

Uraia

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS RESEARCH REPORT ON ELECTORAL EXCELLENCE: THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRE-2027 ELECTORAL REFORMS.

THEMATIC KNOWLEDGE PRODUCT AND RESEARCH BRIEF ON ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH AND SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN KENYA.



Naturing an engaged, empowered and value-based Youth.



**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK**
Denmark in Kenya



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



**ITALIAN AGENCY
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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Abbreviations	2
Acknowledgements	3
Study Team.....	3
Synopsis	4
Introduction	4
Study Design and Components	5
Key Findings	5
The Context - Unravelling layers of exclusion.....	5
Why Youth, Women and PWDs Vote.....	7
'I won't vote, or I can't vote?'	8
Voter Apathy: Why youth, women and PWDs don't vote	8
Structural barriers: 'I can't vote even if I wanted to'.....	9
Women negotiating masculine spaces.....	10
Navigating the roadblocks - recommendations for change	11
General recommendations	11
The 5-point agenda	12
1. Civic and voter education: Comprehensive, contextual, continuous with transformational content and pedagogy.....	12
2. Data: Accessible, disaggregated for targeted interventions and strengthening the intersectional eye	13
3. Infrastructure and Facilities: Flexible, gender and inclusive	13
4. Resources: Timely allocation and disbursements.....	14
5. Advocacy: Enforcement of democratic, gender and disability transformative and value-based election laws and practices	15
References	15

ABBREVIATIONS

CERA	Consortium for Election Research and Advocacy
CRI	Centre for Research and Innovation in East Africa
DANIDA	Danish International development agency
EFA	Education for Africa
FBO	Faith-based Organisation
IEBC	Independent Elections & Boundaries Commissions
MCA	Member County Assembly
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ORPP	Office of the Registrar of Political Parties
PWD	People with Disabilities
SIG	Special Interest Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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We recognise the long hours put in by senior and junior researchers, data analysts, transcribers, field mobilisers and enumerators. Their collective efforts were integral to the comprehensive and impactful outcomes of this report on the engagement of youth, women and PWDs in Kenya.

SYNOPSIS

Are Kenyan youth, women and persons with disabilities disinterested in elections? This question broadly guided the study, focusing on the engagement of the youth, women, and people with disabilities in national elections as voters and aspirants. Taking an intersectional approach, the study focused on discovering the factors that influenced their decisions to vote or not to vote, and whether to vie for political positions. Between August and December 2023, we talked to a cross-section of Kenyans - approximately 400 - women and men voters, successful and unsuccessful candidates for different electoral positions, members of political parties, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, and government institutions including IEBC. Conclusions were drawn from the perspectives of the research participants and triangulated with the findings of a comprehensive literature review, providing the basis for recommendations to address the barriers faced by youth, women, and people with disabilities in participating meaningfully in national elections.

Based on the findings, the following 5-Point Agenda are proposed to Navigate Roadblocks to Engagement of Youth, Women, and PWDs in Electoral Processes,

1. *Civic Education: Comprehensive, contextual, continuous with transformational content and pedagogy*
2. *Data: Accessible, disaggregated for targeted interventions*
3. *Infrastructure and Facilities: Flexible, gender and inclusive*
4. *Resources: Timely allocation and disbursements*
5. *Advocacy: Enforcement of democratic, gender and disability transformative and value-based election laws and practices*

INTRODUCTION

Uraia Trust in partnership with the Consortium of Election Research and Advocacy (CERA) with financial support from DANIDA and UNDP, conducted four mini-studies on selected thematic areas related to the conduct of elections in Kenya. This brief summarises the findings of one of the four thematic areas, namely, Engagement of Youth and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) in the Electoral Process that was undertaken between August and December 2023. The overall purpose of the study was to generate insights on the topic under consideration that may be utilised to improve the execution of the 2027 elections. The broad research questions addressed included:

1. What is the context of democratic elections in Kenya?
2. To what extent do Kenyans, specifically youth, women and PWDs, engage in Kenyan elections as voters and aspirants?
3. What are the underlying barriers to their meaningful participation?
4. What should be done to address the barriers?

This research brief presents a synthesis of the key findings of the mini study focusing on the engagement of youth and other special interest groups in Kenyan elections, and the underlying factors that facilitate or hinder their participation. It is organised into six sections that include a synopsis of the study, the introduction, the study design and components, key findings and finally the recommendations and references.

