

The Hidden Glory of Gen Z in African Leadership: Determinants of Electoral Violence in Tanzania

Author

Dominick Muya^{ID}

Author's email: muyadk1976@gmail.com

Mzumbe University, Tanzania.

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Abstract

This study examines the determinants of electoral violence in Tanzania and the transformative role of Generation Z (Gen-Z) in promoting peace and democratic development. The study is contextualised within the demonstrations and civil unrest that began on 29 October 2025 amid Tanzania's general election, following allegations of electoral irregularities, suppression of opposition parties, and police intimidation. Using a cross-sectional design, primary data were collected from 384 respondents in Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, and Mbeya through structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics and the Relative Importance Index (RII). Findings indicate that electoral violence is primarily driven by governance and institutional failures, particularly unanswered citizens' demands (RII = 83.6%), a discredited electoral commission (RII = 81.8%), and weak institutions (RII = 73.2%). Political manipulation (RII = 73.3%) and unemployment (RII = 59.6%) also contribute significantly. Contrary to common assumptions, 83.4% of respondents rejected the view that youth are mobilised for violence (RII = 21.1%), while 91.1% agreed that youth promote peace. Gen-Z influence is evident through social media (99.7%, RII = 83.2%) and increased participation (98.5%, RII = 78.0%). They are perceived as agenda shapers (RII = 89.2%) and opinion influencers (RII = 87.4%), although 82.6 per cent reported that inadequate support limits their potential. The study concludes that electoral violence is rooted primarily in systemic governance failures and socio-economic inequalities rather than identity-based divisions. It recommends strengthening democratic institutions, addressing youth unemployment, enhancing civic education, and promoting inclusive political participation to harness Gen-Z as agents of peace and sustainable democratic development.

Keywords: Democratic governance, electoral violence, Gen-Z political participation, youth empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Electoral violence is a persistent and global phenomenon that has manifested across different regions and historical periods, making it a critical subject of scholarly inquiry (Masabo, 2019; Sulley, 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2009). In Africa, and particularly in Tanzania, the issue has become increasingly significant in the context of democratic transitions and multiparty political systems (Omeke, 2025; Rahim, 2002). Since the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in the 1990s, elections have been expected to promote inclusivity, accountability, and citizen participation (Birch et al., 2020). However, these democratic processes have also intensified political competition, sometimes resulting in tensions that escalate into violence (Masabo, 2019). The shift from a single-party system to a pluralistic political environment has redefined how power is contested and distributed (Chaney, 2016). While this transformation aligns with democratic ideals, it has also exposed institutional weaknesses and socio-political divisions (Táíwó, 2004; Smith, 2018).

The primary Sustainable Development Goal for addressing political or electoral violence is to promote peaceful, inclusive societies with strong, accountable institutions (SDG 16) in order to directly combat violence through various targets under SDG 16. Electoral violence in this setting is therefore not accidental but emerges from a combination of structural and contextual factors (Shivji, 2013). These include political rivalries, limited institutional capacity, and socio-economic inequalities that influence how elections are conducted and experienced (Ansell & Gingrich, 2024). Examining these dynamics is crucial to determining the underlying factors contributing to electoral violence and identifying potential avenues for reform within Tanzania's electoral system.

The nature of politics itself provides an important lens for understanding electoral violence, as it is inherently characterised by competition and disagreement (Tabassum, 2026). As noted by Aristotle, human beings are naturally political, and conflicts over power, resources, and governance are inevitable (Heywood, 2001). These disagreements, when confined within institutional boundaries, can strengthen democracy by encouraging debate and accountability (Tarimo & Manwelo, 2007). However, when they spill over into

everyday life and become deeply embedded in social relations, they may lead to hostility and violent confrontation. In emerging democracies, this risk is often heightened by weak institutional frameworks and limited mechanisms for conflict resolution (Poncian, 2015).

Electoral violence is therefore shaped by a complex interaction of political networks, ideological divisions, and the fusion between state and party structures (Paget, 2015). Additionally, institutional factors such as unemployment, income inequality, and limited access to opportunities create conditions that make individuals more vulnerable to political manipulation (Finlay, 2023). These overlapping factors collectively explain why electoral violence persists despite efforts to strengthen democratic governance. Youth, particularly the Gen-Z generation, play a central role in the dynamics of electoral violence and political transformation.

