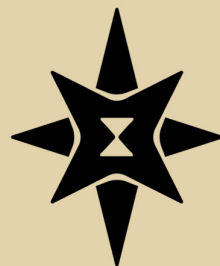


STUDY REPORT

Mapping And Analyzing Electoral Violence
Hotspots In Kenya And Leveraging Technology For
Peacebuilding Ahead Of The 2027 Elections



**American
Friends
Service
Committee**

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- Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA)
- National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC)
- Political Parties Liaison Committee (PPLC)
- Political actors
- Civil society organizations
- Technology developers and data scientists
- Faith-based and community organizations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a comprehensive analysis of electoral violence in Kenya, focusing on the identification of hotspots, evolving risk dynamics, and the role of technology in prevention and peacebuilding ahead of the 2027 General Elections. Kenya’s electoral history reflects a dual reality: while elections remain central to democratic governance, they have also recurrently triggered violence, most notably during the 2007–2008 post-election crisis. Although constitutional, legal, and institutional reforms following the 2010 Constitution have reduced large-scale national violence, electoral conflict has not disappeared. Instead, it has evolved into more localized, episodic, and complex forms, often shaped by both physical and digital dynamics.

Using a mixed-methods approach that combines geospatial analysis, stakeholder consultations, and desk review, the study examines four electoral cycles (2007/08, 2013, 2017, and 2022). A composite hotspot model based on frequency, severity, and recurrence of incidents is used to classify counties into risk tiers, providing a forward-looking framework for anticipating electoral violence.

Findings show that electoral violence in Kenya remains cyclical, peaking during key phases of the electoral cycle particularly party nominations, campaigns, and post-election periods. While violence is geographically concentrated, it is increasingly manifested at micro-levels such as wards and informal settlements. Persistent high-risk counties include Nairobi, Kisumu, Uasin Gishu, Nakuru, and Mombasa, alongside emerging hotspots driven by shifting political competition, demographic pressures, and localized grievances.

The study identifies three interrelated categories of drivers:

Structural drivers include the winner-takes-all nature of politics, ethnicized political mobilization, socio-economic inequalities, and historical grievances. Importantly, while land is frequently cited as a driver, it often serves as a proxy for deeper issues of identity, belonging, and political exclusion. These dynamics are compounded by low institutional trust, which weakens confidence in electoral management bodies, security agencies, and the judiciary. In such contexts, impunity is reinforced, and political actors increasingly rely on extra-legal strategies including intimidation, coercion, and the mobilization of organized youth groups (“goonism”) as viable tools of political competition.

Proximate triggers include disputed party nominations, contested results, political incitement, and localized conflicts. Emerging practices such as informal “zoning,” where certain areas are treated as exclusive political strongholds, have shifted violence earlier into the campaign period and contributed to localized but intense confrontations.

Digital risks represent a growing and critical dimension of electoral violence. Misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech; often amplified through social media platforms and vernacular media shape perceptions of legitimacy and accelerate mobilization. Digital narratives frequently transcend geographic boundaries, meaning that localized violence may be triggered by national-level events or online content rather than purely local dynamics.

Electoral violence in Kenya is therefore increasingly multi-layered, combining physical, organized, state-related, and digital forms within interconnected environments where online dynamics directly influence offline behavior.

The study also determined that a broader ecosystem of actors shapes electoral risk. While state institutions remain central, their effectiveness is uneven due to coordination gaps, limited trust, and weak accountability mechanisms. The private sector, particularly telecommunications providers and mainstream media, including vernacular radio, play a dual role as both potential risk amplifiers and critical partners in prevention. County peace structures and community actors serve as frontline responders, though their capacity and effectiveness vary significantly.

Technology continues to play a growing role in electoral violence prevention. Tools such as GIS mapping, social media monitoring, AI-driven analytics, and community reporting platforms enhance early warning and situational awareness. However, their impact is constrained by weak integration with response systems and gaps between early warning and timely action.

An emerging risk area is the potential disruption of information ecosystems, including internet shutdowns or restrictions on media. Evidence from Kenya's 2017 elections and regional experiences shows that such measures can undermine transparency, weaken early warning systems, and increase reliance on rumors, thereby heightening rather than reducing instability.

Overall, the study concludes that while Kenya has made progress in reducing large-scale electoral violence, risks remain significant and are increasingly localized, dynamic, and digitally mediated. These risks are sustained by the interaction of structural inequalities, political mobilization strategies, institutional weaknesses, and evolving information environments.

Preventing violence in the 2027 elections will require proactive, coordinated, and data-driven approaches that go beyond traditional reactive measures. This includes strengthening institutional accountability, addressing the drivers of organized political violence, enhancing early warning response linkages, engaging private sector and media actors, safeguarding information ecosystems, and leveraging technology in ways that are locally grounded and nationally coordinated.

ACRONYMS

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data
AFSC	American Friends Service Committee
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ELOG	Election Observation Group
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
IEBC	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission
IPOA	Independent Policing Oversight Authority
KNCHR	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
NPS	National Police Service
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPDT	Political Parties Disputes Tribunal
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SMS	Short Message Service
TJRC	Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program

1. INTRODUCTION

Elections are a fundamental pillar of democratic governance, providing citizens with the opportunity to participate in leadership selection and shape national development trajectories. However, in contexts where political competition intersects historical grievances, social inequalities, and institutional pressures; electoral processes can also generate heightened tension and at times, violence. In Kenya, elections have consistently reflected this dual reality, serving as both moments of democratic expression and potential triggers for conflict. Electoral violence in Kenya has taken multiple forms, including physical confrontation, intimidation, displacement, and destruction of property. These dynamics not only disrupt communities and livelihoods but also undermine public confidence in electoral processes and democratic institutions. As such, a clear and evidence-based understanding of where, how, and why electoral violence occurs is essential for informing effective prevention and peacebuilding strategies.

1.1. Background and Context

Kenya's electoral history is marked by recurring cycles of violence, with the most severe occurring during the 2007–2008 post-election crisis. This period resulted in over 1,100–1,300 reported deaths, approximately 3,500 injuries, the forced displacement of between 500,000 and 650,000 people and significant socio-economic disruption: exposing critical weaknesses in electoral management, security coordination, and conflict mitigation systems. Subsequent inquiries, including the Waki, Kriegler, KNCHR reports, and TJRC processes, exposed major weaknesses in electoral management, security coordination, accountability, and conflict-mitigation systems, and demonstrated that the violence followed identifiable political, ethnic, and geographic patterns across hotspots such as the Rift Valley, Nairobi's informal settlements, and Kisumu. These findings showed that electoral conflict in Kenya has been neither random nor unpredictable but rooted in recurring structural grievances and activated through recognizable triggers that can, in principle, be anticipated and prevented.

In response, Kenya implemented a series of constitutional, legal, and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening democratic governance and reducing electoral risk. Central to these reforms was the promulgation of the 2010 Constitution, which introduced a comprehensive framework for electoral integrity, including the establishment of an independent judiciary, a strengthened bill of rights, and devolved governance structures intended to reduce the high stakes associated with centralized political power. The Constitution also reconstituted key electoral institutions, leading to the creation of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) to replace the discredited Electoral Commission of Kenya. Elections held in 2013, 2017, and 2022 reflected varying degrees of progress, including improvements in electoral administration and security preparedness. While these efforts contributed to a reduction in large-scale nationwide violence, they did not eliminate underlying tensions. As noted earlier,

electoral violence has become increasingly localized, often concentrated in politically competitive areas, urban informal settlements, and historically marginalized regions.

A defining feature of electoral violence in Kenya is its cyclical nature where tensions tend to escalate at key moments in the electoral cycle particularly during party nominations, campaign periods, results announcement, and post-election dispute resolution. These phases are often characterized by heightened political mobilization and uncertainty, increasing the likelihood of confrontation and unrest. Electoral violence is also spatially uneven, with certain regions consistently emerging as recurrent hotspots across election cycles. These include areas with histories of political contestation, demographic pressures, and localized grievances. Urban informal settlements such as Kibera, Korogocho, and Mathare have consistently experienced protest-related violence, often involving organized youth groups. By contrast, parts of the Rift Valley including Sondu and peri-urban areas such as Nakuru, Molo, Naivasha, and Eldoret have seen more localized conflicts linked to political competition. These disputes commonly stem from land and boundary issues, inter-communal rivalries, contested settlement patterns, competition over resources, and disagreements around political representation and administrative boundaries. Such tensions are frequently activated or intensified during election periods, when political actors mobilize support along ethnic or territorial lines.

Evidence from the 2017 and 2022 electoral cycles suggests a further shift in Kenya's electoral conflict dynamics, with violence becoming more fragmented, locally driven, and episodic, rather than large-scale and nationally coordinated. While large-scale violence has declined, risks have become more dispersed and less visible, with increasing contestation at sub-national levels and evolving patterns of political mobilization. These trends highlight the need for continuous monitoring and adaptive strategies that respond to both historical patterns and emerging realities.

As Kenya approaches the 2027 General Elections, the persistence of localized electoral tensions, combined with evolving patterns of conflict, underscores the need for proactive and evidence-based approaches to violence prevention, particularly because traditional reactive responses (typically characterized by late security deployments, ad hoc mediation after escalation, peace messaging at moments of crisis, and post-violence inquiries with uneven implementation of recommendations); have proven insufficient to address the structural, localized, and rapidly shifting nature of electoral risk in Kenya. It is within this context that the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) commissioned this study.

As a global organization dedicated to promoting lasting peace with justice, AFSC works with communities and partners to address the root causes of conflict and strengthen local capacities for peacebuilding. In Kenya and across the region, AFSC has supported initiatives focused on dialogue, conflict prevention, and community resilience. Recognizing the importance of timely and context-specific analysis ahead of the 2027 elections, AFSC sought to generate actionable insights that can inform early warning, prevention, and peacebuilding efforts. By mapping electoral violence hotspots and examining the dynamics that shape them, the study aims to support stakeholders in anticipating risks and implementing targeted interventions. The

political, spatial, and temporal patterns of electoral violence in Kenya explains past events and provides a foundation for predicting future risks. As such, this study treats hotspot mapping as a forward-looking tool, integrating historical incident data, structural vulnerabilities, and emerging digital risk indicators to anticipate where violence is most likely to occur and how it may evolve in the 2027 electoral cycle.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of the study was to map electoral violence hotspots in Kenya and assess how technology can be leveraged to strengthen electoral violence prevention and peacebuilding ahead of the 2027 elections.

1.3 Study Objectives

The overall objective was to generate actionable insights that support peaceful, inclusive, and credible elections in Kenya through hotspot mapping and technology-driven peacebuilding strategies.

Specifically, the study sought to:

- Identify and map historical and emerging electoral violence hotspots.
- Analyze key drivers, triggers, and patterns of electoral violence.
- Assess existing early warning and response mechanisms.
- Examine the role of technology in violence prevention and peacebuilding.
- Document best practices and lessons learned.
- Provide practical recommendations ahead of the 2027 elections.
- Come up with a scenario risk mapping of 2027 elections

1.4. Scope

The study applied a focused temporal, geographic, and thematic scope to understand electoral-violence dynamics in Kenya and inform preventive strategies for the 2027 General Elections.

Temporal Scope

The analysis reviewed four key electoral cycles 2007/08, 2013, 2017, and 2022; to understand how election-related violence has changed over time, evaluate the impact of reforms, and identify emerging risks. Together, these periods show Kenya's shift from widespread violence to more localized and less visible forms of conflict.

- The 2007/08 elections marked a major crisis, with widespread violence following disputed results. This exposed serious weaknesses in electoral management, the judiciary, and security responses, allowing political and ethnic tensions to escalate.
- The 2013 elections were the first under the 2010 Constitution and reflected early progress in institutional reform. The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission managed the process, supported by new technologies like biometric registration and electronic

results transmission. However, system failures raised doubts about credibility, showing that reforms alone are not enough without reliable implementation.

- In 2017, the Supreme Court of Kenya annulled the presidential results, a landmark decision that demonstrated judicial independence but also led to protests, economic disruption, and strong security responses. The repeat election and opposition boycott further deepened political divisions and questions of legitimacy.
- The 2022 elections were largely peaceful at the national level, indicating improvements in election management. However, tensions shifted to local contests, and misinformation spread widely through digital platforms. Disagreements within the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission also pointed to ongoing institutional challenges.
- Overall, these cycles illustrate a move away from large-scale violence toward more localized, digital, and perception-driven risks. Looking ahead, early warning signs identified for 2026–2027 include rising misinformation, shifting patterns of political mobilization, continued low trust in institutions, and more intense competition at the local level.

Geographic Scope

The study took a national lens with granular hotspot analysis at county level and where data allowed, at town level. Priority areas included historically volatile counties, urban informal settlements, border regions, and emerging hotspots linked to demographic pressures and digital mobilization. GIS mapping was applied to visualize incident patterns, severity, recurrence, and risk overlays.

Thematic Scope

The analysis was guided by six key thematic areas:

- Violence patterns and trends: An examination of the forms of violence, when they occur, how they shift across locations, and the use of both offline and digital tactics.
- Drivers and triggers: Identified underlying causes such as long-standing grievances, political tensions, immediate flashpoints, and the role of digital platforms in escalating risks.
- Risk indicators: Tracked warning signs including repeated violence in certain areas, intensity of political competition, youth mobilization, hate speech, levels of trust in institutions, and spikes in misinformation.
- Institutional preparedness: Assessed the readiness of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, security agencies, county peace structures, and community initiatives. This includes evaluating how accessible and effective Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms are within political parties, local peace committees, and administrative systems, and whether they can resolve disputes quickly and fairly before they escalate.

- Early warning and response: Reviewed how well early warning systems function, including reporting channels, verification processes, and coverage gaps. It also considered public awareness, i.e. whether people know how to report incidents, trust the systems in place, and respond to alerts; and whether there are clear links between early warnings and ADR mechanisms to enable timely de-escalation.
- Technology for peacebuilding: Explored the use of tools such as GIS mapping, incident-reporting platforms, social media monitoring, and data analytics, as well as lessons learned from past use of these technologies.

By bringing these areas together, the study built strong evidence based on past trends, current risks, institutional readiness, and the role of technology, helping inform recommendations on how to support more peaceful and resilient elections in 2027.

1.5. Limitations

One limitation encountered during the study was the difficulty in scheduling key informant interviews with state agencies within the available timeframe, largely due to competing priorities and limited availability of officials. Secondly, gaps and inconsistencies in historical data, particularly localized incidents and informal dispute-resolution mechanisms limited the ability to fully capture patterns.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study design and analytical framework

The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative geospatial analysis with qualitative research to provide a well-rounded, evidence-based understanding of electoral violence in Kenya. This approach allowed for the use of multiple data sources, improving both the reliability of the findings and the depth of contextual insight.

The analysis was guided by a three-part framework examining structural drivers, proximate triggers, and institutional factors.

- Structural drivers assessed long-term conditions such as historical grievances, ethnic divisions, socio-economic inequalities, and regional marginalization; that create a foundation for conflict.
- Proximate triggers focused on short-term events that can escalate tensions during elections, including political disputes, party primaries, court decisions, hate speech, and misinformation.
- Institutional factors assessed the capacity, preparedness, and credibility of key actors; particularly the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission; Security agencies; and early warning systems in preventing and responding to violence.

This framework was applied through a spatial and temporal analysis of four electoral cycles (2007/08, 2013, 2017, and 2022), enabling the identification of recurring, emerging, and previously inactive hotspots. Geospatial methods, including hotspot mapping, were used to visualize patterns of violence and their relationship to underlying risk factors. By combining quantitative data, stakeholder perspectives, and institutional assessments, the study provides a balanced and context-sensitive analysis, forming a strong basis for practical recommendations ahead of the 2027 elections.

2.2. Sampling and data collection

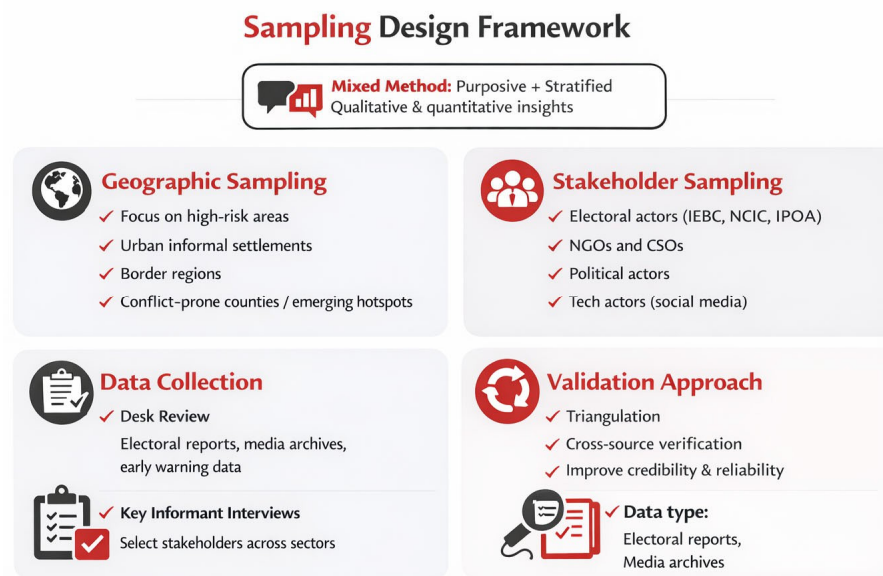


Figure 1: Sampling design framework

The study employed a purposive and stratified sampling approach designed to capture diverse perspectives across geographic areas and stakeholder groups, with a particular focus on historically and emerging high-risk locations. Geographic sampling prioritized regions that have experienced recurrent electoral violence, such as urban informal settlements, border regions, and areas affected by resource-based conflicts or demographic pressures.

