MZALENDO

A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TOOLS ON THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN KENYA

2025

Funded by the European Union

KenSafeSpace

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CHAPTER **ONE**

Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

Kenya's digital landscape has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade, reshaping how citizens access information and engage in governance. As of June 2024, the country recorded 68.9 million active mobile SIM subscriptions, reflecting a mobile penetration rate of 133.7%. The total number of mobile phone devices connected to networks was 66.1 million, with smartphone and feature phone penetration rates at 68.3% and 59.9%, respectively. [1]

Digital platforms, particularly social media and instant messaging applications like WhatsApp, have become instrumental in fostering political participation across social and geographic divides. WhatsApp groups have created 'safe' online spaces for political discourse. Civil society organisations, political candidates, and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission have utilised SMS alerts and social media campaigns to engage voters and disseminate electoral information. These technological shifts are part of a broader governmental effort to digitise public service delivery, though often with limited consideration for equity, privacy, or access. [2]

However, the design of digital platforms significantly influences how different groups engage with them. For instance, Facebook's group and event features have made it a preferred platform for civic organizing, while TikTok's short-form, entertainment-driven content has been less effective for sustained political discourse.[3] Studies show that platform architecture, such as content visibility algorithms, moderation tools, and user interface design, can either promote or hinder inclusive participation. Despite these advancements, several groups remain marginalised within the digital ecosystem, including youth, women, rural communities, and persons with disabilities. Youth constitute approximately 30% of the population but represent about 75% of the electorate.[5] Although digital tools are empowering this demographic to organise around pertinent issues such as the 2024 #RejectFinanceBill movement, only 40% of newly registered voters in recent elections were youth.[6] Women, who comprise half the population, remain hindered by digital illiteracy, gender-based online violence, and cultural restrictions that limit participation in both online and offline civic spaces.[7] Persons with disabilities, estimated at 2.2% of the population, face platform inaccessibility, policy oversight, and economic constraints. Despite frameworks like the National ICT Policy and the PWDs Act, legal protections are either underutilised or poorly implemented. Only 21 out of 47 counties have enacted County PWD Acts, with implementation lagging due to political instability, lack of budget allocation, and inaccessible government structures. [8]

The 2024 Best Practices Report on Digital Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Community Networks reveals widespread non-compliance with accessibility standards, especially among community networks that serve rural and underserved populations. While community networks provide localised, low-cost connectivity, none of those surveyed met more than 50% of the Revised Disability and ICT Accessibility Framework Indicators. [9]

During Kenya's 2022 general elections, disinformation campaigns were rampant across platforms like TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook. These included fake polls, impersonation accounts, and manipulated videos spreading false claims such as premature election victories and fabricated threats. Regulatory bodies offered a limited response, leaving the digital public sphere vulnerable and eroding public trust in electoral processes. [10] In response to such challenges, deliberative technologies like Pol.is, Remesh, and TalkToTheCity are emerging globally as tools to foster inclusive public dialogue.

These platforms use AI and collective intelligence to surface diverse perspectives and build consensus, offering promising models for civic engagement in polarised contexts. [11] Their potential for adaptation in Kenya, especially to amplify underrepresented voices, warrants exploration. [12]

In rural Kenya, USSD remains a vital tool for digital inclusion due to its compatibility with basic phones and offline functionality.

However, it faces limitations in interactivity, accessibility for PWDs, and integration with richer media formats. Meanwhile, WhatsApp AI chatbots are gaining traction as a more dynamic alternative, offering real-time, conversational interfaces for civic education and service delivery. [13] The 2019 Huduma Namba judgment illuminated the potential for exclusion by digitised systems lacking regulatory safeguards. The court ruled that without strong data privacy laws and inclusive policy frameworks, the NIIMS program could marginalise communities without proper documentation. [14] Structural and legal barriers, ranging from digital surveillance fears to limited civic education, compound this exclusion. [15]

Digital and data governance efforts continue to marginalise PWDs and women due to the absence of gender-disaggregated and disability-specific data, lack of standardisation in accessibility design, and underfunded support mechanisms such as the Universal Service Fund. Women in low-income areas are approximately 50% less likely to access or actively use digital platforms compared to men. [16]

The ProSocial Design Network offers evidence-based design interventions that could inform Kenya's civic-tech ecosystem. These include features like 'friction prompts' to slow down harmful content sharing, peer moderation tools, and inclusive onboarding experiences, all aimed at fostering healthier, more inclusive online spaces. [17]

1.2. Research Questions

Do marginalised groups in Kenya use digital tools to enhance their political participation?

How do these digital tools influence their engagement in governance and decision-making?

What barriers do marginalised groups face in digital political participation?

What gaps and unintended exclusions exist in current policy and legal frameworks?

What recommendations can be proposed to improve digital inclusivity and political participation?

This study contributes to policy discourse grounded in the principles of the 2010 Constitution while advancing contemporary debates on democratic governance, digital ethics, and social justice. Commissioned by Mzalendo Trust under the KenSafe Space Project, it addresses critical knowledge gaps by exploring how digital tools are reshaping political participation among marginalised communities in Kenya. Drawing on evidence from recent research, the study proposes a people-centred framework to inform inclusive policy reforms and guide civic technology design that responds to Kenya's diverse social realities. [4]

The findings are significant for several reasons. First, they generate fresh empirical insights into how different groups—including women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural populations—navigate opportunities and risks in digital political spaces. By documenting specific barriers such as affordability, limited skills, inaccessible platforms, and lack of trust, the study equips policymakers with evidence to translate constitutional commitments on participation and equity into concrete action.[5] Second, the analysis offers practical recommendations for civic-tech developers and civil society organisations seeking to design platforms that are safe, accessible, and responsive to user needs.[6] Finally, by identifying structural and policy gaps, the research supports advocacy aimed at ensuring Kenya's digital transformation becomes a catalyst for meaningful civic engagement and inclusive democracy.

1.3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design to comprehensively examine how digital tools influence political participation among marginalised groups in Kenya. The study captured both statistical trends and the deeper socio-political dynamics that shape digital inclusion, civic engagement, and exclusion. The quantitative component consisted of structured surveys that capture patterns of digital access, literacy, and political engagement. The qualitative component, including key informant interviews and focus group discussions, explored the nuanced experiences, attitudes, and challenges faced by marginalised groups in accessing and utilising digital tools for political participation. This design was suitable given the study's objective of both measuring prevalence, such as access to digital tools, and understanding lived experiences, such as marginalised or gendered digital exclusion or online safety concerns.

Surveys were used to collect quantitative data from diverse respondents across urban and rural areas. Online surveys were administered through platforms such as Google Forms, WhatsApp groups, and email, targeting digitally connected populations. The surveys were distributed with the support of community-based organisations, institutions, and research assistants in underserved or offline communities. The survey will include both closed and open-ended questions.

A total of twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually with key stakeholders to provide expert perspectives on policy, regulation, and digital civic engagement. Interviewees included: Policymakers, Civil society leaders and digital rights advocates, Civic-tech developers and managers, and representatives from community-based organisations. Nine targeted FGDs were conducted to capture the lived experiences of marginalised populations, with each discussion involving 6–10 participants. FGDs were conducted virtually, and facilitators were trained in inclusive and ethical research practices. The groups were segmented as follows:

i. *Women -Exploring barriers to digital access, safety concerns, and online harassment.*
ii. *Youth -Investigating civic-tech adoption, digital literacy, and mobilisation strategies.*
iii. *Persons with Disabilities -Focusing on accessibility, the use of assistive technologies, and the effectiveness of inclusive digital policies.*

The study utilised a purposive and stratified sampling approach. For surveys, stratification by region and socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, disability status, and rural/urban residence ensured representation across different marginalised groups. Participants for KIIs and FGDs were purposively selected based on their expertise, lived experience, or community representation in digital and political engagement. The researcher collaborated with local NGOs, digital inclusion advocates, institutions of higher learning, and civil society groups to identify and reach appropriate participants, particularly in hard-to-reach areas.

The study adhered to strict ethical standards, including: All participants were informed about the study's purpose, data use, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Data was anonymized during analysis, and personal identifiers were securely stored or excluded to protect privacy. Digital data is encrypted and stored in password-protected systems. Special attention was paid to the needs of participants with disabilities and those from marginalized communities. FGDs and KIIs were conducted in accessible formats.

CHAPTER **TWO**

Digital Tools in Political Participation

2.1 Digital Democracy

Digital democracy, defined as the utilisation of digital technologies to enhance democratic practices by promoting broader participation, transparency, and accountability, holds significant potential in the Kenyan context. [1] The proliferation of digital tools has opened new avenues for civic engagement, particularly among marginalised groups. However, the inclusiveness of digital democracy is contingent upon deliberate efforts to ensure equitable access and meaningful participation. [2]

The Digital Rights in Kenya Report highlights that while digital innovations offer opportunities for public participation, policy oversight, weak digital rights protections, and inconsistent enforcement continue to hinder participation by vulnerable groups.[3] The report finds that surveillance concerns, lack of redress mechanisms, and opaque content moderation policies inhibit freedom of expression online, especially for women, persons with disabilities, and dissenting voices.[4]

Freire and Servaes argue that marginalised communities should not be passive recipients of information but active participants in creating and disseminating content relevant to their lives. In Kenya, digital tools such as WhatsApp groups, Twitter campaigns, and civic-tech platforms have been used to amplify marginalised voices and promote bottom-up participation. Nonetheless, the digital divide driven by gender, geography, and socioeconomic class remains a formidable obstacle. The Digital Rights in Kenya Report also identifies algorithmic bias and unequal access, particularly during electoral periods, as persistent challenges.

During Kenya's 2022 general elections, disinformation campaigns were widespread across platforms like TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook. These included fake polls, impersonation accounts, and manipulated videos spreading false claims, such as premature election victories, military deployments, and even fabricated wildlife threats on election day. Despite the scale of these operations, regulatory bodies offered a limited response, leaving the digital public sphere vulnerable and eroding public trust in electoral processes. [6]

According to the GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report, only 35% of Kenyan women use mobile internet compared to 50% of men, highlighting a persistent gender digital divide driven by affordability, literacy gaps, and socio-cultural barriers. [7] Persons with disabilities continue to face multi-layered exclusion, including inaccessible platform designs, high costs of assistive technologies, and limited digital skills training. While earlier reports like the Digital Rights in Kenya Report emphasised that inclusive digital democracy requires more than just access, calling for protections, education, and ethical governance, recent developments underscore the urgency of implementing these recommendations to ensure trust, transparency, and civic empowerment. [3]

The Annual Gender and Equality Report further highlights that poor coordination and underfunded mandates among county governments have exacerbated digital exclusion for PWDs, as many counties have yet to localise accessibility guidelines or adapt e-government platforms to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.[8] The growth of digital democracy globally is not only shaped by access but also by platform architecture and intentional design choices. Research shows that algorithmic amplification, content curation tools, and design nudges significantly affect user participation and perception of safety. [9] In Kenya, these design issues remain underexplored.

Deliberative tools like Pol.is have demonstrated success in overcoming echo chambers by surfacing underrepresented perspectives through crowd-based clustering rather than popularity ranking. The TalkToTheCity project in Germany and the Remesh platform in Liberia's peacebuilding efforts offer examples of AI-facilitated deliberation that centres marginalised voices through anonymity, multilingual prompts, and adaptive feedback loops. [1] The relevance of such tools in the Kenyan context cannot be overstated. With political participation often mediated through informal networks, tribal affiliations, and polarised party lines, designing digital forums that prioritise consensus over confrontation is a necessary innovation.

Similar challenges are evident in Uganda and Nigeria. In Uganda, research by CIPESA shows that high data costs, platform shutdowns during elections, and intimidation of online activists undermine digital participation.[11] In Nigeria, a study by Paradigm Initiative documented widespread digital rights violations, including targeted harassment of women activists and systemic exclusion of PWDs from e-government services.[12] By situating Kenya's experience alongside these examples, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how digital democracy in sub-Saharan Africa is shaped by similar structural and political constraints.

While existing literature documents the barriers to digital democracy in Kenya, there is limited empirical research on how these issues intersect across gender, disability, and youth populations, or how users themselves perceive the effectiveness of civic-tech platforms. This study fills this gap by providing firsthand evidence on the lived experiences, perceptions of trust, and specific barriers that marginalized communities face when engaging with digital democracy tools.

2.2 Digital Divide and Civil Engagement

The digital divide in Kenya is increasingly not just a matter of connectivity but a matter of design justice. As articulated by Costanza-Chock, inclusive design goes beyond access to encompass participatory development processes, diverse defaults, and equitable algorithms.[1]

In Kenya, where over 85% of the population owns a mobile phone but less than half actively use the internet, the question of how tools are designed, and for whom, determines their civic utility.

The ProSocial Design Network offers insights into interventions that promote more ethical and inclusive online behavior, such as civic prompts, reporting tools, and accessible UI/UX guidelines. Integrating these approaches into civic platforms like MyGov, Mzalendo, or SemaBox could enhance uptake and trust.[2]

Co-creation is another key to digital inclusivity. Platforms like Ushahidi or Dokeza saw higher adoption where users were part of early-stage testing and could shape the visual interface, language options, and feedback formats. This principle is affirmed by Participatory Design research, which advocates for equal partnership between developers and communities, especially those with lived experience of marginalisation.[3]

The digital divide refers to the gap between individuals who have effective access to digital tools and those who do not. This gap is multidimensional, encompassing disparities in physical infrastructure, affordability, digital literacy, and the confidence and agency to use technology for civic purposes. [4] In Kenya, infrastructural and socio-economic inequalities continue to restrict meaningful digital participation, particularly among women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural communities.

