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Fostering Civic Engagement: Predictors of Youth Engagement in Electoral Processes in Kenya

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The background of the page features a large, semi-transparent image of a crowd of people with their arms raised, suggesting a concert or a public gathering. The image is rendered in a light, ethereal style with a color gradient from purple to yellow. A solid yellow horizontal bar is positioned below the disclaimer text.

Disclaimer

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Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CVM	Civic Voluntarism Model
CWMNA	County Women Member of National Assembly
EU	European Union
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ID	Identification Card
IEBC	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MCA	Member of County Assembly
MNA	Member of National Assembly
NYS	National Youth Service
ORPP	Office of the Registrar of Political Parties
TPB	Theory of Planned Behavior
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Abstract

In Kenya, youth constitute approximately 66.7% of the voting-age population, yet they remain significantly underrepresented in electoral processes. In the 2022 General Elections, only 39.8% of registered voters were aged 18-35, a drop of nearly 5% from the last elections. This study assessed the predictors of youth engagement in electoral processes in Kenya using a mixed-methods design, combining surveys of 1,075 youth across seven counties with key informant interviews involving chiefs, religious leaders, and civil society actors. The findings reveal that socio-economic status strongly shapes participation. Self-employed (23.7%), formally employed (23.6%), and students in tertiary institutions (22.4%) reported higher levels of civic engagement than unemployed (16.5%) youth and those working in the informal-sector (13.7%). Although education levels were high (50.3% tertiary and 21.5% postgraduate), education alone did not significantly influence voting intentions. Instead, psychological efficacy emerged as more decisive, with 64% of youth affirming that understanding the voting process strengthened belief in the importance of voting and 32% linking belief in the power of their vote to turnout intentions. Institutional trust among youths remains fragile, with only 9% expressing confidence in the IEBC, political parties, and the Police, and 17% in the Judiciary. Despite the investment in civic education programs by the European Union and other development partners, 47.6% of respondents in the informal sector and 50.3% of students in higher learning institutions reported having not received any civic education. The influence of the Gen-Z protests was also notable, as 49.1% of youths reported they were more politically active following the protests. However, 48.2% reported experiencing physical assault, 51% online threats, and 32.4% sexual violence during political processes; while 47% faced delays in acquiring national identification cards. Despite these challenges, 83% of youths intend to vote in the 2027 General Elections. Taken together, the study advances a predictive model of youth civic engagement shaped by four determinants: psychological efficacy, socio-economic status, institutional trust, and civic education. It concludes that Kenyan youth are redefining participation through both electoral and alternative civic channels. It therefore calls on Parliament to reform the Electoral Act to institutionalize continuous voter registration and civic education, and for development partners including the EU to expand localized civic education and digital democracy initiatives. Restoring trust and opportunity will enable Kenyan youth to become central architects of an inclusive and accountable democracy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Globally, there are over 1.8 billion youth aged between 15 and 35 years, representing nearly a quarter of the world’s population (United Nations, 2025). Nowhere is this demographic transformation more pronounced than in Africa, where over 60% of the population is below the age of 25 years (UN DESA, 2022). This demographic shift has coincided with young people participating in movements agitating for change at an unprecedented scale. They are mobilizing both in the streets and through digital platforms, leveraging social networks and online communities to amplify their voices, forge solidarity, and press for transformative political and socio-economic reforms. Their activism spans resistance to authoritarian rule, protests against corruption and widening inequality, and collective demands for employment opportunities and improved macroeconomic conditions. Scholars argue that this movement provides a unique moment to harness a “demographic dividend” and a looming risk of democratic instability if the aspirations of youth remain unmet (World Bank, 2025; Resnick & Casale, 2014).

In Kenya, over 75% of the population is below the age of 35 years (KNBS, 2023). Youths of voting age (primarily between 18-35 years), constitute 36% of the population, making it the second largest demographic group, after adolescents. When taking into account the voting-age population (18 years and above), youths make up over 66.7% of potential voters. Despite their numerical strength, Kenyan youth remain significantly underrepresented and disengaged from electoral processes. Data on electoral participation from the IEBC reveals a steady decline in youth participation. In the 2017 General Elections, youths accounted for 44.7% of registered voters, yet this proportion fell to 39.84% in the 2022 General Elections (IEBC, 2022).

According to a survey conducted by Afrobarometer, only 48% of Kenyan youth expressed interest in public affairs, with as many as 35% reporting never discussing politics at all (Afrobarometer, 2016). The results of this pattern are that few youths are represented in key political positions. In the 2022 General Elections, only 17 youth (out of a total of 364 elective positions) were elected in both the Senate and the National Assembly. Just one youth (out of 47) was elected as Governor, signaling a big gap that prevents the interests of youths being accounted for in decision-making processes.

Elective Position	2017 General Elections			2022 General Elections		
	Men	Women	Youth	Men	Women	Youth
President	1	0	0	1	0	0
Deputy President	1	0	0	1	0	0
Governor	44	3	1	40	7	1
Senator	44	3	6	44	3	4
CWMNA	0	47	3	0	47	5
MNA	267	23	17	260	30	8
MCA	1,334	96	287	1,336	114	317

Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Elected Positions in Kenya’s Last Two General Elections (IEBC, 2022)

The factors driving low youth engagement are structural and institutional. High youth unemployment and underemployment remain critical predictors of low civic engagement. The World Bank (2025) reports that youth unemployment stood at 12% in 2023, with nearly 62% of graduates unable to find employment one year after completing their studies (Government of Kenya, 2023). When youths lack stable socio-economic conditions, it can erode political trust and discourage civic participation, with many of them perceiving elections as elite rituals disconnected from their lived realities (Resnick, 2014).

Political gatekeeping within Kenya's multiparty system further limits youth engagement. Intra-party democracy remains weak, with nominations often characterized by patronage to the party leader and the highest bidder (Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis, 2021). Recent studies in counties such as Homa Bay and Mandera reveal that party primaries are frequently violent, exclusionary, and prohibitively expensive, disadvantaging young aspirants who lack resources and elite connections (Odanga, 2018; Hassan & Minja, 2024). Moreover, political aspirants have been documented to use youth to foment violence against their opponents. Such dynamics reinforce a cycle in which the role of youths is restricted to being mobilized as foot soldiers to create chaos and violence rather than holding a seat at the decision-making table.

Despite these barriers, youths have tried to find ways to beat the system. The recent Gen-Z protests against the controversial Finance Bill in June 2024, organized primarily through online platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, marked a watershed moment in Kenya's history. These leaderless, decentralized movements mobilized millions of youths across ethnic, economic class, and geography lines on the internet, generating over 500 million and 25 million interactions on TikTok and X respectively (Nendo, 2024). However, the state responded with excessive force. According to the state-funded Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, police officers killed at least 63 persons, injured a further 610 others, and abducted 87 during the protests in 2024 (KNHCR, 2024). This duality of vibrant digital activism on one hand and state repression on the other raises serious questions about how youth perceive legitimacy, state institutions, politics, and the value of civic engagement.

Kenya has robust policy frameworks that affirm youth inclusion. The 2010 constitution defines youth as 'The collectivity of all individuals in the Republic who have attained the age of 18 years but have not attained the age of 35 years (KLCR, 2010). Article 38 of the Constitution guarantees universal suffrage, while the Kenya Youth Development Policy of 2019 outlines comprehensive strategies for youth empowerment. The Political Parties Act of 2011 obliges all registered political parties to ensure "the composition of its governing body reflects regional and ethnic diversity, gender balance, and representation of special interest groups", including women, persons with disabilities, youth, and ethnic minorities. (Section 7c). The Act also requires parties to submit

disaggregated data of their membership based on each of the components of the special interest groups to the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties. However, subsequent amendments to the Act in 2022 failed to fully enshrine youth representation by establishing mandatory quotas.

The cumulative effect of these dynamics is a legitimacy deficit that could derail Kenya's democratic aspirations. The paradox of a country where three in four citizens are youths, yet fewer than two in five registered voters are youth is unsustainable. Persistent exclusion risks perpetuating cycles of apathy that could lead to violence. As the country prepares for the 2027 General Elections, it is vital to address the gap why a demographic majority remains an electoral democratic minority, and what interventions can reverse this trajectory.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Kenya's youth bulge is yet to translate into meaningful political inclusion or robust democratic participation. Despite youths constituting 66.7% of the voting age population, their participation in electoral processes has declined alarmingly across the last two electoral cycles. In the 2022 General Elections, the number of registered young voters fell by 5% (IEBC, 2022). This paradox of a youthful majority in population but a shrinking minority in the electorate poses significant questions on the legitimacy of Kenya's electoral processes.

Youth engagement is influenced by multiple structural and institutional barriers, key being socio-economic marginalization. Due to high unemployment and challenging economic conditions, many young Kenyans perceive politics as irrelevant to their daily struggles (Afrobarometer, 2016). Surveys reveal that 62% of recent graduates remain unemployed a year after leaving university (Government of Kenya, 2023) and more than 65% of youth believe that political leaders are disconnected from their realities (Afrobarometer, 2022). Previous government programs such as Ajira Digital, Hustler Fund, and Kazi Kwa Vijana have failed to create suitable economic conditions for youths to flourish as they did not address structural barriers such as high taxation, non-merit allocation of employment opportunities, harassment by county officials, and limited access to capital.

Institutional barriers further restrict civic engagement. Access to national identification cards remains fraught with bureaucratic delays and discrimination. According to the 2024 FinAccess Household Survey, about 2.3 million Kenyan adults (18+) do not have an ID, and a striking 80.5% of them are between 18 and 25 years old (Central Bank of Kenya, 2024). This means that nearly 1.9 million youths are left without one of the most fundamental tools for registering as a voter and formal participation in the economy. This situation disproportionately affects youths in urban informal settlements, pastoralist communities, and historically marginalized border regions. Even among those who successfully register to vote, the IEBC has struggled to sustain consistent outreach and voter education. Moreover, polling stations in rural areas are often located far away from key population centers, limiting the ability of registered voters to exercise their civic rights.

To further compound these barriers, political parties in Kenya continue to ostracize youth from their governance structures. Nomination processes remain highly monetized, opaque, and dominated by political elites, with costs of getting a party ticket to vie for a Member of Parliament (MP) seat reaching 20 million Kenyan shillings (Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis, 2021). Such financial and structural barriers continue to exclude young aspirants. Party primaries are frequently marred by violence and voter manipulation, often targeting youthful candidates who lack protective patronage networks (Odanga, 2018). As a result, despite constitutional provisions mandating inclusivity, youth representation in the Parliament and County Assemblies has consistently remained below 20% (inclusive of nominated seats), with many young aspiring leaders relegated to symbolic roles as foot soldiers (IEBC, 2022).

In recent years, civic education programs largely funded by the EU have played a crucial role in shaping democratic attitudes among youth and stimulating voter registration in Kenya (EU Election Observation Mission, 2022). Between 2018 and 2022, UNDP Kenya, with financial support from the EU, implemented extensive voter and civic education initiatives in collaboration with the IEBC. These efforts contributed to a notable increase in registered voters during the 2022 General Elections, from 19,611,423 in 2017 to 22,120,140 in 2022. The number of female registered voters also rose from 9.4 million (47%) in 2017 to 10,865,560 (49.1%) in 2022 (UNDP, 2023). Although civic education initiatives have helped expand voter registration, their efficacy has been limited as some of these strategies lacked interactivity to sufficiently build civic knowledge and capabilities (InfoTrack, 2024). Uraia (2024) cites participation of youth in civic education initiatives has been low at 34% when compared to that of older persons (46%).

While the Gen-Z protests of June 2024 have offered hope of a reawakening of youth civic consciousness outside formal institutions, it has also underscored a crisis of legitimacy. Youth are willing to engage politically, but they are increasingly doing so in extra-institutional ways, bypassing political parties and electoral processes altogether. The violent repression that followed, including the documented cases of police killings, arbitrary detentions, and abductions, has elevated mistrust. Instead of strengthening democratic engagement, the heavy-handed state response risks further alienating youth from traditional political processes and reinforcing perceptions that the 2027 General Elections will be “rigged”. Unless addressed, this disconnect threatens not only the inclusivity of upcoming elections but also the long-term stability and legitimacy of Kenya’s democracy.

This study therefore seeks to investigate the socio-economic, institutional, and psychological determinants of youth civic engagement in Kenya, while also examining the role of the emerging digital activism and state repression in shaping civic behavior. In doing so, it generates evidence-based strategies for fostering inclusive civic engagement, and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to assess the predictors of youth engagement in electoral processes in Kenya. Other objectives include:

- i. To identify socio-economic, institutional, and psychological factors influencing youth civic engagement in Kenya.
- ii. To assess the impact of civic education, policy frameworks, and political trust on youth engagement in electoral processes in Kenya.
- iii. To evaluate the influence of recent Gen-Z protests and political violence on youth political behavior, voter attitudes, and perceptions of governance institutions and democratic accountability in Kenya.

1.4 Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- i. What socio-economic factors influence youth engagement in electoral processes in Kenya?
- ii. How do institutional barriers such as access to national identification cards and distance to polling stations affect youth participation in electoral processes in Kenya?
- iii. What psychological factors influence youth participation in electoral processes in Kenya?
- iv. To what extent does exposure to civic education influence youth understanding of and participation in electoral processes?
- v. How have recent Gen-Z protests shaped youth perceptions of politics, democratic processes, and governance institutions in Kenya?
- vi. What effect has the state responses to the protests, including police brutality and abductions, had on youth trust in institutions?

1.6 Scope and Limitations

This study examines youth civic and electoral engagement in Kenya, focusing on the predictors of participation in voter registration, turnout, and related democratic processes. Its scope is both thematic and geographical, designed to capture the diversity of Kenya's youth while maintaining methodological rigor. Thematically, the study explores socio-economic factors (unemployment, income, and education levels); institutional barriers (access to national identification cards, distance to polling stations); and psychological and behavioral dimensions (trust in political parties and institutions, efficacy of civic education, and fear of state repression). It also interrogates the implications of the Gen-Z protests as emerging forms of civic engagement reshaping electoral attitudes. Additionally, the analysis explicitly integrates gender and disability inclusion, recognizing that young women and persons with disabilities (PWDs) face unique structural and cultural barriers to participation in electoral processes.

Geographically, the study covers seven counties – Nairobi, Kisumu, Nakuru, Kilifi, Mandera, Meru, and West Pokot – purposively selected to represent Kenya’s political, economic, and social diversity. These counties also exhibited divergent voter turnout patterns in the 2022 General Elections, with West Pokot recording the second-highest turnout at 79% and Kilifi the second-lowest at 49% (IEBC, 2022). The unit of analysis is youth aged 18-35 years, consistent with Article 260 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and the African Youth Charter, ensuring policy alignment and comparability with existing demographic data.

Despite its breadth, the study acknowledges certain limitations. Given the political sensitivity of the research, some respondents may have withheld information due to fear of reprisal, particularly when discussing state violence or institutional mistrust. To mitigate response bias, enumerators were trained in confidentiality and trauma-sensitive interviewing, responses were fully anonymized, and interviews were conducted in neutral community spaces to ensure safety and openness. Lastly, the limited financial resources available for this study significantly constrained the research team’s ability to expand sampling across all sub-counties within the selected regions.

2. The History of Youth Civic Engagement in Kenya

2.1 Introduction

Understanding the modern-day forms of youth civic engagement in Kenya requires an appreciation of the historical events that have shaped politics in the country. Youth involvement in political processes has never been static; rather, it has been shaped by shifting socio-political contexts, from the pre-colonial governance structures that restricted native Africans from participating in politics, colonial resistance movements, the authoritarian post-independence stages under President Kenyatta and Moi, to the later reintroduction of multiparty democracy in 1991 and the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

2.2 Pre-colonial Political Engagement

Before the advent of British colonial rule in Kenya, political participation was deeply embedded in community-based governance structures that were largely participatory and consensus-driven. Among many communities, political authority was vested in councils of elders like the *Kiama* among the Gikuyu, or the *Ruoth* among the Luo, which served as decision-making bodies on issues of justice, land use, security, and interclan relations (Ogot & Ochieng, 1995; Berman, 2010).

While youth were typically excluded from these formal elder councils, they played significant political roles through the age set systems and warriorship. Among the Maasai, the *ilmurran* (warrior age-set) performed military, policing, and community defense roles, while also influencing negotiations between clans (Spear, 1993). Similarly, initiation rites across many ethnic groups prepared young men and women for active roles in society, often embedding expectations

of civic responsibility. Thus, although pre-colonial governance was generally gerontocratic, it incorporated structured pathways for youths to gradually assume power as they age; creating norms of collective decision-making and civic obligations that were later upended by colonial rule.

2.3 Role of Youth in Resistance to Colonial Rule and Nationalist Movements

The imposition of British colonial rule in 1895 fundamentally reconfigured political participation and governance in Kenya, introducing economic dispossession, authoritarian rule, and exclusions based on race and color. Colonial authorities restricted African political representation, while implementing coercive taxation, land alienation through the 1902 and 1915 Crown Lands Ordinances, and forced labor policies (Anderson, 2005). Youths were disproportionately affected as colonial land policies disposed smallholders and compelled many young men into wage labor in settler farms, mines, and urban centers.

