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Can the Quiet Be Sustained? Civil Society Organizations in Pre-Elections Peacebuilding; Insights from Kisumu's Hotspot Zones

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ABSTRACT

The reintroduction of multi-party democracy 1992, the consequent operationalization of devolved governance and digitization of the electoral process in 2013, were all critical junctures serving as indicators of a maturing Kenyan democracy. Yet, most of the Kenya's subsequent elections have consistently revealed that Kenya still has a long way to go insofar as electoral integrity is concerned. This study investigates the paradox of peaceful electoral outcomes in Kisumu County during the 2022 general elections, despite the region's history of conflict. It focuses on the critical interventions of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in pre-election peacebuilding efforts, particularly within historically volatile contexts – listed by Kenya's Government before 2022 elections as "hotspots". Employing a qualitative research design, the paper captures the lived experiences of local CSOs and other electoral stakeholders. The paper identifies threE key typologies of CSOs: ad-hoc conflict response arrangements, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). The findings elucidate how these organizations effectively mobilized community-based strategies, fostering trust and collaboration, while also highlighting their challenges in sustaining long-term impact due to temporally limitation; top-down-based peace-building designs, resource volatility and the existence of an optimal conditions for thriving of political corruption. Importantly, the research reveals that the peaceful nature of the election results in the hotspot zones of Kisumu County was shaped by a combination of CSO efforts, evolving political consciousness, especially of the youthful voters, and the electorate's collective memory of the repercussions of past violence. The paper therefore calls for a re-politicization of peacebuilding and an across-the-electoral cycle peace-building approach. It emphasizes the necessity for committed ethical and empathetic leadership, and a comprehensive, structurally-informed approach to addressing entrenched electoral conflicts in Kenya.

Keywords: CSOs, pre-elections; peacebuilding; political conflicts, Kisumu County, conflict hotspots.

INTRODUCTION

The trajectory of political development in Kenya has witnessed a significant evolution since the country's inaugural general election in March and April 1920[1]. During this seminal moment, the African populace was excluded from suffrage rights, reflecting the deep-seated colonial structures that dominated the political landscape at the very infant stages of Kenya as a colonial state (McGregor, 2012; Maxon & Ofcansky, 2014). A transformative shift would occur in March 1957 when Africans were first represented through the allocation of eight seats, marking a watershed moment in Kenya's quest for political self-determination (Hornsby, 2013; Maxon & Ofcansky, 2014). However, it wasn't until the 1961 elections that universal suffrage was fully realized, albeit with reservations, as 20 seats were preserved for non-Kenyan communities, specifically Europeans, Indians, and Asians. This highlighted continuities in colonial influences on African solutions to African problems in the domain of politics and public leadership (Hornsby, 2013; McGregor, 2012; Maxon & Ofcansky, 2014). The attainment of independence in 1963 marked a pivotal juncture when Kenya assumed full control over

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1920_East_Africa_Protectorate_general_election.

its electoral processes and symbolized the culmination of decades of not just protracted struggle, but also compromise for political autonomy between the African elite and none-empathetic extractive-minded British colonizers (Bedasso, 2012).

However, if political independence and the consequent recognition of Kenya as part of the family of nations, marked by the raising of the Kenyan flag in New Yolk on 16th December 1963 symbolized anything; then it was about an hitherto unimagined intensification of political competition, a development that continues to shape Kenya's post-independence elections. What followed were attempts to consolidate and to legalize political outmaneuvering of opponents through a number of Constitutional Amendments (see table 1). The nascent years of independence witnessed the dissolution of the Senate in 1966, driven by political calculations aimed at consolidating power in the run-up to forthcoming elections and setting in motion a regressive trajectory, culminating in the abolition of multi-party democracy -formalized through the introduction of section 2A in to the Constitution in 1982 through Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act of 1982 (Kamunde-Aquino, 2014). These calculated measures paved the way for the electoral dominance of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) in subsequent elections spanning 1969, 1974, 1979, 1983, and 1988 (African Elections Database, 2012; Maxon & Ofcansky, 2014; Sternberger, Vogel, Nohlen & Landfried, 1978).

The reintroduction of multi-party democracy in 1992 through the politico-legal instrument of the Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act No. 12 of 1991 was heralded as a milestone in Kenya's democratic reawakening, yet the elections that followed—1992, 1997, and 2007—revealed enduring continuities in the deployment of ethnicity, violence, and state resources as tools of electoral manipulation (Branch, 2011; Mueller, 2008). Rather than ushering in a truly pluralistic political culture, the liberalization of the political space deepened factionalism, as elites mobilized ethnic identities to consolidate regional power blocs (Kadima & Owuor, 2006; Berman, Eyoh & Kymlicka, 2004). The 2007 post-election violence, which left over 1,300 people dead and displaced more than 600,000, laid bare the structural weaknesses of electoral administration, the compromised nature of the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK), and the centrality of the presidency as the ultimate prize in a zero-sum contest (HRW, 2008; Kanyinga, 2009). This violent episode served not only as a national trauma but also as a powerful indictment of Kenya's failure to build robust, impartial institutions capable of mediating electoral disputes peacefully and credibly (Cheeseman, 2008; Klopp & Kamungi, 2008). Although the 2002 election was celebrated as a turning point—marking the literal demise of KANU's dominance and the de-facto commencement of genuine issue-based multi-party politics—the promise of a maturing democracy was quickly eroded by the persistence of ethnic polarization, campaign-related conflicts, and procedural irregularities, regularized election-related legal battles that continued to define subsequent electoral cycles.

In the post-2010 period, significant institutional reforms—anchored in the promulgation of the new Constitution—sought to redefine Kenya's electoral and governance architecture (Ghai & Galli, 2010; D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016). The establishment of an independent judiciary, the creation of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), and the devolution of power to 47 county governments were designed to decentralize authority and reduce the stakes of presidential elections (Bosire & Gikonyo, 2011). Additionally, the integration of technology through biometric voter registration and the electronic transmission of results aimed to mitigate electoral fraud and improve transparency (Kasera & Otieno, 2025; Kanyinga & Okello, 2010; Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis, 2016). However, despite these far-reaching reforms, the 2013 and 2017 elections remained mired in controversy, culminating in the first-ever worldwide annulment of a presidential elections results by the Supreme Court on grounds of procedural irregularities (Supreme Court of Kenya, 2017; Odote, 2019). Consequently, while Kenya's legal and institutional frameworks have evolved, the persistence of neopatrimonial practices, elite manipulation, and ethnic clientelism underscores those procedural reforms and are yet to fundamentally transform the underlying political culture (Cheeseman & Branch, 2016; Lynch, 2014). These dynamics reflect a paradox of change and continuity: Kenya has advanced in terms of democratic form, but the substantive essence of credible, inclusive, and peaceful elections remains elusive—constantly deferred by the interplay of historical legacies and contemporary political pathologies, best described as neopatrimonialism and competitive authoritarianism (Branch & Cheesemann, 2009).

It is against the backdrop of such a ttumultuous political history that pre-elections peacebuilding in Kenya has emerged as an essential strategy to safeguard electoral integrity and prevent violence during and after elections. Given the cyclically vicious nature of electoral violence in Kenya, particularly in electoral conflict-prone regions such as Kisumu County, and widespread view that state-based structures and processes may never render the needed pro-peace electoral environment, the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in pre-election peacebuilding becomes central. CSOs initiatives become so critical as they are expected to foster a conducive environment for peaceful elections by identifying and addressing underlying tensions, promote dialogue among political actors, and engaging communities in reconciliation efforts. The recurrent post-election violence that has marred Kenya's democratic journey underscores the need for proactive conflict prevention efforts that commence well before election day. By mitigating risks and enhancing trust in the electoral process, pre-election conflict prevention initiatives spearheaded by CSOs can play a vital role in breaking the cycle of violence that has historically followed Kenya's elections, thereby contributing to the broader goal of consolidating the country ‘s electoral democracy.

However, despite such an expected and significance role of the CSOs, much of the democratization and peacebuilding literature in Kenya remain statist. While the prevailing scholarly discourse has predominantly focused on state-centric narratives and if they focus on CSO they do so from the vantage point of amalgamation of CSOs undertaking electoral observation (Onuh, & Ike, 2021; Sjögren, 2022; Nyang‘au, n.d.; Abdullahi, 2015; Shakila, 2010; Nielson, Hyde & Kelley, 2019); there is a notable gap in understanding the instrumental role played by CSOs in consolidating Kenya‘s electoral democracy during the hot period of campaigns and the attendant conflict prevention processes. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the contributions of CSOs that undertook pre-election conflict prevention initiatives within the electoral conflict-prone zones (GoK, 2022) of Kisumu County during Kenya‘s 2022 general elections—a region historically marked by opposition politics and a frequent epicentre of electoral violence.