While national internet penetration stands at 46%, this figure conceals significant regional and demographic disparities.[5] For instance, only about 13.7% of rural residents report regular internet use, compared to over 50% in urban areas. Fewer than one in ten women with disabilities have reliable access to digital platforms.[6] Affordability remains a critical barrier. The cost of 1GB of data in Kenya amounts to 2.5% of monthly income for low-income households, exceeding the UN Broadband Commission's affordability target of 2%.[7] Additionally, smartphone ownership remains lower in rural and low-income households, further entrenching information poverty and limiting opportunities for civic participation, education, and economic advancement.[8]

Digital literacy and skills gaps also deepen exclusion. Many Kenyans lack the knowledge or confidence to use e-government portals, participate in online consultations, or distinguish reliable information from disinformation.[9] KICTANet has emphasized that inadequate investment in community-based digital literacy programs disproportionately affects women, older adults, and PWDs, reducing their ability to exercise civic rights online.[10]

Civic engagement in the digital era requires more than just internet access. It involves citizens' willingness, ability, and motivation to use digital channels to express opinions, scrutinize power, and co-create solutions.[11] However, many Kenyans are discouraged by the perception that online participation is unlikely to produce real change. Fear of surveillance, cyber-harassment, and data misuse can create a 'chilling effect,' suppressing dissent and reducing trust in digital engagement.[12]

2.2 Digital Divide and Civil Engagement

Among women and youth, these threats intersect with pre-existing inequalities, reinforcing exclusion.[13] Cultural and social norms also limit participation. Patriarchal attitudes in some communities restrict women's ownership and use of digital devices, contributing to self-censorship and disengagement even when connectivity exists.[14] Youth in low-income urban settlements may face skepticism from elders or local authorities, who perceive online activism as subversive or unpatriotic.[15]

Rather than designing civic technologies in top-down ways, inclusive political participation requires co-creation, shared ownership, and the incorporation of diverse user perspectives throughout the development process.[16] This ensures that digital platforms are culturally relevant, linguistically accessible, and responsive to the needs of marginalized users. For example, Kenyan initiatives like Ushahidi, developed during the 2007–2008 post-election crisis, demonstrated the power of inclusive, user-driven design to empower citizens.[17] Similarly, civic-tech projects by organizations such as Mzalendo and Siasa Place show that when communities are engaged in co-design, they are more likely to trust and adopt new tools.[10]

In Kenya, civic engagement platforms that incorporate local languages, audio content for low-literacy users, and offline support mechanisms are significantly more effective at reaching rural and marginalized populations.[18] Mobile-based civic education campaigns using SMS in Swahili and local dialects have achieved higher uptake than purely web-based platforms.[15] Bridging Kenya's digital divide requires a holistic approach. Policymakers must address infrastructure gaps, high connectivity costs, limited digital skills, social and gendered inequalities, and low trust in institutions. Without addressing these factors, digital innovations risk reproducing the same exclusions they aim to solve. Inclusive policies, targeted subsidies, community-based digital literacy initiatives, and participatory technology design are all essential to realizing the transformative promise of digital civic engagement.

In Nigeria, similar patterns of exclusion have been documented, with high costs and fear of repression discouraging participation among youth and women.[19] In Uganda, digital divides are exacerbated by periodic internet shutdowns and limited local language content.[12] By comparing Kenya's experience to these contexts, this research highlights shared barriers and illustrates how localized solutions, such as community networks and SMS platforms, can improve inclusivity across the region.

Although studies have explored the digital divide in Kenya, most focus on general access statistics rather than the specific experiences of marginalized groups in civic engagement. There is also limited analysis of how design practices, such as language options or offline integration, impact adoption. This study addresses these gaps by documenting user perspectives on design, trust, and participation, and by examining which approaches are perceived as most inclusive.

2.3 Political Participation in Kenya

Digital technologies have redefined the landscape of civic engagement, expanding opportunities for political participation beyond conventional boundaries. A 2024 Pew Research Centre study found that 84% of respondents across 19 countries believe the internet and social media have made people more informed. [1] Kenya is no exception. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok have become critical civic forums, providing tools such as e-petitions, e-consultations, and e-campaigns. [2] Yet, digital spaces are also sites of exclusion and risk. The Digital Rights in Kenya Report points to the importance of safeguarding civic-tech spaces from politicisation, disinformation, and state surveillance. [3] While platforms like Ushahidi and Dokeza have promoted transparency and participatory law-making, the report reveals that uptake among PWDs and low-literacy populations remains low due to inaccessible design and lack of trust.

The 2024 #RejectFinanceBill movement demonstrated the capacity of young Kenyans to mobilise through digital means. Activists also reported digital repression, including online threats and police surveillance. [4] The dual nature of digital tools, as enablers and suppressors, requires more attention to digital safety and policy enforcement, according to Kenya's Digital Information System Report. [5]

Civil society has taken steps to mitigate this, including digital rights training, anonymisation tools, and advocacy for gender-sensitive tech. Nonetheless, the Digital Rights in Kenya Coalition finds limited state collaboration with grassroots movements and civil actors. [6] For digital political participation to be inclusive, civic-tech must prioritise local contexts, inclusive design, and strong legal protections. The National Gender and Equality Commission observes that very few civic-tech platforms used in county governance provide content in accessible formats such as sign language, screen-reader compatibility, or alternative text. This undercuts participation for PWDs in crucial decision-making forums such as county budget forums, public participation platforms, and feedback channels. Where such tools exist, PWD representation is often tokenistic and lacks sustained follow-up or capacity support. [7]

In Nigeria, research has found that online activism often provokes coordinated harassment and arrests, while in Uganda, digital organizing is constrained by periodic blackouts. [8] These experiences illustrate how similar dynamics shape civic engagement across the region, highlighting the need for robust safeguards and inclusive design. While studies have described these challenges, little is known about how end-users evaluate the credibility, safety, and effectiveness of civic platforms. This study contributes by exploring perceptions of trust, usability, and engagement among marginalized Kenyans and by identifying specific barriers that limit sustained participation.

2.4 Challenges of Digital Inclusivity in Kenya

Kenya's digital transition is shaped by intersecting structural, economic, and psychosocial barriers. The Digital Rights in Kenya Coalition Report has documented systemic weaknesses in data protection enforcement, noting that although Kenya passed the Data Protection Act in 2019, many state and private entities still collect data without consent or transparency.[9] Internet affordability, low literacy, gendered digital violence, and infrastructure gaps exacerbate exclusion.[10]

Women face disproportionate risks, online abuse and surveillance, with limited mechanisms for reporting or redress and support.[11] PWDs are also excluded due to non-compliant platforms and insufficient investment in inclusive tech. The Annual Gender and Equality Report notes that most counties have not integrated disability inclusion into ICT budgets or conducted usability audits.[12] The report criticizes the low visibility and accessibility of civic platforms like MyGov, which remain largely one-directional in communication. It recommends regulatory reforms, institutional accountability, civic education, and independent oversight of digital platforms to address algorithmic harms and misinformation. Without these reforms, digital tools risk reinforcing rather than remedying exclusion.[13] As Kenya continues its digital transition, ensuring inclusive, safe, and accountable digital spaces is essential to realizing the promise of democratic participation for all.

The best practices for digital inclusion of people with disabilities in the Kenyan community networks highlight practical barriers that persist at the grassroots level. Despite the growing promise of community networks to extend internet access to rural and underserved areas, most of these networks fall short in accessibility standards.
None of the surveyed networks met more than 50% of the Revised Disability and ICT Accessibility Framework Indicators, pointing to systemic neglect in inclusive design.[14] Specific challenges noted in the report include the absence of screen-reader compatible platforms, lack of assistive technologies such as braille interfaces and captioned content, and insufficient training of staff and community network operators on inclusive communication and design. There are also minimal budgetary allocations specifically targeting disability inclusion for democratizing connectivity, and lack of deliberate inclusion strategies.

As digital participation becomes a determinant of democratic inclusion, Kenya's civic-tech ecosystem must ensure that disability is not an afterthought but a design principle. It is therefore imperative to create dedicated funding for assistive technologies and accessible content, establish feedback mechanisms that allow PWDs to inform platform design and performance, and incorporate inclusive infrastructure targets within Universal Service Fund disbursements.

CHAPTER **THREE**

Data Presentation and Analysis

3.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter presents descriptive and inferential analyses of survey and qualitative data. Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were used to explore relationships between socio-demographic characteristics and digital civic engagement. Comparative tables summarize differences among groups, while thematic insights illustrate unique experiences and perceptions.

3.2 Demographics of the Respondents

3.2.1 Age Group

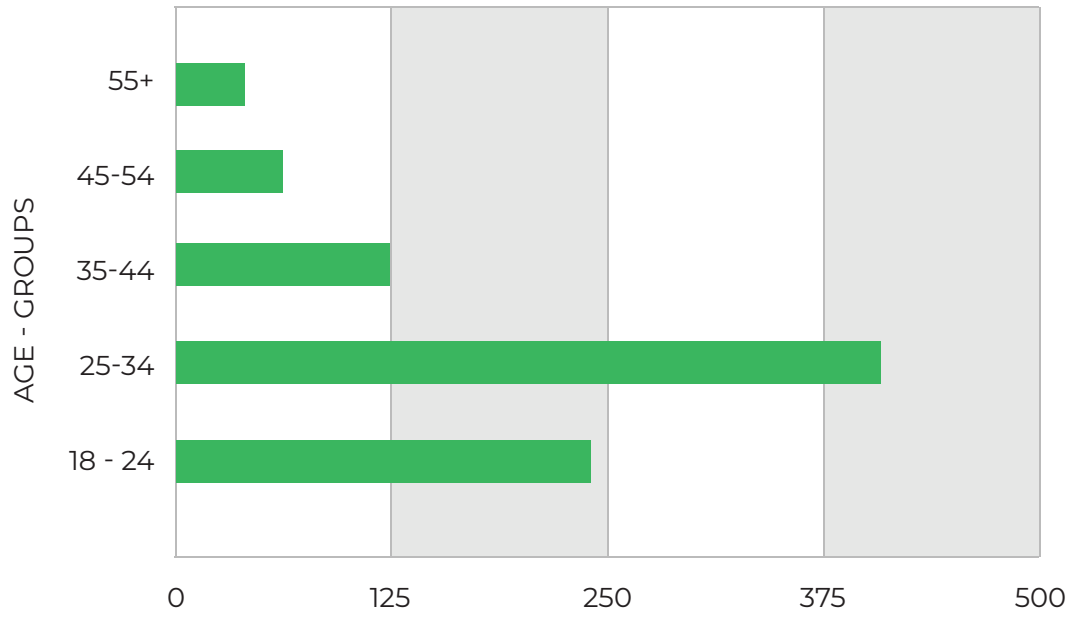

Figure 3.2.1 Age Distribution of Respondents

Youth aged 18–34 make up nearly 59% of all respondents, indicating they are the primary users of civic-tech tools. This finding highlights that digital platforms have become a preferred and often indispensable space for political expression and community mobilization among young people, a demographic long considered marginalized within Kenya's formal political structures. The high adoption of civic-tech tools by youth reflects their comfort with mobile technology and social media ecosystems. For many, online platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter/X, and Facebook have replaced traditional meeting spaces as the main arenas for debate, organizing, and advocacy.

This pattern was consistently emphasized during focus group discussions. As one youth participant in Nairobi explained,

"Most of our political conversations happen on WhatsApp and Twitter. It's faster, safer, and you can reach many people instantly. But my parents don't even know these tools exist."

Another participant in Kisumu echoed this sentiment, describing how digital tools help circumvent exclusion from in-person forums:

"When you're young, no one in the chief's baraza takes you seriously. But online, if you have something to say, you can build an audience."

The study also revealed that civic-tech offers low-barrier opportunities for engagement, including signing e-petitions, participating in hashtag campaigns, sharing infographics, and joining WhatsApp groups dedicated to community development and accountability. Several youth respondents noted that they prefer these forms of participation because they are perceived as less confrontational and more accessible. An interview with a youth digital organiser in Nakuru reinforced this point:

"It feels like you have power in your hand. You can start something from your phone and get hundreds of people to support you."

In contrast, older groups aged 45 and above were significantly less represented in civic-tech usage, suggesting either limited digital engagement or outright exclusion from digital governance tools. The sharp decline in participation after age 34 points to a combination of barriers, including lower digital literacy, limited confidence with new technologies, cost constraints, and cultural skepticism toward online platforms. One community-based organisation leader in Machakos observed,

"Many older community members think online politics is not serious. They fear scams, and most of them cannot afford smartphones or data."

Another respondent in a rural Makueni focus group shared that even when older adults do have smartphones, they mostly use them for phone calls or mobile money transfers rather than civic engagement:

"My father has a smartphone, but he only uses M-Pesa. He says the rest of the apps are too complicated."

These intergenerational differences in digital participation were reinforced by additional qualitative accounts. A youth activist in Mombasa described how older residents often rely on second-hand information from younger family members:

"We have to explain everything to our parents or grandparents. They hear about petitions or government apps from us."

Others noted that in households where internet access is shared, older adults sometimes defer to youth for guidance or simply opt out altogether. These findings suggest a clear and persistent generational digital divide, where youth are significantly more engaged and empowered through civic-tech, while older citizens remain largely sidelined. Bridging this gap will require targeted training, affordable connectivity options, and culturally sensitive outreach strategies to ensure that civic participation is truly inclusive across age groups.

3.2.2 Gender

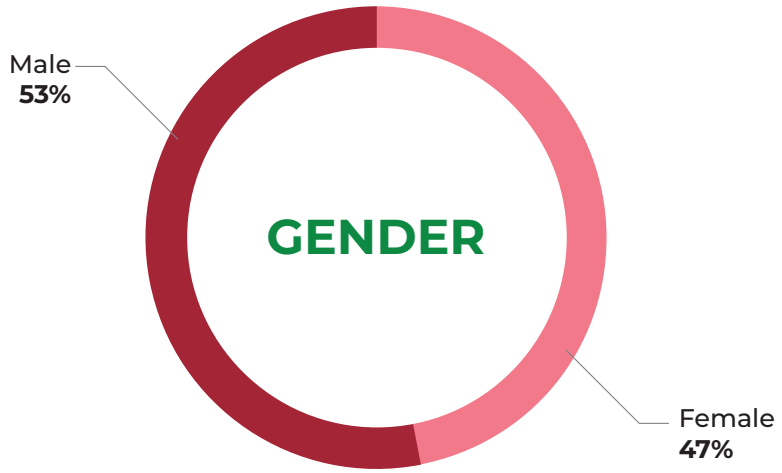

Figure 3.2.2 Gender Distribution of Respondents

The relatively balanced gender distribution in this study suggests that both women and men are increasingly engaging with civic-tech tools. On the surface, this near parity points to growing digital inclusion among women in Kenya, many of whom have historically faced systemic social and digital marginalisation. However, deeper qualitative insights reveal that while women are participating in larger numbers, they continue to experience significant structural and psychosocial barriers that shape how, and whether, they engage meaningfully online.

