Ballots or bullets? Electoral conflict, voter apathy, and the quest for sustainable democratic governance in Kenya

Rodgers Ombeck Oyoo[1]
Frank Khachina Matanga[2]
Pontian Godfrey Okoth[3]

[1]rombeck93@gmail.com

[1]https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8392-3163
[2]https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1157-9980

[1,2,3] Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

Recommended Reference: Oyoo, R. O., Matanga, F. K., & Okoth, P. G. (2026). Ballots or bullets? Electoral conflict, voter apathy, and the quest for sustainable democratic governance in Kenya. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 3(4), 909–924. https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.3.4.73

ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is fundamentally contingent upon peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). However, in Kenya, the pursuit of this goal is critically undermined by a cyclical interplay of electoral violence and pervasive political disengagement, particularly among the youth—a cohort this study conceptualizes as the "forgotten generation." This paper investigated this self-reinforcing dynamic in Nakuru County, a recurrent epicenter of post-election conflict. Therefore, the paper interrogated Ballots or Bullets? Electoral Conflict, Voter Apathy, and the Quest for Sustainable Democratic Governance in Kenya. The study adopted greed-grievance theory and conflict transformation theory. Using mixed method approach. The target population included household heads, while key informants were officials from Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission, political advisors and analysts, officials from Office of Registrar of Political Parties, County commissioner's office, political leaders, civil society organization representatives, victims and perpetrators, county peace committee officials. The primary data was collected from 342 household heads through questionnaire and key informant interviews and focus group discussion. Quantitative data was analyzed through SPSS while qualitative data was analyzed thematically through Nvivo version 12. The study reveals that electoral violence is a significant suppressor of voter turnout, disproportionately affecting youth and marginalized groups. Regression results demonstrate strong negative correlations between voter apathy and both the frequency of electoral violence ($\beta = -0.67$, $p < 0.001$) and intensity of ethnic mobilization ($\beta = -0.52$, $p < 0.01$), while chi-square tests confirm the persistence of ethnic bloc voting ($\chi^2 = 28.90$, $p < 0.001$). The study argues that Kenya's political architecture, characterized by ethnic patronage, militia involvement, and elite manipulation, creates a "ballots or bullets" paradox for young citizens: both electoral participation and withdrawal serve to perpetuate their marginalization. The study concludes that achieving sustainable democratic governance requires transformative structural reforms focused on enhancing electoral integrity, dismantling violence economies, and fostering genuine, issue-based political inclusion. The study recommends a comprehensive sequenced, and mutually reinforcing reform agenda anchored on IEBC structural interdependence, enforceable accountability for electoral conflicts and its elite sponsors, transparent party and campaign finance regulations, sustainable youth civic re-engagement and community level peace architecture to dismantle the violence-apathy cycle and restore institutional trust.

Keywords: Ballots or Bullets; Ethnic Politics; Inclusive Governance, Political Participation; Sustainable Democracy; Voter Apathy; Youth Disengagement

I. INTRODUCTION

Electoral conflict remains a pervasive challenge to democratic consolidation globally, rooted in the interplay of political party dynamics, institutional fragility, and unresolved historical grievances. In established democracies, robust institutions typically mitigate such conflicts by ensuring transparency and accountability (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). In contrast, within fragile democratic states, political parties often exacerbate socio-political cleavages, transforming elections into arenas of dispute and violence (Cheeseman, 2022). This divergence is starkly evident when comparing the managed tensions of the United States or United Kingdom with the overt suppression of opposition groups in venues like Venezuela (Khadiagala, 2010), underscoring the pivotal role of partisan actors in shaping electoral integrity.

Within the Kenyan context, scholarship has extensively documented the engines of electoral strife, notably ethnic mobilization (Lynch, 2011) and institutional decay (Cheeseman, 2008). Yet, the critical nexus between recurrent violence and the systemic political apathy of young people remains inadequately explored. Despite data revealing

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

declining youth voter registration (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission [IEBC], 2022), the underlying drivers—such as the trauma of past violence or perceptions of irredeemable systemic exclusion—are seldom the focus. Historical analyses (Mwagiru, 2008) and comparative studies from countries like Colombia and India (Bekoe, 2012; Gutiérrez-Sanín & Wood, 2017; Wilkinson, 2006) provide valuable frameworks for understanding violence-induced abstention. However, Kenya's unique ethno-political patronage system demands a more nuanced lens. For instance, whereas apathy in post-war Sierra Leone stemmed from unmet expectations (Harris, 2014), Kenya's version is a "triggered apathy"—a direct response to episodic, politicized violence that blends ethnic antagonism with state complicity (Anderson, 2005).

Further complicating this picture is the paradox of devolution. The 2010 Constitution aimed to dismantle centralized exclusion through county governments. Instead, it has often devolved patronage, creating localized ethnicized political machines that offer youth superficial inclusion while coercing them into violent roles (Omanga et al., 2023). This **"**tactical infantilization" (Kiprotich, 2024) traps a generation—38% of whom are unemployed (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2019)—in a cycle of political bondage, strategically deployed as electoral militias (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2008). This reality forces a sobering philosophical inquiry: can decentralization genuinely democratize power when local elites meticulously replicate national patterns of exclusion?

By bridging global theories of democratization with grounded, qualitative insights from Kenya's youth, this study moves beyond macro-level analyses that often miss grassroots narratives. While voter detachment in Brazil may arise from state neglect (Arias, 2017), and disillusionment in Tunisia from unmet revolutionary promises, Kenyan youth disengagement is frequently a direct response to victimization within an ethnicized political economy. This paper argues that for Kenya's "forgotten generation," apathy is not a sign of passivity but a rational survival tactic in a system perceived as rigged against them. It is this redefinition—from disinterest to conscious withdrawal—that is central to understanding the transformation of ballots into bullets in the Kenyan context.

1.1 Research Objective

The paper interrogated Ballots or Bullets? Electoral Conflict, Voter Apathy, and the Quest for Sustainable Democratic Governance in Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study adopted greed-grievance theory and conflict transformation theory for examining "Ballots or Bullets? Electoral Conflict, Voter Apathy, and the Quest for Sustainable Democratic Governance in Kenya".

2.1.1 Greed-grievance theory

Greed-grievance theory (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004) elucidates the dialectical interplay between elite predation (greed) and historical marginalization (grievance) in perpetuating electoral violence and subsequent voter apathy in Nakuru. The instrumentalization of ethnic patronage by political entities like United Democratic Alliance [UDA] and Orange Democratic Movement [ODM] exemplifies a political economy of conflict, wherein electoral contests devolve into zero-sum scrambles for resource hegemony (Kanyinga, 2016; Laakso & Kariuki, 2023). This cyclical violence engenders profound disillusionment among Kenya's *forgotten generation*—youth who perceive electoral processes as structurally exclusionary or irredeemably compromised. While the theory exposes the material and ideological scaffolding of conflict, its failure to deconstruct the ontological salience of ethnic identity necessitates complementary frameworks. Mitigating this crisis demands constitutional overhauls, deracialized resource allocation, and the transcendence of ethnocratic party architectures to restore electoral legitimacy.

2.1.2 Conflict transformation theory

Political parties in Kenya, ostensibly vehicles of democratic participation, paradoxically entrench electoral strife, exacerbating systemic disenfranchisement among the youth—the nation's *forgotten generation* (Ajwang, 2025). Conflict transformation theory (Lederach, 1996) illuminates this duality, positing that parties must transcend ethnicized politicking to embrace structural peacebuilding or risk perpetuating cyclical voter apathy (Cheeseman, 2015). Nakuru County's post-election crises (2007, 2017) epitomize this paradox, where allegations of rigging and intimidation corrode civic trust, rendering youth politically inert (Kagwanja & Southall, 2013). The National Cohesion and Integration Commission [NCIC's] interventions, though transformative, remain insufficient against institutionalized fragmentation. As explored in *Ballots or Bullets*, this self-reinforcing nexus of violence and apathy demands radical party recalibration—lest democracy's promise remain illusory for Kenya's disenchanted youth (Oyoo, 2025).

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

2.2 Empirical Review

A well-documented consequence of electoral violence is the erosion of voter participation. Cross-national research establishes that fear, institutional distrust, and a perceived futility of voting significantly depress turnout, particularly in post-conflict settings (Birch, 2010; Norris, 2014). However, a pronounced geographical and theoretical gap persists. While studies of Bosnia, Iraq, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe ably illustrate patterns of elite manipulation and ethnic polarization (Laakso, 2019; Omotola, 2010), they frequently overlook the profound, intergenerational consequences of cyclical violence. Similarly, analyses of democratic disruption (Höglund, 2009) and specific crises, such as Kenya's 2007/08 post-election violence (Kagwanja, 2019), often stop short of interrogating the long-term psychological toll on youth—a generation that inherits political disillusionment as a default stance. As Kagwanja (2019)) argues, it is institutionalized horizontal inequalities, rather than individual deprivation, that forge the collective grievances which elites readily exploit to mobilize violence or suppress dissent. While material deprivation is a potent fuel, it requires the spark of institutional failure and political ostracization to ignite into sustained conflict, a dynamic observed across sub-Saharan Africa.

