



Police Professionalism and Civilian Oversight in the Management of Political Transition-Related Conflicts in Nairobi City County Informal Settlements

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Abstract

This study examined police professionalism and civilian oversight in the management of political transition-related conflicts in informal settlements of Nairobi County with reference to Kibera, Mathare, and Mukuru during the 2013, 2017, and 2022 General Elections. The study assessed police adherence to professional policing standards; analysed spatial and socio-economic disparities influencing policing outcomes; evaluated the influence of civilian oversight institutions (COIs) on police professionalism and identified challenges and opportunities shaping professional policing. Guided by social contract and conflict transformation theories, the study adopted pragmatic and interpretivist paradigms within a mixed-methods descriptive survey design. Using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling framework, a sample of 384 respondents was drawn from a target population of 635,282 and proportionately distributed across Kibera (112), Mathare (125), and Mukuru (147) using stratified purposive and random sampling techniques involving police officers, community members, and COI representatives. Data were collected through questionnaires, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentary review and analysed using descriptive, inferential, and thematic methods. Findings indicated that police professionalism during transition conflicts remained moderate and spatially uneven. The overall police professionalism index (PPI) score of 46% was computed from indicators of legality, accountability, political neutrality, proportional use of force, ethical conduct, and community engagement. Aggressive policing was highest in Mathare (57%), Kibera (48%) and Mukuru (34%). Although civilian oversight improved accountability and procedural compliance, weak enforcement capacity and delayed complaint resolution limited its effectiveness. The study recommends strengthening civilian oversight, decentralising accountability services, and institutionalising professionalism-focused scenario-based policing training during political transitions.

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Introduction

Political transitions frequently generate electoral tensions, protests and insecurity particularly within informal settlements characterised by poverty, socio-economic exclusion and weak state presence (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2024; United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2024). During such periods, police institutions experience increased operational and political pressure while policing practices become critical indicators of democratic governance, police legitimacy and state accountability (Bayley, 2024; Tyler, 2023). Contemporary scholarship further demonstrates that electoral transitions in Africa and the East African region increasingly expose tensions between constitutional freedoms and state security management, through intensified police deployments, securitised political competition, and allegations of excessive use of force during demonstrations and opposition mobilisation (Branch & Cheeseman, 2023; Freedom House, 2024). In Kenya, emerging youth-led and digitally coordinated protests have further complicated conventional policing approaches and intensified scrutiny regarding police professionalism, accountability and civilian oversight, particularly within Nairobi's informal settlements such as Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru, where socio-spatial inequalities and fragile police-community relations continue to shape conflict management dynamics (IPOA, 2025; Murunga, 2024; Thieme, 2023).

Contemporary policing challenges in Kenya are closely linked to the legacy of the 2007–2008 post-election violence, which exposed major weaknesses in policing, accountability and conflict management systems (Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence [CIPEV], 2008; Nasong'o, 2021). Although the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and subsequent reforms established institutions such as the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) and National Police Service Commission (NPSC) to strengthen professionalism and civilian oversight, reports continue to document concerns regarding excessive force, arbitrary arrests, politicised policing and weak accountability during elections and demonstrations including the 2013, 2017 and 2022 General Elections and the 2024–2025 youth-led protests (Amnesty International, 2024; KNCHR, 2024; Missing Voices, 2025). In this study, political transition refers to the electoral and post-electoral periods associated with presidential succession, regime contestation, and shifts in political power during the 2013, 2017, and 2022 General Elections in Kenya. These periods were characterised by heightened political mobilisation, demonstrations and intensified public order management, particularly within informal settlements.