Historically, young people have been active participants in political movements and social change, especially within educational institutions (Chambers & Phelps, 1993; Malekela et al., 1994). Student activism, often viewed as a form of leadership development, has long been associated with broader struggles for political reform and social justice (Balkaran & Masha, 2025). From early university protests to contemporary movements, youth have demonstrated both the capacity to challenge authority and the potential to influence national political trajectories (Anderson & McKnight, 2015). While some scholars argue that youth activism can be driven by idealism and, at times, impulsiveness (Beissinger, 2013), others emphasise its rational and transformative dimensions in addressing systemic inequalities (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Global examples, such as the 1968 protests in France and the 1989 demonstrations in China, illustrate the power of youth mobilisation in shaping political outcomes (Bennett et al., 2008; Easton, 1975). In the African context, youth engagement is often intertwined with socio-economic realities, including unemployment and limited access to resources (Boyd & Crawford, 2012). These conditions can make young people both agents of change and targets for political exploitation. As a result, understanding the role of Gen-Z is crucial for analysing both the causes of electoral violence and the opportunities for promoting

peaceful political participation (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021).

In many African democracies, including Tanzania, the persistence of electoral violence is closely linked to institutional and socio-economic challenges (Sulley, 2013). Studies have shown that political stability and electoral outcomes are influenced by broader social, economic, and political conditions (Kim et al., 2026). Weak institutionalisation of democratic structures, as highlighted by Gansewig and Walsh (2022), often undermines the credibility of electoral processes and increases the likelihood of conflict. In such contexts, youth are frequently mobilised by political actors who exploit their economic vulnerabilities, offering incentives such as money or employment opportunities to engage in violent activities (Gansewig & Walsh, 2022). At the same time, youth are not merely passive participants but active agents capable of shaping political discourse and outcomes (Setaki & van Timmeren, 2022). This dual role underscores the importance of moving beyond simplistic narratives that portray young people solely as perpetrators of violence (Stoker et al., 2017; Trang et al., 2024). Instead, there is a need to recognise their potential as drivers of positive change and democratic consolidation.

This study therefore seeks to examine the determinants of electoral violence in Tanzania, analyse the role of Gen-Z in influencing electoral processes, and explore their capacity to promote peaceful and democratic elections (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020; Togun, 2024). By integrating political, institutional, and demographic perspectives, the study aims to improve understanding of electoral violence while highlighting youth's transformative potential in African leadership.

Theoretical Framework

In examining the determinants of electoral violence and the role of youth in Tanzania, this study adopts two complementary theories: System Theory (ST) and Social Identity Theory (SIT). System Theory serves as the primary framework, offering a holistic perspective on how different components within the political system interact to produce outcomes such as electoral violence (Luft et al., 2022). Social Identity Theory, on the other hand, complements this perspective by explaining how individual and group identities shape

political behaviour, particularly among Gen-Z (Gbati, 2024). The integration of these two theories allows for a comprehensive understanding of both structural and behavioural dimensions of electoral violence (Shneiderman & Lama, 2026). While Systems Theory focuses on patterns, relationships, and institutional dynamics, Social Identity Theory emphasises identity, perception, and group affiliation (Bekker et al., 2022). Together, they provide a balanced approach to analysing both causes and solutions to electoral violence.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy's Systems Theory views society as an integrated system whose various elements are interdependent and connected to one another (Kelsall et al., 2021; von Bertalanffy, 1968). In political science, this perspective was further developed by David Easton, who conceptualised the political system as a set of interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated (Easton, 1965). The theory emphasises three key concepts: patterns, organisation, and wholeness, suggesting that outcomes such as electoral violence result from interactions among various subsystems rather than isolated causes (Li et al., 2026). In this study, electoral violence is understood as a product of interactions among political institutions, socio-economic conditions, and demographic characteristics (Elfvesson, 2025). This approach allows for the analysis of how factors such as weak institutions, political competition, and unemployment collectively shape electoral outcomes. It also highlights that sustainable solutions require systemic reforms rather than isolated interventions, making it highly relevant to the study's objectives (Celi et al., 2026).