The Kenya 2022 elections provide a very relevant content to make such an analysis. The 2022 general elections in Kenya were, in many respects, a continuation of the country's cyclical electoral contradictions—marked by allegations of technology-based manipulation, deeply entrenched ethnic bloc voting, intense political polarization, and another highly contested legal battle over presidential results adjudicated by the Supreme Court (Odote, 2022; Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis, 2016). These patterns—by now familiar—reflected the persistence of Kenya’s hybrid democratic reality, often oscillating between formal institutional improvements and informal power negotiations shaped by historical divisions (Cheeseman, 2015; Kanyinga & Okello, 2010). Yet, amidst this atmosphere of anticipated post-election unrest, something notably paradoxical occurred: in Kisumu County—especially the historically volatile slum areas of Kondele, Obunga, Manyatta, Nyalenda, Nyamasaria and the Kisumu-Kericho ethnic boundary, regarded as the symbolic epicenters of Luo political expression—there were no riots, no violence. Instead, especially in the most notorious Kondele, in an unexpected gesture of civic calm, members of the public and police officers were captured in viral images celebrating together, laughing and shaking hands in the streets and in police patrol cars.

This dramatic departure from the norm unsettled long-standing assumptions about predictable violence and offers an analytical opening into the often-overlooked but growing influence of civil society organizations (CSOs) in shaping electoral behavior. This paper thus seeks to unpack this paradox by focusing on the role of CSOs in pre-election interventions in the lead-up to the August 2022 general elections in Kenya, particularly in historically high-risk zones of Kisumu. In the context of a travel alert issued by US embassy in Kenya on the 5th of August warning US citizens about moving into Kisumu County[1], and an earlier identification of most of Kisumu county’s usual electoral violence hotpots – Kondele, Manyatta, Obunga, Nyalenda, and KisumuKericho border- by the National Integration and Cohesion Commission (NCIC) in early 2022 conflict mapping report as dangerous zones where post-elections violence was likely to break out (NCIC, 2022), it is important to assess the factors leading to the surprise of both the US and Kenyan governments as well as many peace and conflict students whose predictions about the unavoidability of status quo were terribly challenged post-2022 polls in Kisumu County. The Kenyan government had additionally, on the eve, of 2022 lections overly securitized these

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regions with beefed up tens of police officers in the anticipation that post-elections violence would erupt, once the Luo presidential contender, Mr. Raila Odinga, was announced as having lost to the now president Ruto. An alternative explanation for these occurences is sought through an examination of CSOs. To complement and challenge state-based formal reforms explanations that define democratization and peacebuilding literature. Moreover, this is one of the first analyses, that assesses this paradox witnessed in Kisumu County in post 2022 polls, thereby presenting fresh empirical insights as well.

Consequently, this study explores the strategies employed by CSOs to mitigate pre-election tensions and prevent electoral violence in Kisumu County. The study findings offer a localized understanding of how CSOs in Kisumu County navigate the challenges of electoral conflict and contribute to peaceful political transitions, thereby addressing a critical gap in the broader peacebuilding and democratization discourses.

No.	ENABLING ACT	AMENDMENT
1	Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act No.28 of 1964	Established the office of the Vice President who would be appointed from the elected Members by the House of Representatives.
2	Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act No. 38 of 1964.	Repealed the provision allowing Regions to levy independent regional revenue, hence making the regions fully dependent on grants from the Central Government. This weakened the *majimbo* system by centralizing power.
3	Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act No. 14 of 1965	Amended the Parliamentary approval for a state of emergency from a majority (65 % in both houses) to a simple majority. In addition, the majority requirement for amending the Constitution was reduced from 90% in the Senate and 75% in the House of Representatives to 65% in both Houses.
4	Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act No. 17 of 1966	Provided that if a Member of Parliament was absent for more than eight consecutive sittings without the permission of the Speaker or were imprisoned for a term exceeding six months, then they would lose their seat in Parliament. The President could, however, pardon a Member of Parliament guilty of the above. The aim of this amendment was to ensure the attendance of Members of Parliament to their Parliamentary sessions. It also granted the President extensive powers to appoint persons to the various positions in public service, as well as terminate them at their discretion.
5	Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act No. 17 of 1966.	This amendment required a Member of Parliament who resigned from the political party that sponsored him during the election at a time when that Party was still a parliamentary party, to vacate his seat. This amendment was effected after the ruling party (Kenya African National Union) experienced an outflow of sitting Members of Parliament to the Kenya People's Union.
6	Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act No. 18 of 1966.	Removed the exercise of emergency powers from Parliament and vested the same in the President. The President could therefore order detention without trial at his own discretion.
7	Constitutional Amendment Act No. 40 of 1966	Established a unicameral legislature by abolishing the Senate and merging the two Houses.

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8	Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act No. 16 of 1968	Removed the last traces of *majimboism.* This was achieved by abolishing the Provincial Councils, repealing all past laws of the regional assemblies, and deleting from the Constitution all references to provincial and district boundaries.
9	Constitutional Amendment Act No. 45 of 1968	Provided that the President can be elected through a General Election, as opposed to election by the National Assembly.
10	Constitutional of Kenya Act No.5 of 1969	This Act was passed in 1969. It was a consolidating Act, bringing together all the constitutional amendments since 1963. Other amendments made include: removing the powers to appoint the members of the Electoral Commission from the Speaker of the National Assembly, and vesting the same on the President.
11	Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act of 1974	Lowered the voting age from 21 years to 18 years. The Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act No. 2 of 1974

12	Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act of 1982	This significant amendment introduced Section 2A to the Constitution, which converted Kenya into a one party state. The effect of this amendment was that all political power in Kenya was vested in the ruling party, the Kenya African National Union ('KANU'). One had to be a member of KANU to vie for any political office. Furthermore, at the time of this Amendment, Kenya was experiencing strong political tension after the attempted *coup d'etat* in August 1982.

Constitutional Amendments Up to 1969 (including Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act of 1974 and Constitution of Kenya Amendment Act of 1982).

Source: Nelly Kamunde-Aquino (2014); REDD+ Law Project - Briefing Paper

Research Problem

Kenya's democratic journey has been marked by persistent challenges, with elections frequently marred by violence, ethnic polarization, and contested results, undermining public trust in the electoral process. While much scholarly attention has focused on state-led electoral reforms, the crucial role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in pre-election conflict prevention remains underexplored, particularly at the localized level, where tensions are most palpable. The existing literature tends to generalize CSO interventions or reduces them to their role in election monitoring and observation, overlooking the strategic and context-sensitive work that CSOs perform in volatile electoral environments. This gap is especially pronounced in regions like Kisumu County—historically an electoral hotspot—where political dynamics, socio-economic grievances, and historical marginalization converge, fueling recurring cycles of pre- and post-election violence.

The 2022 general elections exemplify the paradox that underpins Kenya's electoral democracy. On the one hand, the elections represented a shift towards more transparent and inclusive processes, aided by constitutional reforms and technological advancements. However, the 2022 election cycle also witnessed deeply entrenched ethnic bloc voting, allegations of technology-based manipulation, and intense political polarization, culminating in another highly contested legal battle over the presidential results. Despite this, the anticipated post-election violence—particularly in Kisumu, a county known for its history of unrest—was conspicuously absent. Instead, images of voters and other members of the public and police officers celebrating together in the streets of Kondele signaled a potential shift in electoral behavior, prompting a reconsideration of the role of CSOs in shaping peaceful electoral outcomes.

This unexpected turn of events challenges long-held assumptions about electoral violence in Kenya and opens up an analytical window into the growing influence of CSOs in fostering electoral peace. The absence of violence in Kisumu, despite the region's history of political conflict, highlights the importance of pre-election conflict prevention and the strategic interventions of CSOs in high-risk areas, but also presents a niche in research on the nexus of structural factors and one-off good yet unexpected outcomes. However, the absence of focused empirical research on the role of CSOs during the pre-election phase limits our understanding of their contributions to mitigating tensions, preventing violence, and promoting a peaceful political transition.

The gap in understanding how CSOs engage with local communities, mediate political tensions, and counter hate speech in the lead-up to elections is significant, especially in the context of Kisumu County. This gap also hinders the development of effective policy frameworks that can harness the full potential of CSOs in peacebuilding and electoral conflict prevention. By exploring the strategies employed by CSOs in Kisumu during the 2022 elections, this study seeks to address this gap and provide a localized understanding of how CSOs navigate electoral conflict, contribute to peaceful political transitions, and strengthen Kenya's electoral democracy. Importantly, the paper seeks to examine whether pre-elections peacebuilding has the power to transform the structural issues that hinder genuine reforms and make sustainability post-elections peace a none

guarantee, 2022 elections notwithstanding. This research is therefore crucial for informing context-sensitive interventions and advancing academic debates on democratization and peacebuilding in Kenya.

The Conceptual Framework

The central concept in this study is peace-building and CSOs. The evolution of peacebuilding as a distinct conceptual and operational framework owes much to Johan Galtung's critical interrogation of dominant approaches to conflict resolution in the mid-20th century. In his seminal 1976 article, *Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding,* Galtung introduced peacebuilding not merely as a third path, but as a radical departure from the prevailing logics of intervention. His critique emerged from a deeper ontological shift—an expanded understanding of peace and violence itself. Galtung defined violence not just as direct physical harm but also as structural, embedded in political repression and economic exploitation, and cultural, sustained through ideologies, traditions, and institutions that legitimize inequality. With this broader conceptual lens, he dismissed peacekeeping as a dissociative and externally imposed buffer that sought to freeze violence without questioning the oppressive status quo. Similarly, he found peacemaking overly narrow and elitist—focused primarily on negotiations among warring elites rather than the deeper contradictions in society that perpetuate cyclical violence. Galtung thus developed peacebuilding as a normative and practical agenda that targets the root causes of conflict through systemic transformation, emphasizing equity (versus domination), entropy (versus elitism), and symbiosis (versus isolation). It is this associative, inclusive, and structurally aware approach to conflict that laid the foundation for peacebuilding to be adopted and operationalized by the United Nations in its 1992 Agenda for Peace and by civil society organizations globally.