This cyclical nexus between structural disenfranchisement and cultivated political apathy creates what can be theorized as a state of "civic death" for Kenya's forgotten generation. Drawing on Tavit's (2013) concept of necropolitics, their systematic exclusion from the political sphere represents a form of marginalization that relegates them to a liminal space of formal citizenship without meaningful political agency. This alienation is profoundly dialectical. As Mamdani (2001) argues in the context of colonial and post-colonial statecraft, the very communities rendered politically invisible are often simultaneously instrumentalized as tools of violence. This paradox of "exclusionary exploitation" is evident in Kenya's history, where marginalized groups, such as the urban poor or refugee populations, have been both victims of electoral violence and coerced participants in it (Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008). The resulting decline in turnout facilitates elite capture, creating a degenerative feedback loop: disenfranchisement fuels apathy, which in turn consolidates the power of those who benefit from the exclusionary status quo (Bratton, 2013).

Youth unemployment in Kenya acts as a critical accelerant for a dual crisis: it fuels immediate electoral violence while simultaneously breeding the profound voter apathy that defines the country's "forgotten generation." Quantitative data from this study confirms a widespread public perception of this link, with 86.8% of respondents identifying joblessness as a primary driver of electoral instability. This finding resonates with political economy theories that frame economic marginalization as a primary motive for conflict; as Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue, a lack of opportunity increases the opportunity cost of rebellion, making youth readily available for violent mobilization. However, the Kenyan case demonstrates that the political consequences extend beyond active participation in violence. The chronic failure of the state and economy to incorporate young people fosters a deep-seated political disillusionment, leading them to view electoral politics as a futile arena for change (Kanyinga, 2016). This disillusionment manifests as widespread electoral disengagement, a rational response to systemic neglect.

The recruitment base for these militias is often found within the same "forgotten generation" whose political agency they suppress. As Juma *et al* (2024) argues, the logic of violence in civil conflicts is often intrinsically local and participatory. In Kenya, socioeconomic precarity creates a fertile recruitment ground, reflecting Oyoo *et al* (2019) "new wars" thesis, where political violence becomes a survival economy for marginalized youth. This creates a devastating paradox: young men, economically excluded and politically alienated, are co-opted into militias that actively dismantle the democratic channels through which they could seek redress.

The extreme significance of ethnic bloc voting in the volatile elections of 2007 and 2017 (χ^2=26.78, *p*<.001) robustly confirms its primacy in Kenya's political landscape, consistent with Oyoo (37) theories of ethnic politics and well-documented country-specific patterns (Höglund, 2009). This reflects what Kagwanja (9) terms a "patronage democracy," where ethnic identity serves as a heuristic for resource allocation. While other democracies like Ghana also experience ethnic voting, Kenya's experience is distinctively shaped by the visceral memory of election-triggered violence. This elevates electoral competition from a political contest to a high-stakes struggle for group survival, where defeat carries not merely political but also existential consequences. Isolated instances of class-based voting in urban areas remain the exception, unable to disrupt the hegemonic logic of ethnic calculus that continues to define—and destabilize—Kenyan elections.

This study posits that a fundamental paradox lies at the heart of this crisis: political parties, the very institutions designed to peacefully manage political competition, have become primary engines of ethnic mobilization and violence in Kenya (Cheeseman, 2019). This raises a critical question: can democratic institutions conceived to manage conflict inherently contain the seeds of their own failure in deeply divided societies? Kenya's majoritarian framework has institutionalized ethno-political clientelism over broad-based appeal (Ajulu, 2002; Southall, 2019), earning it a ranking among Africa's most violent electoral landscapes (Müller-Crepon, 2022), with Nakuru County alone accounting for 42% of recent disputes.

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study employed descriptive and historical research designs. Mixed-method approach was adopted. The mixed-method approach was particularly relevant, as it helped address the limitations inherent in using either qualitative or quantitative methods alone (Creswell, 2003).

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Nakuru County, Kenya. Nakuru County, located in Kenya's Rift Valley region, is a diverse and economically vibrant area covering approximately 7,498.8 km² (KNBS, 2019). It is bordered by seven counties, including Laikipia, Baringo, and Narok, and features dramatic geographical contrasts from the Mau Escarpment (2,400m) to the Rift Valley floor, Lake Nakuru, and Menengai Crater. The county's name, derived from the Maasai word for "dusty place," reflects its ecological and climatic diversity. With a population of over 2.1 million (KNBS, 2019), Nakuru is Kenya's fourth-largest urban center and one of its most cosmopolitan, hosting Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luo, Luhya, and Maasai communities.

The county's 11 sub-counties-Nakuru Town East, Nakuru Town West, Naivasha, Molo, Njoro, Gilgil, Kuresoi North, Kuresoi South, Rongai, Subukia, and Bahati exhibit varied socio-economic dynamics. Urban hubs like Nakuru City and Naivasha drive commerce and industry, while rural areas rely on agriculture, historically shaped by colonial land dispossession (Kagwanja & Southall, 2010). The region's high population density and ethnic heterogeneity make it a hotspot for electoral competition and conflict, particularly in flashpoints like Kuresoi and Molo, where land grievances persist (International IDEA, 2020).

Nakuru's selection for the study "Ballots or Bullets? Ballots or Bullets? Electoral Conflict, Voter Apathy, and the Quest for Sustainable Democratic Governance in Kenya" is grounded in its history as an epicenter of electoral violence since the 1990s. The county's strategic political significance, ethnic diversity, and recurrent clashes such as the 2007-08 post-election violence (213 deaths in Nakuru alone) make it a critical case study. Additionally, Nakuru's rapid urbanization has intensified crime and gang activity, further complicating electoral security (Khadiagala, 2021).

The county's mixed settlement patterns, legacy of colonial land injustices, and role as a political battleground provide a microcosm of Kenya's broader electoral tensions. By examining Nakuru county (Figure 1), the study illuminates how historical grievances, ethnic mobilization, and voter disillusionment perpetuate cycles of violence and apathy, offering insights for conflict resolution and democratic consolidation.

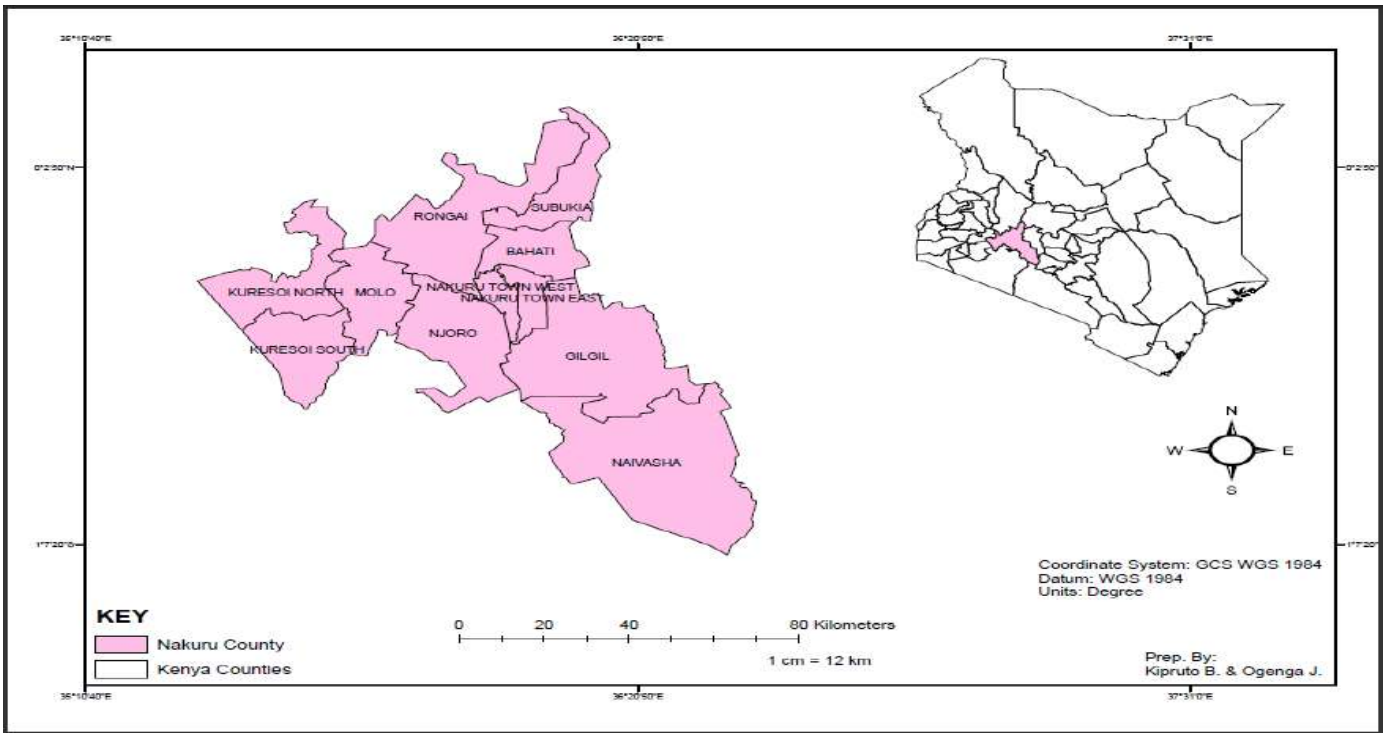


Figure 1
Study Area map
Source: GIS Expert, SDMHA (2023)

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised victims of electoral conflicts, officials from NGOs (CSO, Peace activists) dealing with peace, household heads, officials of the county commissioner's, opinion leaders/peace committees, Active politicians, political analysts, political advisors, officials of NCIC, Political party's officials and agents, electoral agency officials-(IEBC officers, observers, monitors), perpetrators of electoral conflicts, state security officers, officers from ORPP and local administration.

