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PIER-K

PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ELECTORAL REFORMS IN KENYA

COST OF ELECTIONS IN KENYA

2026

Funded by the European Union

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This study was undertaken to contribute to policy dialogue on the cost of elections in Kenya and the relationship between institutional trust, electoral credibility, and public expenditure. The findings and recommendations are intended to support ongoing efforts towards building transparent, accountable, inclusive, and sustainable electoral processes.

For more information about the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy and the Promoting Inclusive Electoral Reforms in Kenya (PIER-K) programme, visit:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study assesses the cost of elections in Kenya, focusing on how resources are allocated, what drives expenditure, and how the cost per voter compares internationally. At the centre of all these is trust deficit: low levels of confidence in electoral institutions and processes drive up the cost of elections, as competing political actors demand increased safeguards, and technical and administrative measures to guarantee credibility, and transparency, in the processes. The varied interests on how to secure credibility of elections means additional and costly layers of mechanisms.

This is the context on which this study is based. The study seeks to:

- Identify and analyse components and cost drivers of elections in Kenya;
- Evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of resource allocation and expenditure; and
- Provide recommendations for optimising election costs while maintaining integrity and transparency.

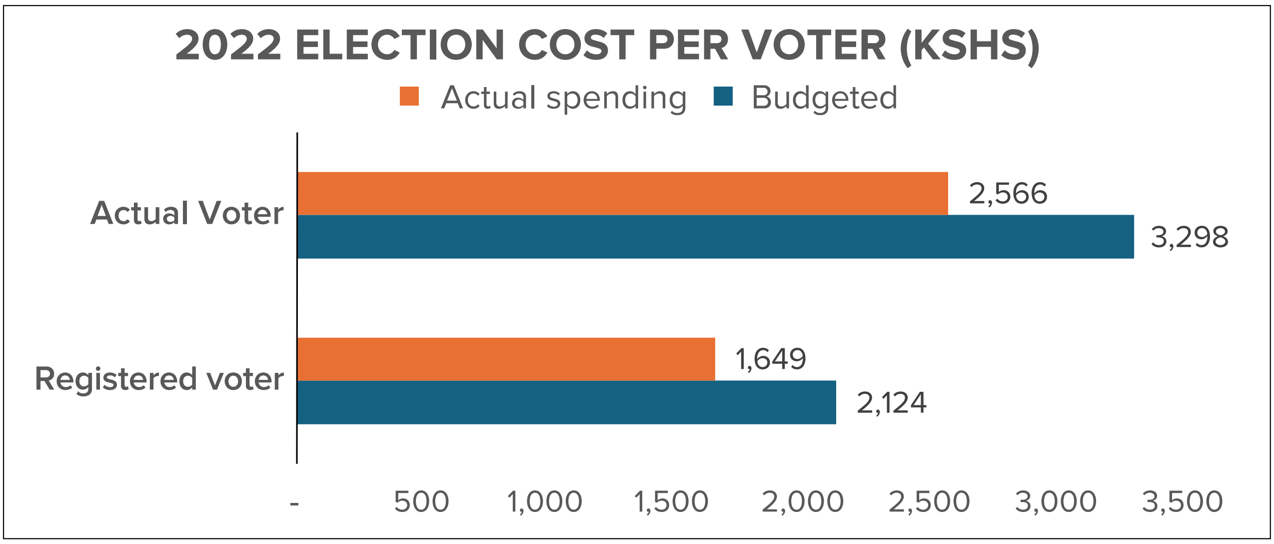
The goal of the study is to generate evidence to guide policy dialogue on affordable, credible and transparent elections.

The analytical framework is built on the electoral cycle (pre-election, election day/operations, and post-election) to map activities and the public institutions involved. The analysis focuses on review of budget and expenditure data across institutions. Further, the analysis derives cost-per-voter metrics by dividing the total election cost by registered voters and, separately, by actual turnout.

On the whole, the study draws on expenditure data for 2017 and 2022 General Elections, across the electoral institutions -- particularly the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), State Department for Interior, Judiciary, and Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP), Ministry of Defence, EACC, and IPOA.

Key Findings

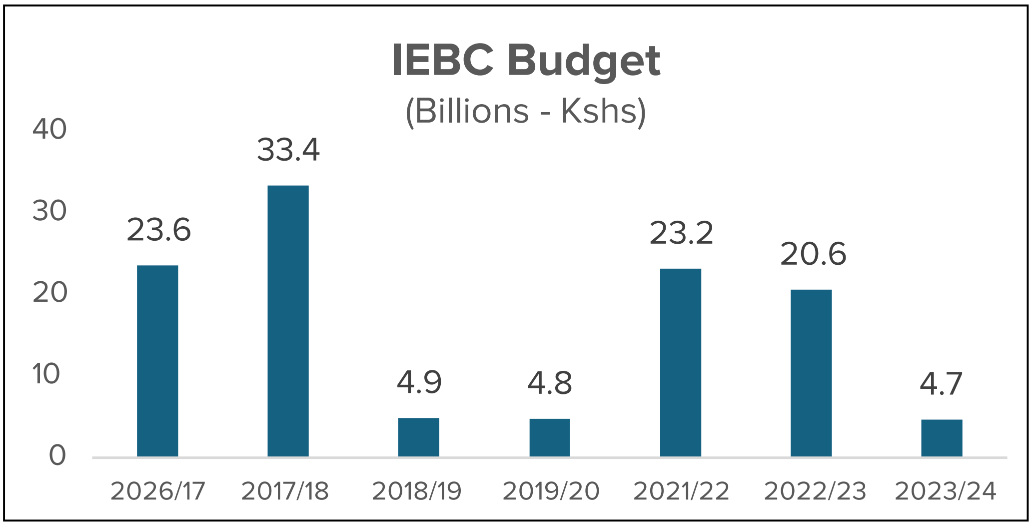
1. **Kenya has one of the highest election costs globally**: Kenya's elections remain among the most expensive across the world -- the cost is three times higher than the global benchmark of US$5 (Ksh 645) per voter.
   a) **2017:** Total spending was Ksh54 billion (≈ US$418 million), or Ksh2,124 (≈ US$16.5) per registered voter and Ksh3,298 (≈ US$25.6) per actual voter.
   b) **2022:** Expenditure fell to Ksh36 billion (≈ US$ 279 million), or Ksh1,649 (≈ US$12.8) per registered voter and Ksh2,566 (≈ US$19.9) per actual voter.



2. **Relatively low turnout compared to registered voters contribute to high costs**. Elections are run on fixed costs. The cost of materials, among others, is based on the assumption that almost everyone registered will turn out to vote. Because of this
   a) Low turnout increases unit costs per actual voter.
      i. In 2017, each vote cost Ksh1,174 (≈ US$9.1) more due to non-turnout.
      ii. In 2022, this “wastage effect” stood at Ksh917 (≈ US$ 7.1) per ballot.
   b) On average, the cost per actual voter was 56 per cent higher than per registered voter in both years.
   c) Overall, the failure to participate (after registering) in an election adds to the costs of elections because materials are already procured and logistics paid for before voting day.

3. **Election financing is event-driven – elections are treated as an event rather than as a continuous process in the governance cycle, and this reduces trust in electoral processes**. As a result, the IEBC and institutions in the electoral ecosystem follow this sharp cyclical pattern where more funds are allocated during an election year but limited funding is availed between elections.

   This stop-start model has several consequences:
   a) Weakens institutional continuity
   b) Compresses procurement timelines
   c) Increases reactive spending
   d) Undermines reform implementation
   e) Encourages repeated technology procurement.



4. **The largest cost components include technology, logistics, and security**. These expenditures are intensified by compressed timelines and periodic technology replacement rather than amortisation or systematic cost reduction in the long term.

5. **The true cost of elections extends beyond IEBC.** The broader electoral ecosystem includes:
   a) Judiciary (petitions and dispute resolution)
   b) State Department for Interior (security deployments)
   c) ORPP (party oversight)
   d) IPOA, and EACC, among others.

   Although only a small percentage of these institutions’ budgets is formally attributed to elections, their operational involvement reflects a securitised and risk-intensive approach to elections.

6. **Security expenditure represents a significant but under-accounted component of Kenya's electoral costs**. Although only a small fraction of security-sector budgets is formally classified as election spending, security agencies are engaged throughout the entire electoral cycle.

   The associated costs are included within broader institutional budgets and are rarely isolated as election-related expenditure. As a result, official election budgets understate the true costs of elections under the security agencies. Indeed the costs increase with intense political competition and electoral conflicts as well as in tandem with reduced trust – on the process - by the competing political elites.

7. **Trust deficits and reduced voter turnout** compared to registered voters are key drivers of increased costs.
   Trust deficit and reduced public confidence in institutions increases costs especially because there is limited access to credible information on what institutions could be doing in the stop – start approach to elections.
   Some of the related drivers include:
   a) **Trust Deficit:** The most critical driver is mistrust in institutions and the electoral process itself, which compels the state and the electoral agency to "buy" credibility through excessive technology, security features, and legal safeguards.
   b) **Operations and Logistics:** The largest expenditure covers over 300,000 temporary staff, transportation, warehousing, and management of 46,000 polling stations.
   c) **Technology and ICT Systems:** Heavy investment in biometric registration, the KIEMS system, and results transmission infrastructure.
   d) **Security Operations:** High spending on police deployment and logistics reflects Kenya's securitised electoral environment.
   e) **Judiciary and Dispute Resolution:** Rising costs from petitions, legal infrastructure, and tribunals.
   f) **Voter Education:** Although modest in budget share, underinvestment here leads to misinformation and litigation, indirectly inflating overall costs, especially when fewer voters than the registered number turn out to vote.

Conclusions

Kenya's elections are expensive because they operate in a low-trust political environment. Cost of elections will fall only when public trust in institutions improves. It will also fall when elites begin to trust that the process will produce credible results irrespective of whether those results are in their favour or not.

The politics of mistrust, fear of rigging and limited transparency force institutions to over-invest in reassurance mechanisms. Low trust also depresses voter turnout. For instance, over one third of registered voters did not turn out to vote in 2022 elections. This increased the cost per voter especially because preparations and election materials are done on the assumption that almost all registered voters in some polling stations will turn out to vote.

Even as total spending fell between 2017 and 2022, the cost per voter remained among the highest globally, reflecting the **political**, rather than purely **technical** nature of Kenya's conflated electoral expenses. The true cost of elections is the cost of mistrust—manifested in securitisation, technological redundancy, and legal contestation.

While operational efficiency matters, the deeper solution lies in institutional credibility, transparency, and political reforms. The data show that where trust is low, the electoral agencies compensate with higher spending on technology, security, and courts in arbitration of disputes.

To achieve sustainable, credible, and affordable elections, Kenya must shift from a security- and technology-driven model to a trust- and transparency-driven model. In essence, the cost of Kenya's elections will only decrease when the cost of mistrust does.

Recommendations

1. ***Create innovative messages on voter turnout and cost of elections with a focus on improving voter participation***: Those who do not turn out to vote increase the cost of elections -- Kenya's elections are expensive due to fixed costs on materials, technology and logistics. Reduced voter turnout means these costs are shared among fewer voters, raising the cost per voter. Those who fail to vote contribute to high costs. Clear messages to show how failure to vote increases costs of elections will be required.

2. ***Rebuild institutional trust in IEBC and security institutions***: Reducing costs begins with *restoring credibility and impartiality* in the IEBC and related bodies. Transparent, inclusive appointments and predictable funding across the electoral cycle are essential. Transparency and commitment to independence – and being seen to do the right things right -- will reduce the need for expensive "confidence-building" measures.

3. ***Institutionalise multi-year funding to ensure financial independence of IEBC***: Adopt a multi-year electoral cycle budget framework can spread out costs and avoid fiscal spikes during election years.

    Enhance transparency across the process and especially in tallying and transmission of results: Openness at every stage — *procurement, results transmission, and auditing* — reduces suspicion and the need for redundant verification. Public disclosure of contracts, suppliers, KIEMS test results, and real-time publication of polling-station results in a public space and portal can drastically reduce parallel tallying, litigation, and related expenses.

4. ***Depoliticise security and litigation***: Kenya's elections are excessively securitised and litigious because of political fear and uncertainty. Moving toward *risk-based security deployment*, coupled with *pre-election dialogue and mediation platforms* can lower costs while preserving peace. Judicial costs can also fall if pre-election disputes are resolved through *alternative dispute resolution (ADR)*.

5. ***Rationalise technology investment and enhance transparency***: Technology should serve efficiency, not be a substitute for trust. Kenya must *upgrade and maintain existing KIEMS systems* rather than procure new ones every cycle. Open contracting and independent technical audits will improve confidence and value for money.

6. ***Invest in civic confidence and voter education to improve voter participation***: Strategic investment in civic education is a *cost-saving measure*: It will improve voter participation A well-informed electorate reduces misinformation, election-day errors, and post-election disputes — all of which drive up costs. Civic literacy is thus an important intervention – it can lead to reduced costs, especially if an educated citizenry has trust in the process.