This marginalization fueled youth radicalization and their central role in resistance. During the Mau Mau uprising (1952-1960), youth constituted the majority of fighters in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), mobilizing around grievances of land dispossession and political exclusion (Branch, 2009). The colonial state labeled them “terrorists” and “unruly”, yet their activism was pivotal in challenging colonial authority. Women youth also played critical roles as couriers, mobilizers, and food suppliers, though their contributions were often erased in official narratives (Kanogo, 1987).

2.4 Post-Independence: Authoritarian Rule and the Single-Party Era (1963-1992)

The euphoria of independence in 1963 initially promised expanded political space for youth across all ethnicities. However, Kenya’s post-independence trajectory quickly shifted toward authoritarianism, with youth mobilization increasingly subordinated to state control. Under the leadership of President Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978), and later Daniel Moi (1978-2002), the state consolidated power through Kenya African National Union, which by 1982 was legally entrenched as the sole political party.

In this context, youth participation became institutionalized primarily through state-led structures such as the National Youth Service and KANU youth wings. While the NYS, established in 1964, was envisioned as a vehicle for skills training and national service, it was increasingly used for political indoctrination and surveillance of KANU regime’s opponents (Branch, 2011). The KANU Youth Wing, similarly operated as a quasi-paramilitary force, often mobilized to intimidate opposition voices, enforce party loyalty, and suppress dissent (Ajulu, 1998).

At the same time, youth-led activism persisted in universities and trade unions, albeit under heavy repression. University student movements, such as the University of Nairobi Student Organization

(SONU), frequently clashed with the Moi government over issues of governance, corruption, and academic fees. These confrontations reflected the broader paradox of the single-party state. While youth were rhetorically celebrated as “the leaders of tomorrow”, their political actions were criminalized and violently suppressed (Mutunga, 1999).

2.5 The Multi-Party Era (1992-2007)

The reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1991, following intense domestic and international pressure, marked a watershed moment in Kenya’s democratic journey. The repeal of the controversial Section 2A of the Constitution opened the door for political pluralism, creating opportunities for youth to engage through multiple political parties, civil society organizations, and grassroots movements.

However, this period also exposed the vulnerability of youth to voter manipulation and ethnic divisions. Political parties frequently deployed unemployed youth as campaign foot soldiers, mobilizers, and, at times, perpetrators of electoral violence (Kagwanja, 2006). The 1992 and 1997 General Elections were marred by ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley and Coast regions, where youth were mobilized to sow ethnic tensions and violence.

2.6 Post-2007 Constitutional Reforms

The 2007-2008 Post-Election Violence (PEV), which left over 1,200 people dead and displaced more than 600,000 (CIPEV, 2008), marked a turning point in Kenya’s statehood. Youth were at the center of this crisis, both as perpetrators, mobilized by key political figures along ethnic lines, and as victims, bearing the brunt of police brutality, displacement, gang violence, sexual abuse, and economic loss. The crisis revealed the fragility of Kenya’s democratic institutions and the ease with which political elites could exploit youth grievances.

In the aftermath of the violence, sweeping reforms as suggested by the Kriegler Commission report, culminated in the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, widely regarded as one of the most progressive in Africa. The new Constitution institutionalized youth inclusion by affirming universal suffrage (Article 38), mandating the state to promote youth participation in governance (Article 55), introducing proportional youth representation in the National Assembly and Senate (Article 100), and requiring political parties to ensure fair representation of youth, women, and persons with disabilities (Article 91). Affirmative action was also entrenched through the two-thirds gender rule and established quotas for marginalized groups.

While the 2010 Constitution created unprecedented opportunities for democratic inclusion, the translation of policy commitments into practice has lagged behind. Youth representation in Parliament and County Assemblies remains far below the envisioned thresholds across all three electoral cycles under this new dispensation. In the 2022 General Elections, only one Governor (out of 47), 4 Senators (out of 47), and 8 Members of National Assembly (out of 270) elected were below the age of 35, despite youth constituting 39.84% of the electorate (IEBC, 2022).

2.7 The Gen-Z Protests and Digital Activism

The 2022 General Elections crystallized emerging shifts in youth civic engagement. Despite youth constituting 66.7% of Kenya’s electorate (KNBS, 2023), only 39.84% of registered voters were aged 18-35, a sharp decline of nearly 5% from the previous elections in 2017 (IEBC, 2022). Yet just two years later, the country witnessed a historic moment as hundreds of thousands of young people poured to the streets in opposition to the controversial Finance Bill.

Unlike traditional electoral mobilizations that are often rooted in ethnic or partisan identities, the 2024 protests were leaderless, decentralized, and digitally coordinated. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X served as primary nodes for recruitment, coordination, and framing, generating an estimated 530 million online interactions in the first month alone (Nendo, 2024).

Distinctive features of these protests highlight the evolution of digital activism in Africa. First, the rapid diffusion of memes, short-form video explainers, and livestreams accelerated narrative alignment and civic literacy, transforming content creators into “micro-influencers” of political awareness. Second, decentralized logistics enabled micro-donations via mobile money, open-source legal aid, and medical support, sustaining the protests without reliance on formal organizational hierarchies. Third, digital activism translated into sustained offline mobilization, including street protests, boycotts, and sit-ins, challenging the notion of digital engagement as “clicktivism” or “slacktivism” (Gladwell, 2010). Instead, the Kenyan case aligns with Tufekci’s (2017) argument that digital affordances reduce coordination costs and facilitate high-risk activism.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Youth engagement in electoral processes has emerged as a critical dimension of democratic growth in Africa, and across the world. A growing body of scholarship emphasizes that young people are not merely passive observers of politics but are increasingly central to trends of democratic participation, state legitimacy, and social stability (Norris, 2011; Henn & Foard, 2014). However, despite constituting the largest demographic group in Africa, with over 65% of the population under the age of 25 years (UN DESA, 2022), youth remain disproportionately disengaged from formal political processes such as voter registration, party membership, and electoral turnout (Afrobarometer, 2022).

In Kenya, youth have been told for a long time that they are “*the leaders of tomorrow.*” But the paradox of a “youth bulge without a democratic dividend” persists. The youth share of registered voters declined to 39.8% in the 2022 General Elections, with low turnout figures recorded (IEBC, 2022). This raises questions about the underlying predictors of youth engagement, including socio-

economic marginalization, institutional mistrust, exposure to violence, and the emergence of digital activism.

3.2 Theoretical Review

Political participation is a multi-dimensional behavior influenced by both individual agency and environmental contexts. To capture this complexity, this study is anchored in two complementary frameworks: the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba et al., 1995). Together, these theories bridge psychological, structural, and institutional determinants of electoral engagement.

3.2.1 Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

The Theory of Planned Behavior is a socio-psychological model that explains how attitudes and perceptions shape individual decision-making. It states that behavior is primarily predicted by intention, which is in turn influenced by three determinants:

- i. Attitudes toward the behavior – the degree to which a person has favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior. For example, whether voting is perceived as meaningful or futile.
- ii. Subjective norms – the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior. For example, whether peers, family, or community leaders encourage voter participation.
- iii. Perceived behavioral control – the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, akin to self-efficacy.

When amplified to electoral participation, this theory suggests that young people are more likely to register and vote if:

- i. They believe their vote matters in shaping governance outcomes (attitudes);
- ii. They perceive that significant others expect them to participate (norms);
- iii. They feel capable of navigating the logistical and institutional barriers to participation (control).

Empirical evidence supports these mechanisms in Kenya, and the wider sub-Saharan Africa region. Bratton (2013) found that perceived institutional efficacy strongly predicted turnout in Afrobarometer surveys, while Akuamoah (2020) showed that citizens who trusted electoral bodies and believed their vote counted were significantly more likely to participate in elections. On the other hand, weaker institutional trust and high perception levels of corruption coincided with lower participation.

In Kenya, the difficulties in obtaining national identification cards undermine perceived behavioral control. About 41% of Kenyans do not have the required identification or are excluded from acquiring it, thereby excluding them from the process of voter registration (InfoTrack, 2024).

Mistrust in the IEBC, with only 36% of Kenyans expressing confidence in 2022 (Afrobarometer, 2022) further reduces perceived efficacy. These dynamics align with the Theory of Planned Behavior’s prediction that intention to vote weakens when efficiency and control are undermined.

Importantly, this theory also accounts for non-participation. Abstention, disengagement, or opting into alternative forms of activism such as protests and boycotts can also be understood as rational behavioral outcomes shaped by attitudes, norms, and control (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011). Thus, the theory is relevant not only for analyzing turnout but also for explaining why Kenyan youths are increasingly turning to street protests to raise their demands.

3.2.2 Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba et al., 1995)

The Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) complements the Theory of Planned Behavior by emphasizing structural determinants of participation. Verba et al. (1995) argues that people fail to participate in political processes not because they are disinterested, but because they often:

- i. Can’t (lack resources such as time, money or skills);
- ii. Don’t want to (low political interests or confidence in the candidates and electoral process);
- iii. Nobody asked (absence of mobilization or civic education).

For Kenyan youth, CVM resonates strongly. High youth unemployment and underemployment hamper the ability to actively engage in electoral processes. Limited civic education outreach, with only 39% of youth reporting exposure to structured civic education (Uraia, 2024), depresses civic skills. Recruitment into political parties is also weak. Only 28% of youth believe the current parties represent their interests (Afrobarometer, 2016), and the Oslo Center (2025) found that youth make up just 36% of party memberships.

However, digital networks are emerging as new recruitment channels (Bennett & Segerberg, 2023). The 2024 Gen-Z protests demonstrated how peer-to-peer mobilization via TikTok, X, Instagram, and WhatsApp has replaced formal party structures, echoing the “nobody asked” problem identified by this theory. CVM thus explains both youth exclusion from formal channels and their emergence in alternative, digital activism.

3.3. Conceptual Framework

Building on TPB and CVM, the conceptual framework guiding this study links predictors, mechanisms, and outcomes in youth electoral participation.

Predictors	Mechanisms	Outcomes
Socio-economic status - Income levels - Education levels - Employment status	Perceived efficacy: belief that one’s participation matters	Voter registration: proportion of youth successfully registered

- Residence in urban/rural areas		
Institutional access and trust - Ease of obtaining ID cards - Confidence in IEBC - Trust in political parties and institutions	Social norms: pressure or encouragement from peers, family, or networks	Voter turnout: proportion of registered youth who cast ballots
Civic education exposure - Participation in formal or informal civic education programs	Perceived behavioral control	Peaceful participation: involvement in rallies, campaigns, and civic activities
Digital activism - Access to internet - Social media engagement	Sense of logistical feasibility; ID acquisition and access to polling stations	Protest behavior: participation in demonstrations or digital activism
Psychological engagement - Political interest - Sense of civic duty - Political efficiency	Fear of repression: deterrent effects of violence and state harassment	Institutional trust: attitudes toward state legitimacy and electoral institutions

Table 2. Conceptual Framework

This framework is deliberately dynamic as predictors interact through mechanisms to shape diverse outcomes. For instance, socio-economic status may erode efficacy, leading to abstention; while digital activism may reshape social norms, producing protest movements despite state repression. By empirically testing these relationships through mixed-methods data, this study contributes to a predictive model of youth civic engagement tailored to Kenya’s current political environment.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in seven purposively selected counties in Kenya: Nairobi, Kisumu, Kilifi, Mandera, Meru, Nakuru, and West Pokot. These counties were chosen to reflect the country’s socio-economic and political diversity, as well as varying patterns of youth voter turnout in the 2022 elections. Nairobi, as the capital city, represents urban youths with a large middle class. Kisumu represents the lakeside region, and an opposition stronghold for decades. Kilifi captures coastal and historically marginalized communities. Meru embodies the Mount Kenya region. Nakuru as a multi-ethnic Rift Valley hub reflects the complexity of Kenya’s politics. Mandera

represents the borderland communities and the Northern Frontier region. West Pokot captures rural, pastoralist, and conflict-prone contexts.

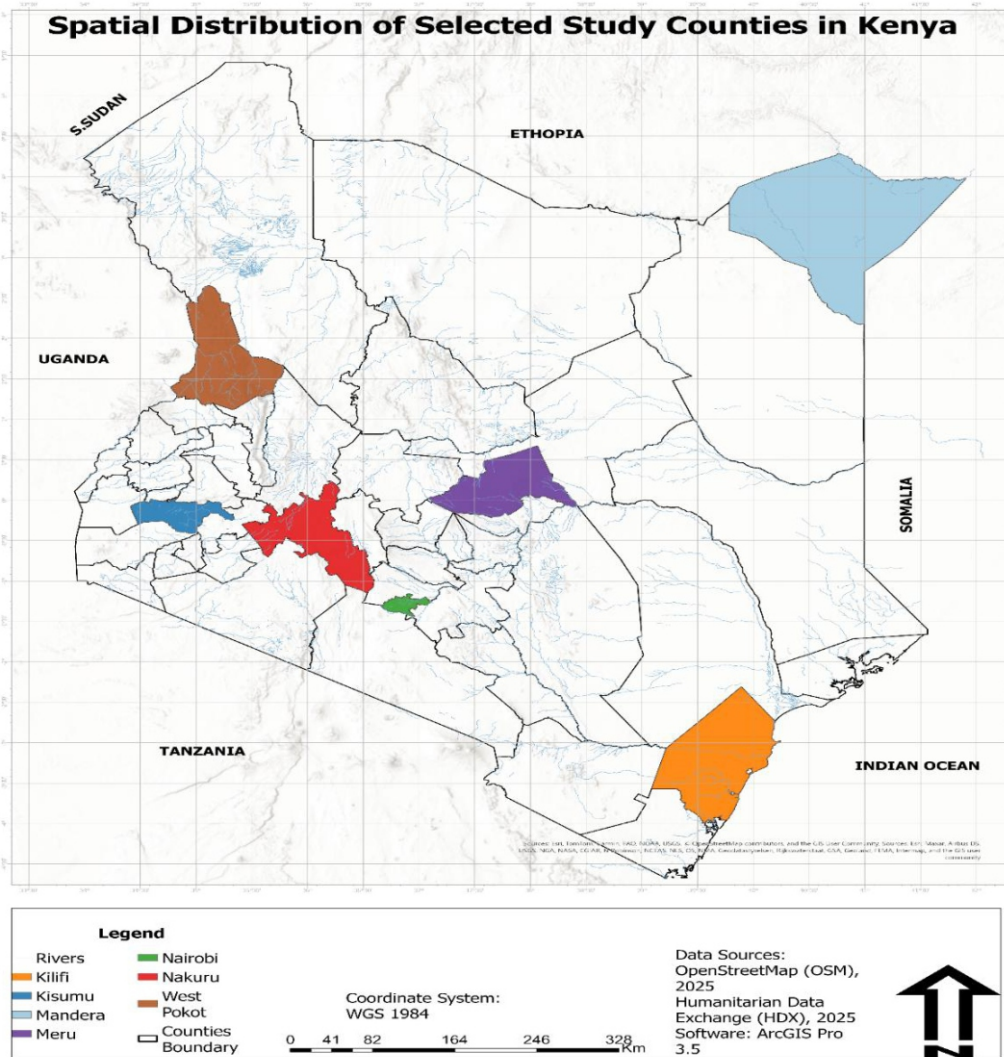


Fig 1. Spatial Map of the Study Area

Study County	% Voter Turnout in the 2022 General Elections	Nationwide Rank (/47)
Nairobi	56%	43
Nakuru	66%	24
Meru	66%	24
Kilifi	49%	46
Kisumu	71%	10
West Pokot	79%	2
Mandera	63%	33

Table 3. Percentage Voter Turnout in the Select Study Counties (IEBC, 2022)

4.2 Research Design

A sequential mixed-methods design was adopted for this study, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. This methodology was chosen to measure the extent of youth civic engagement while also unpacking the socio-economic, institutional, and psychological barriers that shape participation.

Quantitative data from household surveys was complemented by qualitative insights from key informant interviews (KIIs). This dual approach allowed for statistical inference and correlation, while also capturing lived experiences and social interpretations.

4.2.1 Quantitative Household Surveys

A total of 1,075 respondents (youth aged 18-35) were surveyed across seven counties using a multi-stage stratified sampling design to ensure representativeness, logistical feasibility, and statistical reliability. Using the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, county-level youth population data (18–35 years) was extracted for all the seven counties. The proportional allocation method was then applied to distribute the 1,075 target respondents across the seven counties according to each county’s share of the total youth population (see Table 4).

County	Youth Population (according to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census)	Proportion of Total Youth Population in the Study Area	Sample Allocation
Nairobi	1,671,889	37.7%	258
Nakuru	756,771	17.1%	210
Kilifi	523,363	11.8%	131
Meru	494,628	11.2%	127
Kisumu	404,451	9.1%	107
Mandera	346,983	7.8%	105
West Pokot	236,072	5.3%	125
TOTAL	4,434,157	100%	1075

Table 4. Sample Allocation of Respondents Per County.

Narrowing to each county, the study adopted a design where three constituencies were randomly selected for the data collection exercise. What informed this approach is the analysis of the 2022 General Elections data from the IEBC that demonstrates that within each county, voter turnout rates across constituencies were broadly consistent, clustering around the county average with only marginal variations. For instance, in Nairobi County, overall turnout stood at 57%, with most constituencies recording turnout levels within a narrow band of ± 2 percentage points (Table 5). This pattern suggests that intra-county variation in voter turnout in Kenya is relatively low, reducing the statistical benefit of attempting to sample every constituency.

