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Predictors of Youth Engagement in Political and Electoral Processes in Kenya

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Research Article

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Predictors of Youth Engagement in Political and Electoral Processes in Kenya

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Abstract

In Kenya, youth constitute 66.7% of the voting-age population, yet remain significantly underrepresented in electoral processes. In the 2022 General Elections, only 39.8% of registered voters were aged 18-35 years. This study examines the predictors of youth engagement in political and electoral processes in Kenya using a mixed-methods design, combining surveys of 1,100 youths across seven regions with key informant interviews involving local chiefs, religious leaders, and civil society actors. The findings reveal that 83% of youths intend to vote in the 2027 General Elections, with different rates among first-time voters (75.1%) and previous voters (87.7%). Education alone does not significantly influence voting intentions. Instead, socio-economic status and psychological efficacy emerged as more decisive, with 64% of youth affirming that understanding the voting process strengthened their 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 political parties, the police, and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission. Despite the huge investment in civic education programs over the past decade, 47.6% of respondents in the informal sector and 50.3% in universities and colleges reported having not received any form of civic education. The influence of the 2024 Gen-Z protests was also notable, as 49.1% of youths reported they were more politically active following the protests. Taken together, this study advances a predictive model of youth electoral engagement shaped by four determinants: psychological efficacy, socio-

economic status, institutional trust, and civic literacy. It suggests that Kenyan youth are not disengaged but are instead redefining participation through alternative means.

Keywords: youth civic engagement, youth political participation, civic education, electoral participation, Gen-Z protests, institutional trust

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

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 (Bastedo et al., 2012). They are mobilizing 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 (Hobbs, 2025). Scholars argue that this movement provides a unique moment to harness a "demographic dividend" and a looming risk of political instability if the aspirations of youth remain unmet (Resnick & Casale, 2014).

In Kenya, youth constitute 66.7% of potential voters. However, they remain significantly underrepresented in political and electoral processes (Odanga, 2018). Data from the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) reveals a steady decline in youth participation in recent electoral cycles. 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). Meanwhile, only 17 youths (out of a total of 364 elective positions) clinched seats in the Senate and National

Assembly. Despite this underrepresentation, Kenya has established robust legal frameworks to promote youth inclusion. The Political Parties Act 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. (KLCR, 2010).

Table 1 Demographic Distribution of Elective Positions in Kenya's Last Two General Elections (IEBC, 2022)

	2017 General Elections			**2022 General Elections**		
Elective Position	**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

Youth civic engagement is influenced by multiple structural and institutional barriers, chief being socio-economic marginalization. Only 48% of Kenyan youth express interest in political affairs, with as many as 35% reporting never discussing politics at all as they perceive it to be irrelevant to their daily struggles (Afrobarometer, 2016). Moreover, 65% of youth believe that the current political leaders push agenda disconnected from their socio-economic realities (Afrobarometer, 2022).

Institutional barriers further hinder meaningful youth engagement. Access to national identification cards (ID 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 card, and a striking 80.5% of them are between 18 and 25 years old (Central Bank of Kenya, 2024). This situation disproportionately affects youths in urban informal settlements, pastoralist communities, and historically marginalized border regions (Hope, 2012). Polling stations in rural areas are also often located far away from key population centers, limiting the ability of registered voters to exercise their civic rights (Keven, 2024).

Political gatekeeping within Kenya's multiparty system further limits youth engagement. Empirical 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). In 2017, the costs of securing a party ticket to vie for a Member of Parliament (MP) seat in the largest political parties reached 20 million Kenyan shillings (Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis, 2021). Moreover, political aspirants have been documented to use youth to foment violence against their opponents (Hassan & Minja, 2024). Such dynamics reinforce a cycle in which youths are restricted to being mobilized as foot soldiers to ferment chaos and violence rather than holding a seat in the decision-making table.

In recent years, civic education programs funded by development partners have played a crucial role in shaping positive democratic attitudes among youth and stimulating voter registration in Kenya (EU Election Observation Mission, 2022). Between 2018 and 2022, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Kenya, with financial support from the European Union, implemented extensive voter civic education in collaboration with the IEBC (UNDP, 2023) that contributed to an increase in registered voters in the 2022 General Elections, from 19,611,423 in

2017 to 22,120,140 in 2022. While the civic education initiatives expanded voter registration, they had minimal impact in stimulating high voter turnout on election day (InfoTrack, 2024).

Despite these structural barriers, youths have tried to find ways to beat a system they perceive to be restrictive and unresponsive to their needs (Resnick & Casale, 2014). The 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).

The cumulative effect of these dynamics is a growing legitimacy deficit that risks undermining Kenya's political stability. The paradox of a country in which three in four citizens are young, yet fewer than two in five registered voters fall within this demographic, is unsustainable. While existing studies have examined socio-economic and institutional determinants of participation, they often treat these factors in isolation. There is limited empirical work that integrates psychological efficacy, institutional trust, and civic literacy into a unified framework for explaining youth engagement in electoral processes in developing democracies. This study therefore examines why a demographic majority remains a democratic minority, and identifies pathways for fostering more meaningful youth engagement in Kenya's political and electoral processes.

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to assess the predictors of youth engagement in electoral processes in Kenya. Specifically, the study aims to:

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

2. The History of Youth Political Engagement in Kenya

2.1 Pre-colonial Political Engagement

Before 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, *Akiriket* among the Pokot, and 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 councils, they played significant political roles through the age set systems and warriorship. Among the Maasai, the *ilmurran* 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.

2.2 Colonial Rule and Resistance 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 skin color (Njeru, 2022). The colonial government restricted native 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 movements. 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 dispossession. Women youth also played critical roles as couriers, mobilizers, and food suppliers, though their contributions were often erased in official narratives (Kanogo, 1987).

2.3 Post-Independence: Authoritarian Rule and the Single-Party Era (1963-1991)

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 presidency of Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978), and later Daniel Moi (1978-2002), the state consolidated power through the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) party, 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 National Youth Service (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 and human rights activists (Branch, 2011). The KANU Youth Wing, similarly operated as a quasi-paramilitary force, often mobilized to intimidate opposition voices, counter activists, enforce party loyalty, and suppress dissent (Ajulu, 1998).

At the same time, youth-led activism persisted in universities, colleges, and trade unions under heavy repression (Njeru, 2022). 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).

2.4 The Multi-Party Era (1992-2007)

The reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1991 following 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 that were formed during this period such as the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy–Kenya (FORD–Kenya), Democratic Party of Kenya (DP), Social

Democratic Party (SDP), and Kenya National Congress (KNC) frequently deployed unemployed youths as campaign foot soldiers, mobilizers, and, at times, perpetrators of electoral violence (Kagwanja, 2006).

2.5 Post-2007 Constitutional Reforms

The 2007-2008 Post-Election Violence, 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 from the competing Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and Party of National Unity (PNU) 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 were suggested by the Kriegler Commission report, that culminated in the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, widely regarded as one of the most progressive in Africa (Kramon & Posner, 2011). The new Constitution institutionalized youth inclusion by affirming universal suffrage in Article 38) mandating the state to promote youth participation in governance in Article 55, introducing proportional youth representation in the National Assembly and Senate in Article 100, and requiring political parties to ensure fair representation of youth, women, and persons with disabilities in Article 91 (LOF Kenya, 2013). 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 the 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 years, despite youth constituting 66.7% of the electorate (IEBC, 2022).

2.6 The Gen-Z Protests and Digital Activism

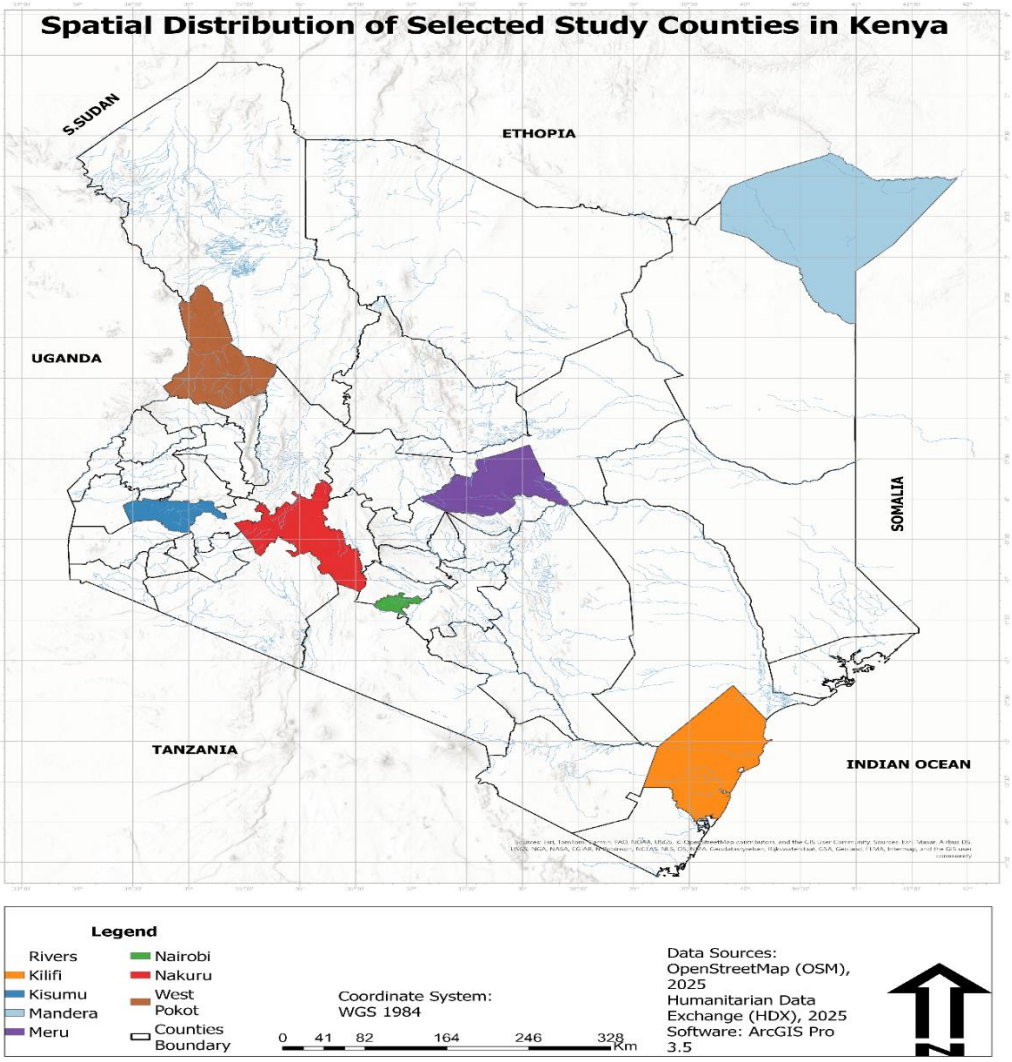
The 2022 General Elections crystallized emerging shifts in youth civic engagement. Despite youth constituting 66.7% of Kenya's electorate (KNBS, 2023), only 39.84% of registered voters were aged 18-35, a sharp decline of nearly 5% from the previous elections in 2017 (IEBC, 2022). Yet just two years later, the country witnessed a historic moment as hundreds of thousands of young people poured onto the streets in opposition to the controversial Finance Bill. Unlike traditional political mobilizations that are often rooted in ethnic identities, these 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 to the protest movements through 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 through 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 platforms reduce coordination costs and facilitate high-risk activism.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Area

This 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 General Elections. Nairobi, as the capital city, represents urban youths with a large middle class. Kisumu represents the lakeside region, and an opposition stronghold in Kenya's politics. Kilifi captures coastal and historically marginalized communities. Meru embodies the Mount Kenya region, which collectively has the largest share of Kenya's population. Nakuru as a multi-ethnic Rift Valley hub reflects the complexity of Kenya's politics and a hotspot for electoral violence across decades. Mandera represents the border communities and the Northern Frontier region, with a complex history of conflicts and armed violence. West Pokot captures rural, pastoralist, and conflict-prone environment.