According to Social Identity Theory, individuals derive part of their self-concept from the social groups they belong to (Tajfel, 1978). The theory was further expanded by John Turner, who emphasised the role of self-categorisation in shaping group behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). According to this theory, individuals derive identity from categories such as ethnicity, political affiliation, and age, which influence attitudes and behaviour (Bingley et al., 2026). In electoral contexts, these identities often become politicised, leading to group-based mobilisation and sometimes conflict. In Tanzania, political actors may exploit such identities to mobilise

youth, reinforcing divisions and shaping voting behaviour. Social Identity Theory is therefore useful in explaining how Gen-Z may be influenced by group affiliations, stereotypes, and peer dynamics in electoral processes. It also helps explain how youth can either contribute to electoral violence or promote peaceful engagement depending on how identities are constructed and mobilised.

The integration of System Theory and Social Identity Theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework for this study. While System Theory explains the structural and institutional conditions that create opportunities for electoral violence, Social Identity Theory accounts for the behavioural and psychological processes that drive individual and group actions. This combined approach allows the study to address both macro-level and micro-level factors influencing electoral outcomes. It also aligns with the study's objectives by linking systemic determinants with youth dynamics and leadership potential. Importantly, the framework highlights that addressing electoral violence requires both institutional reforms and efforts to manage identity-based divisions. By doing so, it underscores the potential of Gen-Z not only as participants in the political system but also as transformative leaders capable of promoting peace and democratic governance.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in three major urban regions of Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, and Mbeya, which have been identified among the areas most affected by incidents of electoral violence. These regions were purposively selected because of their political significance, population density, and history of electoral tensions, making them suitable for examining the dynamics of electoral violence and youth participation. The study used a cross-sectional research design, which allowed data collection at a single point in time to capture prevailing conditions, attitudes, and experiences related to electoral processes. This design was considered appropriate as it facilitates the analysis of relationships between variables such as socio-economic conditions, demographic characteristics, and political behaviour within a defined timeframe. It also enables the comparison of patterns across different regions,

thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The cross-sectional approach further supports the study's objectives by providing a snapshot of how electoral violence manifests and how Gen-Z engages within the political landscape. Through this design, the study was able to systematically examine both structural and behavioural factors influencing electoral outcomes.

The study collected primary data from a sample of 384 respondents, determined using the Cochran formula to ensure statistical reliability and representativeness. The sample was equally distributed across the three regions, with 128 respondents selected from each area through random sampling techniques to minimise bias and enhance the validity of the findings. Data collection used structured questionnaires, which allowed the collection of standardised information on respondents' perceptions, experiences, and involvement in electoral processes. The use of structured instruments ensured consistency in responses and facilitated quantitative analysis aligned with the study objectives. The researchers strictly observed ethical considerations throughout the research process to protect participants' rights and well-being. Before the commencement of data collection, participants were provided with detailed information regarding the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Each participant formally consented to participate before data collection began. Confidentiality and anonymity were safeguarded by not collecting identifying information, and the data were used exclusively for academic purposes. Adherence to these ethical procedures supported the credibility of the research and its compliance with recognised research standards.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents Characteristics

This section examines the socio-economic characteristics of respondents from Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, and Mbeya. A total of 384 respondents participated in the study, with equal representation from each region. The analysis indicates that the sample was largely dominated by youth, reflecting the study's focus on Gen-Z and their role in electoral processes. The majority of respondents

(approximately 62%) were aged between 18 and 30 years, followed by 25 per cent in the 31–45 age group, while only 13 per cent were above 45 years. The gender composition of the sample was fairly even, comprising 54 per cent male respondents and 46 per cent female respondents. This distribution provided representation of perspectives from both genders. Marital status showed that 58 per cent of respondents were single, 37 per cent were married, and 5 per cent

fell under other categories such as divorced or widowed. Educational attainment varied, with 48 per cent having completed secondary education, 32 per cent holding tertiary qualifications, and 20 per cent having primary education or below. The findings indicate that most respondents had attained at least a basic level of formal education, a factor that may contribute to their understanding of political issues and engagement in political activities.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 384)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18–30 years	238	62%
	31–45 years	96	25%
	Above 45 years	50	13%
Gender	Male	207	54%
	Female	177	46%
Marital Status	Single	223	58%
	Married	142	37%
	Divorced/Widowed	19	5%
Education Level	Primary or below	77	20%
	Secondary education	184	48%
	Tertiary education	123	32%
Employment Status	Unemployed	169	44%
	Self-employed	138	36%
	Formally employed	77	20%
Monthly Income Level	Low income	200	52%
	Middle income	127	33%
	High income	57	15%
Household Size	1–3 members	111	29%
	4–6 members	181	47%
	Above 6 members	92	24%
Voting Participation	Have voted	261	68%
	Never voted	123	32%