01

INTRODUCTION

It is generally acknowledged that elections are a key pillar of democratic governance. Through elections, citizens choose their representatives and shape the direction of governance and development in their respective countries. However, globally, the cost of conducting elections has risen in recent years due to heightened demands for transparency, security and inclusivity, as well as inflationary pressures. Kenya is no exception in this regard. The electoral process faces many challenges, including political divisions that impact on trust in institutions that have responsibility to guarantee conduct of credible, free and fair elections.

The cost of elections has continued to increase. This is due to many factors, including the adoption of new election technologies, demand to secure elections, voter education, logistical operations, and the administration of polling stations, among others.

In 2022, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EOM) report on Kenya's 2022 General Election identified obstacles to the consolidation of transparent, democratic, and credible elections. These included, among others, concerns about voter registration transparency, inadequate regulation and poor oversight of campaign financing, and costs relating to elections at different stages of the process.

1.1 Why this study is significant

Elections are an essential element of any democracy as citizens get to elect their representatives for government. Comprehending the costs associated with conducting elections is therefore important for ensuring transparency, accountability and efficient use of the said resources.

In recent years, the cost of conducting elections has increased globally. This is informed by a growing demand for transparency, security and inclusivity in the electoral process, as well as factoring in general inflation. Like many other democracies, Kenya faces significant financial pressures associated with ensuring credible, free and fair elections. The financial pressure continues to intensify owing to the costs of election technology, securing elections, conducting voter education, supporting logistics and the general administration and management of polling stations. Additionally, electoral expenses are driven upwards because of the low levels of trust in and among political actors, calling for heightened public scrutiny in the management of electoral processes.

The high cost of elections presents challenges not only for government budgets, but also for the broader democratic framework as financial constraints can impact the quality, inclusivity and accessibility of elections in Kenya's resource-strained environment. Thus, understanding the comprehensive cost of elections is essential for developing cost-effective, sustainable electoral systems that do not compromise the quality or legitimacy of the process.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study aims to develop a more in-depth understanding of the drivers of the cost of elections in Kenya and provide recommendations on safeguarding public spending on elections. To this end, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) with partnership under the *Promoting Inclusive Electoral Reforms in Kenya (PIER-K)* consortium is undertaking this study to collate empirical data on election costs and facilitate evidence-based dialogue among policymakers, election administrators, political parties and civil society organisations, among others.

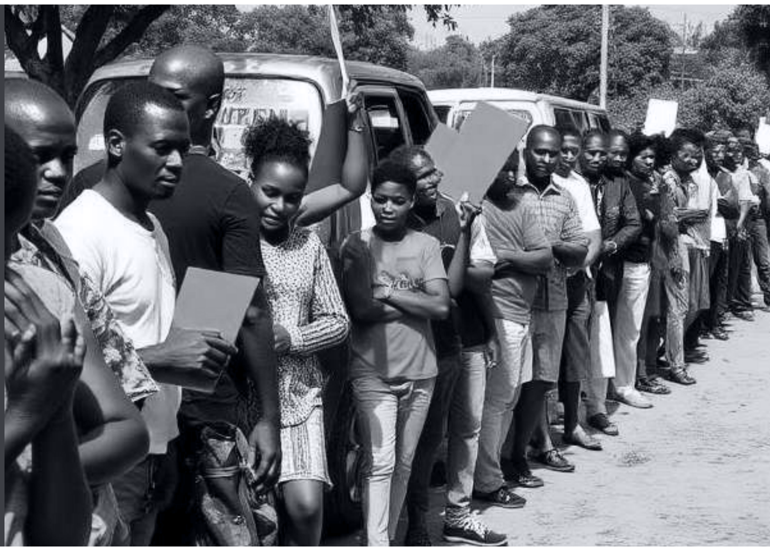
The study aims to contribute to policy reforms and practices that balance cost-efficiency with democratic integrity, ensuring elections remain a pillar of accountable governance in Kenya.

The key objectives of the study are to:

A Identify and analyse the various components and cost drivers of elections in Kenya, including the cost of printed election materials, non-printed polling materials and election technology, among others.

B Evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of resource allocation and expenditure.

C Provide recommendations for optimising election costs while maintaining the integrity and transparency of the electoral process.



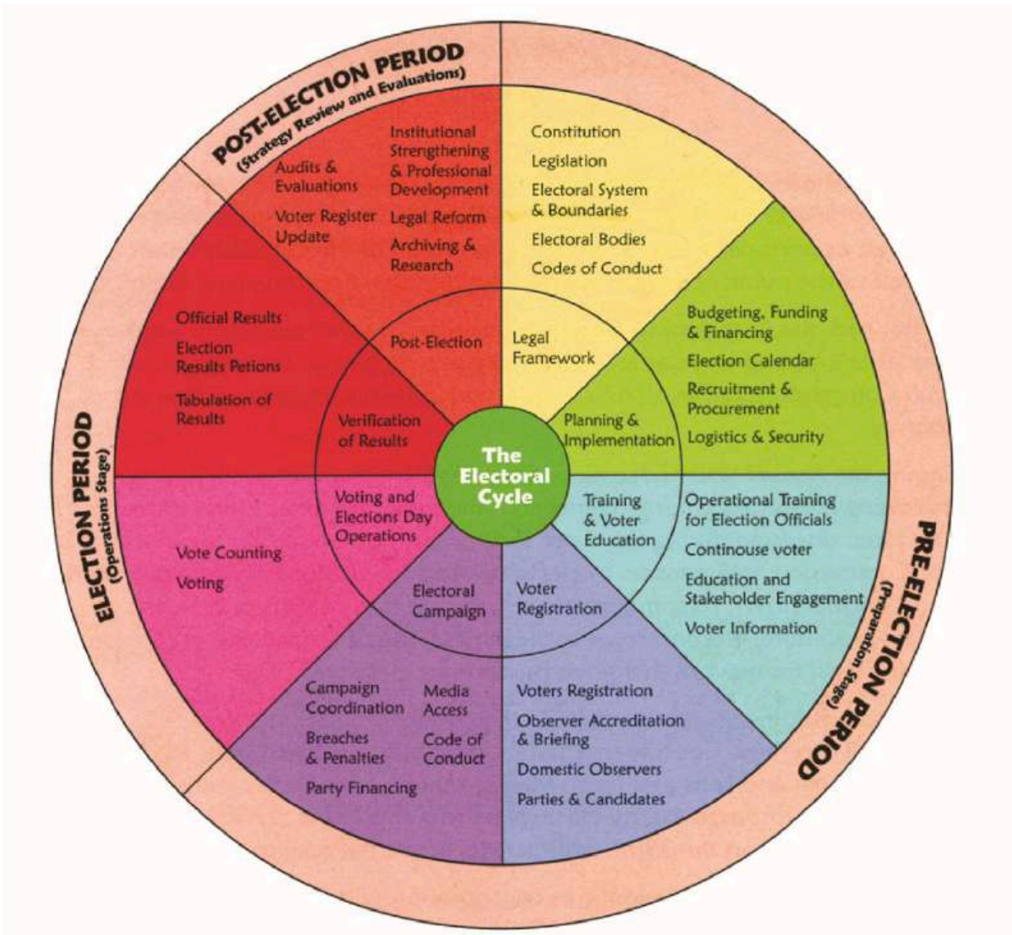
02

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) provides details of key election-related activities that take place within each of the three stages of the electoral cycle as illustrated in the concentric circle below. Most of these activities are undertaken by the IEBC as the primary body mandated with the running and management of elections in Kenya.

Election activities outside the realm of IEBC are undertaken by other electoral institutions as will be identified in the subsequent section.

Figure 1: Kenya's Electoral Cycle



Source: IEBC

IEBC defines an election cycle as a series of electoral activities that happen in a systematic manner between one General Election and the next. The election cycle has three phases namely:

a. Pre-Election (Preparation stage)

b. Election (Operation stage)

c. Post-election (strategy review and evaluation).

By a mere count, the bulk of election activities are undertaken during the pre-election stage of the electoral cycle as illustrated in the schema. By contrast, the least number of activities are undertaken during the post-election phase.

A keen review of the schema reveals that there are tasks outside or complementary to traditional election activities discharged by the IEBC. This simply demonstrates the involvement of other electoral institutions, for example, political party primaries done by the ORPP or post-election petitions heard by the Judiciary. Security, on its part, is undertaken by the State Department for Interior and cuts across the entire cycle.

Table 1 provides a list of specific activities by election phase and aligns with the concentric circle schema.

Table 1: Kenya's Election Phases and Key Activities

No	Election Phase	Sub-Components/Activity
1	Pre-Election (Preparation stage)	i. Review of electoral boundaries, where applicable ii. Drawing of electoral calendar iii. Drawing of election budgets iv. Procurement of election materials and services v. Warehousing of election materials vi. Recruiting, training and deployment of election officials vii. Voter education, information and public outreach viii. Stakeholder engagement ix. Partner coordination x. Accreditation of voter education providers and election observers xi. Registration of voters and update of the register of voters xii. Verification and inspection of the Register of Voters xiii. Certification and publication of the Register of Voters xiv. Procurement and testing of electoral technologies.
2	Election (Operation stage)	i. Monitoring political party primaries ii. Receiving party lists from political parties iii. Registration of political party and independent candidates for elections iv. Monitoring campaigns and enforcing of the election campaign schedules v. Enforcement of electoral laws and the code of conduct vi. Monitoring and enforcing campaign financing vii. Accreditation of voter education providers and election observers viii. Accreditation of political party agents ix. Voter education and information x. Stakeholder engagement xi. Partner coordination xii. Conducting elections xiii. Tallying and announcement election results xiv. Declaration and gazettement of election results xv. Election petition and appeals.

No	Election Phase	Sub-Components/Activity
3	Post-election (strategy review and evaluation)	i. Post-Election Evaluation ii. Voter education and information iii. Stakeholder engagement iv. Development partner coordination v. Auditing and evaluation of processes and systems vi. Documentation and archiving of election results and other records vii. Review of electoral laws viii. Upgrade or reuse of electoral technology.

In conducting this assignment, we sought to:

- Develop a mapping of the election cycle of Kenya's elections and institutions in the broader election ecosystem.
- Identify the key components/elements of each stage in the cycle
- Identify the key public institutions involved at each stage
- Review the budgets and expenditure by public institutions and by component of the election cycle.

Two sets of data were gathered for the assessment of the cost of elections, mainly from secondary sources. The first set was **expenditure on elections as a proxy for cost.** The second was **registration of voters and actual voter turnout**. The ratio of total election cost to registered voters; and to actual voter turnout constitutes the cost per voter (registered vs actual) which is globally accepted as the most common measure of election cost.

2.1 Identifying Key Institutions Participating Along the Kenya Electoral Cycle

Costs associated with General Elections are identifiable from budgets and expenditure of electoral institutions. By way of a thorough desk review, we first identified the key electoral institutions in Kenya, besides the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) which is the primary election management body (EMB) mandated to manage electoral processes.

The two reports that were relied on to come up with the list below were produced by the National Treasury, namely:

i) 2022 Post-Election Economic and Fiscal Report, and
ii) 2018 Post-Election Economic and Fiscal Report.

It was necessary to cluster the identified electoral institutions based on their participation along the election cycle as demonstrated in the matrix below. It is important to recognise that besides the IEBC whose mandate is purely elections, there are other institutions involved in elections and have wider mandates extending beyond elections. Therefore, by combing through their respective institutional publications such as Annual Reports, Strategic Plans and Budget Documents including MTEF Sector Reports, the objective was to establish where (Program/Department) the electoral-related activities were domiciled.

It is also prudent at this point to clarify that the definition of the total cost of an election in fact straddles two financial years: the one before the actual Election Day and the one immediately after. For example, with regard to the 2022 General Election, the total of cost of election constitutes a summation of election expenditure figures for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years.

2.2 Isolating Expenditure on Election-related Activity per Key Institution

Isolation of information on budgetary allocation and expenditure for individual electoral institutions is dependent on the way it is presented and the level of disaggregation in budget documents. During this research, it was noted that budgetary information was presented in two ways. The first was by line item (input-based) approach for both recurrent and development expenditure information. This approach is critical in analysis of the key cost drivers for elections by electoral institution as well as overall.

The second is the more recent and modern, referred to as the programme-based budgeting (PBB) (results-oriented) approach. Information is presented in terms of programmes and sub-programmes with additional non-financial information on the annual target for key indicators. As a result, it was possible to discern the *expected output* and more specifically, the *actual outcome* out of such expenditure. Unlike the line-item budget approach, the level of disaggregation in PBB, to facilitate the isolation of election related budgets, is generally lower. It should be noted that these differences in the presentation of budget data presented a challenge with respect to the analysis of the same.