In multiple focus group discussions, women described the ambivalence of stepping into digital spaces. As one participant in a women's rights group in Homabay observed,

It's encouraging that women are more vocal now, but there is still fear, especially from harassment online. Many prefer to stay quiet or use pseudonyms."

Others reported that online engagement often feels safer than attending public forums, but this safety is fragile and contingent on anonymity. A participant in a rural women's group in Nyeri shared,

"I can participate in a civic campaign from my home, where I feel safe. In public meetings, women rarely speak out. Online, at least you can have a voice without men interrupting you."

Yet, the sense of safety is complicated by the persistent threat of gendered harassment. In Mombasa, young women involved in civic organizing recounted targeted abuse, intimidation, and doxxing after sharing opinions on corruption and governance. One female blogger explained,

"The first time I posted about misuse of funds, someone took my profile picture and turned it into a meme to mock me. They even sent me private messages threatening to find me. After that, I stopped posting with my real name."

Women in several counties described using strategies to minimize visibility online. In Kakamega, participants noted that some women avoid commenting on posts altogether or restrict their social media accounts to close friends. A female youth leader in Nairobi described this as "Silent watching," explaining,

"We read everything, but we don't engage because we don't want trouble. It's easier to stay in the background."

Similarly, in Kilifi, women reported relying heavily on WhatsApp groups where participation could be more discreet:

"We prefer WhatsApp because it feels private. On Facebook or Twitter, everyone sees your name and photo."

The study also found that access and literacy barriers continue to disproportionately affect women, especially in rural and low-income communities. An interview with a county official in Isiolo highlighted that many women lack personal smartphones and instead depend on shared devices, limiting their privacy and autonomy. One participant in a mixed-gender focus group in Laikipia observed,

"In my village, the phone is for the man. Even if a woman wants to learn, she has to wait or ask permission."

Another respondent in a rural Turkana settlement said,

"If you don't know English or can't read fast, you feel embarrassed. So you don't even try to join."

These accounts illustrate that while civic-tech tools may offer a democratizing effect and expanded access to political discourse, gendered divides remain deeply entrenched. Women face a constellation of constraints, including limited device ownership, lower digital literacy, social expectations around public voice, and exposure to targeted abuse. This combination of factors creates a precarious environment in which participation often comes at the cost of personal safety and confidence. These findings underscore that numerical representation does not equate to genuine inclusion or empowerment. Closing the gender gap in digital civic participation requires not only improving access and skills but also transforming the cultures of intimidation and surveillance that discourage women from fully using their voices online.

3.2.3 Counties

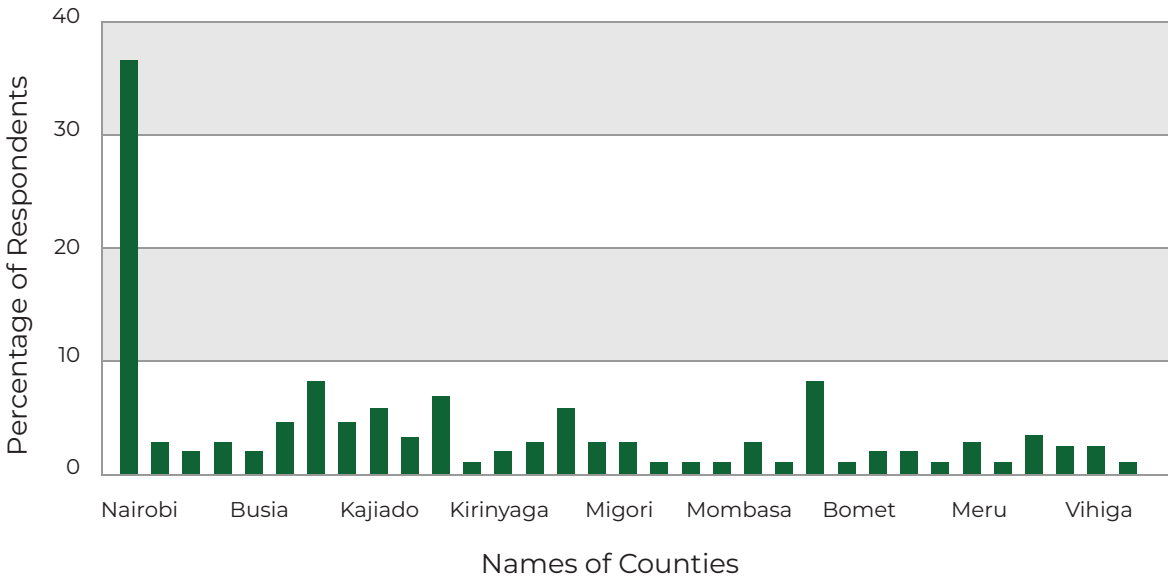

Figure 3.2.3 County Representation

Nairobi has a significantly higher representation among respondents, followed by Nakuru , Kiambu , Kakamega , Kajiado , Kisumu , Eldoret , and Homabay . This geographic pattern underscores how infrastructure, connectivity, and exposure to civic-tech initiatives shape who participates and how frequently. The concentration of users in Nairobi and Nakuru likely reflects better access to reliable internet, more consistent electricity supply, and higher levels of digital literacy compared to other counties.

Focus group discussions and interviews consistently highlighted this disparity. As one youth activist from Nakuru explained,
"We have access to fast internet and frequent civic-tech workshops here in Nakuru. But in my rural home in Migori, even getting a network signal is a struggle."

A participant in a Kisumu focus group echoed this contrast, sharing,
"In town, you find cyber cafes and Wi-Fi hotspots. When I visit my grandmother's place, there's no network at all. It's like the digital world doesn't exist there."

In counties such as Kilifi, Marsabit, Kuria, and Laikipia, where entries were consistently low, respondents described a layered sense of exclusion. A county official in Kilifi noted,
"People here want to participate, but we lack reliable electricity, not to mention internet. We feel left out of national conversations."

This was reinforced by a women's group in Marsabit, who said,
"We hear about these apps and websites on the radio, but no one shows us how to use them. Even if you wanted to, where would you start?"

In several rural FGDs, participants described how civic-tech remains an abstract concept. One man in Nyandarua recounted,
"When politicians talk about engaging citizens online, they don't mean people like us. Most people here use basic phones. No one comes to teach us."

Another youth participant in Kuria added,
"You feel ashamed to ask for help with these tools because everyone assumes you already know."

These perspectives underscore how limited infrastructure, persistent power outages, and the high cost of mobile data combine with social and cultural barriers to entrench digital exclusion. In Kilifi and Kwale, focus group participants linked low uptake to language barriers and distrust in digital platforms. A young woman from Kwale explained,
"Most information is in English or hard Kiswahili. Older people don't trust it, and young people feel it's not for them."

Conversely, in counties with higher participation, residents described more consistent opportunities to learn about and use digital tools. A civic-tech trainer in Kiambu recounted,
"We have partnerships with NGOs here. They run training in schools and churches, so people get exposed early."

In Eldoret, a women's cooperative leader noted that civic-tech training had become part of community meetings:
"They show us how to use WhatsApp groups to report county issues. It's not perfect, but at least we know where to start."

Overall, the data reveal an urban-rural divide in civic-tech access and engagement. While urban centers and large towns benefit from stronger infrastructure, outreach initiatives, and institutional support, many rural counties remain on the digital periphery. These gaps are not merely technical but also social and cultural, as limited awareness, language differences, and lack of trust further suppress participation. This uneven landscape underscores the need for targeted investments in rural connectivity, localized training programs, and multilingual content to ensure that civic-tech tools do not deepen historical inequalities but instead expand meaningful participation across every county.

3.2.4 Social Groups

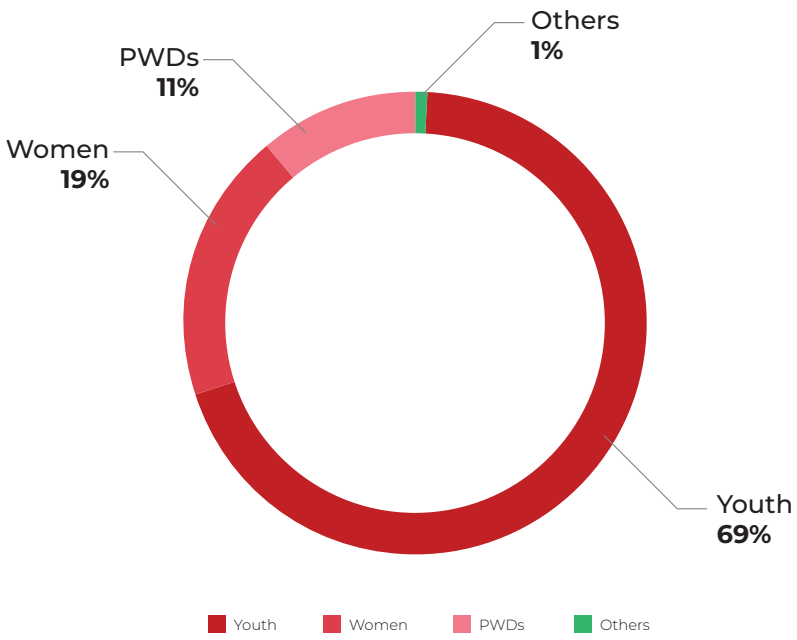

Figure 3.2.4 Social Group Representation

Youth represent the majority of respondents, accounting for 69.1% of civic-tech users, which strongly suggests both high digital fluency and a deepening interest in civic engagement among younger Kenyans. In nearly every focus group, youth participants described online spaces as their most accessible and effective means of influencing governance.

A youth digital advocate in Nakuru shared,
"WhatsApp and Twitter are our main channels. We can't always attend public forums, but online, we can share videos, petitions, and updates in real time."

Another youth participant in Kisumu noted that digital activism had created new opportunities for visibility:
"Before, you had to know someone important to be heard. Now you just need data and your phone."

While this enthusiasm among youth points to significant progress, it also masks more complex patterns of exclusion for other groups. Persons with disabilities accounted for 11.1% of respondents, reflecting gradual progress in digital inclusion but also highlighting persistent underrepresentation. For many PWDs, online tools offer a lifeline to civic participation that would otherwise be out of reach. As one visually impaired participant in Nairobi explained,
"For us as PWDs, online spaces are empowering, but many platforms are not screen-reader friendly, and videos don't have captions."

Another FGD participant from Kakamega emphasized the practical benefits:
"When meetings are far or inaccessible, I can still follow proceedings online and send my feedback."

However, even where PWDs can access platforms, meaningful engagement remains limited by design barriers and inconsistent support. A disability rights advocate in Eldoret observed,
"Some platforms work with screen readers, but most don't. Even simple things like filling out an online form can be impossible."

Similarly, a deaf participant in Kisii explained through an interpreter,
"There are no subtitles or sign language videos. It feels like we are invisible."

These perspectives illustrate that while civic-tech reduces some physical barriers, it often replicates digital exclusion by neglecting inclusive design.

Women, who accounted for 18.6% of respondents, demonstrated moderate levels of engagement, but their participation was consistently described as constrained by multiple, overlapping barriers. In rural areas, women cited limited control over shared household devices, lack of time due to caregiving responsibilities, and fear of online harassment. One woman in a focus group in Mumias recounted,
"I joined a platform but left because people were sending inappropriate messages. There's no accountability in some online groups."

A participant from a women's collective in Kitui added,
"Even when you post something serious, men often dismiss you or insult you. After a while, you just stop contributing."

These patterns were echoed in interviews with civil society leaders. A program officer working with women's groups in Mombasa observed,
"Many women are curious about civic-tech but are intimidated by the language, the design, and especially the fear of being attacked online."

In Isiolo, a young woman described relying on her husband's phone to participate in civic platforms, noting,
"When he is not around, I can't even log in. It's like you need permission."

These constraints underscore how gendered power dynamics in both household technology access and public discourse continue to shape who can participate meaningfully online.

Yet, despite these persistent challenges, the findings show that digital platforms are beginning to empower traditionally sidelined voices. For youth, civic-tech has created a low-barrier entry point for activism, advocacy, and information sharing. For PWDs, digital tools are slowly expanding the space for self-representation and feedback, albeit with considerable design gaps. As a youth leader in Nairobi put it,
"We've started WhatsApp groups where we share community issues and organize around them, especially because public meetings are often inaccessible."
These findings paint a cautiously optimistic picture of digital inclusion. Youth remain the most engaged demographic, highlighting the need to build on their digital fluency and enthusiasm to drive broader civic participation. However, without intentional investments in platform accessibility, gender-sensitive safeguards, and localized training, civic-tech risks entrenching a new layer of exclusion for women and persons with disabilities.

3.2.5 Education Level

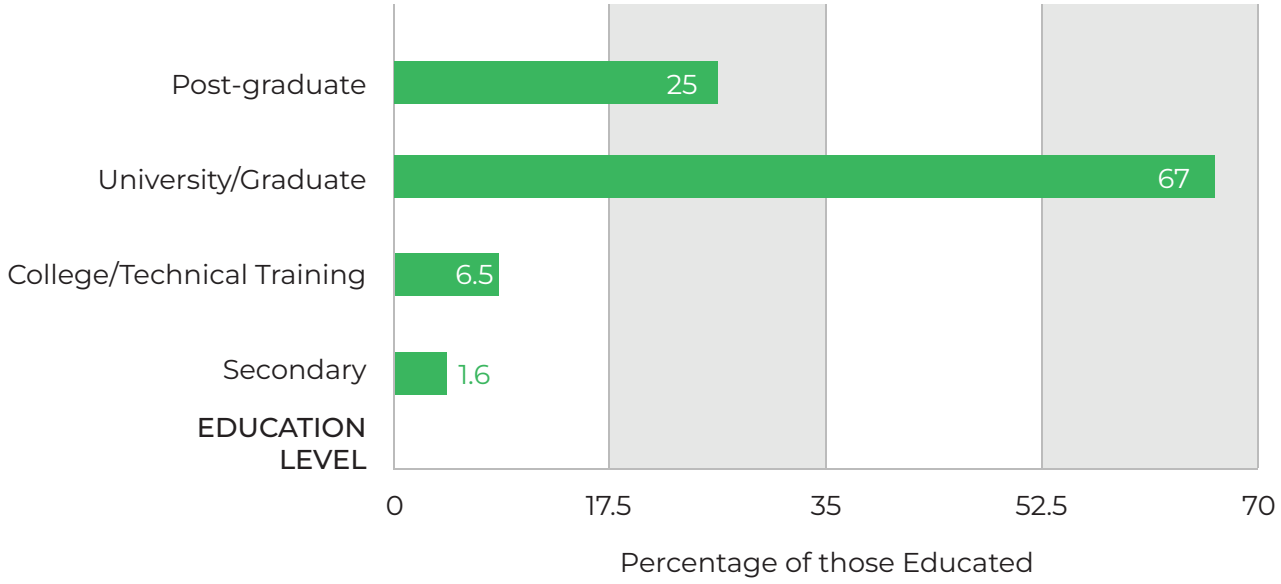

Figure 3.2.5 Education Levels and Civic-Tech Use

67% of respondents in this study reported having a university education, and 25% have postgraduate education, revealing a strong correlation between higher educational attainment and civic-tech usage. This pattern was evident across nearly every county, underscoring that digital tools remain largely the domain of urban, educated, and relatively privileged populations. Those with only secondary or technical training were markedly underrepresented, suggesting that civic-tech platforms may be inaccessible, unfamiliar, or unappealing to less-educated groups.