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Fig.1 The map shows the counties selected for this study. They include Nairobi, Kilifi, Kisumu, Mandera, Meru, Nakuru and West Pokot highlighted in different colors.

3.2 Study 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), allowing for statistical inference and correlation, while also capturing lived experiences and social interpretations.

3.2.1 Household Surveys

A total of 1,100 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 target respondents across the seven counties according to each county's share of the total youth population (see Table 2).

Table 2 Sample allocation of respondents per county (KNBS, 2023)

County	**Youth Population**	**Youth Proportion of Total Population**	**Sample Allocation**
Nairobi	1,671,889	37.7%	280
Nakuru	756,771	17.1%	210
Kilifi	523,363	11.8%	135
Meru	494,628	11.2%	130
Kisumu	404,451	9.1%	115
Mandera	346,983	7.8%	105
West Pokot	236,072	5.3%	125
TOTAL	**4,434,157**	**100%**	**1,100**

Narrowing to each county, the study adopted a sequential design where three constituencies were randomly selected. What informed this approach is the analysis of the 2022 General Elections

data from the IEBC that illustrates that within each county, voter turnout rates across constituencies were broadly consistent, clustering around the county average with only marginal variations. For example, in Nairobi County, overall turnout stood at 57%, with most constituencies recording turnout levels within a narrow band of ±2 percentage points (Table 3). 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 voter 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.

Table 3 Voter turnout in select constituencies in Nairobi County in the 2022 General Elections (IEBC, 2022)

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%

Within each selected enumerated area, households were chosen for this study using systematic random sampling on a pre-determined route. Thereafter, one eligible youth respondent (18–35 years) was randomly selected in each household 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 the youth population.

3.2.2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

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

i. Two local administration officials (chiefs) to capture institutional perspectives.

ii. One religious leader given their influence in shaping civic norms.

iii. Seven human rights activists and youth leaders to capture advocacy perspectives.

3.3 Data Management and Analysis

Multiple measures were adopted to ensure data quality at each stage of the study. The research instruments were piloted in Nairobi County to test clarity, flow, and reliability, after which revisions were made based on feedback. All data was collected on KoboToolbox and 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.

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. The data was later cleaned and coded in Microsoft Excel and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics

software. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize key variables, 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. Results and Discussion

4.1 Sex Distribution

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

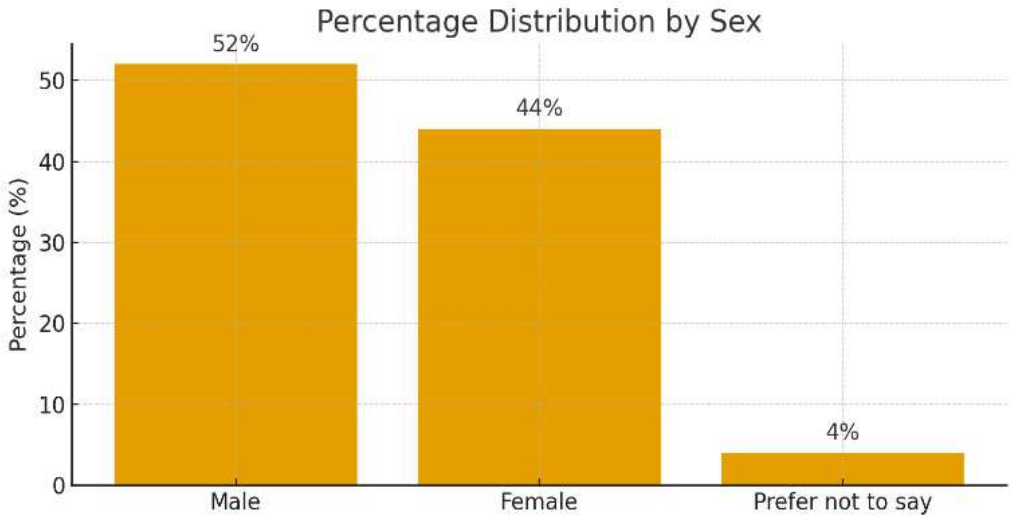


Fig.2 Gender distribution of study participants

4.1.1 Gender Variation in Experiences of Violence

Figure 3 illustrates the gender-disaggregated distribution of respondents reporting experiences of sexual violence, physical assault, and online threats during political 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 identity 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.

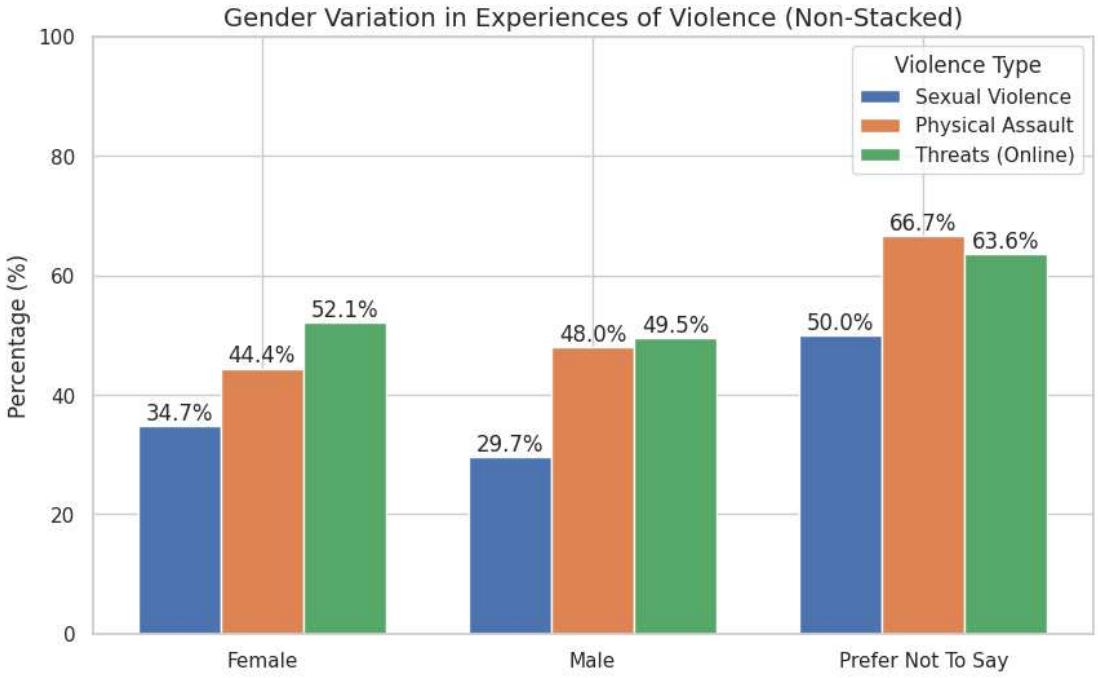


Fig.3 Gender variation in experiences of violence

These patterns reveal significant gender variations in experiences of political violence. Women are more likely to experience sexual violence and online threats, men report greater

exposure to physical assault, and non-disclosing gender respondents appear to face elevated risks across all forms. This data highlights the importance of safety programs to support both women and men who are survivors of violence, and those that may want to contest electoral seats in such polarizing environments. Additionally, more research is needed to uncover experiences and vulnerabilities of non-conforming gender individuals, who experience higher levels of discrimination.

4.1.2 Gender Variation in Voting Intentions

The analysis of voting intentions in the 2027 General Elections in the figure below shows notable variations 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% are undecided. Finally, those who prefer not to disclose their gender identity have 55% intending to vote, 28% not, and 17% unsure. Overall, while the majority in all groups intend to vote, there is a consistent pattern of uncertainty and outright non-participation.

Interviews with human rights officials reveal deeper gendered dynamics that help explain the quantitative trends observed in the data. Many young women reportedly express heightened fear and reluctance to engage in electoral processes following the violence that unfolded during the Gen-Z protests in 2024. 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 surveys alone could not capture: the psychological impact of political violence; the gendered nature of insecurity during campaigns,

protests, and political processes; 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."*

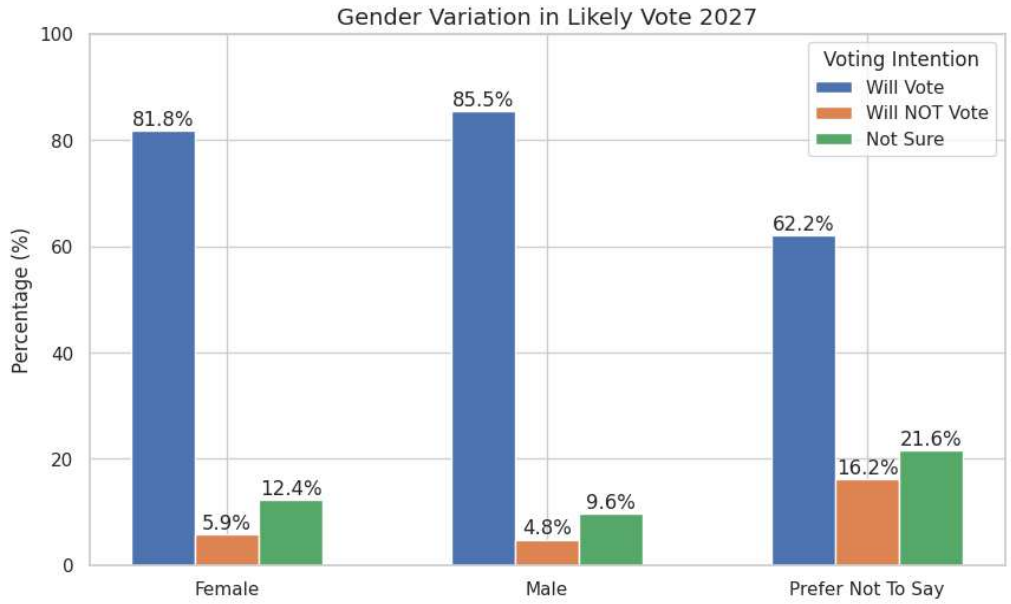


Fig.4 Gender variation in voting intentions

4.2 Education Levels

Majority of respondents reported having completed tertiary education (50%), followed by secondary school education (25%), postgraduate qualifications (22%), and primary education (3%) (Figure 5). The over-representation of tertiary-educated youth suggests that the sample captured a relatively informed and politically conscious demographic.