Table 2: Electoral Institutions and Mandate

Electoral Institutions	Mandate
IEBC	
P1: Management of Electoral Processes **Outcome:** Free, fir and credible elections • SP 1: General Administration Planning and Support Services • SP2: Voter Registration and Electoral Operations • SP3: Voter Education and Partnerships • SP4: Electoral Information and Communication Technology	To deliver free, fair and credible elections.
P2: Delimitation of Electoral Boundaries **Outcome:** Equity in representation and participation in the electoral process • SP1: Delimitation of electoral boundaries	To promote equity in representation and participation in the electoral process.
Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP)	
P1: Registration, Regulation and Funding of Political Parties **Outcome:** Competitive and issue-based political parties • SP1: Registration and regulation of political parties • SP2: Funding of political parties • SP3: Political parties liaison committee	To promote competitive and issue-based political parties.
State Department for Internal Security & National Administration	
P1: General Administration and Support Services **Outcome:** Improved efficiency of service delivery to the people • SP1: National Government Coordination Services • SP2: Disaster Risk Reduction • SP3: Peace Building, National Cohesion and Values • SP4: Government Chemist Services	To enhance accessibility to national government services, coordinate security measures, and promote peace building and conflict management initiatives in Kenya.
P2: Policy Coordination Services **Outcome:** To enhance crime research, society free from alcohol and drug abuse, and regulation of NGOs. • SP1: National Campaign Against Drug and Substance Abuse • SP2: NGO Regulatory Services • SP3: Crime Research	To improve crime research, foster a society that is free from alcohol and drug abuse, alongside the effective regulation of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).
P3: National Government Field Administration Services **Outcome:** Improved service delivery to the people at the field. • SP1: National Government Administration Coordination Services	To enhance accessibility to national government services, coordinate security measures, and promote peace building and conflict management initiatives in Kenya.
Executive Office of the President	
P1: Government Printing Services **Outcome:** Enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of Government Press • SP1: Government Printing Services	To improve the security and efficiency of the production of printed government documents.
P2: General Administration Planning and Support Services **Outcome:** Effective leadership, coordination and supervision of government operations • SP1: General administration planning and support services	To facilitate the execution of presidential mandate as per the Constitution.

Electoral Institutions	Mandate
P3: Government Advisory Services **Outcome:** Public Policy Advisory Services for Effective Management of Public Affairs • SP1: Kenya-South Sudan Advisory Services • SP2: Power of Mercy Advisory Services • SP3: Counter-Terrorism Advisory Services • SP4: Advisory Services on Economic and Social Affairs • SP5: Public Entities Oversight Services • SP6: Strategic Policy Advisory Services	To improve public advisory mechanisms for the efficient management of public affairs.
P4: Leadership and Coordination of Government Services **Outcome:** Efficient coordination of Government Services • SP1: Leadership and Coordination Services	To improve accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness in the coordination of government services.
Ministry of Defence	
P1: Defence **Outcome:** Secured Nation • SP1: National Defence	To defend and protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic; support internal security operations; and promote regional and international peace and security.
P2: Civil Aid **Outcome:** Humanitarian Civic Action • SP1: Civil Aid	To support humanitarian activities across the country.
P3: General Administration, Planning and Support Services **Outcome:** Effective service delivery • SP1: Administrative and Support Services • SP2: Defence Policy and Planning • SP3: Defence Cooperation and Diplomacy • SP4: Defence Financial Management and Oversight	To provide strategic policy direction and administrative support services.
P4: Defence Industrialisation • SP1: National Space Management • SP2: Defence Industries	To develop a self-sustaining defence industry that strengthens national security and stimulates economic growth.
IPOA	
P1: Policing Oversight Services **Outcome:** Improved public confidence in the National Police • SP1: Policing Oversight Services	To build public confidence and trust in policing.
Judiciary	
P1: Dispensation of Justice **Outcome:** To provide equitable access to, and expeditious delivery of justice. • SP1: Access to Justice • SP2: General Administration Planning and Support Services	To provide equitable access to and expeditious delivery of justice.
EACC	
P1: Ethics and Anti-Corruption **Outcome:** Reduce corruption and promote ethics • SP1: Ethics and Anti-Corruption	To efficiently prevent and address corruption and unethical practices.

Source: Various reports

NOTE: IEBC budgetary allocation and expenditure was treated as 100 per cent election cost. As for the other electoral institutions, election costs were only a share or fraction of their total allocation and expenditure. Table 2 highlights specific sub-programmes where election-related activities are undertaken. On this basis it was possible to gather this budgetary allocation and expenditure information per electoral institution.

It was necessary to enter and organise this information into Ms Excel worksheets: budget information for each individual electoral institution categorised by *approved allocation* (estimates that have been approved by the legislature) and *actual expenditure*/spending for the period 2016/17 to 2023/24 (see annex).

The aim of this approach was to, first, compare costs for the two most recent election cycles. Second, this analysis of information helped in understanding expenditure trends for intervening years. Third, this also helped identify implications for electoral planning.

2.3 Research Limitations

It is necessary to point out that the Budget Books (program budgets and other sources such as sector working reports) do not explicitly identify election-related activities. Except for the IEBC, one has to search further from other reports, including annual reports, and strategic plans to identify these activities. The idea is to link/trace where the election-related activity falls under the budget and expenditure of the key agencies and their (sub-)programs.

It is also important to note that information is not publicly available for each year. Only information on the total budget for election-related expenses for 2016/17-2017/18 and 2021/22-22/23 for the eight electoral institutions is available: indicating that this data is only made available around actual electoral events. Disaggregated information on election activities and their budgets is only available for 2021/22-22/23. This information represents actual spending.

There is no information/budget data for the intervening period in between election cycles. The assumption is that even if it exists, there is minimal, if any, spending by many electoral institutions -- except for IEBC, the agency constantly engaged on election-related activities.

Box 1 - The Legal Framework: An Overview

The 2010 Constitution introduced a Bill of Rights that strengthens and entrenches civil and political rights related to elections. The following legislation includes some of the most important rules and regulations relating to the conduct of elections in Kenya.

1. The Elections Act, 2011;
2. The Political Parties Act, 2011;
3. The Campaign Financing Act, 2013;
4. The Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, 2011; and
5. The Election Offences Act, 2016.

These laws prescribe issues such as organization of elections, the oversight of election expenses and the broader organisational structuring of the EMB. Following a legal reform process, several Bills relating to elections were submitted to Parliament. Amendments to the Political Parties Act were enacted in January 2022, but amendments to the Electoral Act were still pending in the Senate as of June 2022 when Parliament went on recess. The Electoral Act Amendments Bill was not passed in time for the 2022 election.

There is little doubt that a tremendous amount of time and energy have been invested in developing the legal framework around elections, ensuring that it is fairly robust:

> *"A very good constitutional framework exists, providing for democracy, rule of law and the protection of political rights; some legal principles, however, await elaboration in legislation or through enforcement of prevailing law".*[1]

The Constitution of Kenya, 2010, has gone a long way to renew the electoral system and usher in the development of a new legislative framework for elections. There is a growing body of jurisprudence in this area, as well as a progressive interpretation of constitutional rights and freedoms.

Despite the robust constitutional framework, many principles remain unfulfilled in practice. For instance, Parliament has repeatedly failed to enact comprehensive Campaign Finance Regulations, leaving gaps in oversight and enforcement. Meanwhile, voter behaviour is evolving, with an increasing trend of voters demanding financial incentives from candidates — a challenge that finance regulations will certainly be ill-equipped to address. To counter this, innovative approaches to voter education are essential, particularly voter education that will highlight how the practice of soliciting bribes from candidates undermines the integrity and quality of voter representation. Such education should seek to link poor service delivery and poor representation to the fact that those who bribe their way to Parliament will only focus on self-interest rather than representation of people.

1. *European Union (2022). Election Observation Mission Final Report.* https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EU_EOM_Kenya_2022_EN.pdf

03

FINDINGS

3.1 Cost of Elections in Kenya is higher than global average

The total cost of elections in 2017 was higher than 2022, both in terms of the approved budget and the actual spending. Comparative international research (ACE/UNDP CORE) suggests that many election administrations operate within an approximate range of US$ 5 per registered voter although definitions and methodologies on cost of elections vary. Kenya's 2022 cost of US$12.8 per registered voter places it significantly above this range. The 2017 election was even higher because of repeat presidential election; and large investment in technology.

Specifically, the approved budget for elections in 2022 was Ksh47 billion, having reduced by 28 per cent from the approved budget of about Ksh65 billion in 2017. Similarly, actual spending on elections reduced by a comparatively higher rate of 33 per cent, from Ksh54 billion in 2017 to Ksh36 billion in 2022.

Reports show that the comparatively higher cost of elections in 2017 to that in 2022 was driven by several factors. There was heavy investment in technology, particularly the initial procurement of the Kenya Integrated Electoral Management System (KIEMS) kits, security and attendant costs, as well as the repeat presidential election. Figure 2 shows the costs in 2017 and 2022. Subsequent sections also provide details on these costs.

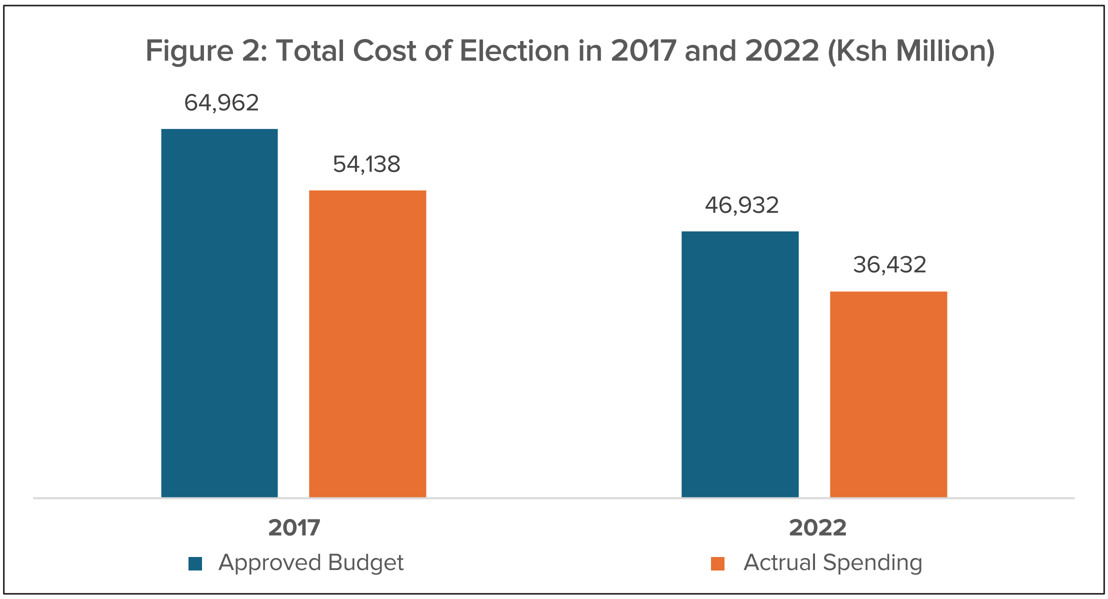
2022

APPROVE BUDGET
KSH47 BILLION

2017

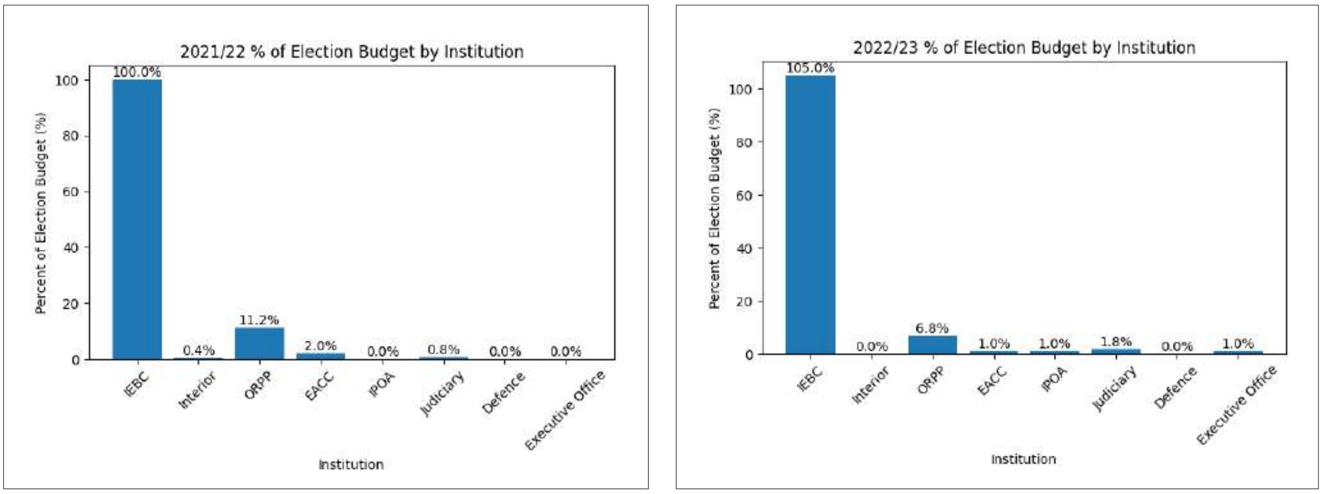
APPROVE BUDGET
KSH65 BILLION

Figure 2: Total Cost of Elections in 2017 and 2022



With an absorption rate of 78 per cent in 2022, Figure 2 further demonstrates that the uptake of approved budget on elections was 5 per cent higher in 2017.

