

CONFLICT SNAPSHOT

SEPTEMBER 2, 2022

Conflict Evolution

Search for Common Ground (Search) in collaboration with the Human Rights Agenda (HURIA), Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI), Kiunga Youth Bunge Initiative (KYBI), Tana River Peace, Reconciliation and Development (TRPRD) and Ijara Women for Peace has established an Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) system through embedded community observation and social media listening, with the aim to harness the shared information between communities, civil society organisations, and government authorities to identify and address imminent threats to peaceful elections, particularly looking at conflict trends, drivers and locations that could potentially trigger or experience violence. Social media listening monitors online conversations, with a focus on Facebook and TikTok, to track hate speech and misinformation trends and how these could potentially affect conflicts offline.

Between August 26 and September 1, 2022, Kenya's electoral context at the Coast and Garissa was marked by the Mombasa gubernatorial elections and the national hearing of Kenya's poll petitions challenging the presidential election results.

Nationally, with two out of the nine petitions filed struck out, the remaining petitions have crystallised to nine¹ key issues on which the supreme court will determine. The Supreme Court has ordered access to the IEBC servers used for storing and transmitting voting information, stemming from the allegations that IEBC's election technology was penetrated and deliberately compromised by non-commission staff. But a stalemate loomed over infringement of intellectual rights, a concern raised by the supplier of the voting technology should full access be granted. An anxious calm prevails in the country ahead of the September 5 Supreme Court ruling, whose verdict will be final, with the Presidential contender, Hon. Raila Odinga reiterating that he would respect the Supreme Court ruling.

In Mombasa, after a three weeks' wait, the gubernatorial elections were finally held on August 29. The voting took place in a generally calm atmosphere in most of the polling centres. Yet, our observers in Mombasa county reported **low voter turnout** and flagged occurrences of online **polarisation, rival supporters clash, criminal gangs, attacks on Kenya Kwanza politicians** and **voter bribery**.

Intensified deployment of security officers and patrols prior and on the eve of the elections has been seen to contribute to the low voter turnout as it instilled fear of violence among residents raising tensions. In Chaani location in Chagamwe sub-county, Mombasa county, **rival supporters clash** were witnessed on August 25, manifesting as an **exchange of gunfire** between the two main political factions, Azimio la Umoja and Kenya Kwanza coalitions, in a bid to woo Kamba votes,

¹ Citizen Digital, [Nine Key issues to be determined in the presidential petition](#), 30th August 2022

resulting in injuries to two people, further escalating tension in the area. In Mawenze location, Likoni sub-county of Mombasa, an **armed criminal gang famously known as 'vipanga'** took advantage of the pre-voting tension and attacked community members on the night of August 28, threatening to end their lives if they didn't surrender their possessions.

During the voting on August 29, chaos was witnessed in Ziwa la Ngombe Primary School, Majengo village hall, Emma's academy and Maweni Primary school voting centres where political goons **attacked** Kenya Kwanza politicians, denying them access to the polling centres accusing them of being on a mission to bribe voters. The **'Linda Kura'** (protect the votes) operation further aggravated this situation as crowds lingered around polling centres after voting due to the general perception that there may be vote rigging. Security officers were swift to respond to these incidents, with heavy deployment of forces reported across the county to restore order.

Widespread voter bribery (locally known as bumulo) allegations were reported during the voting exercise as crowds gathered around polling centres awaiting bribes by party agents prior to voting while others took photo evidence of their voting pattern in order to claim bribes after voting. This malpractice was particularly witnessed in St. Mary's Bangladesh primary school, Bluebench grounds Kisauni, Jamvi la Wageni Likoni and Mirima Primary polling centres.

Online polarisation endured until results were announced, between supporters of the two main gubernatorial candidates, Hon. Abdulswamad Nassir and Hon. Hassan Sarai. This included divisive sentiments shared by well known national political leaders on facebook to woo supporters in a last minute pitch for their candidates.

The 'wabara versus wapwani' narrative persisted during the Mombasa gubernatorial voting:

- *"Team Sarai openly says that wabara should not be given any space in his government..Reject Sarai"*
- *"Hatuwezi kumpigia mtu aliye na chuki na wabara, very tribal and discriminative, Sarai is a no..."*

Inflammatory statements:

- *"Moses Kuria and Aisha Juma out, jambazi nyinyi, operation linda kura..."*
- *"Sonko is a thick headed peddler who escaped jail, he should be taken back to shimo la tewa..."*

This polarisation, further aggravated by political party affiliation affected community horizontal cohesion, as witnessed in Bamburi where rival youths were reported to engage in verbal assaults and fighting over party politics, resulting in injuries to one youth.

Beyond the political polarisation, during this period of transition in other coastal counties and Garissa, uncertainty has loomed over appointments of county administration as mass sacking and reshuffling has been witnessed in Kilifi², Tana River and Garissa counties. This reorganisation has

² Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, [Mung'aro sacks five CEC members, all Chief officers in mini changes](#), 31st August 2022

created anxiety among already divided ethnic communities as fears of marginalisation of minority communities and ‘jobs for political pals’ ensues.

Risks and Opportunity Analysis

Despite the aftermath of the elections being relatively calm, party affiliations, tribal politics and winner-loser divisions have intensified divisions in the communities. Between August 26 and September 1 alone, conflicts related to party affiliations have resulted in injuries done to three people in Mombasa county. With the political competitions remaining dominated by ethnic and clan superiority, winner-loser politics could still bring discord if not peacefully addressed.

Utilisation of local/community owned approaches is key to enabling peaceful coexistence as diverse communities approach reconciliation differently, such as the negotiated democracy led by clan elders in Garissa county, or CSO and CBO-led efforts in Coastal counties. These approaches provide a platform in which the threats of violence can be mitigated.

Recommendations

Post-election reconciliation and dialogues are necessary, to restore trust and broken relationships between winners and losers and for horizontal and vertical cohesion to endure. Such dialogues should take place at different levels, between community members, political parties, clans, different faith groups and between government and the opposition.

While community engagement is ongoing around the appointments of county administration in various counties, it is vital to keep emphasising inclusivity, equal participation, representation and merit based appointments to ensure citizens are provided with the best possible services.



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