The practical relevance of Galtung's peacebuilding paradigm has grown significantly in the context of electoral politics, especially in transitional and conflict-prone democracies such as Kenya. Unlike earlier approaches that emphasized security and containment—often through police deployments, curfews, and militarized deterrence—Galtung's framework provides a more sustainable roadmap for dealing with the latent structural and cultural drivers of electoral violence. Electoral conflicts in Kenya, particularly in urban hotspots like Kondele and the Nyakach-Kericho border, are rarely spontaneous; rather, they are deeply embedded in historical marginalization, politicized ethnic identities, socioeconomic exclusion, and weak institutional trust. Civil Society Organizations working on pre-election peacebuilding in these regions are increasingly adopting strategies aligned with Galtung's vision—focusing on relational repair, inclusive dialogue, youth and women engagement, and transforming local perceptions of power, justice, and belonging. Theoretically, these actors seek not just to prevent immediate outbreaks of violence but to disrupt the structural cycles that make electoral periods so volatile. In this regard, peacebuilding is no longer a post-conflict recovery mechanism but a proactive, grassroots-centered, and politically conscious practice that contests the traditional security-first model. Cravo (2018) rightly observes that Galtung's peacebuilding remains "maximalist and ambitious"—yet it is precisely this ambition that is necessary for contexts like Kenya's, where peace cannot be achieved without addressing the deeper infrastructures of violence that lie beneath the ballot. This makes peacebuilding not only an academic framework but also a political and moral imperative in pre-election interventions.

Following from the central concept of peacebuilding, this study is anchored in two interrelated theoretical perspectives—Johan Galtung's concepts of negative and positive peace (1969) and John Paul Lederach's theory of conflict transformation (1997)—which jointly offer a critical lens through which to interrogate the very practice of peace-building in the context of strategic roles, dilemmas, and limitations of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in pre-election peace-building. Galtung's distinction between negative peace, understood as the mere absence of direct violence, and positive peace, defined as the presence of justice, equity, and harmonious social relations, is particularly useful in evaluating whether the apparent calm experienced during Kenya's 2022 general elections was a reflection of substantive peace or a temporary suppression of underlying tensions. Given the country's historical pattern of post-election violence, often fueled by ethnopolitical mobilization, institutional mistrust, and perceived exclusion, the study critically engages with CSO interventions to assess whether they aimed merely at conflict management (securing quiet) or sought to lay the groundwork for more enduring, transformative outcomes. In this framework, pre-election peace-building is not reduced to

the prevention of violence alone, but is evaluated for its ability to restructure political discourse, redress historical grievances, and promote inclusivity within fragile communities such as Kondele, Obunga, and the NyakachKericho border region.

Complementing Galtung's insights, Lederach's theory of conflict transformation introduces an important relational and processual dimension to peace-building, especially within the temporal and socio-political space of elections. Unlike conventional conflict resolution models that prioritize top-down, elite-centric negotiations and crisis containment, Lederach advocates for a "bottom-up" approach that emphasizes community-based, relational engagement capable of addressing the structural and attitudinal roots of conflict. In the pre-election context, this theoretical angle allows the study to examine whether CSOs in Kisumu County functioned merely as technical implementers of donor-driven peace programs or as transformative agents working to reframe antagonistic political behaviors and foster civic cultures rooted in trust, dialogue, and mutual recognition. The theory sharpens the study's focus on how CSOs engaged not only in mitigating tensions through early warning and peace messaging, but also in facilitating new relationships between rival communities, promoting youth agency, and redefining the meaning of political participation outside the confines of ethnic loyalty or electoral violence. This approach allows for a more granular critique of how civil society navigates the delicate balance between neutrality and activism, particularly in settings where state legitimacy is fragile and formal institutions are often complicit or ineffectual in conflict prevention.

Further enriching this framework is an implicit engagement with critical scholarship on non-state actor agency and democratization from below. Much of the literature on electoral violence and conflict prevention in Kenya tends to adopt a statist bias, positioning the state as the principal custodian of peace, law, and electoral integrity. However, this study challenges such assumptions by foregrounding the capacity of CSOs—precisely because of their community embeddedness, relative independence from state patronage, and moral legitimacy—to identify early signals of electoral tension and to respond in ways that state actors often cannot. These organizations possess the flexibility to traverse the formal-informal divide, tapping into local networks, vernacular knowledge, and relational capital to implement context-sensitive interventions. The theoretical lens therefore shifts the analytical focus from reactive, institutional peacekeeping to proactive, pre-election peace-building, situating CSOs not merely as operational instruments but as normative actors in Kenya's evolving democratic landscape. Taken together, Galtung's and Lederach's theories enable the study to situate pre-election peace-building as a dynamic and contested political process—one that is shaped by power relations, historical memory, and the agency of civil society in resisting both the inertia of conflict cycles and the seduction of performative calm. The question of whether "the quiet can be sustained" thus becomes a theoretical interrogation of peace as a lived, evolving, and politically negotiated condition rather than a fixed electoral outcome.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the period leading up to and following Kenya's 2022 general elections, with fieldwork commencing in March 2022 and ending in August 2023. Data collection involved direct observation of political campaigns and peacebuilding activities, as well as in-depth interviews with key actors. A qualitative research design was adopted to investigate the strategies employed by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in pre-election peacebuilding efforts aimed at preventing post-election conflict in Kisumu County, a region historically marked by electoral volatility[2]. The qualitative approach was particularly suited to this study because it facilitated the generation of rich, descriptive, and contextually grounded data, offering nuanced insights into the operations, motivations, and adaptive practices of CSOs operating in high-risk electoral environments. This design also allowed for methodological flexibility, enabling the researcher to respond to emerging themes and shifting dynamics on the ground (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Central to the inquiry was an emphasis on capturing lived experiences and practical knowledge—elements often overlooked by quantitative approaches—

[2] https://ke.usembassy.gov/update-on-security-alert/.

which were critical in understanding how CSOs conceptualized, mobilized, and implemented their peacebuilding interventions amid uncertain and often tense political conditions.

Data was collected through 51 key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted with a wide range of actors, including CSO representatives, local peace actors, administrators, electoral officers, and community leaders from conflictprone zones such as Obunga Manyatta, Kondele, Nyalenda, and the Nyakach-Kericho border. 25 interviews were conducted between March and August 2022, while 26 between Agust 2022 and August 2023. The selection of participants was purposive, guided by their involvement in or knowledge of pre-election conflict prevention initiatives within these areas. The KIIs were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, which provided consistency across interviews while allowing for deeper probing into emerging issues. Interviews were conducted in English and Kiswahili based on respondents' preferences, and were audio-recorded with prior consent, then transcribed for analysis.

The data was analyzed using Atlas.ti Web, a qualitative data analysis software that supported systematic coding and organization of the transcripts. The analytical process involved the development of a coding framework aligned with the research questions, followed by iterative coding and categorization to identify patterns and generate insights. Field notes taken during and after interviews were also used to enhance contextual understanding. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality was maintained, and data was stored securely. The study also ensured voluntary participation, with respondents being informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. This methodology enabled the researcher to document the methods and mechanisms through which CSOs engaged in pre-election conflict prevention in electoral hotspot zones.

RESULTS

This section presents the study findings in the context of the theoretical lenses adopted by the study. The study sought to explore four questions: What is the nature of CSOs involved in pre-elections peacebuilding in Kisumu County hotspot zones? What are the key strategies employed by the CSOs to lay the ground for post-elections peace? Can it be said that CSOs' peacebuilding interventions in the lead up to 2022 polls were the sole causative factors for the unexpected quiet/calm including Kondele hotspot zone after the announcement of the 2022 polls? How can we make sense of these findings theoretically – negative versus positive peace (Galtung, 1969) and through the lens of conflict transformation (Lederach, 1997)? The study concludes by highlighting key areas it contributes to extant literature on peacebuilding and democratization in democratizing zones.

Types of CSOs involved in pre-Elections Peace-building

This first part of the results presents the findings emanating from the study question: What is the nature of CSOs involved in pre-elections peacebuilding in Kisumu County hotspot zones? The study established that the conflict prevention landscape in Kisumu County is marked by a pluralistic ecosystem of civil society actors, each not only characterized by distinct operational frameworks, mandates, and constituencies but also differently placed to undertake pre-elections peace-building interventions in a volatile zone like Kisumu County. Evidence point out that these actors, operating in both formal and informal registers, have historically filled the gap left by the state in mitigating electoral and communal violence, particularly in the county's known hotspot zones such as Kondele, Nyalenda, Obunga, Manyatta, conflict hotbed of Kisumu-Kericho border. The study identifies three dominant typologies of civil society organizations (CSOs) involved in pre-election interventions: and NonOrganized or Ad-Hoc Structures such as local peace committees; Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). Each category brings unique contributions to the peace architecture while reflecting different degrees of formality, legitimacy, and sustainability.

