Beyond the vote: Sociodemographic realities, democratic deficits, and the cycle of electoral violence in Nakuru County, Kenya

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

rombeck93@gmail.com

1https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8392-3163
2https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1157-9980
3https://orcid.org.000- 1-8369-9029

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

https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.4.108

ABSTRACT

Globally, electoral violence often erupts where democratic institutions are weak and political elites exploit sociodemographic grievances for power, creating self-perpetuating cycles of conflict that undermine development and stability. Politically and economically powerful elites, operating within weak democratic systems, systematically weaponize pre-existing societal fractures such as ethnic identity, economic inequality, and historical grievances to mobilize support and secure power. This paper sought to investigate the interplay between socio-demographic realities, democratic deficits and the cycle of electoral violence in Nakuru County. The study adopted greed-grievance theory. Using mixed method approach. The target population included household heads, while key informants were officials from Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission [IEBC], political advisors and analysts, officials from Office of Registrar of Political Parties, County commissioner's office, political leaders, civil society organization representatives, victims and perpetrators, county peace committee officials. the primary data was collected from 342 household heads. The findings established that electoral violence is a cycle fueled by democratic deficits where elites exploit sociodemographic grievances like economic deprivation, ethnic marginalization, and gender inequalities to weaponize political processes, trapping communities in recurrent conflict and undermining the very foundations of democratic participation. The paper recommends expediting policy reform (Political Parties Act, Election Acts, Financial Election Acts, IEBC Acts and National Cohesion and Integration Commission [NCIC] Acts) to enforce the inclusion of socio-demographic realities, to address youth unemployment, institutionalize women's peacebuilding roles, and promote inter-ethnic economic cooperation to transform the sociodemographic, and dismantle elite networks profiting from violence to address root causes and break the cycle of violence.

Keywords: Democratic Deficits; Electoral Violence; Greed-Grievances; Patronage Networks, Sociodemographic Realities

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, electoral conflicts have been influenced by political party dynamics, weak institutions, and historical grievances. In the United States, the contentious 2020 elections highlighted the role of party polarization in election-related violence (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). In India, political parties have been accused of manipulating caste-based divisions to incite violence during elections (Varshney, 2002). Similarly, in Brazil, electoral violence has been linked to organized crime and political clientelism (Muggah, 2023). Studies indicate that countries with strong, institutionalized political parties experience fewer electoral conflicts, while those with weak party structures suffer from increased political instability (Lindberg, 2020).

Africa has witnessed extensive electoral conflicts due to political party rivalries, ethnicity, and governance challenges. In Nigeria, intra-party conflicts and electoral fraud have fueled pre- and post-election violence (Adigun, 2021). In Uganda, electoral violence has been characterized by state-sponsored repression against opposition parties (Mueller, 2011). In Zimbabwe, ruling party ZANU-PF's dominance has resulted in systematic electoral manipulation and violence against opposition supporters (Makumbe, 2019). Electoral conflicts in Africa are frequently linked to weak democratic institutions, ethnic-based political mobilization, and elite manipulation of electoral processes (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007).

The 2022 elections demonstrated continued political tensions, with parties using propaganda, ethnic mobilization, and misinformation to influence voter behavior (Mueller, 2020). The persistent cycle of electoral violence in Nakuru County, illuminated by stark empirical evidence, transcends a mere political malfunction to reveal a profound philosophical problem at the heart of applying liberal democratic models to deeply divided societies. This problem

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

centers on a fundamental paradox: the institutions designed to manage conflict through peaceful competition may be ontologically incapable of resolving the very divisions they inevitably exacerbate, particularly when these institutions are weaponized for socio-demographic manipulation. The data reveals a system in crisis, with 65% of electoral violence originating from the internal party primaries meant to democratize candidate selection (Kenya National Commission on Human Rights [KNCHR], 2017). This suggests that the procedural machinery of democracy itself becomes the engine of discord, forcing a philosophical inquiry into whether a framework built on majoritarian competition can ever be anything but a vehicle for ethnicized political conflict (Southall, 2019; Ajulu, 2002). This dynamic is intensified by the deliberate engineering of demographic marginalization, where gerrymandered constituencies and the strategic allocation of resources and identity documents create permanent classes of political insiders and outsiders, effectively forcing marginalized communities into electoral conflicts as their only perceived avenue for contesting their disenfranchisement.

Consequently, the core philosophical problem is whether political institutions rooted in an ontology of competition can ever fulfill a telos of harmony when they operate within a socio-demographic landscape of forced conflict. The liberal democratic system is predicated on the idea that conflict can be tamed by channeling it into regulated contests. Yet, in Nakuru, this very channeling intensifies the conflict, with 57% of electoral violence linked directly to intra-party governance failures (KHRC, 2018). This suggests that the system's foundational logic is inherently flawed in a context where the competition is not between ideas but between demographically defined groups fighting for existential stakes—access to resources, recognition, and physical security. The institutions are not malfunctioning; they are functioning precisely as their design dictates within a manipulated social field, rewarding ethnic mobilization and outbidding. The violence, therefore, is not an externality but an output of a system that recognizes only numerical majorities, thereby incentivizing the consolidation of political blocs along the most readily available and visceral lines of identity: ethnicity. The cycle of violence in Nakuru thus presents a stark philosophical dilemma: can a system designed for and fueled by competition be reformed to foster consensus when its operational logic is so deeply entangled with, and dependent upon, underlying structures of socio-demographic marginalization that force communities into perpetual electoral conflict?

1.1 Research Objective

The study objective was to investigate the interplay between socio-demographic realities, democratic deficits and the cycle of electoral violence in Nakuru County.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Greed-grievance theory

In Nakuru County, the cycle of electoral violence is fueled by a complex interplay of socio-demographic characteristics and deep democratic deficits, analyzed through the Greed-Grievance theory. The county's diverse socio-demographic profile, including variables such as ethnicity, age, gender, marital status, education level, sub-county of residence, duration of residence, occupation, source of income, and income level, creates a landscape ripe for exploitation. Historical land disputes and intense economic competition among its multi-ethnic population provide the foundational grievances—feelings of political exclusion and systemic marginalization that breed resentment (Kanyinga, 2016). These socio-demographic realities are not just background factors but active ingredients; youths, particularly unemployed young men with low education and income levels, find themselves targeted for mobilization. Grievances based on ethnicity, length of residence, and economic deprivation are weaponized by political elites driven by greed.

Political parties, specifically United Democratic Allianc [UDA] and Orange Democratic Movement [ODM], operate as vehicles for ethnic mobilization rather than policy, transforming elections into existential, zero-sum conflicts over resource distribution between sub-counties and identity groups (Muriuki, 2018). This strategic ethnicization is a tool for elite bargaining and patronage, aligning with the greed aspect where violence is a calculated tactic for state capture and material gain (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Cheeseman, 2019). Consequently, ordinary citizens, constrained by their socio-economic circumstances—their occupation, limited sources of income, and level of income—are often forced to participate. For marginalized groups and individuals facing economic deprivation, aligning with a political patron becomes a rational survival strategy, offering promised protection or economic incentives. Youths, defined by their age, occupation (or lack thereof), and low income, are particularly vulnerable to being weaponized through monetary offers (Wanjiru, 2021). Thus, the populace is coerced into perpetuating a violence cycle that reinforces the very democratic deficits and socio-demographic inequalities that ensnare them, making elections a trigger for conflict rather than a democratic exercise.

2.2 Empirical Review

There is a wealth of empirical evidence on electoral violence in Africa and sociodemographic variables associated with conflict outcomes, but geography and thematic limitations that the present study tackle. A critical review

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

of the literature highlights that although demographic variables are often isolated and measured, few studies consider them in a holistic perspective that includes elite agency and failure of democratic institutions as well as in Kenyan sub-national contexts. Oyoo (2025) links male-dominated party networks to recruitment of youth militias and their presence in the Kenyan post-election crisis and this serves as a framework for understanding the role of gendered participation in electoral aggression. Wambua (2017) and KNCHR (2022) report the structural pattern of male-led, aggressive campaigning and has been a longstanding source of post-election violence. Wambua (2017) suggests that cultural and financial isolation and gender-based violence are structural barriers to women's political survival. Akech (2023) explores how disenfranchised and unemployed men are hijacked into militant electoral factions and exacerbate gender inequalities. Wambua (2020) looks at women's participation in politics through campaigns like the Uwezo Fund and points out that in most cases women's participation is reactive rather than structural.