STUDY DESIGN AND COMPONENTS

The study was multi-themed, multi-locale and multi-site. Guided by an overall qualitative research paradigm, the research was designed to be consultative, iterative, and contextually relevant, reflected in five interlinked strategies that were used for data collection across all thematic areas. In the context of the present mini-study, data collection strategies included a comprehensive desk review of published and unpublished research literature, digital and print media articles, election observer and related reports of relevance to the thematic area, undertaken on a roll-in basis. Field data was collected using three qualitative methods, namely, key informant interviews, consultative forums and a workshop focusing on the youth, women and PWD thematic area. A total of 377 research participants were reached using these three methodologies of which approximately 60% were women. PWDs constituted 7% of the overall qualitative sample. The key informant interviews were conducted nationally and in three focal counties (Kakamega, Mombasa and Nyeri) and the consultative forums were implemented in nine constituencies within the three counties, that is, Jomvu, Nyali & Kisauni (Mombasa County), Kieni, Tetu & Nyeri Town (Nyeri County) and Khwisero, Ikolomani & Shinyalu (Kakamega County). The thematic workshop with key stakeholders was organised at the national level in Nairobi. The study participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. Data collected through these methods were supplemented by the findings of the perception survey which was administered independently in eight counties (Embu, Isiolo, Kericho, Kilifi, Kisii, Nairobi, Nakuru, Nyandarua) at the constituency levels. The data from the various sources were analysed thematically and triangulated, noting both the emerging patterns and outlier views.

Strict ethical protocols were observed in the implementation of the study. Participants' well-being and the triple principles of ethical research, namely 'do-no-harm,' confidentiality and anonymity guided the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

KEY FINDINGS

Findings centre around two main sub-themes, first, the context of democratic elections in Kenya, and second, the extent to which voters - youth, women and PWDs participated in the last three elections delving deeper into the factors that either facilitated or hindered their participation. The roots of authoritarian, often violent governance is traced to the colonial project, remnants of which persist and continue to permeate the present political fabric of Kenya influencing the context in which elections take place in the country today. The echoes of past injustices and systemic flaws reverberate in the socio-political structures, hindering the realisation of a truly inclusive democracy. Addressing these challenges is not just an option; it is an imperative for safeguarding the democratic principles that Kenya aspires to uphold.



youth registration in election

The Context - Unravelling Layers of Exclusion

The historical antecedents of exclusion: The disenfranchisement and exclusion of citizens from active, and positive participation in democratic elections is rooted in history and predates independence. There was intentional disenfranchisement of those perceived to be Mau Mau sympathisers under colonial rule, with deliberate mechanisms in place to ensure the victory of their allies, the 'loyalists.' Though

examples of electoral fraud were not apparent under either Jomo Kenyatta's rule or under the colonialists, voter suppression tactics were noticeable. The "colonial state exploited the formal regulation of elections to protect its own interests and limit the influence of certain groups" thus establishing "clear precedents for postcolonial political contests." (Branch, 2006:29)

Constitutional response: The enactment of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 was triggered by the continued exclusion and suppression of citizens from the mainstream of political life and democratic practices. It was born out of hope for a democratic country in which citizens would participate in creating a nation that is fair, egalitarian, safe and secure. Arising from the ashes of protracted autocratic rule under President Moi that intersected with the excesses of the colonial project and other negative post-independence experiences, the Constitution 2010 enfranchise the disenfranchised, upholding the right of all citizens above the age of 18 to take informed decisions and exercise their right to vote in political leadership with integrity and respect for the values and principles enshrined in it.

Among the affirmative action mechanisms embedded in the Constitution calls for ensuring that: "not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies should be of the same gender." The Constitution further obligates the state to take progressive measures to ensure that 'at least five percent of the members of the public in elective and appointive bodies are persons with disabilities.' This is supposed to apply to the national as well as county levels. It further calls for the creation of a limited number of dedicated affirmative-action seats for the youth. Political parties are required to establish mechanisms to support youth and women party members as candidates and to serve as leaders within the party governance structure.

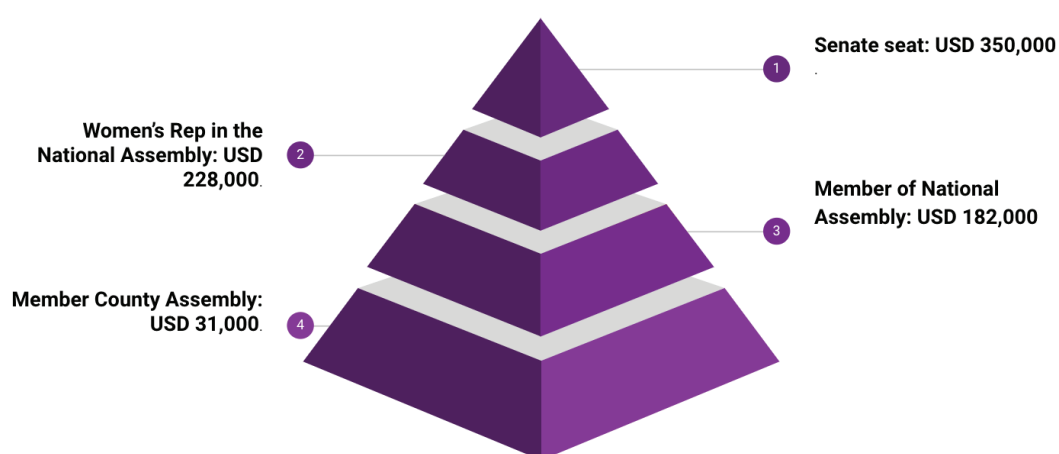
A raft of laws have been crafted to lay down mechanisms and processes to ensure compliance with the constitutionally mandated participation requirements for the SIGs. However, government bodies charged with ensuring full compliance with these and other supportive constitutional provisions, including the parliament and regulatory bodies, have failed to ensure that these obligations are fully achieved.