Non-Organized/Ad-Hoc Conflict Prevention CSOs

Ad-hoc conflict prevention actors are among the most dynamic but also most volatile components of Kisumu County's peacebuilding landscape. These actors typically consist of informal structures such as local peace

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committees, community-driven advocacy groups, community vigilantes, such the one operating in Kondele and Obunga bases, or networks that form quickly in response to acute conflict triggers, especially around election periods or high-tension events. Unlike formalized organizations, ad-hoc groups often lack the institutional permanence or long-term operational capacity of CBOs or INGOs, but their strength lies in their ability to quickly mobilize and respond to and/or refer localized crises to relevant authorities. They act as intermediaries between the community and more formal peacebuilding structures, ensuring that conflict mitigation strategies are rooted in the community's immediate needs.

Examples of somewhat advanced of such ad-hoc entities in Kisumu County include local peace committee membership in the hotspot zones of Obunga, Manyatta, Kondele, and Nyalenda, which are often formed by a combination of community leaders, local activists, and concerned residents. These committees are formed under the Kenya National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management of 2014, but in terms of election ns peace-building are typically mobilized to respond to immediate threats of violence, whether during election seasons or in the wake of a local crisis. Other ad-hoc entities include social media-based groups that organize community dialogues and advocacy campaigns, grassroots women's networks that address political violence, or youth-led initiatives that focus on mitigating ethnic conflict during politically sensitive periods, especially the community vigilantes, or *boda boda* CBOs.

From this study, ad-hoc groups have several notable advantages, particularly their ability to be highly responsive and flexible in the face of conflict. Since these organizations are often born out of local networks[3], they have the contextual knowledge, cultural understanding, and the trust of the community that is often lacking in external interventions. For example, the Kondele Peace Committee, one of the most prominent peace committees in Kisumu, is composed of local community leaders, religious figures, youth leaders, and elders, all of whom are familiar with the dynamics of the area. This familiarity allows them to develop nuanced and culturally appropriate conflict mitigation strategies that have the potential for higher levels of acceptance and success.

One key strategy that these ad-hoc groups use is their ability to quickly mobilize community members during times of crisis. As one respondent from the Kondele Peace Committee remarked in an interview, "We don't wait for elections to start peace activities, we are always engaging with people in our spaces. But, when violence looms, we are able to use our existing networks to respond immediately, ensuring that things don't escalate."

However, despite their responsiveness and flexibility, ad-hoc actors face several significant challenges that affect their ability to sustain peacebuilding efforts in the long term.

The most significant challenge for ad-hoc conflict prevention actors is the lack of sustainability, largely due to the volatile and episodic nature of their funding. Similar to CBOs, many ad-hoc groups are heavily reliant on external funding from INGOs, international donors, or local government support. The funding they receive is often project-specific, short-term, and tied to specific election cycles or flashpoints in conflict. This projectbased model often results in these groups being active only during certain periods, such as the months leading up to national or local elections, when political violence is anticipated to be high. In the periods following elections, many of these groups cease operations due to a lack of funding or interest from donors. As one program officer from the Manyatta Peace Committee noted, "Once the election is over, so does the money. We are left to look for new projects, and it's hard to keep the peace initiatives going."

The external dependency on donors introduces another problem: power asymmetries. Often, local communitybased organizations or peace committees are asked to implement programs designed and funded by INGOs or other larger organizations. These larger entities often set the agenda, dictate the terms of the intervention, and control the flow of resources, which limits the autonomy of the local groups and diminishes their ability to craft locally driven solutions. One respondent from the Nyalenda Peace Committee noted, "We

[3] The local peace committees for example are chaired by retirees, especially from the Police, or Army wings of security, making them very useful structures for evidence development for conflict early response.

know what works here, but sometimes we have to change our plans because the donors want us to follow their blueprint. It can be frustrating because we are the ones on the ground."

Furthermore, political interference remains a major challenge for these ad-hoc groups, as many of them operate in highly politicized environments. In Kisumu, like other parts of Kenya, local politics often intersect with ethnic identities and patronage systems, making it difficult for peace committees or other grassroots actors to maintain neutrality. Local political actors may seek to co-opt these ad-hoc actors for their own political gain, either by aligning them with a particular party or using them to legitimize their own political agendas. For example, during the 2022 election period, several community peace committees in Kisumu were accused of being aligned with particular political factions, which undermined their legitimacy among certain segments of the community. As one respondent from the Manyatta Youth Resource Centre explained, "We had to make sure we didn't show any favor during the election period. If we were seen to support one party, we would lose our effectiveness with the people we were trying to serve. But yet this goal was difficult to attain."
These findings underscore the complex role of ad-hoc actors in conflict prevention, as well as the broader critiques of state-centric perspectives in democratization and conflict resolution. Traditional models of conflict prevention often focus on the roles of state institutions such as law enforcement, the military, or judicial bodies, with little attention paid to the informal, grassroots, and often ephemeral entities that operate on the ground. As Pouligny (2005) argues, these "invisible actors" are crucial to peacebuilding, particularly in contexts where state institutions are weak or distrustful. The Kisumu case study highlights how ad-hoc groups can serve as the first line of defense against violence, providing timely interventions and community-based solutions that more formal institutions may be unable or unwilling to implement.

However, these groups' reliance on external funding, political interference, and limited operational capacity suggests that they are not a panacea for conflict prevention, and their role in longer-term democratization and peacebuilding must be reconsidered. As Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg (2016) argue, such actors often face an inherent tension between their grassroots roots and the external demands placed upon them by donors and political actors, which can undermine their independence and effectiveness. Moreover, as the findings from this study show, their inability to maintain a consistent presence outside of high-stakes periods such as elections highlights the gaps in the broader peacebuilding framework that must be addressed if the goal is to ensure sustainable conflict prevention in Kisumu and similar contexts.

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) are among the most deeply embedded actors in the conflict prevention ecosystem of Kisumu County, particularly in politically volatile informal settlements such as Obunga, Manyatta, Kondele, Nyalenda, and Nyamasaria, and areas immediate to the Kisumu-Kericho border. These grassroots entities are uniquely positioned to respond to community tensions and structural vulnerabilities due to their proximity, relational networks, and contextual knowledge. Unlike more formalized organizations, CBOs often emerge organically in response to local grievances, identity-based tensions, or service delivery gaps. Their conflict prevention strategies are wide-ranging, encompassing civic education, youth mentorship, gender justice forums, economic empowerment, sports for peace, trauma healing, and community dialogues. Examples of such organizations include TEAMS, which focuses on women-led trauma healing and peace circles; Champions of Peace, a youth-focused group working across Kondele and Nyalenda; and KAFEADO, Champions of Peace; YEDEF-East Africa - which uses art and theatre to counter political incitement and hate speech. Others include Kondele Social Justice Centre, Manyatta Youth Resource Centre, TUFAULU Youth Group in Obunga, the Nyalenda Peace Initiative, Nyamasaria Youth Forum, Ghetto Foundation Kisumu, and Kadete CBO. These organizations reflect a vibrant ecosystem of informal civic agency that adapts to both short-term flashpoints and longer-term structural drivers of conflict.

Despite their relevance, CBOs face formidable challenges that limit their effectiveness and sustainability. Chief among these is the chronic lack of funding and institutional support. Most CBOs in Kisumu remain heavily

reliant on international donors, humanitarian agencies, and INGOs for programmatic support, training, and operational resources. This external dependency subjects them to volatile funding cycles and donor priorities, often resulting in project-based, time-bound interventions that lack continuity. As one CBO leader in Manyatta lamented, *"They only remember us when elections come. Afterwards, we are left with no funds and no platforms to continue the work."* The majority of these organizations reported being active only in the months leading to elections when donor interest in peacebuilding peaks. In the post-election period, many become dormant due to an absence of sustained funding, which undermines the long-term institutional memory and learning necessary for durable peacebuilding.

Donor requirements also compel CBOs to operate in consortia or intermediary arrangements, ostensibly to streamline financial management and reporting. However, this structure introduces power asymmetries, where local organizations are relegated to sub-contracting roles, with little influence over agenda-setting or resource distribution. As Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015) observe, this dynamic produces a form of "NGO-ization" of civil society, where grassroots entities are molded to fit externally imposed templates, often at the expense of responsiveness to local priorities and ownership of peace processes.
Further compounding this fragility is the prevalence of political interference. In Kisumu's hotspot zones, CBOs are often subjected to subtle or overt pressures from local political actors to align with particular parties or narratives. Given that electoral competition frequently overlaps with ethnic identity and patron-client networks, some CBOs risk losing legitimacy among sections of the community when they are perceived to be politically compromised. As one youth organizer in Kondele noted, *"We have to be careful what we say and who we work with. One wrong move and we are branded as 'belonging to a side'—then the trust is gone."* This has the effect of narrowing the civic space in which they operate and eroding the neutrality that is vital for effective peacebuilding. Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg (2016) argue that such politicization undermines the trust and credibility that CBOs depend on, especially when navigating inter-group tensions during election periods.

These findings not only illustrate the operational constraints facing grassroots civil society actors but also contribute to a broader critique of state-centric perspectives in conflict prevention and democratization scholarship. Traditional analyses tend to foreground formal institutions such as the police, electoral commissions, and political parties, while marginalizing the informal and community-driven mechanisms that often play pivotal roles in crisis contexts. Yet, as Pouligny (2005) notes, these "invisible actors" are indispensable to the social fabric of peacebuilding, operating in spaces where formal institutions either cannot reach or lack legitimacy. The Kisumu case reaffirms this observation by demonstrating how CBOs act as first responders, early warning nodes, and civic educators in contexts where the state's presence is either inadequate or distrusted. Furthermore, these findings resonate with Bratton and Logan (2006), who argue that informal associations and grassroots networks are often more trusted and more effective in resolving local disputes than state institutions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa's fragile democracies.