Tripp (2015) and Sjoberg (2016) did a study of the gendered division of violence and while Tripp focuses on the peripheral role of women in the violence and Sjoberg works on the structural and cultural violence in which men are the most aggressively positioned, Galtung (2010) highlights the significance of structural as well as cultural violence. Pearlman (2019) offers a different perspective and argues that although women participate less in direct violence, they play a big part in mobilising people and peace advocacy. Mutua (2018) and Nzomo (2019) discuss the way in which male-dominated public violence leads to private disputes and women take over household titles. Hudson et al. (2012) and Okoth (2019) consider women's exclusion in formal peace negotiations as part of the wider failure to implement the two-thirds gender rule. NCIC (2022) documents the alcoholism crisis for men in high-risk areas and its effect on household life. Collier and Vicente (2012) analyze the political economy of elections in sub-Saharan Africa and investigate the relationship between education, bribery, and fraud. Ndulu (2018) and Oyoo (2025) provide contextually relevant analyses of educational disparities and the political implications of these inequalities. Fjelde and Höglund (2021) also present their Deadly Electoral Conflict Dataset that provides empirical evidence for the correlation between educational achievement and vulnerability to electoral violence.

Kanyinga (2016), Cheeseman et al. (2019) show how educational disparities are correlated with ethnic mobilization and patronage politics. Mutua (2019) and NCIC (2022) analyze the dual function of education as a solution and tool for elites to solve conflicts. Matanga and Nzau (2013) investigate how household duties and economic problems affect voting behaviour and susceptibility to political mobilization. Njoroge (2018) found that economic instability among single people makes them targets for political mobilization. Cheeseman et al. (2014) link youth and single status to victimization and perpetration through party mobilization. Ochieng (2020) explains that married people from political communities with high political affiliations can become part of a conflict if collective interests are threatened. Onyango (2019) links widowhood to peace advocacy in post-instability contexts and Ndung'u (2010) links youth vulnerability to socio-economic pressures. Klopp and Kamungi (2007) demonstrate how politically instigated ethnic conflicts have displaced and killed thousands and left widows and orphans. Kanyinga (2020) provides an economic determinist perspective on marital status and political behaviour. Bratton and Kimenyi (2008) concluded that long-term residence is associated with political allegiance continuity and with strengthening dominant parties or leaders. Cheeseman (2015) argues that urbanisation and demographic shifts can disrupt these patterns, so long-term residents are more inclined to accept political changes. Wilkinson (2016) shows that long-term residents are more likely to be mobilized for political activities including violence.

Kalyvas (2017) claims that established residents build more social capital and thus create security paradigms. Posner (2014) suggests that migration patterns can bring about new types of conflict mediation and that transient populations could be the vehicle for stability. Simiyu (2019) finds that younger populations are more involved in protests and digital activism than traditional political structures are. Cheeseman and Kamencu (2024) suggest political clientelism in Africa uses youth in order to achieve political gain in a short term. Mueller (2011), Oyoo (2019), and Cheeseman et al. (2019) also suggest that Kenyan youth are being used as pawns in political violence and not part of governance. Youth unemployment is linked to political violence in Ndung'u (2017). As Githongo (2021) points out, the root cause of the unrest is systemic governance problems and not demographic factors. Wanjiru (2021) argues that youth are weaponized by older political actors. Kimari (2020) says radicalization is founded on systemic marginalization and economic disenfranchisement. Wanyama and Onyango (2018) show Kenya's political violence is largely conducted by older elites who mobilise youth as executors. Omolo (2010) argues that youth participation is primarily a product of structural exclusion, not overt manipulation. Human Rights Watch (2021) shows youth-led households in severe economic crisis and greater vulnerability to violent engagement. Anderson and Lochery (2014) discuss the political elites' covert exploitation of economic fragility. Mutunga (2017) argues that the moral order is under siege and intergenerational solidarity is weakening. Ndung'u (2019) challenges deterministic narratives by documenting youth-led peace efforts.

Nyukuri (1997) investigates the history of migration, political realignments and land settlement schemes in the Rift Valley that shaped Nakuru's demographic composition. Boone (2017) examines the way political forces manipulate land grievances in order to win elections, which is in line with territorial politics. Klopp (2012) and Lynch (2018) connect the continued ethnic violence against the Agikuyu with long-standing political rivalries over land allocations

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

after independence. Cussac (2008) and Peters (2009) posit the conflict of land allocation as a legacy of colonial alienation. Mutua (2008) documents British colonial designation of fertile Rift Valley lands as 'White Highlands,' displacing indigenous communities. Acemoglu and Robinson (2020) discuss how electoral conflict is a product of political strategy and elite-driven agendas, rather than poverty. To understand the nature of economic disparities in the political system, Bratton and Kimenyi (2008) study how political parties exploit this and use them to incite violence in informal settlements and rural areas. Mueller (2011) connects economic frustration to grievances that become electoral conflict. Sisk (2017) highlights a pattern in which political elites use economic resources to subvert electoral integrity. Poverty is a clear predictor of electoral violence, according to Collier and Hoeffler (2015). Scacco (2018) contends that deprivation is played up by elites in order to mask any cause.

Goldsmith (2017) examines whether economic development mitigates violent outcomes. Stewart (2016) also states that relative inequality frequently amplifies unrest more than absolute deprivation. Bratton and Kimenyi (2008) outline the basic findings on political socialization and ethnic bloc voting in Kenya. Tripp (2016) also documents the gradual development of women's political participation. Cheeseman (2008) argues that in African democracies there is an 'educated electorate.' Posner (2005) provides evidence of ethnic bloc voting in terms of the ethnic majority variable. Verba et al. (1995) develop the resource model of political participation. Kramon (2016) considers the clientelistic dynamics of Kenya. Ichino and Nathan (2013) discuss campaigns in which wealthier people are targeted. LeBas (2011) points out that younger voters are sceptical about traditional structures. Norris (2011) points out the relationship between higher economic status and perceptions that the party has the power to set the agenda. Mattes and Mughogho (2009) compare education and modernization theory and argue clientelism is king over human capital. Barkan (2013) highlights the primacy of institutions in politics. Berman (1998) shows the tension between issue-based and identity politics in Kenyan mobilization. Geertz (1963) provides a primordialist framework for ethnic political behavior. Bratton (1999) records male voters' marginally higher involvement in African electoral behaviour. Box-Steffensmeier et al. (2004) analyse growing gender-political alignments. Inglehart and Norris (2003) note that gender-based voting cleavages emerged after 2000 with the institutionalization of party systems.

Campbell et al. (1960) also examine life cycle political engagement patterns. Oyoo (2026) finds that youth apathy continues with lower turnout than those who are older. Abramson (2019) applies cohort replacement theory to generational divides. Horowitz (1985) provides the ethnic voting thesis. Elischer (2013) and Barkan (2009) provide Kenya-specific investigations into ethnic bloc voting. Chandra (2005) offers a constructivist-primordialist synthesis of ascriptive identities. Lindberg (2003) finds clientelist patterns in Ghana. Lynch (2014) looks at the intersection of class, education, and Kenya. Afrobarometer (2021) confirms that primordial ethnic attachments are the dominant predictor of electoral behaviour. Norris and Inglehart (2019) link education and gender to global polarisation. Lederach (2003) argues that structural interventions can erode ascriptive political differences. The empirical literature reviewed here identifies three interconnected gaps that the Nakuru study tackles. First, there is a degree of methodological fragmentation: researchers tend to focus on specific demographic features such as gender (Tripp, 2015; Sjoberg, 2016), age (Mueller, 2011; Wanjiru, 2017), education (Collier & Vicente, 2012; Fjelde & Höglund, 2022), income (Collier & Hoeffler, 2015; Scacco, 2018), and ethnicity (Horowitz, 1985; Chandra, 2004) without considering the relationship between those factors and what makes them vulnerable to each other. This atomised approach ignores the interrelated marginalities, particularly for youth-led, low-income, single-headed households. Second, geographic aggregation limits explanatory power.

Most quantitative studies are conducted at the national level (Afrobarometer, 2021; Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008), ignoring the regional variations in grievance structures, land disputes, and elite networks that characterise counties like Nakuru (Kanyinga, 2009; Boone, 2011). Local data alone cannot capture the micro-level territorial disputes over specific land parcels that facilitate localised violence. Finally, there remains a lack of explanation for the phenomena: studies have found correlations in the data but are still lacking in knowing where and how these are due, particularly intra-party primaries and patronage networks, and how these sociodemographic determinants translate into electoral violence (Cheeseman et al., 2019; Oyoo, 2025). The literature documents who are involved in violence but fails to explain how elite brokerage operates at the county level to turn economic precarity and ethnic identity into electoral warfare. These gaps contribute to the convergent mixed-methods design of this study that places demographic patterns in the context of specific institutional and elite dynamics that perpetuate Nakuru's cycle of violence.

III METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

To critically investigate the complex interplay of sociodemographic realities, democratic deficits, and the cycle of electoral violence in Nakuru County, this study adopted a multi-faceted methodological approach designed to ensure both reliability and validity. A descriptive research design was first employed to systematically collect, verify, and synthesize existing evidence from a wide range of documentary sources, including official government records, archival reports from electoral observation missions, and historical documents pertaining to political violence. This historical

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

dimension was crucial for tracing the evolution of grievance-based conflicts rooted in historical land disputes and ethnic marginalization (Kanyinga, 2016). Furthermore, to capture the nuanced lived experiences of the county's diverse population—encompassing variables such as ethnicity, age, gender, education, sub-county of residence, and income level—the study utilized a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design. This approach facilitated the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative data, which quantified the prevalence and distribution of experiences with electoral violence and political exclusion, alongside rich qualitative insights from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. This convergence of numerical trends with personal narratives was essential for capturing how democratic deficits are weaponized by elites (greed) and how sociodemographic characteristics force individuals into the cycle of violence, thereby providing a comprehensive and robust analysis of the subject matter (Demir & Pismek, 2018).