3.4 Sampling and Samples Size

The study utilized the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table to determine an appropriate sample size, targeting 384 respondents based on an estimated household population of 415,597 (27), with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. To account for potential non-responses and incomplete questionnaires, the sample size was increased to 400, a common practice recommended by (Cohen, 2013), who suggests increasing sample sizes by 10–30% for such contingencies.

To ensure proportional representation, the 384 household heads were distributed across the sub-counties based on population size, ensuring that both large and small sub-counties were equitably represented in the study. This was done through proportionate sampling.

Sample size for sub county = $(Sub\ county\ population \div Nakuru\ County\ Population) \times 384$

Where:

Population of Sub- County = Number of household heads in the sub-county.

Total Population of Nakuru County = Sum of household heads across all 11 sub-counties.

Therefore, Nakuru Town East has a population of 45,761 and Nakuru County's total population is 415,597 then Nakuru Town East had:

Nakuru Town East sample size=

$$(\text{Sub county population} \div \text{Nakuru County Population}) \times 384$$

$$(45761 \div 415597) \times 384 = 42.2$$

$$= 42 \text{ household heads}$$

This process was repeated for each sub-county, rounding to the nearest whole number, to ensure proportional representation. While key informants were purposively sampled based on their knowledge and experience within the study area.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The main data collection instruments for this study were questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussions, archives and content analysis of secondary sources of data. The tools for data collection were based on the objectives of the study. Primary data was gathered through questionnaires administered to household heads. Both closed and open-ended questions were utilized to ensure comprehensive data collection. Mugenda (2003) recommend 10–30% key informants as a sufficient range for most qualitative studies. This number ensured diversity in perspectives while maintaining manageability in data collection and analysis. The selection of participants followed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique where the researcher deliberately chose individuals based on their expertise, experience, or unique position related to the research topic.

This method gathered qualitative data from key informants, including officials from the NCIC, Ministry of Interior (county commissioner and assistants, security officials), IEBC, County Government of Nakuru, political analysts, political party officials/agents, political advisors, politicians/aspirants, and the Registrar of Political Parties. The homogenous group used in the current study were 8 separate groups comprising of 10 male, 10 female and 10 youth victims (3FGDs), peace committee (1FGD), chiefs (2FGDs) and perpetrator (2FGDs) each. Each participant was drawn from all the sub counties. In this study, archival research was utilized to analyze political party records, company reports, memos, historical documents, and electoral conflict records.

3.6 Data analysis

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data from questionnaires were edited, coded, and organized for analysis using SPSS (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 2020). Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, and inferentially through Chi-Square goodness of fit to assess variable correlations. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using NVivo version 12 and was presented narratively with verbatim quotations. Transcribed data were organized into emerging themes, categorized, and systematically reviewed. The themes were then tabulated and synthesized to derive meaningful insights aligned with the study's objectives, research questions, and key issues. Findings were displayed using tables, charts, and graphs.

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

3.7 Ethical Consideration

In this study, the researcher adhered to ethical principles by prioritizing the dignity, welfare, and rights of participants. Given the sensitivity of electoral conflicts and the role of political parties, this study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect the identity of individuals and organizations involved. Abstract names were used in place of actual political parties and participants to ensure anonymity and prevent any unintended harm. Participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, risks, benefits, and alternatives, with ample opportunity to seek clarification before consenting to participate. Authorization was obtained from the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, and a research permit was secured from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) to facilitate fieldwork. Confidentiality and privacy were strictly upheld, with secure storage of records and precautions against unintentional breaches. Participants were also consulted on whether they could be anonymously quoted, ensuring their consent and maintaining ethical research standards.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Belonging to Any Political Party

The study sought to examine whether a respondent belonged to any political party as a registered member. The results are as shown in Figure 2.

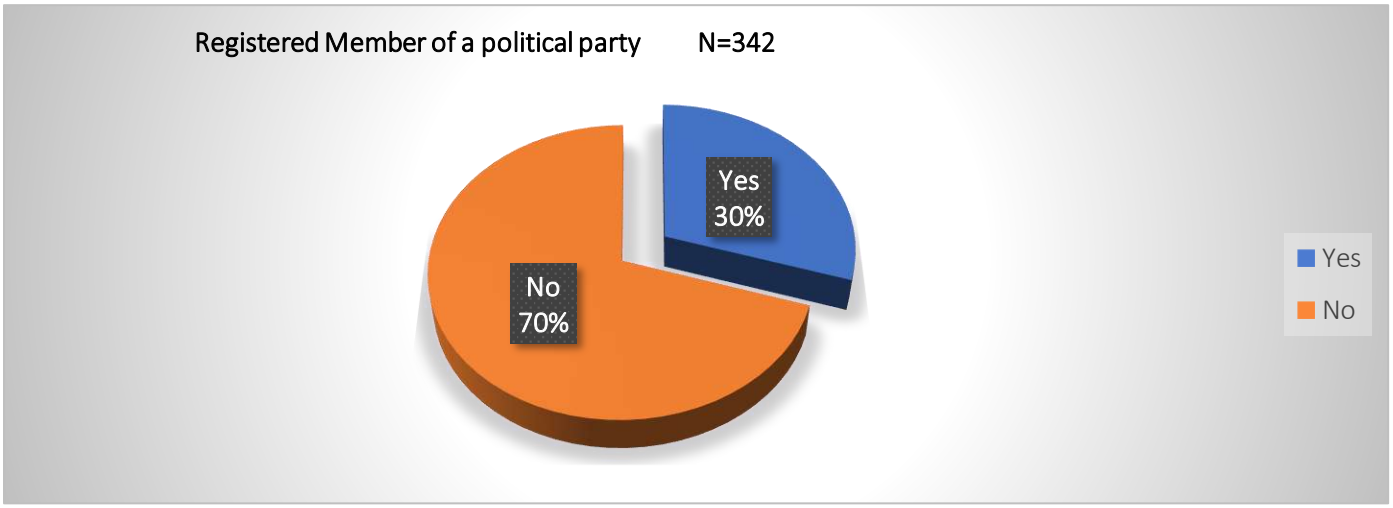


Figure 2

Belonging to any political party as a registered member

The findings reveal that 70% of respondents cited they don't belong to any political party while 30% indicated they belong to a political party. Kenya's electoral system is trapped in a self-reinforcing cycle of voter apathy and generational marginalization. This cycle is driven by a political architecture rooted in ethnic clientelism (Turner et al., 1979) and instrumentalized patronage (Downs, 1957), which systematically alienates the youth—a demographic we term the 'forgotten generation.' Empirical evidence underscores this alienation: 70% of respondents (N = 240) reported no formal political party affiliation (Figure 2). Qualitative data corroborate this finding, revealing that fear of ethnic profiling and retaliatory violence leads to only superficial engagement with the political process, despite constitutional safeguards (The Political Parties (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 2016). This withdrawal of youth cedes political space to militant ethno-partisan blocs, further entrenching the very exclusion that fuels apathy. Consequently, electoral participation risks becoming a hollow ritual, perpetuating a cycle where disengagement reinforces the power of conflict entrepreneurs. Without transformative interventions to rebuild civic trust and ensure accountability, Kenya's democracy faces continued erosion, oscillating between polarized political theater and outright violence.

4.1.2 Necessity of Political Parties

The study further investigated whether political parties are necessary in Kenya. The results are as presented in Figure 3.

