



*Empowering women and girls*



**Project:**

**Interfaith engagement to prevent effects of religious marginalization for peace and justice in Kenya**

**Activity:**

**Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) – Identifying narratives and developing alternative narratives toward the General Elections**

**Kenya National Landscape: Existing Negative Narratives toward General Elections and Messages on Alternative Approaches**



# 1. Introduction

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Elections are about numbers, mobilization and persuasions. In any political contests including elections, political actors seeking elective positions develop and implement diverse means of mobilizing, advancing and engaging with the electorates to vote them into offices. One such means is the political parties as instruments for getting into power. In most cases, political parties are formed based on ideologies. However, in some situations, those parties are formed, driven and led by certain identities including social and geographical. They then become instruments for whipping emotions which often tag along and apply historical and contemporary negative events and dynamics and community's aspirations.

From the aforesaid, as Kenya moves toward the general elections, political parties, actors and electorates have been engaged in campaigns. Some of these campaigns have been characterized by negative rhetoric and narratives. Culture of social and political intolerance are visible manifesting in situations of violence. Institutions charged with the responsibilities of maintaining peace, law and order have already identified and mapped some areas that have potential of violence eruptions.

In order to respond to the above challenges, the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) initiated various processes of mobilizing and equipping young people with skills to identify, interrogate and champion alternatives to various narratives. The following formed key methodologies that highlighted and informed issues of engagements:

- a) Context based Focused Groups Discussions (FGDs) – these were carried out by convening and facilitated young people from similar backgrounds (Counties levels) to discuss specific issues and outline potential areas of actions. In these, they were able to interrogate social and religious capital for appropriate actions and where such have been misused for violence;
- b) National dialogue conference - these were used to consolidate issues arising from the Counties FGDs to have them bear national agenda. Through the conference, young people were able to ascertain similar/converging and divergence issues out of which they developed common and context specific actions. Key common factors identified included the need to have a broad based guideline to correct social and faith-guided narratives that advance culture of violence (including electoral). This is where the development and training on faith-led alternative narratives on the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) emerged; and
- c) Counties training sessions – upon development of faith-led alternative narratives on the PVE, series of County-based training and exposure on the tool was carried out. This provided young people, faith leaders and other actors such as the Government leaders' opportunities to have skills and knowledge of responding to political conflict-prone conflict narratives. The training sessions targeted three Counties of Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa and brought together champions. In discussions, various narratives that were emerging in respective contexts were identified. With skills building, they were able to develop, discuss and affirm some alternatives to those narratives.

One key consensus that was emerging from the named sessions included the need for continued engaging with the aspects of generating context-based alternatives not only during the heated political moments such as elections. It was observed that continued engagements on these would make young people have adequate networks for pro-action. It has been observed that in situations where people have skills and pre-existing networks, they tend to adequately and effectively handle violence whenever they arise as compared to environments without.

## 2. Economic, Religious/Faith, Social and Political Landscape

Kenya, like any African country, has historical, contemporary and emerging situations of economic, religious, social and political dynamics that have potential of contributing to violent conflicts. This can be confirmed especially in looking at the country's past events such as the 2007/9 Post Election Violence (PEV). At the center of this dynamic is the competitive electoral process which, seemingly, continues to bear sectorial identity such as social and religious.

With the increased inflation, deteriorating purchasing power among the citizens and global economic challenges, there is likely to be contestations against the government on the rising cost of living. While the effects of COVID-19 and current global factors have highly contributed to the local economic challenges, it is hard for the local citizens to endorse such especially they observe cases of corruption and reported misuse of public resources.

Through and driven by devastating economic situations in the country, it has been observed that political conversations are taking shape around what should be done or ought to have been done to address the whole problem. In this case, the country has witnessed political divisions between the haves and the have-nots. Political mobilization grouping those who perceive and advance the narrative that those in power are not interested in the common populations' economic status versus those who outside power not having experience to find solutions are evident. In addition, political formations targeting specific historical and economic injustices are being revived for the purpose of ensuring mobilization. There have also been situations where religious or faith identity have played roles in the mobilization of communities ostensibly to pursue justice and correct alleged historical injustices. This has primarily been seen on issues affecting the Coastal region.