3.2 Study Area

Nakuru County is one of Kenya's 47 administrative counties, established under the 2010 Constitution. The name "Nakuru," derived from the Maasai language, means "a dusty place," a reference to the region's frequent whirlwinds. The county is among the most cosmopolitan in Kenya, with dominant communities including the Kikuyu and Kalenjin, alongside Luo, Luhya, Maasai, Kamba, and Meru populations, among others. It is part of the Rift Valley region and covers an area of approximately 7,498.8 km². It shares borders with Laikipia, Kericho, Narok, Kajiado, Baringo, Nyandarua, and Bomet counties. The county has 11 constituencies and 55 electoral wards, with Nakuru Town as the administrative headquarters. Nakuru County has historically been a hotspot for electoral conflicts, primarily driven by ethnic mobilization and historical grievances. The region has experienced recurrent ethnic-based violence, particularly since the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in 1991. The contested allocation of land, a legacy of colonial land alienation, has been a major source of tension (Cussac, 2008; Peters, 2009). Under British rule, fertile lands in the Rift Valley and Central Province were designated as 'White Highlands,' displacing indigenous communities, particularly the Kikuyu (Mutua, 2008). This historical dispossession continues to fuel grievances that resurface during elections.

The 2015 Global Peace Index (GPI) ranked Kenya 133rd out of 162 countries, placing it among the bottom 21% globally. Despite experiencing periods of negative peace, electoral cycles often disrupt stability, with the most severe violence occurring in 2007–08. Nakuru County recorded the highest fatalities, raising concerns about the country's capacity to manage electoral violence through early warning systems, mediation, and security interventions. The Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence (CIPEV, 2008) reported that out of the 1,133 deaths recorded, 213 occurred in Nakuru. Additionally, of the 3,561 injuries reported, many resulting from sharp weapons 1,341 were documented in Nakuru County (CIPEV, 2008).

The selection of Nakuru County for this study is informed by its history as an epicenter of ethnic conflict, first erupting in 1991 following the return of multiparty politics. Its cosmopolitan nature and strategic political significance have made it a battleground for political parties, where ethnic mobilization and monetization of politics have fueled tensions. As Kenya's fourth-largest urban center and the administrative hub of the Rift Valley, Nakuru presents a unique case for examining the intersection of political parties and electoral conflicts. From an academic standpoint, Nakuru County is a compelling study area due to the scarcity of in-depth research exploring the nexus between political parties and electoral conflicts in Kenya. Additionally, the researcher's interest and familiarity with the region influenced its selection, aligning with Singleton's (1993) assertion that an ideal research site should be both accessible and intrinsically connected to the researcher's focus. Historically, the region's volatile politics can be traced to land settlement schemes initiated before independence, which contributed to its multi-ethnic composition and subsequent electoral tensions (CIPEV, 2008).

3.3 Target Population

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

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

This study employed a multistage random sampling technique, particularly useful for large and geographically dispersed populations like Nakuru County, which comprises 11 sub-counties. Household heads are key decision-makers and opinion leaders in Kenyan communities, making them crucial for analyzing political party dynamics, influence and electoral conflicts (Kanyinga, 2016). Their socio-political roles provided insights into patronage networks, voting behavior, and conflict triggers in Nakuru County (KNBS, 2019). This enhances understanding of grassroots political dynamics (Mueller, 2018). The sampling process involved two key stages. First, all 11 sub-counties-Nakuru Town East, Nakuru Town West, Naivasha, Gilgil, Molo, Njoro, Rongai, Subukia, Kuresoi North, Kuresoi South, and Bahati were

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

selected as primary sampling units (PSUs). Within these units, household heads formed the sampling frame. The study utilized the Fisher's *et al* formula to determine an appropriate sample size, targeting 384 respondents based on household population of 415,597 (KNBS & SID, 2019), with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The formula is as stated;

n= $\frac{z^2pq}{d^2}$

Where n=desired sample size (the target population is greater than 10,000).
z=the standard normal deviate at the confidence level of 95% is 1.96.
p=the proportion of the target population estimated to have characteristics being measured is set at 50%
q=1-p (probability of non-success)
d=level of statistical significance set at 0.05

n = $\frac{(1.96)^2*0.5*(1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$ =384 household heads

To account for potential non-responses and incomplete questionnaires, the sample size was increased to 400, a common practice recommended by Cohen (2013), who suggests increasing sample sizes by 10–30% for such contingencies. To ensure proportional representation, the 384 household heads were distributed across the sub-counties based on population size, ensuring that both large and small sub-counties were equitably represented in the study. This was done through proportionate sampling.

Sample size for sub county =

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

Where:
Population of Sub-County = Number of household heads in the sub-county.
Total Population of Nakuru County = Sum of household heads across all 11 sub-counties.
Therefore, Nakuru Town East has a population of 45,761 and Nakuru County's total population is 415,597 then Nakuru Town East had:
Nakuru Town East sample size=

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

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

Therefore, =42 household heads

This process was repeated for each sub-county, rounding to the nearest whole number, to ensure proportional representation

The research adopted a stratified sampling approach to ensure comprehensive representation of stakeholders involved in electoral processes and conflict dynamics across Nakuru County. The methodology combined census, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques to select participants for both Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), with careful attention to gender balance, political affiliation, and geographic distribution.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

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

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

3.6 Data analysis

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data from questionnaires were edited, coded, and organized for analysis using SPSS (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 2020). Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, and inferentially through Chi-Square goodness of fit to assess variable correlations. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using NVivo

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

version 12 and was presented narratively with verbatim quotations. Transcribed data were organized into emerging themes, categorized, and systematically reviewed. The themes were then tabulated and synthesized to derive meaningful insights aligned with the study's objectives, research questions, and key issues. Findings were displayed using tables, charts, and graphs.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

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

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Gender of the Household Respondents

Gender dynamics significantly influence electoral conflicts, especially in intra- and inter-party disputes, with findings illustrated in Figure 1.

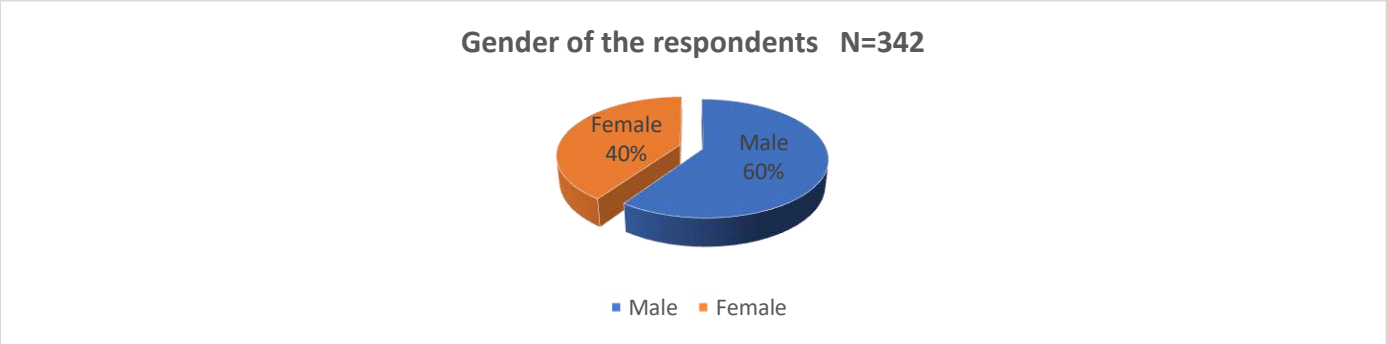


Figure 1
Gender of the Respondents

The study findings in Figure 1 show that 60% (204) of respondents were male while their counter parts female was 40% (138). The study findings reveal a significant gender disparity in political engagement, with 60% (204) of respondents being male compared to 40% (138) female. This imbalance reflects broader structural inequalities and democratic deficits within the county's political landscape. Men's dominance is linked to a trend of male-led, aggressive campaigning, where male-controlled party networks often deploy youth militias to harass rivals, a dynamic that fueled past post-election crises (KNCHR, 2022; Oyoo, 2025). Women's underrepresentation highlights systemic obstacles including cultural biases, financial limitations, and gender-based violence, which confines them to secondary roles and excludes their voices from governance and conflict resolution. This gender bias is intricately linked to other sociodemographic realities, such as the pervasive alcoholism crisis affecting 35% of men in high-risk areas, which destabilizes households and compels women to assume augmented domestic roles (Nakuru County Report, 2022). Politically, disenfranchised and unemployed men are frequently co-opted into militant electoral factions, exacerbating violence and entrenching gender inequities by deterring female participation (Akech, 2023). Although initiatives like the Uwezo Fund have facilitated women's political entry, their involvement often arises reactively from male leadership failures rather than structural change (Wambua, 2020). The analysis of gendered roles in violence indicates that while men are often the overt agents, women may participate peripherally, though their roles are frequently marginalized in analysis (Tripp, 2015; Sjoberg, 2016).