With regard to economic characteristics, the results in Table 1 reveal notable disparities in income and employment status among respondents. A large proportion (approximately 44%) reported being unemployed, highlighting the prevalence of joblessness, particularly among youth. About 36 per cent were self-employed, mainly engaged in informal sector activities, while only 20 per cent had formal employment. In terms of income levels, 52 per cent of respondents earned low monthly incomes, 33 per cent reported moderate earnings, and only 15 per cent fell

within higher income brackets. Household size also varied, with the majority (47%) living in households of 4–6 members, followed by 29 per cent in smaller households of 1–3 members, and 24 per cent in larger households exceeding six members. Additionally, respondents reported diverse voting experiences, with 68 per cent indicating that they had participated in at least one election, while 32 per cent had never voted, often citing reasons such as lack of interest or distrust in the electoral system. Ethnic diversity was also evident across the sample, reflecting the broader

demographic composition of Tanzania, although no single group dominated the dataset.

Determinants of Electoral Violence

The results in Table 2 indicate that electoral violence in Tanzania is predominantly driven by institutional and governance-related factors, which recorded the highest levels of agreement among respondents. Specifically, unanswered citizens' demands ranked highest with an RII of 83.6 per cent, where 95.5 per cent of respondents (27.3% agree and 68.2% strongly agree) acknowledged it as a major cause of electoral violence, while only 4.4% expressed disagreement. Similarly, the discredited electoral commission showed a high RII of 81.8 per cent, with 92.7 per cent of respondents (49.2% agree and 43.5% strongly agree) supporting this factor, indicating widespread mistrust in electoral bodies. In addition, political manipulation by elites (RII = 73.3%) recorded 91.1 per cent agreement (49.2% agree and 41.9 per cent strongly agree), while weak electoral institutions (RII = 73.2%) had near-unanimous support with 99.7 per cent agreement (41.4% agree and 58.3% strongly agree). These high agreement levels strongly suggest that institutional

weaknesses and governance failures are the most critical drivers of electoral violence.

Regarding socio-economic determinants, unemployment and economic hardship were also identified as important contributors, with an RII of 59.6 per cent. A substantial 78.1 per cent of respondents (27.6% agree and 50.5% strongly agree) supported this factor, while 19.3 per cent disagreed and 2.6 per cent remained neutral. The finding suggests that economic insecurity, especially among young people, may heighten their vulnerability to political influence and involvement in violent activities. However, party competition and rivalry showed mixed perceptions, with an RII of 41.9 per cent. Only 42.0 per cent of respondents (19.3% agree and 22.7% strongly agree) viewed it as a determinant, whereas a larger proportion, 58.1% (33.6% strongly disagree and 24.5% disagree), rejected its influence. This suggests that political competition alone is not widely perceived as a primary trigger of violence unless combined with other systemic issues such as institutional failure or economic hardship.

Table 2: Results on The Determinants of Electoral Violence

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	RII
Unemployment/Economic hardship	34 (8.9%)	40 (10.4%)	10 (2.6%)	106 (27.6%)	194 (50.5%)	59.6%
Political manipulation by elites	7 (1.8%)	13 (3.4%)	14 (3.6%)	189 (49.2%)	161 (41.9%)	73.3%
Weak electoral institutions	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	159 (41.4%)	224 (58.3%)	73.2%
Party competition/rivalry	129 (33.6%)	94 (24.5%)	0 (0.0%)	74 (19.3%)	87 (22.7%)	41.9%
Lack of civic education	132 (34.4%)	128 (33.3%)	12 (3.1%)	45 (11.7%)	67 (17.4%)	31.5%
Ethnic/group-based politics	242 (63.02%)	78 (20.31%)	5 (1.30%)	30 (7.81%)	29 (7.55%)	27.8%
Unanswered citizens demands	2 (0.5%)	13 (3.4%)	2 (0.5%)	105 (27.3%)	262 (68.2%)	83.6%
Discredited electoral commission	8 (2.1%)	20 (5.2%)	0 (0.0%)	189 (49.2%)	167 (43.5%)	81.8%