A comparison of which institution allocates how much to elections also shows huge variations. Figure 3 shows an analysis for the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 allocations.
Figure 3: Comparison of Percentage of Election Budget by Institution -- FY 2021/22 and FY 2022/23



3.2 Cost per Registered Voter vs Actual Voter Differ

The cost per actual vote cast is higher than the cost per registered voter, implying that voter turnout is a critical determinant of costs. Table 3 shows this variation between cost per registered voter and the cost after casting of the ballot. This is computed by dividing the total election cost with the number of registered (22,120,458) and number of actual voters who turned out (14, 213,137).

The government's approved budgetary allocation, through the electoral institutions is equivalent to Ksh2,124 (US$14.4) for every registered voter in 2022. The cost of elections goes up whenever registered voters do not turn out to vote. As is evident from the Table 3, the cost per actual voters based on the approved allocation went up to Ksh3,298 (US$25.5)

Table 3: Cost of Elections per Registered Voter and Actual Voter

	Budget (allocation)	Actual Spending
Cost per Registered Voter	2,124 ($14.4)	1,649 ($12.8)
Cost per Actual Voter	3,298 ($25.5)	2,566 ($19.8)

It is important to note that the actual spending on elections, often due to several factors, was lower than the approved budget. Therefore, the cost per registered and actual voter, at Ksh1,649 ($12.8) and Ksh2,566 ($19.8) respectively was significantly lower.

It is also noteworthy that the election cost per registered/actual voters based on either the budget or actual spending is markedly higher than the global national average per registered voter index benchmark of $5 (roughly Ksh645).[2] It is necessary to ask the question why this is the case in Kenya.

3.3 How Are Election Funds Spent?

Funds designated for elections go to various national government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) towards discharging activities aligned to the three stages of the electoral cycle: the pre-election phase, Election Day and post-election phase. The bulk of election-related funds go to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), being the primary body mandated to manage electoral processes in Kenya.

Other ministries, departments and semi-autonomous agencies (MDAs) also receive funds for their complementary roles during elections. The MDAs that play complementary and supportive roles have budgets for the three phases of the electoral cycle.

Table 4 presents a matrix listing the eight MDAs/electoral institutions and their corresponding role which is indicative of where election funds are allocated. It should be noted that identification of where election funds go was based on a literature review as this information is not explicitly made publicly available.

Table 4: Institutions and Related Activities

No	Institutions/Election related activities	Participation in Elections		
		Pre-election	Election Day	Post-Election
1	Independent and Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC) • *Primary agency mandated to conduct elections in the country*	x	x	x
2	Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) • *Monitor political parties' activities, training political parties' aspirants, upgrade Integrated Political Parties Management System (IPPMS) to facilitate public verification of membership status and automate county offices to decentralise management of public parties databased for improved service delivery.* • *Regulate, monitor, investigate and supervise political parties to ensure compliance with the law, administer the political parties fund, verify and make publicly available the list of all members of political parties, maintain a register of political parties and the symbols of political parties, ensure and verify that no person is a member of more than one political party and notify the Commission of his findings.*	x	x	x

2. *Prevailing exchange rate of $1 = Ksh129*

No	Institutions/Election related activities	Participation in Elections		
		Pre-election	Election Day	Post-Election
3	State Department for Interior From 2023/24 -- State Department for Internal Security and National Admin. State Dept for Immigration and Citizens Services National Police Service • *Enhance security operations to protect citizens and their properties as they exercise their constitutional rights-in the run-up to elections; security during campaigns, primaries and during elections; securing registration and polling stations, equipment and personnel.* • *Registrations of persons – to hasten the acquisition of materials for IDs and other related documents.* • *National cohesion and reconciliation management role during the preparation and execution of General Election. Involved during election campaigns to ensure there is peaceful co-existence during and after the General Election.*	x	x	x
4	Ministry of Defence • *Enhance security operations along borders and other identified hots spots against external threats.*	x	x	x
5	Independent Police Oversight Authority (IPOA) • *To effectively oversight police operations during General Election and monitoring of party primaries.*	x	x	x
6	Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) • *To safeguard resources at risk of misappropriation and embezzlement due to the anticipated transitions in both levels of government.* • *Vets candidates & issues clearance certificates.*	x		x
7	The Presidency/Executive Office of the President • *Coordinate transition activities related to assumption of office of new administration.* *Joint activity with Foreign Affairs; Department of Sports; Interior; Culture and Heritage; Broadcasting and ICT & Innovation and Judiciary.*			x
8	Judiciary • *Judiciary Committee on Elections* • *Political Parties Disputes Tribunal* *Role is to ensure that elections are free, fair and credible through hearing and determination of electoral disputes and cater for cases that will result from expected disputes during the elections.*			x

Table 5 presents the approved budgets for each electoral institution, focusing on the 2017 and 2022 General Elections. The analysis includes financial years both before and after August, since elections in Kenya are held every five years in August.

Table 5: Key Electoral Institutions and Their Budgets

	Approved Budget – Ksh in millions							
MDAs	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**	**2021/22**	**2022/23**	**2023/24**
Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC)	23,617	33,372	4,893	4,808	5,309	23,166	20,631	4,699
% of Election Budget	*99*	*100*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*100*	*105*	*-*
State Department for Interior	134,996	131,589	125,957	128,782	129,383	134,359	106,467	-
% of Election Budget	*1.7*	*3.9*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*0.4*	*-*	
Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP)	827	809	1,072	1,212	1,306	3,315	1,530	1,460
% of Election Budget	*25.3*	*17.5*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*11.2*	*6.8*	*-*
Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC)	3,480	3,069	3,167	3,105	3,272	3,519	3,521	3,984
% of Election Budget	*-*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*2*	*1*	*-*
Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA)	485	696	863	820	788	929	927	1,054
% of Election Budget	*-*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*0*	*1*	*-*
Judiciary	17,109	14,653	16,289		17,133	18,560	21,132	22,422
% of Election Budget	*0.1*	*0.9*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*0.8*	*1.8*	*-*
Ministry of Defence	102	114	121	117	122	136,760	138,991	159,085
% of Election Budget	*-*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*0*	*-*	*-*
The Executive Office of the President	10,946	9,980	10,668	16,474	40,937	42,378	35,044	5,221
% of Election Budget	*-*	*0*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*1*	*-*
Foreign Affairs	20,869.00	16,890.00						
% of Election Budget	-	1						
Broadcasting and Telecommunication	3,635	3,743.00						
% of Election Budget	-	1						
Arts and Culture								
% of Election Budget								

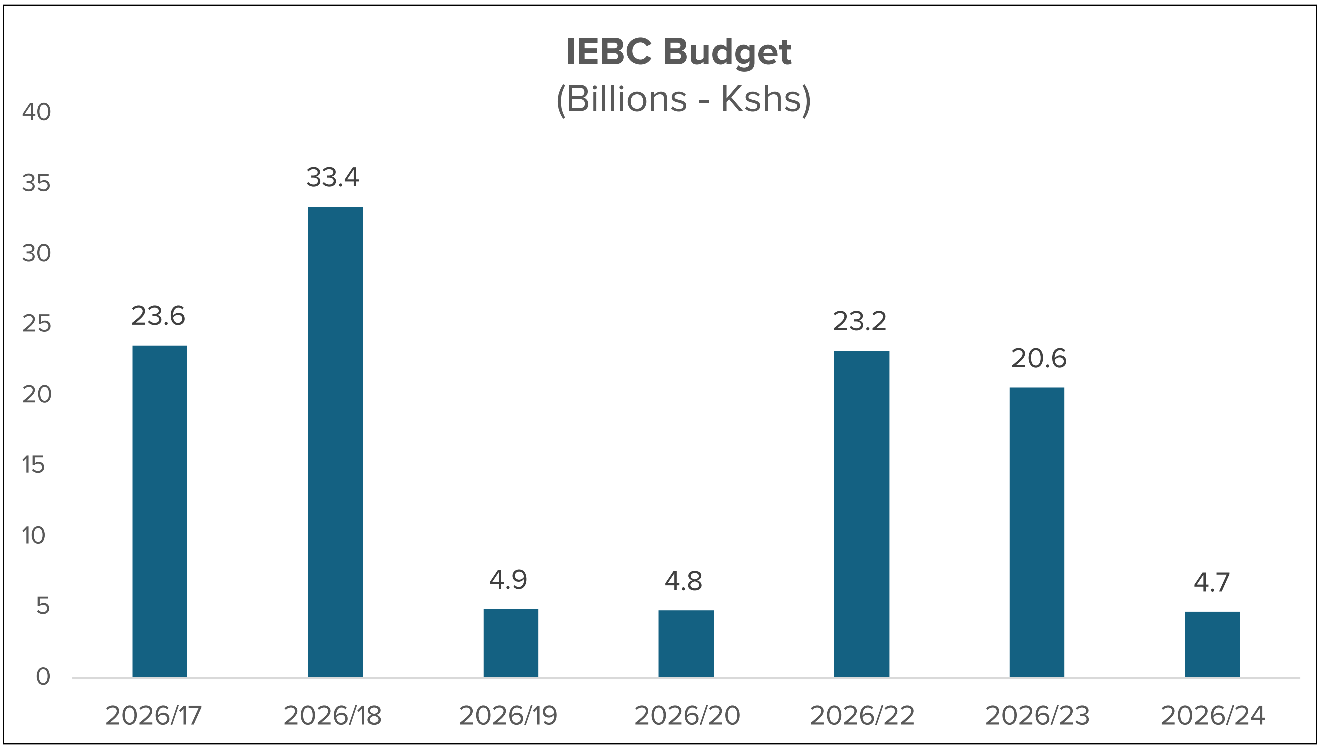
3.4 How Much is Spent by Electoral Institutions

3.4.1 Lion's share of funds goes to IEBC

The IEBC is the single most significant in beneficiary of election-related funding. Its allocations rise sharply in **election years** — from Ksh**23.6 billion** in **2016/17** to **Ksh33.4 billion** in **2017/18 (41.5%).** The costs drop after an election -- for instance, from **Ksh23.2 billion 2021/22** to **Ksh20.6 billion in 2022/23 (-11.2%)**. In these years, IEBC accounted for **100 per cent of the election budget**, underscoring its central role in organising and administering elections.

However, allocations plummet in off-cycle years, such as **2018/19 (Ksh4.9B)**, **2019/20 (Ksh4.8B)**, and **2023/24 (Ksh4.7B)**. This pattern reflects a cyclical funding model: substantial resources flow to the IEBC during election preparations and voting, followed by sharp cutbacks in non-election years.

Figure 4: IEBC Budget



Of note is that elections are a process and not an event – elections are an ongoing process. Reduced funding between election years can harm operations and make it harder to address capacity gaps, implement reforms, and act on recommendations from post-election reports and observer missions. This on itself raises the need for an IEBC elections fund to ensure there is predictable funding to support election as a process rather than an event.

3.4.2 Security agencies incur major expenditure

Security Sector also has a major expenditure as an Indirect Beneficiaries of Election Funding by the Exchequer. The **State Department for Interior** consistently receives very large allocations, ranging from **Ksh125 billion to Ksh135 billion** annually. Although only a small proportion is explicitly tagged to elections (between **1% and 4% of the election budget**), the department's funding highlights the importance of security and policing during electoral processes.

The **Ministry of Defence** allocation also reveals a striking trend. While its allocations were minimal before 2021/22, they surged to **Ksh136.8 billion in 2021/22** and continued to rise, reaching **Ksh159 billion by 2023/24**. Despite this massive growth, almost none of the allocations are formally designated as election-related, suggesting that Defence plays a supporting role in national security but is not considered a primary electoral institution.

Together, Interior and Defence dwarf the budgets of other electoral actors, underscoring the heavy security footprint surrounding Kenya's elections, even if this is not always reflected in the "election budget" categorisation.

Of note here is that although only a small portion of security-sector budgets is formally classified as election spending, security agencies are engaged throughout the electoral cycle – securing voter registration where there is need, managing political rallies, party primaries, polling operations, tally centres, and post-election unrest. The cumulative cost of personnel deployment, logistics, transport, allowances, and contingency operations is therefore substantial.

This heavy securitisation is tied to challenges in political trust. When public trust is weak and contestation is intense, the government and ruling party relies more heavily on use of police force to manage competition. However, this approach adds to the costs that are not directly included in the analysis on costs of elections.

3.4.3 Judiciary also spends to promote electoral justice

The Judiciary's budget reflects its role in handling election disputes and upholding electoral justice. Allocations show significant spikes around election years, particularly **2021/22 (Ksh18.6 billion)** and **2022/23 (Ksh21.1 billion)**. Its share of election budgets, though modest (0.8–1.8%), indicates increasing recognition of the Judiciary's importance in safeguarding electoral integrity through petitions and dispute resolution.

This trend suggests that while the Judiciary's primary mandate is not election-related, it is nonetheless indispensable to the democratic process, particularly in a context such as Kenya where election outcomes are frequently contested.

3.4.4 Oversight and governance bodies receive significant allocation

The **Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP)** has benefitted from a steady growth in allocations, peaking at **Ksh3.3 billion in 2021/22** before falling back to **Ksh1.5 billion in 2022/23 and 2023/24**. However, its share of the election budget declined from **25 per cent in 2016/17** to just **6–7 per cent by 2022/23**. This suggests that while ORPP's mandate has expanded — covering political party funding and compliance — its budgetary significance within the broader electoral framework has declined.