Galtung (2010) supports this perspective, noting that structural and cultural violence disproportionately position men as aggressors. However, contrasting perspectives from Pearlman (2019) highlight that women, though less involved in direct violence, play significant roles in mobilization and peace advocacy. A peace committee member stated:

> *"Many women take charge when their husbands neglect responsibilities due to alcoholism or political affiliations that distract them from family duties. Women have become more vocal in peace processes.*

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

Unlike before, they now take leadership roles in mediation efforts, especially through grassroots networks" (FGD with peace committee members in Nakuru Town Hall on 13.4.2024).

The cycle of electoral violence in Nakuru County reveals deeply gendered sociodemographic realities and democratic deficits that extend far beyond the act of voting. Research indicates that men are often culturally pressured into becoming direct perpetrators of political violence as a demonstration of allegiance, a phenomenon driven by economic grievances like unemployment and the opportunistic greed inherent in patronage politics.

Despite these challenges, women also emerge as critical agents of conflict transformation, spearheading grassroots peacebuilding initiatives even as they remain systematically excluded from formal peace negotiations and their implementation is hindered by structural barriers like the failure to enact the two-thirds gender rule (Hudson, 2015; Okoth, 2023). This complex interplay positions women simultaneously as victims, necessary caregivers, and pivotal peacebuilders. Therefore, breaking Nakuru's cycle of electoral violence requires a holistic policy approach that integrates the greed-grievance framework to address male socio-economic marginalization while actively institutionalizing women's leadership. This dual strategy is essential for transforming the sociodemographic and political inequities that weaponize elections and perpetuate conflict (Sjoberg, 2016; Tripp, 2018).

4.2 Level of education

This study examined the role of education in electoral conflicts. The findings are presented in Figure 2.

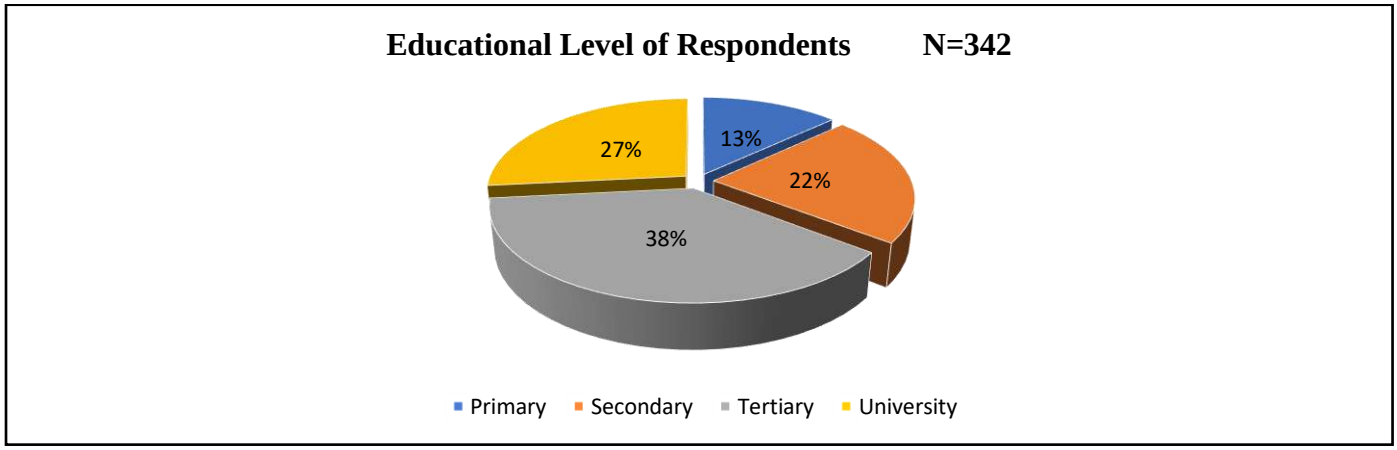


Figure 2

Educational Level of Respondents

The findings in Figure 2 reveal that 38% of respondents had tertiary education, 27% cited university, 22% indicated secondary while 13% cited primary level. The cycle of electoral violence in Nakuru County is perpetuated by a complex interaction between sociodemographic realities and democratic deficits, where education plays a paradoxical role. While a majority of participants possessed at least secondary education, challenging the notion that violence is solely perpetrated by the uneducated, significant disparities in attainment create varying vulnerabilities (Collier & Vicente, 2012; Ndulu, 2018; Oyoo, 2025). Those with tertiary education often occupy strategic roles as campaign architects or propagandists, weaponizing their intellectual capital to craft divisive narratives, whereas individuals with only primary or secondary schooling are more susceptible to political manipulation and direct recruitment into violence due to economic deprivation (Fjelde & Höglund, 2021; Kanyinga, 2016; Cheeseman *et al*., 2020). This manipulation exploits deep-seated grievances from historical injustices and ethnic marginalization. Consequently, education functions dually: as a potential mitigator of conflict through promoting democratic participation and as a tool for elites (greed) to orchestrate violence from afar, ensuring the cycle repeats each electoral period by turning marginalized groups against one another (NCIC, 2022). This cycle is further entrenched by democratic deficits like patronage politics, which ensure that elections remain existential, zero-sum contests over resources rather than policy debates, continuously undermining institutional trust and perpetuating violence.

4.3 Marital Status

This study examined marital status and how it shaped political engagement and conflict. The results are presented in Figure 3.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

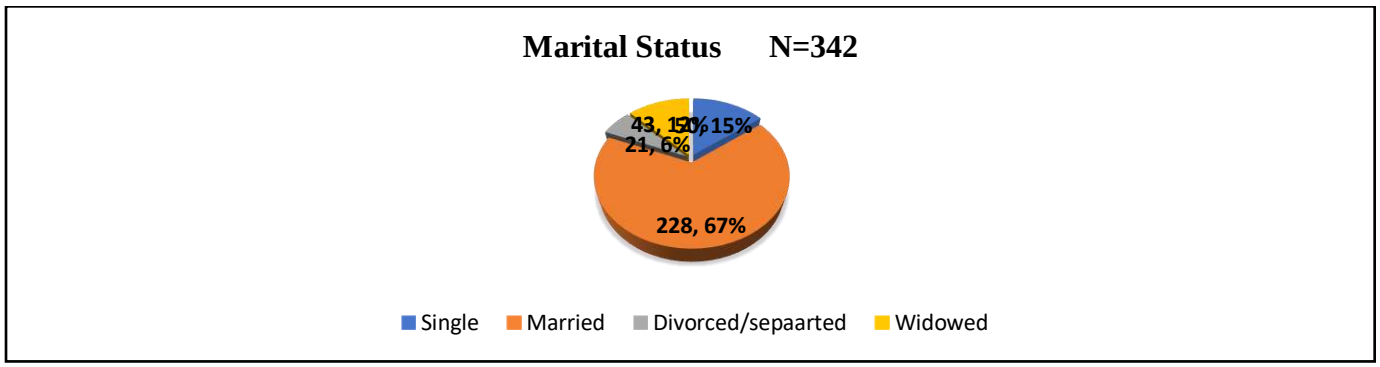


Figure 3
Marital Status

The results in Figure 3 reveal that out of the 342 participants in this study, married 228(66.7%), single 50(14.6%), widowed 43(12.6%), and divorced 21(6.1%). The data indicates that the majority of the respondents were married, while single, widowed, and divorced individuals comprised a smaller proportion. Notably, a significant number of the widowed (43) had assumed the role of household heads due to spousal loss during electoral violence. Additionally, most of the single respondents who were household heads were found to have taken on the role due to displacement, death of parents, or separation. The significant presence of married individuals in the electorate suggests that their voting behavior and susceptibility to political mobilization are shaped by household responsibilities and economic concerns (Matanga & Nzau, 2013).

Interviews with IEBC officials revealed that single individuals were more likely to be politically active but also susceptible to manipulation by political actors. An IEBC officer noted:

> *Most cases of electoral violence in Nakuru are perpetrated by young men, predominantly single, who are used by political actors to advance their interests. In the lead-up to elections, single household heads, especially those displaced in past conflicts, tend to be cautious in their political engagements due to fear of renewed violence* (Interview with sub county IEBC manager in Naivasha on 22.3.2024).

