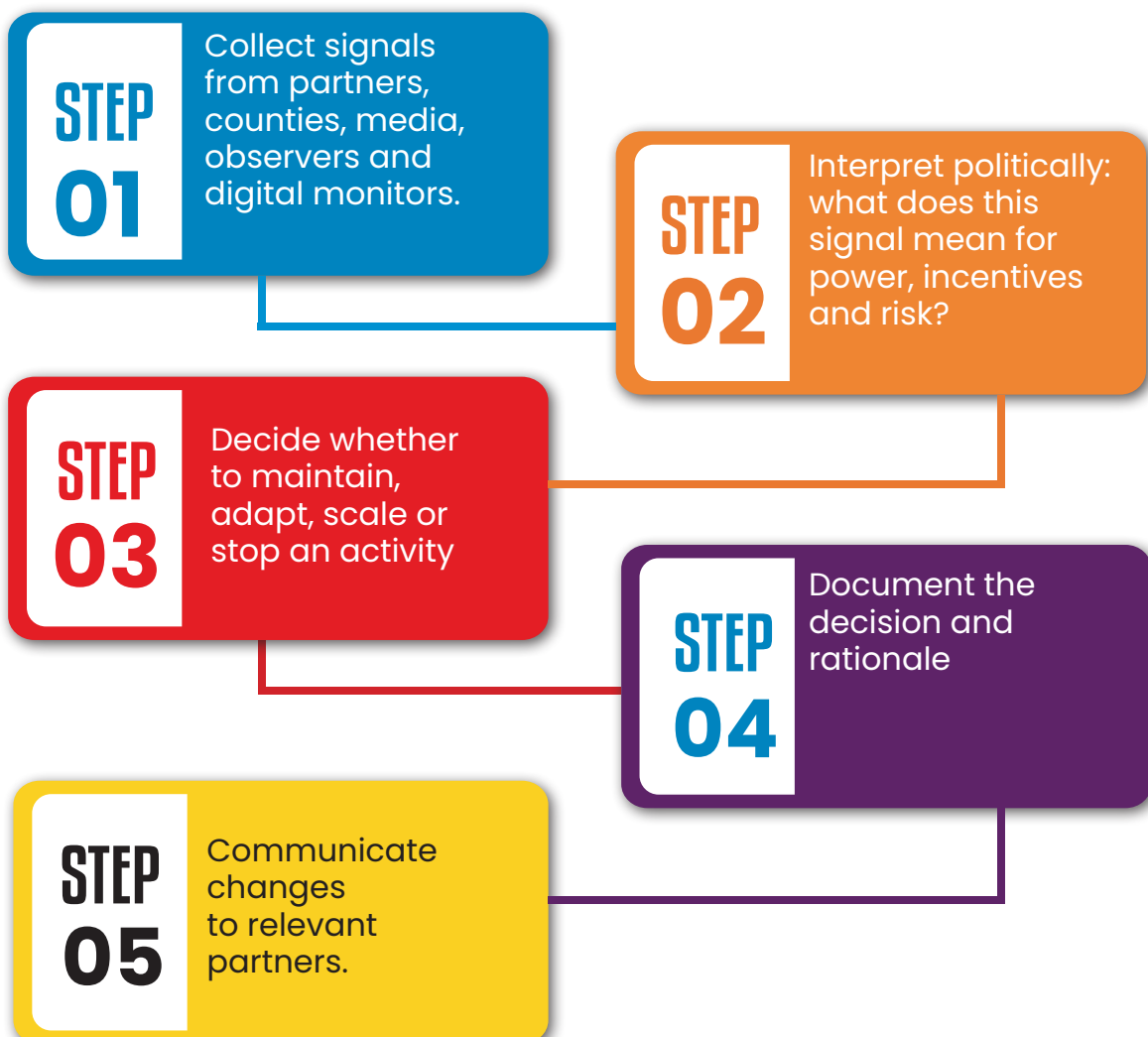
4. Strengthen Political Economy Analysis as a Continuous Function

The PEA should not end with this report. REDI should keep updating its political economy analysis throughout the election cycle, particularly around actors, incentives, blockers to reform, institutional shifts and emerging deals.

The evidence shows that reforms are politically realistic where they improve efficiency and transparency, but much harder where they touch political money, party control, campaign finance, gender rules or elite discretion. This means REDI needs continuous analysis of who benefits, who loses, who can block, and who can enable change.

5. Create a Rapid Learning and Adaptation Cycle

REDI should institutionalise short, regular learning cycles. These can be light but disciplined. A practical model would be:



This can be done through monthly adaptive management meetings, with weekly check-ins during high-risk periods.

6. Develop County-Level Risk Profiles

National level analysis is not enough. Risks differ by county and locality. REDI should prepare county risk profiles for priority areas, covering:

- › History of electoral violence
- › Dominant political actors
- › Party nomination risks
- › Youth mobilisation patterns
- › Ethnic or community tensions
- › Security actor behaviour
- › Local misinformation channels
- › Participation barriers for women and persons with disabilities;
- › Observer coverage gaps
- › Trusted local intermediaries

This will help avoid a generic national programme and allow interventions to be tailored to actual hotspots and constituencies.

7. Build Flexible Funding and Rapid-Response Capacity

Adaptive programming requires some unallocated or flexible funding. REDI should maintain a modest rapid response window for urgent interventions such as:

- › Misinformation response
- › Emergency peace dialogues
- › Legal or technical support to observers
- › Targeted voter education
- › Support for women or youth candidates facing intimidation
- › County-level mediation
- › Rapid public communication materials
- › Incident documentation

Without flexible resources, the programme may identify risks but lack the ability to respond.

8. Clarify Escalation and Accountability Pathways

Risk management should specify what happens when a risk is detected. For example:

Risk detected	Escalation pathway
Electoral violence	Local monitors → peace actors → police/NCIC/ODPP/IEBC
Misinformation	Digital monitors → fact-checkers → IEBC/media response
Party nomination violence	Observers/CSOs → ORPP/IEBC/security actors
Exclusion of persons with disabilities	Local monitors → IEBC inclusion desk → disability organisations
Technology concern	Tech observers → IEBC/ODPC/public clarification
Electoral offence	Monitors → police/ODPP/IEBC enforcement mechanism

Table 4: Escalation and accountability pathways

This matter because the evidence repeatedly shows that weak enforcement and impunity undermine credibility.

9. Protect Neutrality and Manage Reputational Risk

Because election-related programming is politically sensitive, REDI must manage perceptions carefully. Risk management should include safeguards against being seen as partisan, captured by elites, or engaging unevenly. Practical measures include:

- › Transparent criteria for selecting partners and counties;
- › Balanced engagement across political actors;
- › Clear rules on conflicts of interest;
- › Documented decision-making;
- › Public-facing neutrality statements;
- › Careful branding of politically sensitive activities;
- › Safeguarding protocols for youth, women, persons with disabilities and community informants.

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