Additionally, this decision is consistent with various sampling theories. Stratified sampling efficiency (Kish, 1994) emphasizes that when within-stratum variance is low such as when

constituencies within a county have similar turnout rates, fewer clusters are required to generate reliable stratum-level estimates. The multi-stage cluster sampling theory (Cochran, 1977) similarly supports limiting the number of primary sampling units where intra-class correlation is modest, thereby balancing representativeness with logistical feasibility.

Constituency	Number of Registered Voters	Votes Cast	Turnout (%)
Westlands	186,688	106,132	56.8%
Kibra	179,180	101,756	56.8%
Embakasi South	166,460	95,202	57.2%
Dagoretti North	167,740	95,840	57.1%
Starehe	206,229	117,958	57.2%

Table 5. Voter Turnout in Select Constituencies in Nairobi County in the 2022 General Elections (IEBC, 2022)

Within each selected enumerated area, households were chosen using systematic random sampling on a pre-determined route. In each selected household, one eligible youth respondent (18–35 years) was randomly selected using the Kish grid method where multiple eligible youths were present. This process ensured that the survey sample was representative at the county and constituency level, while also reflecting Kenya’s spatial distribution of youth populations

4.2.2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

To complement the quantitative data, key informant interviews were conducted with:

- i. Three local administration officials (chiefs) to capture institutional perspectives.
- ii. Two religious leaders given their influence in shaping civic norms.
- iii. Five human rights activists and CSO representatives to capture advocacy perspectives.

4.3 Data Management and Analysis

All quantitative and qualitative data were systematically managed to ensure accuracy, consistency, and security throughout the research process. The quantitative survey responses were collected on KoboToolbox, which enabled real-time data capture and encrypted transmission to a secure cloud server. The data was later cleaned and coded in Microsoft Excel and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize key variable, while inferential techniques including binary logistic regression and correlation analysis were applied to identify predictors of youth participation in electoral processes. Qualitative data from KIIs was triangulated with the quantitative results to enhance interpretation and validity.

4.4 Quality Assurance

Multiple measures were adopted to ensure data quality at every stage of the study. The research instruments were piloted in Kiambu County to test clarity, flow, and reliability, after which revisions were made based on feedback. All research assistants underwent an intensive training

covering research ethics, digital data collection, and respondent engagement. The research assistants were provided with enumerator evaluation forms that they were required to fill after the conclusion of the exercise. Built-in validation checks in KoboToolbox prevented missing values and out-of-range entries, while random spot verifications and back-checks were carried out on 10% of the sample. Upon conclusion of the exercise, data cleaning was done prior to analysis to guarantee integrity of the findings.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to participation, with explanations provided on the study’s purpose, voluntary nature, and the right to withdraw at any time. No personal identifiers were collected, instead, unique numeric codes were assigned to preserve anonymity. Responses were stored in password-protected servers accessible only to the research team. Sensitive questions on political repression and violence were handled with empathy, and participants were assured of confidentiality and non-attribution in all reports. The study also integrated do-no-harm principles, ensuring that participation posed no physical, psychological, or reputational risk to respondents.

5. Results and Findings

5.1 Sex Demographics

The sample of respondents was evenly balanced, with males constituting 52%, females 44%, and 4% preferring not to disclose their sex identity, as shown in Figure 2 below. This fairly even distribution allows for meaningful comparisons and testing to be conducted on whether gender is a social and structural factor that shapes access, power, and participation among youths in Kenya.

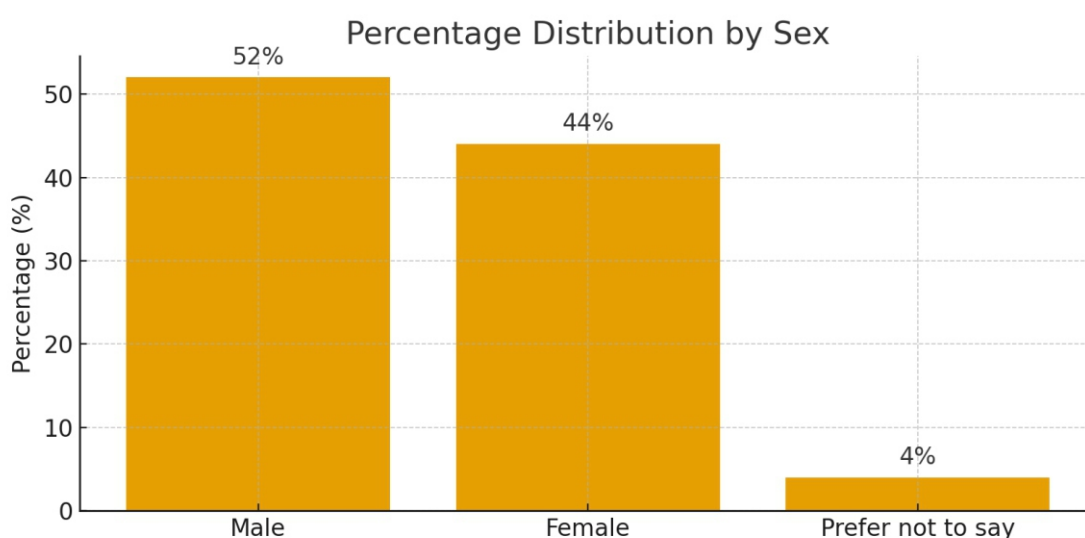


Fig 2. Sex Distribution of Study Participants

5.1.1 Gender Variations in Experiences of Violence

Figure 3 illustrates the gender-disaggregated distribution of respondents reporting experiences of sexual violence, physical assault, and online threats during electoral processes. Among female respondents, 34.7% reported experiencing sexual violence, 44.4% reported physical assault, and 52.1% reported receiving online threats. Male respondents reported slightly lower exposure to sexual violence (29.7%) but higher exposure to physical assault (48.0%), along with a marginally lower prevalence of online threats (49.5%) compared to females. Respondents who preferred not to disclose their gender reported the highest levels across all categories — 50.0% for sexual violence, 66.7% for physical assault, and 63.6% for online threats — indicating a potentially heightened vulnerability within this group.

These patterns reveal significant gender variation in experiences of violence: females report disproportionately higher rates of sexual violence and online threats, males report greater exposure to physical assault, and non-disclosing respondents appear to face elevated risk across all forms. This data highlights the importance of gender-responsive prevention strategies and more research into the experiences and vulnerabilities of individuals who choose not to reveal their gender.

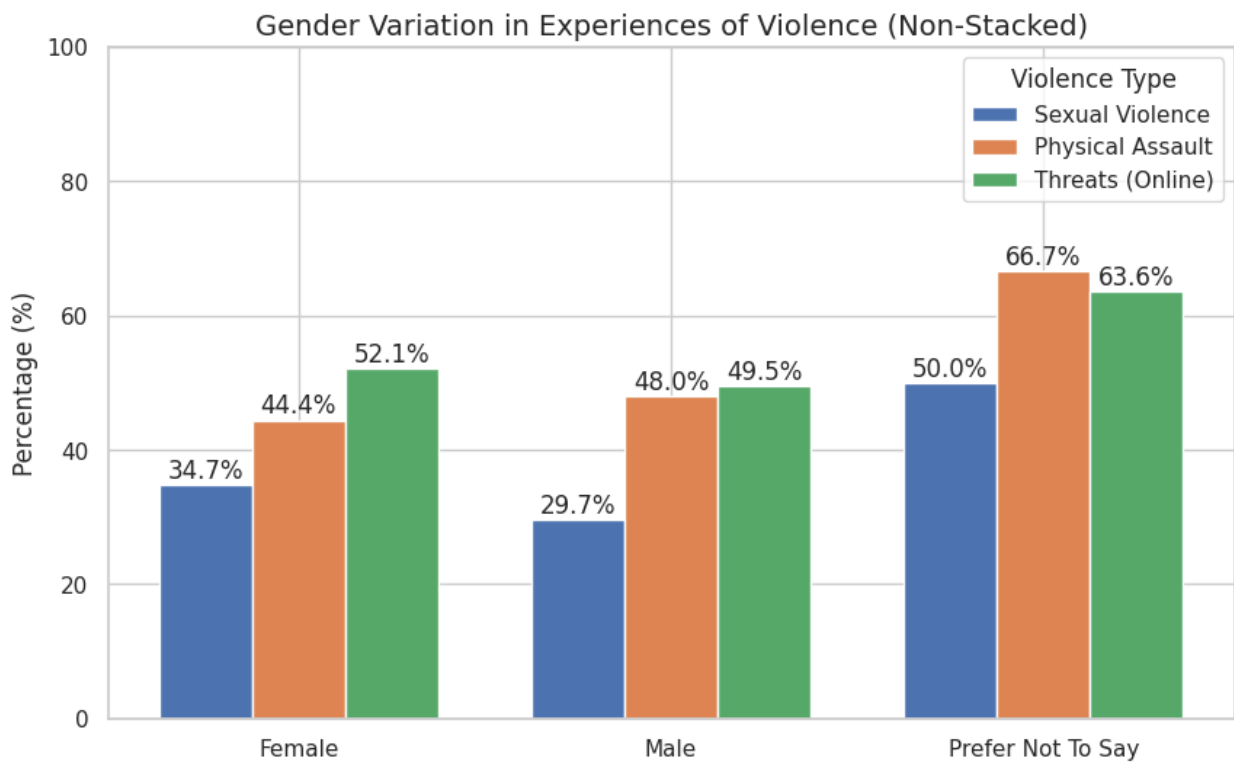


Fig 3. Gender Variation in Experiences of Violence

5.1.2 Gender Variations in Voting Intentions

The analysis of voting intention in the 2027 General Elections in the figure below shows notable variation across gender lines. Among males, 85.53% intend to vote, 4.84% do not, and 9.63% are unsure. Females display a slightly lower commitment, with 81.78% planning to vote, 5.94% not voting, and 12.38% undecided. Finally, those who prefer not to disclose gender have 55%

intending to vote, 28% not, and 17% unsure. Overall, while the majority in all groups intend to vote, there is a consistent portion of uncertainty and non-participation.

Insights from the KIIs with human rights officials reveal deeper gendered dynamics that help explain the quantitative trends observed in the survey data. Participants noted that many young women expressed heightened fear and reluctance to engage in electoral processes following the violence that unfolded during the Gen-Z protests. Officials recounted documented cases of women being sexually assaulted, harassed, or beaten by security officers during the demonstrations, and emphasized that the absence of accountability for these violations has further eroded women’s trust in state institutions.

These qualitative accounts illuminate barriers that the survey alone cannot capture: the psychological impact of state violence, the gendered nature of insecurity in public spaces, and the power asymmetries that leave young women feeling unprotected and excluded from political participation. As one official noted, **“when the system does not safeguard women’s dignity, participation becomes a personal risk rather than a democratic right.”**

Taken together, the KIIs suggest that unless these structural and gendered vulnerabilities are addressed, meaningful inclusion in Kenya’s electoral processes will remain out of reach for many young women. Persistent fear and mistrust may contribute to declining turnout in future elections, reinforcing patterns of political marginalization already visible in the quantitative data.

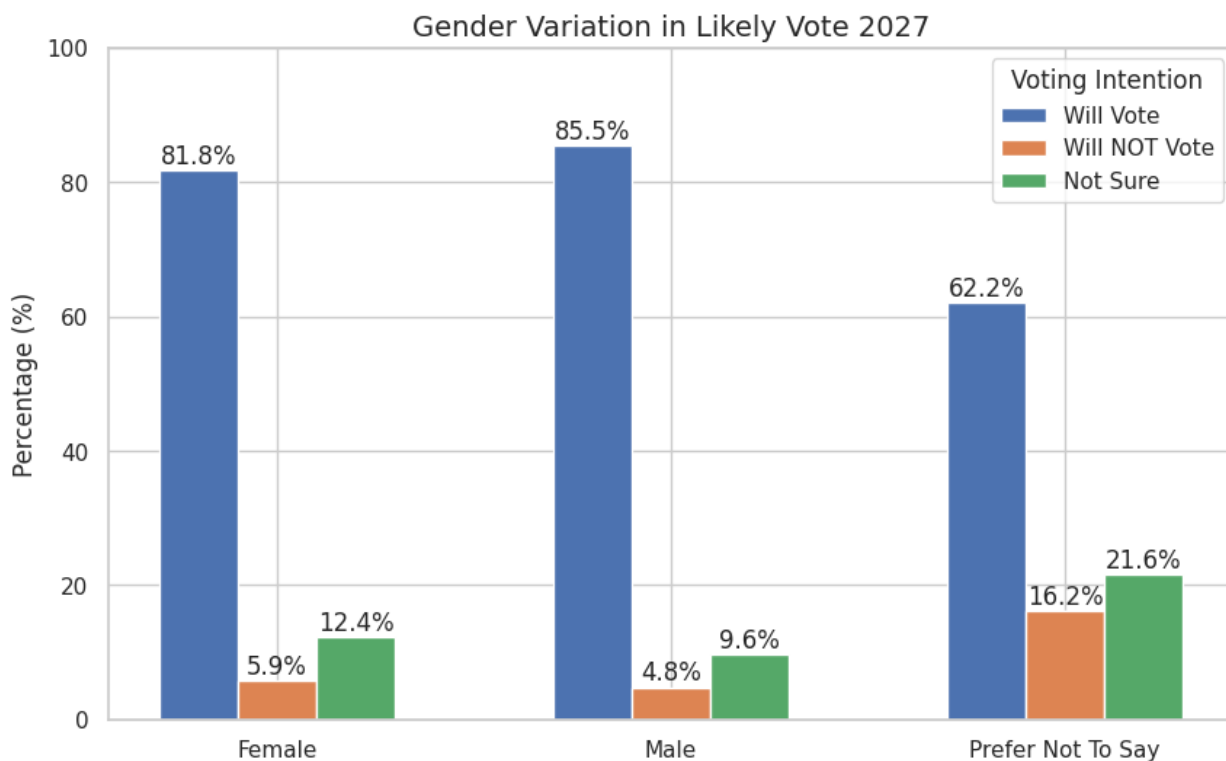


Fig 4. Gender Variation in Voting Intentions

5.1.3 Gender Variations in Access to ID cards

Figure 5 presents the proportion of respondents experiencing delays in accessing identification documents, disaggregated by gender. Among female respondents, approximately 45.4% reported experiencing delays, whereas 54.6% did not. Male respondents reported slightly higher delays, with 49.6% indicating delays and 50.4% reporting no delays. Respondents who preferred not to disclose their gender reported the lowest incidence of delays, at 27.8%, with the majority (69.4%) indicating no delays. These findings suggest that male respondents are somewhat more likely to experience delays in accessing identification documents compared to female respondents, which could be a result of negative profiling by state officers.

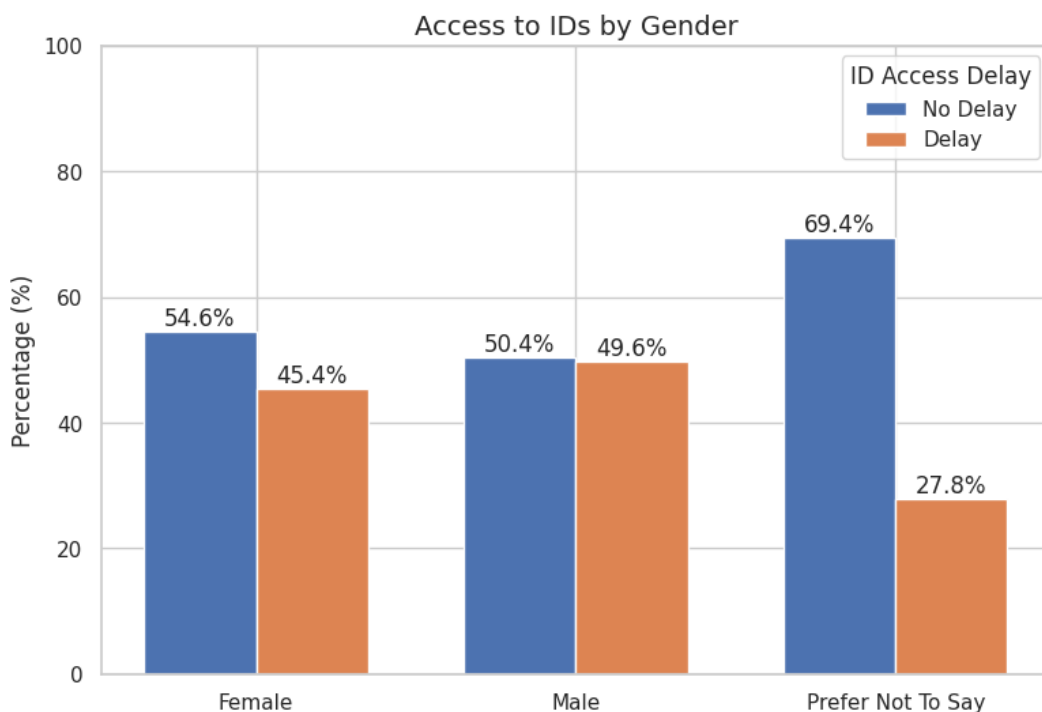


Fig. 5 Access to ID cards by Gender

5.2 Levels of Education

The majority of respondents reported having completed tertiary education (50%), followed by secondary school education (25%), postgraduate qualifications (22%), and primary education (3%) (Figure 6). The over-representation of tertiary-educated youth suggests that the sample captured a relatively informed and politically conscious demographic.