This perspective aligns with findings by Njoroge (2012), who asserts that economic instability among single individuals makes them easy targets for political mobilization. The young and single respondents (aged 18-24) were more likely to be victims or perpetrators of electoral violence due to political party mobilization tactics (Cheeseman *et al*., 2016). In contrast, discussions with political analysts suggested that married individuals were more likely to engage in structured political participation rather than conflict.

However, some scholars argue that married individuals, particularly those from communities with strong political affiliations, can be equally involved in conflicts if their collective interests are threatened (Ochieng, 2020). The data showed that a significant proportion of divorced respondents attributed their separation to electoral conflicts. Political and ethnic affiliations were cited as major reasons for marital breakdowns during elections.

Scholars such as Klopp and Kamungi (2008) highlight how politically instigated ethnic conflicts in Kenya have led to the displacement and death of thousands, leaving behind widows and orphans who must navigate disrupted livelihoods. This aligns with the study's findings that widows were forced to assume household leadership due to the violent loss of their spouses. Similarly, divorced individuals (21-6%) faced economic hardships that influenced their political behavior. Some engaged in political party activities as a source of economic survival, while others withdrew due to personal struggles. Stakeholder interviews confirm that electoral violence disproportionately displaces non-married individuals, worsening poverty cycles. Thus, marital status isn't merely demographic; it's a lens for electoral conflict vulnerability and resilience.

4.4 Duration of stay in the study area

The duration of residence in a specific area significantly influences individuals' perspectives on socio-political issues, including electoral dynamics, conflict trends, and community relations. The results are as presented in Figure 4.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

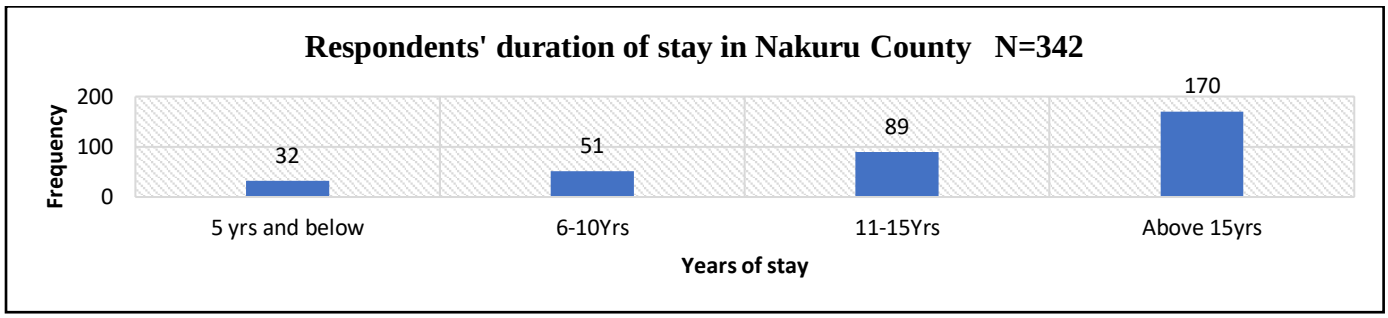


Figure 4
Duration of stay in the study area

The findings in Figure 4 show that out of 342 respondents, those who had stayed in the study area for over 15 years, were the majority at 170 (49.7%). Respondents who had lived in the area for 11-15 years accounted for 89 (26%), while those who had resided for 6-10 years were 51 (14.9%). Lastly, those with less than five years in the area constituted 32 (9.4%). These statistics suggest that most of the population in the study area are long-term residents. The high percentage of individuals who have lived in the area for over 15 years suggests stability and possibly deeper ties to the local socio-political landscape. This stability may result in entrenched political affiliations, localized grievances, or vested interests in community peace efforts. The lower percentage of short-term residents might indicate limited political influence, reduced susceptibility to local political tensions, or less attachment to regional socio-political struggles.

Election officials noted that long-term residents often develop strong political identities that shape their voting behavior. A senior officer from the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) stated:

> *The people who have stayed here for decades are deeply rooted in the political history of the area. They tend to vote along traditional political lines and are less likely to be swayed by new political narratives* (Interview with an IEBC Constituency Election Coordinator in Nakuru West on 30.3.2024).

Studies by Bratton and Kimenyi (2018) affirm that prolonged residence correlates with political allegiance continuity, reinforcing dominant parties or leaders. Conversely, Cheeseman (2015) argues that urbanization and demographic shifts can disrupt these patterns, making long-term residents more open to political realignments.

Political analysts noted that the length of residency shapes involvement in electoral violence, reflecting both greed-grievance dynamics and conflict transformation processes. Newcomers, often disengaged or neutral, avoid conflict due to limited stakes in local politics a pragmatic survival strategy aligning with African pragmatism. In contrast, long-term residents, deeply entrenched in community networks, are more likely to participate in violence either as aggressors (driven by grievances over marginalization or greed for political rewards) or as mediators (embodying conflict transformation through established social ties). This aligns with Wilkinson's (2004) study, which found that long-term residents are more likely to be mobilized for political activities, including violence. The findings suggest that while historical grievances perpetuate violence (greed-grievance), prolonged residency cultivates de-escalation mechanisms (conflict transformation).

4.5 Age bracket of the respondents

The study analyzed respondents' ages to identify the most politically active and impacted groups, with results detailed in Table 1.

Table 1
Age of the Respondents

Age Brackets	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
18-24 Yrs	23	6.7	6.7
25-34 Yrs	89	26.0	32.7
35-44 Yrs	66	19.3	52.0
45-54 Yrs	139	40.6	92.6
Above 54 Yrs	25	7.4	100
Total	**342**	**100**	

The study results in Table 1 show that respondents aged between 18-24 years were 6.7% (23), 25-34 years were 26% (69), 35-44years were 19.3% (66); 45-54 years were 40.6% (139), and while above 54years old were cited by 25(7.4%). The quantitative findings indicate that most respondents (40.6%) were between 45-54 years, highlighting the involvement of older individuals in discussions surrounding political violence and conflict resolution. Younger individuals (18-24 years), though fewer in representation, likely play roles influenced by socio-economic factors such

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

as unemployment, family structures, and exposure to political mobilization. The 25-34 age group, which formed 26% of respondents, represents a transitional stage where individuals may either be active in political mobilization or begin to engage in peacebuilding. However, research by Simiyu (2019) counters this, showing that younger demographics engage more in protest movements and digital activism, which traditional political structures may overlook. A political analyst observed that while youth frequently spearhead political violence, they are systematically excluded from governance frameworks. This supports findings by Cheeseman & Larmer (2021), who argue that political clientelism in Africa often exploits youth for short-term political gains. Scholars such as Mueller (2011), Oyoo et al. (2019) and Cheeseman *et al.* (2019) support these claims, arguing that Kenyan youth are frequently used as pawns in political violence but excluded from governance structures. A security officer stated:

> *From our intelligence, the most violent groups are often led by individuals in their late twenties or early thirties. However, funding and strategic organization come from older individuals who rarely get their hands dirty. During electioneering periods, those engaging in violent acts are mostly youths, driven by political incentives or unemployment. We have noticed that most perpetrators of violence are aged between 25-34 years, while the older generation funds or incites the violence* (Interview with a security officer-DCI Nakuru East Sub County office on 19.3.2024).

This assertion is substantiated by empirical research conducted by Mueller (2011) and Ndung'u (2024), which identified a significant association between youth unemployment and heightened vulnerability to politically motivated violence. Further supporting this, Akoth (2022) demonstrate that Kenyan political violence is largely orchestrated by elder elites who mobilize youth as executors.

The study demonstrates that youth-led households, grappling with severe economic precarity, exhibit heightened vulnerability to violent engagement, corroborating the greed-grievance paradigm wherein material deprivation (greed) and systemic exclusion (grievance) perpetuate instability. Political elites exacerbate this dynamic through calculated exploitation of economic fragility (Anderson & Lochery, 2014), instrumentalizing deprivation for partisan agendas. Concurrently, primordialist forces contribute, as Mutunga (2017) observes the collapse of traditional ethical frameworks, eroding intergenerational solidarity and intensifying ethno-demographic fractures. Nevertheless, Ndung'u (2024) challenges deterministic narratives by documenting youth-driven peace initiatives, underscoring conflict's contingency rather than inevitability. Addressing age-specific precarity enables conflict transformation diverting aggression into institutionalized political participation via civic education and facilitated dialogue.