The ambivalent roles of youth: The positive roles played by young people in freedom struggles are sometimes overshadowed by retrogressive and disruptive acts of youth "bought" by politicians: The role of university students, male and female, in the struggle for the second liberation was both positive and negative. While many students were in the forefront of the liberation movements, allies of the Moi regime actively contributed to a shrinking of the democratic space in Kenya both within

and outside university campuses.

Invisibility of women: Though women have participated actively in the independence struggle and second liberation, their contribution continues to be hidden from the public eye. This may be attributed to the power of colonial patriarchy, which combined with post-independence gender unfriendly values and practices, succeeded in trivialising women's role in the freedom struggles.

The cost of Kenyan elections



Kenya is a highly unequal country as testified by the fact that “the two richest citizens have more wealth than the poorest 16.5 million” (Martin, 2022). This inequality is rooted in Kenya's colonial past and reinforced by post-colonial policies and practices. (Bigsten, et al.,2016) Such extreme inequalities create the conditions for the commercialisation of elections, making the “the right to fair elections remains a mirage”. (Muli, 2020: 1) The cost of Kenyan elections is among the highest in the world, triggered by its competitiveness “because of the power, prestige and benefits attached to elected office”. (Kanyinga & Mboya, 2021: 5) People who are less financially empowered cannot fairly participate in the general elections. (<https://www.voanews.com/a/unregulated-campaign-spending-disenfranchises-youth-women-in-kenyan-politics-/6689782.html>) It is in recognition of the wide socio-economic inequalities in the country, that the Constitution 2010 singles out the youth, women, and people with disabilities as among the special interest groups and entrenches affirmative action to level the playing field.

Hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation: Despite constitutional guarantees of media freedom, this freedom is highly dependent on the political and economic context. Interference by the authorities is evident in the appointment of media managers and editors, and those in charge of the media regulator, by the state,

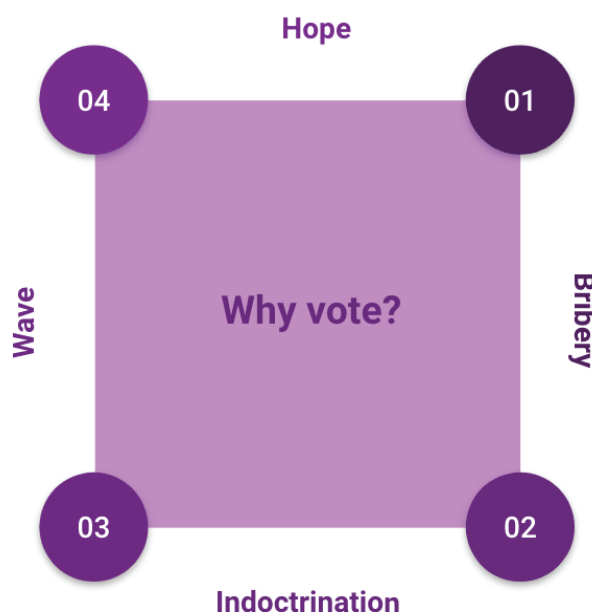
in the “self-censorship”, lack of transparency in the allocation of state aid to the media; linking of ethnicity to “political loyalties” with the promotion or side lining of journalists; and in the Resurgence of abuses against journalists during election campaigns “who may be subjected to physical attacks by both the police and members of the public, intimidation campaigns, threats from politicians, and confiscation of their equipment by the police”. ([Reporters without Borders](#))

Social media and digital technology have been used for political reasons in Kenya since 2007 for campaigning and polling “to spread information, to campaign, and to mobilise supporters during election cycles”. (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017:2) While social media have “democratised access to information” on the one hand, it simultaneously helps “to stimulate social and political fragmentation, eroding the discursive fibres that hold democracies together”. ([Araya](#), 2023) UNESCO cautions that “the spread of harmful content, in particular disinformation and misinformation; hate speech; online gender-based violence content; and malicious, coordinated, and inauthentic behaviour are key challenges, especially during electoral periods” in Kenya. (UNESCO, 2022: 5) Concerns have been expressed by election observers that “kinds of information disorder” resulting from “cosmetic promises by platforms can cause within election environments” leading to “the demonization of elections”. ([Madung](#) (2022)



Women in a voter education session

Why youth, women & PWDs vote



Why Youth, Women and PWDs Vote

The study revealed four broad, interlinked factors that drive youth, women and PWDs to vote in Kenya. The data suggests that those who do vote or have ever voted are often driven by a wave created by a combination of hope, bribery, and 'indoctrination.'