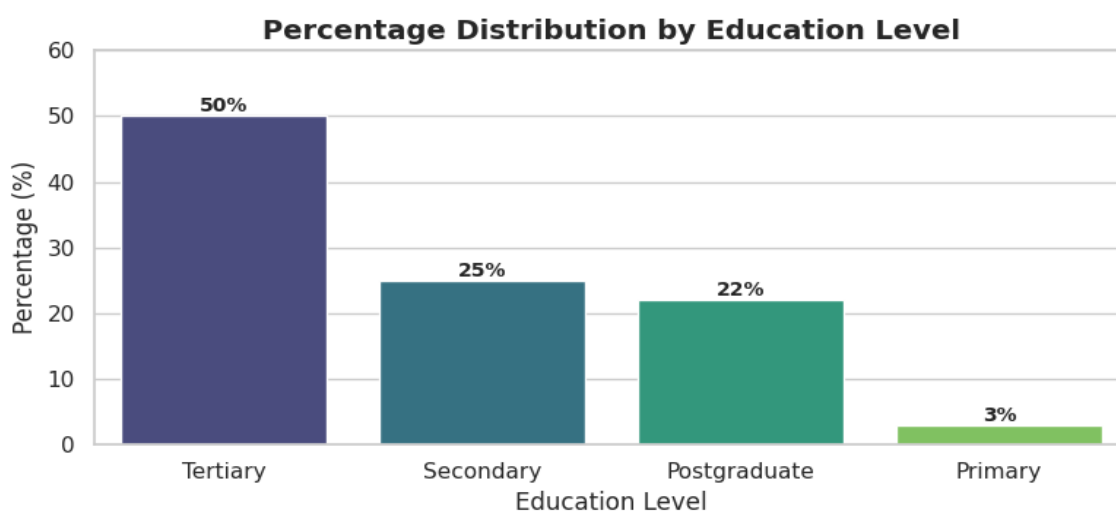


Fig 6. Education Levels

Education level × Likely to vote 2027		
likely_vote_2027_bin	0	1
Education_level		
Postgraduate	32	187
Primary	4	32
Secondary	50	200
Tertiary	89	423
Chi-square = 3.354, p = 0.3402, dof = 3		

Table 6. Level of education and likelihood to vote in the 2027 General Elections

The cross-tabulation between educational attainment and likelihood of voting in the 2027 General Elections reveals important descriptive patterns regarding the connection between schooling and electoral engagement among Kenyan youth. Respondents with tertiary education constitute the largest group reporting intent to vote ($n = 423$), followed by those with secondary education ($n = 200$) and postgraduate qualifications ($n = 187$), while primary school graduates form the smallest subgroup ($n = 23$). Across all categories, the number of respondents indicating that they are unlikely to vote is comparatively smaller; 89 among tertiary graduates, 50 among secondary graduates, 32 among postgraduates, and 4 among those with primary education (Table 6).

Although these distributions suggest a positive association between higher levels of education and the reported likelihood of voting, the Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 3.354$, $p = 0.3402$, $df = 3$) indicates that the relationship is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This finding implies that while descriptive differences exist (where tertiary- and postgraduate-educated youth are more likely to report electoral participation); education, in isolation, does not independently predict voting intention within this sample. Instead, the weak association points toward the greater influence of

other variables, such as political trust, civic efficacy, social influence, and exposure to civic education, in shaping youth electoral behavior.

Nevertheless, the dominance of well-educated respondents among the “likely voters” group ($p = 0.001$ in bivariate associations) is consistent with broader literature linking education to higher levels of political awareness and participatory confidence (Nie et al., 1996; Bratton, 2013; Uraia, 2024). Education thus appears to provide the informational and cognitive resources necessary for civic engagement, but the decision to participate in electoral processes is more decisively mediated by psychological factors, institutional credibility, and contextual environments than by formal schooling alone.

5.3 Occupational Status

Youth participation in economic activities in Kenya is highly heterogeneous, reflecting both structural opportunities and systemic vulnerabilities. Among the respondents, the largest categories were self-employed (24%) and formally employed youth (24%), followed closely by students (22%). A significant proportion, however, reported being unemployed (16%), while 14% were engaged in informal sector activities. This distribution provides a microscopic view of the economic conditions that Kenyan youths find themselves in. On one side, some youths are involved in dynamic entrepreneurship and wage employment, while on the other, underemployment and unstable informal work persist.

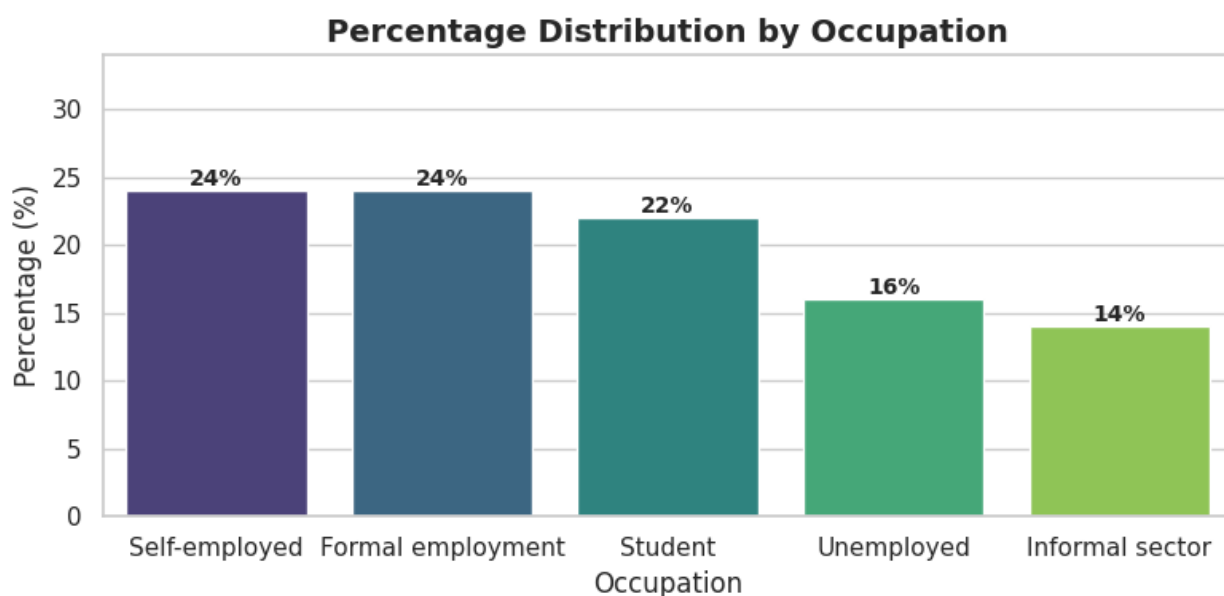


Fig 7. Distribution of Study Participants by Occupation

5.3.1 Influence of Occupational Status on Electoral Participation

The distribution presented in figure 8 indicates consistently high anticipated voter turnout across occupational groups. Students demonstrate the strongest likelihood of participation at 95.87%,

followed closely by respondents in formal employment (94.85%) and those who are self-employed (92.77%). Unemployed youth also report a high expected turnout of 93.20%. Although comparatively lower, informal sector workers still show substantial engagement, with 89.17% indicating they intend to vote in 2027.

These patterns suggest that occupational status exerts minimal constraining influence on electoral participation. Instead, the high projected turnout across all groups points to a broad-based willingness among youth to engage politically, cutting across labour-market status. When interpreted alongside the qualitative insights from KIIs, these findings highlight that youth participation is shaped less by occupation and more by shared lived experiences and other institutional barriers.

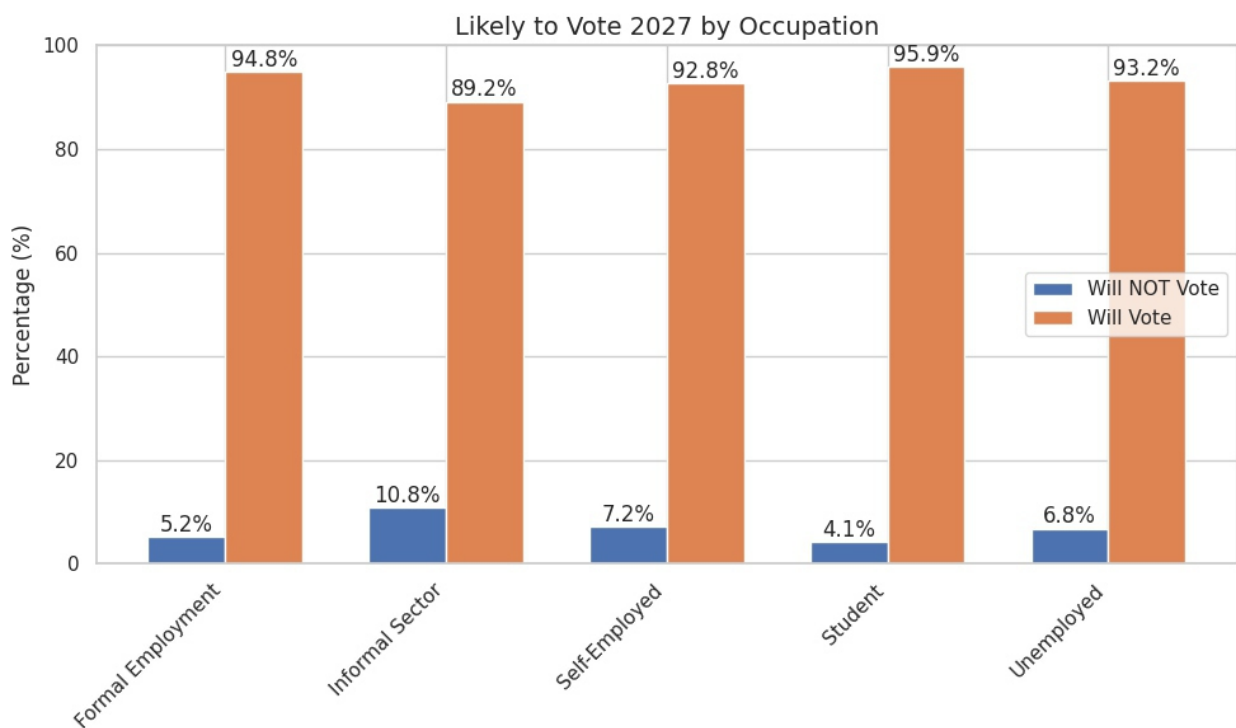


Fig 8. Occupational Status and Likelihood to Vote in the 2027 General Elections

5.3.2 Occupational Status and Civic Education

The figure below presents the proportion of respondents who reported receiving civic education, disaggregated by occupational status. Among those in formal employment, 60.9% indicated that they had received civic education, compared to 39.1% who had not. Respondents in the informal sector reported lower levels of exposure, with 52.4% indicating receipt and 47.6% reporting none. Self-employed respondents showed moderate coverage (57.6% yes, 42.4% no), while students reflected similarly uneven access at 52.9% having received civic education and 47.1% not. Unemployed respondents reported the lowest exposure overall, with only 49.7% having received civic education and 50.3% indicating no access.

These patterns suggest that access to civic education is uneven across occupational groups, with those in formal employment disproportionately benefiting from such initiatives. When interpreted alongside qualitative insights from KIIs, these findings underscore that structural inequalities in the labour market may shape differential access to civic knowledge. As such, civic education programming needs to account for the lived realities of unemployed, informal sector, and self-employed youth, whose lower exposure may translate into reduced preparedness or confidence to participate fully in democratic processes.

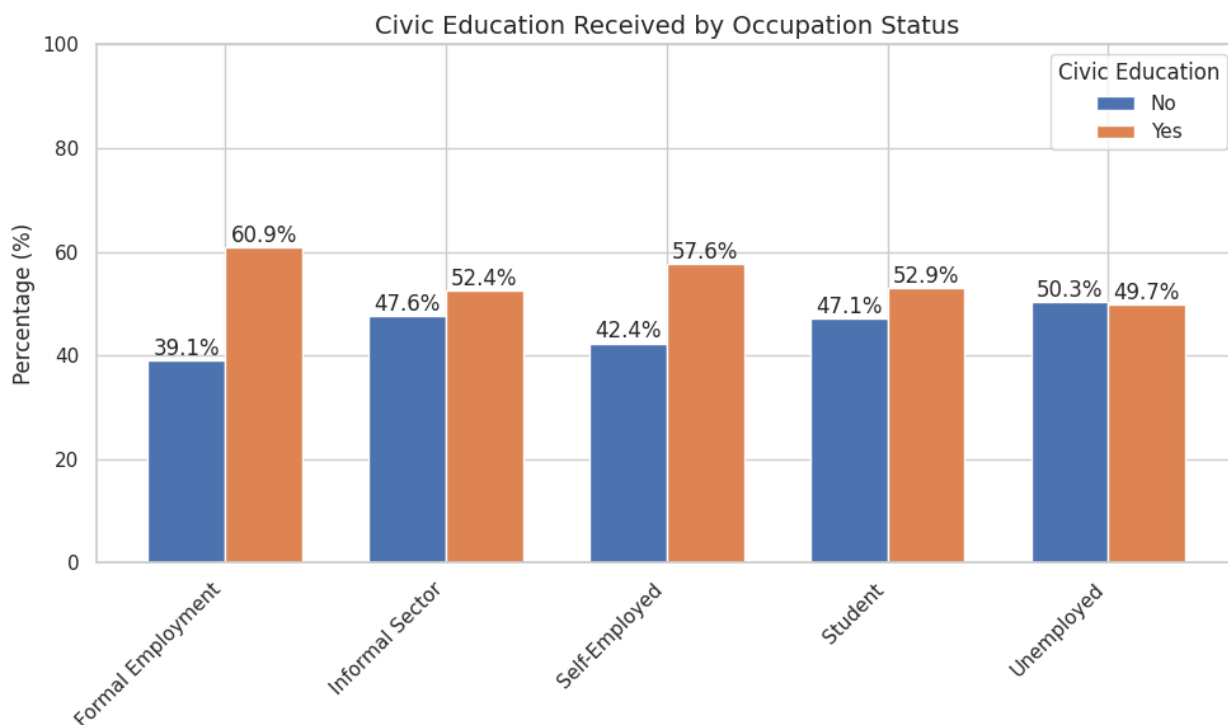


Fig 9. Civic Education Received by Occupation Status

5.4 Geographic Distribution

The respondents were geographically distributed across seven counties, with the largest proportion drawn from Nairobi (23.0%), followed by Nakuru (20%), Kilifi (12%), Meru (12%), West Pokot (12%), Kisumu (11%), and Mandera (10%). This distribution ensured regional diversity and captured Kenya’s distinctive socio-political geographies. Nairobi, Kisumu, and Nakuru represented highly urbanized and multi-ethnic areas, while Meru and Kilifi reflected peri-urban and agrarian dynamics. West Pokot and Mandera, in turn, provided perspectives from rural, conflict-prone, and historically marginalized counties.

Such county-level variability allows for an exploration of how geography and local governance shape youth engagement. Urban areas typically tend to exhibit higher digital connectivity, denser civic networks, and greater exposure to political mobilization, but they also face voter apathy linked to perceptions of elite capture and disillusionment with electoral outcomes (Afrobarometer,

2016). In peri-urban counties like Meru and Kilifi, youth often straddle formal and informal economies, with civic engagement influenced by localized patronage networks and access to civic education programs. Meanwhile, in rural and marginalized areas like West Pokot and Mandera, structural barriers including distance to polling centers, delays in issuance of identification documents, and limited civic infrastructure tend to depress participation.

The empirical results on voting intentions further substantiate these contextual variations. The pre-election commitment visuals presented in Figure 10 demonstrate that 83% of respondents across all counties expressed a high probability of voting in the 2027 General Elections. West Pokot 93%, Nakuru 91%, and Mandera 90% recorded the highest anticipated voter turnouts. These counties are characterized by strong communal ties and localized mobilization efforts, which broadly align with expressions of higher civic enthusiasm.

On the other hand, urbanized counties such as Nairobi and Kisumu reported relatively smaller proportions of youth likely to vote (75% predictive rates) which align with continuing expressions of urban voter fatigue and skepticism towards political processes. Meru 77% and Kilifi 83%, on the other hand, are more consistent with mixed civic engagement as places with peri-urban, rural, and agriculturalist contexts. Across all counties, less than 10% of respondents said they would not vote. On the other hand, those who answered “not sure” responses range from 7% to 20%. This indicates that uncertainty rather than disengagement may be the biggest driver of youth not turning out to vote in the 2027 General Elections.