In contrast, social and identity-related factors were perceived as less influential in driving electoral violence. Lack of civic education recorded an RII of 31.5 per cent, with only 29.1 per cent of respondents (11.7% agree and 17.4% strongly agree) supporting it, while a significant 67.7 per cent (34.4% strongly disagree and 33.3% disagree) dismissed it as a key factor. Similarly, ethnic or group-based politics had the lowest RII of 27.8 per cent, with just 15.4 per cent agreement (7.81% agree and 7.55% strongly agree) compared to a dominant 83.3 per cent disagreement (63.02% strongly disagree, and 20.31% disagree). These findings imply that electoral violence in Tanzania is not strongly rooted in ethnic or identity-based divisions but is instead largely influenced by institutional inefficiencies and unmet socio-economic needs. Overall, the pattern of responses highlights that addressing governance challenges and improving economic conditions are critical for reducing electoral violence.

Role of Gen-Z in Electoral Processes

The results in Table 3 reveal that Gen-Z in Tanzania is largely perceived as a constructive and influential force in electoral processes, rather than a driver of violence. Notably, the statement that “youth are mobilized for violence” recorded a very low RII of 21.1 per cent, with a strong 83.4 per cent of respondents (50.3% strongly disagree and 33.1% disagree) rejecting this claim, while only 14.1% (7.8% agree and 6.3% strongly agree) supported it. In contrast, the perception that “youth promote peaceful elections” received strong support, with an RII of 53.3 per cent and 91.1 per cent agreement (49.2% agree and 41.9% strongly agree). These findings clearly indicate that respondents view Gen-Z more as peacebuilders rather than instigators of electoral violence, challenging common narratives that associate youth with political unrest.

Table 3: Role of Gen-Z in Electoral Processes

Factor	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	RII
Youth are mobilized for violence	193 (50.3%)	127 (33.1%)	10 (2.6%)	30 (7.8%)	24 (6.3%)	21.1%
Youth promote peaceful elections	7 (1.8%)	13 (3.4%)	14 (3.6%)	189 (49.2%)	161 (41.9%)	53.3%
Social media influences youth participation	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	159 (41.4%)	224 (58.3%)	83.2%
Youth participation in elections is increasing	3 (0.8%)	2 (0.5%)	1 (0.3%)	180 (46.9%)	198 (51.6%)	78.0%
Youth vulnerability due to unemployment	1 (0.3%)	2 (0.5%)	4 (1.0%)	214 (55.7%)	163 (42.4%)	85.5%
Digital mobilizers	41 (10.68%)	24 (6.25%)	22 (5.73%)	101 (26.30%)	196 (51.04%)	79.1%
Influencers of public opinions	27 (7.0%)	33 (8.6%)	2 (0.5%)	155 (40.4%)	167 (43.5%)	87.4%
Accountability advocates	36 (9.4%)	47 (12.2%)	13 (3.4%)	124 (32.3%)	164 (42.7%)	84.6%
Agenda shapers	25 (6.5%)	45 (11.7%)	23 (6.0%)	142 (37.0%)	149 (38.8%)	89.2%

Furthermore, the findings highlight the growing influence and participation of Gen-Z in electoral activities, particularly through digital platforms. The role of social media emerged as highly significant, with an RII of 83.2 per cent and near-unanimous 99.7 per

cent agreement (41.4% agree and 58.3% strongly agree), indicating that digital platforms are central to youth political engagement. Similarly, youth participation in elections is increasing (RII = 78.0%), supported by 98.5 per cent of respondents (46.9%

agree and 51.6% strongly agree). However, this growing engagement is accompanied by vulnerability, as 98.1 per cent of respondents (55.7% agree and 42.4% strongly agree) acknowledged that youth are vulnerable due to unemployment (RII = 85.5%). This suggests that while Gen-Z is actively involved in politics, their socio-economic conditions still expose them to potential manipulation, reinforcing the importance of addressing economic challenges.