During focus group discussions, many respondents attributed this gap to the complexity and language of most digital platforms. One participant in an informal youth group in Lamu observed,
"Most platforms are text-heavy and not in Kiswahili or mother tongue. Many people I know just give up because they don't understand."

Another young man in a rural Migori focus group echoed this frustration, saying,
"You need to read a lot, and everything is in English. For someone who did not go far in school, it feels like these platforms are not for you."

Participants with higher education levels consistently described feeling more confident exploring digital civic spaces. A university graduate in Nairobi explained,
"When you are used to reading complex documents or doing research online, it's easier to trust yourself to comment or use e-petitions."

By contrast, those with less schooling were more likely to describe themselves as "watchers" rather than active contributors. A woman in Nakuru with only secondary education shared,
"I have joined a few groups, but I mostly just read what others are saying. I'm not sure if my views are welcome."

These dynamics were also evident among PWDs, many of whom described the compounding effect of low education and accessibility barriers. In Eldoret, a visually impaired respondent explained,
"Even if you know how to use a screen reader, you still need to understand the language. The English is very difficult."
Another participant in Mombasa, who had not completed secondary school, added,
"Sometimes, you don't want to ask for help because people will think you are ignorant."

Interviews with civic-tech developers confirmed that design choices often reflect assumptions about users' literacy levels. As one platform manager in Nairobi admitted,
"We build tools assuming a certain baseline of education. But even educated users find some platforms confusing, especially when there are too many steps."

A digital literacy trainer in Kisii echoed this concern:
"We need visual tools and short videos, not just long forms. If educated users are struggling, what about those who never went beyond primary school?"

This reliance on text-dense, English-only interfaces contributes to an ecosystem that feels exclusive to many. In several focus groups, participants said they preferred platforms that incorporated multimedia content, such as explainer videos or infographics. A young woman in Kilifi shared,
"If you show people a video or a picture, they get it faster. When it's a long form in English, they don't even try."

These findings reinforce that civic-tech platforms, while promising in theory, often mirror existing educational divides. The tools appear to empower highly educated youth, confirming that digital participation is most accessible to those already advantaged by schooling and urban exposure. As a result, civic-tech risks reproducing patterns of inequality rather than dismantling them. This evidence emphasises the urgent need to create accessible, intuitive, and language-diverse digital ecosystems.

Platforms should be designed with the understanding that literacy is not evenly distributed and that meaningful inclusion requires more than simply providing online access. It demands investments in plain-language content, visual aids, translation into local languages, and user interfaces that accommodate varying levels of formal education. Without these changes, civic-tech will remain a resource for the few rather than a democratizing force for all.

3.3 Use of Digital Tools

3.3.1 Digital Tools used for Accessing Information

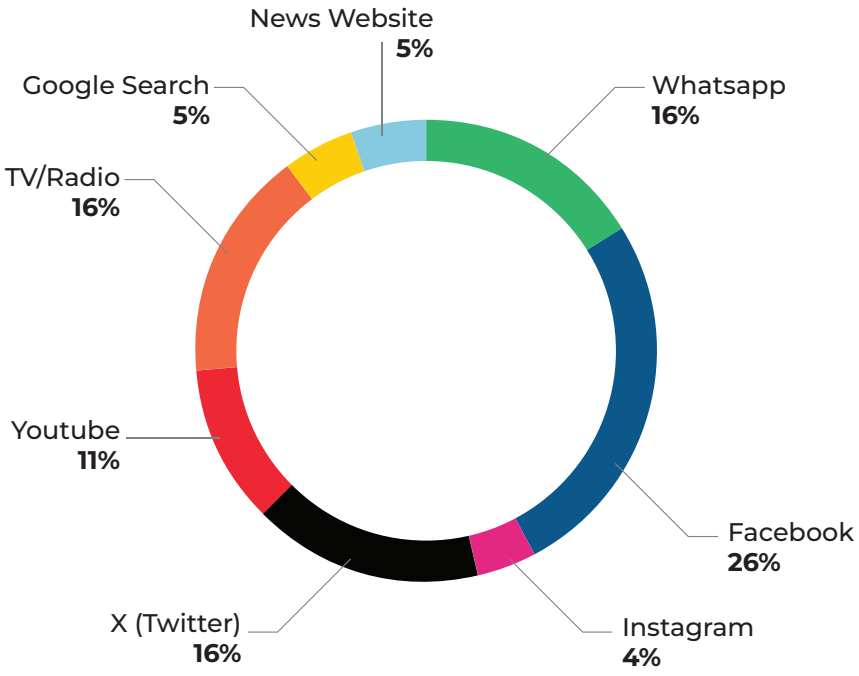

Figure 3.3.1 Which digital platforms do you use for accessing news?

Digital platforms have emerged as a primary news source for many marginalised groups, with Facebook, Twitter/X, and WhatsApp leading in usage. These spaces are not merely channels for consuming information; they have become critical civic arenas where debates unfold, grievances are aired, and collective action is coordinated. Youth and urban dwellers, in particular, described using these platforms as their first point of contact with current affairs and civic discourse.

In various focus groups, the women and youth who participated mentioned that Facebook's popularity is rooted in its design architecture, which supports community-building through groups, events, and threaded discussions. These features allow users to engage in sustained conversations, organise around shared interests, and access localised content. As one urban youth in Kisumu put it:
"Facebook is where I find out what's happening politically. Local leaders post updates, and we debate in the comments. It's like our digital town hall."

A youth activist in Nairobi echoed this sentiment:
"You don't need to wait for a meeting or a newspaper. You see things in real time and you can react."

This is because the platform's algorithmic design also plays a role, by prioritising content from friends, community groups, and pages users follow, Facebook creates a semi-personalised civic space that feels more trustworthy and relevant than national media outlets. This familiarity encourages participation, especially among users who may distrust formal institutions.

WhatsApp emerged as the most accessible platform for peer-to-peer civic mobilisation, especially in lower-income and lower-connectivity settings. An FGD participant in Mombasa explained,
"WhatsApp is our main channel. We forward government memos, raise complaints, and even organise protests. It's simple and doesn't need much data."

In rural Kakamega, a women's group shared that WhatsApp had become their primary source of government updates:
"Someone in the group always forwards information from the chief or MCA. That's how we know when something is happening."

This is because WhatsApp's appeal lies in its low data usage, end-to-end encryption, and group functionality, which make it ideal for peer-to-peer mobilisation in low-connectivity areas. Its simplicity and privacy features offer a sense of safety, particularly for women and youth who fear public scrutiny or harassment.

Twitter/X, while less localised, is valued for its immediacy and visibility, especially during moments of political tension. Hashtags and trending topics allow users to amplify issues quickly, though the platform's fast pace and exposure to harassment can deter sustained engagement. Together, these platforms offer different affordances that shape how marginalised users engage with civic content. Their design choices, ranging from content visibility algorithms to group privacy settings, either enable or constrain participation. Understanding these systemic factors is essential for developing civic-tech tools that are not only accessible but also trusted and empowering.

Despite the dominance of digital tools, the data also reveal that traditional media remains essential, particularly for older adults, persons with disabilities, and those with low literacy. The popularity of TV and radio, each reported by 16.2% of respondents, suggests a hybrid model of information access. One older woman with a visual impairment in Kitui described how radio remains her most trusted source:
"I still rely on radio, but when I want clarity, my son shows me the news on Facebook or YouTube. It helps, but I need guidance."

This blending of channels was common across rural areas. A male respondent in Kilifi shared,
"We listen to the radio for headlines. But when you hear something big, you check Facebook to see if it's true."

In Nakuru, a young woman explained how she uses TV and social media interchangeably:
"I watch the 7pm news, then I go online to see what people are saying. Sometimes you get more details in the comments than from the news itself."

YouTube stood out as an important platform for deeper civic education and explainer content. A participant in Nairobi said,
"When I don't understand a law or a budget, I look for videos on YouTube. They have people who break it down in simple language."

Another youth in Eldoret emphasized the role of YouTube influencers in shaping opinions:
"When someone you trust does a video, you believe them more than a politician on TV."

However, even as these platforms broaden access, several respondents raised concerns about misinformation, especially in WhatsApp groups and Facebook forums. A civic educator in Mombasa warned,
"People share unverified information very quickly. If you don't cross-check, you end up spreading rumors."

In a women's focus group in Homabay, one participant described how false alerts during the elections created fear:
"Someone said polling stations would close early, and many stayed home."

These findings show that digital ecosystems are layered and complex, combining immediacy and reach with real risks of confusion and manipulation. They also highlight the value of trusted intermediaries -friends, family, community leaders, who help interpret and validate information. For marginalized groups, the interplay of digital platforms with radio, TV, and interpersonal networks provides a safety net that can either empower or overwhelm, depending on how information is curated and shared. They confirm that civic-tech and social media platforms are transforming how marginalised Kenyans access, discuss, and act on civic information. Yet, they also underscore the need for digital literacy training, content moderation, and user-centred design to ensure informed participation rather than deepen inequalities or spread harm.

3.3.2 Awareness of the Civic Tools in Kenya

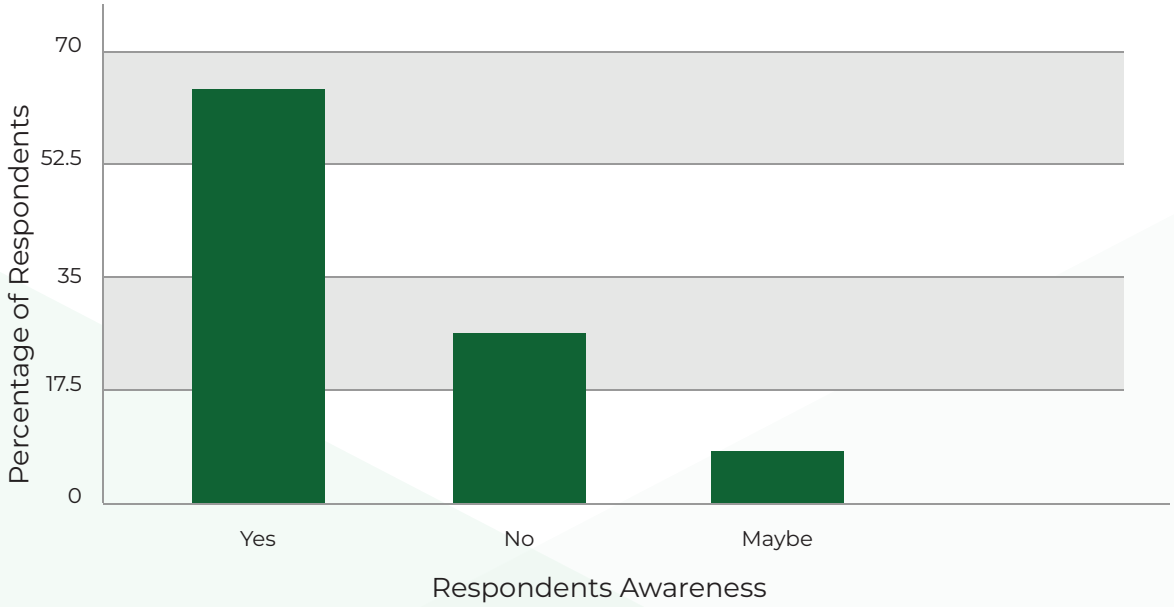

Figure 3.3.2 Are you aware of the civic tools

Although 65.4% of respondents claimed awareness of civic-tech platforms such as Mzalendo, Huduma, and Ushahidi, the data suggest that this awareness is often superficial and unevenly distributed among marginalized groups. Youth in informal settlements like Mathare and Kibera encountered these platforms mainly through social media. One youth shared:
'Sometimes you see a link on Facebook, but you don't know if it's real or a scam. So, you just ignore it.'

Women from rural counties such as Kilifi and Marsabit reported minimal exposure beyond hearing about platforms during public forums. As one woman from Homa Bay explained:
'I've heard of Ushahidi, but nobody around here uses it. People think it's only for elections.'

Persons with disabilities from Mombasa voiced concern about platform complexity and lack of training. A PWD respondent shared:
'I know there's a tool where you can comment on laws, but I couldn't understand how to log in. It's too complex.'

These insights underscore the need for localised, inclusive, and continuous awareness efforts that move beyond basic publicity toward guided, peer-based learning.

3.3.3 Civic Tech Platforms Used

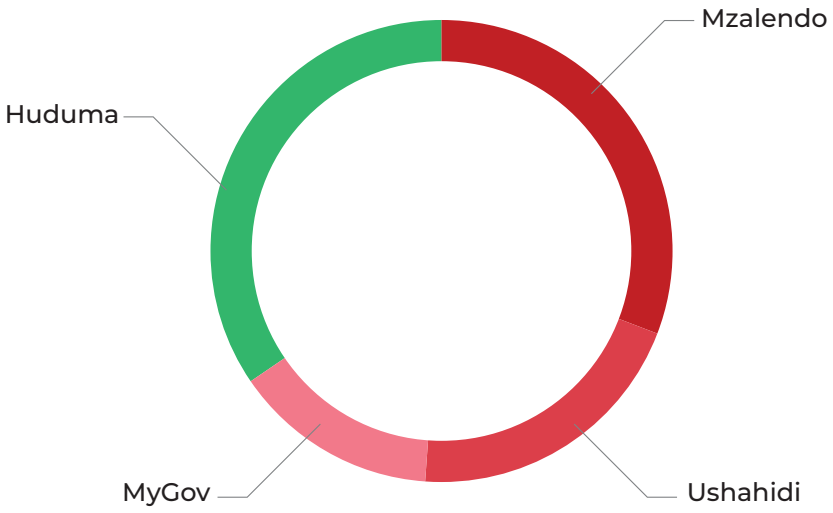

Figure 3.3.3 Civic Tech Platforms Used

Marginalized communities in Kenya interact with civic-tech platforms like Huduma, Dokeza, and Ushahidi in varying capacities. The most frequently used platform was Huduma, due to its direct link to essential services. Youth in Nakuru and Eldoret described Huduma as functional and dependable. One respondent said:
'You apply for a document, you can track it. It feels concrete.'