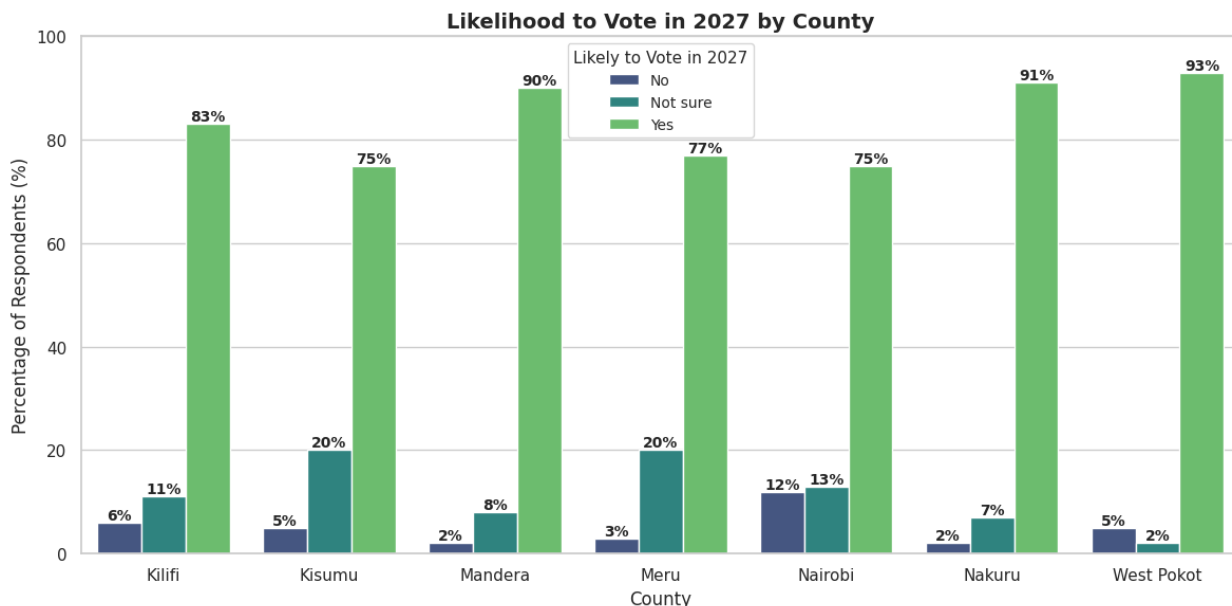


Fig. 10 Likelihood to Vote in the 2027 General Elections by County

5.5 Beliefs and Perceptions

The correlation analysis reveals nuanced associations between young people’s beliefs, perceptions, and intentions to vote in the 2027 General Elections, highlighting the psychological and social

dimensions that shape electoral participation. Confidence in the IEBC’s capacity to conduct a free and fair election was positively correlated with intention to vote ($r = 0.32$). Although not a strong statistical association, this relationship indicates that youth who believe their voices matter are more likely to convert that conviction into actual voting behavior. This finding aligns with qualitative insights from KIIs, where respondents emphasized that institutional trust remains foundational for political engagement.

Perceived civic literacy also emerged as an important determinant. Youth who reported understanding the voting process were strongly associated with believing that voting is important ($r = 0.64$) and were positively correlated with intention to vote ($r = 0.19$). These results suggest that civic education produces both direct and indirect effects, strengthening normative beliefs about the value of voting and reinforcing behavioral intentions. Interviews with civil society leaders reflected these findings. They noted that community-led civic education builds political confidence, particularly among first-time voters, and over time contributes to improved turnout.

Social influence likewise plays a key role. Support from family and community was positively associated with both belief in the value of voting ($r = 0.24$) and intention to vote ($r = 0.18$). These patterns reflect Kenya’s socio-cultural landscape, where kinship networks and community norms often guide political participation. In peri-urban and rural counties, where collective identity is strong, such social engagement can amplify youth engagement.

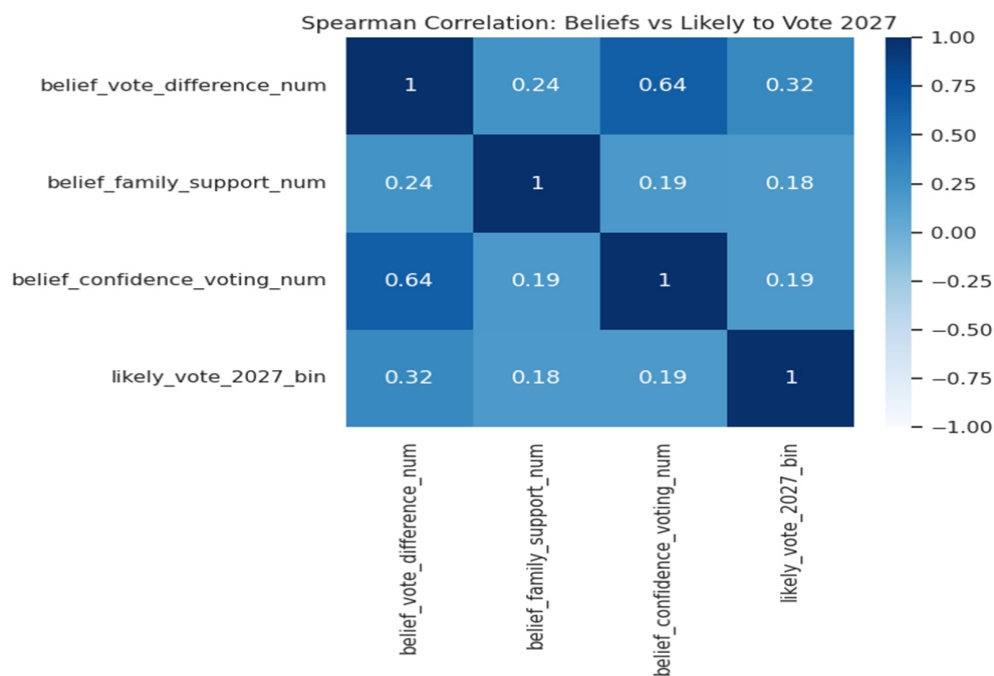


Fig 11. Belief vs Likely to Vote in the 2027 General Elections

Trust in institutions functions as an important mediating factor. KIIs highlighted that mistrust in political actors and perceived unresponsiveness of local administrators contribute to voter apathy and disengagement. **In West Pokot, however, strong relationships between the chiefs and**

youth groups were described as instrumental in building trust, helping the county achieve one of the highest voter turnout rates in 2022 and motivating 93% of surveyed youth to express intention to vote in 2027. This underscores that strengthening responsive and accountable institutions is essential not only for enhancing civic confidence but also for translating positive attitudes into sustained electoral participation.

5.6 Assessing the Impact of Civic Education, Legal Frameworks and Political Trust on Youth Engagement in Electoral Processes in Kenya

The correlation analysis, establishing the impact of civic education, legal frameworks, and political trust on youth participation in elections is based on complex mutually-linked factors. The results indicate a weak but statistically significant correlation between institutional trust and voting intentions in the 2027 General Elections ($r = .187$), which indicates that youths with high confidence in IEBC’s capacity to conduct free and fair elections are slightly more likely to consider participating in the polls.

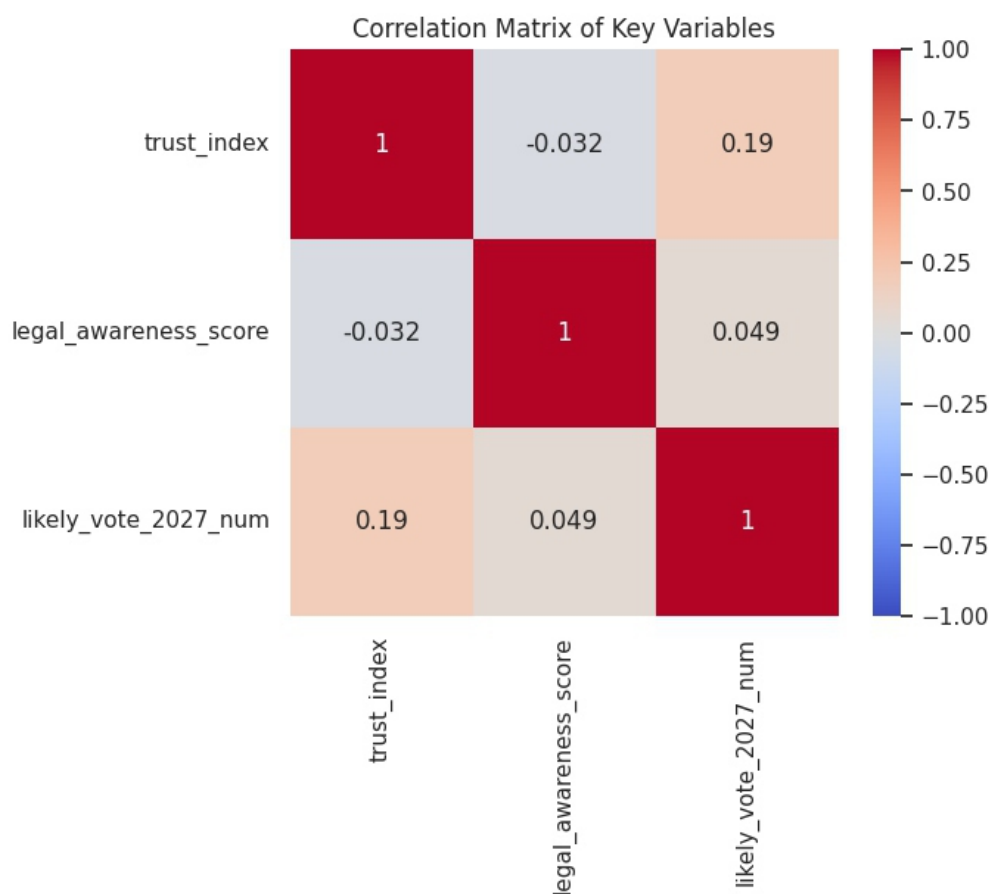


Fig 11. Correlation Matrix of Key Variables

Although weak, this relationship is consistent with the idea that political trust in government and state institutions is a foundation for participation in civic processes. When citizens believe their

institutions are just, transparent and accountable, they are more likely to think their vote really matters. In Kenya where public perceptions of corruption and inefficiency have eroded trust in governance over time, even incremental improvements in institutional trust can translate to concrete gains for participation by young people in formal political processes.

However, the correlation between legal consciousness (as an indicator of civic education) and voting intention is markedly weaker ($r = 0.049$). It is not only the case that knowledge about civic rights and policies does not guarantee voting; this does not sufficiently impress individuals to vote. Curiously, while they are but weakly related ($r = -0.032$), legal awareness and trust are yet negatively correlated; i.e., that increased knowledge of the law and civic processes might only expose young people to what they see as shortcomings or transgressions, leading them to lose faith in it. This contradiction is indicative of the dilemma that any civic education strategy faces. **It is one thing to inform young citizens of their rights, but such awareness will be effective only as far as real change can be experienced in institutional performance.** Without this equilibrium, civic education is apt to create a more informed but also just as disillusioned generation of citizens.

In sum, these findings underline that political trust continues to be the key predictor of youth participation in politics, with civic education and legal awareness as more enabling contexts of action rather than strong motivational forces. Unfortunately, the focus in Kenya has been on reforms when what is required is nothing less than restoring credibility and responsiveness in governance as there will be no 'movement' in electoral participation without these changes. Initiatives that enhance transparency in the conduct of elections, equal access to justice, and youth representation in state institutions can go a long way in reducing the knowledge-action gap. When youth see institutions not only acknowledge their rights, but also address them, civic education becomes a lived practice, building trust and participation among youth in electoral processes.

5.7 Motivation to Vote

An analysis of the voting motivations among the respondents reveals a culmination of influences that drive people to participate in elections. It is evident that voting motivations for the study respondents are mixed, involving both material and non-material factors. Still, the main motivation appears to be those grounded on civic responsibilities: accountability, candidate attractiveness, and manifesto content. Material inducements, like cash, appear less influential, signaling a developing trend among young people towards the consideration of governance quality, integrity, and leadership principles. Among the respondents, civic education and safety were also significant, suggesting that when people feel secure and politically conscious, they are more confident to participate.

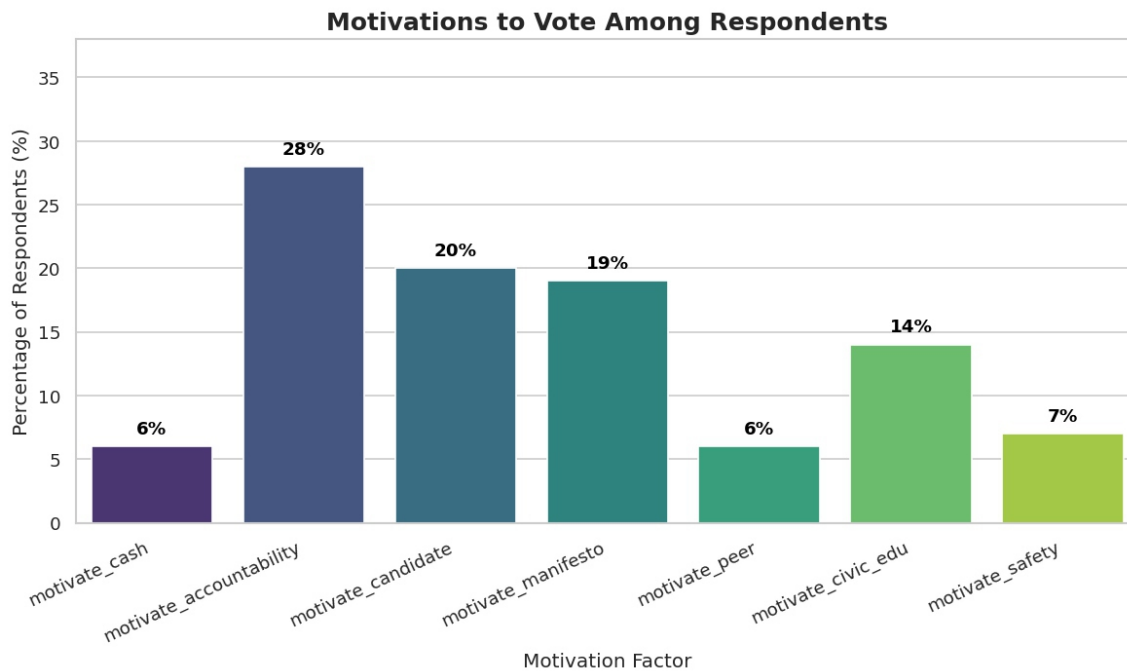


Fig. 12 Motivations to Vote

The results can be interpreted as a sign of transformation in thinking. Voters are shifting from transactional to issue-based politics, focusing more on accountability and policy credibility rather than the immediate benefits they can get.

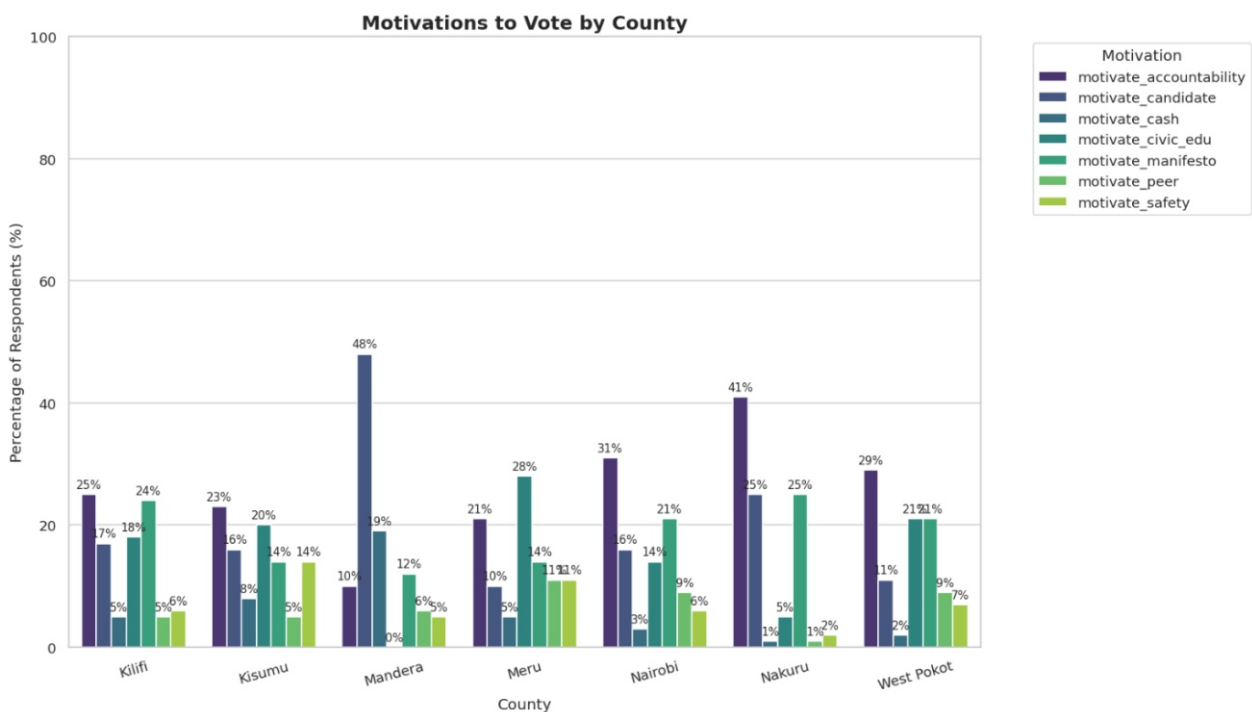


Fig. 13 Motivations to Vote by County

The visualization of county level motivations reveals distinct differences in what motivates the respondents to vote. In urban and peri-urban areas like Nairobi (43%) and Nakuru (41%), youth appear to consider candidate qualities, manifesto content, and accountability more, expressing a higher degree of exposure to political information, digital engagement, and organized political education. In contrast, rural areas like Mandera, Kilifi, and Meru consider safety, cash, and peer influence more, showing that these factors mediate their voting incentives.