In addition, Gen-Z is widely recognised as playing strategic and transformative roles in shaping political discourse and accountability. The findings show strong agreement that youth act as digital mobilizers (RII = 79.1%) with 77.3 per cent agreement (26.3% agree and 51.04% strongly agree), and as influencers of public opinion (RII = 87.4%) with 83.9 per cent agreement (40.4% agree and 43.5% strongly agree). Moreover, accountability advocacy (RII = 84.6%) was supported by 75.0 per cent of respondents (32.3% agree and 42.7% strongly agree), while the strongest perception was that youth are agenda shapers (RII = 89.2%), with 75.8 per cent agreement (37.0% agree and 38.8% strongly

agree). These results demonstrate that Gen-Z is not only participating in elections but is actively influencing political narratives, promoting transparency, and shaping democratic agendas.

Gen-Z as Transformative Leaders

The results in Figure 1 demonstrate a strong recognition of Gen-Z as key agents of positive political transformation in Tanzania. A significant majority of respondents, 306 (79.9%), agreed that youth can advocate for peace and democracy, compared to only 78 (20.3%) who disagreed. This indicates a high level of confidence in the ability of young people to promote democratic values and peaceful electoral processes. Similarly, 289 respondents (75.3%) agreed that civic education enhances youth engagement, while 95 (24.7%) disagreed, suggesting that awareness and education are widely seen as critical tools for empowering Gen-Z in political participation. These findings reinforce the idea that youth are not passive actors but are increasingly viewed as central to strengthening democracy.

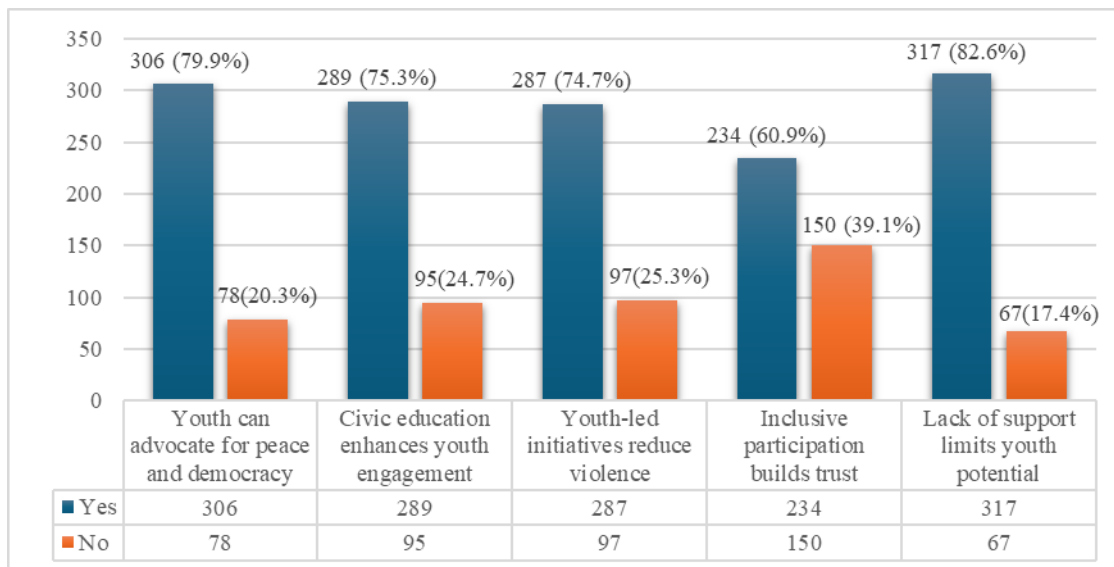


Figure 1: Gen-Z as Transformative Leaders

The results in Figure 1 further highlight the practical contributions of Gen-Z in reducing electoral violence and building trust within political systems. A strong majority, 287 respondents (74.7%), agreed that youth-led initiatives reduce violence, compared to 97 (25.3%) who disagreed, showing confidence in grassroots youth actions. Additionally, 234 respondents (60.9%)

agreed that inclusive participation builds trust, although a notable 150 (39.1%) disagreed, indicating some level of scepticism about inclusivity translating into trust. While the majority still supports the positive role of inclusion, the relatively higher disagreement suggests that structural or institutional barriers may limit the full realisation of trust-building efforts.