Nairobi's informal settlements, including Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru, provide an important context for examining policing during political transitions due to recurrent electoral unrest, socio-economic marginalisation and strained police-community relations (Huchzermeyer, 2023; Lines & Makau, 2024). The settlements differ in spatial organisation, protest mobilisation and police-community interactions, factors which contribute to uneven policing outcomes. Aggressive policing was highest in Mathare (57%), followed by Kibera (48%) and lower in Mukuru (34%), demonstrating that policing outcomes are shaped not only by poverty and exclusion but also by settlement layouts, accessibility, protest dynamics and historical police-community relations. Scholars further argue that the historical foundations of policing in Kenya remain rooted in colonial systems of coercion and regime protection whose influence continues to shape operational policing, particularly within informal settlements (Hills, 2023; Mamdani, 2023). Consequently, electoral periods frequently involve intensified police deployments, aggressive crowd-control operations and reactive use of force. Contemporary policing scholarship conceptualises professionalism as encompassing legality, accountability, political neutrality, ethical conduct and proportional use of force, while civilian oversight institutions function as mechanisms for monitoring police conduct and enforcing constitutional standards (Loader &



Walker, 2023; Reiner, 2024). Nevertheless, concerns regarding excessive force, delayed investigations and weak enforcement capacity continue to undermine accountability during political transitions (IPOA, 2024; KNCHR, 2024).

Despite growing scholarship on democratic policing and civilian oversight, limited empirical attention has been paid to the interaction among police professionalism, civilian oversight, and spatial socio-economic inequalities within Nairobi's informal settlements during political transitions. Existing studies largely focus on police reforms, electoral violence, and human rights violations without adequately explaining variations in policing outcomes across Kibera, Mathare, and Mukuru (Cheeseman et al., 2023; Klopp, 2023). Accordingly, this study examined police professionalism and civilian oversight in managing political transition-related conflicts in Nairobi's informal settlements. The study assessed police adherence to professional standards, analysed spatial and socio-economic disparities influencing policing outcomes, evaluated the influence of Civilian Oversight Institutions on accountability and identified challenges and opportunities shaping professional policing within Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru.

Literature Review

The literature demonstrates that political transition-related conflicts in Kenya have evolved through interconnected phases marked by election violence, constitutional reform, contested electoral cycles and emerging digitally coordinated protest movements. The 2007–2008 post-election violence represented a critical turning point because it exposed profound institutional weaknesses within policing, accountability and conflict management systems (CIPEV, 2008; Anderson & Lochery, 2022). The violence resulted in widespread displacement, destruction of property, loss of life and severe police–community confrontations, particularly within informal settlements and opposition-supporting areas. Importantly, the violence also exposed the direct operational and political role of police institutions during electoral conflicts. The Waki Commission and subsequent International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations identified senior security actors among individuals allegedly linked to violence management failures and human rights violations. The Commissioner of Police was later named among the “Ocampo Six,” signifying the extent to which police institutions had become deeply implicated within the broader dynamics of electoral conflict management, state coercion and accountability failures during the transition period (CIPEV, 2008; ICC, 2011). These developments reinforced concerns regarding politicised policing, operational impunity and excessive use of force during political transitions.

The literature indicates that during the 2007–2008 crisis, police approaches within informal settlements frequently involved militarised deployments, reactive crowd-control operations, use of live ammunition, mass arrests, surveillance and force-oriented public order management, particularly within Kibera, Mathare and other politically contested urban areas (Human Rights Watch, 2011; KNCHR, 2008). Studies further demonstrate that policing strategies during this period prioritised regime stabilisation and the containment of protests rather than procedural justice, de-escalation, and the protection of constitutional freedoms (Branch & Cheeseman, 2023; Hills, 2023). Consequently, the post-election violence generated significant domestic and international pressure for security sector reforms and civilian oversight mechanisms.

Following these events, the Constitution of Kenya (2010) introduced a rights-based governance framework emphasising accountability, constitutionalism and protection of fundamental freedoms. Reforms subsequently established institutions such as the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA), the National Police Service Commission (NPSC) and strengthened civilian oversight structures intended to transform the police into a professional, accountable and service-oriented institution (IPOA, 2024; APCOF, 2023). Nevertheless, scholarship reviewing Kenya's post-2010



policing trajectory demonstrates that legal and institutional reforms have not consistently translated into operational restraint during elections and protests (Loader & Walker, 2023; Reiner, 2024).