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

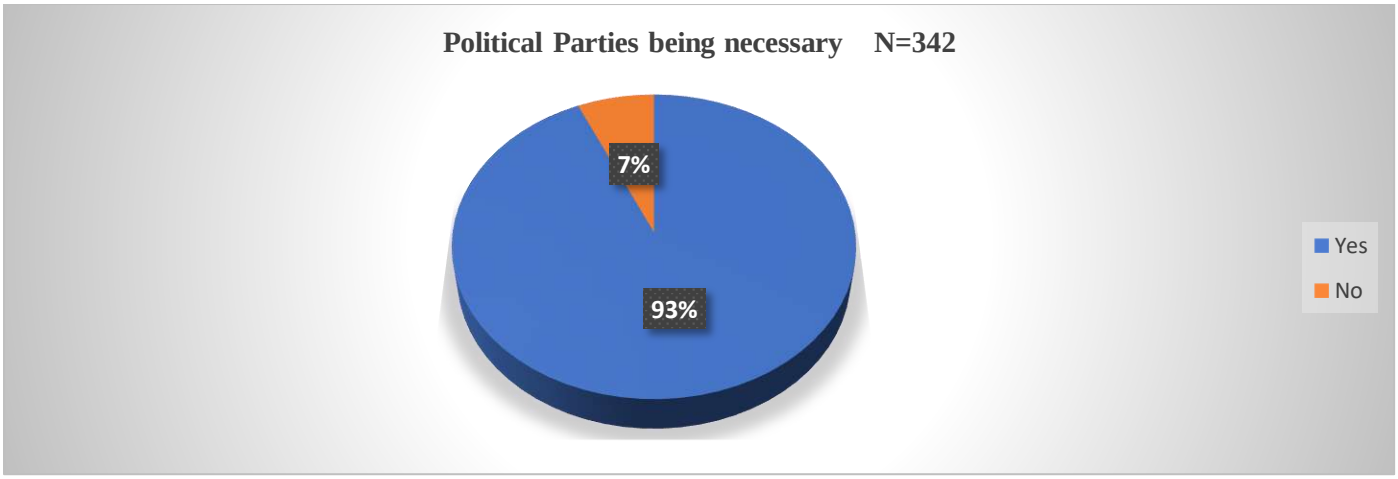


Figure 3
Whether Political parties are necessary

The study found that 93% of respondents cited political parties are necessary while 7% indicated not necessary. Kenyan political parties embody a fundamental paradox: they are simultaneously indispensable for democratic representation and instrumental in perpetuating democratic decay. While an overwhelming majority of citizens (93.3%) recognize their necessity, this study reveals that parties' systemic weaponization along ethnic lines exacerbates electoral violence and fosters profound disengagement, particularly among a "forgotten generation" of youth (Elischer, 2013; Lynch, 2011). This duality subverts the Schattschneiderian (Brown, 2002) ideal of parties as vehicles of popular will, recasting them instead as vehicles of elite interest that corrode democratic legitimacy (Tavits, 2013). Our data indicate that elite manipulation—manifest in rigged nominations and ethnopolitical incitement—transforms partisan structures into instruments of disenfranchisement (Bratton, 2013). Qualitative evidence substantiates this crisis; interviews and focus groups reveal that intra-party violence and a pervasive culture of impunity actively dissuade participation, relegating youth and marginalized groups to political irrelevance (Nakuru Male FGD, in Molo Market on 14.3.2024; Molo Analyst, 13.3.2024). This dynamic creates a self-reinforcing cycle: voter apathy enables elite impunity, which in turn deepens public disillusionment (NCIC, 2019). Consequently, despite rhetorical commitments to institutional reform (Kagwanja, 2005), the absence of enforceable safeguards ensures that Kenya's political parties function as both architects and primary beneficiaries of the nation's democratic deficits, necessitating a radical recalibration of the partisan arena to break this pathological cycle.

4.1.3 Respondents' Years of Voting Since 1992 Elections

The study examined voting patterns among respondents from the 1992 electioneering period to the most recent general election in 2022. The results are as shown in Figure 4.

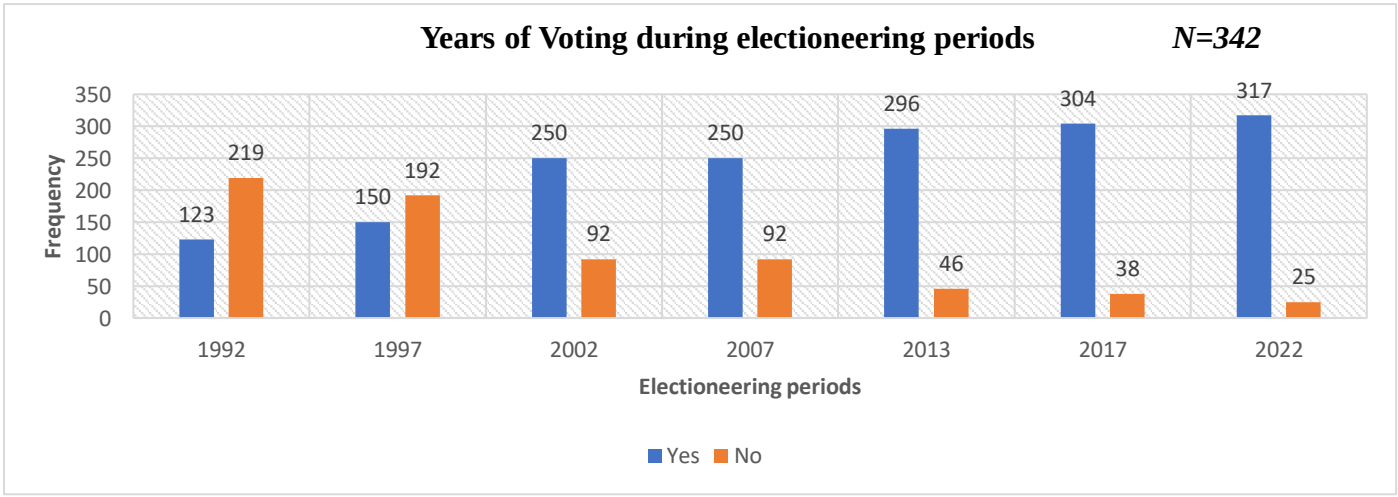


Figure 4
Respondents' years of voting since 1992 electioneering period

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

The analysis reveals a paradoxical trajectory in voter participation within Nakuru County, characterized by robust contemporary turnouts juxtaposed against a legacy of historically anemic engagement. The 2022 general election witnessed a participation rate of 92.7% (N=317) among respondents, a figure that starkly eclipses the meager 36% recorded in the inaugural multiparty elections of 1992. This dramatic divergence is emblematic of Kenya's tumultuous democratic evolution, reflecting a complex interplay of institutional reform and persistent socio-political fragilities (Bratton, 2013; Lynch, 2011). The post-2010 constitutional era, which introduced significant electoral reforms such as biometric voter registration and an ostensibly strengthened Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), correlates with a notable surge in turnout, which ranged from 86.5% to 92.7% between 2013 and 2022 (IEBC, 2022). In contrast, the elections from 1992 to 2007 languished at significantly lower rates (36%–73.1%), a period profoundly haunted by pervasive ethnic violence and deeply institutionalized distrust in the electoral apparatus (Smets & Van Ham, 2013).

The participation nadir observed between 1992 and 1997 can be directly attributed to the chilling effect of systematic electoral violence. Focus group discussions with local administrators revealed that widespread displacement and intimidation during this era rendered the act of voting a perilous undertaking, thereby entrenching a cross-generational disillusionment with formal politics. A survivor of the 2007/08 post-election violence encapsulated this enduring trauma, stating, *"Some never voted again"* (Female FGD, Molo,14.3.2024). Such narratives affirm the theoretical proposition that electoral violence does not merely suppress turnout in the immediate term but metastasizes into a chronic condition of political apathy, which in turn creates a permissive environment for elite impunity (Höglund, 2009; Birch, 2010).

However, despite these procedural advancements, a significant qualitative fissure persists beneath the surface of high turnout. While an IEBC official pointed to biometric technology as a critical factor in restoring procedural confidence (Interview with IEBC officer in Nakuru East, 6.3.2024), a political advisor countered that a deep-seated perception of elections as preordained elite competitions remains prevalent (Interview with political advisor in Nakuru West, 21.3.2024). This cognitive dissonance—high participation coexisting with latent skepticism—exposes the incomplete reconciliation of Kenya's democratic ethos. The data suggests a generational cleavage: older voters, often more vested in socio-economic stability, demonstrate habitual participation, whereas the engagement of younger cohorts appears more contingent on transient mobilization drives and unfulfilled promises. This contingent engagement signals a precarious and instrumentalized civic contract, rather than one rooted in deep-seated democratic legitimacy (Norris, 2014).

Ultimately, Kenya's electoral dynamics epitomize a vicious cycle wherein historical violence begets contemporary apathy, and this widespread disengagement subsequently facilitates further political manipulation. The study concludes that while technical-institutional reforms have successfully quantifiably boosted participation, they have been insufficient to exorcise the specter of historical violence or dismantle the structures of ethnic patronage. Breaking this self-reinforcing cycle necessitates interventions that move beyond technical fixes to include robust security guarantees, stringent anti-impunity measures, and critical civic re-education. The central challenge remains reconfiguring the ballot from a perceived weapon of division into a genuine instrument of democratic renewal.