The **Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC)** and the **Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA)** receive modest allocations (generally between **Ksh0.8 billion and Ksh3.9 billion annually**). Their shares of the election budget rarely exceed **2 per cent**, reflecting limited direct involvement in elections, even though their functions —integrity oversight and police accountability — are of crucial importance to credible polls.

STATE DEPARTMENT FOR INTERIOR

KSH125 BILLION TO KSH135 BILLION ANNUALLY

JUDICIARY

2021/22(KSH18.6 BILLION)
2022/23 (KSH21.1 BILLION)

OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR OF POLITICAL PARTIES (ORPP)

2021/22 (KSH3.3 BILLION)
2022/23 (KSH1.5 BILLION)

ETHICS AND ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION (EACC)

KSH0.8 BILLION AND KSH3.9 BILLION ANNUALLY

3.4.5 Erratic allocations to the Executive Office of the President

The Executive Office of the President shows highly erratic funding trends. Its budget rose dramatically from **Ksh16.5 billion in 2019/20** to **Ksh40.9 billion in 2020/21**, peaking at **Ksh42.4 billion in 2021/22** before collapsing to **Ksh5.2 billion in 2023/24**. Unlike the IEBC or Judiciary, these allocations do not consistently align with electoral cycles, suggesting ad hoc expenditure, possibly linked to administrative or political priorities rather than formal electoral processes.

3.4.6 Overall assessment

Kenya's electoral budgeting landscape, therefore, is characterized by **sharp cyclical funding trends in the case of the IEBC,** which call to question its institutional capacity to meet its requirements in the period between elections. While **security institutions** (Interior and Defence) consistently command vast budgets, their direct linkage to elections is limited in budgetary terms, even though their operational role in safeguarding elections is substantial. The **Judiciary** has emerged as an increasingly important player in election-related funding, mirroring its role in dispute resolution. At the same time, **oversight bodies** such as ORPP, EACC and IPOA have relatively small but steady allocations, highlighting the tension between their critical mandates and modest financial resources.

Overall, the data underscore a dual dynamic in Kenya's electoral funding: **election management institutions receive heavy but cyclical funding**, while **security and executive agencies command consistently high resources** that far exceed some electoral actors, reflecting the securitised and politically charged environment in which Kenya's elections take place

3.5 Efficiency and Effectiveness in Electoral Expenditure

3.5.1 IEBC's event-driven funding and its drawbacks

The IEBC consistently receives the largest share of election-related funding — accounting for 100 per cent of the election budget in election years. In this regard, the election is treated as an event. Indeed, allocation to IEBC surged from Ksh23.6 billion in 2016/17 to Ksh33.4 billion in 2017/18, and again rose sharply ahead of the 2022 elections. However, in off-cycle years, its budget reduces to around Ksh4.7–Ksh4.9 billion.

This pattern suggests inefficiency at a system level. Elections are treated as an "event" rather than a continuous process. This, on its own, undermines institutional learning, reforms, and sustained capacity-building. The 'stop-start' financing approach to IEBC funding raises long-term costs and weakens operational readiness between elections.

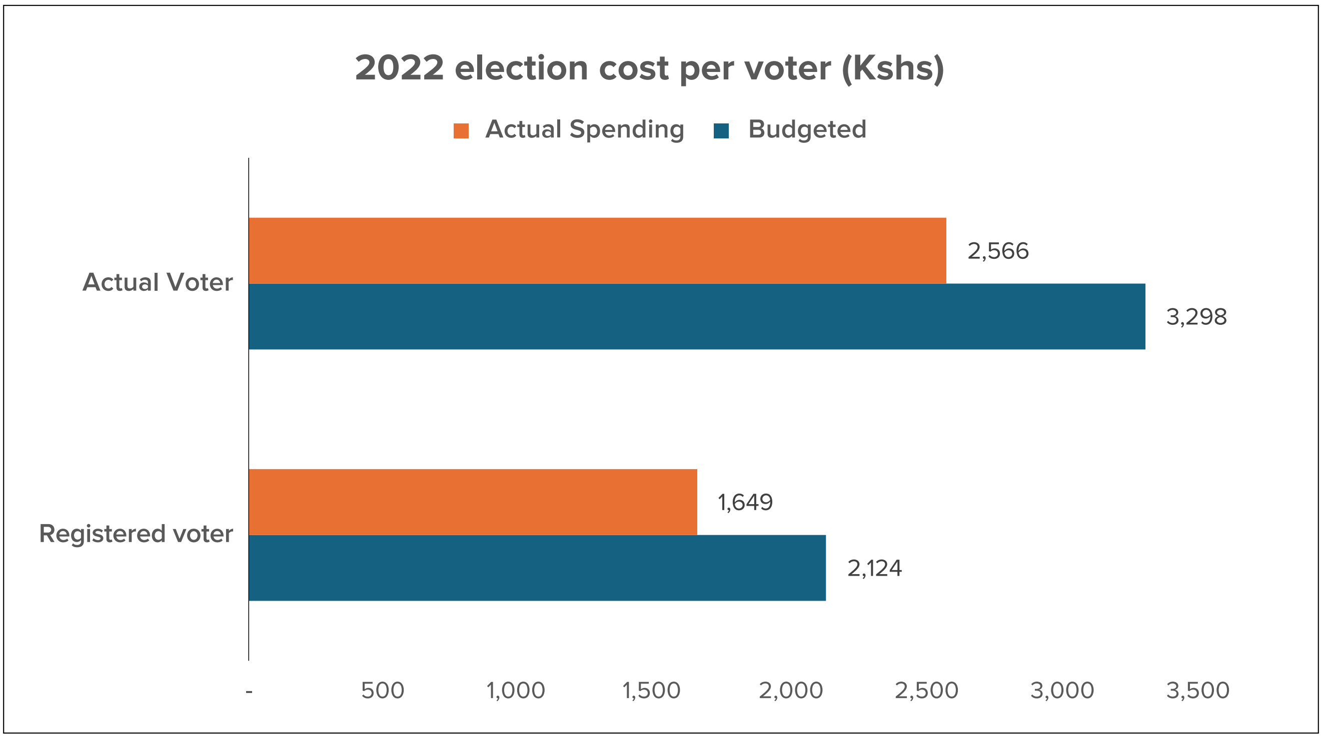
3.5.2 Voter turnout affects election costs

Cost of election increases in tandem with reduced turnout. In 2022, Kenya's election cost per voter was:

a) Ksh2,124 (US$16.47) per registered voter (budgeted)
b) Ksh1,649 (US$12.78) per registered voter (actual spending)
c) Ksh3,298 (US$25.57) per actual voter (budgeted)
d) Ksh2,566 (US$19.89) per actual voter (actual spending).

These figures are significantly higher than the global benchmark of about $5 per registered voter (about Ksh645).

Figure 5: 2022 election cost per voter



Even after underspending against the approved budget, Kenya's elections remain exceptionally expensive by international standards. This indicates weak cost-efficiency in how IEBC-led election resources are utilised. Importantly, it is a result of relatively lower number of people turning out to vote than the number of registered voters.

3.5.3 Underspending by IEBC signals weak execution

In 2022, about 22 per cent of IEBC budget was not spent -- actual election spending was Ksh36 billion, compared to an approved budget of Ksh47 billion, implying an absorption rate of 78 per cent**.** While this improves efficiency (lower cost per voter), it also raises concerns about whether underspending reflects prudent savings or weak execution and procurement bottlenecks. Indeed, lower spending does not automatically translate to greater efficiency if it comes at the cost of quality, credibility or long-term institutional strengthening.

It is noteworthy that large spikes in IEBC spending are driven by especially two factors: one-off technology investments (e.g., KIEMS kits); and late procurement and compressed timelines. The repeat elections in 2017 also increased the costs for that year's elections.

This pattern implies inefficient procurement and planning practices, with large capital costs incurred repeatedly instead of being smoothed through multi-year investments, maintenance and upgrades. It also reveals that many activities are postponed and only carried out during election years.

3.5.4 Political and security constraints and impact on effectiveness

The IEBC has demonstrated the ability to mobilise and deploy large resources in election years and deliver nationwide elections under tight political and security constraints. However, sharp post-election budget cuts undermine its ability to implement reforms on a continuous basis, address audit findings, and act on observer recommendations. In addition, capacity gaps persist due to the inability to retain skilled staff and maintain systems between elections.

On the whole, the IEBC is operationally effective in the last minutes of conducting an election but institutionally ineffective in building a stable, professional and continuously improving electoral management body. Many activities are postponed either because there is no budget, or due to institutional constraints such as failure to appoint new commissioners which prevent the carrying out of such activities.

3.6 Why Costs are High: Overall Assessment

A key finding of this study is that Kenya's election financing space involves several institutions with IEBC dominating the budget allocation – the core election cost. The broader electoral ecosystem also includes other agencies such as the State Department for Interior, the Judiciary, ORPP, EACC and IPOA all undertaking election-related functions as part of their wider mandates.

It is important to clarify that only the identifiable election-related share of these non-IEBC institutions' budgets is relevant to election costs. The analysis in this report does not include their full institutional allocations as part of election expenditure.

Several observations are worth underlining. **One, Kenya's elections remain very expensive on a per-voter basis compared to international benchmarks**. Even after the decline in total spending between 2017 and 2022, the cost per registered voter remains significantly higher than the global norm – almost three times more. Moreover, because a large portion of electoral expenditure is fixed (logistics, staffing, coordination and technology), lower voter turnout inflates the cost per actual voter. The result is a high-cost electoral model whose unit costs remain elevated despite improved absorption control.

Two, IEBC's funding pattern is sharply cyclical — rising steeply in election years and falling dramatically in off-cycle periods. This event-driven approach creates several problems for IEBC and the electoral context in general. These include:

a	b	c	d	e
Weakening of IEBC institutional continuity and long-term planning.	Compressed procurement timelines and reactive spending.	Reduced uptake of reforms between elections periods.	Restricted ability to spread out and sustain the costs of technology investment over time, making it difficult to upgrade technology efficiently.	Erosion of institutional memory due to fluctuating staffing levels.

On the whole, elections are a five-year governance cycle, yet financing treats them as one-off events. This mismatch increases long-term costs – making Kenya's elections very expensive compared to global standards

Three, the IEBC has demonstrated operational capacity to deliver elections under intense political and logistical pressure. However, its effectiveness remains largely short-term and compliance-driven. Spending patterns reveal a reactive approach — mobilising large resources during election years to manage political risks and meet legal deadlines. Absence of adequate budgets make it difficult to embed a strategic approach centred on long-term efficiency and institutional strengthening.

The findings show that Kenya's elections are embedded in a political environment in which credibility requires significant assurance mechanisms. Even if the percentage of Interior or Judiciary budgets directly attributable to elections is small, the need for election-related security deployments, dispute resolution and electoral justice, as well as oversight functions indicates a context of persistent contestation. This political environment indirectly influences IEBC expenditure by necessitating heavier logistics, technological safeguards and dispute management systems.

The findings suggest that the costs increase because of the need to build assurance in the electoral environment. Electoral institutions seek to continually prove themselves to competing political elites and a sceptical public that has low trust in electoral institutions.

In such contexts:

- Security expenditures on elections rise to secure the elections especially around the election.
- Technology investments expand on the hope that this will increase transparency.
- Judicial capacity is strengthened to manage anticipated disputes.
- Oversight institutions are mobilised to mitigate accusations of bias.

While these expenditures fulfil important functions, they also significantly increase the overall cost of elections. However, they do not necessarily enhance public trust and confidence, as perceptions are largely shaped by competing ethno-regional elites and interests. In essence, credibility becomes fiscally expensive because it is not fully institutionalised through the generation of public trust in electoral institutions. Instead, credibility is continually reinforced by resource-intensive safeguards, yet it remains fundamentally dependent on the attitudes and views of political elites towards the electoral process.

04

KEY DRIVERS OF COSTS OF ELECTIONS

The analysis in the previous sections shows that elections in Kenya are consistently among the most expensive globally, both in absolute terms and in per-capita cost. The high cost can be attributed to a combination of institutional, logistical, technological and political factors. The following sections highlight some of the **key drivers of electoral costs in Kenya**, drawing from budgetary data and Kenya's recent electoral experiences.

4.1 Administration, Logistics and Coordination

One of the primary drivers of election costs in Kenya is the sheer scale of logistical operations required to deliver credible polls across a diverse and geographically dispersed population. Kenya has over 46,000 polling stations spread across urban centers, rural areas and remote, hard-to-reach regions. Each polling station requires staff, materials, security and reliable access and transportation.

a) Staffing Costs:

The IEBC recruits and trains tens of thousands of temporary officials each electoral cycle — presiding officers, clerks, and returning officers — in addition to its cohort of permanent staff. Salaries, training, and allowances for this temporary workforce constitute a substantial budget outlay.

b) Materials and Printing:

Printing secure ballot papers, result forms, voter registers, and other sensitive materials is another major cost. In recent elections, printing has been outsourced to international firms, which further increases costs.

c) Transportation and Logistics:

Moving materials securely to and from polling stations across the country necessitates the contracting of vehicles, hiring aircraft or even boats in remote areas, and setting up storage and distribution centres. The need for redundancy and secure handling further inflates these costs.