The combination of economic and political trends contributes to and gets influenced by social identity. There have been economic and political narratives that advance understanding that people, more often than not, experience economic hardships and political discriminations based on their social identity and religious or faith identity. This is where people compare their economic status with others and conclude that it is only through political power that they can address their economic plights. This trend has also contributed to the generation of social classification. One such is the hustler narrative against those who are perceived to be dynasty. In addition, there is a narrative digging deeper on the need to distribute political power leadership among the ethnic groups in the country. As highlighted already, in Coastal region, the religious and faith identity have also been applied to indicate the locals versus the foreigners/settlers implying those who have come from other parts of the country and settled in the area.

Out of the described landscape, the YWCA process, by engaging young people, managed to facilitate sessions in which different narratives were identified, discussed and documented. During some of the sessions, orientations on the narratives and alternative narratives on the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) was also introduced and orientation provided. These narratives captured all the areas – social, economic, religious and political. Key narratives related to the general elections identified during the sessions include the following.

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### 3. Key Areas of Youth Engagements

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In the area of prevention of electoral violence, the following were captured from the FGDs and survey monkey sampling:

- a) Majority of young people (97%) engaged reported to be involved in initiatives to promote peace in respective areas toward the general elections. Those remaining (3%) indicated their lack of participation to various factors including lack of resources to facilitate their participation while some pointed out that they do not believe that those activities are capable of preventing violence. There is a need to further engage this group in enhancing understanding of their role in the society;
- b) Key initiatives being undertaken by young people include promotion of awareness on responsible citizenry and voting; production and circulation of materials on electoral practices; strategies for electoral violence prevention actions such as dialogue; and advancing political and interfaith dialogue as mechanisms of building understanding between and among different actors;
- c) Vulnerable youth were identified to include the unemployed, illiterate and poor youth; those living in the informal settlements; and those following and belonging to faith leaders with no deep understanding of faith values;
- d) Risks and threat factors facing youth toward the general elections include religious and social radical ideologies; historical (real or alleged) injustices; poverty and political discrimination; and mismanaged electoral process and results;
- e) Many young people identified main source of electoral awareness to include the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and social medial (Facebook, twitter, etc.). Others indicated faith leaders and groups while others pointed to the news channels including TV; and
- f) On what can be done in ensuring strong and coordinated approaches to sustainable peace in the country, the youth indicated that there should be a continuous civic engagements beyond elections. In this case, they noted the importance of structured holding duty bearers to account as well as the right holders to play their roles beyond elections period.

## 4. Negative Narratives, Potential Impacts and Messages on Alternative Narratives

Category	Narrative	Potential interpretation and impact	Developed Messages on Alternative Approach
4.1 Political	a) For over 56 years, we have had Presidents from only two tribes. Does it mean that other tribes can't lead the nation or is it that other tribes do not have men enough to contest for the Presidency? Other communities must see that this 2022 is an opportunity to ascend to power and must group and get rid of these two communities	<p>Interpretation: no candidate from these tribes should be cleared to contest for the Presidency</p> <p>Impact: a possible uprising against any candidate from the mentioned tribes and/or anyone supporting them. There could also be violent confrontation</p>	The Constitution allows anyone who meet the requirements to contest for any political position and does not discriminate based on tribe or any identity. On the other hand, the electorates have the power to vote for anyone of their choice. Finally, accountable public service delivery is not defined by tribe but commitment of the individual.
	b) Political decisions including elections, in the past, have driven our area into poverty. Those we elect as Governors, Presidents and even Members of Parliament have always sided with our oppressors. We have seen high rate of youth unemployment as a result of, among others, shifting the port of Mombasa to Naivasha. This must be reversed and we should elect only those promising to reverse this decision. In fact, we should not allow others to campaign unless they commit to reverse the Port	<p>Interpretation: the decision to shift the port was a political decision which must be addressed politically. This implies using all means using violence</p> <p>Impact: negative political mobilization leading to regional violence against some political actors. Demand to reverse the port may contribute to more negative radicalization</p>	Constructive engagements in finding a wider scope of solutions on the economic problems could be more sustainable than just focusing on one aspect. Violence may only lead to investors leaving the town and hence increasing levels of unemployment. It is important to have leaders who can facilitate wider and context-based economic discussions and empowerment of young people to be self-employed.
	c) This country's political landscape has always been dominated by two families – the Kenyattas and the Odingas. Now they have entered into a partnership called Handshake to perpetuate their dominance. All the political problems including politically-motivated violence can be attributed to them. Other communities must arise and reject this Handshake partnerships and never allow anyone from the families to arise to power	<p>Interpretation: the two political communities are responsible to the challenges the country is facing.</p> <p>Impact: the two families and their associates should be closer to power again. Possibility of two classes – those supporting them and those against. A possibility of a protracted political impasse against various tribes.</p>	The country has gone through different stages of political dynamics. Electing someone into a political office is a secret affair and anyone meeting the qualifications can be elected. Unity of the country can be achieved through honest dialogue and engagements. It is good to elect people based on their development ideas rather than based on ethnic or other social identity.