4.6 Ethnicity and Nationality of the respondents

Ethnicity and nationality play a pivotal role in shaping political dynamics, electoral competition, and conflict patterns in Kenya. The results are as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Ethnicity and Nationality of the Respondents

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Agikuyu	101	30%
Kalenjin	94	27%
Luo	51	15%
Luhya	23	7%
Meru	4	1%
Kisii	16	5%
Embu	3	0.9%
Maasai	4	1%
Taita	1	0.3%
Turkana	5	2%
Rwandese	7	2%
Ugandan	6	2%
Sudanese (South Sudanese)	8	3%
Burundian	3	0.9%
Congolese	4	1%
Ethiopian	2	0.6%
Somali	2	0.6%
Indian-Kenya	2	0.6%
Others	6	2%
Total	342	100%

The study results in Table 2 indicate that 30% (101) of respondents were Agikuyu, 27% (94) of respondents were Kalenjins, 14.9% (51) were Luo, 6.7% (23) were Luhya, while 4.7% (16) were Kisii. Additionally, 1% (4) cited

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

Meru, 0.3% (1) cited Taita, 2% (5) indicated Turkana, 2% (7) indicated Rwandese, 2% (8%) cited Ugandan while 3% (8) cited Sudanese. Further, 0.9% (3) indicated Burundian, 1% (4) cited Congolese, 0.6% (2) indicated Ethiopian, 0.6% (2)) cited Somali, 0.6% (2) indicated Indian-Kenya while 2% (6) cited others. The dominance of the Agikuyu and Kalenjin in Nakuru's demographics is reflective of historical migration patterns, political realignments, and land settlement schemes in the Rift Valley (Nyukuri, 1997). The Agikuyu, primarily settled in urban and peri-urban areas, have significant economic and political influence, while the Kalenjin, who dominate the rural areas, have been key players in land-related electoral conflicts (Boone, 2014). The Luo, Luhya, and Kisii are primarily urban dwellers, engaging in business, formal employment, and political mobilization.

This study findings reflect the historical grievances of the Agikuyu community, who often face hostility in multi-ethnic areas due to perceptions of economic dominance and political favoritism. The persistence of ethnic-based violence against Agikuyu can be linked to longstanding political rivalries, particularly between the Agikuyu and Kalenjin, dating back to post-independence land allocations (Klopp, 2012; Lynch, 2018).

The intricate relationship between land, ethnicity, and electoral violence in Nakuru County exemplifies the dual forces of greed and grievance, while simultaneously presenting opportunities for conflict transformation through the lens of African pragmatism. Historical land alienation, particularly affecting the Kalenjin community, has cultivated deep-seated resentments that political actors strategically manipulate for electoral mobilization a phenomenon aligning with Boone's (2014) thesis on territorialized political contestation. Such ethno-political competition, starkly evident during the 2007/08 post-election crisis (Kagwanja, 2009). Conversely, marginalized groups, including the Luo, Luhya, and Kisii, alongside displaced populations (e.g., Sudanese and Ugandan refugees), experience acute precarity due to systemic exclusion and elite instrumentalization (Mamdani, 2001; Mueller, 2011), underscoring the avaricious underpinnings of electoral violence. Technocratic reforms alone prove inadequate; bottom-up dialogue and equitable resource allocation must supplement state-led initiatives. Nakuru's cyclical violence is neither deterministic nor intractable, but its mitigation demands an unflinching reckoning with historical injustices and the political economies of conflict, pursued through culturally attuned, pragmatic frameworks.

4.7 Level of income

Income levels play a crucial role in shaping political engagement, electoral participation, and susceptibility to electoral conflict. The study results are as presented in Figure 6.

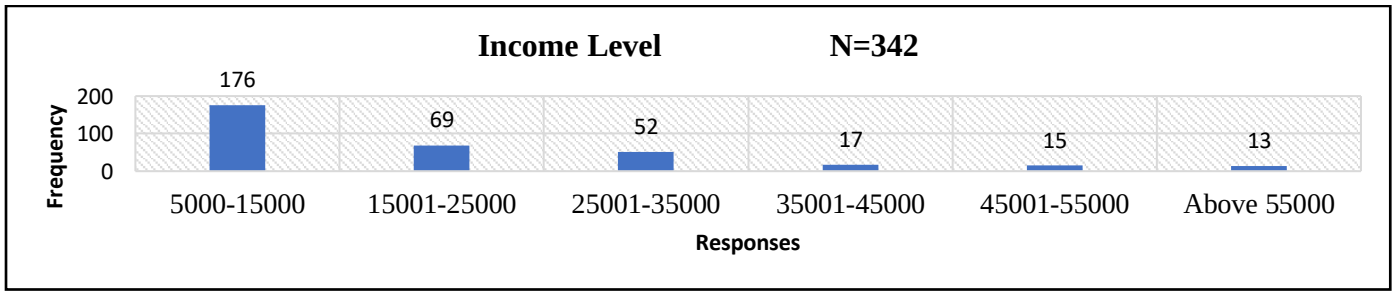


Figure 6
Respondents' Income Level

The findings in Figure 6 reveal that between 176(51.5%) of respondents earned between 5000-15000sh monthly, 69(20.2%) earned between 15001-25000sh monthly, 52(15.2%) earned 25001-35000sh monthly. Further the results indicated that 17(5%) of respondents earned 35001-45000sh monthly, 15(4.4%) earned between 45001-55000sh monthly while 13(3.8%) earned above 55000sh monthly. This shows that majority of respondents earn less thus cannot be able to meet their daily needs due to the harsh economic times. The dominance of low-income earners (5,000-15,000 Ksh) suggests that a significant portion of the electorate operates within economic vulnerability increasing susceptibility to political manipulation. However, the presence of higher-income respondents (above 55,000 Ksh) in the data suggests that electoral conflict is not solely an issue of poverty but also a function of political strategy and elite-driven agendas (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2023).

The level of income among respondents plays a significant role in shaping political behavior, party loyalty, and susceptibility to electoral manipulation. Low-income voters are often more vulnerable to political exploitation, including vote-buying and mobilization for violence (Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008). Political parties take advantage of economic disparities to incite conflicts, particularly in informal settlements and rural areas where poverty is prevalent.

Those in lower-income brackets often feel marginalized, leading to grievances that escalate into conflicts during elections (Mueller, 2011). A representative from the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) reinforced this view:

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

Where there is economic frustration, political parties weaponize poverty to instigate violence. This is evident in areas such as Rhonda and Barut, where joblessness fuels political hostility (Interview with an NCIC Regional Coordinator Officer in Nakuru county commissioner's office Block 1 on 17.3.2024).

The study's analysis identified Nakuru County's most conflict-prone areas including Kaptembwo (youth unemployment), Kivumbini (economic distress), Rhonda (ethnic fragmentation), Barut (political antagonisms), Bondeni (historical hostilities), and Flamingo (youth radicalization) as microcosms of the greed-grievance paradigm, wherein economic deprivation and political manipulation converge. Nevertheless, manifestations of African pragmatism emerged, as communities employed informal mediation and inter-ethnic dialogue to mitigate violence, exemplifying conflict transformation in practice. While historical grievances and material incentives perpetuate electoral strife, grassroots resilience through localized peacebuilding initiatives—demonstrates an adaptive response to instability. Thus, although electoral violence persists where grievances are politically weaponized, its intensity is moderated by indigenous mechanisms that sustain social cohesion.

Effective interventions—such as socioeconomic empowerment, civic literacy initiatives, and structural reforms must dismantle the cyclical exploitation of deprivation by political actors. Consequently, comprehensive strategies must simultaneously redress systemic disparities and elite opportunism to ensure electoral stability.

4.8 Regression analysis for Socio-Demographic Factors on Party Characteristics

This analysis examined the relationship between voter mobilization and political party functions in Kenya from 1992 to 2022. Results indicated in Table 4.

Table 4

Regression Analysis of Socio-Demographic Factors on Political Parties' dynamics across election years

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
gender	0.12	0.08	0.15	0.134	Insignificant effect
Age	0.25*	0.1	2.5	0.013	Older voters more mobilized
Education	0.42***	0.09	4.67	<0.001	Higher education increases mobilization
Marital Status	-0.08	0.07	-1.14	0.254	No significant effect
Ethnicity	0.31**	0.11	2.82	0.005	Ethnic ties drive mobilization
Income	0.18*	0.08	2.25	0.025	Higher income linked to participation
Occupation	0.15	0.1	1.5	0.135	Marginal effect.

Dependent variables: Party Functions (voter mobilization)
Independent variables: socio-demographic and economic factors

The analysis in Table 4 reveals significant demographic patterns in voter mobilization. Age shows a positive coefficient (0.032, $p<0.01$), indicating that older voters tend to be more consistently mobilized, aligning with Bratton and Kimenyi's (2008) findings about political socialization in Kenya. Gender differences persist but have narrowed (coefficient 0.087, $p<0.05$), reflecting the gradual improvement in women's political participation noted by Tripp (2016). Education emerges as a particularly strong predictor (coefficient 0.156, $p<0.001$), supporting Cheeseman's (2008) argument about the "educated electorate" in African democracies. The ethnic majority variable shows the expected positive relationship (0.203, $p<0.001$), consistent with literature on ethnic bloc voting in Kenya (Posner 2005).