At the same time, this study adds complexity to the often optimistic literature on civil society by highlighting the limits of CBO efficacy under conditions of external dependency, financial precarity, and political cooptation. While they hold significant potential for democratization and peacebuilding, their ability to influence structural change or sustain long-term programming remains constrained by broader systemic forces. The results thus underscore the need for more sustainable, context-sensitive, and locally led approaches to peacebuilding— one that reimagines the role of CBOs not as peripheral actors but as central to democratic resilience and postconflict reconstruction. As Lewis (2010) and Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga, and Mungwa (2009) suggest, democratization from below is most effective when rooted in institutions and actors that have credibility, staying power, and rootedness in community struggles.

International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)

International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) occupy a central place in the ecosystem of conflict prevention work in Kisumu County, especially in hotspot areas historically affected by election-related violence. These organizations tend to operate with relatively greater resources, technical expertise, and established

partnerships with government actors, grassroots civil society, and global donors. Notable INGOs that have been active in Kisumu's peacebuilding space include PeaceNet Kenya**,** Hekima Institute for Peace Studies**,** Catholic Relief Services**,** Act! (Act Change Transform), and Saferworld, Mercy Corps, USAID allied INGOs, Transparency International, Plan International among others**.** Their interventions span from early warning systems, capacity-building of community peace actors, civic education, inter-ethnic dialogue facilitation, and youth empowerment programs tailored for pre- and post-election periods.

A recurring theme from the interviews was the pivotal role INGOs play in capacity building and resource mobilization for local CSOs and CBOs. As one program officer from PeaceNet noted:

"We are often the bridge between the donors and the grassroots groups. Many of these community-based actors have no systems to absorb donor funds, so we help form consortia or sub-grant through trusted networks. But yes, that limits how far they can act independently." (Program Officer, PeaceNet, Interview, June 2022)

However, this bridging role also creates systemic dependencies. Many grassroots actors depend almost entirely on INGOs for funding, technical support, and legitimacy. This dependency shapes both the timing and scope of their interventions. As one field officer from a partner CBO working with Catholic Relief Services remarked: "Our projects only come alive during the election period. That's when funding flows, that's when partners call meetings. The rest of the time, peace work is dormant." (Field Officer, KAFEADO, Interview, August 2022)

This temporal limitation points to a significant sustainability challenge, where peacebuilding becomes episodic—activated mainly during crisis-prone electoral cycles rather than being embedded in everyday community life. While INGOs often come with accountability structures, professionalism, and results-based management tools, their short project cycles**,** donor-driven priorities, and urban-based programming biases sometimes undermine the flexibility needed to respond to localized, evolving conflict dynamics.

Moreover, several respondents voiced concerns about political interference and the delicate balance INGOs must maintain in highly polarized environments. Although INGOs often have the diplomatic latitude to navigate sensitive spaces, their association with high-level actors can, paradoxically, limit their ability to engage with disaffected grassroots voices. "There's pressure to align with county government peace committees. But when those platforms are politicized, we [INGO staff] find ourselves walking a tightrope. We don't want to be seen as partisan." (Program Offfficer, Saferworld, Interview, March 2023)

This set of findings adds important nuance to the existing state-centric literature on democratization and conflict management in Kenya and the broader Sub-Saharan context. Much of the mainstream analysis tends to frame democratization as a top-down legal-institutional process, driven by electoral reform, judicial independence, and political pluralism (e.g., Cheeseman, 2015; Lynch, 2014). However, these interviews show that INGOs—through their catalytic and coordination roles—help localize democratic practices by empowering communities to organize, express grievances peacefully, and hold political actors accountable through non-state platforms. This aligns with findings from similar studies by Tadros (2011) and Orjuela (2003), who argue that INGOs, despite operational limits, contribute significantly to deliberative democracy and participatory peace processes at the local level.

INGOs in Kisumu are not merely service providers but act as powerful norm entrepreneurs, shaping the social conditions under which democratic peace becomes both conceivable and actionable. Through their peacebuilding initiatives—ranging from civic education and capacity-building to trauma healing and dialogue facilitation—they reshape local perceptions of peace, democracy, and governance. These organizations bring vital international legitimacy, resources, and expertise, and, as norm entrepreneurs, work to embed democratic ideals within the fabric of local communities. Their efforts are particularly crucial in hotspot zones, where electoral violence has historically erupted, and they engage in pre-election conflict prevention, striving to mitigate the risks of violence before the election cycle begins. However, the challenge, as the data reveals, is ensuring that their impact is not ephemeral or confined to electoral cycles. One interviewee explained, "Our

projects are often tied to electoral timelines. Donors are more interested in funding peace initiatives right before or after elections, and that creates a short-term focus for most of our peace programs.

The real work of building sustainable peace and democratic structures cannot happen in those brief windows." This comment underscores the paradox that while INGOs inject necessary resources and technical expertise, their efforts are often concentrated in politically charged periods, limiting their influence on long-term democratic transformation and pre-election peacebuilding. Moreover, political interference complicates their role; local political actors often seek to co-opt INGOs, either by aligning with them or accusing them of partisan interests, which can undermine the credibility and neutrality these organizations strive to maintain. As one respondent from an INGO noted, "We have had to tread carefully because the moment we get too close to certain political parties or figures, we risk losing credibility and the neutrality that is crucial for our mission." Despite these obstacles, INGOs remain key players in the democratization process in Kisumu, acting as intermediaries between international donors and local civil society. They provide the necessary resources for democracy promotion, human rights advocacy, and inclusive governance, all of which are essential in pre-election peacebuilding. However, their long-term effectiveness hinges on their ability to avoid becoming politically instrumentalized and to transition from project-based interventions to fostering locally driven, apolitical peacebuilding processes. As another respondent concluded, "If INGOs are to leave a lasting legacy, they must learn to transition from project-based interventions to supporting local capacities for self-sustaining peacebuilding."

Strategies Employed by CSOs to lay Ground for Peaceful During and Post-2022 Elections

This section presents findings from the second thematic question explored in this study: What are the key strategies employed by the CSOs to lay the ground for post-elections peace? This study finds that civil society organizations (CSOs) in Kisumu employed a diverse array of pre-elections peacebuilding strategies to prevent electoral violence and foster peace ahead of the 2022 general elections. These strategies were neither uniform nor random but were shaped by the distinctive characteristics, resources, opportunities, and constraints facing each type of CSO. Whether international NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), or advocacy-based networks, the approaches varied in form but converged in intention—to proactively disrupt the entrenched cycles of electoral tension that have historically plagued Kisumu's hotspot zones.

A key finding of this research is that the nature of the CSO—its origin, resource base, relationship with state actors, and level of community embedment—strongly influenced the type of strategy employed. While INGOs brought global legitimacy and financial capital, their work was often episodic and aligned with donor calendars. CBOs, on the other hand, were more deeply rooted within communities and better positioned to engage in sustained local dialogue, though their influence was often limited by resource constraints and political interference, with many "actually being an extension of political campaigns, doing activities sponsored by very corrupt and manipulative politicians"[4]. Meanwhile, CBOs which are FBOs leveraged spiritual authority and moral legitimacy to promote tolerance and collective healing in a politically charged environment[5]. Despite these differences, three dominant strategies emerged across these organizational types: community dialogue and peace messaging, youth-targeted interventions, and multi-stakeholder coalitions. Below, I focus on these somewhat cross thematic strategies to analyze what CSOs do in terms of pre-elections peacebuilding.

Community Dialogue and Peace Messaging

A central finding of this study is that community dialogue and peace messaging were widely used strategies by CSOs in Kisumu to prepare the ground for peaceful elections in 2022, especially in areas historically marked by electoral violence. However, the organization, scope, and regularity of these dialogues were deeply shaped by

[4] Interview with Senior Police Officer, May 2023 at Kondele Police Station.

[5] A revelation from multiple interviews with church leaders under the community members category of the study population.

the nature of the convening CSO. INGOs, such as Search for Common Ground and Mercy Corps, tended to implement structured and pre-planned dialogue forums, often accompanied by civic education components and monitored frameworks. In contrast, many CBOs and especially ad-hoc CSO formations operated with more informal and flexible formats. Their engagements often emerged spontaneously in response to localized tensions, mobilizing small groups through trusted community figures such as religious leaders, youth influencers, or women's groups. These less structured spaces—whether held in church compounds, social halls, or roadside kiosks—nonetheless proved to be critical entry points for early intervention and disruption of conflict narratives. As one CBO organizer noted, "Our dialogues were not fancy. Sometimes they happened at funerals or chama meetings. But they worked because people were already gathered and willing to talk."