Stakeholder sampling was similarly purposive, targeting key actors involved in electoral processes, peacebuilding, and security. These included the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission; the National Cohesion and Integration Commission; Independent Policing Oversight Authority, Civil Society Organizations, Political Party leaders, and technology actors. This ensured a balanced representation of both institutional and grassroots perspectives.

Data collection combined secondary and primary methods. Secondary data was derived from a comprehensive desk review of electoral reports, human rights documentation, early warning system reports, and media archives. These sources were used to develop an incident-level dataset covering the period from 2007 to 2022, capturing information on the location, type, severity, timing, and triggers of electoral violence.

Primary data was collected through key informant interviews using semi-structured tools. These interviews served to validate and contextualize secondary data, identify local conflict drivers and emerging risks; and assess institutional preparedness and the role of technology in early warning and response. Additional input was obtained through stakeholder mapping exercises, which provided coordination gaps, and opportunities for strengthening prevention efforts. Together, these methods ensured a comprehensive, multi-layered evidence base.

2.3. Hotspot Scoring and Classification Framework

The hotspot classification was derived from a composite risk model integrating frequency, severity, and recurrence indicators. Each indicator was constructed from incident-level data triangulated across electoral reports, human rights documentation, and key informant validation. Frequency captured the number of incidents per electoral cycle; severity assessed impact based on fatalities, injuries, displacement, and property destruction, while recurrence measured the persistence of violence across multiple election cycles. These indicators were standardized and aggregated into a composite score used to classify counties into risk tiers. While the model provides a robust comparative framework, it should be interpreted alongside qualitative validation, particularly in identifying emerging and micro-level hotspots where data availability may be uneven.

2.4. Data management and quality assurance

Effective data management and quality assurance were critical to guarantee the credibility, integrity, and usability of this report. Given the sensitivity of electoral violence related data, a structured framework was applied from data collection to analysis and report writing. The study utilized primary qualitative data from Key Informant Interviews, desk review of secondary sources, and geospatial (GIS) data. All data was systematically catalogued using standardized naming convention and stored in a centralized, online and secure repository to ensure consistency, version control, and controlled access. Personally identifiable information was removed during data analysis and report writing, in-line with the Kenya Data Protection Act (2019) and ethical standards.

Data cleaning was conducted prior to analysis, including de duplication of incidents reported across multiple sources, harmonization of geographic identifiers (county, sub county), among others. A multi-layered quality assurance framework was used to guide the study, anchored in data triangulation across at least two or three sources to strengthen validity. Key stakeholders undertook peer review during analysis and report writing to ensure analytical rigor and consistency. Additional checks included verification of data accuracy, identification of anomalies, and validation of geospatial outputs to prevent misclassification.

The validation of findings was conducted through a rigorous and multi-layered approach to ensure accuracy, credibility, and reliability. Triangulation was applied by systematically comparing and cross-checking insights from multiple data sources, including key informant interviews, desk reviews, and stakeholder inputs. Cross-source verification was undertaken by corroborating information from electoral reports, media archives, and perspectives of electoral actors, NGOs, and political representatives. This process helped to identify inconsistencies, minimize bias, and strengthen confidence in the results. Additionally, credibility and reliability checks were performed to ensure that data sources were trustworthy, methods were consistently applied, and interpretations were grounded in verifiable evidence, resulting in well-substantiated and defensible conclusions.

3. ELECTORAL VIOLENCE TRENDS: 2007 TO 2022

3.1. Most vulnerable entities

Across all electoral cycles, several demographic and geographic groups consistently emerged as highly vulnerable to electoral violence. Youth were observed to be the most affected group, largely due to high levels of unemployment and economic vulnerability, which make them more susceptible to political mobilization, including recruitment into violent activities. Women and girls are also significantly affected, particularly through sexual and gender-based violence, displacement, and economic disruption during periods of unrest. Although often underreported, sexual violence has been a recurring feature, especially in high-intensity conflict settings such as 2007/08.

Residents of urban informal settlements such as those in Nairobi (Kawangware, Kibera, Korogocho, Mathare and Mukuru) face heightened exposure due to high population density, poverty, and the presence of organized gangs, which are frequently mobilized during elections. Border communities and populations in historically marginalized or conflict-prone regions (e.g., pastoralist and peripheral counties) are vulnerable, particularly where electoral competition intersects resource conflicts, weak state presence, and existing insecurity.

Persons with disabilities, the elderly, ethnic minorities, and children face context-specific vulnerabilities, often linked to limited mobility, reduced access to protection mechanisms, and exclusion from response systems. These groups are particularly at-risk during displacement, disruption of services, and breakdown of community support structures.

Migrant communities often framed as “outsiders” in regions with contested land and settlement histories have faced heightened vulnerability during electoral periods. In the Rift Valley, election cycles have repeatedly coincided with targeted violence against such communities, driven by ethnicized political mobilization. Exclusionary labels such as “*madoadoo*” have been used to mark these groups as illegitimate residents, reinforcing social exclusion and normalizing intimidation, displacement, and violence during elections.

Beyond structural vulnerability, exposure to electoral violence is also shaped by how different groups are mobilized through both offline and digital mechanisms. Youth, for example, are not only physically mobilized through rallies, patronage networks, and organized groups, but are also increasingly influenced through digital platforms where political messaging, misinformation, and coordinated narratives circulate rapidly. Similarly, residents of informal settlements are exposed not only to direct confrontation and gang activity, but also to the rapid spread of rumors, political messaging, and mobilization calls through platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok. These combined offline and online dynamics increase the speed, scale, and unpredictability of mobilization during electoral periods.

3.2. Historical patterns

Electoral violence in Kenya follows a cyclical but evolving pattern, with peaks occurring around key moments in the electoral cycle particularly results announcement, post-election disputes, and periods of institutional crisis. While the 2007/08 cycle represented a high-intensity, largely physical and organized form of violence, subsequent elections (2013, 2017, 2022) show a shift toward more decentralized, area-specific, and sporadic patterns of conflict. Electoral violence has increasingly taken on a hybrid character, combining traditional offline tactics such as protests, organized group mobilization, and targeted attacks; with digital tactics including misinformation, hate speech, and coordinated online narratives that shape perceptions and mobilize action.



Figure 2: Electoral violence evolution timeline

A key historical pattern is the persistence of recurring electoral violence hotspots, where tensions repeatedly emerge across election cycles due to a combination of structural grievances, political competition, and weak conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Rift Valley: Land and Identity-based Conflict

The Rift Valley remains one of the most consistent and high-risk regions due to longstanding land disputes, historical injustices, and contested settlement patterns. These grievances are often framed along ethnic lines and become highly politicized during elections. As a result, electoral periods frequently trigger organized attacks, displacement, and retaliatory violence, particularly in areas with a history of inter-communal tension. In recent electoral cycles, these dynamics have been further shaped by the spread of political messaging and identity-based narratives through digital platforms, where historical grievances are reframed and amplified. This has contributed to faster mobilization, particularly where online narratives reinforce existing land and identity tensions.

While land is frequently cited as a central driver of electoral violence, it is important to distinguish between land as a material resource and land as a proxy for identity, belonging, and political power. In many cases, individuals targeted during electoral violence are not unlawfully occupying land; rather, they are perceived as politically or ethnically “outsiders.” This suggests that electoral violence is less about land ownership per se and more about contested notions of legitimacy, historical settlement patterns, and access to political representation. Electoral periods reactivate these narratives, transforming land-related grievances into broader struggles over identity and inclusion.

Urban informal settlements: Protest and Gang-linked Violence

Informal settlements, especially in major urban centers, are recurrent hotspots due to high population density, poverty, and the presence of organized youth groups and gangs. These areas are often sites of intense political mobilization, protests, and clashes, particularly in response to disputed results. Violence in these settings tends to involve both direct confrontation such as protests, riots, and clashes with security forces, and indirect forms of mobilization through digital communication. Social media platforms and messaging applications are frequently used to circulate protest calls, spread rumors about electoral malpractice, and coordinate group action in real time. This interaction between offline protest dynamics and online mobilization makes informal settlements particularly volatile during periods of political uncertainty.

Opposition Strongholds: State-citizen confrontations

Regions with strong opposition support have historically experienced repeated cycles of protest and state response, especially following contested election outcomes. These areas often become focal points for demonstrations, which can escalate into violent confrontations with security agencies. Patterns of excessive force, including police shootings and mass arrests, have contributed to deep mistrust between communities and the state, reinforcing a cycle of grievance and resistance across successive elections. In recent cycles, these confrontations have increasingly been influenced by digital information flows, where allegations of electoral malpractice, real-time updates, and unverified claims spread rapidly through social media. These narratives often shape perceptions of legitimacy and can accelerate mobilization, transforming localized grievances into wider protest movements.

At the same time, new or “emerging hotspots” continue to appear, often linked to boundary disputes, local political competition, and shifting demographic pressures. These areas are increasingly influenced by both localized grievances and wider information dynamics. Digital platforms play a growing role in amplifying tensions, enabling narratives, rumors, and political messaging to spread beyond traditional geographic boundaries. As a result, electoral violence is no longer confined to historically volatile regions but can emerge rapidly in previously stable

areas where online mobilization intersects with local disputes. Importantly, electoral violence is not limited to election day; it often begins during nominations and campaigns and can extend into prolonged post-election periods, with digital narratives sustaining tensions even in the absence of large-scale physical violence.

3.3. Violence Typologies

Electoral violence in Kenya has multiple dimensions and is constantly evolving, encompassing physical, organized, institutional, and increasingly digital forms. These types often overlap and reinforce each other, meaning violence is rarely isolated; it is instigated through a combination of actors, methods, and triggers across the electoral cycle.

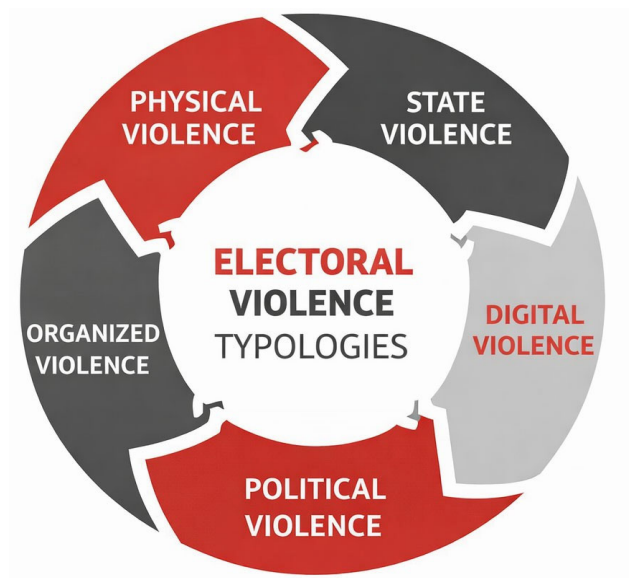


Figure 3: Electoral violence typologies

a) Physical and direct violence

This is the most visible form of electoral violence and includes:

- Killings, assaults, and mob attacks
- Forced displacement and ethnic targeting
- Destruction of homes, businesses, and livelihoods
- Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Such violence was most widespread during the 2007/08 crisis, where it occurred at a national scale and involved mass displacement and coordinated attacks. However, it has not disappeared as it now occurs in more localized and irregular patterns, often concentrated in specific hot spots, during protests, or around tightly contested local races.

b) Organized and retaliatory violence

A significant portion of electoral violence is deliberate and coordinated, rather than spontaneous. This includes:

- Mobilization of militias and politically aligned youth groups
- Planned attacks targeting specific communities or political supporters
- Retaliatory violence, where one group responds to perceived attacks by another

These patterns reflect the existence of organized networks and mobilization structures, often linked to political actors, local elites, or criminal gangs. Violence can therefore unfold in cycles, with initial incidents triggering revenge attacks and prolonged instability.

c) State-related violence

State actors, particularly security agencies, play a complex role in electoral violence. While they are mandated to maintain order, their actions have at times contributed to escalation through:

- Use of excessive or disproportionate force
- Police shootings and abusive crowd-control tactics
- Selective or uneven enforcement of the law

In some contexts, perceived bias or lack of accountability has deepened public mistrust, especially in opposition-leaning areas. This makes state response a double-edged factor i.e. capable of either containing tensions or intensifying them, depending on how it is applied.

d) Political and communicative violence

Electoral violence is also shaped by language, narratives, and messaging, which can create conditions for physical conflict. This includes:

- Hate speech and direct incitement
- Ethnicized or exclusionary political narratives
- Propaganda and inflammatory rhetoric
- Rumor-spreading and misinformation

These forms of violence are often precursors to physical attacks, as they normalize hostility, reinforce group divisions, and justify aggression. Political actors, media, and community influencers can all play a role in amplifying such narratives.

e) Digital and information-based violence

In recent electoral cycles, particularly 2017 and 2022, violence has increasingly shifted into digital space. This includes:

- Coordinated disinformation campaigns
- Manipulation of online narratives through organized networks
- Use of influencers, bloggers, and sponsored content
- Amplification through bots, fake accounts, and viral posts

Digital platforms enable rapid spread of emotionally charged content, often blending truth and falsehoods. This can inflame tensions, shape public perception of electoral credibility, and mobilize individuals or groups toward confrontation. As a result, electoral violence is no longer

confined to physical spaces but operates within an interlinked environment where online dynamics directly influence offline behavior.

These typologies demonstrate that electoral violence in Kenya is not a single event or form, but a layered phenomenon involving physical harm, organized mobilization, institutional actions, and information-driven dynamics. Understanding how these forms interact is critical for designing effective prevention and response strategies, particularly as the role of digital platforms continues to grow.

3.4. Temporal and Geographic Trends

a) Temporal trends

Electoral violence in Kenya follows a predictable pattern across the electoral cycle, with risks rising at specific moments. These include:

- Pre-election phase: Tensions often emerge during party nominations, campaigns, and rallies. This period is marked by intra-party disputes, political intimidation, and early signs of mobilization, including hate speech, ethnic rhetoric and localized clashes.
- Election period: Voting-day violence is typically limited but can include polling-station disruptions, voter intimidation (including by security forces), vote buying, and localized confrontations in high-stakes areas.
- Post-election phase: This remains the most volatile period, particularly following the official pronouncement of results, as disputes over outcomes, perceptions of electoral fraud, and weakened institutional credibility converge. Protests, unrest, and confrontations with security forces are most likely to escalate at this stage.



Figure 4: Electoral violence cycle

Historically, the most severe post-election violence in Kenya has occurred following the announcement of results in elections where incumbents particularly presidential candidates; were perceived to be defending contested mandates, as in 2007 and again in 2017. In these

moments, disputes over legitimacy intensified sharply, triggering widespread unrest. At the same time, the nature of electoral violence has evolved. While the 2007/08 elections produced a short, high-intensity national crisis, more recent cycles; notably 2017 and 2022 have been characterized by lower-intensity but more prolonged and recurrent tensions, expressed through protests, legal challenges, and sustained political standoffs rather than nationwide violence

Emerging Trend: Informal “Zoning” and Campaign-Period Violence

A notable emerging trend in Kenya’s recent electoral cycles is the rise of informal campaign-period “zoning,” whereby specific geographic areas are implicitly designated as exclusive strongholds for political parties or candidates. Within these zones, opposition campaigning is treated as illegitimate or provocative. When rival candidates or their supporters attempt to hold rallies, display campaign materials, or mobilize voters in such areas, the result is frequently violent confrontation.

This practice has significantly altered the geography and timing of electoral violence. Rather than being confined primarily to polling or post-results periods, violence linked to zoning increasingly manifests during the campaign phase, often well ahead of election day. These confrontations are typically localized but highly punitive, involving physical assaults, destruction of property, and targeted intimidation of candidates, party agents, and supporters. Evidence from recent cycles indicates that zoning-related violence has contributed to a growing number of injuries and, in some instances, fatalities.

Importantly, zoning reinforces exclusionary political dynamics by narrowing civic space and undermining the principle of open, competitive campaigning. It also feeds into wider post-election tensions by entrenching narratives of territorial control, political entitlement, and winner-takes-all competition. As such, zoning acts both as an independent driver of pre-election violence and as a catalyst that amplifies disputes and unrest during later stages of the electoral cycle.

b) Geographic trends

Electoral violence in Kenya is not evenly distributed; it is concentrated in specific locations shaped by historical grievances, political competition, and socio-economic conditions. These include:

- Persistent hotspots: Regions such as the Rift Valley, Nairobi’s informal settlements, and Kisumu continue to experience recurrent violence due to resources, for example, land disputes, political mobilization, ethnicization of politics, and entrenched opposition dynamics.
- Urban centers: Particularly informal settlements, are prone to protest-driven violence, often involving clashes between demonstrators and security forces, as well as different ethnic factions affiliated to key political figures.

- Rural and peripheral areas: Violence in these regions is often linked to land disputes, resource competition, and localized conflicts, including cattle rustling and inter-community tensions.
- Border and coastal regions: These areas face identity-based tensions and resource conflicts, which can be intensified during elections, especially where boundaries and political representation are contested.

An important trend is the growing concentration of violence at the local level, with incidents now more likely to occur at the sub-county, ward, or even neighborhood level. This reflects the growing importance of devolved governance and highly competitive local elections, which can trigger intense, localized conflicts even when national elections remain relatively stable.

c) Emerging spatial dynamics

Recent electoral cycles reveal important shifts in how and where violence occurs:

- Expansion into new areas: Risk is no longer confined to traditional hotspots; previously stable regions are showing signs of emerging tensions, often linked to demographic changes, boundary disputes, or political realignment.
- Rise of micro-hotspots: Violence is increasingly concentrated in specific neighborhoods, constituencies, or polling zones, rather than entire regions, making it more difficult to predict and manage.
- Convergence of physical and digital spaces: There is growing overlap between geographic hotspots and digital influence zones, where online narratives such as misinformation, hate speech, and political propaganda; fuel or amplify offline tensions.

These trends point to a shift toward hybrid conflict environments, where physical incidents and digital dynamics interact and reinforce each other.