However, the findings also reveal a critical challenge that may hinder the transformative potential of Gen-Z. An overwhelming 317 respondents (82.6%) agreed that lack of support limits youth potential, while only 67 (17.4%) disagreed. This is the highest level of agreement across all variables in the figure, clearly indicating that despite their capabilities, youth face significant constraints such as limited economic opportunities, inadequate institutional support, and exclusion from formal political structures. This suggests that without deliberate investment in youth empowerment through education, employment, and inclusive policies, their potential to act as transformative leaders may remain underutilised. Therefore, while Gen-Z is widely recognised as a force for peace and democratic progress, unlocking this “hidden glory” requires addressing the systemic barriers that restrict their full participation.

Discussion

The findings from Table 1 reveal that the socio-economic profile of respondents is heavily dominated by youth, many of whom face significant economic constraints such as unemployment and low-income levels. This demographic composition is particularly important in understanding electoral dynamics in Tanzania, as it reflects a population segment that is both politically active and economically vulnerable. The high proportion of unemployed and low-income respondents supports arguments by Elfversson (2025) that economic marginalisation creates conditions where youth can be easily mobilised for political purposes. Similarly, Bekker et al. (2022) emphasise that electoral behaviour in African democracies is strongly influenced by socio-economic conditions, which shape voter choices and political engagement. The dominance of Gen-Z in the sample further reinforces the relevance of focusing on youth in electoral studies, as they represent a significant and growing voting bloc (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). While their educational levels suggest a reasonable degree of political awareness, their economic vulnerability exposes them to manipulation (Valenzuela et al., 2009). These findings align with System Theory, which views electoral violence as an outcome of interconnected structural factors such as unemployment, institutional weaknesses, and political competition. Therefore, the socio-economic realities highlighted in Table 1 provide a critical foundation for

understanding both the causes of electoral violence and the potential for youth-driven transformation.

The results in Table 2 further deepen this understanding by identifying the key determinants of electoral violence, with strong emphasis on institutional and governance-related factors. High levels of agreement on issues such as unanswered citizens’ demands (95.5%), a discredited electoral commission (92.7%), and weak electoral institutions (99.7%) indicate that electoral violence is largely rooted in systemic failures rather than individual actions. These findings strongly support Gbati's (2024) argument that weak institutionalisation of democratic structures is a major driver of electoral conflict in emerging democracies. The prominence of political manipulation by elites (91.1%) also reflects the role of political actors in exploiting institutional gaps and socio-economic vulnerabilities for their own interests. In contrast, the relatively low influence of ethnic politics (15.4% agreement) and lack of civic education (29.1% agreement) suggests that electoral violence in Tanzania is less about identity divisions and more about governance and accountability issues. This challenges dominant narratives in African politics that often attribute electoral conflict primarily to ethnic tensions. Instead, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening institutions and addressing citizens’ grievances as key strategies for reducing electoral violence (Kim et al., 2026). From a Systems Theory perspective, these results confirm that electoral violence is a systemic issue requiring comprehensive and coordinated interventions (Luft et al., 2022).

The findings presented in Table 3 shift the focus to the role of Gen-Z, revealing a more nuanced and largely positive picture of youth involvement in electoral processes. Contrary to common perceptions, a significant majority of respondents (83.4%) rejected the idea that youth are primarily mobilised for violence, while 91.1 per cent agreed that youth promote peaceful elections. This supports the view by Chambers and Phelps (1993) that youth engagement can be a form of leadership and development rather than merely a source of instability. The strong influence of social media (99.7% agreement) and the increasing participation of youth in elections (98.5% agreement) indicate that Gen-Z is actively shaping

modern political landscapes through digital platforms. These findings align with Social Identity Theory, which explains how group identity and shared experiences such as those facilitated by digital spaces can influence political behaviour and mobilisation (Setaki & van Timmeren, 2022; Poncian, 2015). However, the high agreement on youth vulnerability due to unemployment (98.1%) reinforces the earlier findings on socio-economic constraints, suggesting that while youth have the potential to drive positive change, they remain susceptible to manipulation. Additionally, their roles as agenda shapers (89.2%), public opinion influencers (87.4%), and accountability advocates (84.6%) demonstrate their growing importance in democratic processes. These results highlight the dual nature of Gen-Z as both vulnerable and transformative actors within the political system.