Voter registration and electoral operations are consistently the **largest single cost driver**. According to the IEBC sub-programme data:

a) In **2017/18**, voter registration and electoral operations consumed **Ksh20 billion**, compared to much smaller allocations for voter education (Ksh1.5 billion) or ICT (Ksh6 billion).
b) By **2021/22**, in preparation for the 2022 elections, this line jumped to **Ksh11.7 billion**, rising further to **Ksh13.2 billion in 2022/23**.
c) The scale reflects periodic activities such as mass voter registration, updating of the register, nominations and candidate management, and the management of 46,000+ polling stations.

The IEBC also spends heavily on salaries, allowances, and administrative overheads:

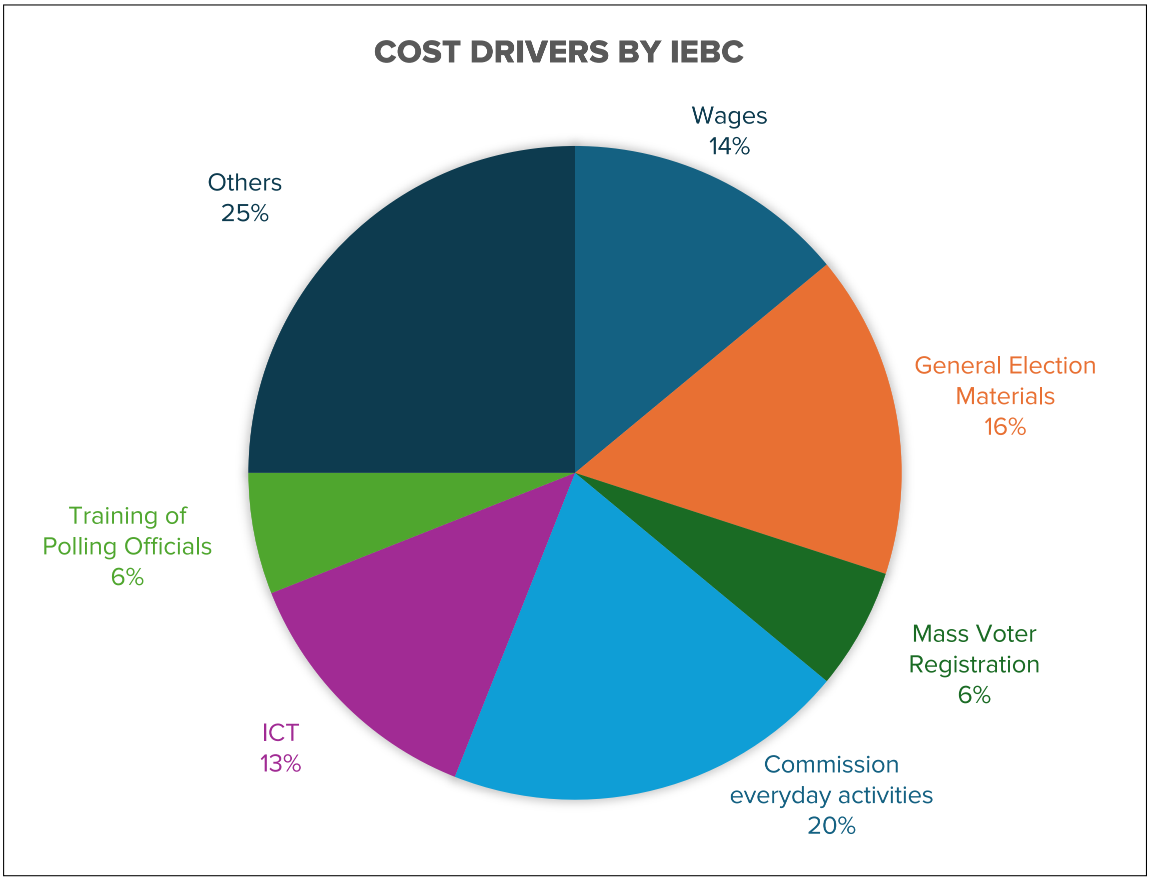
a) Sub-programme allocations under **General Administration and Planning** were **Ksh5.7 billion in 2017/18**, while averaging Ksh3–5 billion in subsequent years.

b) Detailed activity data shows a large wage bill: **Ksh6.0 billion allocated in 2022/23**, with actual expenditure at **Ksh5.4 billion**.

The activity-level data highlight the extent to which transport and tallying centres further add substantial costs:

- **Transport**: Ksh558 million allocated in 2021/22, rising to a staggering **Ksh3.1 billion in 2022/23** (actual expenditure of Ksh2.7 billion)
- **Tallying centres**: County and constituency tallying centres received Ksh108 million (2021/22) and Ksh69 million (2022/23). The national tallying centre cost Ksh108 million in 2021/22 and Ksh219 million in 2022/23.

Figure 6: Cost Drivers by IEBC



General election materials (16%) and ICT (13%) stand out as significant expenditures on the part of IEBC, only slightly behind the Commission's Normal Activities (20%).

4.2 Technology & ICT Procurement

Since 2013, Kenya has adopted electronic systems for voter registration, voter verification, and results transmission. While aimed at enhancing credibility and transparency, technology necessarily comes at a cost and has thus also become a leading cost driver.

a) **Procurement of KIEMS Kits**: Thousands of biometric voter identification devices must be procured, tested and distributed nationwide. These kits are expensive and Kenya often replaces a number of them in each election cycle due to technological obsolescence or supplier contracts.

b) **Software and Servers**: Beyond the hardware, Kenya incurs costs for results transmission servers, tallying centres, and cyber-security measures. Contracts with technology providers, often foreign firms, are high-value and extremely politically sensitive.

c) **Maintenance and Training**: Maintaining these systems, training staff to operate them and providing technical support during critical election periods further adds to the ICT cost burden.

Technology, while intended to improve transparency, accountability, and efficiency, has thus institutionalised a cycle of high expenditure. Each General Election involves new procurement rounds, rather than consideration of long-term amortisation of systems. That is, rather than investing in the long-term maintenance and reuse of existing technology systems, each General Election witnesses a fresh wave of procurement for new equipment and technology. Sometimes disputes on tenders for procurement of technology end up in courts thereby adding to costs incurred in legal fees. At times, disagreements over technology procurement tenders escalate to legal proceedings, which in turn increases overall election costs due to additional legal fees.

Kenya's reliance on ICT is, therefore, another driver of cost. In 2017/18, ICT-related programmes accounted for **Ksh6.0 billion**. In later years, the allocations fluctuate (Ksh5.9 billion in 2021/22 but falling to Ksh1.7 billion in 2022/23), reflecting the frontloading of technology procurement before elections.

The detailed activity data show:

a) Training of polling officials, which is tied to using technology, cost Ksh94 million in 2021/22 and ballooned to Ksh2.4 billion in 2022/23.

b) Training materials added another Ksh197 million in 2021/22.

4.3 Security

Elections in Kenya are highly securitised for a several reasons including the country's history of electoral violence and contestation. The State Department for Interior, the National Police Service, and other security agencies absorb significant allocations to ensure order during campaigns, polling, counting and post-election periods.

a) **Personnel Deployment**: Tens of thousands of officers are deployed to polling stations, tallying centres and known hotspots. Each deployment requires transport, accommodation, allowances and equipment for the officers concerned.

b) **Logistical Support**: Additional vehicles, communication systems and riot-control gear are regularly procured to support election security.

c) **Preventive and Emergency Response**: Special units are placed on standby for rapid deployment in areas of potential unrest.

The scale and intensity of security operations make them one of the single largest cost drivers, often exceeding the allocations to the IEBC in absolute terms. Indeed the costs are higher if the role of security agencies throughout the electoral cycle is considered. They are deployed during voter registration, public rallies, and many other activities before the actual election period.

4.4 Judiciary and electoral dispute resolution

Another significant driver of the cost of elections is the judicial infrastructure required to adjudicate disputes. Kenyan elections are frequently contested, with petitions at all levels of the court system to be heard within a definitive timeframe, culminating in high-profile presidential petitions before the Supreme Court.

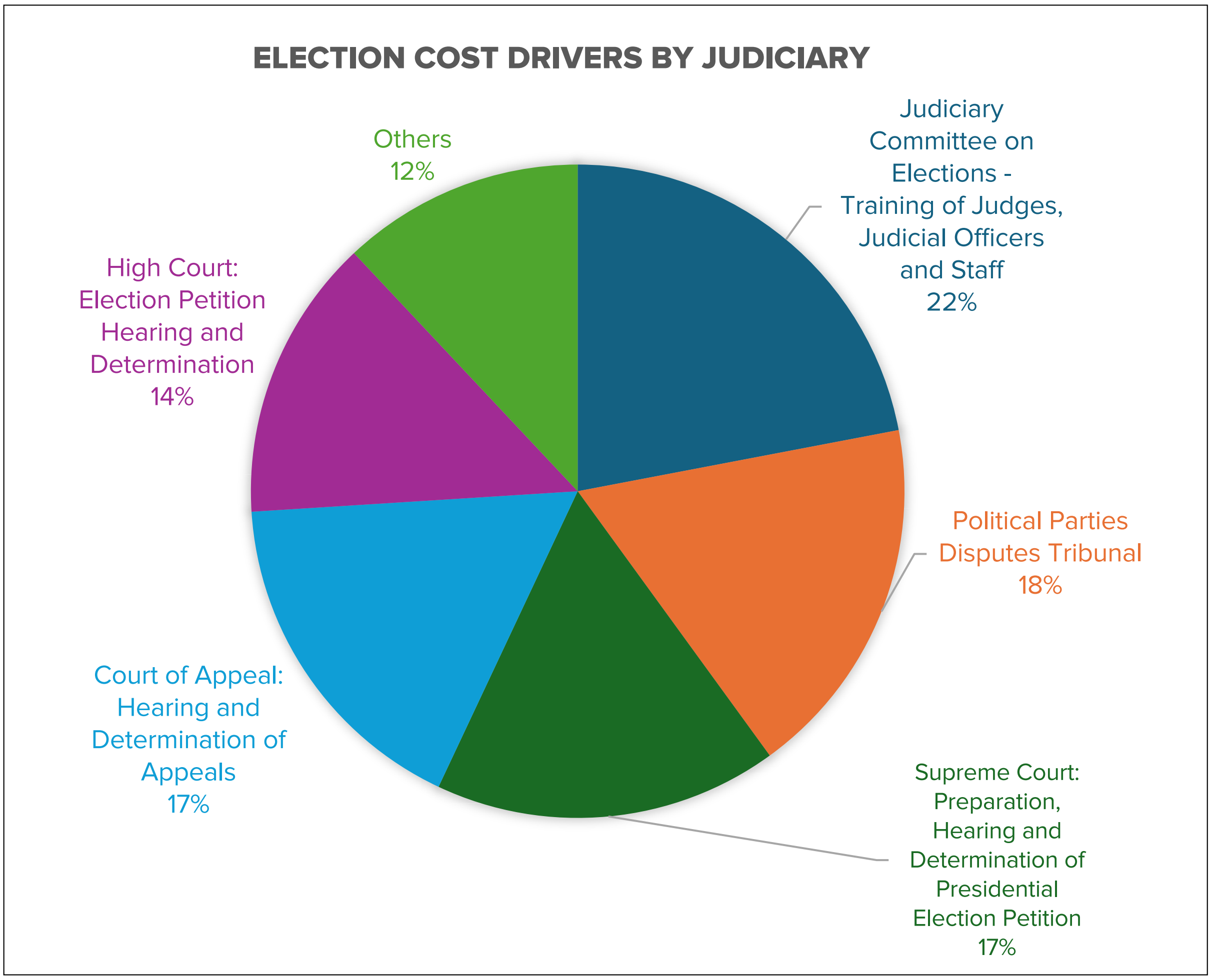
a) **Specialised Benches**: The Judiciary sets up election benches across the country, requiring judges, clerks, and legal support staff.

b) **Fast-tracking Mechanisms**: Election petitions are time-bound, forcing the Judiciary to prioritise them over other cases. This demands additional resources, logistics and administrative support.

c) **Supreme Court Hearings**: Presidential petitions require elaborate hearings, including secure facilities, extended sitting hours and expert consultations.

The Judiciary's role in dispute resolution, while essential to legitimacy, has also become a recurring cost driver in the electoral cycle.

Figure 7: Election Cost Drivers by Judiciary



The High Court (14%), Court of Appeal (17%) and Supreme Court (17%) all account for similar expenditure with regards to elections. Interestingly, the Political Parties Dispute Tribunal (PPDT) also has a similar expenditure (18%), demonstrating the volume of contestation around elections in Kenya.

4.5 Voter Education and Civic Engagement

Voter education constitutes yet another cost element, though comparatively smaller than logistics, technology or security. Nonetheless, it is essential in reducing voter apathy, curbing misinformation, and guiding citizens on relevant electoral procedures.

a) **Media Campaigns**: Television, radio, print, and increasingly social media, are used extensively to reach diverse audiences.
b) **Partnerships with Civil Society**: The IEBC collaborates with NGOs, religious institutions and community organisations to run grassroots voter education campaigns.
c) **Production of Educational Materials**: Printing and distributing manuals, posters and guides in multiple languages adds to the cost.