Overall, electoral violence in Kenya has shifted in form rather than disappeared, evolving from large-scale, nationwide conflict into more localized, complex, and multi-layered patterns of instability. Although the intensity of violence has declined since the 2007–2008 Kenyan post-election violence, underlying risks remain significant.

Electoral cycles between 2013 and 2022 illustrate this uneven transition. The 2013 general election was widely regarded as relatively peaceful, reflecting a period of stabilization (International Crisis Group, 2013). In contrast, the 2017 elections, including the repeat poll, saw a resurgence of violence, with increased fatalities and injuries largely concentrated in protest settings and frequently associated with security force responses (Amnesty International, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2017). By 2022, fatalities had declined, and incidents were generally smaller in scale, more geographically dispersed, and driven by local dynamics, although tensions and isolated clashes persisted (ACLED, 2023; Institute for Security Studies, 2022). These patterns point to a transition from episodic, nationwide crises to lower-intensity but more persistent and localized forms of conflict, often shaped by community-level grievances and localized political competition (UNDP, 2023; EISA, 2022). Electoral violence in Kenya has become increasingly shaped by a combination of localized political competition, organized

mobilization, persistent institutional trust deficits, and the growing influence of misinformation and digital platforms. While the scale of large-scale physical violence has declined since the 2007/08 crisis, underlying risks remain significant and are evolving in more complex and less visible forms. This shifting landscape underscores the need for more targeted, data-driven, and technology-enabled approaches to prevention and response as the country prepares for the 2027 elections.

Importantly, these forms of violence are not evenly distributed across space. Different typologies tend to cluster in specific hotspot environments. For example, organized and retaliatory violence is more prevalent in areas with entrenched land and identity conflicts, while protest-related and state-linked violence is more common in urban informal settlements and opposition strongholds. Digital and information-based violence, by contrast, operates across geographic boundaries but often amplifies tensions in already vulnerable locations. This interaction between violence typologies and spatial context reinforces the need for integrated hotspot mapping that captures both physical and digital risk environments.

4. HOTSPOT MAPPING AND SPATIAL ANALYSIS

4.1. National hotspot overview

The national hotspot analysis revealed that electoral violence risk in Kenya is both widespread and uneven, with varying levels of intensity across counties and sub-counties. Rather than being confined to a few regions, risk is distributed along a tiered spectrum, ranging from high-intensity, historically volatile counties to emerging and lower-intensity zones.

At the highest level, Tier-1 high-risk counties are characterized by a combination of frequent incidents, high severity, and strong recurrence over multiple electoral cycles. These include major urban centers and historically contested regions such as Nairobi, Kisumu, Uasin Gishu, and Nakuru. These areas are associated with a convergence of risk factors including political mobilization, dense populations, ethnic intolerance and repeated protest activity.

A second category of emerging and mid-level risk counties reflects areas where violence has been less intense historically but is increasing due to factors such as competitive local politics, intra-party disputes, and demographic pressures. These counties signal a broadening of the electoral risk landscape beyond traditional hotspots.

Lower-tier counties, while often appearing relatively stable, continue to exhibit latent vulnerabilities, particularly where underlying grievances persist or where early warning indicators are evident. These include political polarization expressed through divisive narratives (such as “hustler vs dynasty”), the mobilization of youth and informal gangs (“goonism”), and the spread of hate speech and inflammatory messaging. Such dynamics highlight that risks are not confined to traditional hotspots but can emerge and escalate across different contexts, reinforcing the need for a national rather than purely localized approach to risk monitoring and early warning.

Hotspot categories

The spatial analysis identified three key categories of hotspots based on historical trends and current risk dynamics:

- **Persistent hotspots:** These areas have repeatedly experienced electoral violence across multiple election cycles, making them consistently high-risk. They are shaped by deep-rooted factors such as land disputes, ethnic polarization, and intense political competition, which make outbreaks of violence both predictable and cyclical. Examples include Nairobi (especially Kibera, Mathare, and Korogocho), Kisumu, Nakuru (Molo, Naivasha), Uasin Gishu (Eldoret), and Mombasa (Likoni, Kisauni). In these locations, violence is typically sparked by triggers such as contested election results, protests, and political mobilization, and often takes the form of street clashes, confrontations with police, and organized youth or gang activity. Given the persistence of these underlying

drivers, these areas require sustained, long-term interventions rather than short-term responses.

- **Emerging hotspots:** These are areas where the risk of electoral violence is rising, even though they have not previously experienced widespread unrest. Key drivers include intensifying county-level political competition, rapid urban growth, youth mobilization, and the spread of misinformation. Counties such as Kiambu, Kajiado, Laikipia, Kilifi, and Kakamega reflect this pattern, where shifting demographics and local rivalries are widening the map of potential instability. Warning signs often appear as growing hate speech and polarization, increased organization of youth groups (“goonism”), and escalating political tensions at the local level. Because these areas are on an upward risk trajectory, they are especially important for early action targeted interventions that can help prevent them from becoming entrenched, high-risk hotspots.
- **Dormant hotspots:** These are areas with a past record of electoral violence that are currently experiencing relative calm but remain fragile due to unresolved issues such as land disputes and past displacement. This underlying tension means they can quickly relapse into instability under the right conditions particularly during tightly contested elections or periods of institutional strain. Examples include Trans Nzoia and Uasin Gishu (Burnt Forest). While they may appear stable, these regions remain vulnerable to sudden escalation, often triggered by renewed political mobilization or emerging disputes. Continuous monitoring is therefore critical to prevent a rapid return to violence.

This categorization highlights that electoral violence risk is dynamic, requiring continuous monitoring and adaptation of prevention strategies. Across all three categories, common risk factors such as political polarization, youth unemployment, organized gangs, low trust in institutions, and digital misinformation interact to shape both current and future hotspots. This reinforces the need for targeted, location-specific interventions and strong early warning systems, especially in emerging and dormant areas that may otherwise be overlooked.

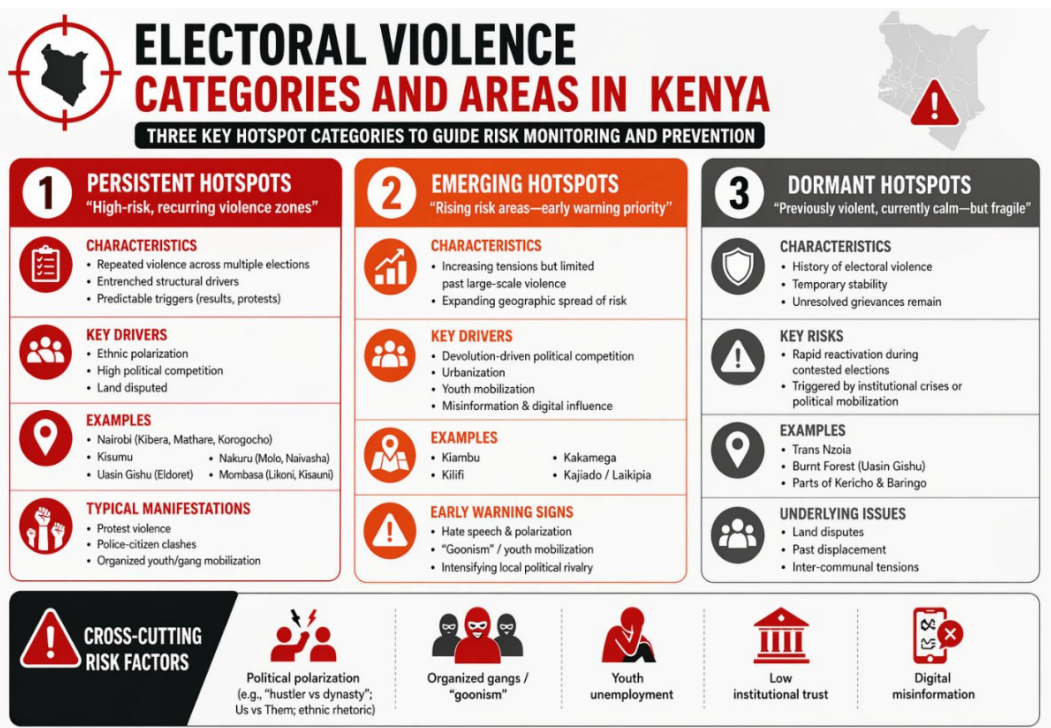


Figure 5: Hotspot categories

County-level profiles

County-level analysis provided a more granular understanding of how electoral violence risk manifests in specific locations. Each county reflects a distinct configuration of drivers, triggers, and violence patterns, rather than a uniform national trend.

In urban counties, such as Nairobi and Mombasa, risk is driven by high population density, youth unemployment, and organized mobilization. Violence often takes the form of protests, riots, and clashes with security forces, particularly in informal settlements and politically active neighborhoods.

In Rift Valley counties such as Uasin Gishu and Nakuru, electoral violence is closely linked to land disputes, historical grievances, and identity-based mobilization. These areas are more prone to organized and retaliatory violence, including displacement and targeted attacks.

In Western and Nyanza Counties, including Kisumu and Kakamega, violence is often linked not only to protest activity, political alignment, and tensions between communities and the state, but also to the involvement of organized gangs and goon networks. These groups are sometimes mobilized during periods of political unrest especially around elections, contributing to post-election violence, intimidation, and clashes with security agencies.

In Coastal and Northern Counties, such as Mombasa and parts of pastoral regions, risk is shaped by a mix of identity politics, economic marginalization, and localized conflicts over resources and boundaries.

Across counties, key early warning triggers include youth mobilization, political incitement, disputes during party primaries, protest activity, and the spread of digital misinformation. These triggers vary in intensity but consistently signal areas where tensions may escalate.

Micro-Hotspots and Electoral Phase Hotspots

While county-level analysis offers a national perspective, electoral violence in Kenya often unfolds at sub-national levels, such as sub-counties, wards, informal settlements, and even individual polling areas. These areas are increasingly being associated with specific stages of the electoral cycle, including party primaries, vote tallying, and post-announcement protest activity. As a result, counties categorized as moderate risk may still contain pockets of increased vulnerability, where local triggers interact with population density, political mobilization, and limited institutional presence. Integrating sub-national level hotspot analysis is critical for effective, targeted prevention and response efforts.

4.2. Spatial Analysis

The study determined that electoral violence in Kenya is geographically concentrated but increasingly fluid, with both long-standing and emerging areas of risk. The shift toward micro-level hotspots, combined with the influence of digital mobilization, means that future interventions must be highly targeted, locally informed, and responsive to rapidly changing dynamics.

The hotspot maps presented in this report provide a visual overview of the spatial distribution of electoral-related risks across Kenya's counties. They focus on a Composite Risk Score emanating from a combination of Frequency, Severity, Recurrence indexes. The maps are not predictions of violence, but rather risk representations drawn from historical patterns (2007–2022) and validated through multiple qualitative interviews with AFSC partners, government agencies, CSOs, technology providers, and political actors.

Frequency Index

This measures how often electoral-related violent incidents, tensions, or triggers occur within a county over a defined period.

Counties scoring highest on frequency (Index 5) include Nairobi City (especially in Mathare, Kibra, Dandora, and Mukuru) and Kisumu, especially Kondele, Manyatta, Nyalenda and Kisumu Central areas. These areas consistently experience protest mobilization, youth clashes, and confrontation between police and the community. Uasin Gishu (Eldoret, Turbo) and Nakuru (Molo, London Estate) register frequent incidents, majorly driven by ethnic

mobilization, and zoning rhetoric. Coastal areas such as Likoni and Kisauni in Mombasa show sustained high frequency patterns (Index 4), indicating persistent grievances such as identity politics and unemployment. Kakamega and Kilifi counties depict moderate frequency (Index 3), indicating periodic but notable tensions linked to political competition and youth mobilization. In contrast, most counties in Central, Eastern, and Northern Kenya show very low frequency levels (Index 1), signaling minimal recurrent incidents.

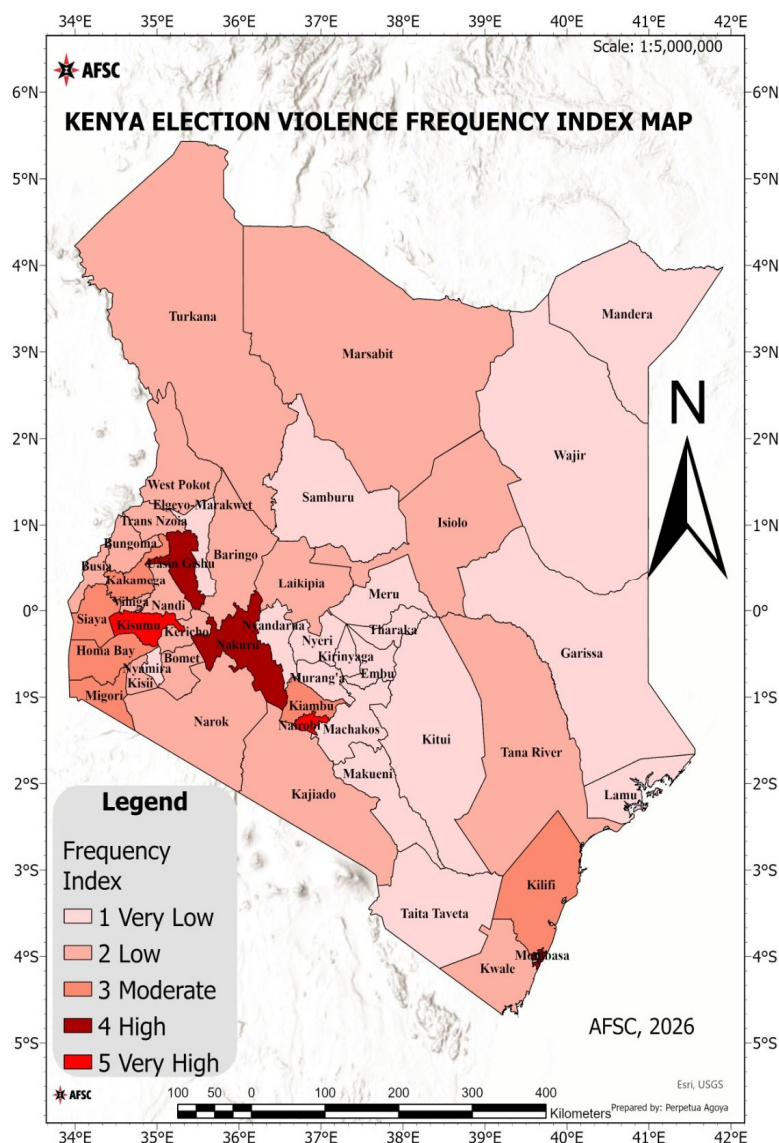


Figure 6: Frequency Index Map

Severity Index

This captures how serious or harmful the reported incidents are, assessing elements such as fatalities, injuries, property destruction, or the intensity of clashes.

Severity is Very High (Index 5) in Uasin Gishu, followed by High Severity (Index 4) in Kisumu, Mombasa, Nairobi City and Nakuru. These areas have been mostly associated with police-civilian confrontations, use of live ammunition in protests, and organized militia involvement. Mombasa has been associated with riots and gang-related violence during tense political periods. Moderate severity counties (Index 3) such as Kilifi and Kakamega experience disruptive but less lethal incidents often stemming from demonstrations, intra-party disputes, or sporadic clashes. Most low and very-low severity index counties are located across Central, Eastern, and Northern Kenya.

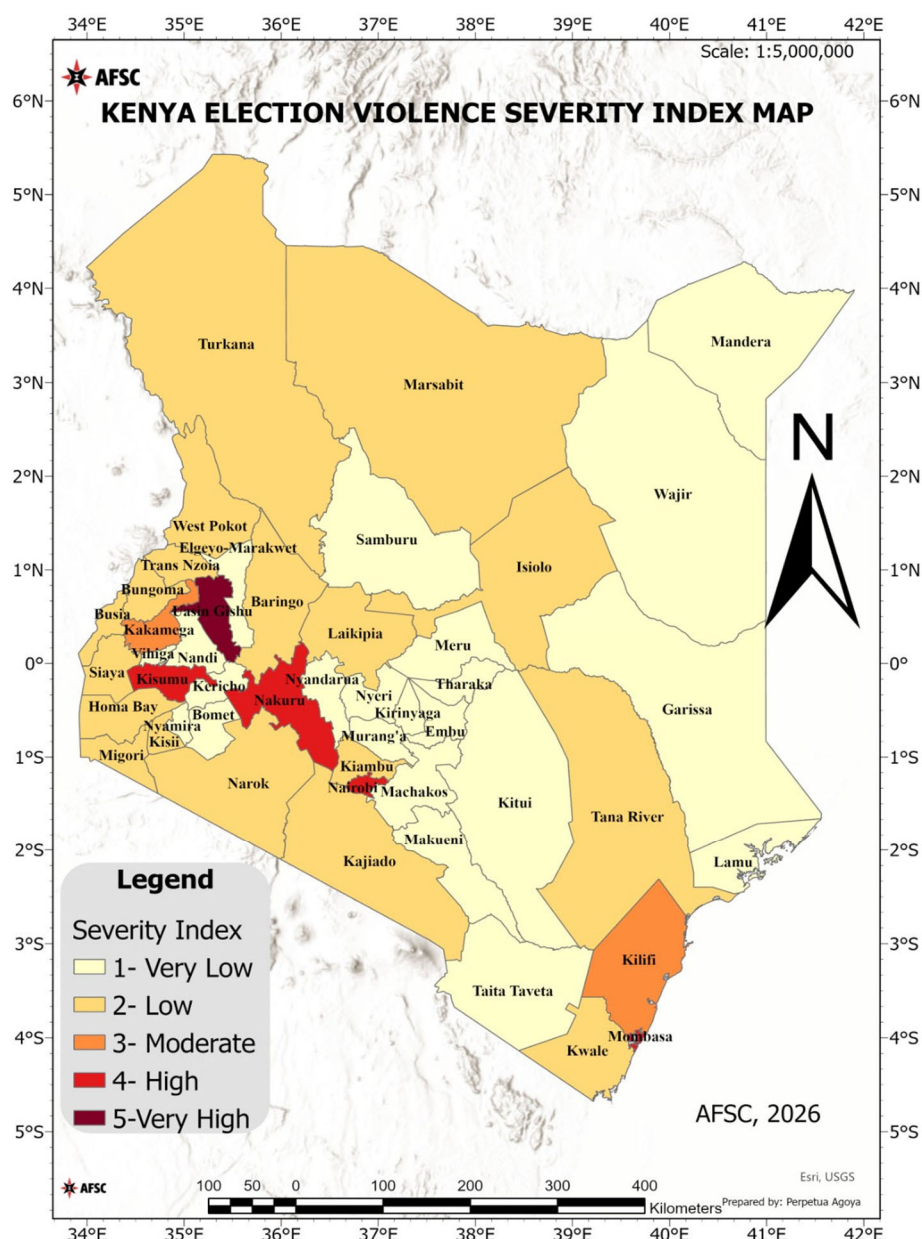


Figure 7: Severity Index Map

Recurrence Index

This index assesses the likelihood that electoral-related tensions or violence will reappear in a county based on historical patterns and structural triggers.