Figure 1 further consolidates this perspective by emphasising the transformative potential of Gen-Z in promoting peaceful and democratic elections. The high levels of agreement that youth can advocate for peace and democracy (79.9%), that civic education enhances engagement (75.3%), and that youth-led initiatives reduce violence (74.7%) underscore the constructive role of young people in electoral processes. These findings resonate with Haberman's (1971) argument on the capacity of individuals to engage rationally in transforming social and political systems. However, the figure also highlights a critical constraint, with 82.6% of respondents indicating that lack of support limits youth potential. This suggests that despite their capabilities, youth require institutional backing, economic opportunities, and inclusive policies to fully realise their transformative role. The moderate support for inclusive participation building trust (60.9%) also points to the need for more effective mechanisms to integrate youth into formal political structures. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that electoral violence in Tanzania is primarily driven by systemic and institutional factors, while Gen-Z represents a powerful yet underutilised resource for democratic transformation (Táiwó, 2004). Integrating insights from both System Theory and Social Identity Theory, the study underscores the importance of addressing structural inequalities while simultaneously empowering youth to act as agents of peace and change.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study set out to examine the determinants of electoral violence, analyse the role of Gen-Z in electoral processes, and explore their potential as transformative leaders in Tanzania. The findings demonstrate that electoral violence is largely driven by structural and institutional factors, particularly weak electoral systems, unmet citizens' demands, and lack of trust in governance institutions. Socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and low income further intensify these dynamics by making youth more vulnerable to political manipulation. At the same time, the study reveals that Gen-Z is not inherently a source of violence, but rather a critical actor within the political system whose actions are shaped by broader systemic conditions. The evidence shows that youth are increasingly engaged in electoral processes and have significant capacity to influence political outcomes. This underscores the importance of shifting perspectives from viewing youth as a "problem" to recognising them as part of the solution. Overall, the study concludes that electoral violence in Tanzania is a systemic issue that requires both institutional reforms and youth-centred interventions.

Recommendations: In light of these findings, the study calls on the government and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen electoral institutions to promote transparency, accountability, and public confidence. Addressing citizens' grievances through responsive governance and inclusive policy-making is essential in reducing the triggers of electoral violence. Additionally, there is a need to tackle youth unemployment through targeted economic empowerment programs, skills development initiatives, and job creation strategies. By improving the socio-economic conditions of young people, their vulnerability to political manipulation can be significantly reduced. Civic education programs should also be expanded to promote democratic values, peaceful participation, and political awareness among youth. These measures, when implemented collectively, can contribute to a more stable and credible electoral environment.

Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of actively integrating Gen-Z into political and decision-making processes. Youth should be supported as

digital mobilizers, opinion leaders, and accountability advocates through platforms that encourage meaningful participation. Investment in youth-led initiatives and community-based programs can enhance their role in promoting peace and reducing electoral tensions. Policymakers should also create inclusive frameworks that allow young people to contribute to governance beyond voting, including leadership opportunities and policy engagement. Strengthening partnerships between government, civil society, and youth organisations is critical in harnessing the positive potential of Gen-Z. Ultimately, empowering youth and addressing systemic challenges simultaneously will unlock their “hidden glory” as transformative leaders in democratic governance.

The study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. In particular,

the cross-sectional design limits how far causal relationships can be inferred because the data were collected at a single point in time. Additionally, the study focused on only three regions of Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, and Mbeya, which, although significant, may not fully represent the entire country. The reliance on self-reported data through structured questionnaires may also introduce response bias, as participants could provide socially desirable answers. Furthermore, the study primarily employed quantitative methods, which may limit deeper insights into underlying motivations and contextual nuances. Future studies may employ longitudinal research designs alongside mixed-method approaches to develop a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of electoral violence and youth engagement. Expanding the geographical scope and incorporating qualitative perspectives would also enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

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