Hope in elections: 'Hope' continues to inspire some sections of the citizenry to vote, especially the poor and marginalised groups like the youth, women, and people with disabilities. In the 2022 elections, they voted for change, they voted because they want to be effective. Young people, in particular, who voted, believed that unemployment will be reduced and opportunities for income generation will increase exponentially, and that other basic services will be provided by the candidates that they vote in. The 'hustler' narrative in the 2022 elections, profiling successful self-made leaders, thus resonated with the many unemployed youthful voters, and women, who live below the poverty line, eking out a living through casual work, both legitimate and illegal, when and if they find it.

Money in elections: Our evidence suggests that while 'hope' is important it is not sufficient to drive masses of voters into the polling stations on election day. There are expectations of receiving handouts from the candidates, political parties, and alliances to induce them to actually cast the ballot. Bribery, in the form of handouts, has become the norm in elective politics in Kenya. A candidate who does not give handouts cannot win because they will have challenges being voted in by the electorate, the track record of a candidate notwithstanding. A good example is Nobel

laureate Prof Wangari Maathai in Nyeri, who despite being described as the best leader they could have had, was not re-elected to the parliament because she was perceived to be “mean” and discouraged bribery. This means that candidates who do not have access to financial resources are unlikely to be able to compete fairly in the elections. This includes youth, women and people with disabilities who may not have resources or strong networks or connections within political parties and alliances. Kenyan elections have been singled out to be among the most expensive in the world not only for the exchequer, but also for those seeking nominations and competing for elections.

God in elections: The Kenyan Constitution is a secular one. However, the 2022 elections saw the forceful entry of ‘God’ into the political arena. Religious leaders especially through the churches, both evangelical and mainstream, played a pivotal role influencing voters in ‘anointing’ particular candidates in a process that we have described as ‘indoctrination.’ In exchange for ‘generous’ contributions, religious leaders gave candidates of their choice platforms to campaign in all church related events, including funerals and push the narrative that they were the saviours who would lead them to the promised land. Thus, big money intersected with religion in creating a wave that swept the electorate (those who voted) into a 6-suit piece voting. Women may have been more susceptible to manipulation by faith-based leaders.

The wave: A political wave refers to the pattern of voters choosing all candidates from the same political party or alliance for all positions without necessarily knowing who individual candidates were. In the case of the 2022 elections, this meant voting for a 6-piece suit. Depending on the counties or regions, voters were influenced by a combination of hope, bribery, and indoctrination, to do 6-piece suit voting, referring to the total number of candidates in the ballot in each constituency. Additionally, research participants reported family, peer, and community pressure to conform to voting trends. Intimidation, eviction threats, and social exclusion were cited as consequences for deviating from expected voting patterns.

Negative voting: While there were those who voted because they believed it was their constitutional right and civic duty to do so, others casted negative votes, voting for someone because they did not like the other candidate. Negative voting is also provoked by the failure of one's candidate of choice being “thrown out at the primaries” through direct nominations and ‘negotiated democracy.’

‘I won’t vote, or I can’t vote?’

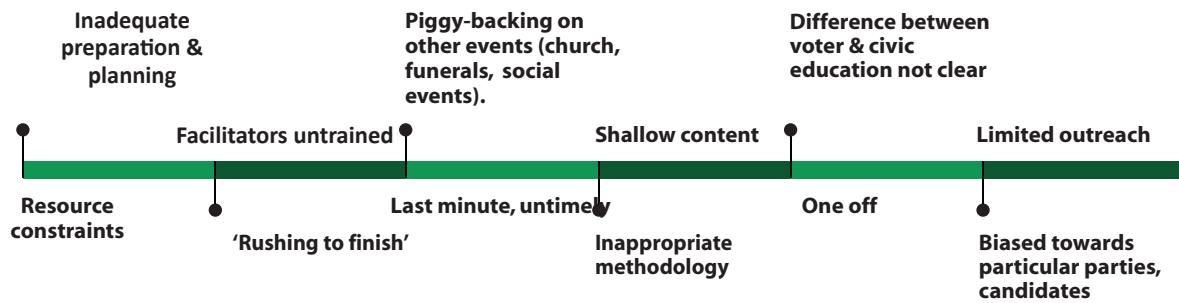
Voter Apathy: Why youth, women and PWDs do not vote.

Declining faith in elections: Many citizens continue to be sceptical about the usefulness of voting. This scepticism is believed to be reflective of a general pattern of voter apathy. The literature on elections in Kenya suggests a high level of voter apathy, especially among the youth. This is confirmed by the CERA perception survey, which reports that more than half of the respondents (53%) expressed disinterest in registering and voting. Underlying this apathy is the perception that their vote does not count. The election statistics testify to a trend of 'pushing out' some voters: The voter turnout was 79.37% in 2017 and 85.91% in 2013 compared to 64.7% in 2022 showing declining turnout this election cycle and may be interpreted as voter apathy.