Recurrence is most acute (Index 5) in Nairobi, Kisumu, Uasin Gishu, and Nakuru, where historic cycles of electoral unrest strongly predict the return of violence especially in hotspots like Kibera, Kondele, Nyalenda and Eldoret. These counties exhibit entrenched political rivalries, dense youth populations, and persistent grievances related to identity politics, policing, and land disputes. High range counties (Index 4), including Mombasa, Kakamega and Siaya depict patterns of repeated protest episodes, party primaries clashes, and reactive mobilization. Counties such as Busia, Homabay, Kiambu (Githurai, Kikuyu, Ruiru and Juja), Kilifi (Magharini, Ganze, Malindi and Kilifi Town), and Migori (Index 3) indicate episodic recurrence connected to resource tensions, land issues, or clan dynamics. Low (Index 2) and very-low (Index 1) recurrence counties span across Central and Eastern Kenya.

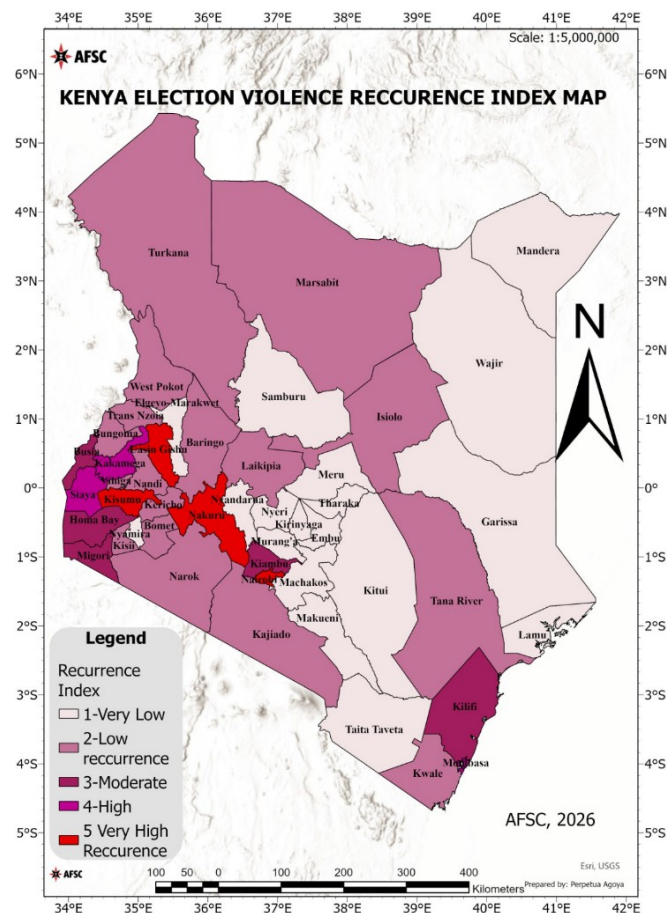


Figure 8: Recurrence Index Map

Composite Risk Score and Risk Tier

The Composite Risk Score combines by averaging the Frequency, Severity, and Recurrence indices, to produce an overall measure of a county's electoral violence risk. This final score determines the Risk Tier, which categorizes counties from Tier-1 (Extreme/High) to Tier-5 (Low).

The highest composite scores (4.3–4.6) place Nairobi County, Kisumu, and Uasin Gishu firmly in Tier-1 Extreme Risk, followed closely by Nakuru and Mombasa in Tier-1 High Risk. These counties are characterized by highly combustible urban hotspots such as Mathare, Kondele, Eldoret, and Likoni which repeatedly display intense political mobilization and violent flashpoints. Mid-tier counties (Tier-2), such as Kakamega, Kilifi, and Kiambu, show emerging risks and recurrent but less severe tension cycles. Tier-3 counties such as Migori, Busia, Laikipia (especially Rimuruti), Turkana (Lodwar, Turkana South and Turkana North), Isiolo, Kajiado (Kitengela, Ngong and Kajiado West), and Baringo record episodic conflict driven by resource competition, cross-border dynamics, misinformation, and pastoral interactions. Lower-risk counties (Tier-4 and Tier-5), mostly in Central and Eastern Kenya, exhibit minimal incidents. Overall, the composite score effectively highlights that hotspots are mainly in urban centers.

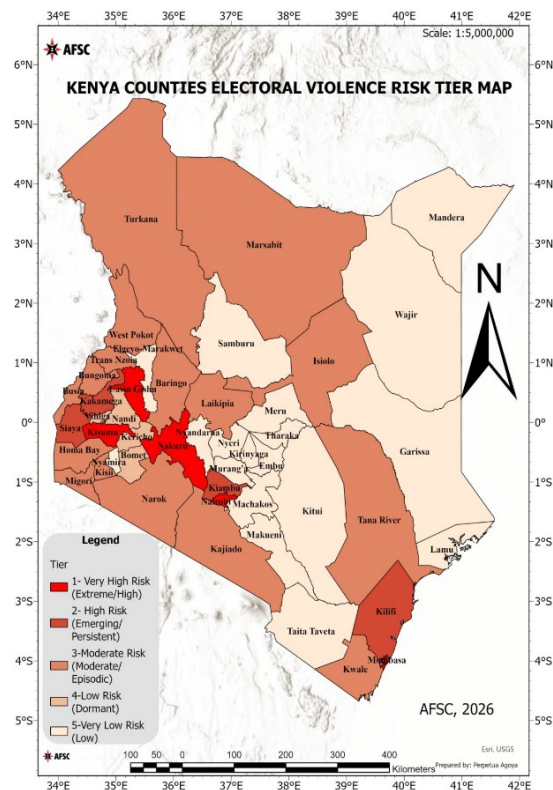


Figure 9: Composite Risk Score & Risk Tier

The map below provides an indication of key towns affected by electoral violence in each county.

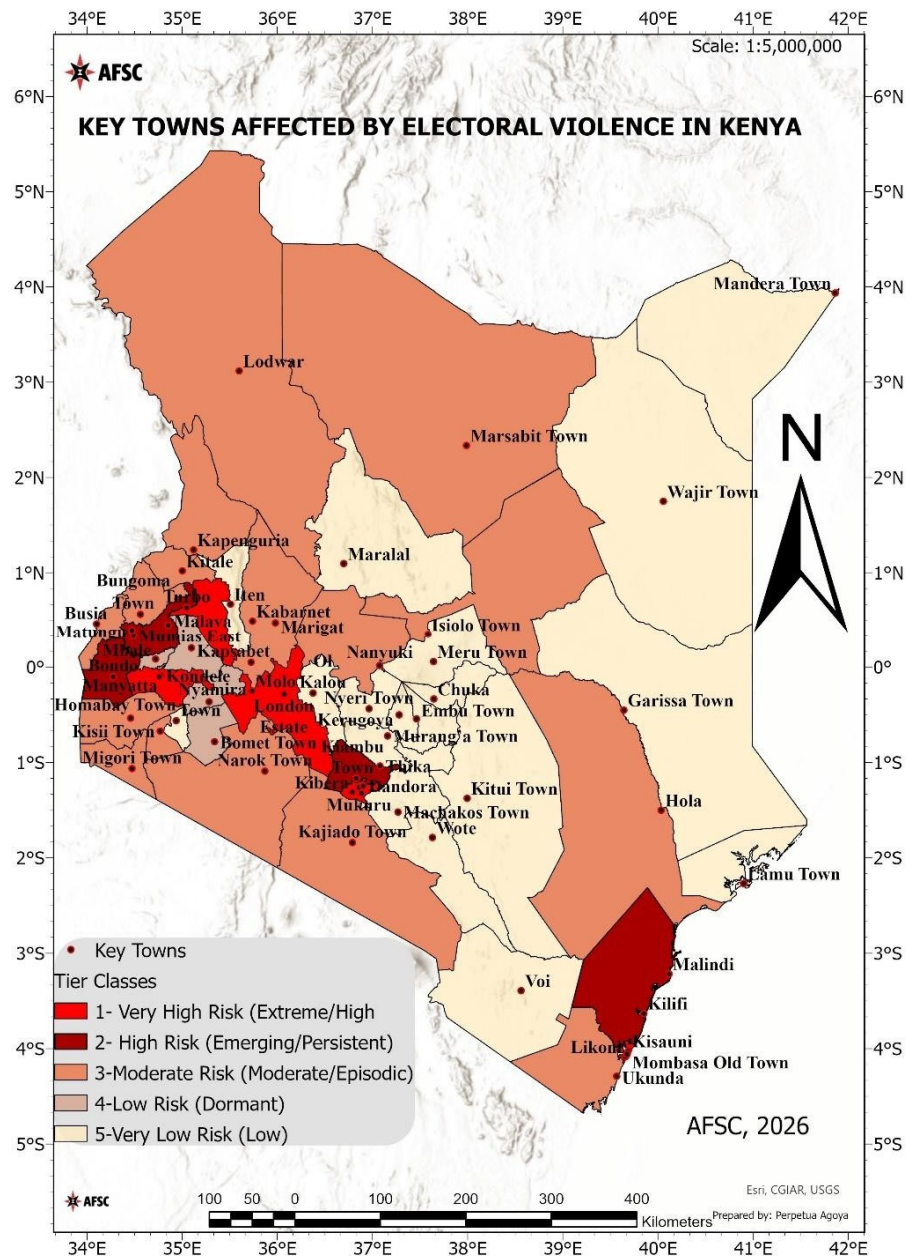


Figure 10: Key towns affected by electoral violence map

4.3. Hotspot Validation and Benchmarking

To strengthen the reliability of the hotspot classification, findings were compared against existing national and institutional mapping exercises, including NCIC hotspot analyses, KNCHR election monitoring coverage, and IPOA deployment patterns. While variations exist due to differences in methodology and scope, there is strong convergence around key high-risk counties such as Nairobi, Kisumu, Uasin Gishu, Nakuru, and Mombasa. Divergences in emerging or dormant hotspots are explained by evolving local dynamics, including demographic change, boundary disputes, and shifts in political competition. This comparative validation enhances confidence in the study's findings while highlighting areas requiring further monitoring.

4.4. Digital Hotspots and Hybrid Risk Environments

Electoral violence risk in Kenya is increasingly shaped by digital dynamics that interact with physical hotspots. Digital hotspots refer to clusters of online activity where misinformation, hate speech, and coordinated narratives intensify around particular communities, political actors, or geographic areas. These digital patterns often precede or amplify offline tensions, particularly in high-risk counties and urban centers. Integrating digital indicators into hotspot mapping allows for earlier detection of escalation risks, as online narratives frequently signal mobilization before physical incidents occur. This highlights the need for a hybrid approach to hotspot analysis that combines geographic and digital risk layers.

5. DRIVERS AND RISK FACTORS

The analysis of electoral violence in Kenya is structured around three interrelated dimensions: structural drivers, proximate triggers, and institutional factors. This framework reflects both the long-term conditions that shape vulnerability to violence and the immediate events and system-level dynamics that influence whether tensions escalate or are contained.



Figure 11: Drivers of electoral violence

5.1. Structural drivers

The major structural driver of electoral violence in Kenya is the *winner-takes-all nature of elections*, where political victory is directly tied to access to state resources and economic opportunity. This creates extreme competition for political office and fuels high-stakes political behavior, where losing an election is equated with exclusion from resources, opportunities, and state benefits. As one respondent noted:

“Elections are usually about resources... resources follow the vote.”

Within this high-stakes environment, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) also emerges as a structural feature rather than an incidental outcome. Evidence from the 2007–2008 post-election violence demonstrates that SGBV has been systematically used to intimidate voters, punish perceived opposition communities, and reinforce political control, particularly in contexts of ethnic polarization.

Closely linked to this is the persistence of ethnicized political mobilization, where political competition is framed along identity lines. Electoral alliances, voting patterns, and campaign narratives frequently align with ethnic and regional identities, reinforcing perceptions of inclusion and exclusion. In such contexts, elections are not only political events but also moments where historical grievances, fears of marginalization, and claims to belonging are reactivated.

Historical injustices and unresolved grievances, particularly around land ownership and long-standing inter-community tensions, are often reignited during election periods. Respondents observed how unresolved issues resurface as triggers for conflict. These grievances are geographically concentrated in specific regions but are politically activated during election cycles, transforming localized disputes into broader communal tensions. The recurrence of violence in certain areas reflects the persistence of these unresolved issues rather than isolated incidents.

“During election time you are reminded that you don’t belong here.”

Socio-economic conditions further reinforce structural vulnerability. High levels of youth unemployment, poverty, and inequality create a large pool of individuals who may be more susceptible to political mobilization, particularly where economic incentives or patronage networks are involved. As noted by a respondent:

“Where people don’t have money, there are no jobs... it’s easy to hoodwink someone idle.”

Economic marginalization also contributes to perceptions of exclusion, which can be politicized during elections and increase receptivity to divisive narratives. These structural pressures are compounded by regional inequalities and uneven development, particularly in peripheral and historically marginalized areas. Limited access to services, weak state presence, and ongoing resource competition especially in pastoralist and border regions; create additional layers of fragility that can intersect with electoral dynamics.

Finally, institutional trust deficits form part of the structural landscape. Long-standing perceptions of bias, inefficiency, or lack of accountability in key institutions such as electoral bodies, security agencies, and the justice system; reduce confidence in formal dispute resolution mechanisms. This increases the likelihood that electoral grievances will be expressed through protest or violence rather than institutional channels. Low institutional trust does not operate in isolation; it directly contributes to a permissive environment for impunity. Where electoral management bodies, security agencies, and accountability institutions are perceived as partisan or ineffective, political actors and their supporters are less likely to rely on formal dispute resolution mechanisms. Instead, they increasingly resort to extra-legal strategies, including violence, intimidation, and coercion.

This dynamic is reinforced by the growing normalization of “goonism” i.e. the strategic mobilization of organized groups of youth or gangs by political actors to influence electoral outcomes. These groups are often deployed to disrupt rallies, intimidate opponents, enforce informal territorial control (“zoning”), or retaliate against perceived rivals. Evidence from recent electoral cycles indicates that such groups operate with a degree of protection or tolerance, particularly where enforcement is weak or selective. Reckless political rhetoric further amplifies this environment. Incendiary statements, coded ethnic messaging, and exclusionary narratives (“outsiders,” “madoadoa”) lower the threshold for violence by legitimizing hostility and signaling acceptance of coercive tactics. In contexts of low institutional accountability, such rhetoric is rarely sanctioned, reinforcing cycles of provocation and response. Weak institutional trust, political incitement, and the organized mobilization of groups reinforce each other, creating an environment where violence is not only possible but seen as an acceptable and effective political strategy. Together, these structural factors establish a persistent underlying risk, with electoral periods serving as trigger points that activate, rather than cause conflict.

Within this broader context, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is not incidental. It is shaped and sustained by the same political, social, and institutional dynamics, making it a core feature of Kenya’s electoral violence landscape rather than a separate or isolated issue.

5.2. Proximate Factors and Triggers

Proximate factors: Escalating tensions and risk conditions

These are underlying, short-term dynamics that intensify instability during the electoral period and create an enabling environment for violence. Disputes during party nominations are among the most consistent proximate factors, representing the first major point of contestation in the electoral cycle. Perceived irregularities such as direct nominations, manipulation of party registers, or exclusion of candidates generate grievances that elevate tensions well before election day. Where internal party dispute resolution mechanisms are weak, delayed, or perceived as biased, these grievances persist and can escalate.

As respondents noted,

“When nomination process has not been free and fair, then tension is very high, especially when candidates argue that somebody has been favored using either party membership or universal suffrage.”

“Tension is usually very high at nomination level... when they feel the announced results are not in their favor.”

Political mobilization patterns further heighten risk. The spread of hate speech, identity-based rhetoric, and territorial claims such as “this is our region” reinforces exclusionary narratives and primes communities for confrontation. At the same time, the visible organization and mobilization of youth groups, often linked to political actors and supported through financial inducements, signal preparedness for potential violence.

As noted by respondents:

“People spreading hate speech... saying this is our region, no political party should come here.”

“The existence of mobilized goons can tell you... we are going to have violence.”

“Youth are given money to attend rallies... what happens when the money is not there?”

These dynamics are not inherently violent but significantly increase susceptibility to escalation, particularly in high-stakes contexts.

Localized conflicts such as land disputes, boundary disagreements, and clan tensions in areas like Marsabit County and Mandera County also function as proximate factors. During election periods, these issues are politicized and linked to broader struggles over power and representation, increasing their volatility. Similarly, displacement, economic insecurity, and heightened community tensions create conditions in which SGBV risks increase, particularly for women and girls in insecure or contested environments.