Women in Kilifi and Homa Bay, however, found platforms like Ushahidi to be intimidating and underutilized. As one woman explained:
'I've heard of Ushahidi, but nobody around here uses it. You have to be some kind of expert to report.'

PWDs in Nakuru and Mombasa highlighted major accessibility issues. A visually impaired participant shared:
'You hear names like Dokeza, but nobody explains how it works. It feels like it's for other people, not us.'

These responses suggest that for platforms to enable active civic participation, they must go beyond dissemination and ensure usability, accessibility, and trust-building.

3.3.4 Learning About Civic Tools

Civic-tech knowledge is predominantly acquired through informal channels such as social media, radio, and interpersonal networks, depending on the community's digital exposure.

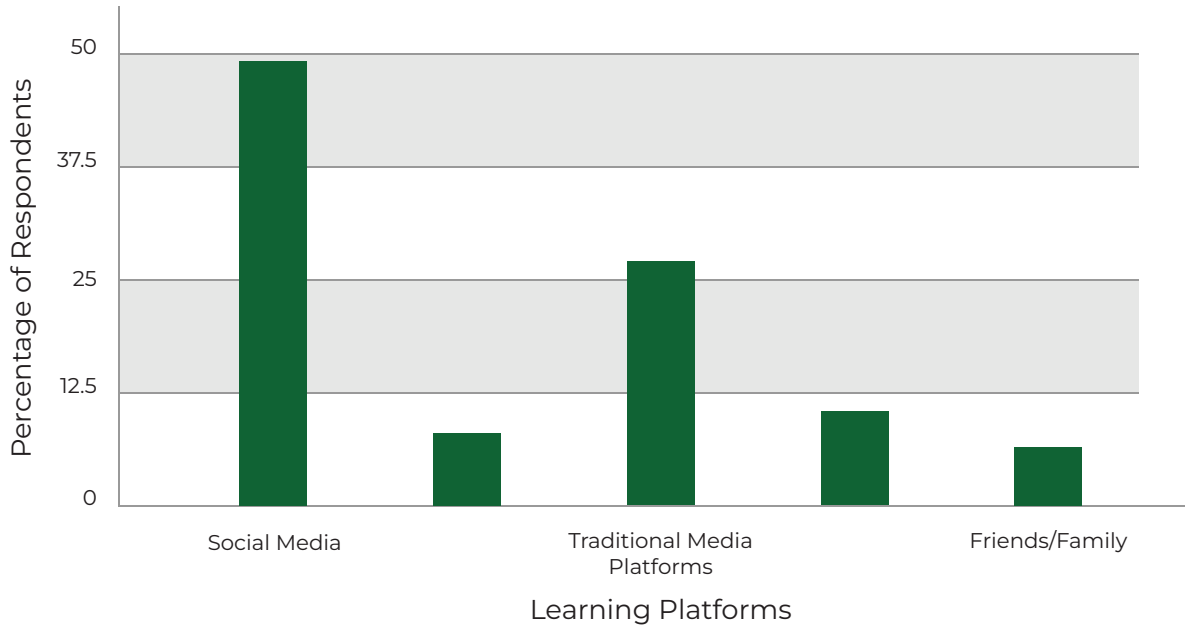

Figure 3.3.4 How did you learn about these civic tools?

Youth in Nairobi and Mombasa learned about civic platforms incidentally while using social platforms. One young person recalled:
'I discovered Huduma through a Facebook post. No one told me, I just clicked and explored.'

Rural women from Kilifi and Turkana reported hearing about platforms through radio broadcasts or village barazas, though with limited understanding. One woman noted:
'They came once and gave us pamphlets. After that, nothing. No phone number, no help.'

PWDs in Nakuru shared that they often depend on peers for assistance in navigating platforms. One respondent stated:
'Even when you know the name, you still need someone to walk you through it because the instructions are not designed for us.'

The findings show that learning is driven more by exposure than training. Effective civic-tech outreach should focus on practical demonstrations, peer-led tutorials, and frequent reinforcement through trusted local channels.

3.3.5 Usage of the Digital Tools

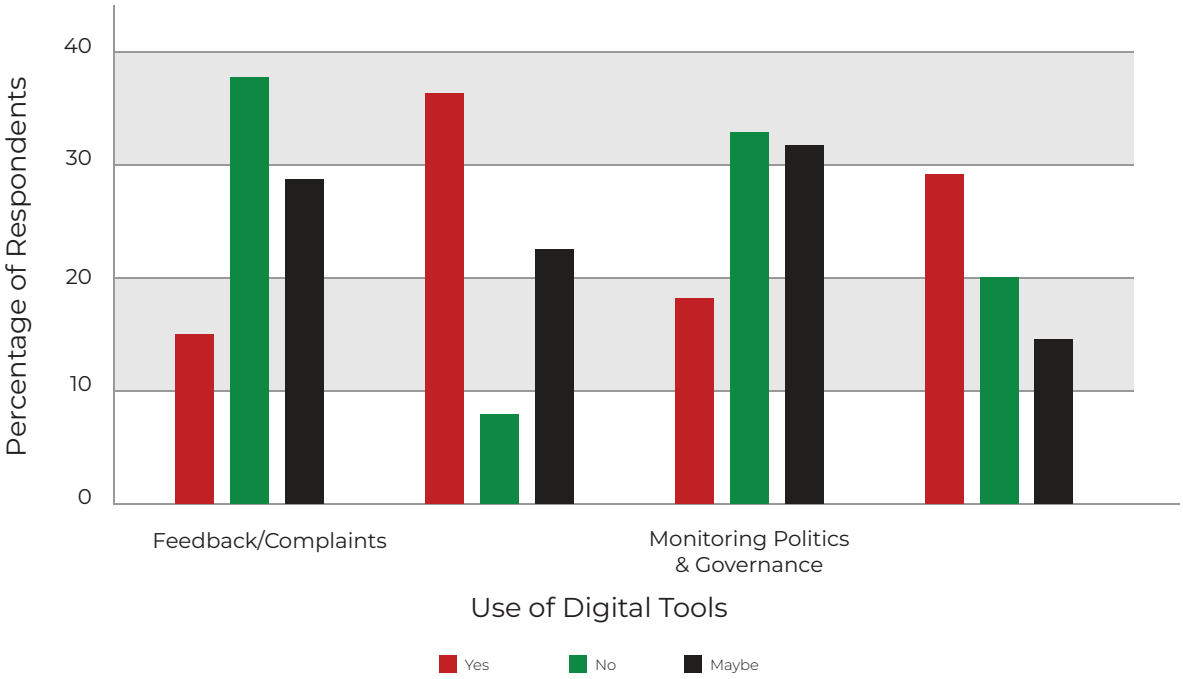

Figure 3.3.4 How did you learn about these civic tools?

Usage of civic-tech tools among marginalized groups in Kenya reveals a strong preference for accessing government services, with 84% of respondents using platforms like Huduma for practical transactions. Women in Kisumu and Nakuru, particularly single mothers, appreciated the speed and convenience:
'You get what you need faster, like a birth certificate or NHIF details.'

However, deeper civic functions such as e-petitions and giving feedback were less commonly used. Youth in Mombasa and Kisii described campaigns that gathered support but lacked follow-through. A student in Nairobi said,
'It's not obvious where your comment goes or who reads it.'

Women from Kitui and Kakamega expressed concern that complaints could lead to retaliation, reinforcing reluctance to engage.

PWDs, including participants in Eldoret and Machakos, faced challenges navigating platforms not designed for assistive tech, which limited their ability to submit feedback or monitor governance processes. These findings reflect a significant participation gap; digital tools are widely used for services but rarely for accountability. Respondents emphasised the need for clearer feedback loops and more responsive interfaces to encourage meaningful engagement.

3.3.6 Usefulness of the Digital Tools

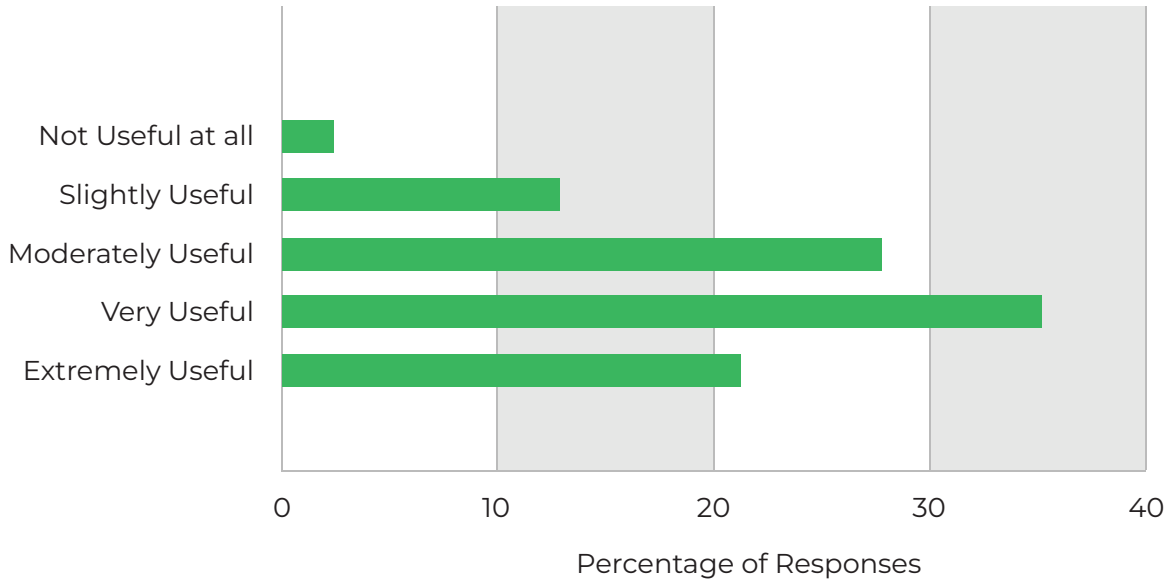

Figure 3.3.6: How useful are these Digital Tools?

Over 82% of respondents found civic-tech tools useful, especially for tasks like tracking documents or avoiding long queues. Youth in Eldoret and small business owners in Nakuru shared that digital tools saved them both time and money. Yet, perceptions of usefulness were shaped by education, accessibility, and outcomes. In informal settlements in Lamu and Kilifi, women noted that tools were helpful only if they had someone to assist them.

PWDs in Nakuru and Mombasa stressed that true usefulness depends on independence. As one participant explained, 'If I have to ask someone to help every time, it's not empowering.' Youth activists in Homabay and Nairobi pointed out that many platforms feel like 'talking into a void' due to a lack of response or action from authorities.

These reflections show that perceived utility is tied to more than functionality—it also hinges on transparency, responsiveness, and inclusive design. Participants expressed that tools are appreciated, but unless they demonstrate real-world impact, trust and motivation will remain fragile.

3.4. Political Participation

3.4.1 Digital Tools' role in political Participation

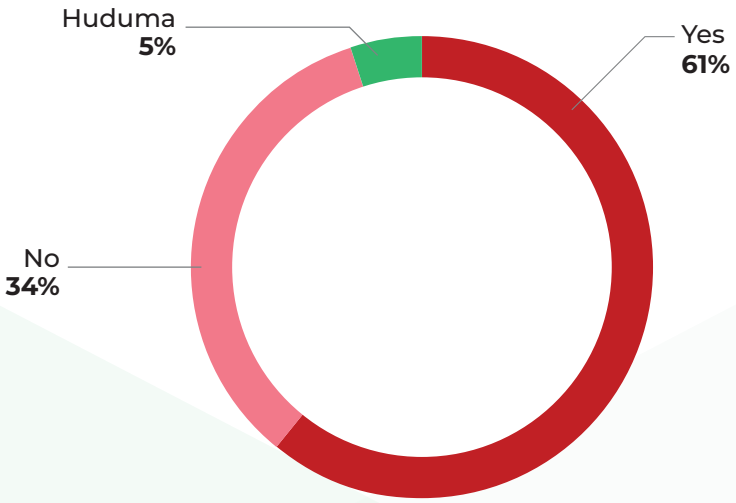

Figure 3.4.1 Have digital Tools increased political participation?

About 61% of respondents reported that digital tools have increased their political participation. This quantitative finding was echoed across many qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, particularly among youth, civil society actors, and persons with disabilities. Participants described how civic-tech has shifted them from passive observation to more active engagement in governance. A youth activist in Nairobi shared a vivid example of this transformation:
"Before, politics was for politicians. Now with Twitter and online forums, I feel like I have a say. We even trended #RejectFinanceBill and it worked."

In Eldoret, a young woman described the same campaign:
"When you see a hashtag trending that you contributed to, you feel powerful. Even if you don't win everything, you know your voice counted."

WhatsApp groups were especially important for those who wanted to participate more quietly, or who were afraid of offline reprisals. A women's leaders' group in Kisumu explained,
"WhatsApp gave us a space to discuss and mobilise silently. We now submit petitions and coordinate feedback in real-time."

Another participant in Nakuru noted,
"You can organise without leaving your home. For women, that's freedom."

Still, many respondents shared that while digital tools have increased their political awareness and confidence, they often struggle to translate that awareness into sustained, meaningful action. In Kitui, a university student said,
"I joined an online petition once. But no one followed up. It felt symbolic, not real participation."

This sense of disillusionment was echoed by a young teacher in Kakamega who shared,
"You sign, you comment, you share—but you never see the impact. After a while, people just watch instead of acting."

For PWDs, limited accessibility was an especially persistent barrier. In a Machakos focus group, a visually impaired participant explained,
"We're always told digital tools are the future. But where are the screen readers? The captions? Until those exist, we're watching from the sidelines."