Voter apathy and 'trust deficit': However, based on our findings, we argue that we need to interrogate the concept of voter apathy a bit more. It is no doubt fuelled by a 'trust deficit' which is a direct trigger of voter apathy. Citizens are disillusioned and have little confidence that their vote will matter in bringing about the desired changes. In our consultations, participants expressed frustration with politicians already going back on their campaign promises, particularly on promises of employment and income generation opportunities. The dashed hopes within one year after the last elections threaten to create a climate of deeper despondency that may be counterproductive to voter registration and turnout in future elections.

Trust deficit and faith-based organisations: The 'trust deficit' not only applies to politicians, political parties, and networks, but also to faith-based organisations and the civil society. The intersection of big money and religion in electoral politics, as illustrated by the 2022 elections, can be damaging in multiple ways. It has implications not only in terms of who gets elected to political offices but contributes to the erosion of a culture of integrity, equality, and good governance. Many of those voters and institutions accepting handouts ignore the possible 'dirty' source from which the campaign finances may be coming. More significantly, this perceived 'unholy' alliance of big money and religion may be a double-edged sword and serve to have the exact opposite effect of pushing voters away from the polls, whether as voters or as aspirants.

Distrust of IEBC: Concerns were raised about the perceived lack of independence of the IEBC, with doubts about its ability to deliver free and fair election results. Participants believe that elections are predetermined, leading to a lack of faith in the voting process.



Source: Multiple KIs & CCFs, All study locales and categories

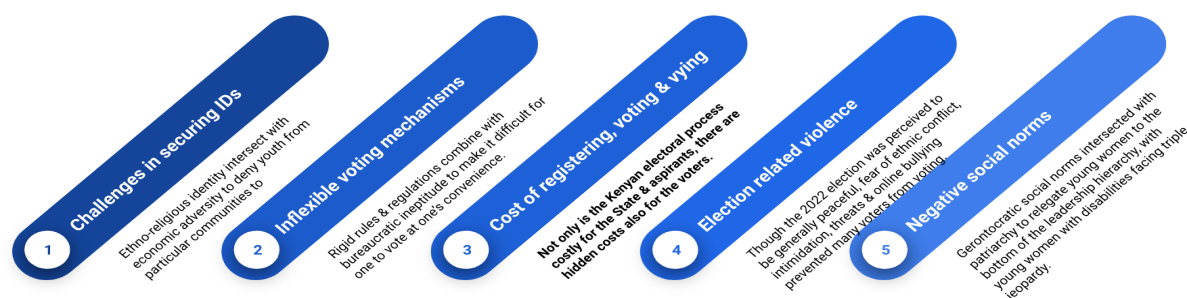
Civic and voter education - Too little, too late: The ineffectiveness of voter and civic education initiatives in Kenya stemmed from a myriad of interconnected challenges as highlighted in figure 3. Resource constraints and delayed financing impacted both the IEBC and civil society organisations, resulting in hurried and subpar training programmes. The last-minute engagement, occurring merely one or two months before the elections, severely limited the effectiveness and outreach of these efforts. Persons with disabilities encountered obstacles, restricting their access to crucial information about candidates and manifestos. The pervasive influence of social media in spreading misinformation, combined with a loss of trust in mainstream media, further complicated the communication landscape. Politicians were criticised for opportunistic civic engagement, exploiting events like funerals and churches for self-serving motives rather than providing substantive information. The cumulative effect of financial constraints, late planning, limited outreach, and politically driven communication strategies collectively undermined the efficacy of voter and civic education, leaving the electorate uninformed and vulnerable to manipulation.



PwD supported to vote

Structural barriers: 'I can't vote even if I wanted to.'

Often the failure to register and to vote may not have anything to do with disinterest; it may be more a question of structural barriers verging on voter suppression. Figure 3 lists five barriers that emerged from the data as preventing youth, women and PWDs from voting. Each of these are described in more detail in the discussion that follows.



Second class citizens? Alongside the 'trust deficit' and related triggers of voter apathy, described in the previous section, the study uncovered five structural barriers that prevent voters from voting and the marginalised from competing in elections. They include bureaucratic bottlenecks to securing national identification cards (IDs) without which one cannot register as a voter. Sometimes, these bottlenecks translate to outright discrimination against some minorities, for example, Muslim youth who must undergo double vetting at the county and national level. For youth with disabilities, the difficulties in obtaining IDs on time may be attributed to disability insensitive practices, physical structures and equipment, and distance of registration centres from home.

Rigid and unfriendly electoral system: The electoral system's inflexibility compounds these challenges. Despite having a national ID, automatic voter registration is not guaranteed. Outdated rules, inadequate technology integration, and unevenly distributed polling stations pose significant hurdles, particularly for those in remote or densely populated areas. The lack of support facilities for people with disabilities and inadequate infrastructure further hinder their participation in the electoral process.