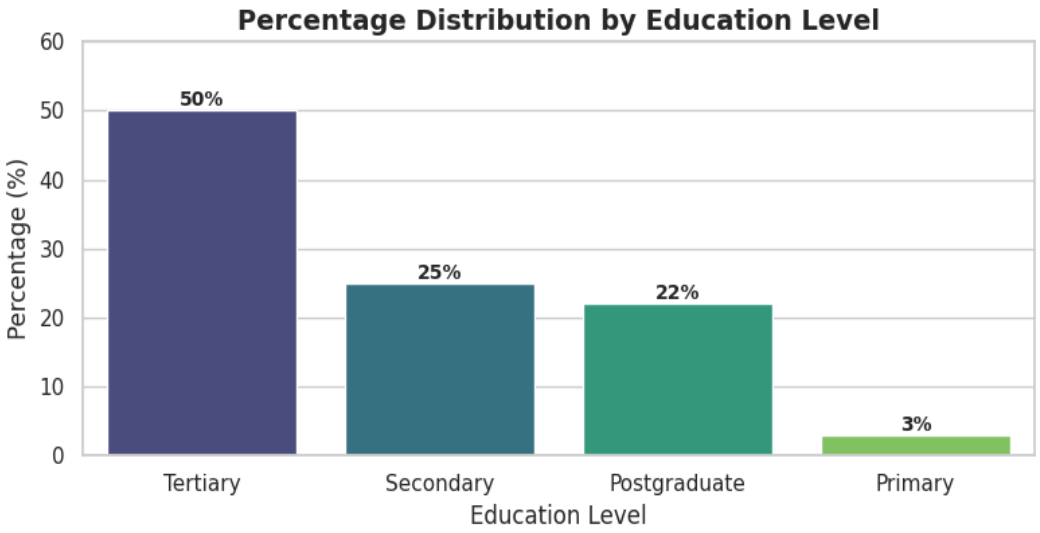


Fig.5 Percentage distribution by education level

Table 4 Education level and likelihood to vote in the 2027 General Elections

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		

The cross-tabulation between educational attainment and the likelihood of voting in the 2027 General Elections reveals important descriptive patterns regarding the connection between education and political participation among Kenyan youth. Respondents with tertiary education constitute the largest group reporting intent to vote (n = 423), followed by those with high school

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 they are unlikely to vote is comparatively smaller; 89 among tertiary graduates, 50 among high school graduates, 32 among postgraduates, and 4 among those with primary education (Table 4).

Although these distributions suggest a positive association between higher levels of education and the 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 participate in political processes); education, in isolation, does not independently predict voting intentions. Instead, the weak association points toward the greater influence of other variables such as institutional trust, civic literacy, social influence, and occupational status, in shaping youth political 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 electoral 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, rather than by formal schooling alone.

4.3 Occupational Status

Youth participation in economic activities in Kenya is highly heterogeneous, reflecting the structural opportunities and systemic vulnerabilities in today's job market. Among the

respondents, the largest categories were self-employed (24%) and formally employed youth (24%), followed closely by university/college 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, with half involved in dynamic entrepreneurship and formal employment, while the rest struggle to find stable income.

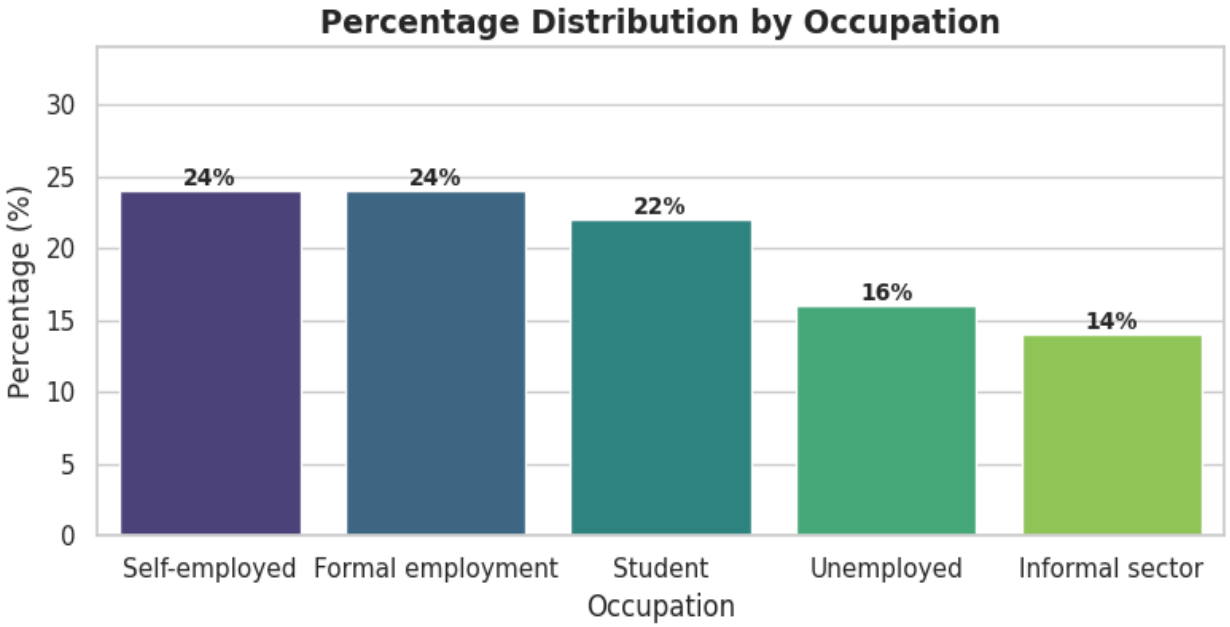


Fig.6 Distribution of study participants by occupational status

4.3.1 Influence of Occupational Status on Electoral Participation

The distribution presented in Figure 7 indicates consistently high anticipated voter turnout intentions across all occupational groups. University/college students demonstrate the strongest likelihood of voting at 95.87%, followed closely by respondents in formal employment (94.85%). Unemployed youth also report a high expected turnout of 93.20%. Meanwhile, informal sector workers show the lowest voting intentions at 89.17%.

These patterns suggest that occupational status exerts minimal constraining influence on electoral participation. Instead, the high projected turnout across all groups point to a broad willingness among youth to engage in political processes, cutting across their occupational status. When interpreted alongside the qualitative insights from KIIs, these findings highlight that youth participation is shaped less by occupation and more by lived experiences and other structural factors.

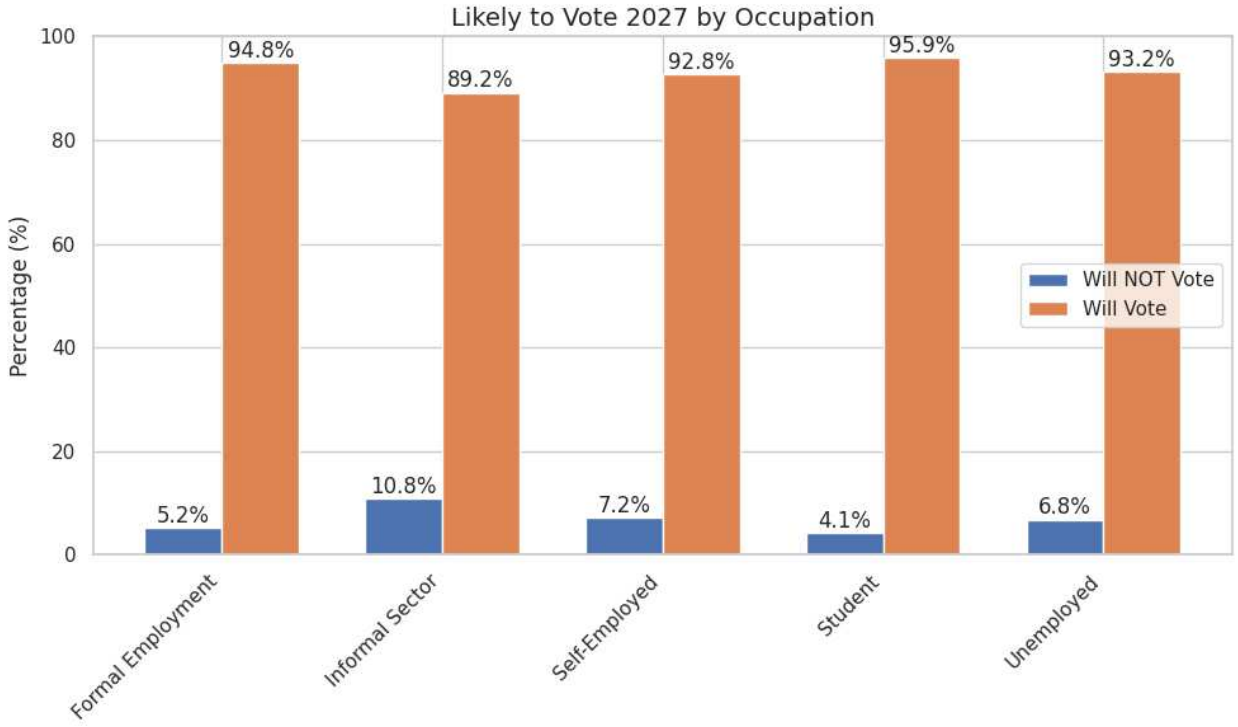


Fig.7 Occupation status and likelihood to vote in the 2027 General Elections

4.3.2 Occupational Status and Civic Education

The figure below presents the proportion of respondents who reported receiving civic education, disaggregated by their occupational status. Among those in formal employment, 60.9% indicated they had received civic education, compared to 39.1% who had not. Respondents in the informal sector reported lower levels of exposure, with just 52.4% indicating prior exposure to

civic education programs. 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% in the negative. Unemployed respondents reported the lowest exposure overall, with only 49.7% having received civic education and 50.3% indicating no access.