5.8 Trust in Electoral Processes and Civic Education

Figure 14 shows that 55% of respondents (591 individuals) reported having received civic education, while 45% (484 individuals) had not. This distribution suggests that although civic education initiatives have reached a moderate proportion of young people, their geographical and demographic penetration remains uneven, indicating gaps in program coverage across different communities.

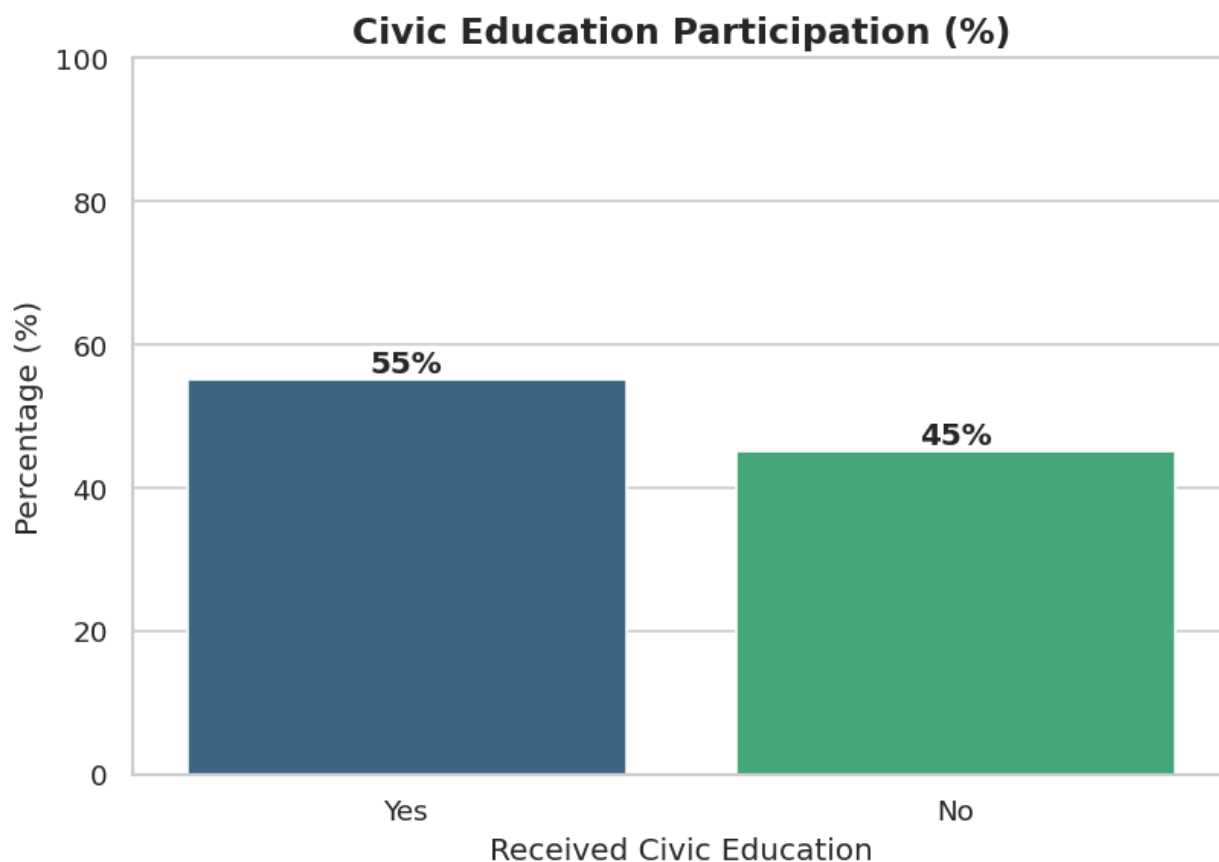


Fig. 14 Participation in Civic Education Programs

The factor correlation matrix of the standardized items reveals two distinct but related clusters of variables: one capturing institutional trust, and the other reflecting civic education exposure and outcomes. Within the institutional trust cluster, all correlations were strong and positive, with

particularly high associations observed between trust in the IEBC and the National Police Service ($r = 0.715$), as well as between trust in the IEBC and the Judiciary ($r = 0.641$). These tendencies suggest that citizens who express confidence in one democratic institution are more likely to extend this trust to others, reflecting a generalized orientation toward the legitimacy and credibility of state authority.

Notably, trust in accepting election results was also moderately correlated with confidence in other institutions, indicating that belief in electoral integrity is closely aligned with broader perceptions of legitimacy. Taken together, the strong intra-correlations within this cluster highlight the presence of a unified latent construct of political trust, whereby citizens evaluate institutional credibility as an interconnected rather than isolated phenomenon (Mishler & Rose, 2001; Akuamoah, 2020).

By contrast, the civic education cluster (capturing whether respondents had received civic education, found it useful, and reported that it influenced their voting decisions) presented moderate intercorrelations within itself but weak or slightly negative correlations with institutional trust. For example, `civic_edu_received` and `civic_edu_practical` were strongly associated ($r = 0.706$), and both were moderately correlated with `civic_edu_changed_vote` ($r = 0.49$ – 0.50). This suggests exposure to civic education is consistent and connected to engagement outcomes.

However, the near-zero or negative correlations between civic education variables and institutional trust (ranging between -0.011 and -0.095) indicate that greater exposure to civic education does not necessarily translate into higher institutional trust. One possible interpretation is that while civic education enhances knowledge and awareness, it may also sensitize youth to governance shortcomings and institutional weaknesses, thereby tempering levels of trust. This dynamic echoes findings from the KIIs, which indicate that civic education can simultaneously foster political efficacy while reducing blind trust in political elites and institutions.

The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) statistic for the model was 0.770 , comfortably above the recommended threshold of 0.60 (Kaiser, 1974), confirming sampling adequacy for factor analysis. This validates the presence of shared variance among the items, sufficient to support the extraction of meaningful factors. The resulting structure suggests two discrete yet related dimensions – institutional trust and civic empowerment – that together help explain patterns of youth engagement in Kenya’s democracy. Whereas institutional trust functions as an attitudinal anchor shaping confidence in electoral processes, civic empowerment reflects resource-based and knowledge-driven efficacy. Both factors are therefore critical in understanding the predictors of electoral participation, though they operate through different psychological and structural pathways.

	trust_election_2022	trust_accept_results	trust_iebc	trust_police	trust_judiciary	trust_parties	civic_edu_received	civic_edu_practical	civic_edu_changed_vote
trust_election_2022	1	0.4	0.199	0.207	0.207	0.139	-0.072	-0.019	-0.026
trust_accept_results	0.4	1	0.313	0.325	0.243	0.264	-0.084	-0.017	-0.014
trust_iebc	0.199	0.313	1	0.715	0.641	0.57	-0.08	-0.095	-0.02
trust_police	0.207	0.325	0.715	1	0.619	0.669	-0.077	-0.074	-0.011
trust_judiciary	0.207	0.243	0.641	0.619	1	0.484	-0.073	-0.086	-0.014
trust_parties	0.139	0.264	0.57	0.669	0.484	1	-0.043	-0.003	0.035
civic_edu_received	-0.072	-0.084	-0.08	-0.077	-0.073	-0.043	1	0.706	0.487
civic_edu_practical	-0.019	-0.017	-0.095	-0.074	-0.086	-0.003	0.706	1	0.504
civic_edu_changed_vote	-0.026	-0.014	-0.02	-0.011	-0.014	0.035	0.487	0.504	1

Table 7. Correlation Matrix for Trust and Civic Education

The scree plot indicates eigenvalues for each of the nine factors extracted and shows that only after the second factor does the inflection point become clear. Factor 1 and 2 have eigenvalues higher than 1, these explaining a large part of the total variation, and subsequent factors fall rapidly with Factor 3 showing eigenvalues that fall below the Kaiser criterion. This structure indicates that a two-dimensional solution is suitable for the data set, correctly reflecting the major underlying dimensions. These two related constructs are likely to tap into different latent concepts: the first one centering around trust in institutions or politics and the other about civic education and empowerment, both of which are key in appreciating youth engagement with and perceptions about governance in Kenya.

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3
trust_election_2022	0.1	-0.025	0.769
trust_accept_results	0.282	-0.025	0.483
trust_iebc	0.815	-0.05	0.157
trust_police	0.872	-0.03	0.155
trust_judiciary	0.698	-0.045	0.155
trust_parties	0.708	0.026	0.102
civic_edu_received	-0.05	0.82	-0.071
civic_edu_practical	-0.059	0.858	0.019
civic_edu_changed_vote	0.018	0.591	-0.015

Table 8. Factor Loading

5.9 Trust in Institutions

Figure 15 presents levels of public confidence in four key institutions in Kenya: the IEBC, Judiciary, police, and political parties, revealing generally low to moderate trust with notable sectoral variation. Confidence in the police is particularly weak: 32% of respondents reported having no confidence in the police, while only 9% expressed full confidence. KIIs suggest that the recent security crackdown following the Gen-Z protests, including widely shared accounts of

abductions, assaults, and killings, has significantly damaged youth trust in law enforcement. Political parties fare similarly poorly, reflecting perceptions that they are elite-driven, patronage-based, and largely unresponsive to young people’s concerns. Only 8% of youth reported full confidence in political parties, while 37% reported none at all.

Youth confidence in the electoral body, IEBC, is also low. Just 9% of respondents expressed full confidence in the Commission’s ability to conduct a free and fair election, while 25% reported no confidence. These findings underscore the scale of institutional rebuilding required ahead of the 2027 elections and may help explain the slow uptake in the current voter registration exercise.

By contrast, the Judiciary enjoys comparatively higher public trust. Only 19% of respondents reported no confidence, while 40% expressed moderate to full confidence. This comparatively favorable rating suggests that, even amid broader institutional skepticism, the Judiciary is still perceived as a viable avenue for accountability and redress.

These quantitative patterns align with insights from KIIs, which point to declining trust in political and security institutions since 2017 and highlight institutional legitimacy as a critical determinant of civic engagement. Strengthening transparency, accountability, and public communication across these bodies is therefore central to rebuilding confidence and sustaining youth participation in Kenya’s democratic processes.

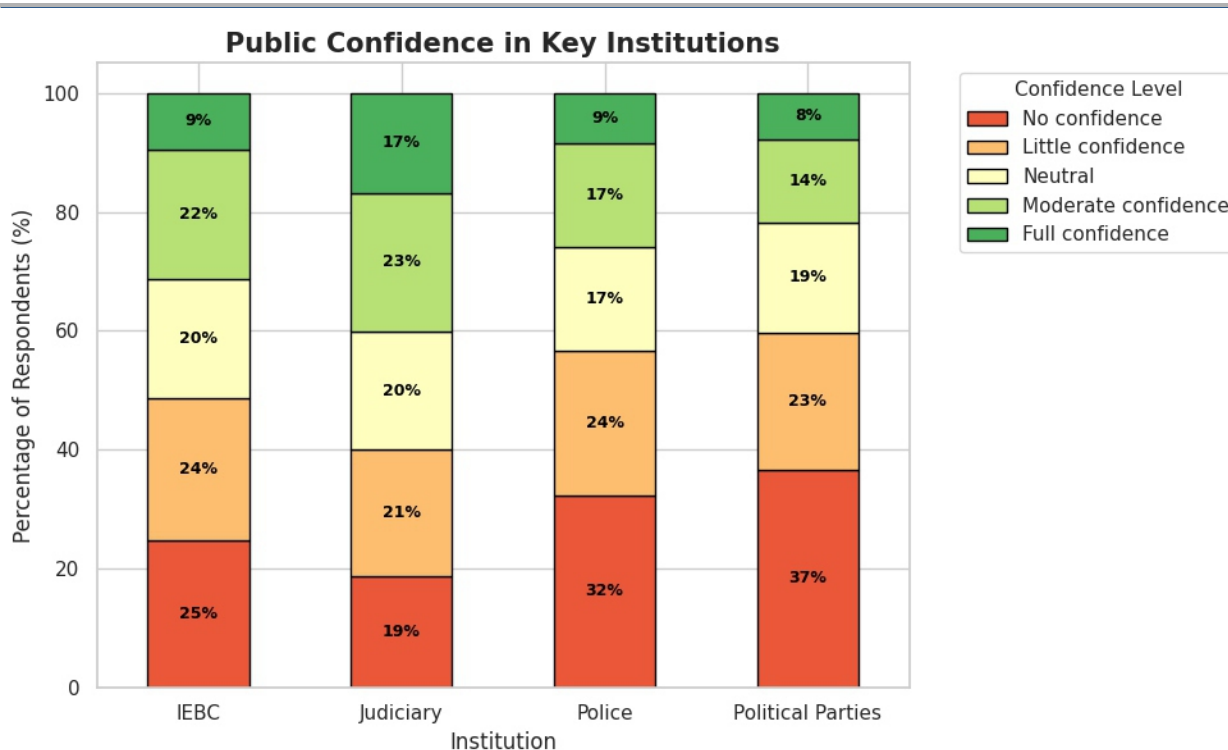


Fig. 15 Public Confidence in Key Institutions

5.10 Access to National Identification Cards

The analysis of delay rates in acquiring national IDs reveals an alarming imbalance both at the national and county levels. 47% of the study respondents have reported delays, while 53% did not face any wait times in receiving their ID cards. These results indicate that there are challenges in the ID issuance process, as close to half of the youth demographic struggles with bureaucratic or logistical hurdles in obtaining their ID cards. Considering that possession of a national ID card is a prerequisite for being able to vote, receive government services, and participate in the formal economy, the delays in ID registration can have dire implications on civic inclusion and equity.

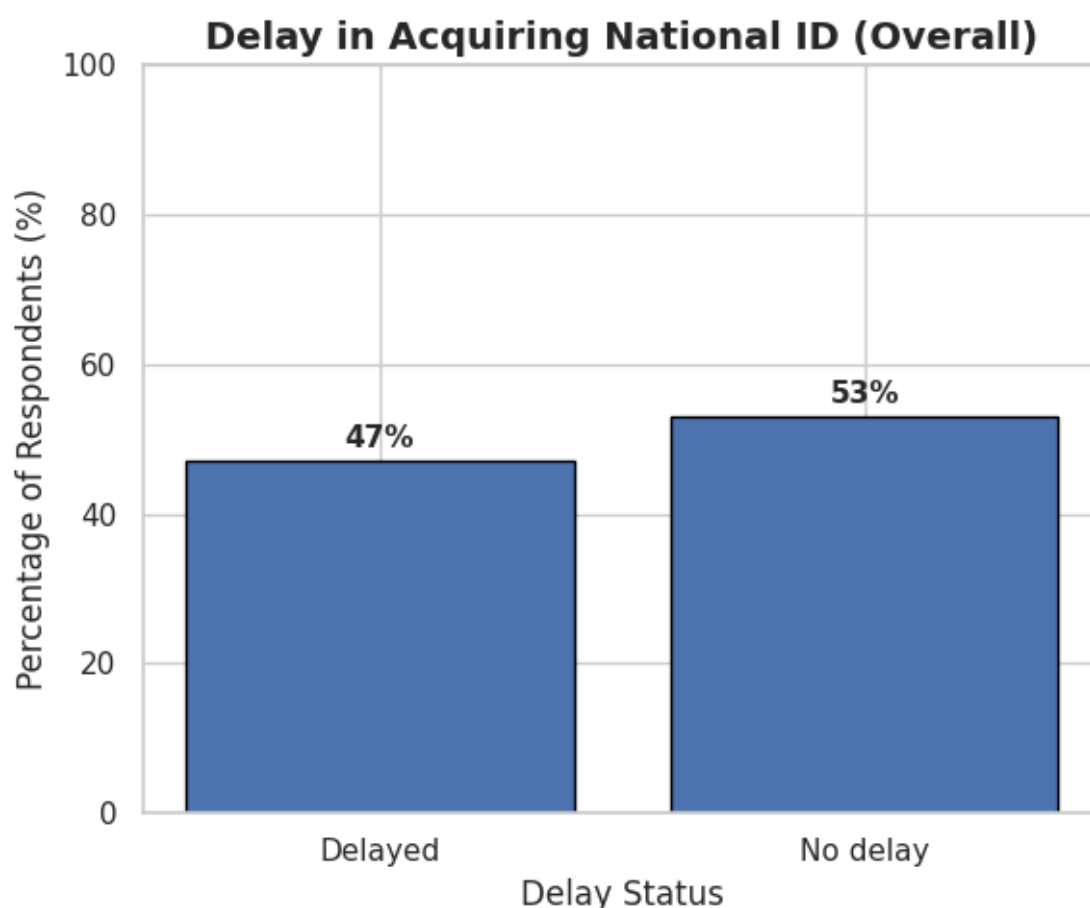


Fig. 16 Delay Status in Acquiring National ID Cards

At the county level, the data shows a significant disparity between the regions. Mandera County has the highest delay rate, with 85% reporting delays. This affirms existing literature that indicates that due to its location as a border county, many youths suffer bureaucratic and discriminatory barriers in acquiring a national ID card. Additionally, Kisumu has a 57% delay rate, Kilifi 52%, Nairobi 50%, and West Pokot 50%, indicating that the residents in those counties face substantial difficulties in acquiring ID cards. In contrast, Nakuru has the lowest delay rate at 15% and Meru 47%.