Another participant who is deaf described using civic-tech platforms as an exercise in frustration:
"I tried to join a Zoom consultation, but there was no interpreter. So, I left."

This exclusion extended beyond just technical barriers. In Mombasa, a woman living with a disability emphasised that even when platforms claimed to be inclusive, the content was often not accessible:
"The forms are too long, the language is hard, and the videos have no subtitles. We are invisible."

Among the 34% of respondents who said digital tools had not increased their participation, and the 4% who were unsure, infrastructure gaps were commonly cited. A community mobilizer in Turkana said,
"When your network goes on and off, you cannot follow discussions. By the time it comes back, decisions are made."
In rural Taita Taveta, a youth participant added,
"People share civic links, but you can't even open them. Data is too expensive."

Trust also played a significant role in discouraging engagement. A woman in an informal settlement in Nairobi explained,
"We see politicians using these platforms to pretend they are listening. But in reality, they don't care."

Similarly, a young man in Kisii said,
"When you don't believe anything will change, why would you waste your bundles?"

These voices highlight that while digital tools have undoubtedly opened doors to political participation for many, that participation remains unequal, conditional, and fragile. As a PWD advocate in Nakuru put it,
"Digital democracy is a good idea. But it only works for those who already have the tools, the skills, and the confidence."

This data confirms that civic-tech can democratize participation, but only when paired with inclusive design, transparent feedback, and investments in infrastructure and capacity-building. Without these changes, many Kenyans, especially those who are rural, disabled, or less educated, will remain on the periphery of digital political life.

3.4.2 Trust of Information on the Digital Platforms

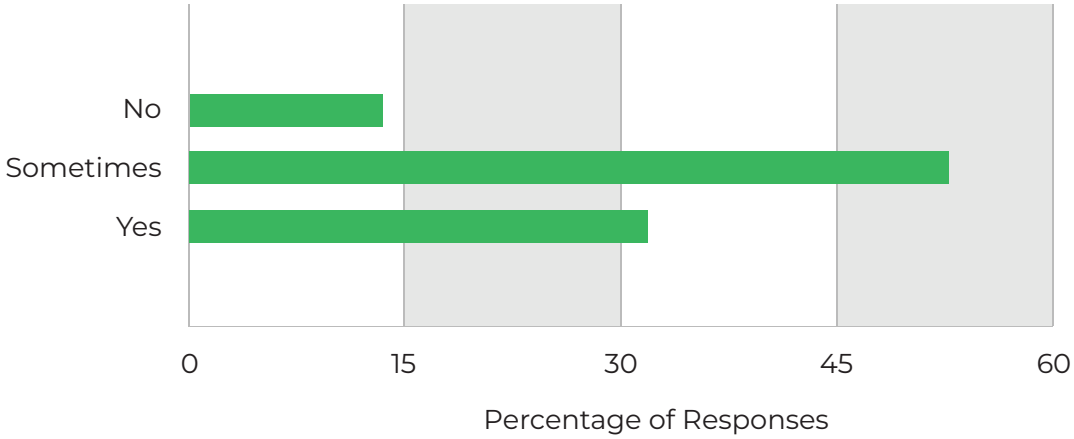

Figure 3.4.2 Do you Trust Information on these digital platforms?

Only 32% of respondents reported they trust civic-tech platforms, highlighting how fragile and contingent trust remains. Across interviews and focus group discussions, participants described a pattern of selective trust, where their confidence depended on the type of platform, the perceived credibility of sources, and the sensitivity of the topic. A woman professional in Mombasa explained this clearly:
"I trust Huduma for services, but not for civic issues. You never know who is behind the content on Facebook or X."

Others echoed that trust was higher when platforms were linked to tangible services with clear confirmation processes. A youth in Nairobi said,
"When I apply for something on Huduma, I get a message. That feels real. But when I comment about politics on MyGov, I don't know if anyone reads it."

Many respondents described cross-checking information across multiple channels to compensate for their skepticism. In Nakuru, a youth influencer shared,
"I read something on Facebook, then look for it in Nation or Citizen TV to verify."

Another participant in Kilifi said,
"WhatsApp is fast, but you can't believe everything. If it's serious, I ask three different people before sharing."

A recurrent theme was how misinformation and manipulation during elections have eroded baseline trust. A digital media researcher in Nairobi recounted,
"We've seen fake election alerts, deepfakes, even paid influencers spreading lies. Trust is hard to build after that."

In Kisumu, a youth organizer added,
"People don't forget when they are misled. One wrong story can make you switch off forever."

Among PWDs, trust was further undermined by a lack of transparency and responsiveness. A participant in a Kisii FGD explained,
"Even when we report issues through apps, we never see the outcomes. Are we being heard or ignored?"

Another visually impaired respondent in Mombasa shared,
"You put effort to give feedback, but there's no follow-up, no update. It feels like a trap to collect your data."

Focus groups in rural counties repeatedly emphasized that trust is relational and earned slowly. A woman in Marsabit said,
"You can't expect us to trust platforms when we don't even trust our leaders. They are connected."

In Turkana, a young man described how fear of surveillance fuels skepticism:
"People think the government is watching everything you post. Even if that's not true, the fear is real."

Several participants also raised concerns about platform bias and lack of neutrality. A youth activist in Kisii explained,
"You see how some platforms push government views more than citizens' views. That is why people prefer WhatsApp, where they feel more free."

For some, selective trust has become a strategy to balance caution and participation. A young woman in Homabay described this approach:
"I use civic platforms but only for certain things. If it's about services, I feel safe. If it's about politics, I watch more than I post."

Similarly, a community health worker in Nakuru said,
"We trust platforms up to a point. Beyond that, you protect yourself."

Overall, while 54% of respondents said they trust civic-tech platforms "sometimes," their engagement was often tentative and transactional, marked by constant questioning of accuracy, bias, and intent. As one participant in Nairobi summed up,
"These tools are useful, but you always feel you must look over your shoulder."

These findings show that fragile trust can only be rebuilt through consistent responsiveness, visible outcomes, clear feedback loops, and transparent moderation policies. Without deliberate efforts to demonstrate that citizens' voices matter and their data is safe, many will continue to approach digital participation cautiously or avoid it altogether.

3.4.3 Challenges Faced when Using Digital Tools

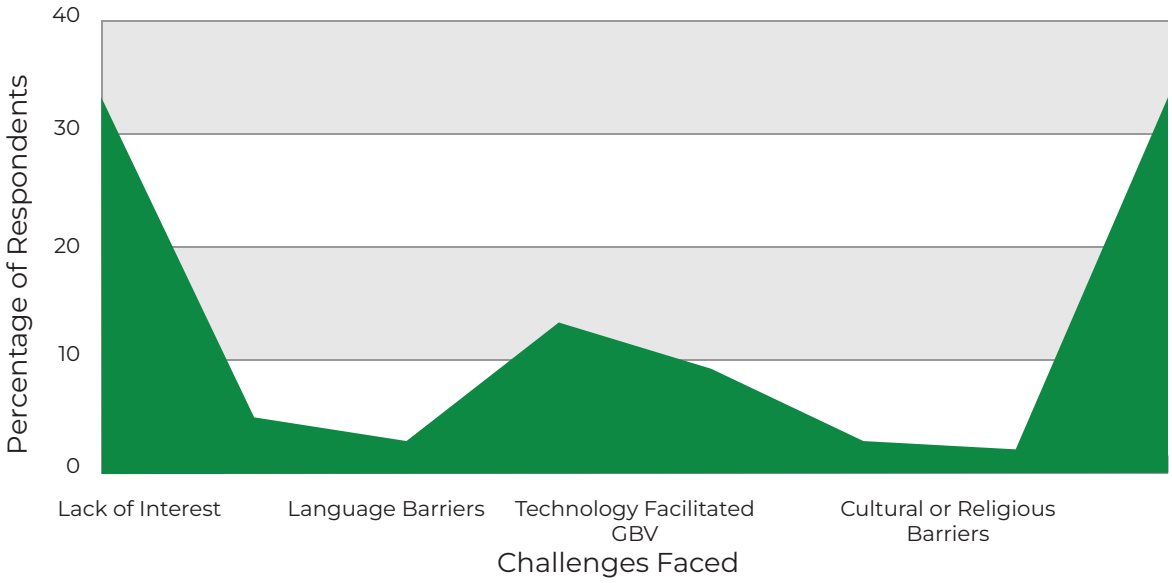

Figure 3.4.3 Challenges faced in using the digital platforms for political participation

The three major barriers to digital political participation reported by respondents were the high cost of devices and data, lack of internet access, and fear of surveillance. These challenges were compounded by additional factors, including technology, gender-based violence, digital literacy gaps, accessibility issues, language barriers, and restrictive cultural norms. Together, these findings highlight the compounded vulnerabilities faced by specific groups, especially women, persons with disabilities, and residents of rural or low-income areas, who must navigate both digital and offline forms of marginalization.

In nearly every focus group, participants described the financial burden of data costs as a major obstacle. A woman from a low-income mothers' group in Kilifi summed it up powerfully:
"Data bundles are a luxury for most of us. You choose between texting your MP or feeding your child."

In Mombasa, a young boda boda rider shared,
"I want to join online forums, but 20 shillings for bundles can be the difference between working and staying home."

Poor and unreliable internet connectivity was equally frustrating. In Lamu, a youth participant explained,
"Even in community networks, we face frequent shutdowns. How can you participate if the signal is always weak?"

A woman in Turkana described how these problems are compounded in remote areas:
"Sometimes the network disappears for days. You only hear about meetings after they happen."

Fear of surveillance and reprisal also loomed large. A human rights lawyer interviewed in Nairobi noted,
"People avoid commenting on governance because they fear being monitored. There's always a fear that you're being watched."

This sentiment was echoed in Kisumu, where a youth leader said,
"Everyone knows the government can trace your phone. If you criticize too much, you feel like you'll get a call."

Gender-based online violence emerged as a persistent deterrent for women. In a Mombasa focus group, a female blogger recounted,
"When I posted about corruption, I got threats. My photos were doctored and shared in WhatsApp groups. I left Twitter for my safety."

Another participant in Homa Bay shared,
"People send you vulgar messages if you speak up. Some women use fake names or just stop engaging."

For PWDs, accessibility gaps were described as both routine and exhausting. A deaf youth group in Nakuru voiced repeated frustrations:
"The platforms are not designed for us. No screen reading tools, no sign language. Even the complaint forms are hard to fill."

A visually impaired participant in Kisii added,
"Sometimes you can't even tell what you are clicking. It's trial and error."

Digital literacy challenges also appeared prominently in rural areas. In Baringo, a community health volunteer explained,
"People here have smartphones but don't know how to use apps beyond WhatsApp."

A teacher in Kwale said, *"We need step-by-step guides, not just posters saying 'go online.'"*

Language barriers were less common but still significant in certain communities. A woman in Lamu shared,
"Many civic platforms are only in English. Older people and those who didn't finish school feel ashamed to ask for help."

Finally, cultural norms continued to discourage participation in some regions. In Kilifi, a male elder said,
"In our culture, young women should not speak about politics publicly. Even online, families discourage it."

This was confirmed by a youth participant in Marsabit:
"If you post about politics, people say you are badly raised."

These lived experiences underscore the intersectional nature of digital exclusion, where economic hardship, technological infrastructure, gendered harassment, cultural restrictions, and inaccessible design all combine to limit meaningful participation. As one participant in Kakamega put it,
"We thought the internet would make things equal, but in reality, the same problems follow us online."

To address these challenges, many respondents stressed the importance of not only expanding access but ensuring that civic-tech platforms are safe, inclusive, and responsive. Without deliberate investment in affordable connectivity, user-friendly design, protections against harassment, and culturally relevant outreach, the promise of digital political participation will remain out of reach for many marginalized Kenyans.

3.4.4 Solutions to Political Participation using Digital Tools

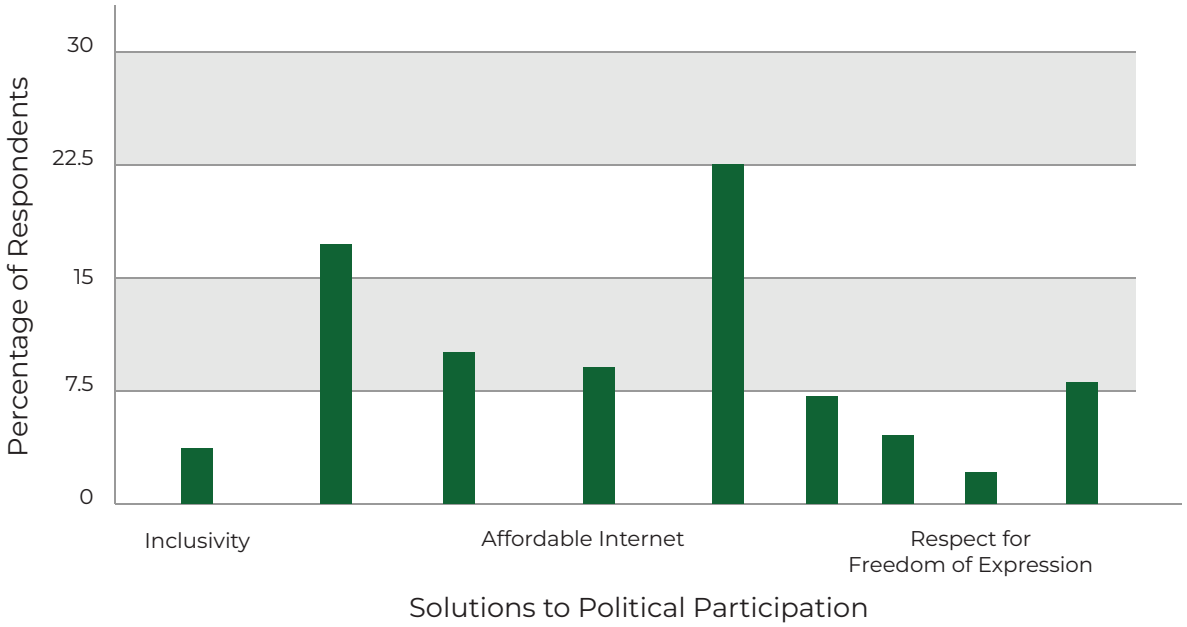

Figure 3.4.4 What would make it easier for your participation on digital platforms?