Given Kenya's high levels of electoral contestation, civic education is and should continue to be treated as a necessity, but unfortunately, it remains underfunded compared to other cost drivers. Although smaller in scale compared to logistics and ICT, costs in relation to voter education are still significant:

- Budgeted at **Ksh1.5 billion in 2017/18**, with later allocations between Ksh1.3 billion (2021/22) and Ksh429 million (2022/23).
- Actual expenditure data show **over Ksh1.1 billion spent in 2021/22**, and about **Ksh307 million in 2022/23**.

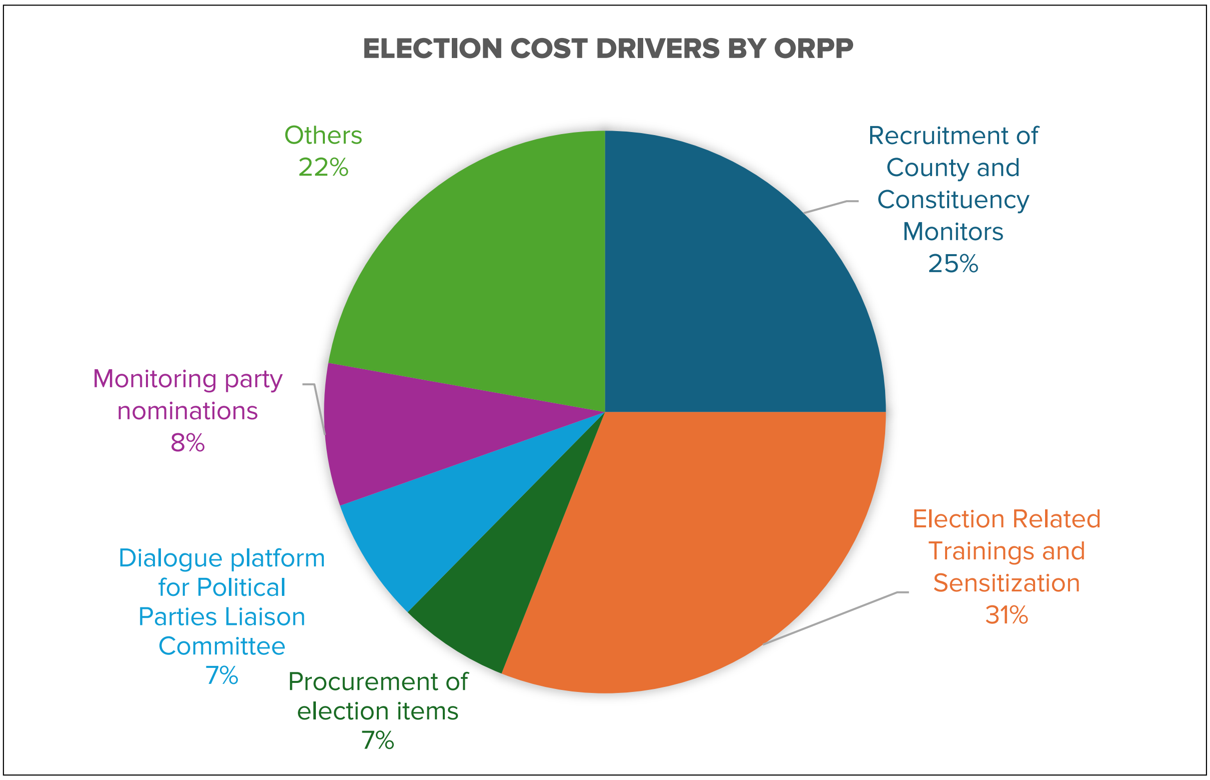
4.6 Political Party Financing and Oversight

Public financing of political parties, administered through the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP), is a positive development seeking to empower political parties, though it also comes at a cost. Though the budgetary allocation for ORPP is modest compared to IEBC or security, it is politically significant.

- **Direct Funding to Parties**: Parties meeting the legal threshold receive state funding, which is intended to promote inclusivity and reduce over-reliance on private financing.
- **Regulatory Oversight**: The ORPP also oversees compliance with electoral laws, which entails staff, monitoring and administrative expenses.

While smaller in scale, these expenditures add to the aggregate cost of elections.

Figure 8: Election Cost Drivers by ORPP

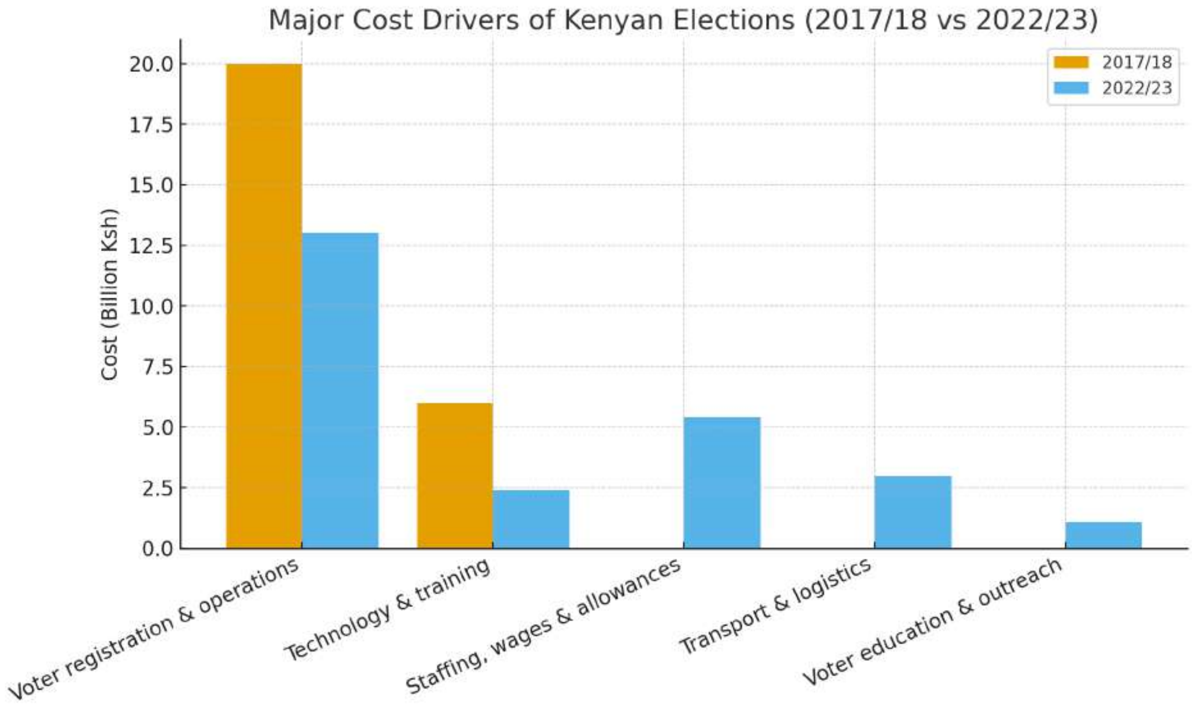


The ORPP allocates a significant share of its budget to election-related trainings and sensitisation. This is notable given that training is a critical part of ORPPs mandate.

Based on the research, the **largest cost drivers of Kenyan elections** are:

1. **Voter registration and electoral operations** – consistently the top budget line (Ksh20 billion in 2017/18, Ksh13 billion in 2022/23).
2. **Technology and training for polling** – ICT procurement and training officials, peaking at Ksh6 billion in 2017/18 and Ksh2.4 billion for training alone in 2022/23.
3. **Staffing, wages and allowances** – over Ksh5.4 billion spent on wages in 2022/23.
4. **Transport and tallying logistics** – over Ksh3 billion in transport costs in 2022/23.
5. **Voter education and outreach** – about Ksh1.1B in 2021/22, smaller but still significant.

Figure 9: Major Cost Drivers of Kenya Elections



It should also be stated that in practice, it is rare that actual expenditure will match approved allocation figures, save for part of recurrent expenditure -- wages. That notwithstanding, it was noted and confirmed from the post-election reports that for some electoral institutions, actual expenditure was exactly the same as the approved budgetary allocation.

4.7 What Can We Expect in the 2027 Election?

The IEBC's projected budget of approximately Ksh61.7 billion (reduced to Ksh57.3 billion following Treasury and Parliament adjustments) for the 2027 General Election signals a decisive return to the high-cost electoral model last observed in 2017, reversing the significant cost compression achieved in 2022. It is instructive to note that over the period reviewed for this report, the highest cost of electoral processes occurred in 2017, with a similar scenario projected in 2027. This would tend to suggest that electoral costs are highest when an incumbent is seeking re-election, rather than when a constitutionally mandated handover is in the offing.

Whereas the approved election budget declined from about Ksh65 billion in 2017 to Ksh47 billion in 2022, the 2027 projection reverts to near-2017 levels, despite the absence of repeat elections or extraordinary political disruptions at this stage. This suggests that Kenya has not institutionalised cost-efficiency gains from past electoral cycles. Instead, election financing remains structurally inflationary, driven by renewed capital expenditure —particularly in electoral technology - and by a funding model that concentrates spending heavily in the immediate pre-election period rather than smoothing investments across the electoral cycle.

At the unit level, the 2027 projection implies the persistence of an exceptionally high cost per voter by international standards. In 2022, the approved cost per registered voter stood at Ksh2,124 and the cost per actual voter at Ksh3,298 — four to five times higher than the global benchmark of roughly Ksh645 per registered voter. A total of over Ksh60 billion in 2027, combined with a likely expansion of the voter register, points to little or no improvement in cost-per-voter efficiency. This reflects a deeper structural problem: repeated technology replacement cycles, weak asset amortisation and limited incentives for the IEBC to internalise long-term cost reduction. The data suggests that Kenya's electoral system remains locked into a high-cost equilibrium in which each election triggers a new round of major procurement rather than building on durable, depreciated infrastructure.

Finally, the formal IEBC projection understates the true fiscal footprint of elections. While IEBC absorbs virtually the entire "election budget" in formal terms, the data show that large and rising expenditures by the security sector, the Judiciary, and the executive — often only marginally tagged as election-related — constitute a substantial indirect election cost. This points to a deeply securitised and politically risk-intensive electoral model, in which high public spending is used as an instrument of risk management rather than institutional consolidation. The policy implication is that meaningful reform cannot focus on IEBC alone: it requires a whole-of-government approach to electoral costing, multi-cycle investment planning, and explicit strategies to de-securitise elections and reduce the structural drivers of high-cost democracy in Kenya.

In summary, therefore, IEBC budget projections for 2027 suggest a return to near-2017 cost levels, reversing the 2022 cost reductions:

a) No structural improvement in cost efficiency per voter.

b) Continued over-reliance on cyclical, election-year funding.

c) Persistent technology-driven cost escalation.

d) Systematic understatement of the full public cost of elections.

e) An electoral model that remains expensive, securitised and politically risk-heavy.

Kenya's projected 2027 election spend reflects continuity, not reform: high costs, weak inter-cycle investment, heavy technology dependence and limited evidence of learning from the cost reductions achieved in 2022.

4.8 Conclusion

Kenya's elections are among the most expensive in Africa — and globally — when measured on a per-voter basis. While the international benchmark is about US$ 5 (≈ Ksh645) per registered voter, Kenya's cost per registered voter is three times higher. For instance, in 2022, the cost per registered voter translated to Ksh1,649 (≈ US$12.8) and Ksh2,566 (≈ US$19.9) per ballot cast. In 2017, the cost per registered voter was approximately Ksh2,124 (≈ US$16.5). When measured against the actual voter turnout of roughly 15.9 million voters in 2017, the cost rises to Ksh3,298 (≈ US$ 25.6) per person who actually cast a ballot.

Kenya's elections are costly because they are as much about politics as about procedure. The data show that despite efficiency gains between 2017 and 2022, the cost per voter remains triple the global average, largely due to the institutional and political environment in which elections occur. Addressing this challenge requires more than financial prudence — it calls for political reforms that restore credibility, transparency and predictability.

Cost of elections increases with low voter turnout. Because most election costs are fixed (staffing, logistics and technology), lower voter turnout raises the unit cost per actual voter. The cost per actual voter was about 56 per cent higher than the cost per registered voter in both 2017 and 2022, meaning that non-participation increases per-voter expenditure through inefficiencies and wastage. Specifically, in 2017, each ballot effectively cost Ksh1,174 (≈ US$9.1) more due to poor turnout. And in 2022, the "wastage" effect was Ksh917 (≈ US$7.1) per ballot.

Key cost drivers include:

1. **Operations and Logistics** – The single largest expenditure component, covering recruitment and remuneration of over 300,000 temporary election officials, the printing, warehousing, and transport of materials to 46,000+ polling stations, and management of national and county tallying centres.
2. **Technology and ICT Systems** – Heavy investment in biometric voter registration, the Kenya Integrated Election Management System (KIEMS), electronic results transmission, and cybersecurity. These create substantial upfront and recurrent costs every cycle.