Financial barriers: The financial burden associated with registering, voting, and vying for political office also hinders the participation of marginalised groups. Campaign financing laws are ineffective, leading to exorbitant election costs as discussed in pages 4-5. The 2022 general elections in Kenya were among the costliest in Africa, disproportionately affecting the economically disadvantaged - the young

people, women and PWDs with little or no income, and weak political networks and sponsors.

Election -related violence: Ethnic violence related to elections, though relatively reduced in the 2022 elections, remains a significant concern. However, different forms of violence against women (physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, and cyberbullying) remain pervasive.

Discriminatory social norms: Negative social norms contribute to discrimination against young people seeking political leadership roles. Traditional gerontocratic norms guide village politics, with candidates facing scrutiny regarding marital status and property ownership. Additionally, the unequal burden of women in the household limits their ability to fully participate in the electoral process, forcing choices between voting and fulfilling domestic responsibilities.

Inadequate, inaccessible data: The unavailability of adequate election related data emerged as a major issue of concern. The data easily available in the IEBC website and publications are not sufficiently disaggregated by gender, age or disability making targeted interventions difficult. Further, the failure to map disabilities at the local level (that is, ward and constituency) means that appropriate materials, assistive aids, and facilities cannot be provided at the polling centres.

Women negotiating masculine spaces.

Patriarchal mind sets: Politics is perceived to be 'macho,' as one study participant described it, "completely masculine." Patriarchal structures and social norms perpetuate gender-based discrimination, stereotyping, stigmatisation, and exclusion of women from the mainstream of election processes. For young women, gerontocratic social norms intersect with patriarchy to relegate them to the bottom of the leadership hierarchy, with young women with disabilities facing triple jeopardy.

Wilful defiance of two-thirds gender rule: The rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution 2010 with the aim of levelling the playing field continue to be ignored by lawmakers. The two-thirds gender rule was instituted as an affirmative action to boost the number of women leaders in parliament among other institutions, but it is yet to be enforced, with parliament disregarding four Court Orders compelling it to enact the legislation required to implement it. The only "bright spot" has been the County Assemblies "where laws have been enacted to ensure that women comprise at least one-third of their members." (ENA and UN Women, 2023:34).

Unfair and discriminatory political processes and practices: Gender discrimination begins right from the nomination stage, manifesting itself at the community and political party levels. Political party policies limit women's participation, with established female candidates standing a better chance at getting nominated. ENA & UN Women (2023) notes that party mergers and coalitions, as well as negotiated democracy referred to earlier in this report, all "favoured mostly male candidates" and "narrowed the overall political space for women's participation". (p. 36) Gender norms rooted in culture and religion assign men leadership positions within the home and community. Men whose wives contest in elections for political positions run the risk of ridicule. In patrilineal and patrilocal cultures, married women face double marginalisation. Perceived as a temporary resident in her natal home, and a 'stranger' in her marital household, the probability of her getting endorsed at either location is slim, as her ability to leverage her social networks in support of her candidature is curtailed. Double standards are evident in the higher moral standards that women are expected to uphold as compared to men.

<p>You have to do all those things you have to be a perfect candidate like you have to be properly married, you have to have a husband, you have to have children all that, the threshold will be set very high but for a man they will be forgiven even if you gave 10 wives they will not bother much.</p>	<p>So there is the whole issue around political parties, politics around political parties and whether these policies actually allow women to actively engage and participate in party leadership because if they are not part of that structure then it becomes very difficult for them to actively participate in elections as candidates.</p>	<p>Even the position of the woman representatives, the political parties, the men in the political parties decide who is going to run for, for the woman's representative; the woman don't define or decide who is going to go for a woman representative. So most of the women are just left from the word go.</p>
<p>Source: Key Informant #2, Political, Male, Kakamega</p>	<p>Source: Key Informant #6 CSO, Female, National</p>	<p>Source: Key Informant #3, CSO, Female, Kakamega</p>
<p>Snippet #1</p>	<p>Snippet #2</p>	<p>Snippet #3</p>

Intergenerational gaps: Our research corroborates the marginalisation of young women within the party hierarchy. Intergenerational gaps are reflected in the relationship between older women described by one female activist as "those awesome ladies" on the one hand and the younger, aspiring female politicians, on the other.

Economic and financial barriers: Unlimited election spending disadvantages women in securing nominations and campaigning as they do not have the financial muscle that men have. Attempts by IEBC prior to 2022 to curtail election spending through the Election Finances Act was foiled by the male Parliament. (ENA & UN Women, 2023: 38) The cost of security also needs to be factored in, especially for young women aspirants. A few political parties like Ford-KA have taken affirmative measures to make it easier for women to seek party nomination but, "even half of

what they were paying was still very unreachable for many women" (KI#6, CSO, Female, National) However, the literature indicates that even when women who make it to the ballot spend more on average than their male counterparts, getting elected remains a challenge. Voters socialised into patriarchal norms and practices reinforced by religious and other opinion leaders, community, and the media, tend to reject women in elective leadership positions.