Proximate Triggers: Events that spark violence

Triggers are specific incidents or decisions that can rapidly ignite violence within an already tense environment. The announcement and management of election results remain one of the most critical triggers. Allegations of vote rigging, result manipulation, or lack of transparency whether verified or perceived; have historically sparked unrest, as seen in the 2007–2008 post-election violence. In highly polarized contexts, even unverified claims can quickly mobilize communities, leading to protests and clashes.

Similarly, disputed outcomes at the nomination stage or during final results announcements can act as immediate flashpoints, especially where grievances have accumulated. The rapid spread of misinformation, inflammatory statements by political actors, or visible acts of provocation (e.g., deployment of organized groups) can further accelerate escalation.

These triggers often interact with existing proximate factors such as mobilized youth groups, entrenched grievances, and heightened political rhetoric; transforming tension into overt violence. In such moments, SGBV has been documented as part of broader patterns of electoral

violence, used opportunistically or strategically amid breakdowns in security and accountability

5.3. Digital and Misinformation risks

The study findings indicate that Kenya's digital environment constitutes a highly dynamic and complex risk landscape, where misinformation and disinformation are embedded within broader political, social, and technological systems. Digital platforms have transformed how information is produced, circulated, and consumed, creating both opportunities for democratic participation and significant vulnerabilities for electoral integrity and peace. As noted by a respondent:

“Most young people get information online... they barely watch TV news.”

At the core of this risk landscape is a decentralized and fast-moving information ecosystem spanning platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, X (Twitter), TikTok, and Telegram. These platforms enable rapid, peer-to-peer dissemination of content with minimal gatekeeping, allowing both organic and coordinated messaging to spread widely and quickly. The speed, reach, and low verification thresholds inherent in these platforms significantly increase exposure to false or misleading information, particularly during politically sensitive periods.

Misinformation and disinformation within this ecosystem are not random occurrences; they are strategically produced and deliberately disseminated. A wide range of actors including politicians, political parties, digital strategists, influencers, bloggers, and ordinary citizens, actively participate in shaping and amplifying these narratives. Operating within a multi-layered and often commercialized disinformation landscape, these actors craft content aimed at influencing public perception, mobilizing supporters, or discrediting opponents. When such strategically engineered narratives exploit existing social tensions, reinforce polarization, or spread inflammatory claims, they can rapidly escalate public mistrust and heighten political animosity. In highly competitive or fragile political contexts, this environment creates fertile ground for mobilization along divisive lines, triggering rumors, fear, and retaliatory behavior. As a result, the systematic production and amplification of false or manipulative information can directly contribute to an atmosphere of hostility and uncertainty that increases the likelihood of electoral violence.

The dominant narratives observed across various digital and misinformation monitoring reports reviewed tend to cluster around identity, legitimacy, and grievance. These include ethnic and racial polarization (especially where political candidates are considered not 'purely Kenyan'), insider-versus-outsider framing, allegations of electoral malpractice, and narratives linked to economic marginalization or governance failures. Such narratives are often simplified into emotionally charged messages frequently conveyed through memes, short videos, and sensationalized posts; that are highly shareable and capable of triggering strong public reactions. This emotional resonance significantly enhances the virality and persistence of misinformation.

In addition to ethnic polarization, emerging forms of racialized and citizenship-based narratives have begun to feature in Kenya's digital information space. These include questioning the "authenticity" or national belonging of political actors based on ancestry, perceived foreign links, or cultural identity. Such narratives often operate through simplified and emotionally charged messaging, framing certain individuals or communities as less legitimate or less "Kenyan." While not always dominant, these narratives can intersect with existing ethnic and political divisions, reinforcing exclusionary attitudes and deepening polarization.

The spread of misinformation is further reinforced by structural vulnerabilities within the information environment. These include limited public capacity to verify information, high reliance on social media as a primary news source, and persistent information gaps in certain regions. In such contexts, rumors and unverified claims can circulate rapidly, particularly where access to credible, timely information is constrained. Reports from conflict-affected areas show that misinformation contributes to fear, distrust, and heightened intercommunal tensions, demonstrating its potential to exacerbate underlying conflict dynamics.

Importantly, digital misinformation risks are not confined to online spaces but have clear offline implications for electoral processes and stability. Hate speech and polarizing narratives circulated online contribute to identity-based mobilization, reinforcing divisions and normalizing hostility between groups. During electoral periods, such dynamics can lower the threshold for violence by legitimizing exclusionary or antagonistic behavior.

Overall, Kenya's digital ecosystem operates as a real-time conflict information environment, where online narratives interact with pre-existing social, political, and economic tensions. Digital platforms act as powerful risk multipliers, accelerating the spread of harmful content, expanding the reach of mobilization, and intensifying underlying divisions. Addressing these risks therefore requires a multi-layered response that goes beyond content moderation to include:

- Strengthening digital literacy and public awareness,
- Enhancing real-time monitoring and early warning systems,
- Integrating community-based reporting and verification mechanisms, and
- Promoting coordinated responses among state, civil society, media, and technology actors.

These drivers do not operate uniformly across the country. Instead, they combine in different ways to produce distinct hotspot profiles. For example, land-related grievances are more pronounced in Rift Valley counties, while urban informal settlements are shaped by youth unemployment and protest mobilization. Understanding how these drivers cluster spatially is essential for designing targeted interventions tailored to specific hotspot dynamics.

An emerging risk in electoral contexts is the potential for state-imposed restrictions on information flows, including internet shutdowns, social media blocking, or interference with mainstream media broadcasting. While often justified on grounds of security or public order,

such measures can have unintended consequences for both electoral integrity and violence dynamics.

Evidence from Kenya's 2017 elections, as well as recent experiences in countries such as Uganda and Tanzania, shows that restricting access to information can:

- Undermine transparency and public trust,
- Disrupt early warning and response systems,
- Limit the ability of citizens to verify information,
- Increase reliance on rumors and informal networks.

In such environments, misinformation may become harder to counter, and grievances may intensify due to lack of credible information. At the same time, shutdowns can hinder coordination among peace actors, observers, and response institutions.

As Kenya approaches the 2027 elections, contingency planning for potential information disruptions will be critical, including offline communication strategies, decentralized reporting systems, and strengthened coordination among stakeholders.

6. ACTOR ANALYSIS

The actors influencing electoral violence in Kenya are diverse and interconnected, involving both formal institutions and non-state actors operating at national and local levels. Electoral risk does not arise from the actions of a single actor, but from how these actors interact particularly in high-risk locations and during sensitive phases of the electoral cycle such as nominations, campaigns, and results announcement.



Figure 12: Ecosystem of stakeholders in electoral violence prevention

At the national level, key institutions such as the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), National Police Service (NPS), the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), Political Parties Liaison Committee (PPLC), and the Political Parties Dispute Tribunal (PPDT) play a central role in shaping the overall risk environment. These institutions are mandated to manage and prevent electoral violence; however, they can also become points of tension when their actions are perceived as lacking transparency, neutrality, or effectiveness. Public confidence in electoral management, enforcement of laws, and impartiality of institutions remains uneven. Where trust is low (especially around results management or handling of disputes) these institutions can inadvertently trigger unrest.

Security actors, especially the NPS, are critical of maintaining order and deterring violence. However, their role is highly sensitive. Past electoral cycles show that the way security forces respond particularly during protests can either stabilize situations or escalate them. Allegations of excessive force, selective enforcement, or political bias have contributed to mistrust in some areas, making security response a decisive factor in either containing or intensifying conflict.

Oversight and accountability bodies such as the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA), alongside investigative agencies, are essential for ensuring accountability and deterring misconduct. However, their impact is often weakened by delays in investigations, limited enforcement capacity, and lack of visible consequences for violations.

Early warning and monitoring actors including civil society organizations, election observers, and multi-stakeholder platforms such as Uwiano play a vital role in identifying and communicating emerging risks. These actors often provide timely, ground-level intelligence and trend analysis. Despite this, their effectiveness is constrained by a persistent disconnect between early warning and institutional response, where alerts are not consistently translated into timely or coordinated action.

At the local level, county governments, peace committees, faith-based organizations, and community leaders serve as the first line of prevention and response. Their close connection to communities enables them to detect tensions early and intervene through mediation, dialogue, and local peace initiatives. However, their capacity varies widely across regions, often limited by resource constraints, weak coordination with national actors, and, in some cases, political influence. Religious actors play an important multi-level role in preventing electoral violence in Kenya, working through both national interfaith platforms and grassroots networks. As trusted community figures, they shape public attitudes, promote peaceful messaging, and intervene during periods of rising tension. National interfaith bodies such as the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya coordinate diverse faith groups to harmonize messaging, conduct joint risk assessments, and engage in preventive diplomacy both through public statements and quiet mediation with political actors. At the community level, religious leaders act as early warning sources and peace influencers. They detect emerging tensions, including hate speech and polarization, and provide safe spaces, guidance, and support during conflict. Through sermons, dialogues, and media engagement, they disseminate peace messages and promote informed, non-violent political participation. Religious actors also contribute to electoral integrity through observation, mediation, and post-election reconciliation. However, their influence can become harmful when neutrality is compromised through political alignment or the use of religious platforms for campaigning.

Youth actors occupy a particularly important and dual role within this landscape. On one hand, they are frequently mobilized by political actors as participants in protests, rallies, or violence, driven in part by unemployment and economic vulnerability. On the other hand, they represent a critical opportunity for prevention, especially when engaged in structured peacebuilding, civic education, and community leadership initiatives.

The role of media and the digital ecosystem has become increasingly significant in the electoral cycle. Traditional media outlets can either promote calm through responsible reporting or heighten tensions through sensationalism. At the same time, digital actors including social media influencers, bloggers, and coordinated online networks now play a central role in shaping narratives, spreading information (and misinformation), and mobilizing public

sentiment. These platforms can rapidly amplify both peaceful messaging and divisive content, making them a key battleground in electoral dynamics.

The private sector and media play a critical but often underexamined role in shaping electoral risk environments. Telecommunications companies, particularly mobile network operators, form the backbone of Kenya's digital communication infrastructure. Platforms such as SMS, mobile data, and mobile money services influence how information is disseminated, how quickly narratives spread, and how mobilization occurs. Similarly, mainstream media, especially vernacular radio stations, have historically played a dual role. On one hand, they serve as key channels for civic education, peace messaging, and information dissemination. On the other, they can amplify polarizing narratives, particularly where political bias, sensationalism, or weak editorial controls exist. The experience of the 2007–2008 post-election violence demonstrated how vernacular broadcasting contributed to mobilization and incitement, while more recent elections highlight the continued influence of both traditional and digital media ecosystems. Given their reach and influence, these actors represent both risk multipliers and critical partners in electoral violence prevention. Strengthening collaboration frameworks, promoting responsible communication standards, and enhancing accountability mechanisms is therefore essential.

Overall, the analysis highlights that the main weaknesses in the current electoral violence prevention ecosystem lie in coordination gaps, low levels of institutional trust, and weak linkages between information and action. Strengthening collaboration across actors particularly by improving coordination between national institutions and local structures, clarifying roles, and ensuring timely response to emerging risks will be essential for more effective prevention of electoral violence.

7. INSTITUTIONAL PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Kenya's ability to prevent and manage electoral violence has improved over successive election cycles, supported by stronger legal frameworks, clearer institutional mandates, and more structured operational plans. However, the effectiveness of this system remains uneven, it depends less on the mere presence of institutions and more on their credibility, coordination, and responsiveness. Assessing Kenya's preparedness for electoral violence therefore requires looking beyond whether institutions exist. It requires examining whether they are trusted, accessible at the local level, and capable of acting before disputes escalate into conflict. This includes evaluating both national bodies and sub-national mechanisms such as county peace committees, community mediation groups, administrative officers, faith-based networks, and political party dispute-resolution forums. An important but often underemphasized component of Kenya's electoral preparedness architecture is the role of religious and interfaith actors. Faith-based organizations complement formal institutions by providing community-level early warning, mediation, and peace messaging. Their extensive grassroots networks enable rapid dissemination of information and mobilization of communities toward peaceful engagement. In addition, interfaith coordination platforms contribute to bridging gaps between national institutions and local communities, particularly in areas where trust in state actors is low. Institutional preparedness should be understood in relation to hotspot geography. High-risk counties require more intensive early warning coverage, faster response mechanisms, and stronger coordination structures. Conversely, emerging and dormant hotspots require preventive engagement to address underlying grievances before escalation occurs. Aligning preparedness strategies with hotspot tiers is therefore critical for effective resource allocation and intervention planning.

The study findings suggest that Kenya has built a more robust prevention ecosystem since 2007/08, but its performance varies widely across regions and phases of the electoral cycle. Preparedness tends to be stronger where coordination is structured, roles are well defined, and local mediation channels are active. It is weaker where systems are overly centralized, under-resourced, or only activated after tensions have already intensified.

7.1. State Agencies

The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) remains the central institution in preventing electoral conflict, as public perceptions of procedural fairness, transparency, and institutional cohesion strongly influence whether disputes are contained or become politicized. To support this role, the IEBC uses an electronic system known as the Electoral Risk Management Tool. This tool includes a digital library of internal and external risk factors, analytical features for generating risk maps, and modules for planning preventive and mitigation actions. Data is gathered from field staff, peace committees, and other early warning systems run by civil society and government agencies. The system enables the identification of

potential hotspots ahead of elections, including by-elections, and the insights are used to guide deployment strategies, logistics, and stakeholder coordination, particularly with law enforcement.

The Commission has taken steps to strengthen preparedness through election operations planning, risk management, post-election evaluation, and technology-supported administration. However, the evidence also shows that technical readiness alone is not enough. Public confidence can deteriorate quickly where there is uncertainty over results management, inconsistent communication, or visible internal disagreement within the Commission. In closely contested elections, institutional credibility is therefore not a secondary issue; it is itself a conflict-prevention variable.

The National Police Service (NPS) has improved their operational preparedness over successive cycles through election planning, hotspot deployment, and inter-agency coordination. However, readiness must be judged not only by deployment levels or command structures, but also by legality, restraint, and public legitimacy. Past electoral periods show that security action can either prevent escalation or become a trigger of further unrest, especially in protest-prone areas and informal settlements. Concerns over excessive force, selective enforcement, intimidation, and weak accountability continue to affect public confidence. This means that rights-based policing, transparent command responsibility, and rapid oversight are not peripheral to preparedness; they are central to whether security presence de-escalates or intensifies tension.

The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) contributes primarily to prevention through monitoring hate speech, promoting cohesion, and engaging political actors in responsible conduct. While this role is important in shaping the broader political climate, its impact is often constrained by limited enforcement capacity, particularly when addressing incitement by influential actors or entrenched patterns of divisive rhetoric.

The Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) provides a critical accountability function within the security sector. By monitoring police conduct and investigating complaints, it contributes to transparency and public trust. However, its effectiveness is limited by delays in investigations, constrained enforcement powers, and a relatively weak deterrent effect. As a result, accountability processes do not always translate into timely or visible consequences.

7.2. County Peace Structures and Community Initiatives

County peace structures and community initiatives are a critical yet often underemphasized component of institutional preparedness. Actors such as peace committees, local administrators, elders, religious leaders, women's groups, youth networks, and civil society organizations frequently serve as the first line of prevention. Their proximity to communities allows them to detect emerging tensions early and intervene before disputes escalate or require securitized responses. In Kenya's peace infrastructure, county peace committees are designed as inclusive platforms that bridge traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms with formal

actors, including security agencies and civil society. Initiatives such as the Uwiano Platform have demonstrated the value of linking local monitoring, public reporting, mediation, and national coordination.

However, effectiveness varies significantly across regions. In some counties, these structures are well-integrated into local governance systems and enjoy strong community trust, enabling timely mediation and effective peace messaging. In others, their impact is constrained by limited resources, unclear mandates, weak coordination with national institutions, and risks of political interference. Their preventive potential is strongest when they are active beyond crisis periods, supported by sustainable resources, embedded within clear institutional frameworks, and connected to early warning and formal response systems through well-defined referral pathways.

7.3. Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

7.3.1. Political Parties, Political Parties Dispute Tribunal and formal referral pathways

Alternative dispute resolution within political parties is especially important because some of the earliest and most combustible electoral disputes arise during nominations. Kenya's legal framework requires political parties to maintain internal dispute resolution mechanisms and to resolve nomination disputes within thirty days, while the Political Parties Disputes Tribunal may only be approached after an attempt has been made to use internal party mechanisms. In principle, this framework provides an early de-escalation pathway. In practice, however, the evidence reviewed shows that effectiveness is uneven. Many party mechanisms remain centralized at national headquarters rather than devolved to county level, making them costly and less accessible to aspirants outside Nairobi. Additional barriers include short filing windows, high complaint fees, limited public understanding of procedures, and dismissals linked to procedural technicalities or non-appearance. These factors reduce the credibility of party-based ADR and increase the likelihood that aggrieved actors will bypass internal channels, mobilize supporters, or externalize disputes into the public arena. Where internal mechanisms are decentralized, affordable, procedurally clear, and perceived as impartial, they can play an important preventive role by resolving disputes quickly before they escalate into violence.

The Political Parties Disputes Tribunal strengthens this architecture by providing a formal adjudicative backstop once internal party remedies have been attempted. Recent reforms have expanded its membership, widened regional access, and introduced e-filing, all of which improved procedural accessibility. Even so, the system still depends heavily on the quality of the first-stage internal party process. If party ADR is weak, inaccessible, or mistrusted, the wider dispute-resolution chain becomes overloaded and less effective as a violence-prevention tool.

7.3.2. Local administrative ADR and referral systems

Administrative and community-based ADR mechanisms also remain important in Kenya's electoral prevention architecture. Chiefs, county commissioners, peace committees, and community and court accredited mediators often handle disputes over rallies, local mobilization, identity-based tensions, and emerging inter-group grievances before such issues reach formal courts or security operations. Their strength lies in speed, proximity, and local legitimacy. Their limitation is that they are unevenly institutionalized and may lack formal authority, resources, or perceived neutrality in politically charged contexts. For these mechanisms to function effectively as part of electoral preparedness, they need clearer referral links to electoral bodies, police, party structures, and county peace forums, as well as safeguards to ensure that informal mediation does not substitute for accountability in serious electoral offences.