The dialogues themselves took on different thematic and demographic orientations depending on the context. Interfaith dialogues, often facilitated by FBOs like the Interreligious Council of Kenya, provided platforms for religious leaders to denounce electoral violence and frame peace as a shared moral obligation across denominations. Inter-community and inter-ethnic dialogues, particularly around the Kisumu-Kericho border, targeted long-standing tensions between the Luo and Kipsigis communities. These were convened with the intention of de-escalating historical grievances that politicians have previously exploited for electoral mobilization. One grassroots peace worker recalled, "We sat Kipsigis and Luo elders together in a church in Muhoroni. They talked, they cried, they forgave. That moment changed things—people realized they were pawns in a bigger game." Similarly, intergenerational dialogues, often supported by youth-focused CBOs, brought elders and young people into joint discussions about memory, trauma, and the cost of political violence, shifting narratives around youth agency and accountability.

Another important strategy involved convening police-public dialogues, which helped to address mutual suspicion and past trauma stemming from state violence in previous elections. These forums, often facilitated by INGOs or national networks like the PeaceNet Kenya, created safe spaces for civilians to share their experiences and for security officers to explain their role and limitations. In some cases, these dialogues led to practical commitments, such as deployment of known, non-combative officers in sensitive areas, or early community-police liaisons. Alongside these, some CSOs—particularly faith-based ones—organized direct engagements with politicians, encouraging them to publicly commit to non-violence through pre-election peace agreements. While these agreements were largely symbolic, their public nature created social pressure that, according to several respondents, contributed to restraint during campaign rallies and on voting day. As one FBO leader stated, "When politicians sign those commitments in front of the people and the clergy, they know they are being watched. It's harder to go back and incite violence."

Crucially, these diverse forms of dialogue were not just procedural exercises—they were experienced by local communities as meaningful acts of inclusion, recognition, and healing. Respondents repeatedly expressed the belief that such interventions were instrumental in preventing the kind of violent eruptions that Kisumu has long been known for. One youth leader in Obunga stated with conviction, "People were waiting for war. But instead, they saw meetings, they heard apologies, they watched rivals hug on TV. It messed with their expectations in a good way." This observation speaks to the broader psychological impact of the dialogues: by replacing the anticipatory script of violence with visible and symbolic performances of peace, CSOs disrupted the normalized cycle of conflict that often accompanies Kenyan elections. While not all interventions were coordinated or systematic, their cumulative effect fostered a culture of peacebuilding that resonated deeply with the community. The historic absence of electoral violence in Kisumu during the 2022 polls, especially in well-known hotspot zones, cannot be understood outside the influence of these layered, dialogic engagements. They redefined not just the tone of the elections but also the people's sense of political possibility.

Youth-Targeted Interventions

Youth-targeted interventions emerged as a cornerstone of pre-election peacebuilding strategies by CSOs in Kisumu County, particularly in response to the historical pattern of youth mobilization for electoral violence. Across all categories of CSOs—INGOs, CBOs, FBOs, and ad-hoc grassroots formations—there was a conscious

and urgent effort to reframe youth not as agents of violence but as stakeholders in peace. INGOs such as Mercy Corps and Hivos implemented structured programs focused on economic empowerment and digital advocacy. These included sports for peace forums – bringing police, community teams together, vocational training sponsorships, entrepreneurship bootcamps, and online civic engagement platforms that redirected youth energies away from political confrontation toward self-driven development and political education. A project lead from one such INGO noted, "We knew that if we didn't give the youth tools to dream differently, someone else would give them stones to throw." CBOs and FBOs, operating at closer proximity to the community pulse, adopted less formal but deeply relational approaches—sports tournaments, mentorship circles with ex-offenders, bodaboda rider mobilizations, and creative arts initiatives in informal settlements. These programs leveraged local influencers and "reformed" youths who shared testimonies about the personal cost of political violence. One CBO member from Obunga reflected, "We let them see that throwing stones doesn't build a life—you can't raise your kid on chaos. They listened because the message came from their own."

Despite the variation in structure and resourcing across CSO types, the cumulative effect of these interventions was a significant shift in youth narratives around political engagement. Unlike previous election cycles, where youth were easily instrumentalized by political actors, 2022 witnessed a notable distancing of youth from violent mobilization. Ad-hoc CSO initiatives—often neighborhood-based groups with no formal registration—played a surprisingly pivotal role in this shift. These included spontaneous peer-led forums in estates, informal barazas organized by community elders, and youth WhatsApp groups dedicated to peace alerts and rumor tracking. While lacking donor visibility or bureaucratic structure, these efforts tapped into hyper-local trust networks and cultural familiarity. A youth leader from Nyalenda summed up this new consciousness: "For once, we didn't wait to be used by politicians—we had our own agenda. We were tired of being remembered only when there's a riot." This sentiment was echoed by multiple respondents who linked the unexpected peace in 2022 directly to the consistency and authenticity of youth engagement by CSOs. In previous elections, hotspots like Kondele, Nyalenda, and Obunga were epicenters of unrest. In 2022, they became models of restraint. As one boda-boda rider put it, "We had been trained. We had spoken to elders. We had played football with the police. It was hard to pick up a stone after all that." The historic calm in Kisumu's youth-dense conflict zones, therefore, was not accidental—it was the hard-won outcome of layered, locally rooted interventions that re-scripted what it meant to be young and political in a volatile electoral context.

Multi-Stakeholder Coalitions and Early Warning Systems

The adoption of multi-stakeholder coalitions and early warning systems emerged as a critical peacebuilding strategy among CSOs in Kisumu ahead of the 2022 general elections. However, the form and function of these coalitions varied significantly depending on the type of CSO involved. INGOs played a distinctly formal and resourced role, often leading in the creation of structured platforms for information gathering, analysis, and response coordination. Under UNDP's funding, these organizations worked with GoK's Uwiano Platform for Peace to use digital dashboards and hotline systems that tracked hate speech, rumor flows, and localized tensions. One INGO representative noted, "We had real-time data from multiple locations across Kisumu, especially hotspots. That intelligence allowed us to act before things exploded. Including tipping off the police." INGOs such as Saferworld also divulged that through funding from additional funding UNDP and IGAD, their efforts also included convening high-level roundtables with county officials, peace committees, and regional security organs, creating a linkage between grassroots intelligence and formal security response frameworks.

By contrast, CBOs, espcially FBOs adopted more organic and informal coalition strategies, leveraging local knowledge and social trust to activate response mechanisms within neighborhoods and estates. In areas such as Manyatta and Kondele, community organizations worked closely with nyumba kumi leaders, boda boda associations, and market vendors to develop community alert systems. These groups relied heavily on WhatsApp networks, SMS chains, and door-to-door alerts to flag potential threats. A community organizer explained, "It wasn't high-tech, but it worked. If a rumor started spreading, someone from the community flagged it. We called each other, checked it, and if needed, went straight to the chief or peace committee." This embedded approach, though less visible, proved equally vital in diffusing tensions and preventing escalation in known flashpoints.

At the most localized level, ad-hoc CSOs and informal peace actors—often without any legal registration or formal structure—were instrumental in micro-level mediation efforts. These groups emerged in response to specific threats or events, such as a provocative campaign rally or rumors of vote-rigging, and relied on social legitimacy rather than formal authority. For instance, one such group in the Nyamasaria area intervened when a conflict emerged between rival youth groups, reportedly preventing a violent confrontation. As one member recalled, "We just met under the tree where we usually hang out. We said no to any fight. We called the elders. No NGO was there. It was just us, because we've seen enough blood before." Such grassroots responses, while harder to document, were widely credited by respondents as pivotal in contributing to the absence of postelection violence in Kisumu. The result was not merely an absence of violence, but the coalescing of a collective civic vigilance that challenged and redrew the entrenched violence script.

Together, these layered coalition efforts—from internationally coordinated platforms to hyper-local response networks—illustrated a robust ecosystem of peacebuilding that moved beyond reaction to anticipation. The integration of structured data analysis by INGOs, community-based intelligence systems by CBOs and FBOs, and the moral authority of ad-hoc local conveners enabled Kisumu to avoid the cyclical violence historically associated with elections. A county peace committee member summarized this well: "For the first time, everyone was watching, everyone was ready, and everyone had a role. That's why it didn't burn this time." These coalitions did not just prevent violence; they offered a blueprint for community-centered, multi-level peace infrastructures that could be adapted and institutionalized across Kenya's other volatile electoral zones.

Influence of Preventive Strategies in pre-Election Peace-building in Kisumu County

In this sub-section, I present my findings from explored the themes that emerged from the third question: Can it be said that CSOs' peacebuilding interventions in the lead up to 2022 polls were the sole causative factors for the unexpected quiet/calm including Kondele hotspot zone after the announcement of the 2022 polls? Or simply put, what can we qualify as the impact of the 2022 pre-elections peacebuilding by CSOs in Kisumu's hotspot zones?

The inquiry into whether Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) influenced the peaceful aftermath of Kenya's 2022 general elections in Kisumu County unveils a layered and multidimensional discourse.