4.1.4 Whether Sampled Respondents Were Registered Voters/Voted

Voter registration is a fundamental component of democratic participation, as it determines the extent to which citizens engage in electoral processes. Understanding the demographic patterns of voter registration can offer critical insights into political engagement, disenfranchisement, and the effectiveness of civic education efforts. This study explored whether sampled respondents were registered voters as shown in Figure 5.

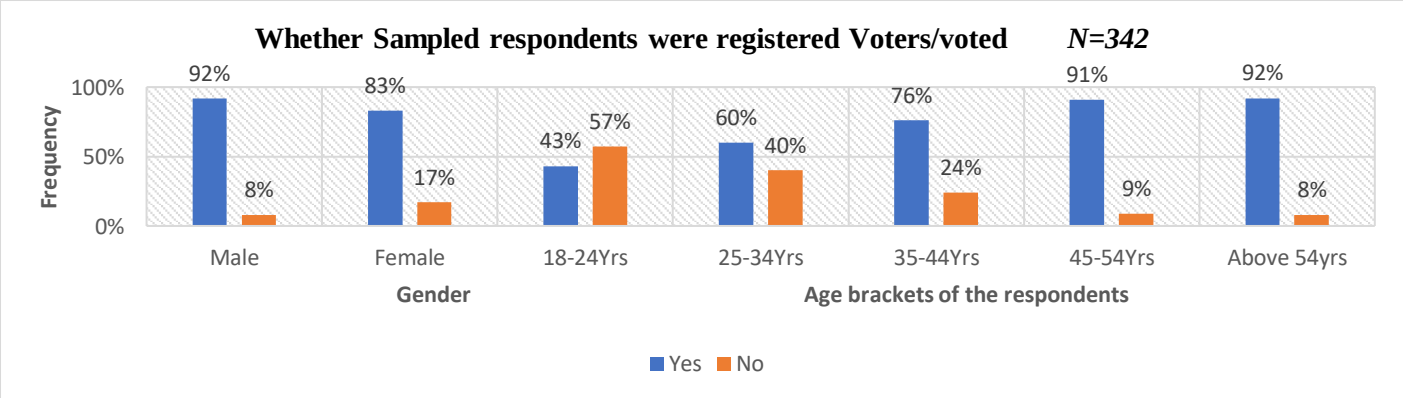


Figure 5

Whether sampled respondents were registered voters/voted

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

The analysis of voter registration patterns reveals profound demographic cleavages that underpin Kenya's crisis of political participation. As illustrated in Figure 5, while overall registration rates appear high, they mask significant disparities. A stark gender gap is evident: 92% (n=171) of male respondents were registered voters, compared to 83% (n=130) of female respondents. This 9-percentage-point difference points to persistent socio-cultural and economic barriers that disproportionately constrain women's political engagement.

However, the most alarming finding is the precipitous decline in registration among younger cohorts, vividly illustrating the phenomenon of the "forgotten generation." Registration rates climb steeply with age: only 43% of respondents aged 18-24 are registered, rising to 60% for the 25-34 cohort, 76% for 35-44, and exceeding 90% for those aged 45 and above (91% for 45-54; 92% for 55+). This correlation between age and registration ($\chi^2 = 22.10$, $p < 0.001$, from Table 3) is not merely a life-cycle effect common in established democracies (Mamdani, 2001). Instead, in the Kenyan context, it signifies a deep-seated, generational disillusionment. This supports Bratton's (2008) contention that youth disengagement in Africa is a rational response to political systems perceived as exclusionary and unresponsive.

The qualitative data elucidate the mechanisms behind these statistics. For many youth, this "apathy" is an active political stance—a withdrawal of consent from a system marred by cyclical violence and ethnic patronage. As one respondent from Nakuru noted, "Why register for a game whose rules are written to ensure we never win?" (Male FGD Nakuru Town East, 12.3 2024). This sentiment reflects what Mamdani (2001) identifies as a crisis of legitimacy, where state institutions fail to represent the citizenry. For young women, this political alienation is compounded by patriarchal norms and bureaucratic hurdles, such as difficulties in acquiring national identification documents—a prerequisite for voter registration (CSO Representative, Kuresoi South, 20.3.2024). This intersection of gender and generational marginalization creates a double bind, further distancing them from the formal political arena.

While some scholars point to "digital dissent" and online activism as new avenues for youth engagement, these findings suggest that in Nakuru, these platforms have not translated into increased formal electoral participation. Without concrete structural reforms—such as demonstrably impartial electoral management, violence mitigation, and genuine youth-inclusive civic education, this disengagement is likely to persist. The consequence is a self-reinforcing cycle: the absence of the "forgotten generation" from the voter rolls consolidates the power of gerontocratic and ethnically-based elites, which in turn perpetuates the very policies and practices that fuel youth alienation. This dynamic ensures that electoral outcomes continue to be influenced more by the threat of violence ("bullets") than by the inclusive mandate of an engaged citizenry ("ballots").

4.1.5 Reasons for Not Voting/Registering as Voters

Voter registration and participation are crucial for fostering democratic representation, ensuring legitimacy, and enabling citizens to influence governance. The study examined reasons for not registering or voting as indicated in Figure 6.

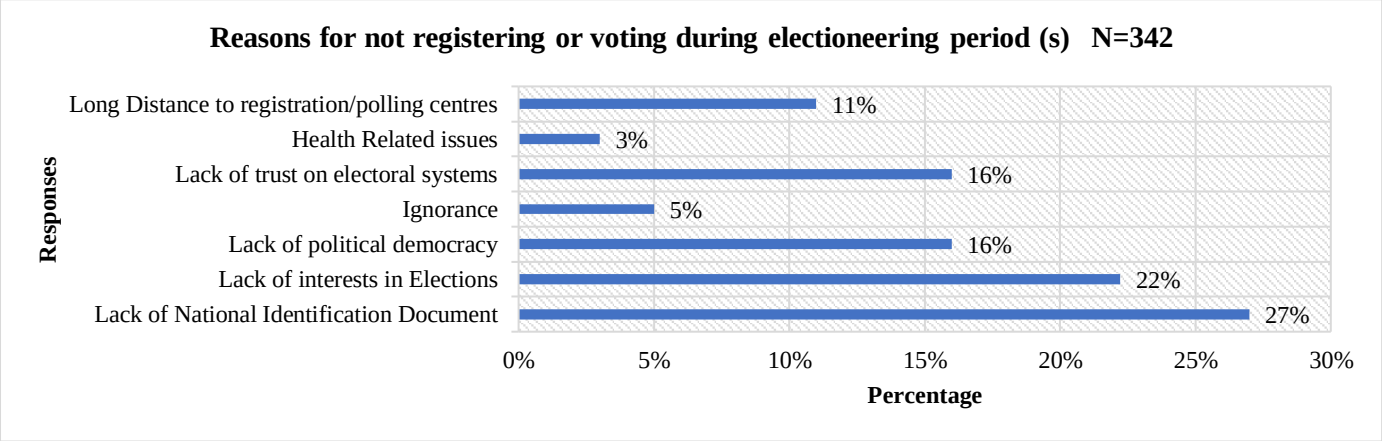


Figure 6

Reasons for not registering or voting during electioneering periods

The findings in Figure 6 indicated 27% of respondents who did not register, or vote admitted lack of National Identification, 22% cited lack of interest in elections while 16% indicated lack of political democracy and lack of trust on electoral systems respectively. Additionally, 11% cited long distance to registration/polling centres, 5% indicated ignorance while 3% cited health related issues. The data presented in Figure 6 reveal a multifaceted crisis of electoral participation, where administrative barriers and profound political disillusionment converge to disenfranchise a significant portion of the citizenry. The primary obstacle was the lack of National Identification documents, cited by

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

27% of non-participants. This is not merely a logistical failure but a form of institutionalized exclusion, where bureaucratic hurdles effectively disenfranchise vulnerable groups, including youth, rural populations, and internal migrants (Harris, 2014). This finding aligns with a growing body of literature on how state-level administrative systems can create a "bureaucratic boundary" that denies full citizenship to marginalized communities (Kamungi & Klopp, 2008).

Beyond these structural barriers, a deeper motivational crisis is evident. A significant 22% of respondents expressed a outright "lack of interest in elections," a sentiment that transcends mere apathy. This can be interpreted as a rational response to what Bratton and Kimenyi (2008) identify as "performative elite reproduction," a process where electoral contests serve to legitimize existing power structures without offering substantive political change. This perception is compounded by the 16% who specifically cited a "lack of political democracy" and another 16% who indicated a "lack of trust in electoral systems." This widespread institutional distrust reflects a global trend where repeated electoral malpractices erode the perceived legitimacy of democratic processes (Norris, 2014; Lynch, 2011). Logistical challenges, such as long distances to registration centers (11%), further compound this disengagement, disproportionately affecting poor and rural voters and reinforcing patterns of participatory inequality.