Political violence: Violence, including hiring male youth to intimidate female candidates, is a pervasive issue. Women candidates face character assassination and sexual abuse, discouraging them from participating.

NAVIGATING THE ROADBLOCKS - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

General Recommendations

In a democratic state, regular, credible, free, fair elections are used to express the “power of the people” in terms of how the country should be governed. Overall, while Kenya has been successful at holding general elections every five years, these have not always been perceived as either free or fair. The outcomes of all three elections (in 2013, 2017 and 2022) since the enactment of the Constitution 2010, have been contentious and have landed in the Supreme Court for determination.

Elections in Kenya are high stakes characterised by unhealthy competitiveness and big money. Violence is endemic, though the extent and intensity has varied from one election cycle to another with 2022 declared by most observers as relatively peaceful, at least as far as ethnic violence is concerned. Given that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) tends to be underreported, it is difficult to conclude whether its incidence as a campaign tool to intimidate adversaries, has declined.

Navigating the roadblocks identified in this report requires commitment and creativity guided by the values and principles enshrined in the Constitution 2010. It is with this in mind that we recommend the following to facilitate inclusion of youth, women and PWDs in the election processes:

1. Productive and honest partnerships between government institutions, political parties and politicians, civil society, the media, and ordinary citizens (inclusive of youth, women and PWDs), supported by funding partners guided by mutual respect.
2. Multi-sectoral efforts - elections are not the business of anyone-government agency or ministry alone but stakeholders from different sectors. Moving beyond the usual, it is important to bring in education, health, water, and sanitation sectors as early into the process as possible.
3. Deliberate measures seeking out and involving the most remote and marginalised communities, those living on the brink and not only confine efforts to the most accessible.
4. Strengthening coordination structures that bring together the diverse stakeholders with an interest in elections and identifying synergies as basis of collaborations and reduction of wastage.

5. Early evidence-based planning and rolling out implementation of work plans of various stakeholder groups.
6. Youth, women and PWD focused and/or led organisations should be sought out and actively involved in all stages of the electoral process.
7. A 5-point agenda to promote inclusion of youth, women and PwDs in election processes and facilitate overcoming the roadblocks to their active and positive participation in future elections.



Youth, women and PwDs holding leaders to account

THE 5-POINT AGENDA

1. Civic and Voter Education: Comprehensive, Contextual, Continuous with Transformational Content and Pedagogy

Comprehensive civic and voter education is the bedrock of a thriving democracy. To ensure an informed and engaged electorate, there is a critical need for continuous civic and voter educational programmes. These initiatives should go beyond generic information, incorporating transformational content and pedagogy that is gender responsive and inclusive. By tailoring content to the local context and employing transformative teaching methods, we empower citizens to not just understand their rights but to internalise the values of democracy. Civic and voter education becomes a catalyst for active participation and an informed electorate.

- a. The IEBC has the official mandate for voter education. However, as our findings suggest, voter education in the 2022 election cycle was perceived to be neither systematic nor extensive. IEBC, according to study participants, came in at the last minute to authorise selected CSOs to partner with them to roll out voter education. We argue that even with limited resources and because of it, IEBC must begin the process early in the current election cycle of mapping and authorising CSOs to collaborate on voter education. This will increase the outreach and strengthen the ability to reinforce the messages instead of making voter education a one-time event.
- b. Civil society organisations, including youth, women and PWD-focused organisations operating in remote and hard to reach areas, should be supported to provide comprehensive, context specific and continuous civic education. Funding support should involve training of a core group of civic educators in transformational content and pedagogy that recognises gender equality and inclusion as guiding principles.
- c. The trust deficit in opinion and faith leaders may be addressed through targeting them for sensitisation and awareness raising on the values and principles of civic education, backed up by research evidence and experiential knowledge.
- d. Diverse teaching and learning methodologies should be used customised to the needs of target audiences. For example, for young people social media channels would be appropriate, especially to counter misinformation, disinformation and malinformation relating to elections, gender equality and inclusion. Creative experiential methodologies would be particularly effective

in reaching out to illiterate and semi-literate populations, and where reading culture is poor.

- e. CSOs, like Uraia Trust, CERA and others can also play a crucial role in civic education. They would be in a position to continuously engage the citizenry and especially the electorate (those that have been there and those joining) on the importance of voting and the qualities of good and value-based leadership and lead advocacy initiatives for the review and reform of election laws, ensuring alignment with democratic, gender-transformative, and disability-inclusive principles.
- f. IEBC, political parties and participating CSOs should ensure that campaign messages, election information, and communication materials are available in various accessible formats such as braille, large print, and audio. Limited information on candidates and their manifestos lead to uninformed voting decisions, especially by the elderly and PWDs.