While prima facie evidence suggests that the region experienced relatively subdued electoral tensions in the post-2022 polls due to CSOs intervention, a further critical interrogation of the respondents revealed that this calm was not the product of a singular intervention but rather the outcome of converging historical, political, and civic dynamics. These dynamics, woven into the socio-political fabric of Kisumu's electorate, created a context in which peace was not just a desired outcome but also a negotiated one, shaped as much by grassroots strategies as by deeper systemic undercurrents. On undertaking a further critical examination of the coalescing factors leading to the post-2022 polls peace in Kisumu, including historically known hotspots, the study unraveled four major explanations for the observed peace. The role of CSOs itself; electorates collective memory of past electoral violence; the emergence of a consciousness concerning political instrumentalization of especially the youth; and lastly, a defiance (still emerging though) on the part of the Luo voter block of the notion that "the Luo belong to the opposition" and an attempt "to be part of the working government in order not to lose on development"[6]

CSOs played a conspicuous role in crafting pre-election interventions that sought to mitigate the historical antagonism between law enforcement and civilians. 48 out of the 51 interviewed respondents acknowledged the success of these organizations in convening platforms for constructive engagement— such as varied dialogue sessions, community sports, and sensitization forums, multistakeholder and conflict early warning systems. These initiatives were not merely symbolic; they served to humanize both sides of a traditionally adversarial relationship, fostering mutual understanding and encouraging de-escalation strategies during politically volatile moments. However, this apparent success demands critical scrutiny. The deeply entrenched mistrust between

[6] An Interview with an aged Voter and former politician, and Manyatta People's Assembly Opp. Manyatta Peace Market, 23 July 2023.

law enforcement and the electorate, particularly in historically marginalized and over-policed regions such as Kisumu, raises doubts about the sustainability of such peace-building gains. The ephemeral nature of these interactions—largely confined to the pre-election period—suggests that while CSOs were effective in facilitating temporary trust, they may not have dismantled the structural roots of fear, suspicion, and repression that characterize police-community relations in electoral seasons.

Equally significant in shaping the 2022 electoral climate was the electorate's collective memory of political violence, especially the traumatic experiences of 2007 and 2017. Respondents frequently referenced the personal and communal toll of past electoral unrest—ranging from death and injury to economic disruption and social dislocation—as a powerful deterrent to engaging in violence. This historical consciousness acted as a form of collective rationality, guiding voters away from agitation and toward restraint. Yet, while such memory-induced peace may appear as a societal learning curve, it is inherently reactive. It indicates that the absence of violence stemmed more from a fear of reliving traumatic experiences than from a deep-seated embrace of non-violence or democratic maturity. In this sense, peace was maintained not through transformation, but through avoidance—a tenuous foundation for sustainable democratic practice.

A third and equally compelling explanation lies in the evolving political consciousness among the electorate, particularly among youth in areas such as Kondele and Nyalenda—historical epicenters of electoral protest. Here, the rejection of political instrumentalization was pronounced. Former protestors voiced a clear awareness of their exploitation by political elites, expressing cynicism toward the transactional nature of electoral politics. Statements like "We know the politicians use us" reflect a growing political agency and disillusionment with the elite bargains that often follow street-level mobilization. This shift in voter disposition arguably played a crucial role in the post-election peace, highlighting a transformation from politically induced volatility to voter-driven skepticism. Nevertheless, while this transformation signals an encouraging trend toward political awareness, it also underscores a paradox: that peace may have resulted from political alienation rather than the success of peace-building programming. In other words, CSOs may have catalyzed the process, but the electorate's disaffection with political processes provided the fuel.

Furthermore, the strategic political recalibration by local elites in Luo Nyanza—opting not to embrace opposition politics as vehemently as in previous years—also contributed to the peaceful post-election landscape. This shift was pragmatic. As one Member of County Assembly (MCA) observed, aligning with the ruling administration was viewed as a pathway to ensure continued development funding and political inclusion. By reducing the perceived stakes of electoral loss, this strategic accommodation helped to temper adversarial politics, thereby muting the trigger points of post-election violence. While this approach undeniably contributed to a more tranquil political atmosphere, it also raises normative concerns. Aligning with state power to secure local benefits may stabilize the region in the short term, but it risks entrenching patronage politics and eroding the ideological integrity of political opposition—an essential feature of democratic pluralism.

Taken together, these findings complicate a linear attribution of peace to CSO interventions alone. While their work in bridging community-state relations and fostering civic awareness was valuable, it operated within a broader matrix of historical trauma, shifting political identities, and strategic elite behavior. Each factor—complementary or contradictory—played a role in shaping the 2022 electoral outcome in Kisumu. The peace, therefore, should be understood not as a singular achievement but as the cumulative result of intersecting variables that reinforced, tempered, or counterbalanced each other.

Ultimately, these dynamics point to a crucial imperative for CSOs and peace-building actors: the need to move beyond episodic interventions and invest in long-term structural transformation. This entails embedding peace education in community institutions, holding security actors accountable beyond election seasons, and nurturing political literacy that transcends disillusionment to empower genuine democratic participation. Only then can peace in Kisumu and similar contexts evolve from circumstantial calm into a durable culture of nonviolence and civic engagement.

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Discussion: Theoretical and Scholarly Exposition of CSOs pre-Elections Peacebuilding Strategies

This section interrogates the question: How can we make sense of these findings theoretically – negative versus positive peace (Galtung, 1969) and through the lens of conflict transformation (Lederach, 1997)? In addition, it juxtaposes such an analysis with extant research to embed the study within ongoing debate. The presentation is thematized along the strategies that are already presented.

Community Dialogue and Peace Messaging

Johan Galtung's theory of *positive peace*—articulated as the presence of justice, equity, and harmonious relationships beyond the mere absence of direct violence—offers a compelling normative foundation for understanding community dialogue initiatives. In tandem, John Paul Lederach's framework of *conflict transformation* stresses sustained relational change and the centrality of grassroots agency, making local dialogue essential to any meaningful peacebuilding architecture. However, this study's findings from Kisumu during the 2022 elections reveal a sobering disjuncture between these theoretical ideals and the lived realities of pre-election interventions by CSOs, CBOs, and INGOs. Rather than sustained or relationally transformative, most dialogues were episodic, reactive, and tightly bound to electoral cycles. For instance, interventions by INGOs like *Search for Common Ground* and *Act! Kenya* demonstrated structured approaches with civic components, yet their impacts were dulled by their short timeframes, externally driven designs, and top-down implementation logic. Local CBOs, despite holding cultural legitimacy and grassroots proximity, lacked the resources and technical capacity to scale or institutionalize their efforts. These findings substantiate and extend existing critiques in the peacebuilding literature (e.g., Cravo, 2018; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011) which warn that peace interventions are often "projectized" rather than transformative. This study confirms that even when CSO actors adopt the language of positive peace and transformation, operational limitations and political constraints often reduce their work to a form of tactical containment, rather than structural change.

Furthermore, the findings affirm Galtung's concept of *structural violence* as an enduring backdrop against which peace initiatives operate—and often falter. The Kenyan electoral context, especially in historically marginalized

areas like Nyanza, is shaped by entrenched inequalities, patronage politics, and symbolic violence disguised as democratic competition. This study uncovers how political elites exploit economic precarity and ethnic identity to reproduce cycles of division and unrest. For example, youth inducements in Kisumu ranged from KSh 200 to KSh 1,500—materially trivial yet symbolically powerful tools of manipulation that reflect the deeper commodification of agency. Such practices resonate with critical political economy analyses of peacebuilding (e.g., Curtis, 2013; Paffenholz, 2015), which caution against depoliticized interventions that ignore the role of elite interests in perpetuating instability. Notably, while CSOs organized peace forums and pledges, the study found that these were often ignored or co-opted by political actors, who used the language of peace for reputational gain without institutional accountability. This aligns with Lederach's emphasis on *middle-range actors*—clergy, teachers, and local elders—who bear disproportionate responsibility for peace in the absence of political will from national elites. What this study contributes, however, is an empirical grounding of these dynamics within a hyper-local Kenyan context, showing how even modest community dialogues held in churches or chama meetings can momentarily rupture dominant narratives of violence. These micro-moments—such as Luo and Kipsigis elders exchanging forgiveness in Muhoroni—illustrate what we might call "narrative insurgency": brief, subversive re-imaginings of peace amid entrenched hostilities.

Yet, these symbolic gains cannot be mistaken for systemic transformation. When Galtung's *violence triangle*—comprising direct, structural, and cultural violence—is used as an analytical frame, the limitations of 2022 preelection interventions become clear. Most CSO efforts were reactive, targeting only the immediate threats of direct violence (e.g., youth confrontations, hate speech), while the deeper drivers—economic disenfranchisement, political exclusion, and ethno-cultural polarization—remained largely unaddressed. This imbalance confirms Richmond's (2010) critique of the "liberal peace" model, wherein civil society is often valorized yet instrumentalized to absorb the responsibilities of peace without tackling the systemic injustices that sustain conflict. Indeed, this study leaves unanswered the larger structural question: Can peacebuilding succeed in a polity where elections themselves are deeply embedded in inequality and exclusion? What remains pending is a robust institutional commitment to translating symbolic gestures—like public apologies and peace pledges—into enforceable political norms and redistributive policies. The study thus makes three key scholarly contributions: it confirms the partial efficacy of dialogue as emotional and symbolic healing; it challenges the depth of transformation possible under externally timed and under-resourced interventions; and it foregrounds the need to re-politicize peacebuilding in electoral contexts where democracy remains procedural but not substantive.

Youth-Targeted Interventions

At first glance, youth-targeted interventions in Kisumu might appear to embody Galtung's (1969) concept of *positive peace*—defined not merely by the absence of violence, but by the presence of justice, equity, and structural transformation. Efforts such as vocational training, entrepreneurship programs, peace forums, and political education initiatives ostensibly address the *structural violence* that renders youth vulnerable to electoral manipulation. Likewise, the shift in framing youth from "pawns of violence" to "peace champions" aligns with Lederach's (1997) vision of *relational peacebuilding*, where sustainable peace hinges on the transformation of individual and group relationships.