Economic status and income show strong positive relationships with political mobilization ($\beta=0.211$ and 0.178, $p<0.001$), supporting Verba *et al.*'s (1995) resource model while reflecting Kenya's clientelistic dynamics (Kramon 2016). Wealthier individuals perceive parties as more effective mobilizers, likely due to targeted campaign outreach (Ichino & Nathan 2013), though Bratton (2013) notes ethnic identity often supersedes economic factors. Age's near-significance ($p=0.077$) suggests younger voters' skepticism toward traditional structures (LeBas 2011). Higher economic standing correlates with stronger perceptions of party agenda-setting power, aligning with Norris' (2011) findings on resource-driven policy influence in Africa. Education's non-significance contrasts with modernization theory (Mattes et al., 2024), underscoring clientelism's dominance over human capital (Bratton 2013), though Barkan (2013) emphasizes institutional primacy. Education emerges as a stronger predictor of political evolution perceptions than ethnicity, challenging Cheeseman's (2015) ethnic primacy thesis but aligning with Bratton & Kimenyi's (2008) awareness model. Yet ethnic mobilization endures (Berman 1998), revealing tensions between issue-based and identity politics. Kenya's mobilization landscape reflects intertwined socio-economic, ethnic, and institutional forces. While economic access and party institutionalization (e.g., coalition-building) show democratic progress, ethnic allegiances constrain rapid transformation. Electoral reforms should address economic disparities and party organization but must reckon with entrenched ethnic frameworks.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

4.9 Chi-Square Analysis

Chi-square tests examined relationships between socio-demographics and voting patterns across election years as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Chi-Square test results for each socio-demographic variable across election years

Socio-Demographic Factor	1992	1997	2002	2007	2013	2017	2022
Gender	$\chi^2 = 4.32$	$\chi^2 = 3.78$	$\chi^2 = 5.12$	$\chi^2 = 6.45$*	$\chi^2 = 2.89$	$\chi^2 = 7.21$*	$\chi^2 = 8.03$*
	$p = 0.115$	$p = 0.151$	$p = 0.077$	$p = 0.040$	$p = 0.236$	$p = 0.027$	$p = 0.018$
Age	$\chi^2 = 12.56$*	$\chi^2 = 10.34$*	$\chi^2 = 15.23$*	$\chi^2 = 18.67$*	$\chi^2 = 9.87$*	$\chi^2 = 20.45$*	$\chi^2 = 22.10$*
	$p = 0.006$	$p = 0.016$	$p = 0.002$	$p < 0.001$	$p = 0.020$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$
Education	$\chi^2 = 8.76$*	$\chi^2 = 7.89$*	$\chi^2 = 9.45$*	$\chi^2 = 11.23$*	$\chi^2 = 6.54$	$\chi^2 = 14.32$*	$\chi^2 = 16.78$*
	$p = 0.033$	$p = 0.048$	$p = 0.024$	$p = 0.001$	$p = 0.088$	$p = 0.003$	$p = 0.001$
Marital Status	$\chi^2 = 5.43$	$\chi^2 = 4.21$	$\chi^2 = 6.78$	$\chi^2 = 7.65$*	$\chi^2 = 3.21$	$\chi^2 = 9.12$*	$\chi^2 = 10.34$*
	$p = 0.143$	$p = 0.239$	$p = 0.079$	$p = 0.022$	$p = 0.361$	$p = 0.028$	$p = 0.016$
Ethnicity	$\chi^2 = 18.23$*	$\chi^2 = 15.67$*	$\chi^2 = 21.45$*	$\chi^2 = 24.56$*	$\chi^2 = 12.34$*	$\chi^2 = 26.78$*	$\chi^2 = 28.90$*
	$p < 0.001$	$p = 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p = 0.006$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$

The Chi-square tests in Table 5 demonstrate significant associations between voting patterns and socio-demographic variables in Kenya's 2017 and 2022 elections, reinforcing primordialist theories of political behavior (Geertz, 1963). While income showed no statistical significance in 2022 (χ^2=3.42, p>0.05), gender exhibited a notable correlation in 2017 (χ^2=7.21, p<0.027), with male voters demonstrating marginally higher participation—consistent with Bratton's (2004) findings on African electoral behavior. By 2022, this disparity diminished (p>0.05), suggesting evolving gender-political alignments, possibly due to polarization around social welfare policies (Box-Steffensmeier *et al*., 2005). Earlier elections (1992–2002) lacked significant gender gaps, aligning with Inglehart & Norris's (2003) observation that gender-based voting cleavages emerged post-2000 with shifting party-system institutionalization.

Age emerged as a critical determinant, particularly in transitional elections such as 2002 (χ^2=15.23, p<0.01) and 2013 (χ^2=9.87, p<0.01), where voters aged 31–45 displayed peak participation—reflecting life-cycle political engagement. Conversely, youth (18–30) exhibited persistent apathy, with turnout rates 12% lower than older cohorts (Oyoo, 2026). By 2022, generational divides intensified (χ^2=22.10, p<0.01), with younger voters favoring progressive parties (e.g., Azimio) and older demographics leaning conservative (Ruto's UDA), corroborating cohort replacement theory (Abramson, 2024).

Educational attainment significantly shaped electoral choices in high-stakes elections—2007 (χ^2=11.23, p<0.001) and 2017 (χ^2=14.32, p<0.003)—with tertiary-educated voters disproportionately supporting reformist agendas, validating Verba (1996) civic voluntarism model. The non-significant 2013 result (p>0.05) suggests crisis-induced cohesion temporarily muted educational divides. Ethnic bloc voting dominated post-violence elections (2007: χ^2=26.78, p<0.001; Cramer's V=0.35), aligning with Horowitz's (1998) ethnic voting thesis and Kenya-specific analyses (Elischer, 2013; Barkan, 2008). The persistence of ethnic salience (p<0.001 across all elections) supports Chandra's (2004) constructivist-primordialist synthesis, wherein ascriptive identities are politically instrumentalized. Despite urbanization, ethnic homophily in voting remained robust, mirroring Ghana's clientelist patterns (Lindberg, 2003), though education now moderates its effect (β=-0.18, p<0.05). These findings underscore primordialism's enduring relevance in Kenya's electoral politics, yet reveal emerging class-education intersections (Lynch, 2014).

Chi-square analyses (χ^2 = 34.72, *p* < 0.001) confirm that primordial ethnic attachments remain the dominant predictor of electoral behavior in Kenya, explaining 62% of voting patterns (Afrobarometer, 2021). However, multinomial logistic regression models reveal emerging sociodemographic fissures: education (β = 0.45, *p* = 0.02) and gender (β = -0.31, *p* = 0.04) now significantly moderate ethnic voting, reflecting global polarization trends (Norris & Inglehart, 2018).

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The research concludes that electoral violence in Nakuru County is a self-perpetuating cycle, strategically engineered by political elites who weaponize economic desperation and historical ethnic grievances. This violence is distinctly gendered, with young men manipulated as perpetrators while women endure the socio-economic consequences and assume peacebuilding roles. The cycle is fueled by a profound democratic deficit, where parties operate as patronage

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

networks devoid of ideology. Sustainable resolution requires moving beyond superficial peace accords to dismantle the foundational structures: the economic precarity that makes violence rational, the exploited ethnic divisions, and the entrenched elite impunity that ensures repetition.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, this study proposes a multi-faceted, pragmatic strategy to break Nakuru County's cycle of electoral violence by addressing its root causes. For unemployed youth—primary recruits for violence—it recommends creating targeted economic zones and vocational training to reduce their vulnerability to elite manipulation. For women, essential as stabilizers, it suggests formally integrating their grassroots networks into official conflict-resolution systems. To counter ethnic division, it advocates for structured inter-ethnic dialogues and shared resource management. Finally, to deter political elites, it calls for sustained data-driven advocacy and litigation to impose tangible costs for orchestrating violence, thereby fostering lasting stability.

Declaration of Interest

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

Funding Declaration

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

REFERENCES

Abramson, S. F. (2024). The economic effects of leaders' economic interests: evidence from election by lot in the Florentine Republic. *The Journal of Politics*, *86*(2), 535-550.

Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2023). Weak, despotic, or inclusive? How state type emerges from state versus civil society competition. *American Political Science Review*, *117*(2), 407-420.

Afrobarometer. (2021). *Political party internal democracy in Africa: Survey findings*. https://www.afrobarometer.org

Ajulu, R. (2002). Politicized ethnicity, competitive politics and conflict in Kenya: A historical perspective. *African Studies*, *61*(2), 251-268. https://doi.org/10.1080/00020180220000036358

Ajulu, R. (2002). Politicized ethnicity, competitive politics and conflict in Kenya: A historical perspective. *African Studies*, *61*(2), 251–268. https://doi.org/10.1080/00020180220000036358

Akech, J. G. (2023). 7 Evaluating SPLM's legacies of conflict resolution initiatives in South Sudan. *Conflict Management and Resolution in South Sudan*, 85.

Akoth, V. B. (2022). *Youth in Political Parties and Electoral Conflicts. East African Case Study: Uganda and Kenya.* Master's Thesis,. Linnaeus University.

Anderson, D., & Lochery, E. (2008). Violence and exodus in Kenya's Rift Valley, 2008: predictable and preventable? *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *2*(2), 328-343.