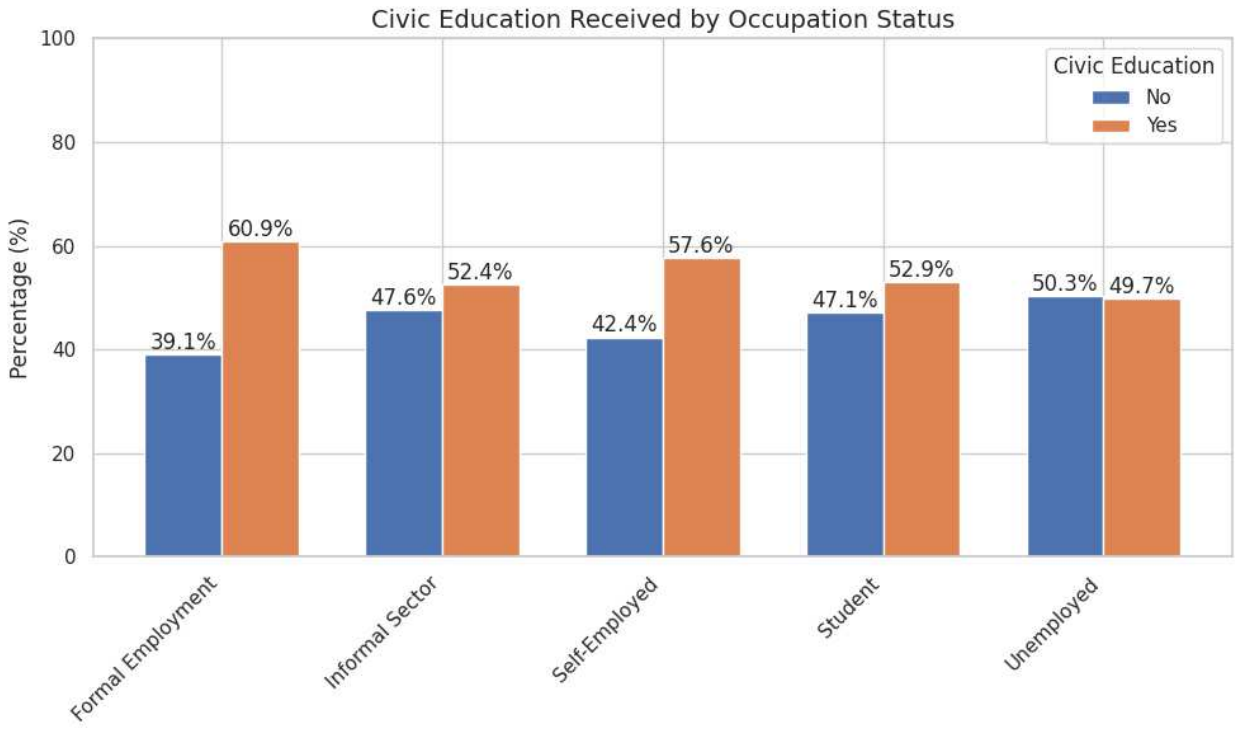


Fig.8 Civic education received by occupation status

These patterns suggest that civic education does not reach all occupational groups evenly, with youth in formal employment disproportionately benefiting from such initiatives. When interpreted alongside qualitative insights from KIIs, these findings highlight that structural inequalities in the labour market may shape differential access to civic education. 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 in political processes.

4.4 Psychological Efficacy and Voting Intentions

The correlation analysis below reveals nuanced associations in 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 electoral body'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 votes will count are more likely to convert that conviction into actual voting behavior.

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 grassroots youth civil society leaders further reflected these findings. They noted that community-led civic education builds political confidence, particularly among first-time voters, and contributes to improved turnout.

Social influence likewise plays a critical 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 conservative socio-cultural environment, where kinship networks and community norms often guide how youth engage in governance processes. In peri-urban and rural counties where collective identity is even stronger, such structures can amplify youth engagement if positively leveraged.

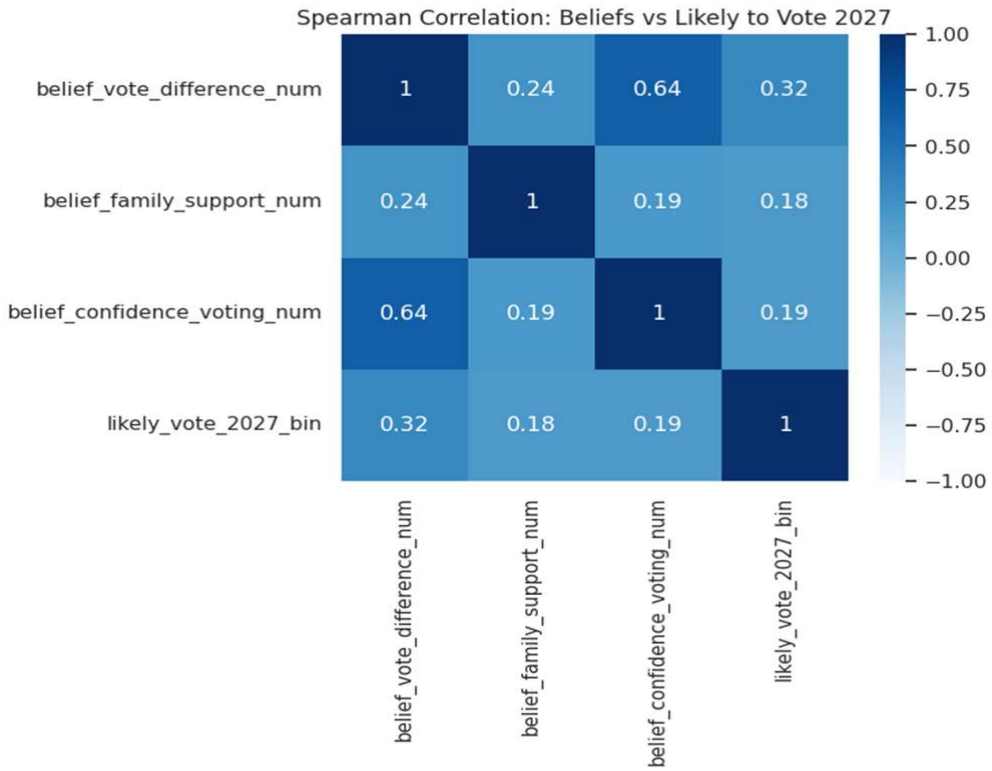


Fig.9 Belief vs likelihood of voting in the 2027 General Elections

Institutional trust functions as an important mediating factor. Interviews with youth leaders highlighted that mistrust in political parties and perceived unresponsiveness of local administrators in issuing of identification cards leads many youths to shy away from voting. In West Pokot County, strong relationships between chiefs and local youth groups was described as being instrumental in building trust, helping the county achieve one of the second highest voter turnout rate in the 2022 General Elections and motivating 93% of surveyed youth to express intention to vote in 2027 (the highest among the sampled counties for this study). 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.

4.5 The Impact of Civic Education and Institutional Trust on Youth Electoral Participation

The correlation analysis establishing the impact of civic education and institutional 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 the electoral body – IEBC's capacity to conduct free and fair elections are slightly more likely to consider participating in the polls.

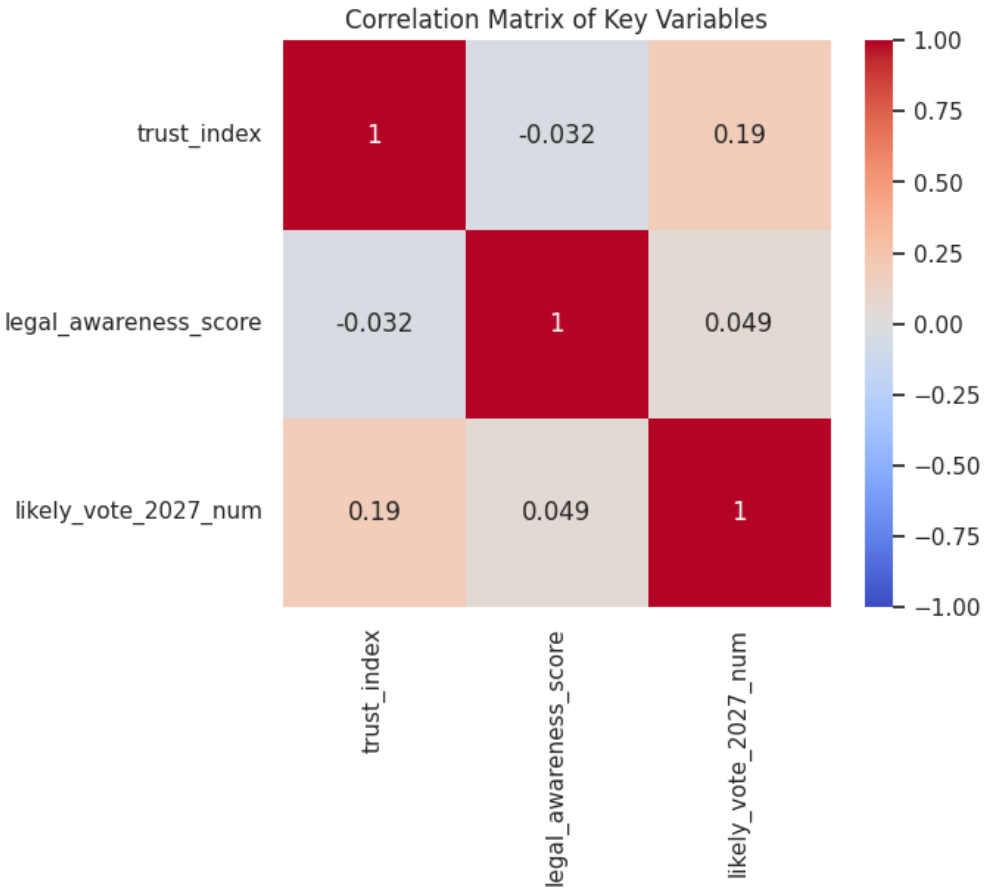


Fig.12 Correlation matrix of key variables (institutional trust, legal awareness, voting intentions)

Although weak, this relationship is consistent with the idea that trust in the state and political parties 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 tribalism have eroded trust in governance, even incremental improvements in institutional trust can translate to concrete gains in participation of young people in 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 rights and civic processes might only expose young people to what they see as shortcomings or transgressions, leading them to lose faith in elections. 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 institutional trust continues to be the key predictor of youth participation, with civic education and legal awareness as more enabling contexts of action rather than strong motivational forces. Initiatives that enhance transparency in the conduct of elections, equal access to justice, and meaningful youth representation in institutional decision-making, 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.

4.6 Motivations to Vote

An analysis of voting motivations among the respondents reveals a culmination of influences that drive youth to participate in elections. It is clear that voting motivations 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 to be less influential, signaling a growing trend among youth towards considering governance quality, integrity, and leadership principles in their political choices. Young voters are shifting away from transactional to issue-based politics, focusing more on accountability and policy credibility rather than the immediate benefits they can get from material inducements. Civic education and safety were also significant, demonstrating that when people feel secure and politically conscious, they are more confident to participate in electoral processes.