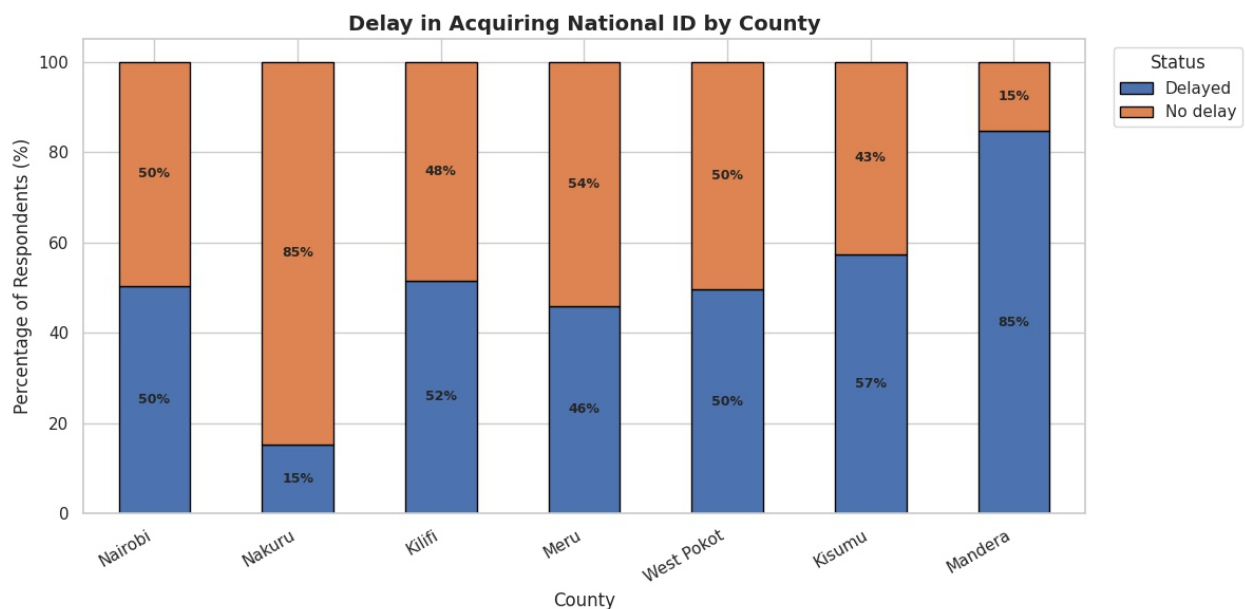


Fig. 17 Delay Status in Acquiring National ID Cards by County

Figure 18 illustrates the primary challenges reported by respondents in obtaining national identification cards. The data shows that bureaucratic delays and administrative inefficiencies represent the most significant barrier, cited by approximately 35% of respondents. This highlights the extent to which lengthy procedures, unclear requirements, and limited service delivery by National Government Administration Officers hinders timely access to ID cards. The loss of documents (25%) and distance to registration centers (18%) emerged as the second and third most common challenges, respectively, emphasizing how logistical and infrastructural limitations particularly affect first-time applicants in rural or marginalized regions.

Interviews with chiefs revealed that the government has introduced mechanisms to smoothen acquisition of ID cards for first-time applicants, including taking registration to high schools and community awareness campaigns. However, it is not clear that such measures have been effective as local civil society leaders complained of the excessive vetting that is undertaken on border communities and those living in urban informal settlements.

Social and safety-related obstacles were also noted in the surveys such as discrimination (12%), often along ethnic, gender, or regional lines, and insecurity (7%), which restricts mobility and access in conflict-prone areas. A small proportion (3%) cited other miscellaneous difficulties. Overall, these findings suggest that ID acquisition in Kenya remains constrained by a combination of bureaucratic inefficiency, logistical inaccessibility, and social exclusion. Addressing these challenges will require streamlined administrative systems and decentralized registration mechanisms to ensure equitable and timely access for all citizens.

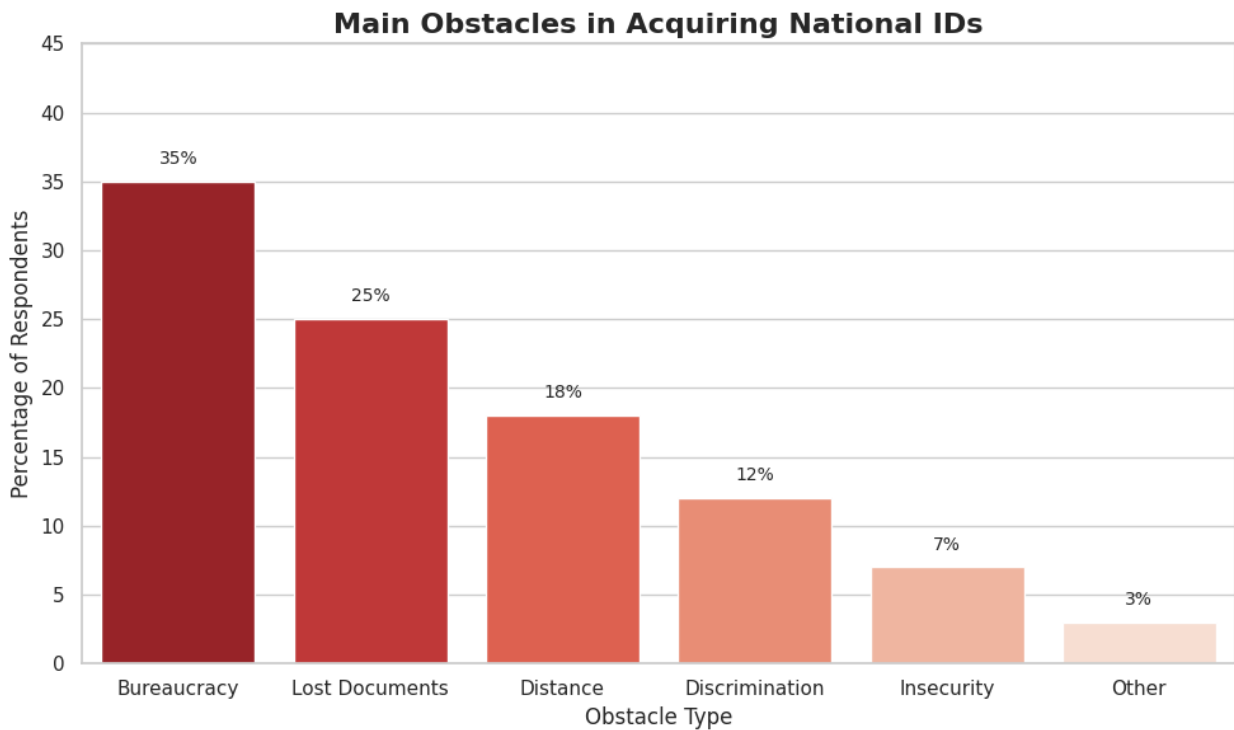


Fig. 18: Main Obstacles in Acquiring National ID Cards

5.11 Evaluating the Influence of Gen-Z Protests and Political Violence on Youth Political Behavior and Voter Attitudes

To explore how exposure to and participation in the Gen-Z protests shape youth political engagement and perceptions of politics in Kenya, the researchers asked, **“Did you participate in the 2024 Gen Z protests?”** The responses to this question suggest three clear patterns of involvement: non-participation 53% (571 respondents), digital-only participation 26% (280 respondents) and physical participation 21% (233 respondents). The results highlight that 53% of Kenyan youth did not participate in the protests, while 47% were actively involved either online or physically. This suggests that while protest participation has emerged as a central form of civic and political expression among Kenyan youth, it is yet to reach the levels to surpass traditional forms of participation.

The findings also suggest an expansion in civic expression channels available to youth, reflecting a diversification beyond traditional electoral participation. Respondents who did not participate in the protests represent politically aware youth who nonetheless refrain from confrontational activism, often citing concerns about harassment by the police, victimization by political elites, or skepticism about the efficacy of street protests in achieving meaningful reforms. Their non-participation highlights the persistent role of structural constraints, particularly fear of repression and low institutional trust, in shaping youth disengagement from protests.

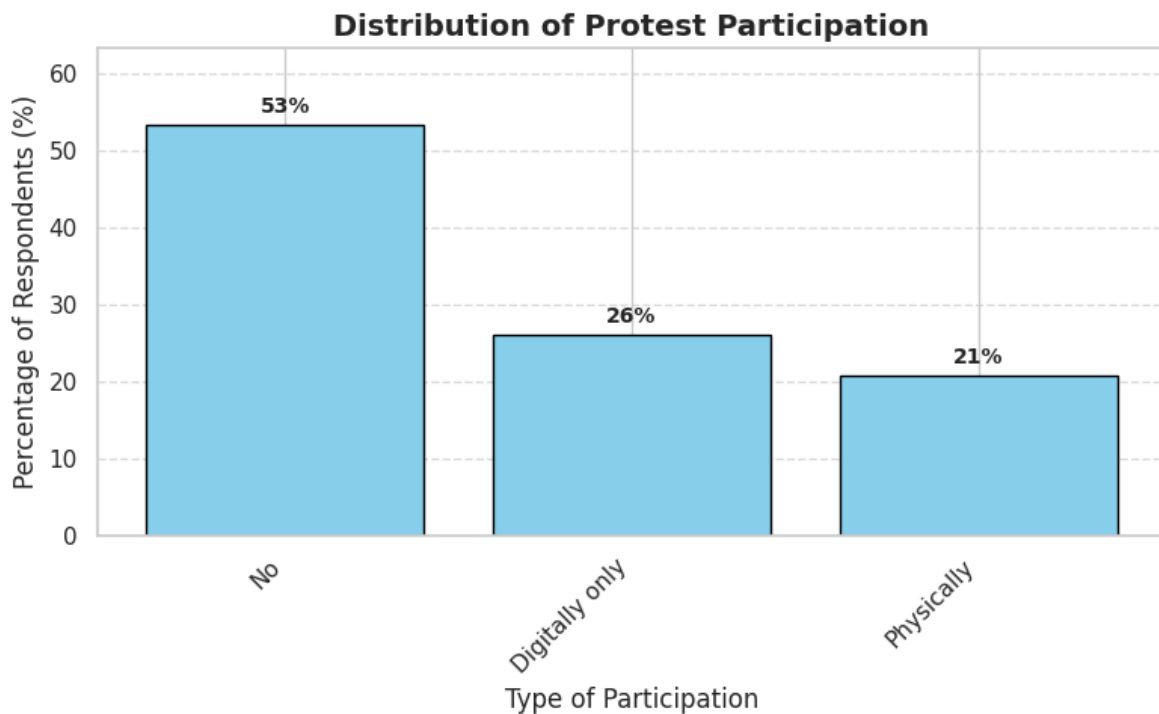


Fig. 19 Distribution of Protest Participation

A second and particularly notable group is the digital-only activists (26%), who represent an emergent, technologically mediated form of civic engagement that has been most visible among the Gen-Z. These youth primarily use digital platforms such as X, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram to express dissent, share political commentary, and mobilize peers, particularly within student and urban youth networks. Digital participation offers a mechanism for amplifying political voices while minimizing physical risks associated with in-person protests. This aligns with global scholarship on networked activism, which suggests that online platforms lower coordination costs, enable rapid diffusion of information, and create new opportunities for agenda-setting, even in contexts of repression (Tufekci, 2017).

Generally, the high levels of youth participation observed in this study are symptomatic of mounting impatience with poor governance, as well as a broader search for alternative avenues of civic participation beyond conventional electoral channels. The confluence of street protests and electoral participation reveals important insights into the evolving political identity of Kenya's youth. Central to this shift is the rise of digital-savvy activists who increasingly reject traditional forms of engagement such as party affiliation and voting in favor of decentralized, issue-based, and self-empowered forms of activism.

At the same time, these new channels of engagement reflect a deeper disillusionment with formal democratic institutions. Disaffection is being fueled by repeated experiences of broken campaign promises, entrenched corruption, rising unemployment, and widening inequality, which erode the legitimacy of political parties and electoral authorities. However, the outcome is paradoxical.

While activism may serve as an empowering pathway to reclaim civic space, it simultaneously reinforces alienation from the very institutions youth are expected to participate in. For some, digital and street protests may act as a springboard to future electoral participation, potentially stimulating higher turnout in the 2027 General Elections and beyond if institutional responsiveness improves. For others, however, these experiences may entrench political cynicism, defined as heightened awareness of political processes coupled with diminishing confidence in their efficacy

5.12 Youth Participation in Protests by County

To provide a clearer picture of the protest movement, the study analyzed youth participation in protests across the seven counties. The findings reveal notable spatial variation. Nairobi recorded the highest rate of protest participation at approximately 59%, a pattern that can be attributed to its position as Kenya’s political and economic hub where civil society groups are most concentrated and media visibility is strongest. Kisumu, West Pokot, Kilifi, and Nakuru followed closely, with participation levels ranging between 49 and 51%. These results demonstrate that youth activism is not confined to the capital but also thrives across the country as youths share similar grievances.

By contrast, Mandera exhibited the lowest levels of protest participation at about 10%. Several factors may account for this deviation, including the county’s dispersed population, security concerns linked to its border location, and minimal access to digital mobilization platforms that have become the principal drivers of youth-led activism in other regions. Counties such as Meru and Nakuru displayed medium-to-low participation rates, suggesting that localized determinants such as perceptions of governance, youth unemployment levels, or the reach of civic education may exert stronger influence than national dynamics in shaping protest behavior.

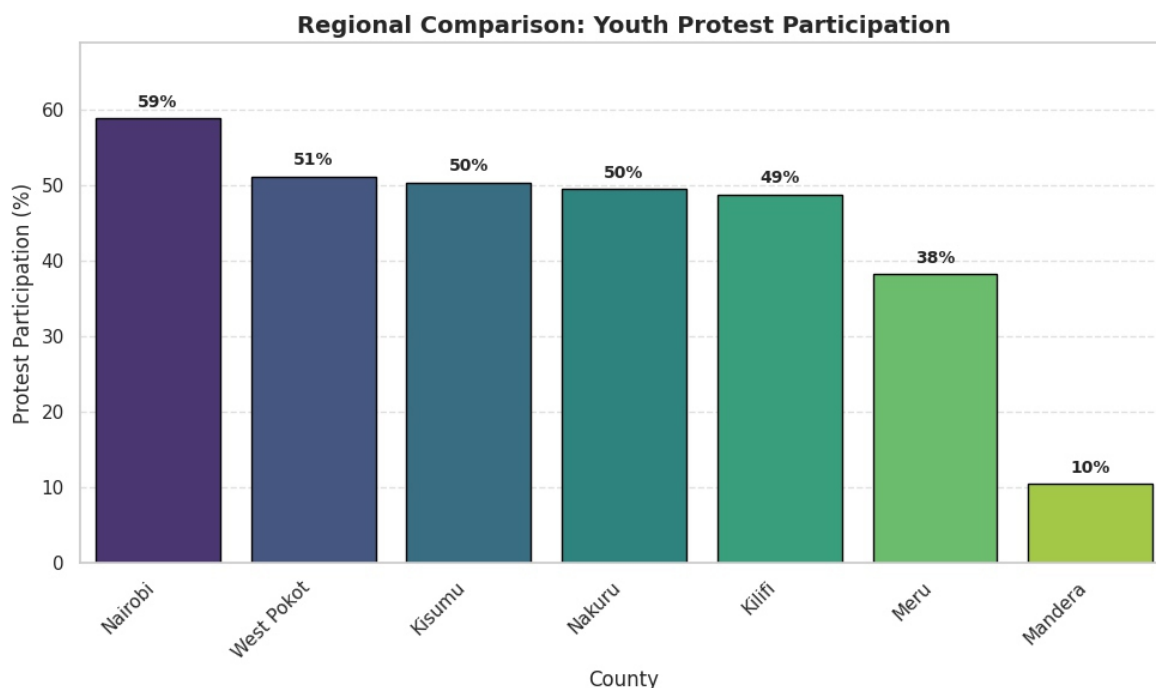


Fig 20. County Comparison of Youth Participation in Protests

5.13 Participation in Protests vs. Trust and Voting Intentions

The study assessed the association between institutional trust, measured through a composite trust index, and youth intentions to participate in the 2027 General Elections. The results demonstrate a weak but positive correlation ($r = 0.19$), implying that higher levels of trust in political and civic institutions are modestly associated with an increased likelihood of youth voting. In practical terms, young people who lack confidence in core institutions such as the IEBC, Judiciary, police, or political parties are only marginally less inclined to vote compared to their peers with greater institutional trust.

The policy implications are therefore significant. **While civic education and voter mobilization campaigns remain necessary, they will have limited effects unless accompanied by sustained efforts to strengthen institutional credibility.** This entails ensuring electoral transparency, enforcing campaign finance regulations, enhancing the inclusiveness of party primaries, and demonstrating accountability in public service delivery. Incremental restoration of youth trust in institutions can act as a multiplier, reinforcing civic awareness and social norms in favor of participation. In short, trust is not the sole determinant of youth electoral engagement, but its erosion can have lasting impact. Without rebuilding confidence in institutions, efforts to boost voter turnout among Kenyan youth will remain constrained.