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<b>4.2 Religious or Faith</b>	<p>a) Our religion is facing political and economic war. This has seen emergence of policies and laws that even restrict how we conduct our affairs. We have witnessed situations where our Country has joined other nations and institutions in the fight against our religion and our people.</p>	<p>Interpretation: if people belonging to that faith does not rise and fight for their rightful position, the faith will be extinct</p> <p>Impact: either violent resistance against any effort by the government to establish any law that is not accepted and/or struggle by the faith community to entrench various policies and laws to advance respective religious ideology. This may spur suspicion and mistrust from other faith communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No individual and/or group should face any form of discrimination along religion or any identity;</li> <li>• Kenya is a signatory to a number of global structures including protocols and conventions that denounce any discrimination. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which Kenya is part of states clearly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Article I: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood; and</li> <li>✓ Article 2 Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p>b) As we have witnessed in other Countries, fighting in the way and name of our religion and its teachings could be both the pathway to getting approval from God but also ensuring that we expand our religious righteous teachings. This can also help us in making sure that we get rid of bad political leadership that do not fear our God.</p>	<p>Interpretation: imitating what is happening and 'successes' in other countries may seem fashionable by the locals</p> <p>Impact: development of connections with such countries and individuals and initiation of similar struggles could be seen as the main routes for changing the landscapes</p>	
	<p>c) There are cases that laws such as abortions and LGBTQ are now becoming part of our constitution. We strongly believe that these are actions that are being used by the political class to finish our religious values and beliefs. If nothing is done soon, we will have a society without values and we fear that all what we stand for will be gone. Actions are needed now before it is too late and it is our responsibilities as young people to stand up and defend our religion and its values from these irresponsible political leadership</p>	<p>Interpretation: there are emerging attempts of secularizing the society and hence doing away with religious values. These are approaches of Western culture</p> <p>Impact: there is likely to emerge culture of violent extremism against those who advance laws that may seem against specific faith values. Without understanding and constrictive spaces for engagements, such developing culture of violent extremism may enter into confrontations between people of faith</p>	

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<b>4.3 Economic</b>	a) Distribution of economic resources including national and county budgets only favor places dominated by other tribes. Areas that our tribes or ethnic group live have been ignored – roads are terrible, health centers do not have enough supplies and personnel and schools are deplorable. We have an opportunity to elect one of our own who can fight for our rights. We see those crisscrossing our area with campaigns promising to address these problems yet they are the same people who have been in power with no solutions. We must reject them and never allow them in our areas.	<p>Interpretation: there is a systemic and institutionalized means of discrimination</p> <p>Impact: there is high likelihood of violent rejection of those perceived to be part of the previous and current political regimes. Electoral violence is a possibility.</p>	Elections provide platforms of identifying and putting in office those with responsible agenda. These leaders do not necessarily have to come from particular political parties. Violence can only lead to more violence and may not give the right leaders. With violence and no responsible voting, the economic situation is likely to get worse
	b) Complaints of non-locals grabbing land while the locals remain landless and squatters have been raised in many parts of the country. Some local people have been accused of supporting the land grabbers. Little solutions have been found. With the forthcoming elections, many see opportunities of addressing these injustices once and for all. However, they feel that elections could be rigged and hence should use other means of getting rid of the land grabbers and their supporters. Cases of potential agitation of forceful removal of some ethnic communities is possible.	<p>Interpretation: communities are suffering because of foreigners living among them. This is not whether they have acquired properties legally or not</p> <p>Impact: the local communities can politically organize themselves to attack and forcefully evict those not supporting their candidates or living in the 'grabbed lands' during the elections.</p>	Land grabbing is a criminal offense which must be dealt with through legal process. Electing non-corruptible leaders can enable us have accountable governance. Election moment provides opportunity of having people who can help in addressing the problems of land and other resources.
	c) There are only two economic sides in Kenya today – hustlers (those who are poor or from poor background or living from hand to mouth) and dynasties (the rich and politically powerful). Hustlers must rise up and reject those who are rich and dominating political space and hence denying them opportunities to live decent life. Dynasties must be sent home in these forthcoming elections	<p>Interpretation: the two economic sides can't work together due to huge economic gap</p> <p>Impact: class violent confrontations yielding to potential creation of violent groups getting rich by force</p>	Responsible economic policies are capable of correcting the past and present disparities. Neither hustler nor dynasty categories can provide the needed solutions. The only way is to jointly engage and elect those who can provide tangible economic development for all