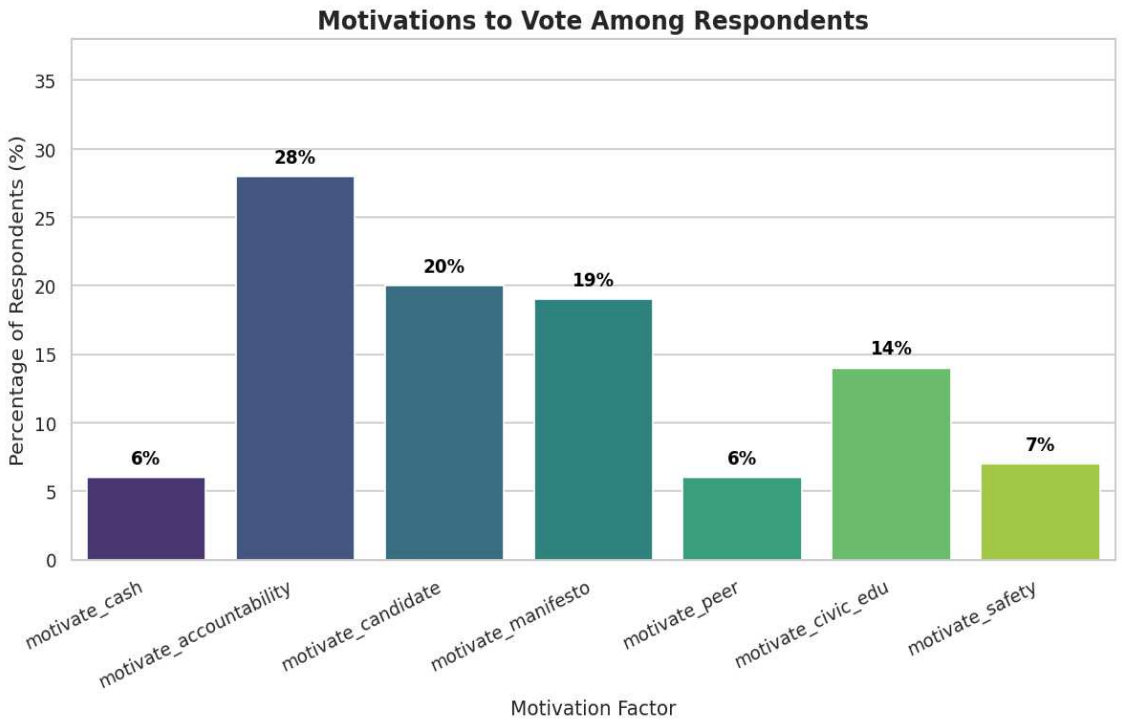


Fig.13 Motivations to vote

The empirical results on voting intentions further substantiates these contextual variations. In this study, 83% of respondents said they would vote in the 2027 General Elections. This indicates that uncertainty rather than disengagement may be the biggest driver of youth not participating in the 2027 General Elections. Breaking the results per county, West Pokot (93%), Nakuru (91%), and Mandera (90%) recorded the highest anticipated voter turnouts. These counties are characterized by strong communal ties, kinship systems, and robust relationships with local administration officials, which broadly aligns with higher expressions of political participation.

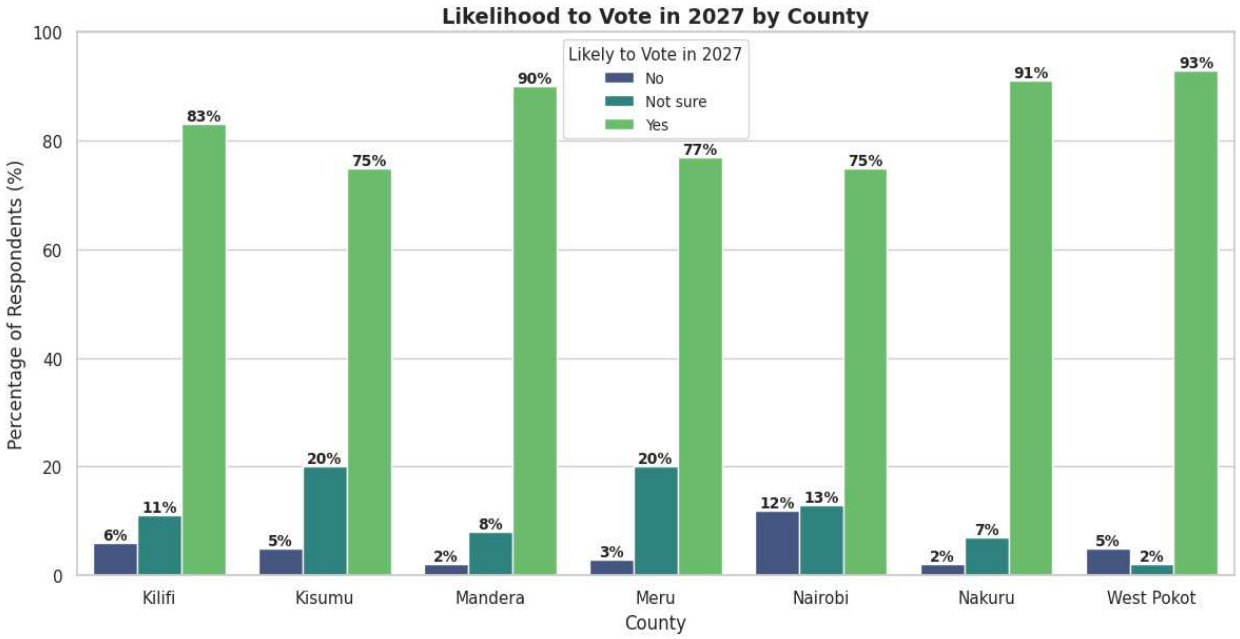


Fig.14 Likelihood to vote in the 2027 General Elections by county

On the other hand, urbanized counties such as Nairobi and Kisumu reported relatively smaller proportions of youth likely to vote (75% predictive rates) which aligns with continuing expressions of urban voter fatigue and skepticism towards political processes. Meru (77%) and Kilifi (83%) are more consistent with mixed civic engagement as places with peri-urban, rural, and informal agricultural occupations.

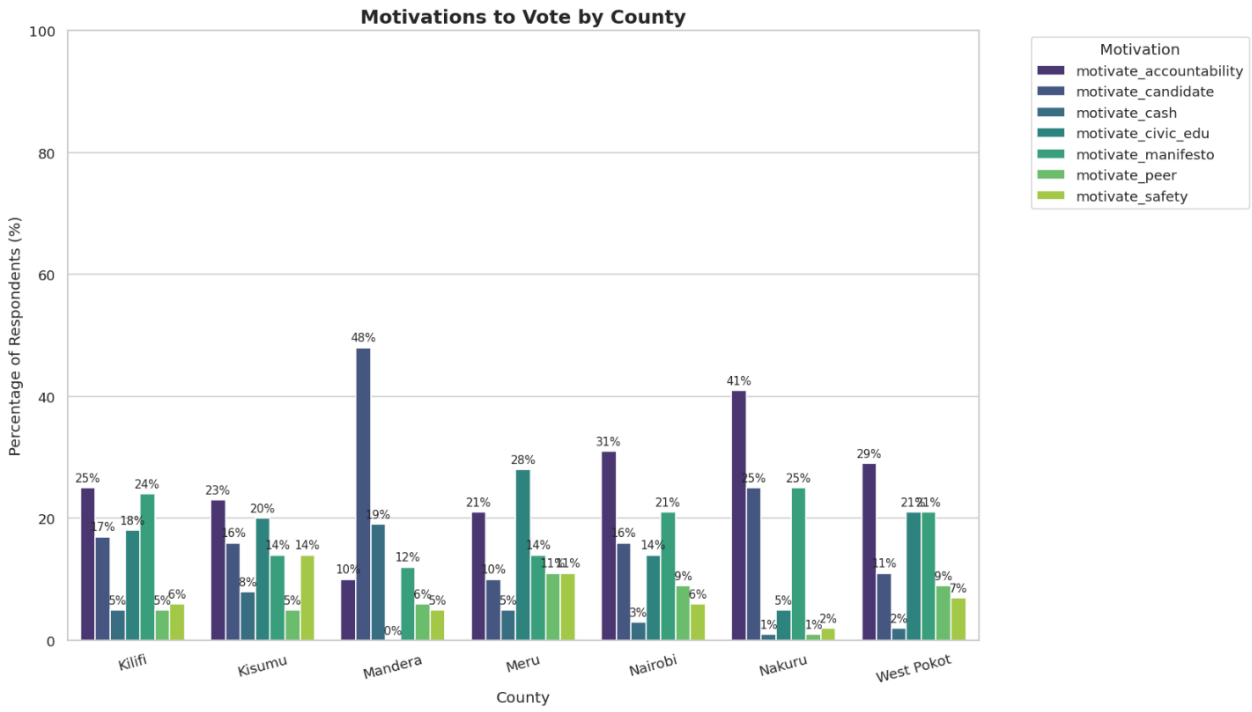


Fig.15 Motivations to vote by county

The visualization of voting motivations by county reveals distinct differences in what motivates the respondents to vote based on their geographical environment. In the capital city Nairobi (43%), youth appear to consider candidate qualities, manifesto content, and accountability more, expressing a higher degree of exposure to civic education. In contrast, youths in rural and peri-urban areas like Mandera, Kilifi, and Meru consider safety, cash, and peer influence more in their voting intentions.

4.7 First-time Voters vs Previous Voters

The data reveals significant variations in voting intentions between those who participated in the last elections held in 2022, vis-à-vis those who have never voted before (and of whom the coming election may be their first one). Among previous voters, 87.7% of respondents expressed motivation to vote in the upcoming elections (against an 83% average across the sample), while among those who did not vote in the last Geneal Elections, only 75.1% expressed motivation to

vote. This variance can be attributed to the divide between Gen-Z youths (born after 1997) and millennial youths (born before 1997). It illustrates that civic education programs must account for these differences in messaging, and much more emphasis needs to be placed on utilizing digital tools and social media channels for engagements with Gen-Z youths who are increasingly shying away from traditional political messaging platforms.

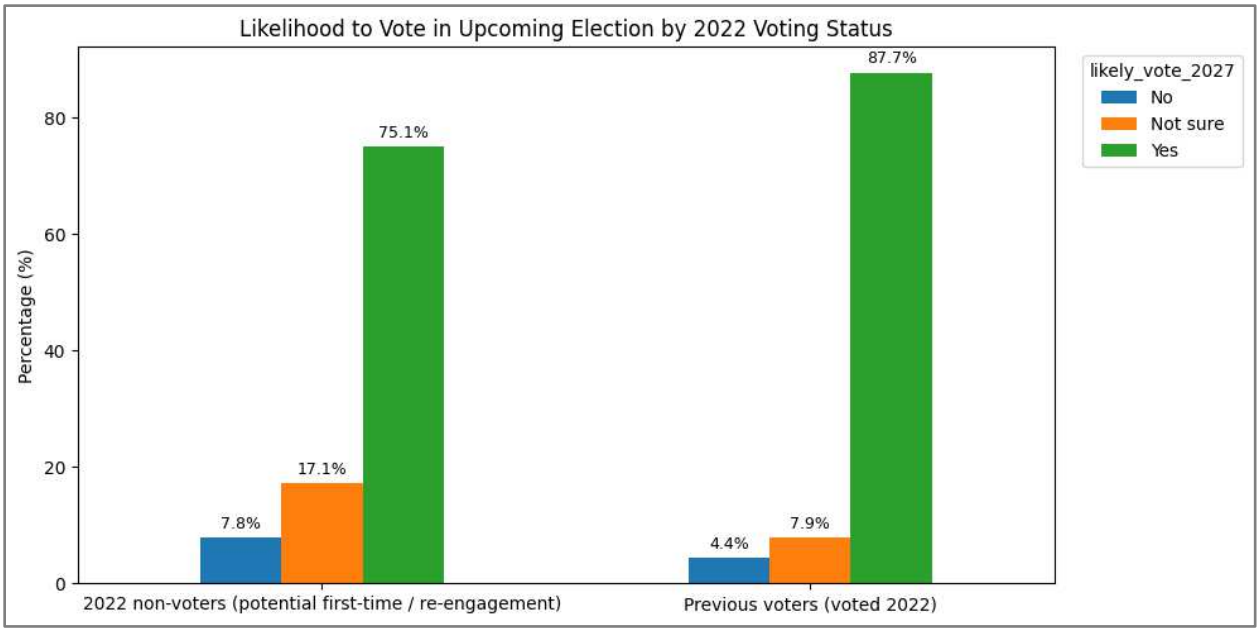


Fig.16 Likelihood to vote in the upcoming elections by previous elections voting status

Previous voters favored accountability (48%/43.8%), candidate background (34.9%/30.7%), and party manifesto (34.3%/29.2%) more than potential first-time voters. On the other hand, potential first-time voters had more preference for cash handouts (11.5%/8.3%). Taking into account the lower voting intentions and preference for cash handouts, this means candidates who are wealthier, or able to spend heavily in campaigns are likely to get Gen-Z votes at higher rates than any demographic group. This also opens the door for election meddling by foreign actors or lobby groups who may want to spend heavily in political campaigns to swing outcomes in their favor.