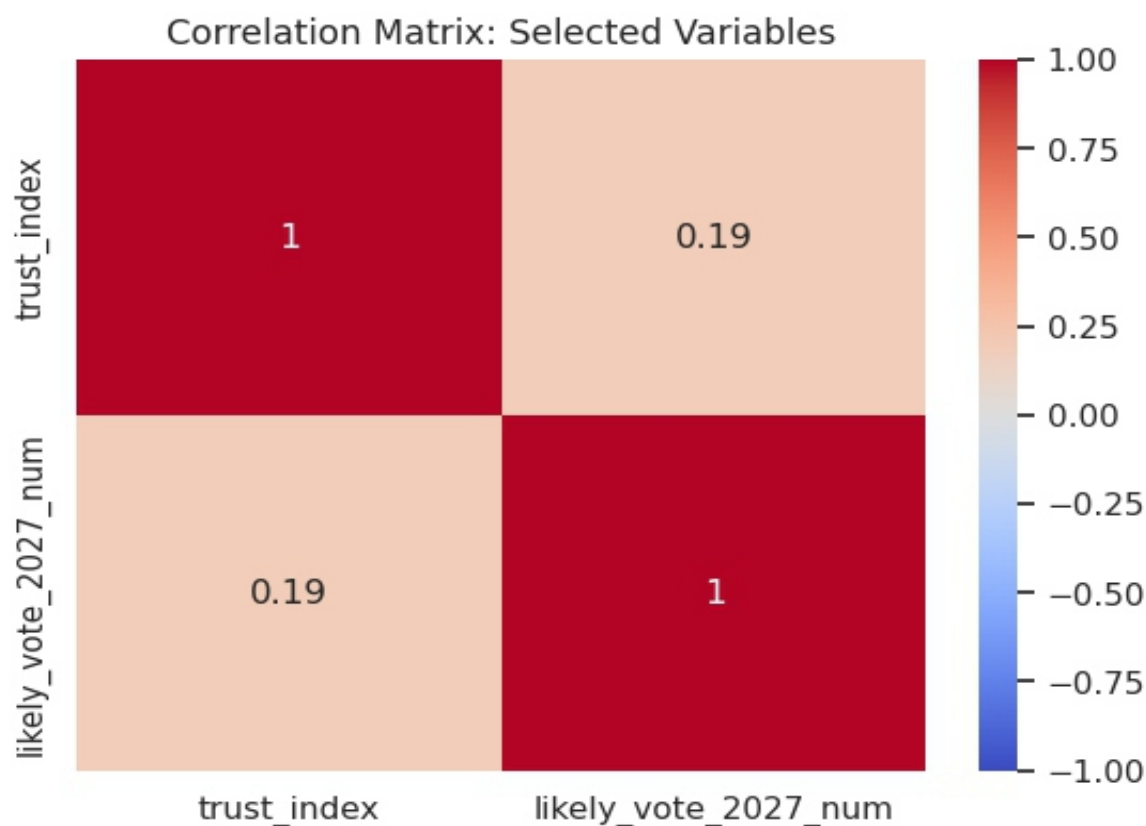


Fig. 21 Participation in Protests vs. Trust and Voting Intentions

The distributional analysis uncovers important patterns in the ways recent protests and exposure to violence have influenced youth political attitudes and intentions in Kenya. 49.1% of youths reported they were more politically active following the protests, indicating that the social upheaval contributed to greater civic engagement and awareness. But a smaller percentage (16.4%) said they felt less active, fearful, frightened or worn down by the protests.

A history of violence was also prevalent. 48.2% of the respondents reported having experienced physical assault, 51% online threats, and 32.4% sexual harassment or violence at protests, highlighting that political expression can be dangerous in Kenya. However, 83% said they intended to vote in the 2027 General Elections, suggesting the ongoing state repression had not completely eradicated their faith in civic engagement. Instead, these dynamics suggest a generation that is resilient but polarized, one that is driven just as much by frustration as hope, oscillating between civic empowerment and trauma over political violence.

OLS Regression Results						
Dep. Variable:	trust_index		R-squared:	0.067		
Model:	OLS		Adj. R-squared:	0.067		
Method:	Least Squares		F-statistic:	77.55		
Date:	Sun, 12 Oct 2025		Prob (F-statistic):	5.09e-18		
Time:	08:53:51		Log-Likelihood:	-1610.3		
No. Observations:	1075		AIC:	3225.		
Df Residuals:	1073		BIC:	3235.		
Df Model:	1					
Covariance Type:	Nonrobust					
	coef	std err	t	P> t 	[0.025	0.975]
const	2.8833	0.045	63.660	0.000	2.794	2.972
protest_participation	-0.5831	0.066	-8.806	0.000	-0.713	-0.453
Omnibus:	52.673		Durbin-Watson:	1.540		
Prob(Omnibus):	0.000		Jarque-Bera (JB):	32.357		
Skew:	0.287		Prob(JB):	9.42e-08		
Kurtosis:	2.373		Cond. No.	2.55		

Table 9. Participation in Protests and Institutional Trust

The regression analyses gives a more nuanced picture of how protesting and trust in institutions influences youth's political attitudes in Kenya. The original model of protest participation on institutional trust reflects a statistically significant inverse association ($\beta = -0.583$, $p < 0.001$). This

suggests that as youth become more engaged in protests, their trust in institutions falls. The model accounts for only a small amount of variance ($R^2 = 0.067$), but the consistent and significant association suggests that participation in protests could be an indicator of, or can help foster, increasing disillusionment with political and civic institutions. That is to say, young people who protest, especially after their demands are unmet or following perceived state repression, aren't just less likely to have confidence in governance systems.

OLS Regression Results						
Dep. Variable:	likely_vote_2027		R-squared:	0.004		
Model:	OLS		Adj. R-squared:	0.002		
Method:	Least Squares		F-statistic:	1.961		
Date:	Sun, 12 Oct 2025		Prob (F-statistic):	0.141		
Time:	08:53:51		Log-Likelihood:	50.200		
No. Observations:	1075		AIC:	-94.40		
Df Residuals:	1072		BIC:	-79.46		
Df Model:	2					
Covariance Type:	nonrobust					
	coef	std err	t	P> t	[0.025	0.975]
const	0.9069	0.021	42.914	0.000	0.865	0.948
protest_participation	0.0058	0.015	0.396	0.692	-0.023	0.035
trust_index	0.0129	0.007	1.977	0.048	9.57e-05	0.026
Omnibus:	843.045		Durbin-Watson:	1.829		
Prob(Omnibus):	0.000		Jarque-Bera (JB):	9701.463		
Skew:	-3.811		Prob(JB):	0.00		
Kurtosis:	15.590		Cond. No.	10.1		

Table 10. Trust and Protest Participation

In the second model of trust and protest participation predicting voting intentions in the 2027 General Elections, both are considered together. The findings show that institutional trust does have a (although small-scale) significant positive effect on voting intentions ($\beta = 0.0129$, $p = 0.048$), whereas participation in protests does not seem to matter ($\beta = 0.0058$, $p = 0.692$). However,

the predictive effect of this model is minimal ($R^2 = 0.004$) and other unobservable variables such as civic education or socio-economic status may contribute more to voter registration and turnout.

Qualitative data from the KIIs also illustrate that even though protest activity may erode institutional trust, it does not disincentivize voter turnout. Rather, confidence in institutions still appears to be a better predictor of intention to vote, signaling the importance of re-establishing the credibility and responsiveness of governance structures as means for translating youth political awareness into sustained democratic engagement.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive and data-driven understanding of the predictors of youth civic and electoral engagement in Kenya. The findings reveal that while educational attainment correlates positively with political awareness and civic confidence, it does not independently predict voting intention. Instead, institutional trust, civic literacy, social influence, and psychological efficacy emerge as the strongest determinants of youth participation. Confidence in the IEBC ($r = 0.32$), perceived civic literacy ($r = 0.64$), and family or community support ($r = 0.24$) each show meaningful associations with intention to vote, illustrating that engagement is as much a relational and emotional process as it is cognitive or informational.

The study further demonstrates that institutional trust shapes participation far more than education and occupational status. Counties such as West Pokot and Mandera, where local administration and community networks are strong, record higher predicted turnouts (above 90%), while urbanized areas like Nairobi and Kisumu exhibit lower enthusiasm due to institutional fatigue and political skepticism. Despite widespread exposure to repression and violence, youths remain remarkably resilient, with 83% expressing intention to vote in upcoming elections. This paradox highlights a generation that is aware of systemic failures yet unwilling to give up their “rights”.

Ultimately, the study concludes that youth electoral participation in Kenya is best understood as a function of trust, empowerment, and social connectedness. Civic education enhances awareness but only translates into action when paired with visible institutional integrity and accessible democratic processes. Strengthening youth engagement, therefore, requires a dual approach involving institutional reforms to rebuild credibility and context-sensitive civic education initiatives that transform awareness into agency. Without this equilibrium, civic education risks producing a politically informed yet deeply disillusioned generation. With it, Kenya stands to unlock a powerful democratic dividend driven by its youth.

6.2 Predictive Model of Youth Civic Engagement in Kenya

Based on the findings, the study proposes a predictive model of youth civic engagement in Kenya shaped by four interrelated determinants, each exerting distinct and overlapping influences on participation. This **Youth Civic Engagement (YCE)** model can be applied in developing democracies to accurately predict youth participation in civic and electoral processes.

The Youth Civic Engagement Model is based on four key pillars:

- i. Psychological efficacy
- ii. Socio-economic status
- iii. Institutional trust
- iv. Civic education

i. Psychological efficacy

Youth who believe their vote matters, understand electoral processes, and feel supported by peers and family are substantially more likely to participate in elections. This internal sense of political agency, combined with social support, translates belief into behavioral intentions. The study findings underscore that efficacy is both psychological and relational. It is anchored in confidence that individual actions can produce meaningful outcomes.

ii. Socio-economic status

Economic positioning indirectly affects participation by shaping access to resources, time, and mobility. University students and self-employed youth exhibit higher civic engagement rates, while unemployed graduates and informal-sector workers are more prone to disengagement. These patterns suggest that civic engagement is mediated by material capacity and perceived opportunity.

iii. Institutional trust

Confidence in the electoral management body (IEBC) and other governance institutions remains fragile yet consequential. Youth who perceive state institutions as legitimate and responsive show greater willingness to vote. However, this trust can be easily eroded by corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and political repression.

iv. Civic education

Civic education emerged as a decisive factor, strengthening both the normative belief that voting is meaningful and the practical understanding of how to participate. Youths with higher civic literacy exhibit stronger political confidence and a clearer sense of responsibility. However, civic education also exposes youth to governance failures which motivated them to express distrust in institutions and electoral processes. Well-designed civic education programs, especially those

tailored to local contexts, can thus transform awareness into agency and help rebuild trust in formal processes.

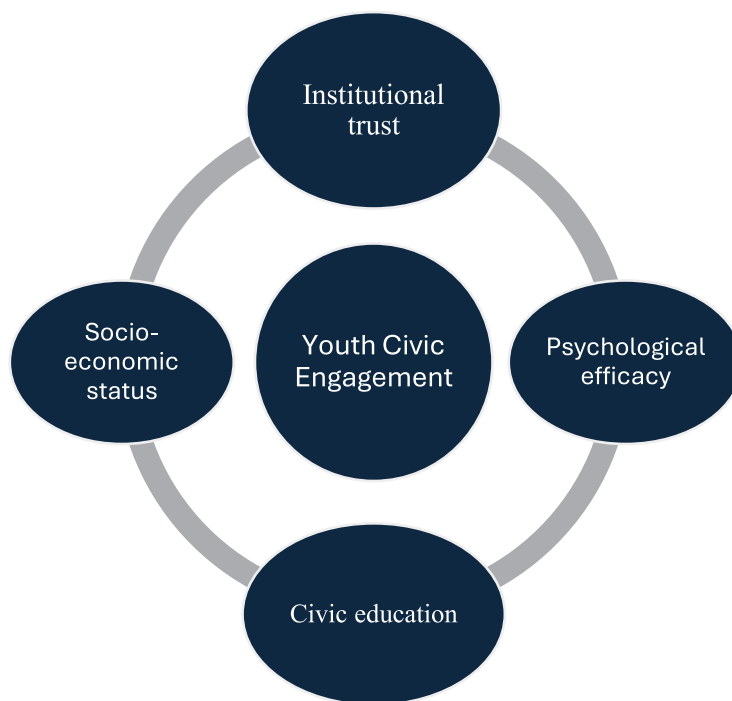


Fig. 22 Predictive Model of Youth Civic Engagement in Kenya

Collectively, the Youth Civic Engagement model explains how youth engage in civic and electoral processes. It demonstrates that engagement is not merely a function of education or income but a dynamic interplay of confidence, opportunity, trust, and knowledge.

While not a determinant in this model, digital activism operates as a contextual modifier that can deepen disillusionment with traditional institutions. It represents the evolving face of participation among a generation redefining citizenship beyond the ballot box.

Ultimately, this model highlights that strengthening youth civic engagement requires integrated interventions such as expanding and localizing civic education, restoring institutional trust, addressing economic conditions for youths, and cultivating psychological efficacy. When these conditions align, the youth can transform from passive observers into central architects of a resilient and inclusive democracy.

6.3 Recommendations

To translate these findings into practice, the study proposes the following policy recommendations:

i. Reform the Elections Act to embed continuous voter registration and civic education

Given the weak statistical relationship between formal education and voting intentions, but the strong descriptive evidence linking civic literacy and institutional trust to turnout, these findings

point to the need for administrative reforms that directly strengthen voter registration and civic learning. The IEBC and the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties should intensify continuous voter registration and expand civic education outreach, in collaboration with community-based organizations, faith-based groups, and civil society organizations. To support this, Parliament should amend the Elections Act to institutionalize year-round voter registration and embed civic education within the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), ensuring that civic knowledge is cultivated as a lifelong learning process rather than delivered through sporadic programs.

Additionally, requiring the IEBC to publish age- and gender-disaggregated voter registration and turnout data within nine months of each election would enhance transparency, improve accountability, and enable evidence-driven youth engagement strategies. These reforms would operationalize the study's findings and create a more responsive institutional framework capable of strengthening youth civic participation.

ii. Allocate targeted funding for civic literacy and digital engagement programs

The findings indicate that civic education significantly strengthens belief in the value of voting and modestly increases turnout intentions ($r = 0.19$). Therefore, the EU and other development partners should expand funding for localized civic education and digital democracy initiatives, particularly in marginalized counties in the Northern Frontier such as Mandera where logistical and trust deficits are highest. Integrating youth leaders in election observer missions would further reinforce accountability and legitimacy.

iii. Establish strategic media-youth collaboration

Given that uncertainty drives low participation, the Media Council of Kenya, Kenya Media Owners Association, Kenya Editor Guild, Kenya Community Media Network, Association of Media Women in Kenya and the Kenya Union of Journalists should partner with youth networks and community media to disseminate accurate electoral information, counter misinformation and disinformation, and normalize constructive political discourse. This aligns with the finding that exposure to credible information enhances civic confidence and lowers voter skepticism.

iv. Restore trust and improve relationships between the National Police Service and youth

The correlation between confidence in the IEBC, police, political parties and voting intentions highlights the importance of institutional trust. The National Police Service should establish independent coordination platforms with youth civil society actors to monitor police conduct during elections, ensure accountability, and rebuild public confidence, especially after the heightened repression reported during the 2024 Gen-Z protests.

v. Accelerate structured youth participation in governance

West Pokot's high predicted turnout of 93%, which the qualitative data attributes to strong relationships between youth and local chiefs, demonstrates the value of localized administrative

engagement. To build on these county-level strengths while avoiding the recurrent tensions between county and national governments, the Ministry of Interior and National Administration should institutionalize this approach by establishing youth advisory councils at both county and sub-county levels. These councils would formalize the collaborative structures already working effectively in counties like West Pokot, providing youth with legitimate and structured platforms to transform activism into policy dialogue and co-governance.

Importantly, this model would complement rather than compete with existing county youth departments, which currently run parallel empowerment and civic engagement initiatives. By creating a clearly defined interface between National Government Administrative Officers (chiefs and assistant chiefs) and county youth programs, the proposed councils would harmonize mandates, reduce duplication, and ensure that youth engagement is coordinated across both levels of government. Such alignment would strengthen regional civic ecosystems and enable more effective voter mobilization, echoing the study's broader finding that social connectedness and trusted institutions are critical drivers of youth participation.

vi. Integrate livelihoods with civic empowerment

Given that unemployment and poverty intersect with low civic engagement, civil society organizations should design peer-led, community-based civic education programs that combine livelihood skills with civic education. Targeting unemployed and informal-sector youth would bridge the gap between economic agency and political participation.

vii. Expand voter registration through inclusive approaches

With 47% of respondents reporting delays in acquiring national ID cards, youth face substantial administrative barriers that directly undermine their ability to participate in elections. These constraints are compounded for youth with disabilities, who often encounter inaccessible registration centers, lack of assistive support, and greater difficulty travelling long distances to polling stations or civil registration offices. Such structural inequalities limit not only registration but also broader civic inclusion.

To address these diverse needs, the IEBC should deploy mobile voter registration units targeted at hard-to-reach populations, including rural communities, informal settlements, and youth with mobility, visual, or hearing impairments. Ensuring universal design in polling stations such as ramps, tactile ballots, sign-language interpreters, and priority queues would further remove participation barriers and comply with constitutional obligations on disability inclusion (Article 54).

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