2. Data: Accessible, Disaggregated for Targeted Interventions and Strengthening the Intersectional Eye

Data is a powerful tool for effective governance, but its true potential is unlocked when it is disaggregated and comprehensively represented. Instead of homogenising diverse groups under broad categories, collecting and analysing disaggregated data enables precision which leads to better focused interventions. By understanding the distinct needs of persons with disabilities, women, and other demographics within the 'youth' label, interventions can be targeted where they are most needed. This approach ensures that policies and programmes are not one-size-fits-all but tailored to address specific challenges faced by different segments of the population in meaningfully participating in electoral processes.

- a. It is IEBC's responsibility to ensure that data disaggregated by sex, age and disabilities are maintained and publicly available to researchers, CSOs and other interested parties. Currently, some very indicators are not reported on in the election analysis reports. For example, statistics on the proportion of young women and men registered in elections versus the number of eligible voter population is not available. What is available is the number and percentage of youth who registered as a proportion of the total registration. Sex disaggregated data is not consistently available. Additionally, there is scarcely any data on PWDs in general and on the several types of disabilities.
- b. IEBC should map types of disabilities at the ward and constituency level and use the data to plan for provision of appropriate facilities, assistive devices,

and aids for people with diverse types of disabilities. This will help to increase the number of voters with disabilities and reduce possibilities of manipulation of such voters in the polling stations when they show up to cast their vote.

- c. Researchers need to apply intersectional perspectives to their research, dig deeper into the issues and package and share findings on election related research that is customised to specific target populations.

3. Infrastructure and Facilities: Flexible, Gender and Inclusive

Inclusive infrastructure is the cornerstone of a democratic process that truly represents everyone. Advocating for gender-sensitive, flexible, and inclusive facilities during voter registration and voting is a commitment to accessibility. This includes addressing physical barriers, ensuring facilities cater to diverse needs, and creating an environment where every eligible voter, regardless of age, gender, or ability, can exercise their right without hindrance. Inclusivity in infrastructure reflects a commitment to democratic ideals and the equitable participation of all citizens.

- a. Conduct accessibility audits to identify and address barriers for women with disabilities in electoral processes. Linked to this, map facilities that are proposed as registration and polling centres to ensure that the needs of voters with disabilities, and female voters, especially young women (pregnant, mothers with babies for example) are catered for. This should not be done as an afterthought, but resources should be invested in making these facilities friendly and inclusive right from the outset, for example, ensuring that ramps are constructed and maintained, disability and women's toilets with sanitary pad disposal facilities available.
- b. Better use should be made of ICT infrastructure to improve accessibility in remote areas and implement user-friendly technology for the youth. Youth is a highly mobile segment of the voting population. This will also assist this category of voters to vote from their current locations, instead of returning to where they registered originally.
- c. Polling stations should be equitably distributed. Many young people and women who depend on casual work count the opportunity costs of voting and will be encouraged to participate in registering and voting because of reduced commuting and waiting time.

4. Resources: Timely Allocation and Disbursements

Timely allocation of resources is pivotal for the success of pre- and post-election activities. Whether it is funding educational programs, data collection efforts, or infrastructure development, the availability of resources when needed is non-negotiable. This recommendation emphasises the importance of a well-funded electoral process, where financial support is allocated in a manner that ensures the smooth execution of activities, fostering a fair and inclusive democratic environment.

- a. Late release of resources by funding agencies was flagged as a significant deterrent to timely and effective interventions, be they related voter or civic education, improvement of infrastructure and facilities, production of informational materials. Funders supporting IEBC and civil society are urged to make timely decisions on the allocation of resources and disbursements.
- b. Specific resources should be earmarked for youth focused and youth led organisations going beyond interventions like travelling caravans to initiatives that delve deeper into understanding and addressing mind set change.
- c. Engagement with CSOs and the private sector to mobilise additional resources for targeted interventions, especially those addressing the needs of youth, women, and PWD.

5. Advocacy: Enforcement of Democratic, Gender and Disability Transformative and Value-Based Election Laws and Practices

Championing the enforcement of election laws that embrace democratic principles, foster gender transformation, and ensure disability inclusivity forms the bedrock of a robust electoral process. This advocacy is not just a call for adherence but a passionate drive towards the values and principles embedded in the Constitution 2010 that upholds democracy, promotes gender equality, and removes barriers for individuals with disabilities. It seeks to fortify the very foundations of the electoral system, ensuring it resonates with inclusivity, fairness, and the diverse voices of all citizens.

- a. The women's rights youth and PWD organisations have a pivotal role to play in advocacy to facilitate the implementation of the two thirds gender rule and other affirmative actions for levelling the playing field for all in the electoral process. In this regard, investment must be assured in providing women at multiple levels with skills for evidence-based advocacy.

b. Advocacy for

- i. Policies that recognize and address the unique challenges faced by women belonging to minority groups should be strengthened.
- ii. Removal of discriminatory rules and practices against youth from minority groups like the Muslim communities that contravene the constitutional provisions in the Bill of Rights

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