Overall, Kenya's institutional preparedness for electoral violence is best understood as a layered system with both strengths and unresolved weaknesses. At the national level, the country has more developed electoral, security, cohesion, oversight, and early warning frameworks than in earlier cycles. At the local level, peace committees, faith-based actors, administrators, and community initiatives provide important mediation and de-escalation capacity. Political party ADR and PPDT mechanisms also create formal pathways for managing disputes before they spill into violence. However, the evidence suggests that the main weaknesses are not due to a lack of legal frameworks, but rather uneven access, inconsistent performance at the local level, poor coordination, and fluctuating public trust. The key test for 2027 will therefore be whether these institutions and mechanisms can resolve disputes quickly, fairly, and close to the point where tensions first emerge.

7.4. Early Warning Systems

Institutional preparedness for electoral violence is anchored in the presence of early warning and early response systems, which are designed to track risk signals, analyze trends, and trigger timely interventions. Across contexts, these systems combine community-based monitoring with structured reporting channels, drawing data from peace committees, local administrators (chiefs, county commissioners), civil society networks, and security actors. Information is collected through field reports, community monitors, hotline alerts, SMS platforms, and increasingly, social media tracking, then aggregated at sub-county, county, or national levels. A critical component of preparedness is the continuous assessment of indicators such as rising political tensions, hate speech, youth mobilization, and unusual movements or gatherings. This enables actors to move beyond isolated incidents and identify patterns that signal escalation risk.

The study determined that early warning systems operate through a combination of formal platforms and informal community-based networks. Mechanisms such as Uwiano-type coordination platforms integrate multiple reporting streams, while digital tools including social media monitoring platforms such as Phoenix support the tracking of online narratives,

hate speech, and misinformation. These tools enhance situational awareness, particularly in an increasingly digital information environment. However, they are most effective when combined with local verification and grounded community intelligence, rather than used as stand-alone solutions.

To fully assess system effectiveness, it is important to examine how information flows through early warning systems. Reporting channels in Kenya are diverse and include formal mechanisms such as structured incident-reporting tools, SMS-based systems, and coordination platforms, as well as informal pathways through community leaders, chiefs, faith-based actors, civil society networks, and widely used communication tools such as WhatsApp, local radio, and direct community alerts. While this diversity expands reach and inclusivity, it also introduces fragmentation, as not all reporting channels are standardized, systematically tracked, or consistently linked to response actors.

Verification remains a critical step in ensuring that early warning information is credible and actionable. In practice, reported incidents are often cross-checked through multiple sources, including local monitors, administrative structures, and partner organizations, before escalation. However, the increasing speed of information flows particularly through digital platforms; poses a significant challenge. Rumors, misinformation, and politically charged narratives can spread rapidly, often outpacing institutional verification processes. This creates a persistent gap between the speed at which risks emerge and the ability of systems to confirm and respond to them in a timely manner.

Coverage of early warning systems is also uneven across geographic areas. While some counties such as Nairobi, Kisumu, Nakuru, Bungoma, and Vihiga benefit from relatively active peace committees, strong civil society presence, and integration with national early warning platforms; others including Garissa, Isiolo, West Pokot, Kilifi, Kwale, and parts of the coastal region continue to face gaps linked to limited resources, weaker institutional presence, and inconsistent coordination. These disparities highlight that early warning coverage in Kenya remains uneven, with functionality varying significantly across counties and sub-county levels.

Public awareness and trust are equally important determinants of system performance. Communities are more likely to report incidents through channels that are familiar, accessible, and perceived as credible. However, the study found that awareness of formal reporting mechanisms remains uneven, and trust varies, particularly in areas where institutions are perceived as slow, unresponsive, or politically biased. In such contexts, individuals may rely on informal or unverified information networks, which can amplify tensions rather than support prevention. Strengthening public awareness, providing clear guidance on how and where to report incidents, and ensuring visible feedback to communities are therefore essential components of effective early warning systems.

Dissemination of early warning information typically follows a multi-layered approach, including situation reports, coordination meetings, and rapid alerts shared across stakeholders. In some cases, situation rooms or coordination hubs are activated to centralize analysis and

response planning, enabling real-time decision-making. However, feedback loops remain inconsistent, and information does not always reach frontline actors in time to support preventive action. The integration of digital tools has improved the speed and reach of dissemination, but challenges remain in managing large volumes of data and ensuring that information is both verified and actionable.

Effective preparedness is closely linked to multi-stakeholder coordination. Early warning systems bring together government agencies, electoral bodies, civil society organizations, faith-based institutions, and community leaders, each playing complementary roles. Community actors provide ground-level intelligence, civil society supports analysis and advocacy, while state institutions are responsible for enforcement and formal response. Where coordination platforms are active and inclusive, they enhance trust, enable joint planning, and support timely, coordinated interventions. However, coordination is often ad hoc, personality-driven, or activated only during crises, limiting overall system effectiveness.

A key gap identified across the analysis is the weak linkage between early warning and early response. While risks are frequently detected, response pathways are not always clearly defined, timely, or appropriately matched to the nature of the threat. Early warning systems are not consistently integrated with Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms. Alerts related to local disputes such as party nomination conflicts, land grievances, or inter-community tensions; are not systematically referred to mediation structures such as political party dispute mechanisms, peace committees, or administrative processes. As a result, opportunities for early de-escalation through dialogue and mediation are often missed, allowing tensions to escalate into violence.

Several structural challenges continue to undermine system effectiveness. These include fragmented reporting frameworks, limited standardization of data collection tools, weak integration between community-based and formal systems, and reliance on external funding, which raises sustainability concerns. In addition, unclear mandates, delays in decision-making, and limited accountability mechanisms weaken the translation of early warning into timely action.

Overall, Kenya's early warning systems are strong in design but uneven in implementation. Their effectiveness depends on reinforcing the full operational chain from reporting and verification to information sharing and timely response. To improve performance, the country needs to harmonize reporting channels, strengthen verification procedures, expand geographic reach, and increase public awareness and trust. Most importantly, early warning signals must be tied to clear, actionable response mechanisms, including alternative dispute resolution (ADR) pathways. Without these linkages, early warning risks becoming an information-collection exercise rather than a practical tool for conflict prevention and de-escalation.

Strengthening institutional preparedness and response will require fully institutionalizing and harmonizing early warning systems across government and community structures, with clear roles, protocols, and accountability. Priority investments should include building data analysis

capacity and training stakeholders to recognize and interpret risk indicators over time. Enhancing real-time information sharing through integrated dashboards and communication platforms can further improve coordination and responsiveness. Expanding inclusive, multi-stakeholder platforms especially those that operate continuously rather than only during election periods, is also essential. Finally, sustained funding, stronger accountability mechanisms, and clear links between early warning and defined response actions are critical to shift from reactive crisis management to proactive, preventive peacebuilding.

7.5. Coordination mechanisms for preparedness and response

Early warning systems are inherently multi-sectoral in nature and function effectively when coordination across institutions is deliberate, structured, and sustained. Institutional preparedness is therefore not only a question of data availability or technical systems, but of how information is shared, interpreted, and acted upon collectively by actors such as electoral bodies, security agencies, civil society organizations, and community-based actors.

A core lesson from the Build-Up experience is that coordination must begin at the design stage rather than at the point of crisis. Bringing all relevant actors together into the system early allows for shared ownership of risk indicators and response thresholds. Build Up emphasizes that different institutions perceive risk differently, noting that what may appear insignificant to one actor could represent a critical threat to another. Joint development of risk matrices and indicator frameworks helps ensure that alert systems reflect a diversity of institutional mandates and reduce blind spots in preparedness. As highlighted in the interview:

“What a state agency like IEBC is going to be looking for is completely different from what CSOs are going to be thinking about...”

Coordination is further strengthened through clear role delineation and the designation of decision-making focal points within institutions. A major challenge is the absence of empowered individuals who can translate early warnings into action. Build Up cautions that coordination breaks down when information circulates widely but there are no actor or focal points with the authority to make decisions. Without such focal points, alerts may be acknowledged but not acted upon in time, eroding trust in early warning systems and weakening preventive response.

At the operational level, there is need to advocate for structured communication and tracking mechanisms to replace ad-hoc information sharing. Coordination often fails when institutions rely on informal emails, calls, or parallel engagements that are not systematically recorded. This leads to duplication, confusion, and blame-shifting when responses falter. As described by a respondent:

“...people rarely track events, they just exchange an email, and everybody ends up calling the police multiple times.”

Establishing shared tracking tools, joint situation updates, and agreed communication protocols enables institutions to see who has been alerted, what actions are being taken, and

where additional intervention is needed. Such transparency not only improves efficiency but also builds accountability among actors.

Another critical dimension of coordination relates to balancing state and non-state roles in early response. Build Up's experience highlights that institutional preparedness improves when response responsibility is distributed appropriately across formal and informal actors. In many contexts, community leaders, elders, religious figures, or market leaders may have greater legitimacy and speed of influence than formal security actors. Effective coordination mechanisms therefore recognize that police responses are not always the first or most suitable intervention and allow for flexible, context-specific response pathways. This diversity of responders is a strength when properly coordinated, but a source of fragmentation when left unstructured.

Finally, coordination mechanisms are increasingly challenged by the digital information environment, where misinformation spreads faster than institutional response. Build Up notes that private digital spaces, particularly WhatsApp groups, limit institutional visibility and complicates coordination. When institutions lack shared digital monitoring insights or trusted verification channels, responses are delayed or misdirected. Strengthening coordination in this context requires closer collaboration between technology-focused actors, civil society monitors, and state institutions, as well as agreed protocols for validating and responding to digital risks.

Coordination mechanisms are the backbone of institutional preparedness and response. Effective coordination depends on early co-design, clarity of roles, empowered decision-makers, structured communication systems, and respect for the complementary roles of state and community actors. Without these elements, early warning systems remain technically sound but operationally weak, unable to translate early signals into timely, preventive action.

8. TECHNOLOGY FOR PEACEFUL ELECTIONS

Technology now plays a central role in Kenya's electoral violence prevention architecture, shaping how information is generated, shared, and acted upon throughout the electoral cycle. Over recent elections, digital platforms, data systems, and communication tools have transformed both risks and responses; improving information flow, transparency, and citizen engagement, while also introducing new vulnerabilities such as rapid misinformation spread, coordinated online manipulation, and technology-enabled mobilization. In this context, technology should be viewed not as a standalone solution but as a strategic enabler that strengthens early warning, improves coordination, supports decision-making, and facilitates timely response. Lessons from Kenya's past electoral cycles show that effectiveness depends less on the sophistication of tools and more on how well they are integrated into community structures, institutional processes, and response mechanisms.

Technology's contribution varies across the electoral cycle: during nominations, digital tools help monitor disputes and early signals of mobilization; in the campaign period, they track hate speech and misinformation; on election day, they enable real-time incident reporting; and in the post-election phase, they support rumor verification and rapid coordination among responders. Aligning technology with the specific requirements of each phase is therefore essential for maximizing its preventive potential.

8.1. Technology Landscape: Tools and platforms

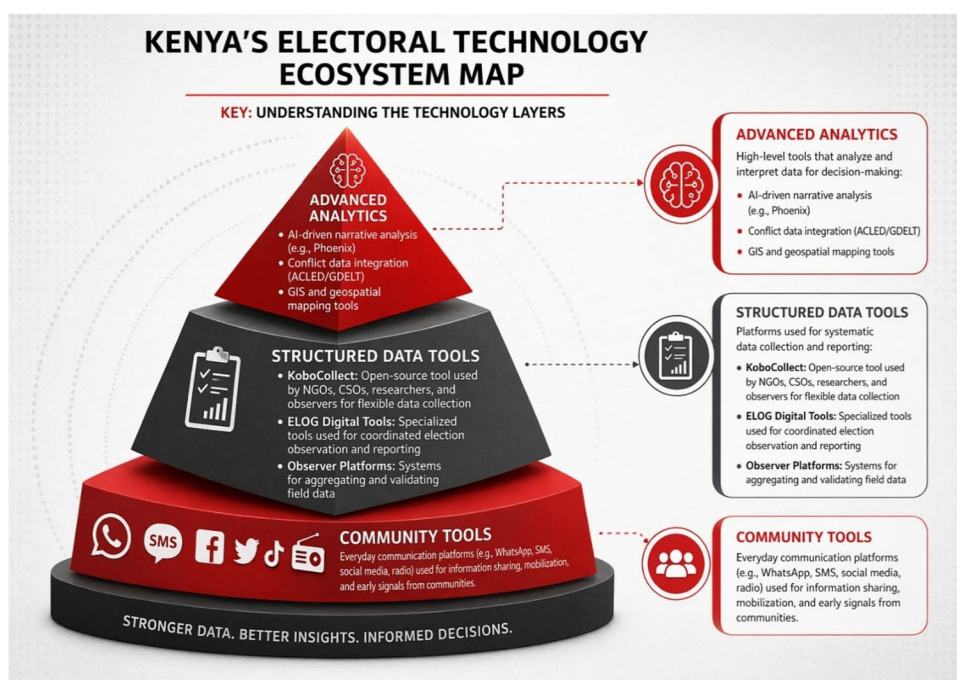


Figure 13: Electoral technology ecosystem

A wide range of digital tools and platforms now shape peacebuilding and early warning efforts in Kenya, creating a multi-layered technology ecosystem that spans everyday community communication, structured data collection, and advanced analytics. At the most accessible level, communities rely on tools embedded in daily life, such as WhatsApp, SMS, Facebook, X, TikTok, and local radio to share information, report incidents, and circulate alerts. Because these channels require no additional training, they are highly effective for rapid dissemination of updates and peace messaging.

As one respondent noted:

“WhatsApp groups, for instance, have become critical spaces for citizen reporting, monitoring threats, and circulating alerts, even though their closed nature also makes them harder to systematically monitor.”

Alongside these informal channels, peacebuilding organizations and election observers use structured digital systems to document incidents in a more standardized manner. Tools such as Kobo Collect and online observer platforms allow for systematic data gathering during elections, capturing details on location, type of incident, and severity. Groups like ELOG employ digital checklists and real-time reporting tools to monitor the electoral process, although their monitoring of online misinformation still relies primarily on human analysis rather than dedicated digital tools. While both Kobo Collect and ELOG digital tools support electoral monitoring and data collection, it is important to distinguish their scope of use. Kobo Collect is an open, flexible data collection tool that can be used by a wide range of actors, including NGOs, civil society organizations, researchers, and electoral observers across different contexts. In contrast, ELOG digital tools are purpose-built for election observation and are primarily used within structured observation frameworks coordinated by accredited election monitoring bodies.

More advanced capabilities come from AI-enabled platforms and data analytics systems. Organizations such as Build Up deploy tools like Phoenix, which draw on data from multiple social media platforms, ACLED and GDELT datasets, and crowdsourced community reports to detect spikes in hate speech, map coordinated digital campaigns and classify online narratives. Phoenix combines localized linguistic indicators with algorithmic analysis to generate contextual early warning signals, offering deeper insight into emerging digital risks.

Complementing these systems, geospatial (GIS) technologies are increasingly used to map hotspots, visualize patterns of electoral violence, and overlay risk indicators. These tools help decision-makers identify high-risk areas, allocate resources more effectively, and track changes over time.

Together, these varied technologies form an interlinked ecosystem consisting of community reporting platforms, structured incident-reporting tools, AI-driven monitoring systems, and geospatial mapping. When combined with local validation and responsive institutional mechanisms, this ecosystem significantly enhances Kenya’s capacity for early warning, situational awareness, and coordinated action in peacebuilding and electoral violence prevention.

8.2. Technology Functions Across the Electoral Cycle

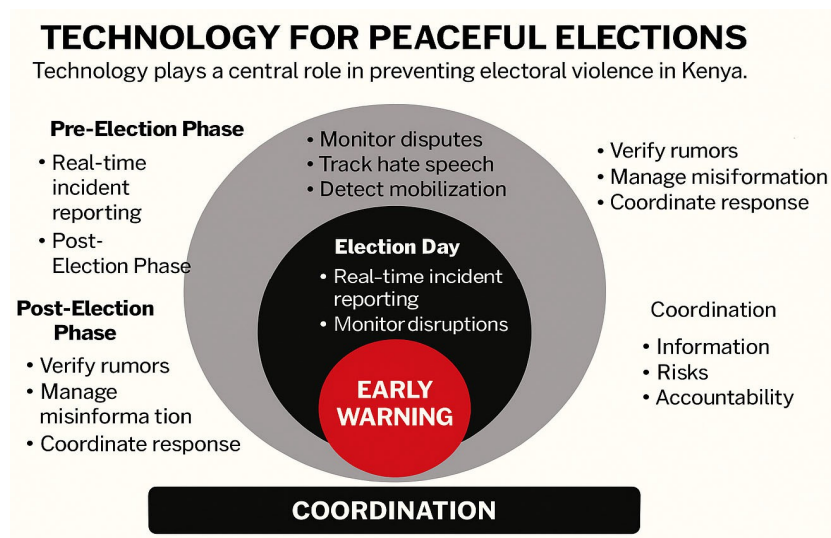


Figure 14: Role of technology towards peaceful elections

Technology plays different but mutually reinforcing roles throughout the electoral cycle. Understanding these functions is essential for designing interventions that respond to the specific risks and information needs at each stage.

Pre-Election Phase (Nominations and Campaigns): In the early stages, technology enhances visibility into emerging risks by helping track party nomination disputes, rising political tensions, and early signs of mobilization. Digital tools also detect hate speech, incitement, and online narratives that may signal polarization. At the same time, widely used platforms support the dissemination of civic education and peace messaging. Because this is the period when underlying tensions begin to surface, digital monitoring systems are particularly valuable in identifying early warning signs before they escalate into physical violence.