Safety and trust emerged as some of the most pressing concerns among respondents, underscoring how economic, infrastructural, and psychosocial barriers intersect to limit meaningful digital participation. About 22.5% of participants prioritized affordable internet as their most urgent need, highlighting the pervasive economic exclusion that keeps many offline. In multiple focus groups, young people described data costs as a daily burden. A participant from an informal settlement in Nairobi explained,
"Free or subsidized internet would change everything. We'd be online daily, contributing to issues that matter."

Another young man in Turkana shared,
"Even if you have a smartphone, if you can't buy bundles, it's useless."

The desire for safer digital spaces was voiced by 17.1% of respondents, with women and persons with disabilities especially emphasizing their vulnerability to harassment. A member of the Women & Disability Rights Coalition in Nairobi said,
"We need safe, moderated spaces where women and people with disabilities can express themselves without fear."

In Mombasa, a female youth leader recounted her experience:
"When I spoke about corruption, I got threatening messages. Now I'm careful about what I say online."

Concerns about freedom of expression and surveillance were also widespread. About 16.1% of respondents highlighted the need to protect freedom of speech, reflecting a persistent fear of censorship or reprisal. In an interview, a digital policy advocate in Mombasa explained,
"Respecting freedom of speech online is key. Some people are afraid to comment because they think they'll be tracked."

A woman in Nakuru added,
"It's not just about having a platform. It's about feeling safe and knowing your opinion won't come back to haunt you."

Privacy and security were flagged by 10.5% of respondents as critical. In Kisumu, a youth activist said,
"People are worried their data will be shared without consent. There's no trust that what you submit is confidential."

In Baringo, a community volunteer explained,
"Even WhatsApp groups feel risky. You don't know who is screenshotting your messages."

Infrastructure gaps, especially in rural and marginalized areas, remained a recurring theme. About 9.4% mentioned unreliable connectivity as a significant barrier. A youth in Marsabit shared,
"We have a network maybe two days a week. How can you participate in real time if your signal disappears?"

While PWD access and inclusivity were mentioned by relatively few respondents , the voices of those affected revealed systemic neglect. A visually impaired participant in Nakuru explained,
"Platforms are built without us in mind. Later, they say they will add features. But it's too late -people have already given up."

A PWD advocate emphasized,
"Invite us when you're building the platforms, not after. Accessibility should not be an afterthought."

Low mentions of platform accountability reflected limited trust in content governance and moderation. A youth from Kisii explained,
"We see hate speech and fake news every day. Nobody is removing it."

In Homa Bay, a woman shared,
"When you report abuse, nothing happens. So you stop bothering."

Similarly, the fact that only 7.3% mentioned civic education indicates that existing efforts to build user capacity are insufficient, especially among rural and low-literacy populations. A County Assembly representative in Siaya said,
"We want to engage, but we need to understand how. Many don't even know how to navigate these tools, or what their rights are."

In Kilifi, a youth leader observed,
"Posters and radio ads are not enough. We need real training and demonstrations."

Across all groups, participants stressed that any strategy to improve digital participation must combine affordability, safety, inclusivity, and education. As a woman in Homabay put it,
"Access alone is not empowerment. If you are afraid, or if you can't understand, you are still excluded."

These findings point to a civic-tech ecosystem that has made progress in providing platforms but has failed to create conditions of trust, safety, and inclusiveness. Building meaningful participation will require not just better technology but transparent governance, affordable infrastructure, and intentional support for marginalized users.

3.5 Descriptive Statistics

3.5.1 Intersection of Respondents' Age, Gender, and Education

Figure 3.5.1 shows the Intersection of Age, Gender, and Education in shaping civic-tech engagement among respondents. The intersection indicates that:

i. Young women are digitally active but face higher online harassment and lower trust
ii. Young university graduates are the most frequent users, but also more skeptical
iii. Educated women report high usage but limited impact on decision-making

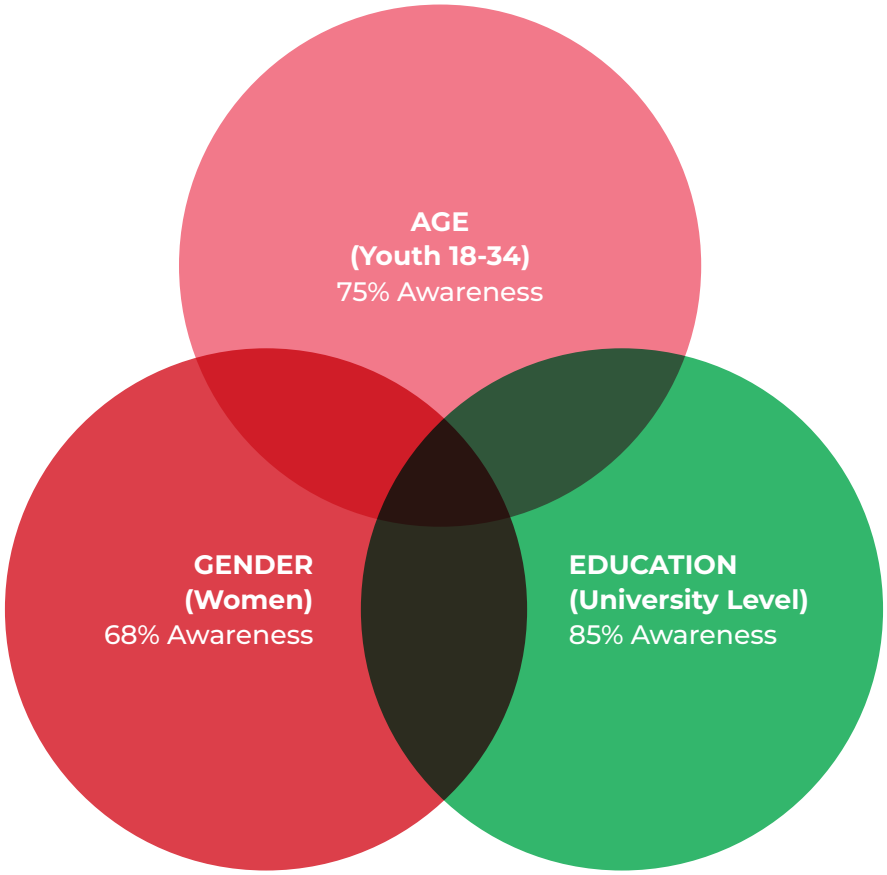

Figure 3.5.1 Intersection of Age, Gender, Education, and Digital Tools Used.

Youth reported the highest awareness and use of digital platforms. Women were moderately engaged but faced significant barriers related to trust and safety. University-educated respondents used platforms most frequently but had the lowest levels of trust in information credibility. The overlap between these groups, young, educated women, reveals high digital participation paired with pronounced skepticism and concerns about online harassment.

Female respondents accounted for 47% of users, suggesting improving digital inclusion. However, subsequent analysis reveals that women were significantly less likely to trust civic platforms and more likely to report online harassment. This indicates that while access is improving, safety and trust remain critical barriers for female participation.

3.5.2 Frequency of Civic-Tech Use by Gender

Figure 3.5.1 shows the Intersection of Age, Gender, and Education in shaping civic-tech engagement among respondents. The intersection indicates that:

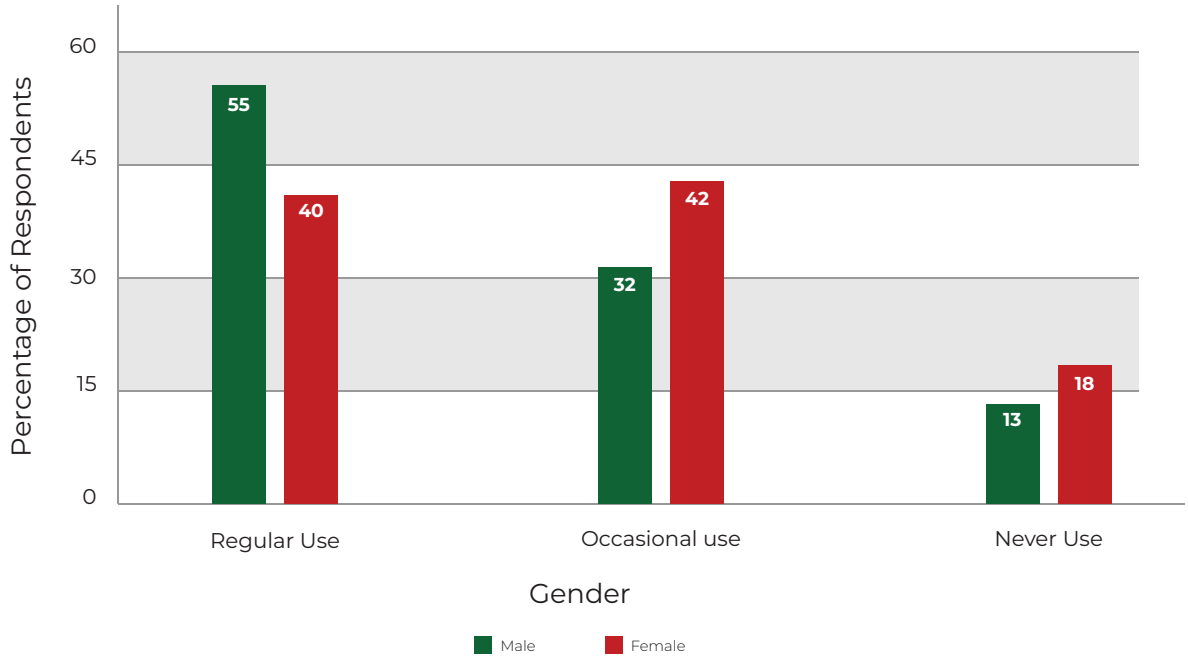

Figure 3.5.2 Frequency of Civic-Tech Use by Gender

This chart illustrates that men reported higher regular civic-tech use compared to women, while women were more likely to be occasional or non-users. A chi-square test confirmed that this difference is statistically significant, suggesting gender plays an important role in civic-tech engagement patterns.

3.5.3 Weekly Civic-Tech Use by Education Level

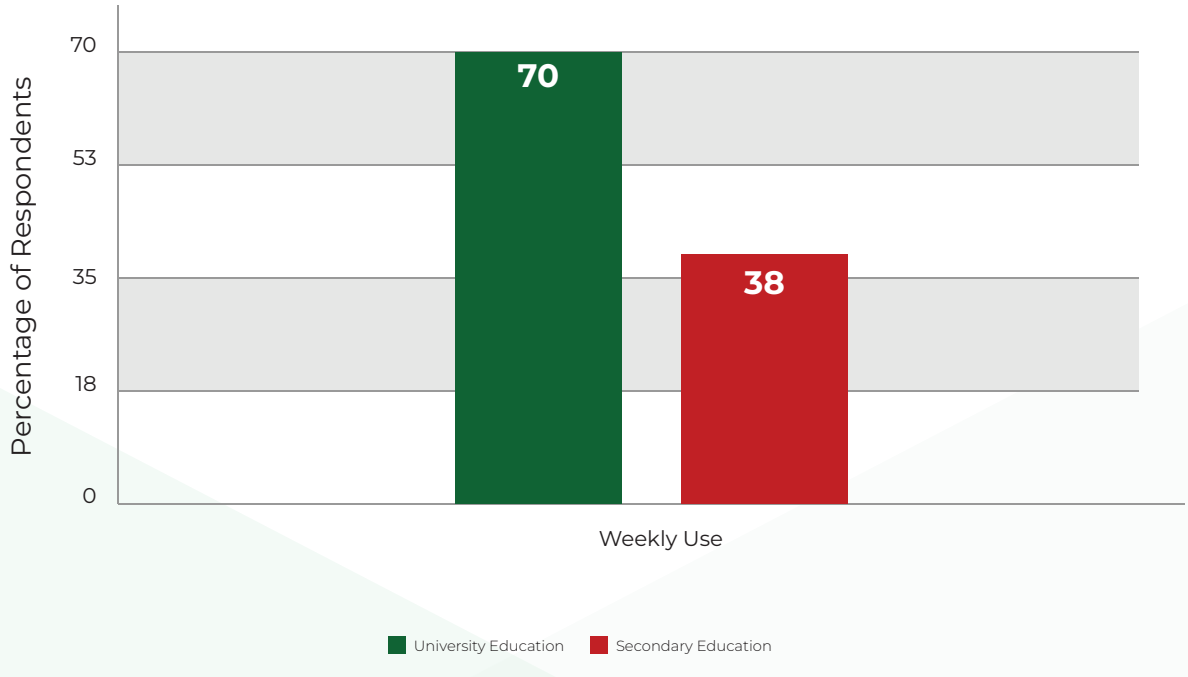

Figure 3.5.3 Weekly Civic-Tech Use by Education Level

Respondents with university education were nearly twice as likely to use civic-tech tools weekly compared to those with secondary education. This association was statistically significant, underscoring the influence of education on civic-tech adoption

3.5.4 Correlation Between Digital Literacy and Civic-Tech Platforms

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Interpetation
Digital Literacy	Trust in Platforms	0.46	Moderate positive Relationship

Table 3.5.4 Correlation Between Digital Literacy and Civic-Tech Platforms

The correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between digital literacy and trust in civic-tech platforms. This indicates that respondents with higher confidence in using digital tools are more likely to trust the information they encounter online. Targeted digital skills training may help improve trust and engagement among marginalised users.

Figures 3.5.2, 3.5.3 and 3.5.4 Comparative and inferential analysis of civic-tech engagement by gender, education, and digital literacy. Gender and education were significantly associated with usage frequency, while digital literacy correlated positively with trust. These insights highlight the importance of targeted interventions to bridge participation gaps.