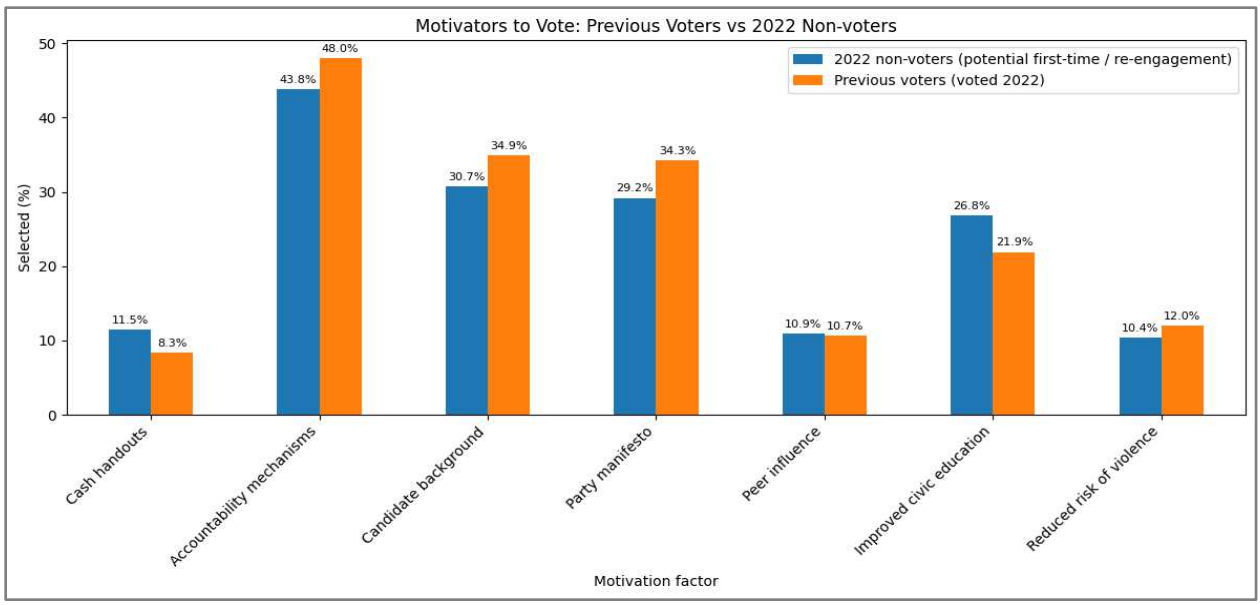


Fig.17 Motivators to vote: previous voters vs potential first-time voters

4.8 Institutional Trust

Figure 18 presents levels of public confidence in four key institutions in Kenya: the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), Judiciary, National Police Service (NPS), and political parties, revealing generally low levels of trust across all these institutions. Confidence in the police is particularly weak: 32% of respondents reported having no confidence in the police, while only 9% expressed full confidence. This suggests that the brutal crackdown of Gen-Z protests has significantly damaged trust and confidence in law enforcement agencies. Political parties similarly fare poorly, reflecting perceptions 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 remarkably 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 illustrate the scale of institutional rebuilding required to stimulate voter turnout ahead of the 2027 General Elections and why the

ongoing voter registration exercise has been dragged on sluggishly. By contrast, the Judiciary enjoys comparatively higher levels of 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 patterns collectively point to a trend of declining trust in state institutions and highlight institutional legitimacy as a critical determinant of youth civic engagement in Kenya. Strengthening transparency, accountability, and public communication is therefore central to rebuilding confidence and sustaining youth participation in electoral processes. Without such measures, more youths are likely to adopt alternative forms of participation such as protests, boycotts, and digital activism.

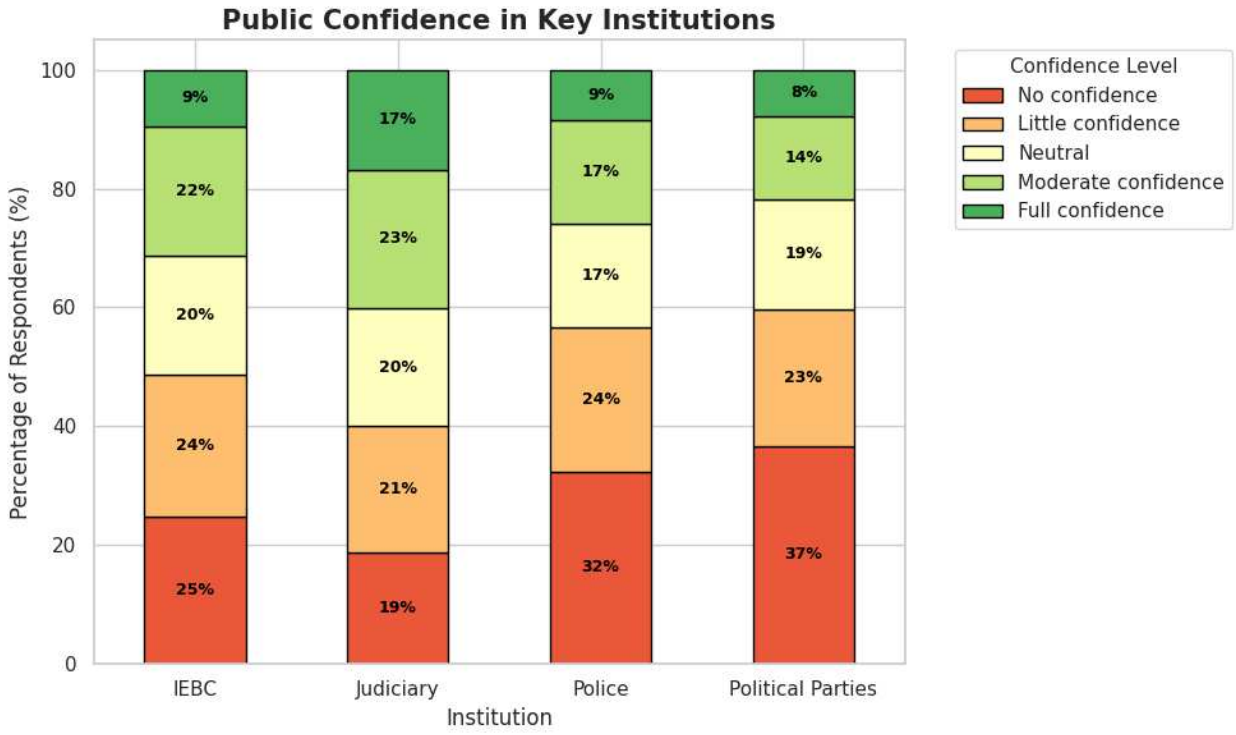


Fig.18 Public confidence in key institutions

4.9 Impact of Civic Education and Institutional Trust on Youth Participation

Figure 19 shows that 55% of respondents (591 individuals) received civic education, while 45% (484 individuals) did not. This distribution suggests that although civic education initiatives have reached a moderate proportion of young people in Kenya, their geographical reach and demographic penetration is uneven. Civil society organizations and development partners need to evaluate their coverage to ensure such initiatives are targeted and delivered in mediums accessible to grassroots communities.

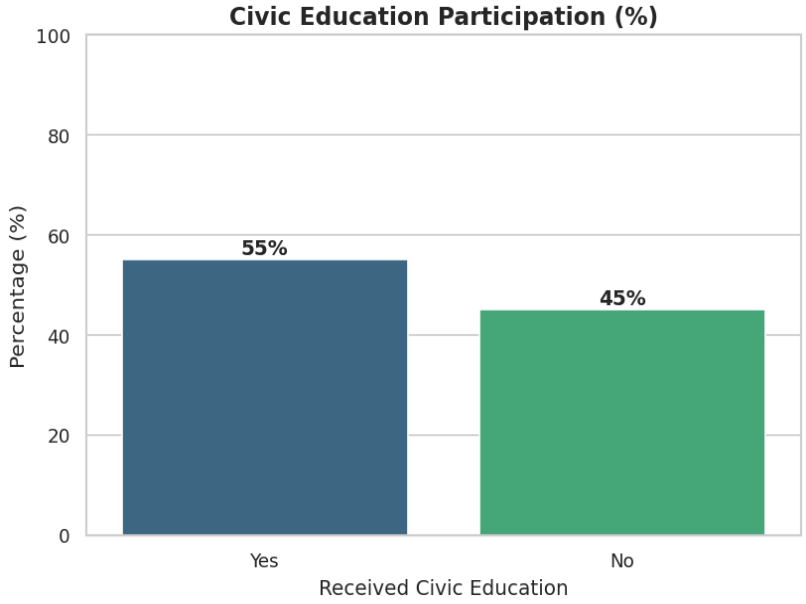


Fig.19 Participation in civic education programs

Notably, trust in electoral outcomes was moderately correlated with confidence in political institutions and civic education, indicating that electoral confidence 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).

Table 5 Correlation matrix for Institutional trust, civic education, and confidence in election outcomes

	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

By contrast, the civic education cluster (capturing whether respondents had received civic education, found it useful, and reported that it had 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 participation 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.

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 dimensions (institutional trust and civic education) that together explain patterns of youth engagement in Kenya's political processes. Whereas institutional trust functions as an attitudinal anchor shaping confidence in electoral processes, civic education reflects resource-based and knowledge-driven efficacy. Both factors are critical in understanding the predictors of youth electoral participation, though they operate through different psychological and structural pathways.

Table 8 Factor loading

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

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 processes and the other about civic education, both of which are key in understanding youth engagement and perceptions about elections in Kenya.