Election Period (Polling and Voting): During polling, technology plays a crucial role in real-time information flow. Observers and citizens use digital platforms to report incidents as they occur, while rapid communication tools allow stakeholders to coordinate responses and monitor disruptions at polling stations. Public information sharing through SMS, WhatsApp, and observer platforms helps reduce uncertainty and build confidence in the process. At this stage, speed, simplicity, and accessibility are essential to ensure timely reporting and response.

Post-Election Phase (Results and Disputes): The post-election period is often the most sensitive. Technology supports the monitoring and verification of rumors, the management of misinformation, and the rapid clarification of results. Digital platforms help track protest mobilization and facilitate coordination among institutions responding to emerging tensions. Because perceptions of legitimacy are shaped heavily by information flow during this phase, technology plays a central role in influencing public trust and preventing escalation.

Cross-Cutting Functions: Across all phases of the electoral cycle, technology contributes to data aggregation and analysis, improves information sharing among actors, strengthens coordination between early warning and response mechanisms, and supports documentation

for accountability and learning.

Together, these functions emphasize that technology must be deployed strategically and in alignment with the specific needs and risks of each electoral stage, rather than applied uniformly throughout the cycle.

8.3. Scalability and integration

The scalability of technology within Kenya's peacebuilding and electoral early warning systems depends on its ability to function effectively across diverse contexts i.e. urban and rural areas, digitally connected and underserved regions, and varied institutional environments. Low-cost widely used platforms such as SMS, WhatsApp, and local radio scale easily because they build on familiar communication practices and existing infrastructure. These tools can reach large populations quickly and inclusively, making them essential for rapid alerts, community reporting, and peace messaging.

More sophisticated technologies such as AI-enabled monitoring platforms and digital data-collection tools; also scale well when embedded within coordinated, multi-actor systems. Models like Build Up's Phoenix platform or Justice Africa Kenya's county-to-national reporting structure demonstrate that scalable architectures depend on layered workflows: local monitors feeding information into county structures; county teams aggregating and validating data; and national platforms conducting analysis and coordinating responses. In these setups, digital systems strengthen not replace community-level verification and joint decision-making.

However, the primary constraints to scalability are institutional rather than technological. Tools can only expand effectively when supported by trained personnel, clear protocols, functional coordination mechanisms, and reliable funding. Weak or fragmented response systems limit the impact of even the most advanced platforms.

Integration is equally crucial. Technology often operates in silos, leading to duplication and gaps in early warning. Effective integration requires shared data standards, interoperable platforms and dashboards, clear communication channels among actors, and well-defined roles for key responders including chiefs, elders, police, political parties, and community structures. Integration must therefore be understood as both technical and institutional.

Ultimately, scalable and integrated peace technology systems are those that:

- Build on platforms communities already trust (WhatsApp, SMS, radio).
- Layer advanced tools like AI and digital monitoring onto grassroots reporting networks.
- Connect local, county, and national actors through shared data flows and validation processes.
- Embed response protocols that ensure alerts lead to timely, coordinated action.

When these elements align, technology becomes a transformative force multiplier, enhancing early warning, strengthening coordination, and enabling proactive conflict prevention across the electoral cycle.

8.4. Digital Risks and Information Disorder

While technology expands opportunities for early warning and peacebuilding, it also introduces significant risks that must be managed within any electoral preparedness strategy. Kenya's digital space operates as a fast-moving, decentralized information environment where misinformation and disinformation spread rapidly. These narratives frequently tap into identity, historical grievances, and perceptions of legitimacy, deepening polarization and shaping public attitudes.

Key risks include coordinated disinformation campaigns, hate speech and incitement, manipulation by influencers or organized networks, the rapid circulation of rumors and unverified claims, and algorithm-driven amplification of polarizing content. These challenges intensify during elections, when uncertainty is high and political competition is elevated. Importantly, digital harms rarely remain confined to online spaces; they often spill over into offline mobilization, intimidation, or violence.

Mitigating these risks requires a layered and collaborative approach that combines real-time monitoring and analysis, fact-checking and counter-messaging, public awareness and digital literacy efforts, and partnerships with media and technology actors. Recognizing that digital platforms can function both as risk multipliers and as channels for intervention is essential to effective peacebuilding and electoral violence prevention.

8.5. Governance, Ethics, and Safeguards

The use of technology in electoral contexts requires robust governance frameworks to ensure that digital tools are applied ethically, responsibly, and in ways that protect the rights and safety of citizens. Effective safeguards begin with strong data protection practices, including compliance with relevant laws, secure storage, controlled access, and the anonymization of sensitive information. These measures are essential to prevent harm to reporters, communities, and those identified in incident reports.

Ethical use also requires adherence to do-no-harm principles, particularly in conflict-prone environments where mishandled information can expose individuals to retaliation or heighten tensions. Safeguards must also address issues of bias and accuracy, especially where AI systems struggle with local languages or risk misclassifying context-specific content. Ensuring that digital analysis is complemented by contextual interpretation is therefore critical.

Inclusion and accessibility are equally important. Technology must bridge, rather than reinforce, digital divides by ensuring that marginalized groups can participate and that digital systems work alongside non-digital approaches. Without these governance and ethical safeguards, technological systems can inadvertently undermine trust, reinforce inequalities, or introduce new vulnerabilities.

8.6. Linking Technology to Early Warning and Response

A central finding of this study is that technology only contributes meaningfully to peacebuilding when information is linked to timely and coordinated action. In many cases, early warning systems successfully identify risks but fail to trigger appropriate responses due to unclear response pathways, weak coordination, decision-making delays, or lack of accountability.

To close this gap, digital tools must be embedded within defined response mechanisms. These include mediation through peace committees and community leaders, clarifications from electoral institutions, appropriately calibrated security responses, fact-checking and public communication efforts, and legal or accountability actions where necessary.

For these mechanisms to function, systems require designated decision-makers, clear thresholds for action, real-time communication channels, and feedback loops that return verified information to communities. Without such linkages, technology remains limited to monitoring rather than prevention, reducing its overall effectiveness in mitigating electoral risks.

8.7. Strategic Priorities for 2027

Strengthening the role of technology in electoral violence prevention ahead of the 2027 elections will require focused investments and coordinated action among stakeholders. Priority areas include:

- Integrating digital and community-based early warning systems by combining social media monitoring with grassroots reporting and local validation to generate more reliable signals.
- Improving interoperability and shared platforms through integrated dashboards and data-sharing systems that connect national, county, and community-level actors.
- Enhancing real-time monitoring and response capacity by investing in tools, training, and protocols that support speed, accuracy, and coordinated action.
- Expanding public awareness and digital literacy, enabling citizens to better identify misinformation and engage responsibly online.
- Institutionalizing technology within governance structures through formal mandates, sustainable funding, and strengthened capacities across institutions.
- Building stronger partnerships with media and technology actors to improve rumor management, factchecking, and the mitigation of harmful digital narratives.
- Aligning technology with hotspot mapping to target monitoring and response toward high-risk locations and periods.

These priorities create the foundation for a more integrated, proactive, and responsive system ahead of the 2027 elections.

Technology is now a central enabler of electoral violence prevention in Kenya, but its effectiveness depends on how well it is integrated into institutional systems and community structures. The study determined that digital tools have the greatest impact when paired with local knowledge, strong coordination, and timely, actionable responses. As Kenya prepares for the 2027 General Elections, the priority is not adopting more technologies, but building an integrated ecosystem where information moves smoothly from detection to response.

Strengthening the links between technology, early warning, and coordinated action will shift stakeholders from reactive crisis management to proactive, data-driven prevention, supporting more peaceful, credible, and resilient elections.

9. SCENARIO MAPPING: 2027 GENERAL ELECTIONS

This scenario mapping outlines three possible trajectories for the 2027 elections based on current trends in electoral violence, institutional preparedness, and the evolving information environment. Each scenario highlights likely developments, their implications, and priority actions required to either sustain stability or prevent escalation. These scenarios will likely manifest differently across hotspot tiers. High-risk counties are more susceptible to worst-case dynamics, while emerging hotspots may shift rapidly depending on local triggers and digital mobilization. Tailoring response strategies to hotspot categories is therefore essential for effective scenario planning.

9.1. Best-Case Scenario

A coordinated, credible, and responsive electoral system

What this scenario looks like

- Strong, consistent coordination among the IEBC, security agencies, the judiciary, and oversight bodies, with clear roles and shared planning.
- Clear, timely, and transparent communication on key electoral processes including transmission of results; reducing uncertainty, rumors, and public anxiety.
- Early warning systems that trigger rapid and effective responses at both national and county levels.
- A proactive coalition of government, civil society, media, and tech platforms working together to monitor and counter misinformation.
- Political leaders and parties modelling peaceful behavior, avoiding inflammatory rhetoric, avoiding use of armed youth groups, and upholding peace pledges.
- Rising public trust in electoral institutions and confidence in formal mechanisms for resolving disputes.

Illustrative Scenario

As party primaries begin, disputes emerge in several counties. Instead of escalating, these are quickly resolved through credible internal party dispute mechanisms and mediation by county peace committees.

In the months leading to Election Day, early warning systems detect increased tension in historically sensitive areas such as some informal settlements and parts of the Rift Valley. These alerts immediately activate a coordinated national, county response: trained mediators are deployed, security presence is calibrated (not heavy-handed), and the IEBC provides proactive communication that reassures the public.

On Election Day, voting proceeds smoothly. During tallying and transmission, the IEBC shares consistent, transparent updates across all platforms. This steady communication reduces

speculation and prevents misinformation from taking hold. As results are announced, the public remains calm, confident that disputes will be managed through lawful channels.

Implications of this Best-Case Scenario

- High voter confidence and turnout, driven by trust in a fair process.
- Lower likelihood of mass protests or political violence, even in competitive races.
- Greater legitimacy of election outcomes, strengthening acceptance by both winners and losers.
- Reinforcement of democratic norms and institutions, contributing to long-term stability.

Recommended Actions to achieve this Scenario

- Institutionalize real-time coordination mechanisms that tightly link early warning to rapid response.
- Enhance transparency in results transmission, including publishing clear, accessible updates.
- Strengthen multi-stakeholder platforms to jointly monitor, fact-check, and counter misinformation.
- Invest in local peace infrastructure particularly in high-risk counties to expand mediation capacity.
- Enforce accountability for hate speech, incitement, and violations of electoral codes of conduct.

Outcome: A peaceful election with only isolated, quickly managed disruptions demonstrating a resilient, coordinated, and trusted electoral system.

9.2. Most-Likely Scenario

Contained but persistent localized tensions

What this scenario looks like

- Moderate institutional performance, with some improvements since 2022, but coordination gaps persist between national and county actors.
- Misinformation continues to spread, particularly across social media and messaging platforms, influencing public perceptions and deepening suspicion.
- High political polarization, especially in battleground counties where competition is intense.
- Early warning systems detect risks, but responses are inconsistent i.e. effective in some areas, delayed or inadequate in others.
- Localized violence and disruptions occur, particularly during party nominations and in the immediate aftermath of results.

Illustrative Scenario

In the months before the election, several counties experienced tense and disputed party nominations. Some of these disputes result in protests, stone-throwing incidents, or clashes among rival supporters. Early warning systems raise alerts, but the quality and speed of response differ across regions: some counties deploy mediators quickly, while others struggle due to limited resources or slow decision-making.

Election Day itself is generally peaceful and well-managed. However, throughout the day, misleading online posts claim vote manipulation or malfunctioning electronic systems. These narratives spread widely on social media, causing confusion in certain urban centres.

Once results are announced, localized protests emerge in opposition strongholds. In Nairobi's informal settlements and parts of Kisumu, tensions escalate into confrontations with security forces. While these incidents are serious, they remain geographically contained and do not spiral into nationwide unrest.

Implications

- Overall, elections are viewed as credible, but pockets of dissatisfaction fuel contestation in specific regions.
- Recurrent cycles of protest and police response continue in known hotspot areas.
- Trust in certain institutions remains fragile, especially among communities that feel politically marginalized.
- Economic activity is disrupted in affected neighborhoods, though the impact does not spread nationally.

Recommended actions to manage this Scenario

- Strengthen rapid response mechanisms at county and sub-county levels to address risks before escalation.
- Improve coordination between early warning actors and county/national decision-makers to ensure timely, consistent action.
- Enhance digital monitoring and fact-checking capacities to counter misinformation more effectively.
- Deploy targeted peacebuilding and mediation interventions in identified hotspots, especially during nominations and results periods.
- Ensure institutions provide unified, consistent, and accessible public communication throughout the electoral cycle.

Outcome: A generally stable election process, but with recurring localized unrest and tension in high-risk areas that is manageable, yet indicative of underlying political and institutional fragilities.

9.3. Worst-Case Scenario

System breakdown and widespread instability

What this scenario looks like

- Severe collapse in public trust in key institutions, especially the IEBC.
- Disputed, delayed, or poorly communicated results that fuel perceptions of large-scale malpractice.
- Explosive spread of misinformation and inflammatory content across social and digital platforms.
- Mass protests erupting across multiple regions, mobilized by political actors and amplified online.
- Widespread organized criminal groups
- Heavy-handed or inconsistent security responses, escalating tensions instead of calming them.
- Reactivation of historic hotspots, alongside new outbreaks of violence in areas previously seen as stable.

Illustrative Scenario

During the results transmission phase, contradictory statements and unclear updates from the IEBC trigger confusion and suspicion. Screenshots of alleged “alternate” results go viral, while unverified claims of hacking and vote-rigging spread rapidly across social media platforms.

Opposition leaders, citing irregularities, call for nationwide protests. Demonstrations quickly escalate in major cities including Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Eldoret and spill over into rural communities. Security forces respond with inconsistent force: in some areas, restraint is shown; in others, aggressive tactics result in injuries and deaths.

These incidents ignite deeper anger, triggering wider mobilization and retaliatory violence. For the first time in years, violence spreads beyond traditional hotspots to counties that previously remained stable, as long-standing political, ethnic, and economic grievances surface.

Implications

- Widespread unrest with the potential to evolve into national instability.
- Loss of life, displacement, and destruction of property, particularly in urban low-income areas.
- Severe economic disruption, including business closures, transport shutdowns, and reduced investor confidence.
- Deepened ethnic and political divides, making reconciliation more difficult.
- Long-term erosion of institutional legitimacy, weakening Kenya’s democratic foundations.

Recommended Actions to Prevent or Contain this Scenario

- Ensure maximum transparency, accuracy, and consistency in results management and communication.
- Establish and rehearse clear crisis-response protocols among security agencies, the IEBC, and oversight bodies before the election period.
- Strengthen security-sector accountability mechanisms to prevent excessive force and ensure disciplined crowd management.
- Activate high-level multi-stakeholder coordination platforms for rapid joint decision-making during crises.
- Scale up real-time monitoring and rapid debunking of misinformation, including partnerships with technology companies and fact-checkers.
- Deploy preventive peacebuilding and mediation efforts early, particularly in both known hotspots and emerging high-risk areas.
- Religious actors act as first responders in the social and moral space helping to calm tensions, counter misinformation, mediate conflict, and support affected communities, while complementing formal state and civil society responses.

Outcome: Widespread unrest with a high risk of escalation into a national crisis if not contained early and decisively.

Best Case	Most Likely	Worst Case
 High Trust	 Mixed Trust	 Low Trust
 Minimal Violence	 Localized Violence	 Widespread Violence
 Proactive Action	 Delayed Response	 Breakdown in Action

Figure 15: Illustration of best case, most-likely and worst-case scenarios

These scenarios highlight that the 2027 elections will not be determined solely by the presence of risk factors which are already known but by how effectively institutions, actors, and systems respond to those risks in real time. The difference between a peaceful election and a crisis will depend on:

- Level of trust in institutions
- Speed and coordination of response
- Management of information and public narratives

Proactive, coordinated action in the pre-election period therefore remains the most critical factor in shaping a stable outcome.

9.4. Early warning indicators

As Kenya approaches the 2027 elections, the ability to detect and act on early warning indicators will be a decisive factor in determining whether tensions are contained or escalate into violence. Strengthening the link between data, decision-making, and rapid response will be essential to ensuring peaceful and credible elections. Building on the scenario analysis, the early warning indicators below provide practical signals that can help anticipate, monitor, and prevent escalation of electoral violence ahead of the 2027 elections. The timely identification and response to these indicators will therefore be critical to preventing escalation.