3. **Trust deficit and low public confidence in electoral-related institutions** -- Kenya's election bill is inflated not only by logistics and technology but by deficits of trust in institutions. When parties and citizens fear rigging or biased administration, the system responds with costly assurances — heavier securitisation, more layers of technology, parallel results channels and high-volume litigation. Reducing costs therefore requires political and institutional reforms that lower contestation and perceived manipulation risk — so the system does not have to "buy" credibility through expensive controls.
4. **Security Operations** – Significant expenditure for nationwide deployment of police and security personnel, vehicles, and communication systems to secure polling stations and materials.
5. **Electoral Dispute Resolution** – Considerable judicial and tribunal costs to process hundreds of election petitions within strict constitutional timelines.
6. **Voter Education and Oversight** – Though relatively underfunded, weak investment in this area often leads to misinformation, procedural errors, and increased post-election disputes, which inflate overall costs indirectly.

Overall, Kenya's elections are among the most expensive globally, with security operations absorbing the largest share of resources. The current model reflects a reactive, risk-driven approach that prioritises securitisation and litigation over prevention and trust-building. By rebalancing allocations toward preventive institutions, optimising technology investments, and institutionalising predictable funding, Kenya can achieve more credible elections at a lower cost. Strengthening oversight and transparency will not only enhance electoral integrity, but also reduce the long-term financial burden on the state.

In short, the true cost of elections is the cost of mistrust. Reducing that mistrust — through independent institutions, open processes, transparent procurement and inclusive oversight —is the surest way to achieve both fiscal savings and democratic legitimacy.

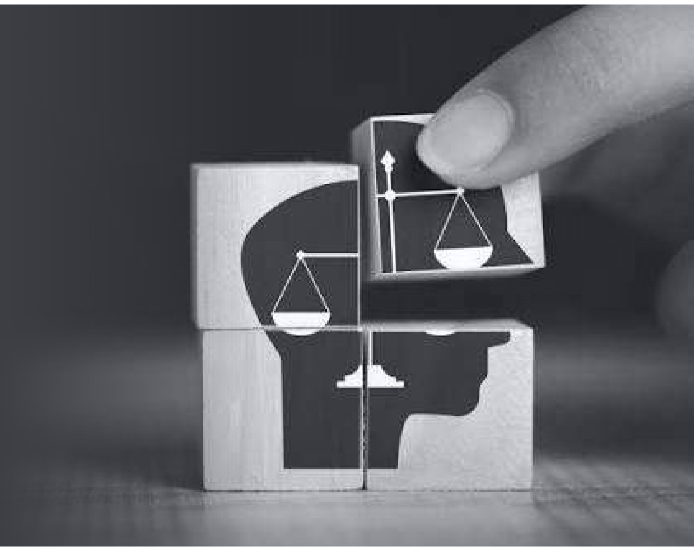
4.9 Challenges Ahead

Political and fiscal resistance is inevitable and will certainly act as a major blockage to any proposal for an independent fund to support the electoral process. This is precisely because, first, the National Treasury is operating in a fiscally constrained space and therefore will resist implementing measures such as operationalising an elections fund. Indeed, owing to Kenya's high public debt, the government is generally focused on containing recurrent and electionrelated spending within strict targets, limiting willingness to carve out hard protections for IEBC in law or in the Constitution.

Second, politically, Parliament is wary of ceding too much financial autonomy to an institution that referees intensely competitive elections. MPs read these interventions using a self-interest perspective – giving IEBC security and independence runs against these self-interests, especially because they may not have opportunity to influence the IEBC. Parliament therefore prefers to maintain strong annual oversight and the ability to renegotiate ceilings through the budget process. This itself opens doors for rents for political elites.

Third, the trust deficit in the electoral management and its use of public resources presents another challenge. Discussions to ringfence the IEBC fund would take place in the context of a contested trust in both electoral management and public finance. Rent-seeking and abuse of public resources have meant that the public is critical of how funds are used. Moreover, past disputes over IEBC procurement and technology costs have fuelled demands that any movement towards a dedicated fund must be matched by enhanced transparency, external audit and performance benchmarks to reassure the public that additional financial security will not simply escalate the cost of elections.

These challenges are a pointer that multiyear planning, and structured engagement with Parliament will also require political commitment by elites. That is, until political elites reconcile the tension between electoral independence and budgetary control, the IEBC is likely to remain dependent on negotiated ceilings and supplementary allocations. Political considerations will not make it easy for IEBC to have a fully ringfenced fund, even though this fund would allow predictability and by that stabilise funding of elections in Kenya.



05

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Kenya's high cost of elections emanates from a politics of distrust and limited public confidence in key institutions — a system where institutions must "buy" credibility because citizens, parties and candidates have limited confidence in electoral processes. The country's elections are thus shaped as much by politics as by structural conditions: fears of rigging, weak institutional trust and lack of transparency make each election an expensive reassurance exercise. The IEBC makes large investments in technology almost every election year to improve on transparency but this is not enough to assure the public and competing political elites that the election will be fair and credible. Security institutions also spend significant amounts on securing the elections, again on the assumption that this would improve credibility and trust. But this ends up increasing the costs of elections without improving on trust levels.

The electoral environment is filled with suspicions and mistrust because the perception of credibility and fairness in the electoral process is a factor of intra-elite bargains and compromises. The credibility of the electoral process and outcome becomes fiscally expensive because it is not fully institutionalised through the generation of public trust in electoral institutions.

Reducing costs of elections will require several broad reforms focused on:

- Building a Credible & Affordable Electoral Infrastructure
- Rationalisation of Costs
- Strengthening Transparency, Accountability and Oversight.

These reforms require strategic interventions by both Parliament and the IEBC.

5.1 What Parliament Should Do

Under the 2020, Parliament has responsibility over the making of budgets. In this regard, Parliament will need to institutionalise the funding of the electoral cycle to ensure the financial independence of IEBC. This requires adopting a multi-year electoral cycle budget framework to spread out costs and avoid fiscal spikes during election years.

A multi-year funding approach would enable IEBC, the Judiciary and oversight bodies to build sustainable capacities to address election-related issues over time, rather than only having funding available during an election year. IEBC can only be truly independent when it is assured of funding over a full electoral cycle (5 years).

Establish IEBC Fund

The analysis shows that IEBC sometimes postpones implementation of activities only to rush such activities during an election year when funds are available. This stop-go approach undermines institutional capacity and prevents undertaking of key reforms between elections. There is a need, therefore, to establish an IEBC Fund (as contemplated by S.18 IEBC Act) to support institutionalisation of election- related activities throughout the election cycle. This will prevent the country and even the National Treasury and Parliament from treating elections as an event. The fund will lead to ensuring that activities in the electoral process are implemented throughout the electoral cycle and with a high degree of predictability. In addition, it may be worthwhile for Parliament to consider a proposal to set aside a specific percentage of the national budget for the IEBC Fund.

Box 2: The need for an IEBC Fund

The big question around Kenya's elections is "how IEBC can create public trust" and "how to conduct credible elections". These questions require that IEBC is sufficiently resourced to carry out key activities between elections rather than wait for budget allocations during an election year. The IEBC Fund will secure "independence" for IEBC and enable the Commission to undertake predictable, multi year financing for elections without allowing situations where other actors dictate the pace at which the Commission can carry out activities. On the whole, the IEBC should rely on a more ring fenced fund to stabilise the cost and quality of elections.

Stakeholders advocating for a dedicated IEBC fund correctly point out that Kenya's electoral cycle requires long term planning and investments in voter registration, technology, staff training and boundary review that cannot be planned on the basis of erratic year to year allocations.

IEBC has adopted multi year budgeting instruments and presented its budget policy positions to Parliament, explicitly linking expenditure plans to the 2027 General Election and interim by elections. The Commission has also engaged with Treasury and legislative committees to frame parts of its election related spending as priority programmes. It is hoped that these measures will lead to a quasi-ring-fenced status within the overall ceiling. In practice, this does not lead to a constitutionally entrenched standalone fund – the ideal funding approach.

5.2 What IEBC Should Do

The IEBC has to commit to undertaking several interventions to improve on credibility of elections and by that reduce the cost of elections. These measures include:

a) **Rebuild institutional trust**: Building confidence in the independence and competence of the IEBC will directly translate into lower costs per voter. To do this, IEBC will have to do things right and demonstrate high levels of independence in a manner that inspires public confidence.

   The first pathway to reducing costs lies in restoring trust in electoral institutions, particularly the IEBC and related oversight bodies. When political actors believe the system is impartial, the demand for redundant safeguards — such as multiple verification systems, excessive security deployment and repeated training — declines significantly.

   Building trust requires transparent and inclusive approaches to everyday activities in the electoral process. It also requires public accountability frameworks that make electoral operations open to scrutiny.

b) **Address the political roots of technology dependence**: Technology has become both a symbol and a symptom of political mistrust. Each cycle elicits calls for new or more sophisticated systems to "guarantee" credibility, often at exorbitant cost.

   Nonetheless, without institutional trust and transparency, technology alone cannot build credibility in Kenya's elections. Neither can it restore elite confidence in elections. As a result of this, IEBC should focus on demonstrating that electoral technology is fool proofed against human manipulation and that it is credible enough to give a just outcome. Public audit of the system and messages anchored on reality – including evidence of citizens' trust in the mobile money transfer service -- M-Pesa -- open contracting and competitive tendering, will combine to turn technology into a tool for promoting trust in elections.

c) **Optimise ICT investments**: Transition from one-off procurement of KIEMS kits and servers toward long-term techno-infrastructure and integration with national identification systems to reduce registration costs will add value. Forward planning will prevent buying of new technologies and ensure that equipment is both re-usable and can be maintained with updated software, as required.

d) **Invest in transparency**: Transparency reduces suspicion and, consequently, also reduces the need for expensive technological and security solutions as a way of reassuring voters. Such openness would reduce the motivation for parties to maintain parallel tallying centres or to flood courts with petitions — both of which significantly increase overall election costs. Transparency can be improved through:
   i. Public disclosure of procurement contracts, supplier lists, and testing results for key technologies such as the KIEMS kits.
   ii. During elections, results should be published in real time at the polling station and in an accessible e-public portal level in both image and machine-readable formats to allow public verification on a real-time basis.
   iii. After elections, audit trails, chain-of-custody records, and final tallies should be made openly accessible.

e) **Civic and voter education** will play an important part in restoring trust in elections and by that ensure increased voter turnout. A well-informed electorate is likely to turn out and vote because they can relate elections to their everyday struggles. Strategic investment in civic education, therefore, not only enhances democracy but also improves cost efficiency by lowering the "trust premium" that currently inflates the electoral budget. It would be worth considering ring-fencing a specific percentage of IEBC budget for civic education.

5.3 What Other Agencies Should Do

Empower ORPP and EACC to improve on compliance with the law. Increase funding for compliance audits and monitoring of ethical behaviour, party primaries, among others. Stronger enforcement can reduce disputes and corruption-driven instability, which generally tends to push up the costs of elections.

Security sector: There is a need to shift the security sector mindset from securitisation of elections to prevention: Rebalancing budgets by reallocating resources to civic education, conflict mediation, and preventive oversight can be an added advantage. Strengthening KNCHR and NGEC's field presence could defuse tensions before they escalate.

Importantly, there is need depoliticise security. Kenya's elections are highly securitised, with large-scale police deployment across all counties regardless of specific risk levels. Moving toward risk-based security planning**,** including pre-election dialogue and mediation platforms between political actors, the IEBC and the Judiciary can resolve many operational grievances before they escalate into full-blown petitions, thus lowering judicial costs and logistical delays.

Judiciary: Expand alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms to lower litigation costs.

5.4 Overall Recommendations

1. ***Create innovative messages on voter turnout and cost of elections with a focus on improving voter participation***: Those who do not turn out to vote increase the cost of elections. Reduced voter turnout means these costs are shared among fewer voters, raising the cost per voter.
2. ***Rebuild institutional trust in IEBC and security institutions***: Reducing costs begins with *restoring credibility and impartiality* in the IEBC and related bodies. Transparency and commitment to independence – and being seen to do the right things right - will reduce the need for expensive "confidence-building" measures.
3. ***Institutionalise multi-year funding to ensure financial independence of IEBC***: Adopt a multi-year electoral cycle budget framework to spread out costs and avoid fiscal spikes during election years.
4. ***Enhance transparency across the process and especially in tallying and transmission of results***: Openness at every stage — *procurement, results transmission and auditing* — reduces suspicion and the need for redundant verification.
5. ***Depoliticise security and litigation***: Kenya's elections are excessively securitised and litigious because of political fear and uncertainty. Moving toward *risk-based security deployment*, coupled with *pre-election dialogue and mediation platforms*, can lower costs. Judicial costs can also fall if pre-election disputes are resolved through *intra-elite settlements*.
6. ***Rationalise technology investment and enhance transparency***: Technology should serve efficiency, not be a substitute for trust. Open contracting and independent technical audits will improve confidence and value for money.
7. ***Invest in civic confidence and voter education to improve voter participation***: Strategic investment in civic education is a *cost-saving measure*: It will improve voter participation A well-informed electorate reduces misinformation, Election Day errors, and post-election disputes — all of which drive up costs. Civic literacy is thus an important intervention – it can lead to reduced costs especially if an educated citizenry has trust in the process.