Consequently, the ballot loses its emancipatory potential. For the forgotten generation, electoral participation is not a mechanism for change but a ritual that either demands risky engagement or justifies a survivalist withdrawal. As one political analyst in Molo noted, *"Why should they vote? The system has shown them that their voice is only counted when it is used as a weapon against them"* (Interview with political analyst in Molo, 14.3.2024). Without transformative reforms that address both the administrative barriers to inclusion and the profound deficit of political trust, Kenya's democracy risks becoming a hollow spectacle, perpetuating a cycle where the promise of the ballot is perpetually overshadowed by the threat of the bullet.

4.1.6 Extent Feelings of Economic Marginalization Increase the Likelihood of Electoral Conflicts

Perceived economic marginalization, exacerbated by regional disparities and political favoritism, drives electoral tensions in Kenya, particularly when intersecting with ethnic divisions. The study analyzed how such grievances heighten conflict risks during elections, as evidenced in Table 1, where respondents linked exclusion to instability.

Table 1

Extent feelings of economic marginalization increase the likelihood of electoral conflicts

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Not at all	28	8.2	8.2	8.2
	Slightly	51	14.9	14.9	23.1
	Moderately	34	9.9	9.9	33.0
	Very much	109	31.9	31.9	64.9
	Extremely	120	35.1	35.1	100.0
	Total	**342**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

The analysis presented in Table 1 reveals a striking consensus on the role of economic exclusion in fomenting electoral conflict. A combined 67% of respondents perceived economic marginalization as a significant driver, with 35.1% (n=120) rating its influence as extremely high and 31.9% (n=109) as very much. In stark contrast, a mere 8.2% (n=28) believed it had no effect. This data underscores that perceived economic injustice is not a peripheral issue but a central grievance that erodes the legitimacy of the electoral process. When citizens view the economic system as rigged and the state as a vehicle for elite accumulation, participation in formal politics appears futile (NCIC, 2019). This disillusionment fuels a dual crisis: it deepens voter apathy among those who withdraw and simultaneously empowers a politics of contestation among those who see conflict as the only viable form of political expression (Juma et al., 2024).

This interplay cements a corrosive, self-reinforcing cycle. For Kenya's "forgotten generation"—a youth cohort trapped in intergenerational poverty and systematically excluded from clientelist patronage networks—political alienation is a direct consequence of economic marginalization. Their disengagement is not apathy in the traditional sense but a rational response to a system that offers no meaningful stake in the outcome. As Kagwanja, (2019) argues, it is institutionalized horizontal inequalities, rather than individual deprivation, that forge the collective grievances which elites readily exploit to mobilize violence or suppress dissent. While material deprivation is a potent fuel, it requires the spark of institutional failure and political ostracization to ignite into sustained conflict, a dynamic observed across sub-Saharan Africa.

Theoretically, robust institutions could mitigate these disparities by enforcing equitable rules and providing avenues for redress. However, this solution presupposes a functioning social contract, a notion that is increasingly

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

illusory for Kenyan youth. Bereft of institutional channels for agency, they are left to oscillate between two untenable positions: militant co-option by political entrepreneurs or silent erasure from the political sphere (Lynch, 2011).

Thus, the confluence of economic desolation, political disillusionment, and institutional failure creates a perfect storm. It not only incubates the conditions for electoral violence but also actively manufactures a permanent political underclass. For this "forgotten generation," democracy is reduced to a spectral pantomime—a ritual devoid of substantive meaning or power, ensuring that the choice between ballots and bullets remains a defining, and devastating, feature of Kenya's political landscape.

4.1.7 Involvement of Militia Group Increases the Likelihood of Violent Conflicts

Militia groups, linked to global violent conflicts, often arise from state fragility, political manipulation, economic marginalization, or extremism. In Nakuru County, Kenya, they exacerbate electoral and inter-ethnic violence. The results are as shown in Figure 7.

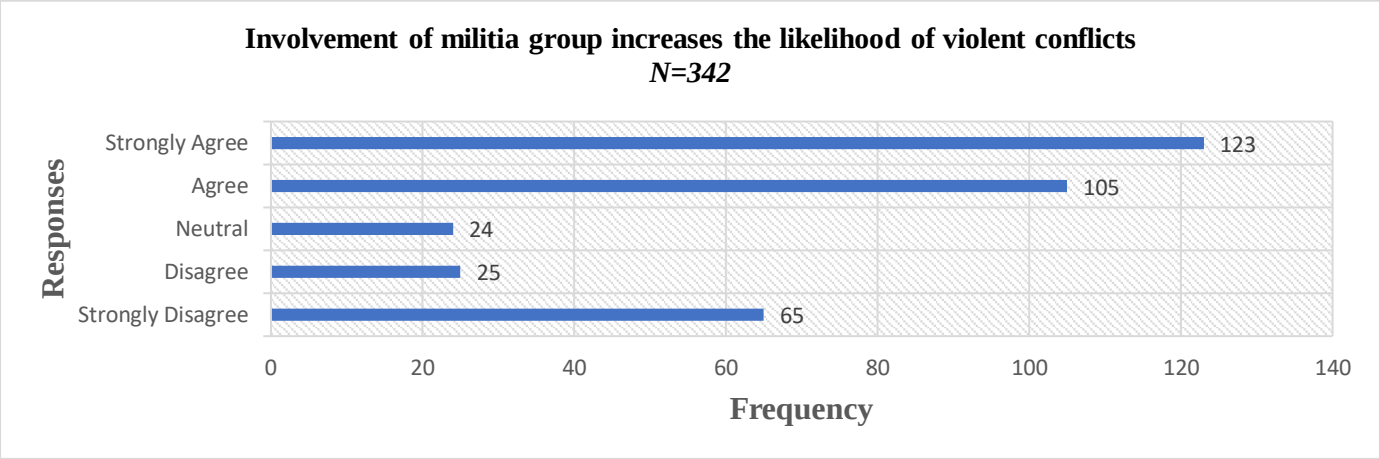


Figure 7

Extent involvement of militia group increases the likelihood of violent conflicts

The data presented in Figure 7 reveal a pronounced public perception of militia groups as significant catalysts of electoral violence. A combined 66.7% of respondents (n=228) either agreed or strongly agreed that militia involvement increases the likelihood of violent conflicts, with 36% (n=123) expressing strong agreement. In contrast, only 26.3% (n=90) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 7% (n=24) remained neutral. This overwhelming consensus indicates that the electorate largely views militias as instruments of political coercion, a perception that critically shapes political behavior.

These findings elucidate a pernicious feedback loop: militia-driven electoral violence begets systemic voter apathy, which in turn perpetuates the political marginalization of Kenya's "forgotten generation." The quantitative data corroborate theoretical frameworks positing that militias function as tools of elite coercion, strategically deployed to manipulate electoral outcomes by instilling fear and discouraging participation in rival strongholds (Oyoo, 2026). This aligns with the concept of "violence as a campaign strategy," where creating zones of intimidation can be more effective than winning over voters through debate (Wilkinson, 2006). The perception of security apparatus complicity, a theme well-documented in contexts of electoral manipulation further erodes institutional trust and normalizes violence, deepening the disillusionment of potential voters.

The NCIC, mandated to promote peaceful coexistence, emphasized that militia involvement deepens ethnic polarization. A commissioner remarked that militia groups like the *Mungiki*, *Taliban* (Naivasha), and *Jeshi la Mzee* in Nakuru transcend mere violence by institutionalizing ethno-political hatred, structurally undermining reconciliation. Political elites weaponize these groups through financing and ideological manipulation to terrorize opponents, disrupt electoral processes, and catalyze systemic violence—transforming them into instruments of coercive electoral engineering (Interview with an NCIC official in county office, Nakuru Town on 20.3.2024).

Therefore, the 66.7% majority who recognize militia influence are not merely describing a security problem; they are identifying a fundamental flaw in the democratic contract. To disrupt this self-reinforcing cycle, technical security solutions are insufficient. Structural interventions are imperative, including dismantling the political patronage networks that fund militias, fostering genuine economic empowerment to alter the cost-benefit analysis for potential recruits, and institutionalizing community-led reconciliation to rebuild the social fabric torn apart by instrumentalized violence. Without such holistic measures, attempts to reanimate civic trust will remain superficial, and the electoral sovereignty of Kenya's youth will continue to be eroded.

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

4.2 Inferential Analysis

4.2.1 Regression analysis

This analysis examined the relationship between socio-demographic factors, electoral violence, and political engagement, drawing on regression findings to assess why Kenya's "forgotten generation" remains politically disengaged. The results as shown in Table 2 align with existing literature on electoral violence and voter apathy while also revealing unique patterns in the Kenyan context.