4.10 Access to National Identification (ID) Cards

Analysis of delay rates in acquiring national ID cards reveals an alarming imbalance both at the national and county levels. 47% of respondents reported experiencing delays, while 53% did not face any wait times in receiving their ID cards. This indicates that Kenyan youth face significant barriers in obtaining ID cards. Considering that possession of an ID card is a prerequisite for voting, receiving government services, and participating in the formal economy, these delays can have serious implications on political participation and socio-economic life.

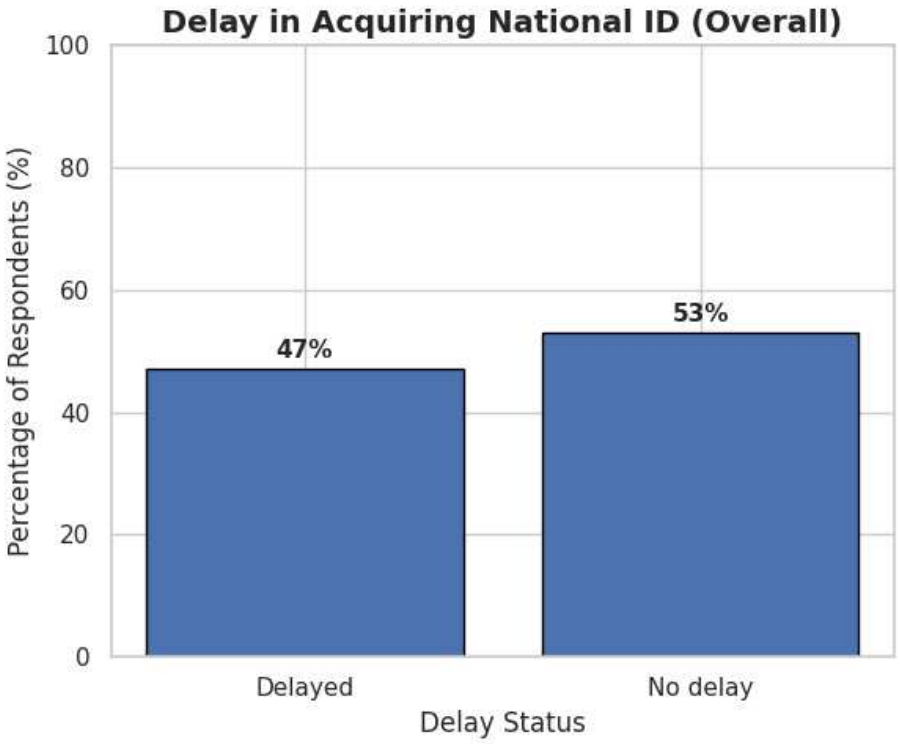


Fig.20 Delay status in acquiring ID cards

At the local level, the data shows a significant disparity between regions. Mandera County has the highest delay rate, with 85% of youth reporting delays. This can be explained by its location on the volatile Kenya-Ethiopia-Somalia border. Due to the prevailing insecurity, many youths are likely to suffer bureaucratic and discriminatory barriers in acquiring ID cards. While delay rates were very high in Mandera, other counties such as Kisumu (57%), Kilifi (52%), Nairobi (50%), and West Pokot (50%) also had significant delay rates, indicating that difficulties in acquiring ID cards cuts across nationally.

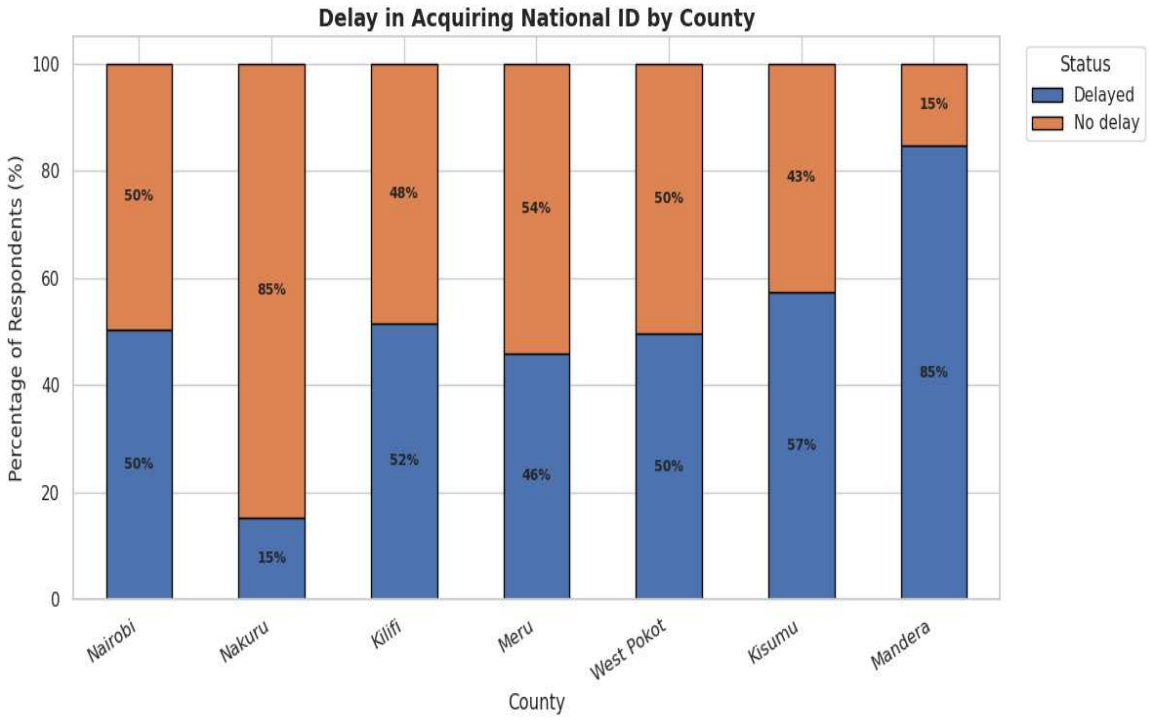


Fig.21 Delay status in acquiring ID cards by county

Figure 22 illustrates the primary challenges youth encounter when registering for ID cards. Bureaucratic challenges involving excessive delays, complex vetting procedures for marginalized groups, and high corruption by National Government Administration Officials (local chiefs, Assistant County Commissioners, and registration officials), represent the most significant barrier cited by 35% of respondents. 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 affect first-time applicants in rural communities. Addressing these challenges will require streamlined administrative systems and decentralized registration mechanisms to ensure equitable and timely access of ID cards for all citizens.

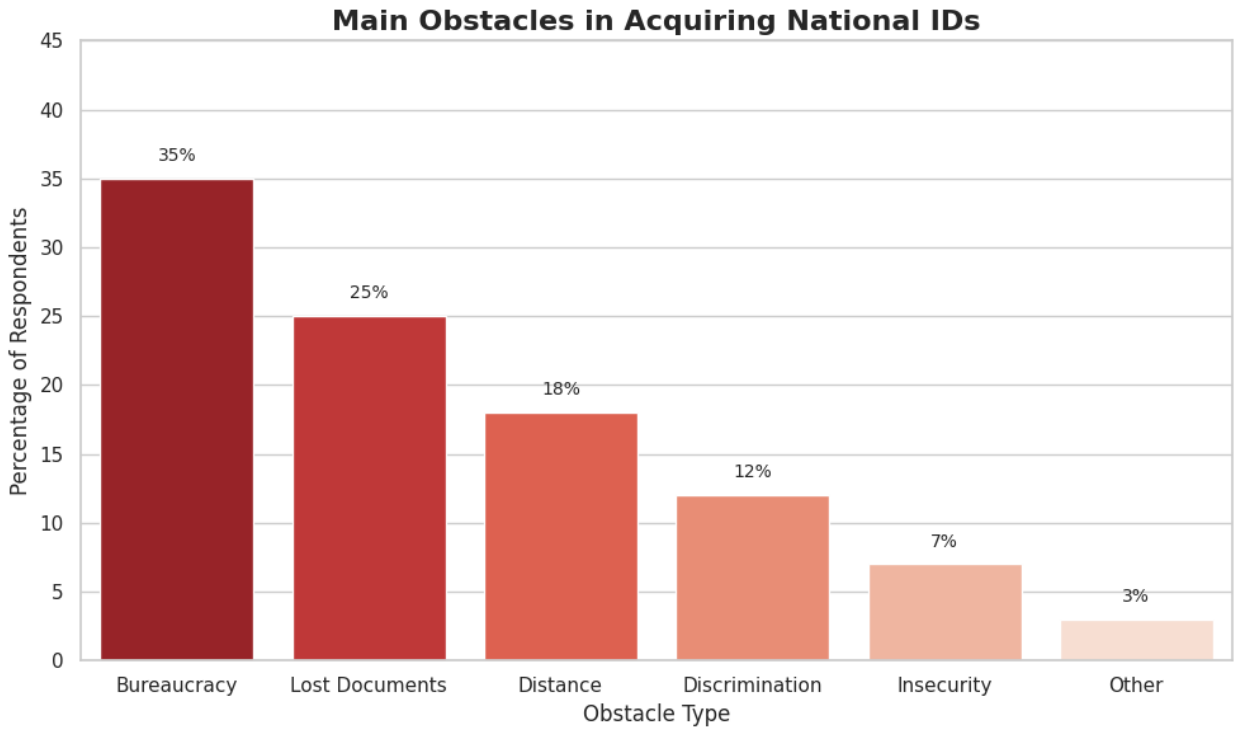


Fig.22 Main obstacles in acquiring ID cards

4.11 Influence of Gen-Z Protests and State Violence on Youth Political Behavior

To explore how exposure and participation in the Gen-Z protests in 2024 shaped youth political engagement in Kenya, the researchers asked, *"Did you participate in the 2024 Gen-Z protests?"* The responses to this question indicate three clear patterns of involvement: non-participation at 53% (571 respondents), digital-only participation at 26% (280 respondents) and physical participation at 21% (233 respondents). This illustrates an expansion in civic expression channels available to youth, ushered in by the Constitution of Kenya (2010), which guarantees the right to peaceful protest and assembly.

Respondents who did not participate in protests represent politically conscious youth who nonetheless refrain from activism, often citing fear of harassment and assault by police officers, victimization by political elites and their goon networks, or skepticism about the efficacy of street

protests in achieving meaningful reforms. Their non-participation may also indicate that violence has a mitigating effect on how youth perceive protests.