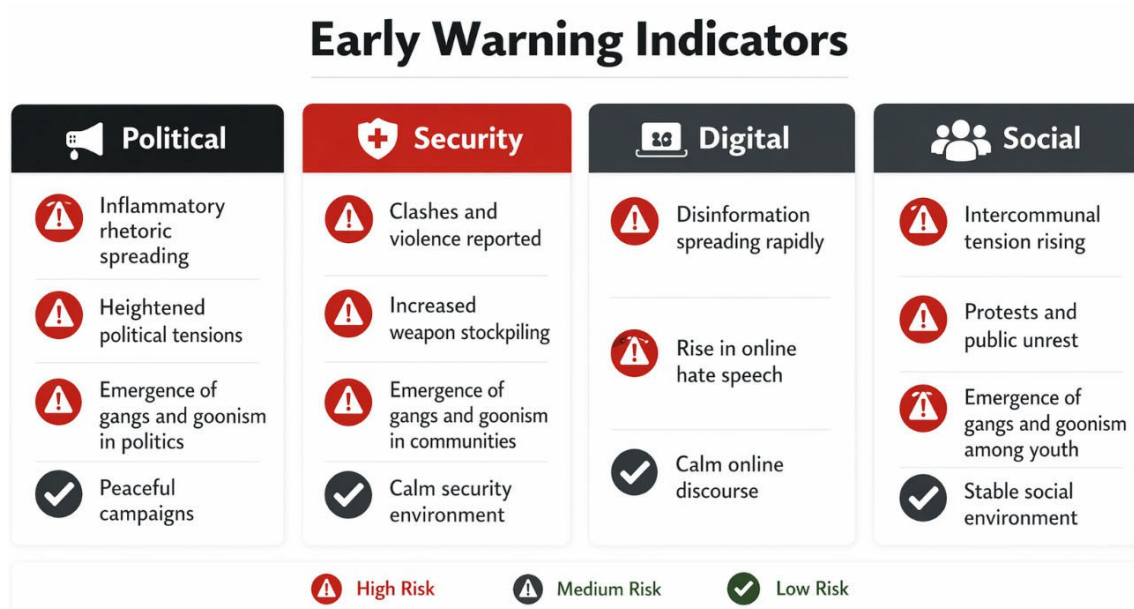


Figure 16: Early warning indicators

Political and electoral process indicators reflect tensions arising directly from how elections are managed and contested. These include escalating disputes during party nominations, such as parallel primaries, legal challenges, or allegations of manipulation, as well as growing public disagreements among political actors or within institutions like the IEBC. Delays, inconsistencies, or opaque practices in voter registration, candidate clearance, or results management further contribute to rising anxiety. When political rhetoric begins to challenge the credibility or neutrality of electoral institutions, the risk of confrontation increases. These dynamics matter because perceived irregularities in the electoral process frequently act as immediate triggers for protests, especially in highly competitive contexts.

Security and law enforcement indicators point to risks linked to how state security agencies operate during the electoral period. Early warning signs include heightened or uneven

deployment of security forces in sensitive regions, which may signal anticipated unrest or create perceptions of political bias. Reports of intimidation, harassment, or selective enforcement by security actors heighten tensions, as do increasing clashes between police and civilians during rallies or demonstrations. Slow or inconsistent responses to incidents of violence or incitement similarly indicate weakened control over escalating risks. These patterns are significant because security responses can either help contain or intensify tensions; early signs of mistrust or misuse of force often foreshadow conflict.

Social cohesion and community-level indicators capture shifts in local relations that may suggest rising tensions. These include growing inter-community mistrust, especially in areas with a history of conflict, as well as the mobilization of youth groups, vigilante formations, or informal networks across neighborhoods or counties. Local disputes over land, resources, or political representation and the weakening of community leadership or mediation mechanisms also signal deteriorating cohesion. These changes are critical because electoral violence in Kenya often begins at the community level, and early breakdowns in local relations tend to precede wider unrest.

Hate speech, incitement, and information environment indicators reflect how narratives and communication shape public perceptions during election periods. Rising hate speech, inflammatory political rhetoric, and ethnicized messaging by influential actors indicate deepening polarization. The rapid spread of misinformation or disinformation about electoral processes or results along with unverified results, manipulated imagery, and provocative online content further fuels uncertainty. Coordinated online campaigns that amplify division or mobilize supporters heighten these risks. These trends matter because the information landscape strongly influences public behavior, and misinformation can quickly escalate tension into action.

Institutional stress and trust indicators relate to the stability and credibility of key governance bodies. Warning signs include declining public trust in electoral authorities, courts, or security agencies; internal divisions or conflicting statements within institutions like the IEBC; and delays or unclear decision-making at critical moments. When institutions fail to respond to emerging risks or early warning signals, it suggests limited capacity to manage electoral tensions. This is especially important because weakened trust in institutions often drives communities to bypass formal dispute-resolution mechanisms, increasing the likelihood of protest or violence.

Economic and livelihood stress indicators highlight underlying vulnerabilities that can heighten the risk of mobilization. Rising youth unemployment, deepening economic hardship, and livelihood disruptions during campaign periods can intensify frustration. Reports of political actors financially incentivizing groups for mobilization, especially in urban and peri-urban areas, are further signs of risk. These conditions matter because economic vulnerability increases susceptibility to recruitment for violence, particularly among young people.

Finally, trigger events and flashpoints are specific incidents that can rapidly escalate tensions. These include the announcement of election results in contested races, court rulings on electoral disputes, and incidents such as the arrest, injury, or death of political figures or supporters. The cancellation or disruption of political rallies can also act as catalysts. These moments are critical because they often turn underlying tensions into open conflict within a short period.

10. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that electoral violence in Kenya is neither random nor sporadic, but rather a structured and cyclical phenomenon shaped by the interaction of long-standing grievances, localized political dynamics, institutional trust deficits, and an increasingly complex digital information environment. While the country has made significant progress in reducing large-scale, nationwide violence since the 2007–2008 post-election crisis, this progress should not be interpreted as a reduction in overall risk. Instead, electoral violence has evolved in both form and distribution, becoming more localized, episodic, and less visible, while at the same time increasingly influenced by digital narratives and perception-driven mobilization.

This evolution has fundamentally altered the nature of electoral risk. Violence is now more likely to occur at sub-county and community levels, often concentrated in micro-hotspots such as informal settlements, peri-urban zones, and highly competitive local constituencies. These localized dynamics are closely tied to contestation during party nominations, intensified competition for devolved positions, and the mobilization of youth through both physical and digital networks. As a result, national electoral stability is increasingly dependent on the capacity to manage conflicts at the local level, where tensions first emerge and escalate.

The study further establishes that electoral violence in Kenya is predictable and therefore preventable. Historical patterns, hotspot mapping, and stakeholder insights consistently point to identifiable spatial, temporal, and behavioral trends. Persistent high-risk counties, including Nairobi, Kisumu, Uasin Gishu, Nakuru, and Mombasa, continue to exhibit strong convergence of risk factors, including political mobilization, demographic pressure, unresolved grievances, and recurrent protest dynamics. At the same time, emerging hotspots indicate a broadening of the risk landscape, driven by shifting political alignments, urbanization, and localized disputes. This evidence underscores the potential for anticipatory and targeted interventions, provided that early warning information is effectively translated into timely action.

However, a central conclusion of the study is that the primary gap in Kenya's electoral violence prevention architecture lies not in the absence of information or institutional frameworks, but in the limited capacity to act on available knowledge. Although early warning systems, legal frameworks, and institutional mandates are well established, their effectiveness is undermined by weak linkages between early warning and early response, fragmented coordination among actors, delayed decision-making, and insufficient accountability mechanisms. In this context, the system can be characterized as information-rich but response-constrained, with significant implications for prevention outcomes.

The growing influence of digital ecosystems represents another defining feature of the current electoral risk environment. Misinformation, disinformation, and coordinated online narratives have become central drivers of mobilization, shaping perceptions of electoral legitimacy,

amplifying grievances, and accelerating the spread of tension across geographic boundaries. Electoral violence in Kenya is therefore increasingly hybrid, operating at the intersection of online and offline spaces. This convergence requires integrated approaches that address both physical and digital dimensions of conflict simultaneously.

Institutional legitimacy emerges as a critical determinant of whether electoral disputes are managed peacefully or escalate into violence. Public trust in key institutions, particularly the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, security agencies, and dispute resolution mechanisms, directly influences how communities respond to contested outcomes. Where institutions are perceived as transparent, impartial, and responsive, disputes are more likely to be channeled through formal processes. Conversely, where trust is low, grievances are more likely to manifest in protests, unrest, and confrontation. Institutional credibility must therefore be understood not only as an outcome of good governance, but as a core component of conflict prevention.

At the same time, the study highlights that community-level actors remain among the most underutilized assets in electoral violence prevention. Local peace committees, faith-based organizations, women networks, eminent persons and youth networks, and community leaders possess the proximity, legitimacy, and contextual knowledge required to detect and address tensions at an early stage. However, these actors are not consistently integrated into formal early warning and response systems, limiting their potential impact. Strengthening community-centered prevention mechanisms represents a critical opportunity for enhancing resilience and reducing escalation risks.

Overall, the analysis points to an electoral violence landscape that is decentralized, dynamic, and increasingly driven by localized and perception-based factors. Preventing violence in the 2027 elections will depend less on reactive, crisis-oriented interventions and more on the ability to implement sustained, anticipatory, and community-rooted strategies. For the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), these findings reinforce the importance of an approach that combines grassroots peacebuilding, advocacy for accountable institutions, and the strengthening of inclusive systems that link local action with national policy processes.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

As Kenya approaches the 2027 General Elections, there is a need to move from reactive crisis management toward proactive, anticipatory prevention. This requires stronger links between early warning and timely response, improved coordination across institutions and communities, and better integration of insights from digital, institutional, and grassroots levels. Importantly, electoral violence should be understood as a governance and justice issue rooted in inequality, exclusion, and gaps in accountability.

Within this context, AFSC is well positioned to play a strategic role as a neutral convener, connector, and facilitator of collaboration; bridging grassroots actors, civil society, state institutions, and policy platforms. Its strong community relationships and commitment to peace, justice, and nonviolence enable it to connect local knowledge with national policy processes, ensuring that lived experiences inform electoral preparedness. Looking ahead, AFSC can serve as a catalyst for community-led, justice-oriented prevention by strengthening the translation of early warning into dialogue and de-escalation, while also influencing national systems through evidence-based advocacy. By aligning its work with key priorities i.e. anticipatory action, local resilience, rights-based security practices, digital risk mitigation, and multi-level coordination; AFSC can help foster a more peaceful, inclusive, and accountable electoral environment.

The recommendations below set out practical steps to support this shift, strengthening Kenya's capacity to prevent electoral violence in 2027 and beyond, while reinforcing AFSC's role as a bridge between community insights, policy systems, and evidence-driven action.

i. Shift from Reactive to Preventive Electoral Peace Architecture

Kenya's electoral risk patterns are predictable and should inform forward-looking planning. Hotspot mapping and scenario-based analysis should be formally integrated into national and county preparedness processes, enabling early, targeted interventions especially at sub-county levels where risks emerge first.

AFSC's Role: Act as a convener of inclusive county-level platforms that bring together state and non-state actors (including women peacebuilders) to translate risk analysis into coordinated action, while advocating for the integration of these locally grounded approaches into county and national electoral preparedness and governance systems.

ii. Strengthen Early Warning → Early Response Systems

Early warning systems frequently detect risks but fail to trigger timely response due to unclear responsibilities and weak coordination. Defining response pathways, escalation thresholds,

and actor roles while embedding ADR mechanisms within these systems will ensure actionable prevention.

AFSC's Role: Convene multi-actor coordination platforms that link grassroots early warning (including women-led networks) with institutional response systems, ensuring alerts trigger collaborative, timely, and nonviolent interventions.

iii. Localize Electoral Violence Prevention

Because most violence is localized, ward and sub-county peace structures must be strengthened. Building the capacities of youth, women, faith leaders, and local mediators is central to detecting and managing tensions early.

AFSC's Role: Create and collaborate with networks of local actors, with a deliberate focus on supporting and connecting women peacebuilders, youth leaders, and faith actors positioning them as central actors in prevention and mediation efforts.

iv. Reform and Democratize Political Party Dispute Resolution

Party nomination disputes are among the most consistent triggers of electoral violence. Decentralized, accessible, transparent, and timely party dispute resolution mechanisms are essential, with clear linkages to community mediation structures.

AFSC's Role: Convene dialogue spaces between political actors, civil society, and community mediators, including women-led peace initiatives, to advocate for more inclusive, transparent, and community-linked dispute resolution systems.

v. Address Digital Drivers of Electoral Violence

Digital narratives increasingly shape perceptions and mobilization. A coordinated system of monitoring, verification, and community-based factchecking is necessary to counter misinformation, hate speech, and online incitement.

AFSC's Role: Act as a convener and strategic collaborator with other development agencies, facilitating dialogue between tech actors, civil society, and community networks to align digital monitoring efforts, while strengthening and elevating women-led and community-based fact-checking and digital literacy initiatives.

vi. Promote Accountable and Rights-Based Security Responses

Security responses significantly influence whether tensions escalate or de-escalate. Clear rules of engagement, community-sensitive policing, and strong oversight of excessive force are essential.

AFSC's Role: Support advocacy coalitions pushing for rights-based policing, strengthened accountability mechanisms, and constructive police-community engagement.

vii. Strengthen Multi-Level Coordination Systems

Kenya's coordination landscape remains fragmented. Permanent multi-stakeholder platforms, shared dashboards, and well-defined institutional roles are needed to enable cohesive action.

AFSC's Role: Serve as a neutral convener, fostering trust and collaboration among state institutions, civil society, and community actors.

viii. Rebuild Trust in Electoral Institutions

Public trust is central to peaceful elections. Strengthening transparency in results management, proactive communication by IEBC, and citizen oversight mechanisms will reduce uncertainty and speculation.

AFSC's Role: Facilitate collaborative civic engagement platforms, ensuring that community voices including women are integrated into dialogue with electoral institutions, while supporting collective advocacy for transparency and accountability.

ix. Center Youth as Peace Actors, Not Risk Factors

Youth should be engaged as partners in peacebuilding through civic education, leadership development, and economic empowerment, shifting their role from potential instruments of mobilization to agents of stability.

AFSC's Role: Convene and strengthen youth and women-led networks, fostering intergenerational collaboration and linking them with broader peacebuilding and governance platforms.

x. Ensure Sustainability Beyond Election Cycles

Electoral violence prevention must extend beyond election periods. Sustained funding, enduring peace structures, and continuous community engagement are essential for long-term resilience.

AFSC's Role: Advocate for and help coordinate long-term, networked peace infrastructure, ensuring sustained collaboration among actors and continued support for women-led and community-based peace initiatives beyond election cycles

STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS AND ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

THEMATIC AREA	TARGET ACTORS	KEY ACTIONS	ADVOCACY ACTIONS
Restore Electoral Integrity and Public Trust	IEBC, Political Parties, Judiciary, Election Observers	Ensure transparent results transmission; strengthen dispute resolution; improve public communication; target hotspots with voter education	Advocate for full transparency in electoral results systems, promote inclusive and accessible dispute resolution mechanisms Call for community-based voter education in high-risk areas, and call for proactive, coordinated communication to counter misinformation.
Rights-Based Security Responses	Kenya Police Service, IPOA, Ministry of Interior	Enforce restraint and neutrality; deploy preventively in hotspots; investigate misconduct; build community trust	Advocate for accountability in cases of excessive force; support community-police dialogue platforms; promote public reporting of security conduct
Accountability for Electoral Offences	NCIC, DPP, Judiciary, DCI	Fast-track investigations; prosecute hate speech and incitement; ensure timely case resolution; disclose outcomes	Advocate for timely prosecution of electoral offences; Push for transparency in enforcement; support monitoring of hate speech cases; call for stronger institutional coordination
Early Warning and Early Action	National Government, Uwiano Platform, County Governments, CSOs, Security Agencies	Establish response protocols; integrate risk data into planning; strengthen coordination platforms;	Advocate for binding response mechanisms that ensure timely action on early warning

THEMATIC AREA	TARGET ACTORS	KEY ACTIONS	ADVOCACY ACTIONS
		support community reporting	signals and strengthen the Uwiano Platform as a central coordination hub. Call for promotion and investment in community-based early warning systems and expand monitoring to include vernacular media and localized digital platforms, given their influence on community narratives and mobilization. Lobby for contingency strategies to manage potential information disruptions including internet shutdowns; through offline reporting channels and decentralized communication systems.
Strengthen Local Peace Infrastructure	County Governments, Peace Committees, Faith-Based Organizations, Community Leaders	Fund peace structures; support mediation and dialogue; link local and national systems; promote civic engagement	Advocate for national and county governments and partners to prioritize and sustain county-level funding for peace structures, strengthen support for community-led mediation initiatives, and formalize the integration of local peace systems into national frameworks. This includes ensuring clear mandates,

THEMATIC AREA	TARGET ACTORS	KEY ACTIONS	ADVOCACY ACTIONS
			adequate and predictable resourcing, integration with early warning systems, and stronger linkages to formal response institutions to enhance their effectiveness as frontline prevention mechanisms.
Youth Engagement in Peacebuilding	Ministry of Youth Affairs, CSOs, Political Parties, Development Partners	Integrate youth in peacebuilding; invest in employment; prevent political exploitation of youth	Call for meaningful youth inclusion in electoral processes; support youth-led peace initiatives; push for accountability of political actors who mobilize youth for violence Advocate for strengthened accountability mechanisms to address political incitement and organized electoral violence, including consistent and targeted enforcement against actors involved in mobilizing organized groups (“goonism”).
Counter Misinformation and Harmful Speech	Communications Authority, Media, Tech Platforms, CSOs, Political Actors	Monitor and enforce against hate speech; promote conflict-sensitive reporting; enhance digital literacy	Call for stronger regulation of harmful content, expanded partnerships with technology platforms, and the promotion of digital literacy campaigns to build public resilience against misinformation.

THEMATIC AREA	TARGET ACTORS	KEY ACTIONS	ADVOCACY ACTIONS
			Advocate greater accountability in political communication and establish formal engagement frameworks with private sector actors particularly telecommunications companies and media houses to support responsible information dissemination, rapid response to harmful content, and coordinated crisis communication.
Coordination Across the Electoral Ecosystem	National Government, IEBC, Security Agencies, CSOs, Private Sector	Establish coordination frameworks; define roles; conduct joint planning; ensure continuous engagement	Push for formal multi-stakeholder coordination platforms; support inclusive participation of civil society; promote accountability mechanisms across actors
Target High-Risk Areas (Hotspots)	All stakeholders	Use hotspot mapping; design localized interventions; prioritize high-risk phases; update risk assessments	Advocate for gender-responsive, data-driven resource allocation; support context-specific programming that integrates women as peacebuilders and mediators; promote continuous, community-informed risk monitoring; and ensure women's meaningful participation and leadership in hotspot interventions.

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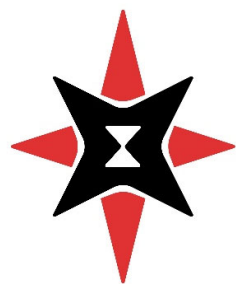
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