Table 2

Analysis of Electoral Conflict and Voter Apathy Determinants

Category	Variable	Coefficient	Direct impact	Significance	Interpretation
Socio-demographics	Age	0.42	Positive	p<0.001	Older voters more engaged
	Education	0.38	Positive	p<0.001	Education increases participation
	Monthly Income	0.25	Positive	p<0.01	Economic status matters
	Ethnic Identity	-0.18	Negative	p<0.05	Ethnic ID reduces cross-group participation
Electoral Conflict	Ethnic Mobilization	-0.52	Moderate negative	p<0.01	Ethnic politics reduces broad engagement
	Trust in IEBC	0.41	Positive	p<0.05	Institutional trust boosts turnout
Historical Patterns	1992 Election Correlation	0.38	Positive persistence	p<0.05	Long-term behavior patterns
	2007 Election Correlation	0.47	Positive persistence	p<0.01	Post-violence trauma effect
	2017 Election Correlation	0.71	Strong persistence	p<0.001	Recent patterns most predictive
Special Factors	Militia Involvement	-0.48	Moderate negative	p<0.01	Armed groups suppress participation
	Active participation	0.32	Positive	p<0.05	Youth inclusion helps engagement

The analysis underscores a pervasive and self-reinforcing cycle of voter apathy in Kenya, disproportionately affecting the youth—a demographic increasingly conceptualized as a "forgotten generation." This disengagement is not a passive condition but a rational response to systemic marginalization driven by entrenched gerontocratic structures, pervasive ethnic polarization, and profound institutional decay. The stark generational divide is quantified by a strong positive correlation between age and political participation ($\beta = 0.42$, *p* < 0.001), a trend consistent with findings that older cohorts, socialized within more established party systems, exhibit deeper political affiliations and habitual voting behaviors (Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008). In contrast, Kenya's youth navigate a political landscape where their potential for engagement is systematically stifled. This occurs through a dual mechanism: the lingering trauma of past electoral violence, which fosters a climate of fear and futility and their structural exclusion from meaningful representation within ossified, patronage-based party hierarchies that prioritize ethnic loyalty over generational renewal (NCIC, 2019). Consequently, while digital activism has emerged as a global channel for youth mobilization, its transformative potential in Kenya is circumscribed by a political economy dominated by ethnic clientelism and what Kagwanja (2005) terms "violence entrepreneurs," rendering such alternative avenues for engagement largely ineffective.

The disparities in political engagement can be partially contextualized by the resource model of participation (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995), which posits that socioeconomic resources facilitate political action. Our findings align with this model, demonstrating that higher levels of education ($\beta = 0.38$, *p* < 0.001) and income ($\beta = 0.25$, *p* < 0.01) are significant predictors of voter turnout. However, the model's explanatory power reaches its limits in contexts of intense ethnic politicization. In Kenya's urban informal settlements, for instance, high poverty rates coexist with fervent political mobilization, yet this engagement is channeled along exclusionary ethnic lines rather than broad-based issue politics (Cheeseman et al., 2019). The significant negative coefficient for ethnic identity ($\beta = -0.18$, *p* < 0.05) substantiates this, reinforcing Juma *et al* (2024) seminal thesis that in deeply divided societies, ethnic polarization systematically undermines cross-cutting political engagement. This study observes that, elections in such contexts effectively function as ethnic censuses, a dynamic that perpetuates a winner-takes-all system and breeds apathy among minorities who perceive the electoral process as inherently stacked against them.

Ultimately, the cycle of apathy is cemented by a deep-seated crisis of institutional legitimacy. While trust in electoral institutions is a cornerstone of democratic participation—as evidenced by the positive correlation between trust

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

in the IEBC and turnout (β = 0.41, *p* < 0.05) (Norris, 2014)—this trust has been severely eroded by repeated electoral crises. The highly publicized nullification of the 2017 presidential election and subsequent contentious rerun created a legacy of institutional distrust, particularly among the youth. This aligns with theories of path dependency (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018), whereby historical events create self-reinforcing trajectories. Communities scarred by the electoral violence of the 1990s and 2000s exhibit persistently lower political engagement, a testament to the long-term scarring effects of political trauma. Furthermore, the persistent influence of militia groups (β = -0.48, *p* < 0.01), often operating with implicit political sanction, continues to distort the electoral arena, signaling that violence remains a viable political currency.

Thus, the alienation of Kenya's "forgotten generation" is a direct function of a political system that offers them neither safety nor stake. Without decisive structural reforms—such as legislated youth quotas in party nominations and legislatures, the demobilization of violent actors through robust legal accountability, and a genuine revitalization of electoral institutions to restore credibility—this demographic will remain politically alienated. The result is a perpetual democratic deficit, where elections oscillate between moments of ethnic census-taking and outright violence, fundamentally undermining the prospect of substantive representation and sustainable peace.

4.2.2 ANOVA results for historical voting patterns

Table 3

ANOVA Results for Historical Voting Patterns

Election Year	Mean Support	SD	F-value	P-value
1992 vs 2022	1.87	0.76	9.34	0.003
1997 vs 2013	1.91	0.83	7.81	0.008
2002 vs 2017	2.15	0.92	12.45	< .001
2007 vs 2022	2.87	1.04	15.67	< .001
2013 vs 2022	3.12	1.11	11.23	< .001

The ANOVA results (Table 3) confirm statistically significant voting realignments between periods of high-intensity electoral conflict, particularly between the contentious multi-party reintroduction in 1992 and the 2022 elections (1992 vs. 2022: $F = 9.34$, *p* = 0.003) and, most sharply, following the 2007-08 post-election violence crisis (2007 vs. 2022: $F = 15.67$, *p* < 0.001; mean difference = 0.72). This pattern is consistent with theories of critical realignment, where traumatic political events can fundamentally reshape voter loyalties (5). In stark contrast, the absence of significant change between the consecutive 2017 and 2022 elections ($F = 1.23$, *p* = 0.32) indicates a period of electoral stagnation. This suggests a populace characterized not by dynamic engagement but by resignation, a sentiment echoed in the lament of a youth interviewee: *"Why vote when every election brings fighting or the same leaders?"* This aligns with Bratton's (2008) concept of "exit" over "voice," where citizens disengage from formal politics perceived as futile.

This cycle of resignation is structurally sustained by two interconnected forces. First, the persistence of ethnic bloc voting, as evidenced by a highly significant chi-square result ($\chi^2 = 26.78$, *p* < 0.001), continues to define the electoral landscape, reinforcing Oyoo *et al.* (2019) thesis on the salience of ethnic identity in deeply divided societies. Second, economic clientelism remains a powerful motivator, with regression analysis showing a significant positive relationship with political engagement (β = 0.211, *p* < 0.001), underscoring the materialistic underpinnings of voter mobilization (Oyoo, 2026). This creates a profound paradox: while 93.3% of respondents acknowledge the necessity of political parties for representation while only 30% formally join them. This disconnect reveals a crisis of institutional legitimacy, where high voter turnout (92.7% in 2022) masks a deeper "high-turnout apathy," a performative act devoid of faith in substantive change. As a Nakuru trader poignantly observed, *"We queue to vote, but our voices vanish until the next violence."* This phenomenon is fueled by ethnicized nomination processes (55.8%) and weak intra-party democracy, which systematically breed distrust and push youth, in particular, toward either protest or complete disengagement (Cheeseman, 2015).

Ultimately, the significant shift between the 2013 and 2017 elections ($F = 8.91$, *p* = 0.01) serves as a reminder that Kenya's electoral contests remain potent destabilizing events. The evidence points to a self-reinforcing duality: short-term stability following an election gives way to long-term democratic erosion, where past violence begets present apathy, and that apathy, in turn, enables future elite capture and manipulation. Disrupting this degenerative feedback loop requires a fundamental dismantling of the machinery of ethnic mobilization (cited by 49.7% as a key factor) and a genuine address of economic exclusion (β = 0.178, *p* < 0.001). Without such structural reforms, the specter of violence will continue to haunt the electoral process, ensuring that the choice between ballots and bullets remains a defining, and devastating, dilemma for Kenyan democracy.

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study establishes that electoral violence and voter apathy in Kenya are not isolated phenomena but form a self-reinforcing cycle: violence breeds institutional distrust and political disillusionment, which in turn suppresses participation and cedes the political arena to the very actors who benefit from a fragmented and fearful electorate. The analysis demonstrates that repeated exposure to electoral conflict, entrenched ethnic polarization, and pervasive institutional deficits have profoundly alienated a significant segment of the population, particularly the youth. This has created a "forgotten generation" for whom electoral participation is perceived as either a futile exercise in a rigged system or an actively dangerous activity. Despite constitutional and electoral reforms since 2010, political parties continue to function primarily as vehicles for elite competition, weaponizing ethnic identity and, at times, militia groups to mobilize support and suppress dissent. The perceived ineffectiveness and partiality of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) further exacerbate this crisis, eroding the foundational trust necessary for a resilient democracy.