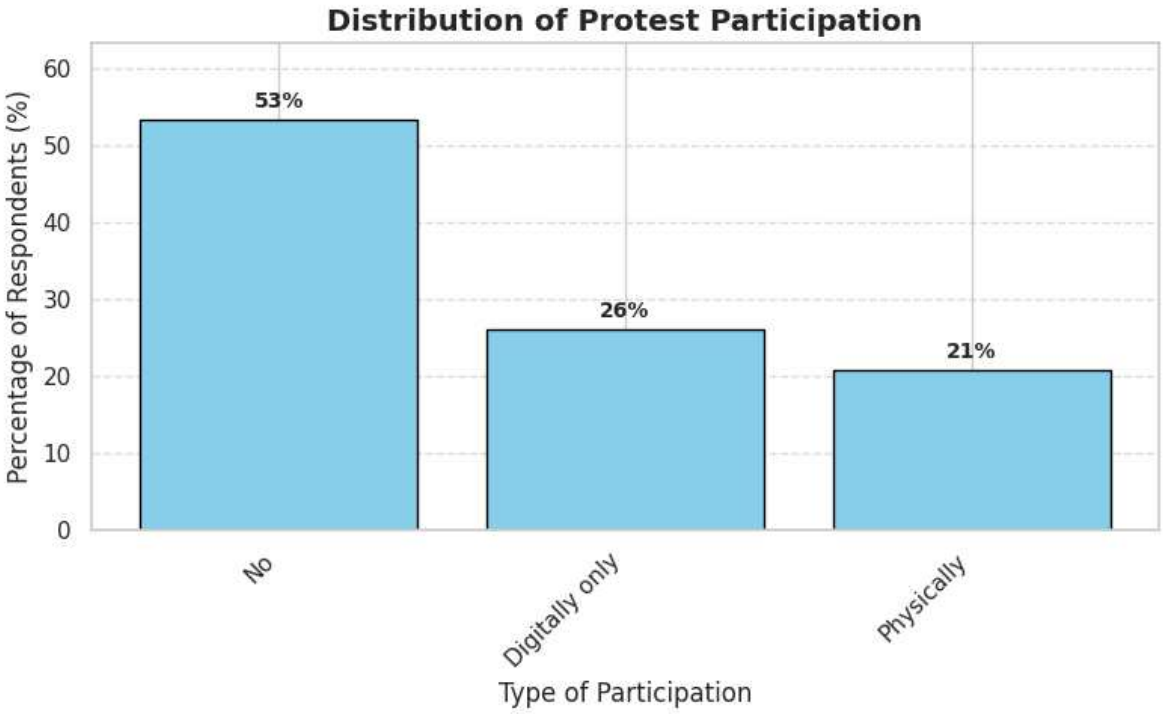


Fig.23 Distribution of protest participation

A second 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 youths primarily use digital platforms such as X, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram to express dissent, share political commentary, and mobilize peers within student and 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 environments where repression is taking place (Tufekci, 2017).

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 variations. Nairobi county recorded the highest rate of participation at 59%, a pattern that can be attributed to its status as Kenya's political and economic hub where civil society groups are most concentrated and media visibility is at its strongest. Kisumu, West Pokot, Kilifi, and Nakuru counties followed closely, with participation levels ranging from 49%-51%. These results demonstrate that youth activism is not confined to the capital city (Nairobi) but also thrives across the country as youths share similar grievances with the cost-of-living crisis and poor governance. In contrast, Mandera county exhibited the lowest levels of youth protest participation at 10%. Several factors may account for this deviation, including the county's dispersed population, security concerns linked to its location in the volatile Kenya-Ethiopia-Somalia border, and low internet connectivity.

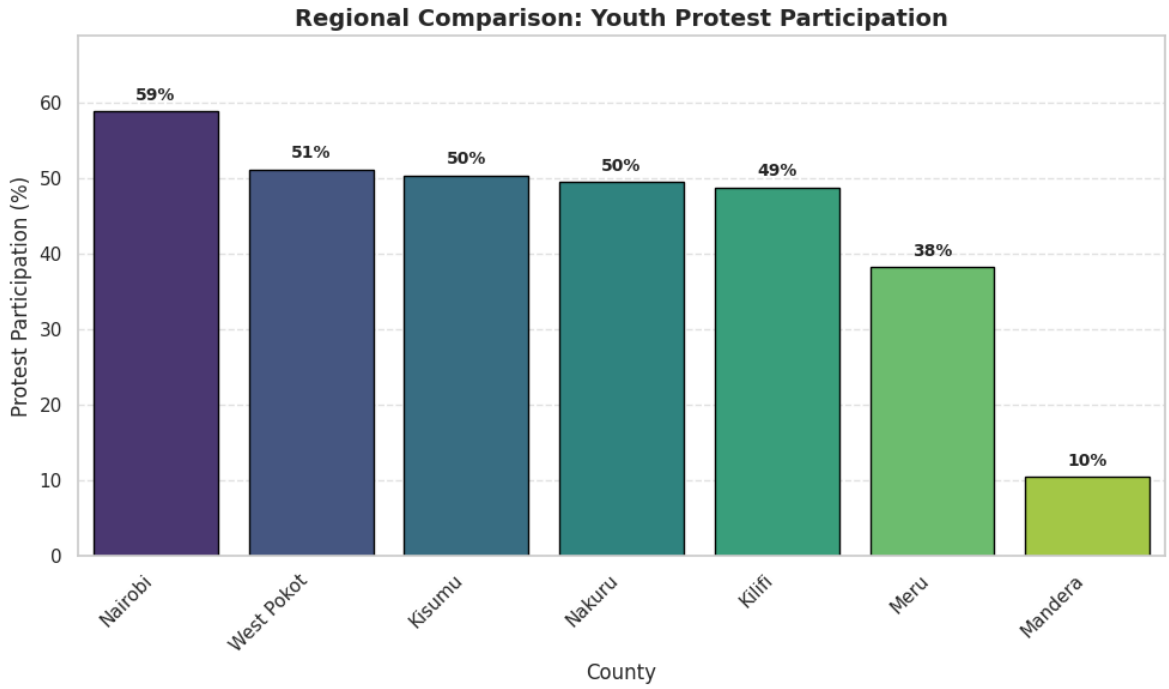


Fig.24 County comparison of youth participation in protests

Overall, the high levels of youth participation in protests 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 elections. Disaffection is being fueled by repeated experiences of broken campaign promises, entrenched corruption, rising unemployment, and widening inequality, which erodes the legitimacy of political parties and electoral bodies. 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 activism and street protests may act as a springboard for 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.

4.12 Youth Participation in Protests and Voting Intentions

The distributional analysis uncovers important patterns in how the Gen-Z protests and state violence have influenced youth political attitudes and voting intentions in Kenya. 49.1% of youths reported they were more politically active following the protests, indicating the movement that formed during this period contributed to greater civic engagement and awareness. Meanwhile, 16.4% of youths said they felt less active, fearful, frightened or worn down by the protests.

The impacts of violence were also prevalent. 48.2% of youths reported having experienced physical assault, 51% online threats, and 32.4% sexual harassment during the protests, highlighting that political expression can be dangerous in Kenya despite the constitutional safeguards in place. However, 83% said they intended to vote in the 2027 General Elections, suggesting the ongoing state repression had not completely eroded their faith in political processes. 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 engagement and traumas of political violence.

Table 6 Protest participation and institutional trust on youth voting intentions

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	

The regression analyses give a more nuanced picture of how protests and institutional trust influences youth political behavior 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 institutions and electoral processes. 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.

Table 7 Protest Participation and institutional trust on youth voting intentions

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

In the second model of institutional 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 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 youth political participation and voting intentions.

Qualitative data collected also reinforces that even though protests may erode institutional trust, it does not disincentivize youth voter turnout. Rather, confidence in institutions still appears to be a better predictor of youth participation, illustrating the importance of re-establishing the credibility and responsiveness of governance structures as means for translating youth political awareness into sustained civic engagement.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the predictors of youth civic and political engagement in Kenya. The findings reveal that while educational attainment correlates positively with political awareness and civic confidence, it does not independently predict voting intentions.

Instead, institutional trust, civic literacy, social influence, and psychological efficacy emerge as the strongest determinants of youth participation. Confidence in the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission ($r = 0.32$), perceived civic literacy ($r = 0.64$), and family or community support ($r = 0.24$) each show meaningful associations with intentions 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 youth participation far more than education and occupational status. Counties such as West Pokot and Mandera, where kinship ties and relationships between local administration and communities are strong, have higher voter intentions (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 following the Gen-Z protests, Kenyan youth remain remarkably resilient, with 83% expressing intention to vote in the upcoming elections. This paradox highlights a generation that is aware of systemic failures yet unwilling to give up their constitutional rights.

Ultimately, this study concludes that youth electoral participation 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 accountability and inclusive electoral processes. Strengthening youth engagement, therefore, requires a dual approach involving institutional reforms to rebuild credibility and targeted civic education initiatives that transform awareness into agency. Without this equilibrium, civic education risks producing a politically informed yet deeply disillusioned youth electorate.

5.2 Predictive Model of Youth Civic Engagement

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

i. Psychological efficacy

Youth who believe their vote matters, understand electoral processes, and feel supported by their 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

Occupational status indirectly affects participation by shaping access to resources, time, and mobility. Formally 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 body and key state institutions such as the police and judiciary is very important. Youth who perceive 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 literacy

Civic literacy is a decisive factor, strengthening both the normative belief that voting is meaningful and the practical understanding of how to participate in these processes. Youths with higher civic awareness exhibit stronger trust and a clearer sense of responsibility. However, civic literacy also exposes youth to governance failures which may motivate them to express distrust in institutions and electoral processes, sometimes through protests. Well-designed civic education programs, especially those tailored to local contexts, can transform awareness into agency.

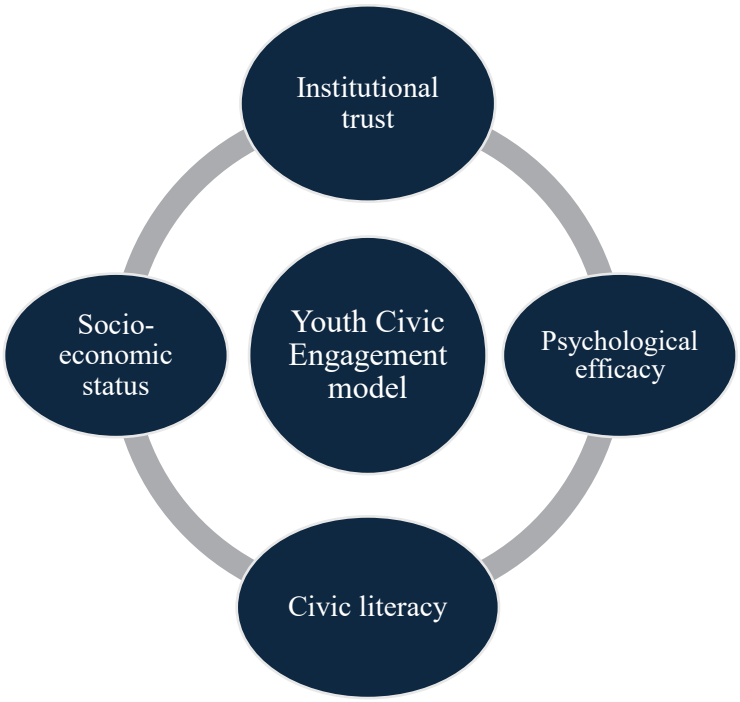


Fig.25 Predictive Model of Youth Civic Engagement

This model explains how youth engage in civic and political 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 variable, 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.

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