3.6 Recommendations

Thematic Area	*Issue Identified*	*Qualitative Input & Recommendations*
Digital Literacy & Education	Lack of skills, need for localised training, and early learning inclusion	Introduce civic tech in school curricula and offer adult literacy workshops through community centres and CBOs. *"We need training programs in our communities, not just Nairobi."* – FGD, Women Leaders, Kisumu.
Internet & Devices Access	High data costs, low connectivity, limited device access	Subsidize smartphones and internet, expand community Wi-Fi, and include PWDs in Universal Service Fund support mechanisms. *"Bundles are too expensive to use Digital tools regularly."* — FGD, Youth, Kajiado.
Language & Interface	Lack of local language content, few visual/audio formats, poor design	Design interfaces with intuitive navigation, voice prompts, and subtitles; include screen-reader compatibility and sign language options. *"If it's not in Kiswahili or local dialect, many of us switch off."* – KII, Adult Educator, Kilifi
Trust & Privacy	Surveillance fears, lack of data protection, unsafe online spaces	Enforce stronger data protection laws, promote anonymous participation features, and train moderators in rights-based content governance. *"I deleted my Twitter after being harassed for posting political content."* – FGD, Female Youth, Nairobi.
Inclusion & Representation	Discrimination, lack of feedback, ignored views, poor representation	Create public dashboards showing policy actions from digital feedback, mandate inclusive co-design processes for civic platforms. *"We give our opinions but don't know if they are heard."* — FGD, PWD Forum, Nakuru
Institutional Support	Weak partnerships, limited local government engagement, absence of disability-responsive systems	Reform digital governance laws to mandate inclusive accessibility standards and support multisectoral coordination (ICT, disability, governance, education). *"Most digital tools don't even work for us. No consultation."* — KII, Disability Rights Advocate, Kitui

3.6 Recommendations

Thematic Area	*Issue Identified*	*Qualitative Input & Recommendations*
Awareness & Sensitization	Ignorance of platforms, poor visibility and civic-tech outreach	Use SMS, radio, barazas, religious centers, and local leaders to disseminate civic-tech awareness. Include civic-tech literacy in school and adult education. *"We only know Huduma. Mzalendo and others? Never heard of them."* – FGD, Rural Youth, Siaya
Platform Efficiency	Poor user experience, slow platforms, inaccessible or unresponsive interfaces	Invest in lightweight, mobile-first designs with offline functionality, real-time service tracking, and multilingual interfaces. Ensure prompt responses and public feedback loops. *"The apps freeze or don't work on our phones."* – FGD, Young Mothers, Lamu

Table 1: What improvements or changes would you recommend to make digital political participation easier and more inclusive for marginalised

The presence of barriers such as ignorance of platforms, poor platform usability, and limited digital literacy suggests that while civic-tech tools exist, marginalised groups are not fully utilising them. Their use is often hindered by a lack of awareness, training, and access. The need for improvements in digital literacy, user interface, and awareness indicates low but potentially growing engagement, especially when tools are designed inclusively. When accessible and inclusive, digital tools can enable engagement, particularly by offering localised content, language options, and safe online spaces. However, the data shows that issues like poor platform performance, lack of feedback mechanisms, and minimal representation hinder meaningful engagement. Digital tools must be responsive, multilingual, and interactive to truly influence governance participation for marginalised users.

The data outlines several systemic barriers such as Limited skills and training, especially in rural areas or among women and youth, High data costs, poor connectivity, and limited device ownership, Platforms often lack support for local languages or accessible formats, Surveillance concerns and weak data protection erode user confidence, and Experiences of discrimination and being ignored in feedback loops limit participation. These reflect interconnected infrastructural, socio-cultural, and technical barriers that marginalise these populations further. [1]

There is a need for Targeted, localized training programs and inclusion in school curricula; Subsidies, community Wi-Fi, and access to smartphones/devices; Local language content, audio/visual tools, and intuitive designs for low-literacy users; Strong data protection laws, user anonymity features, and community moderation; Proactive outreach to marginalized voices and public reporting on how input influences policy. Collaboration with local governments, CSOs, and tech firms to co-create solutions; Fast, mobile-friendly, accessible platforms offering real-time updates and services; and Multimedia sensitization on available civic-tech tools and their impact.

3.7 Unique Findings

Theme/Variable	*Unique Insight*	*Why It Matters*
Age	Youth (18–34) were the most engaged but did not report proportionately higher trust compared to older users.	Frequent use does not guarantee confidence; trust-building is needed even for youth.
Gender	Women had comparable awareness but less frequent use and higher fear of harassment.	Highlights that access alone doesn't create safe or meaningful participation.
Counties	Some peri-urban counties had low participation despite partial infrastructure.	Civic education gaps can be as limiting as infrastructure deficits.
Social Groups	PWDs found online tools reduce mobility barriers but introduce new accessibility barriers.	Accessibility must be addressed at the design stage, not as an add-on.
Education	Educated users still found platforms confusing and text-heavy.	Simplicity and clarity benefit everyone, regardless of education level.
Digital Platforms Used	WhatsApp was the main platform for civic mobilization, not Facebook or Twitter.	Civic strategies should leverage WhatsApp's reach, especially in low-connectivity areas.
Awareness of Civic Tools	"Awareness" was often superficial, with low confidence in impact or purpose.	Awareness campaigns must include demonstrations and capacity building.
Civic-Tech Platforms Used	Huduma was practical and widely used; Dokeza mainly used passively for reading.	Design should bridge the gap between information access and participation.
Learning About Civic Tools	Word of mouth was the least common discovery channel despite high interpersonal trust.	Stigma and fear may be suppressing peer-to-peer diffusion.
Usage of Digital Tools	Large drop-off between service access (84%) and accountability (37%) functions.	Indicates a participation gap: platforms enable voice in theory but not in practice.
Usefulness of Digital Tools	Even among those rating tools as "very useful," many described them as "talking into a void."	Perceived usefulness depends on responsiveness and visible impact.
Political Participation	Participation increased for many (61%), but trust remained low (32%).	Engagement is fragile without consistent transparency.
Trust in Information	Respondents trusted service-related content more than political content.	Content credibility strategies must be tailored by platform and topic.
Challenges	Economic exclusion (high data and device costs) was the most frequently cited barrier.	Affordability remains the main participation barrier.
Solutions	Only 2% mentioned PWD access as a priority, suggesting invisibility or under-reporting of accessibility needs.	Accessibility advocacy needs more visibility and mainstreaming.

3.7 Unique Findings

Theme/Variable	*Unique Insight*	*Why It Matters*
Solutions	Only 2% mentioned PWD access as a priority, suggesting invisibility or under-reporting of accessibility needs.	Accessibility advocacy needs more visibility and mainstreaming.
Intersection (Age, Gender, Education)	Young, educated women were the most active but reported the lowest trust and highest harassment.	Targeted safety measures are essential for digitally fluent female users.
Frequency by Gender	Women were more likely to be cautious or occasional users rather than never-users.	Women are selectively engaged, not disengaged—support safer participation options.
Frequency by Education	Gap between secondary and university-educated users (38% vs. 70%) was the widest demographic divide observed.	Tools risk reinforcing education-based exclusion if not simplified.
Digital Literacy & Trust Correlation	Even with a positive correlation (r=0.46), many skilled users still distrusted platforms.	Trust-building requires transparency and accountability, not only digital literacy.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a detailed analysis of how marginalised groups in Kenya engage with civic-tech platforms, drawing on quantitative data and rich qualitative narratives. The findings paint a picture of both promise and persistent inequality in digital political participation. The demographic profiles confirmed that youth aged 18–34 are the most active users of digital tools, leveraging platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Dokeza for both information and activism. Gender patterns reveal that while nearly half of users are women, their engagement is often limited by online harassment, fear of reprisal, and lower digital confidence. Persons with disabilities reported the greatest systemic barriers, including inaccessible interfaces, lack of assistive technologies, and exclusion from civic-tech design processes.

This chapter demonstrates that while civic-tech platforms have begun to democratise political participation in Kenya, their transformative potential remains constrained by structural, economic, and psychosocial barriers. To move from symbolic inclusion to meaningful engagement, civic-tech must be redesigned with and for marginalised communities. The evidence calls for holistic interventions combining affordable connectivity, inclusive design, robust civic education, and protections for privacy and safety. This chapter provides a foundation for the recommendations and policy reforms proposed in subsequent sections, which aim to realise the promise of digital tools as engines of accountable, equitable, and participatory democracy.

CHAPTER **FOUR**

Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1 Discussion

The analysis of data collected and literature reviewed highlights that while civic-tech platforms in Kenya have created unprecedented opportunities for marginalized groups to participate in governance, this transformation remains fragmented, uneven, and fragile.

Youth aged 18–34 have emerged as the most digitally engaged demographic, comprising nearly 59% of users. Their fluency with platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter/X, and Mzalendo has enabled them to shape narratives, mobilize peers, and demand accountability. As a youth participant in Nakuru described, “Social media is our parliament; we raise issues there when we are ignored elsewhere.” However, quantitative data reveal that high usage among youth does not automatically translate to high trust. Despite their activism, young people remain skeptical about whether participation leads to tangible change, reflecting a gap between civic expression and policy impact.

Gender dynamics further complicate the picture. Although the survey showed near parity in participation , qualitative insights exposed deep-seated barriers to equitable engagement. Women consistently reported higher levels of online harassment, surveillance fears, and reluctance to speak out. As one woman in Kisumu put it, “Even when you know how to use the apps, the abuse and trolls make you keep quiet.” This underscores that numerical representation does not guarantee safe or empowering participation.

The rural-urban divide remains a critical determinant of engagement. Nairobi, Nakuru, and Kiambu accounted for most civic-tech activity, buoyed by stronger infrastructure and higher awareness. In contrast, counties like Marsabit, Kilifi, and Kuria lagged due to unreliable internet, low digital literacy, and limited outreach. A youth leader from Migori summed it up: “We want to use these platforms, but the network is poor, and we don’t know how they work.” This layered exclusion reinforces historical inequalities, making civic-tech adoption highly uneven across geographies.

Persons with disabilities continue to be the most systematically excluded. While digital tools reduce some physical barriers to participation, most platforms lack universal design features such as screen-reader compatibility, captioning, or sign language content. A disability rights advocate in Nairobi noted, “Most apps don’t have sign language videos or screen reader support. We are always added last.” This exclusion reflects structural failures in policy implementation and platform design, despite existing legal frameworks. Education emerged as a strong predictor of engagement. University-educated respondents were nearly twice as likely to use civic-tech tools weekly compared to those with secondary education. However, even this group reported frustration with overly text-heavy interfaces and opaque processes. As several rural respondents observed, “We need local training programs, not just Nairobi seminars.” This shows that digital literacy and usability are critical factors regardless of education level.

Trust remains a fragile pillar. While 61% of users reported increased political participation due to digital tools, only 32% fully trust civic-tech platforms. This skepticism is fueled by misinformation, lack of feedback mechanisms, and fears of surveillance or reprisal. One PWD respondent captured this sentiment: "We give feedback but never hear what happened to it." As a result, participation often remains transactionally focused on accessing services, rather than transformative or deliberative. Policy and legal frameworks, though progressive on paper, remain inconsistently enforced. Kenya's Data Protection Act and National ICT Policy offer strong foundations, but implementation gaps persist. County-level disability legislation is outdated or symbolic, and inclusive digital governance remains aspirational rather than operational.

These findings suggest that while civic-tech holds immense promise, it frequently reproduces the same exclusions it purports to dismantle. Without deliberate efforts to address affordability, accessibility, safety, and trust, the potential of digital platforms will remain unrealised for many marginalised Kenyans.

4.2 Conclusion

This study affirms that digital tools have created new pathways for civic engagement among marginalised groups in Kenya, especially educated, urban youth who have leveraged platforms for activism and public debate. However, digital participation is neither widespread nor equitable. Persistent barriers, including limited digital literacy, poor infrastructure, high data costs, gender-based harassment, and low trust, continue to entrench structural inequalities. Persons with disabilities, rural populations, and less-educated citizens remain disproportionately excluded despite formal commitments to inclusion. For civic-tech to evolve from symbolic to substantive inclusion, Kenya's digital ecosystem must transition from platform-centric design to people-centered governance. This requires:

i. *Enforcing universal accessibility standards*
ii. *Subsidizing devices and the internet for low-income users*
iii. *Building trust through transparency and responsive feedback loops*
iv. *Centering gender-responsive and disability-inclusive design principles*

Multilingual, community-driven, and co-created solutions must become the norm rather than the exception. Equally, efforts must address the structural determinants of exclusion, such as poverty, education gaps, and digital illiteracy, so that civic participation becomes a right accessible to all, not a privilege reserved for the few. With targeted investment, legislative reform, and participatory approaches, digital tools can transform from temporary solutions into lasting engines of democratic equity and accountability. Realizing this vision requires commitment not only from government but also from civil society, technology designers, and communities themselves.

4.3 Recommendations

Building on the findings and unique insights of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to advance an inclusive, equitable, and accountable civic-tech ecosystem in Kenya. These recommendations combine programmatic, platform-level, policy, and legal interventions, identifying clear responsibilities and pathways for implementation. To streamline advocacy and align with national and local stakeholders' mandates, the following actor-specific recommendations are proposed:

4.3.1 Government Ministries and Agencies

- *Lead a National Digital Inclusion Agenda through the Ministry of ICT, aligning sectoral policies and formalizing it via a Cabinet directive.*
- *Ensure CAK conducts regular accessibility audits, updates Consumer Protection Regulations, and reforms USF guidelines to prioritize inclusion.*
- *Update the Persons with Disabilities Act and Kenya Information and Communications Act to embed enforceable digital accessibility standards.*
- *Ensure KNBS collects and publishes disaggregated ICT usage data to guide policy and planning.*

4.3. 2. County Governments

- *Partner with civil society to implement community-based digital literacy and civic-tech training in rural and marginalized areas.*
- *Establish local digital hubs equipped with Wi-Fi, accessible devices, and user support in underserved communities.*

4.3.3. Civic-Tech Developers and Platform Providers

- *Adopt inclusive mobile-first designs with screen-reader compatibility, visual navigation aids, and multilingual interfaces.*
- *Integrate user feedback dashboards and anonymous participation options to enhance safety and accountability.*
- *Establish inclusive advisory councils to co-design platforms with women, youth, and PWDs.*

4.3.4. Civil Society and Academia

- *Facilitate localized civic-tech training and advocacy using accessible formats, including Braille, sign language, and plain-language guides.*
- *Integrate civic-tech and digital rights content into university programs and support research-based evaluations of platform accessibility.*

4.3.5. Technology Companies and Internet Service Providers

- *Collaborate with the government to offer subsidized internet and devices via USF-backed partnerships.*
- *Invest in rural broadband infrastructure and develop platforms to prevent and report online harassment effectively.*

4.3.6. Office of the Data Protection Commissioner

- *Ensure all platforms comply with the Data Protection Act, prioritizing privacy-first civic engagement.*
- *Conduct outreach and digital safety education targeting marginalized populations and rights-based data governance*

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