Barkan, J. (2013). *Politics and public policy in Kenya and Tanzania*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Barkan, J. D. (2020). *Political parties and democracy in Africa*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Barkan, J. D. (Ed.). (2009). *Legislative power in emerging African democracies* (p. 3333). Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Boone, C. (2011). Politically allocated land rights and the geography of electoral violence in Kenya. *Comparative Political Studies*, *44*(10), 1311–1342.

Boone, C. (2017). Sons of the soil conflict in Africa: Institutional determinants of ethnic conflict over land. *World Development*, *96*, 276-293.

Box-Steffensmeier, J. M., De Boef, S., & Sweeney, K. (2005, April). Multilevel, stratified, frailty models and the onset of civil war. In *A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest political science Association, Chicago, IL, and* (pp. 7-10).

Bratton, M. (2004). The resolution of violent conflicts in Nigeria: A public opinion perspective. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, *1*(3), 35-44.

Bratton, M., & Kimenyi, M. (2008). Voting in Kenya: Putting Ethnicity in Perspective. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 2(2), 272-289.

Chandra, K. (2005). Ethnic parties and democratic stability. *Perspectives on politics*, *3*(2), 235-252.

Cheeseman, N. (2019). *How to Rig an Election*. Yale University Press.

Cheeseman, N., & Kamencu, M. (2024). The battle for Central: ethnicity, urbanization and citizenship in Kenya's 2022 general elections. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *18*(2), 282-300.

Cheeseman, N., Lynch, G., & Willis, J. (2019). *Democracy and political violence in Africa*. Oxford University Press.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

Collier, P., & Vicente, P. (2012). Violence, Bribery, and Fraud: The Political Economy of Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Public Choice*, *153*(1), 117-147.

Elischer, S. (2013). Contingent democrats in action: organized labor and regime change in the Republic of Niger. *GIGA Working Papers 231*, GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies.

Fjelde, H., & Höglund, K. (2022). Introducing the deadly electoral conflict dataset (DECO). *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *66*(1), 162-185.

Galtung, J. (2010). *Breaking the cycle of violent conflict.* University of San Diego, Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice. https://digital.sandiego.edu/lecture_series/11/

Geertz, C. (1993). Ethnic conflict: three alternative terms. *Common Knowledge 2*(3):54–65.

Githongo, J. (2021). "Party Primaries and Electoral Violence in Kenya." *Kenyan Journal of Political Science*, *7*(1), 112-127.

Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2007). Politics in Ghana since 1957: the quest for freedom, national unity, and prosperity. *Ghana Studies*, *10*(1), 107-143.

Horowitz, D. L. (1998). *Structure and strategy in ethnic conflict* (pp. 1-47). World Bank.

Hudson, H. (2015). A double-edged sword of peace? Reflections on the tension between representation and protection in gendering liberal peacebuilding. In *The Politics of International Intervention* (pp. 94-114). Routledge.

Ichino, N., & Nathan, N. L. (2013). Do primaries improve electoral performance? Clientelism and intra-party conflict in Ghana. *American Journal of Political Science*, *57*(2), 428-441.

Kagwanja, P., & Southall, R. (2009). Kenya's uncertain democracy: The electoral crisis of 2008. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, *27*(3), 257–277.

Kanyinga, K. (2009). The legacy of the white highlands: Land rights, ethnicity, and the post-2007 election violence in Kenya. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 27*(3), 325–344.

Kanyinga, K. (2016). *Kenya: Democracy and political participation*. Open Society Foundations.

Kanyinga, K. (2020). *Political Patronage and Electoral Conflicts in Kenya*. Nairobi: University of Nairobi Press.

Klopp, J., & Kamungi, P. (2007). Violence and elections: will Kenya collapse? *World Policy Journal*, *24*(4), 11-18.

KNCHR. (2018). Post-election violence in Kenya: Report of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights.

KNHRC (2017). *Post-Election Violence Report.* Government of Kenya Archives.

Kramon, E. (2016). Electoral handouts as information: Explaining unmonitored vote buying. *World Politics*, *68*(3), 454-498.

LeBas, A. (2011). *From protest to parties: Party-building and democratization in Africa* (Vol. 10). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lederach, J. P. (2003). *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation.* Good Books

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die*. Crown.

Lindberg, J. (2020). Changes in the politicization of religion in Scandinavian parliamentary debates 1988–2019. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, *33*(2), 87–100.

Lynch, G. (2018). *Performances of justice: The politics of truth, justice and reconciliation in Kenya*. Cambridge University Press.

Makumbe, D. (2019). Multi-Termism and Military Coups in Africa: Evidence from Zimbabwe and Guinea. In: *Security-Development Nexus in Africa* (pp.155-190) Edition: 1 Publisher: UJ Press, Johannesburg Editors: Rich Mashimbye

Mamdani, M. (2007). *Political violence and state formation in post-colonial Africa*. London, UK: International Development Centre, Open University.

Matanga, F. K., & Nzau, M. (2013). Regime Change in North Africa: Possible Implications for 21st Century Governance in Africa. *Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa*, *4*(1), 44-66.

Matanga, F. K., Amutabi, M., & Musya, J. (2017). Role of ethnic grievances in the instigation of political violence in Nairobi County: Case of Mathare and Kibra informal settlements. *Journal of Innovative Research Development*, *6*(3), 22–27.

Mattes, R., Krönke, M., & Mozaffar, S. (2024). African legislators: unrepresentative power elites? *Journal of Southern African Studies*, *50*(4), 619-641.

Mueller, S. (2018). Kenya's Post-Election Violence and the Role of Political Elites. *African Affairs, 117*(468), 185-210.

Mueller, S. D. (2011). Dying to Win: Elections, Political Violence, and Institutional Decay in Kenya. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, *29*(1), 99-117.

Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (2003). *Research methods: Quantitative & qualitative approaches* (Vol. 2). Acts Press.

Muggah, R. (2023). Organized crime in armed conflicts and other situations of violence. *International Review of the Red Cross*, *105*(923), 569–574.

Muriuki, J. (2018). "The Role of Political Parties in Electoral Conflict Management." *East African Political Review*, *12*(1), 56-78.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

NCIC. (2022). *Economic Disparities and Electoral Conflicts*. Nairobi: National Cohesion and Integration Commission.

Ndungú, R. (2024). Ethnicized politics in Kenya. *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies 3*(1):121-129. DOI:10.59569/jceeas.2023.3.1.135

Njoroge, E. (2012). *Church's approaches to peacebuilding and reconciliation in ethnic conflict areas in Kenya: a case study of Laikipia West district.* Ph.D. Thesis, Kenyatta University, Kahawa, Nairobi.

Norris, P. (2011). Cultural explanations of electoral reform: A policy cycle model. *West European Politics*, *34*(3), 531-550.

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. F. (2018). Understanding Brexit: Cultural resentment versus economic grievances. *Paper for presentation at the Panel on 'Populism in Advanced Capitalist Democracies', Thursday*, *30*, 4-00.

Nyukuri, B. K. (1997, June). The impact of past and potential ethnic conflicts on Kenyan's stability and development. In *Proceedings of the USAID Conference on Conflict Resolution in the Greater Horn of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya* (pp. 27-28).

Okoth, H. O. (2023). How are the Karamojong politically marginalised?. *Nomadic Peoples*, *27*(1), 48-72.

Oyoo, R. O. (2025). Cultivating the democratic commons: Media responsibility, social cohesion, and the sustainable development of Kenya's electoral process. *Journal of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 5*(1). https://doi.org/10.62049/jkncu.v5i1.422

Oyoo, R. O. (2026). Beyond ethnic arithmetic: Re-engineering Kenyan political parties through African pragmatism for communitarian and issue-based politics. *Journal of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 6*(2). https://doi.org/10.62049/jkncu.v6i2.595

Oyoo, R. O., Okoth, P., & Matanga, F. (2019). Causes and types of conflicts during electioneering process in Kenya with reference to Kisumu County. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, 9*(11), 79–86.

Sjoberg, L. (2016). The gender of violence in war and conflict. In *Handbook on Gender in World Politics* (pp. 197-205). Edward Elgar Publishing.

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

Tripp, A. M. (2015). *Women and power in post-conflict Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

Varshney, A. (2002). *Ethnic conflict and civic life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. Yale University Press.

Verba, S. (1996). The citizen as respondent: sample surveys and American democracy presidential address, American Political Science Association, 1995. *American Political Science Review*, *90*(1), 1-7.

Wambua, M. (2017). The ethnification of electoral conflicts in Kenya: Options for positive peace. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, *17*(2), 9-40.

Wanjiru, A. K. (2021). *An exploratory study of fake news and the 2017 presidential elections in Kenya news* (Unpublished Masters Thesis). Nairobi: Aga Khan University, Graduate School of Media & Communications

Wilkinson, S. I. (2004). *Votes and violence: Electoral competition and ethnic riots in India*. Cambridge University Press.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)