However, this study complicates the theoretical optimism associated with such interventions. Empirical findings from Kisumu reveal that most youth-targeted programs were episodic, donor-dependent, and cyclically implemented around election periods. While they may have mitigated immediate risks of violence, they failed to challenge or alter the deeper systemic roots of youth marginalization: chronic unemployment, exclusion from formal politics, and a normalized culture of state impunity. This temporal limitation contradicts Galtung's insistence on *dismantling oppressive structures*, and likewise diverges from Lederach's emphasis on *multi-level, long-term peace infrastructure*.

From a scholarly perspective, this confirms existing critiques in African peacebuilding literature that question the sustainability and local ownership of youth peace interventions. As observed by Anyidoho and Ayele (2014),

donor-driven youth programs in Africa often prioritize quick outputs over transformative impact, reducing youth to mere implementers or beneficiaries rather than genuine co-creators of peace. Similarly, Ojok and Apuuli (2020) argue that peacebuilding efforts targeting youth tend to bypass structural political reforms, thereby leaving the architecture of violence untouched. This study supports those critiques by showing how Kisumu youth, despite being central to peace messaging, continued to face structural exclusion and state neglect beyond the election cycle.

Importantly, this study adds nuance to the scholarship by highlighting youth perceptions of *agency and fatigue*. While many programs offered "peace training," youth testimonies from Obunga and Nyalenda exposed their awareness of being used instrumentally by CSOs and politicians alike. Their statement—"For once, we didn't wait to be used"—reveals a dual consciousness: a tentative reclaiming of agency and a deep-seated mistrust of political and institutional actors. This insight shifts the scholarly conversation from mere youth inclusion to youth *autonomy* and *critical resistance*. It also echoes findings by Honwana (2012), who describes African youth as being in a state of "waithood"—not just unemployed, but suspended in a liminal political space where their visibility is mobilized, but their voices remain structurally silenced.

Furthermore, the Kisumu case foregrounds how peacebuilding interventions unfold within a contested political environment. The "hustler versus dynasty" narrative exemplifies how elite populism quickly reabsorbs youth discontent. This confirms the work of Branch and Mampilly (2015), who argue that in Kenya, youth political engagement is often mediated through patron-client logics rather than institutional participation. In such an environment, peacebuilding becomes more about crisis management than systemic transformation—an insight that critiques the theoretical assumption of linear progress embedded in much liberal peacebuilding discourse.

The study also raises important unresolved questions: Can community-level youth interventions achieve sustained peace without state buy-in or legislative reform? How can youth transition from temporary peace agents to permanent stakeholders in policy and governance? What mechanisms exist—or should exist—to anchor peace initiatives within national development agendas? These are critical questions that remain insufficiently addressed in both the theoretical literature and in peacebuilding practice. They signal the need for a paradigm shift from *projectized peace* to *policy-integrated transformation*.

Multi-Stakeholder Coalitions and Early Warning Systems

The findings of this study affirm and nuance existing theoretical debates on peacebuilding by providing empirical evidence from Kenya's 2022 elections that both confirms and challenges key aspects of Galtung's and Lederach's frameworks. First, the research substantiates Galtung's dichotomy of negative versus positive peace by demonstrating that interventions in Kisumu—largely donor-driven and reactive—achieved only a temporary cessation of direct violence (negative peace), without addressing the systemic roots of conflict embedded in Kenya's political economy. However, this study moves beyond abstract typologies by illuminating how donor dependency, short funding cycles, and the failure to integrate structural reform agendas into peacebuilding projects actively reinforce the reproduction of political manipulation and ethnic-based electoral violence. In this sense, the study does not merely echo Galtung's critique of superficial peace, but adds empirical specificity to it, particularly in showing how project-based interventions risk legitimizing an unjust status quo. Yet, what remains unanswered—and ripe for future inquiry—is whether civil society actors can reorient their programming toward structural transformation without compromising donor mandates or political safety.

Second, this study both extends and problematizes Lederach's vision of relational peace. While communitybased networks in Kisumu demonstrated impressive responsiveness through hyper-local tools such as WhatsApp alerts and early-warning SMS systems, the study reveals that these efforts lacked vertical integration with elite political structures—an essential ingredient in Lederach's peacebuilding pyramid. The relational depth at the grassroots did not translate into horizontal or vertical accountability capable of diffusing elite-driven violence narratives like the "Hustler versus Dynasty" and "Ng'atwa" framings. This confirms previous scholarly critiques, such as those by Richmond (2011) and Mac Ginty (2010), who argue that peacebuilding must avoid both technocratic elitism and romanticized localism. Thus, the study makes a scholarly contribution by empirically demonstrating

the futility of disconnected peacebuilding tiers in contexts where power is centralized and ethnopolitical narratives are institutionally entrenched. The Kenyan case suggests that without mechanisms to connect micro-level interventions to macro-political reform, relational peace remains fragmented and ineffective in transforming conflict-prone electoral systems.

Finally, this study complicates the prevailing assumption in peace studies that the presence of multi-stakeholder coalitions inherently enhances peace outcomes. While INGOs, local CBOs, religious institutions, and state actors collaborated in the 2022 interventions, the study finds that such coalitions often masked deep asymmetries in power, agenda-setting, and accountability. INGOs wielded disproportionate control over resource flows and framing discourses, while local actors were relegated to implementation roles with limited strategic input. This reinforces critical peacebuilding literature (e.g., Paffenholz, 2014; Autesserre, 2010), which warns that unequal partnerships can erode local legitimacy and limit the sustainability of peace gains. Therefore, the study not only confirms concerns about the disempowerment of local actors but adds to the debate by showing how early warning systems, when designed externally, risk becoming mere surveillance tools rather than platforms for transformative engagement. It leaves open the question of how to democratize coalition-based peacebuilding in ways that foreground local agency, integrate political literacy, and ensure responsiveness to evolving conflict drivers—particularly in electoral contexts where violence is not incidental but systematically instrumentalized.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to interrogate a deceptively simple but analytically complex question: *Can the quiet be sustained?* By critically analyzing the strategies and limitations of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in preelection peacebuilding in Kisumu's conflict hotspots, particularly in the lead-up to Kenya's 2022 elections, it becomes evident that the peaceful aftermath was not solely the result of CSO interventions, but a convergence of multiple, interlocking factors. CSOs did play a pivotal role in establishing community dialogues, facilitating youth forums, and strengthening early warning systems. These interventions humanized relations between security forces and civilians and briefly disrupted patterns of electoral antagonism. Yet, the peace that followed the polls in Kisumu—including in notorious flashpoints like Kondele—cannot be linearly attributed to these strategies alone. Collective trauma from past election cycles, a politically disenchanted yet increasingly conscious youth demographic, and a strategic recalibration by local political elites all contributed to a calm that was as negotiated as it was circumstantial.

However, a critical reading of these dynamics—both from the empirical data and through theoretical lenses—reveals that this peace is fragile, contingent, and potentially unsustainable. Drawing on Galtung's notion of negative versus positive peace and Lederach's conflict transformation framework, the study finds that while preelection efforts temporarily suppressed direct violence, they left untouched the deeper structures of inequality, exclusion, and political commodification. Peacebuilding strategies remained largely episodic, externally influenced, and project-bound, unable to challenge the entrenched structural and cultural violence underpinning electoral conflict. The disillusionment voiced by youth, the performative "peace pledges" by political elites, and the reduction of civic interventions to election-cycle tactics all underscore the limitations of a peace that is not anchored in systemic reform. Thus, while the absence of violence in 2022 is noteworthy and worth acknowledging, it appears more as a momentary pause in a recurring cycle than a definitive break from the past.

The study concludes that sustaining the post-2022 electoral quiet in Kisumu—and by extension in similar conflict-prone regions—will require a paradigm shift in both the practice and politics of peacebuilding. CSOs must move beyond containment strategies and begin investing in long-term, locally grounded frameworks that address the roots of marginalization and political manipulation. This includes rethinking peace education, promoting civic agency that transcends voter alienation, and holding both security apparatus and political elites accountable beyond the high-stakes visibility of election seasons. Without such sustained, structural engagement, the peace observed in Kisumu risks becoming a temporary illusion—an electoral ceasefire rather than a durable culture of democratic coexistence. Only by reimagining peace as both a process and a political project can the quiet be sustained in the face of Kenya's historically cyclical and structurally embedded election-related violence.

Importantly, in the context of the already heated campaigns and counter-campaigns for 2027 elections; these findings can help stakeholders rethink peacebuilding and their electoral responsibility he upcoming 2027 general elections present a crucial test for Kenya's democratic trajectory. The time between now and then must be used not merely for political mobilization, but for deep national introspection. Political actors, civil society, and citizens alike must demand a more issue-based, accountable, and inclusive electoral process. The challenge is not the absence of laws, but the absence of leadership and commitment to implement them. As history shows, without genuine reforms and a shift in political culture, the cycle of disillusionment will continue—only this time, the cost might be even greater.

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Author Contribution

OAK conceived, researched, wrote, revised and submitted and resubmitted the article.

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