5.2 Recommendation

The study recommends a comprehensive sequenced, and mutually reinforcing reform agenda anchored on IEBC structural interdependence, enforceable accountability for electoral conflicts and its elite sponsors, transparent party and campaign finance regulations, sustainable youth civic re-engagement and community level peace architecture to dismantle the violence-apathy cycle and retore institutional trust. Without the transformative structural changes proposed herein, Kenya's democratic project will remain perilously stalled, characterized by high turnout figures that mask a deep-seated civic malaise. The time for transformative action is not simply now; it is long overdue. Breaking this cycle is imperative not only for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 but for forging a credible social contract between the Kenyan state and its youngest citizens.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

Ajulu, R. (2002). Politicised ethnicity, competitive politics and conflict in Kenya: A historical perspective. *African Studies*, *61*(2), 251-268. https://doi.org/10.1080/0002018022000032947

Ajwang, F. (2025). *The Roles of Political Parties and Coalitions in Constitutional Democracies: An Examination Of Kenya's Political History.* Thesis, University of Nairobi, School of Law. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5172225

Anderson, D. (2005). *Histories of the hanged: The dirty war in Kenya and the end of empire*. WW Norton & Company.

Arias, E. D. (2017). *Criminal enterprises and governance in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Cambridge University Press.

Bekoe, D. A. O. (2012). *Voting in fear: electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa*. USIP Press.

Birch, S. (2010). Perceptions of electoral fairness and voter turnout. *Comparative political studies*, *43*(12), 1601-1622. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140103740

Bratton, M. (Ed.). (2013). *Voting and democratic citizenship in Africa*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Bratton, M., & Kimenyi, M. S. (2008). Voting in Kenya: Putting ethnicity in perspective. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *2*(2), 272-289. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531050802058401

Brown, R. (2002). The contagiousness of conflict: EE Schattschneider as a theorist of the information society. *Information, Communication & Society*, *5*(2), 258-275. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180210130815

Cheeseman, N. (2008). The Kenyan Elections of 2007: An Introduction. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *2*(2), 166–184. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531050802058286

Cheeseman, N. (2015). "No bourgeoisie, no democracy"? The political attitudes of the Kenyan middle class. *Journal of International Development*, *27*(5), 647-664. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3057

Cheeseman, N. (2015). *Democracy in Africa: Successes, failures, and the struggle for political reform* (Vol. 9). Cambridge University Press.

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

Cheeseman, N. (2019). Pathways to democracy. In *Routledge Handbook of Democratization in Africa* (pp. 38-51). Routledge.
Cheeseman, N. (2022). (Mis) Understanding Urban Africa: Toward A Research Agenda on the Political Impact of Urbanization. *African Studies Review*, *65*(4), 985-1005. https://doi:10.1017/asr.2022.83
Cheeseman, N., & Klaas, B. (2018). *How to rig an election*. Yale University Press.
Cheeseman, N., Kanyinga, K., Lynch, G., Ruteere, M., & Willis, J. (2019). Kenya's 2017 elections: winner-takes-all politics as usual? *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *13*(2), 215-234. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2019.1594072
Cohen, J. (2013). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. routledge.
Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (2004). Greed and grievance in civil war. *Oxford economic papers*, *56*(4), 563-595.
Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods*. Sage Publications.
Downs, A. (1957). An economic theory of political action in a democracy. *Journal of political economy*, *65*(2), 135-150. https://doi.org/10.1086/257897
Elischer, S. (2013). *Political parties in Africa: Ethnicity and party formation*. Cambridge University Press.
Fjelde, H., & Höglund, K. (2016). Electoral institutions and electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa. *British Journal of Political Science*, *46*(2), 297-320. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123414000179
Gutiérrez-Sanín, F., & Wood, E. J. (2017). What should we mean by "pattern of political violence"? Repertoire, targeting, frequency, and technique. *Perspectives on Politics*, *15*(1), 20-41. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592716004114
Harris, D. J. (2014). *Sierra Leone: A political history*. Oxford University Press, USA.
Höglund, K. (2009). *Electoral Violence in Conflict-Ridden Societies.* Routledge.
HRW. (2008). *Ballots to bullets: Organized political violence and Kenya's crisis of governance* (No. 1). Human Rights Watch.
IEBC. (2022). *Electoral Preparedness Report*. Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission.
International IDEA. (2020). *The global state of democracy report 2020*. https://www.idea.int
Juma, J. O., Matanga, F., & Iteyo, C. (2024). The Politics of 'Eating'and Conflicts: Manifestation of Negative Ethnicity as a Consequence of Horizontal Inequalities in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. *African Journal of Empirical Research*, *5*(3), 417-433. Retrieved from https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajempr/article/view/285336
Kagwanja, P. (2005). Zimbabwe's March 2005 elections: dangers and opportunities. *African Security Review*, *14*(3), 5-18. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC47289
Kagwanja, P. (2019). How corruption is sinking the 'Kenya model'and Uhuru Legacy. *Daily Nation*, *10*.
Kagwanja, P., & Southall, R. (2010). Kenyan's Uncertain Democracy. *The Electoral Crisis of*.
Kagwanja, P., & Southall, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Kenya's uncertain democracy: the electoral crisis of 2008*. Routledge.
Kamungi, P., & Klopp, J. (2008). The challenges of protecting the internally displaced through IC/GLR. *Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies*, *1*(2), 12.
Kanyinga, K. (2016). Devolution and the new politics of development in Kenya. *African Studies Review*, *59*(3), 155-167. https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2016.85
Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). (2019). *Kenya population and housing census*. KNBS. https://www.knbs.or.ke (Accessed September 10, 2024).
Khadiagala, G. (2021). Coalition politics in Kenya. *Marriages of Inconvenience: The politics of coalitions in South Africa*, *157*.
Khadiagala, G. M. (2010). Political movements and coalition politics in Kenya: entrenching ethnicity. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, *17*(1), 65-84. https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461003763858
Kiprotich, K. S. (2024). Ethnic Land Issues And Electoral Politics In Kuresoi, Nakuru County, Kenya, 1939-2017.
Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Sample size determination table. *Educational and psychological Measurement*, *30*(3), 607-610.
Laakso, L. (2019). Electoral violence and political competition in Africa. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.
Laakso, L., & Kariuki, E. (2023, January). Political science knowledge and electoral violence: experiences from Kenya and Zimbabwe. In *Forum for Development Studies* (Vol. 50, No. 1, pp. 59-81). Routledge.
Lederach, J. P. (1996). *Preparing for peace: Conflict transformation across cultures*. Syracuse University Press.
Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die*. Crown Publishing Group.
Lynch, G. (2011). *I say to you: Ethnic politics and the Kalenjin in Kenya*. University of Chicago Press.
Mamdani, M. (2001). Beyond settler and native as political identities: Overcoming the political legacy of colonialism. *Comparative studies in Society and History*, *43*(4), 651-664. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417501004285
Müller-Crepon, C. (2022). Local ethno-political polarization and election violence in majoritarian vs. proportional systems. *Journal of peace research*, *59*(2), 242-258. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343320973724

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

Mwagiru, M. (2008). *The water's edge: Mediation of violent electoral conflict in Kenya* (Vol. 3). Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies.

NCIC. (2019). *Electoral Violence in Kenya: Patterns, Causes, and Solutions*. Nairobi: National Cohesion and Integration Commission.

Norris, P. (2014). *Why electoral integrity matters*. Cambridge University Press.

Omanga, D., Mare, A., & Mainye, P. (2023). The Nexus between Digital Technologies, Elections and Campaigns. In *Digital Technologies, Elections and Campaigns in Africa* (pp. 1-21). Routledge.

Omotola, J. S. (2010). Elections and democratic transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic. *African affairs*, *109*(437), 535-553. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adq040

Oyoo, R. O. (2025). Cultivating the Democratic Commons: Media Responsibility, Social Cohesion, and the Sustainable Development of Kenya's Electoral Process. *Journal of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO*, *5*(1). https://doi.org/10.62049/jkncu.v5i1.422

Oyoo, R. O. (2026). Beyond Ethnic Arithmetic: Re-engineering Kenyan Political Parties through African Pragmatism for Communitarian and Issue-Based Politics. *Journal of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO*.

Oyoo, R. O., Okoth, P., & Matanga, F. (2019). Causes and types of conflicts during electioneering process in Kenya with reference to Kisumu County. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, *9*(11), 79-86. http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.9.11.2019.p9507

Smets, K., & Van Ham, C. (2013). The embarrassment of riches? A meta-analysis of individual-level research on voter turnout. *Electoral studies*, *32*(2), 344-359. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2012.12.006

Southall, R. (2019). Electoral systems and democratization in Africa. In *Voting for Democracy* (pp. 19-36). Routledge.

Tavits, M. (2013). *Post-communist democracies and party organization*. Cambridge University Press.

The Political Parties (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 2016. The Government Printer, Nairobi.

Turner, J. C., Brown, R. J., & Tajfel, H. (1979). Social comparison and group interest in ingroup favouritism. *European journal of social psychology*, *9*(2), 187-204. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420090207

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard university press.

Wilkinson, S. (2006). *Votes and violence: Electoral competition and ethnic riots in India*. Cambridge University Press.

© 2026 Author(s). This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)