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<b>4.4 Social</b>	The youth in this country have always faced all forms of discriminations. In every election, political class always give promises that they don't fulfill. 'Why do you, as young people, allow yourselves to be given directions on what to do'? This time round, we must plan for ourselves and determine our own destiny even if it means facing the bullet. As young people, this time round, hatupangwingwi <sup>1</sup> .	<p>Interpretation: the elderly persons have perpetuated policies that have discriminated against the youth.</p> <p>Impact: young people can identify with political class that seem to be promising revolutionary ideas or initiate violent means of ejecting those they consider not willing to accept their ideas</p>	Election provides means of engaging with real issues and people with clear and implementable ideas. Secondly, young people could design means of holding those they elect responsible and accountable. Real, sustainable and inclusive changes can only be realized when young people work together with other in the society
	Our social and religious identity have resulted to us being discriminated in the area of political leadership. This can also be used to explain why our region's political landscape have been dominated by outsiders. Frequently, anytime our person is aiming at succeeding politically, the 'big' political parties nominate someone else. In some ways, other people do not want to associate with us pointing that we hold extremes social and political identity anytime we fight for our rights. This is why some actors emerged and started campaigning with the call Pwani sio Kenya <sup>2</sup> with the expected goal of chatting own social and political agenda separate from Kenya	<p>Interpretation: people of other social and religious identity desire that others do not thrive in the community.</p> <p>Impact: there is likelihood of communities organizing themselves along and advancing social and religious negative extremism in order to defend themselves. This may lead to situation of social and religious profiling and violence</p>	The CoK 2010 does not have a provision of social and religious discrimination. There are means of raising cases of felt discrimination and elections provide opportunity of putting into office those who can advance such means. While it is possible that there could be cases of individuals who would want to use violence to achieve certain goals, such should not be viewed as the communities' overall aspirations.
	The social cultural identity has been applied to campaign against individuals seeking elective positions. Cases such as 'we can't vote for the uncircumcised' or 'we can't allow them to ascend to power given that they have a grabbing culture' have been heard during heated political contests. Others include 'that community are murderous, very intolerant to others and always full of anger'. Leadership needs mature people and hence some identity still confirm that some people are not mature, they are children	<p>Interpretation: intolerance against individuals or communities during the election's campaigns</p> <p>Impact: targeted violence against communities in one area implying eruption in other areas.</p>	Leadership is not determined by ones social-cultural backgrounds but rather ideas and commitment to deliver. During elections, it is important to listen to and elect those who have development ideas rather than in consideration of their social backgrounds.

<sup>1</sup> Swahili word meaning 'we can't allow anyone to tell us what to do'.

<sup>2</sup> Literally meaning *Coast is not part of Kenya* a campaign that was initiated by those calling for cessation of the Coast from Kenya

## 5. Conclusion

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Role and place of narratives in advancing political and faith-based violence was highly identified in all sessions. For example, at the national dialogue conference, one of the central issues that was linked to Violent Extremism (VE) is the social, economic and religious narratives. It was acknowledged that while a narrative can be historical, it takes only an individual to craft and situate it to the current and emerging context and use such to justify the community's status. Young people therefore appreciated a structured and coordinated joint actions toward advancing correct narratives. Faith based values were highlighted to be potential factors of entrenching culture of understanding, tolerance, respects and constructive engagements. Given that most Kenyans identify with one faith or religion or the other, it was appreciated that the alternative narrative Handbook has the potential of changing the landscape of VE in the country.

In order to ensure that the alternative narratives become part of the process of addressing issues of violence in the forthcoming elections and beyond, a handbook has been developed to help in the facilitation of skills development. The handbook also offers a space for mediation where there could be differences in opinion and approaches. In this case, whereas the above enumerated narratives point to those that were identified during the mentioned sessions, the handbook contains more areas and organized through a wholistic and integrated framework.



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Young Women's Christian Association of Kenya



Empowering women and girls



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