Studies examining the 2013, 2017 and 2022 electoral cycles reveal both continuity and transformation in political transition-related conflicts. Although the 2013 elections were comparatively less violent than the 2007–2008 period, literature still documented concerns regarding police preparedness, crowd-control tactics and selective enforcement, particularly within informal settlements and opposition-supporting areas (KNCHR, 2014). The 2017 elections marked a sharper recurrence of protest-related confrontations following disputed presidential results and demonstrations within Nairobi’s informal settlements, including Kibera and Mathare. Reports documented excessive use of force, unlawful killings, beatings, arbitrary arrests and confrontational crowd-control operations during opposition protests (Amnesty International, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2018). Literature reviewing the 2022 elections further demonstrates that although large-scale electoral violence declined comparatively at the national level, concerns regarding reactive public order management, excessive force and strained police–community relations persisted, particularly during demonstrations and post-election mobilisation (KNCHR, 2023; Oloo, 2024).

Emerging studies on the 2024–2025 Gen Z and youth-led protests further indicate a shift from traditional party-centred mobilisation toward decentralised and digitally coordinated protests organised around governance accountability, corruption, taxation, unemployment and police brutality (Cheeseman et al., 2024; Mutahi, 2023). These protests increasingly challenged conventional command-and-control policing approaches because of their decentralised structure, rapid mobilisation, and the absence of centralised political leadership. Literature demonstrates that police responses to these demonstrations frequently involved anti-riot deployments, tear gas dispersal, roadblocks, arrests, surveillance and force-oriented crowd-control operations, particularly within densely populated informal settlements and urban protest hotspots (Amnesty International, 2024; IPOA, 2025). Consequently, the literature suggests that Kenya’s transition conflicts have progressively shifted from large-scale electoral violence to episodic protest-related confrontations, characterised by persistent tensions among public order management, democratic freedoms, and police accountability.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that Kenya’s policing trajectory reflects partial institutional reform but continued operational inconsistency. Although constitutional reforms, IPOA, KNCHR and NPSC strengthened the formal architecture for democratic policing after 2010, studies continue to document persistent patterns of excessive force, politicised deployments, delayed accountability processes and uneven professionalism, particularly within informal settlements during political transitions (KNCHR, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024). These patterns suggest that while formal reform structures have improved, operational policing practices within conflict-prone urban settlements continue to reflect elements of coercive and securitized policing inherited from earlier state-centred policing traditions.

Methodology

Research Design

The study therefore adopted a mixed-methods descriptive and correlational survey design because, beyond describing policing patterns and respondent perceptions, it also employed inferential statistical techniques, including Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis, to explain the relationships and predictive influence of spatial socio-economic inequalities, civilian oversight and institutional collaboration on police professionalism. Quantitative data facilitated measurement of police professionalism through indicators such as legality, accountability, political neutrality, proportional use of force and community engagement, while qualitative data generated interpretive

insights into lived experiences and contextual policing dynamics. The study was primarily grounded in the pragmatic paradigm because it provided methodological flexibility for integrating numerical and experiential evidence in addressing the practical problem under investigation, while interpretivism complemented pragmatism by informing qualitative interpretation of perceptions, meanings and lived experiences relating to policing and civilian oversight.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Nairobi County, Kenya, specifically within the informal settlements of Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru, which were purposively selected due to their high population density, socio-economic marginalisation and recurrent exposure to political transition-related tensions and police–community confrontations. Nairobi County, located between latitude 1° 09' South and longitude 36° 49' East, serves as Kenya’s political, administrative, and economic centre and frequently experiences heightened political mobilisation, demonstrations, and security operations during electoral periods. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) Population and Housing Census (2019), Kibera Sub-County had an estimated population of 185,777, Mathare Sub-County 206,564, and Mukuru approximately 242,941, yielding a combined population of about 635,282. The selected settlements are characterized by overcrowding, poverty, unemployment, infrastructural deficits and strained police–community relations which collectively shape policing dynamics during political transitions. Consequently, the study area provided a suitable and contextually grounded setting for examining police professionalism, civilian oversight and conflict management within Nairobi’s informal settlements.

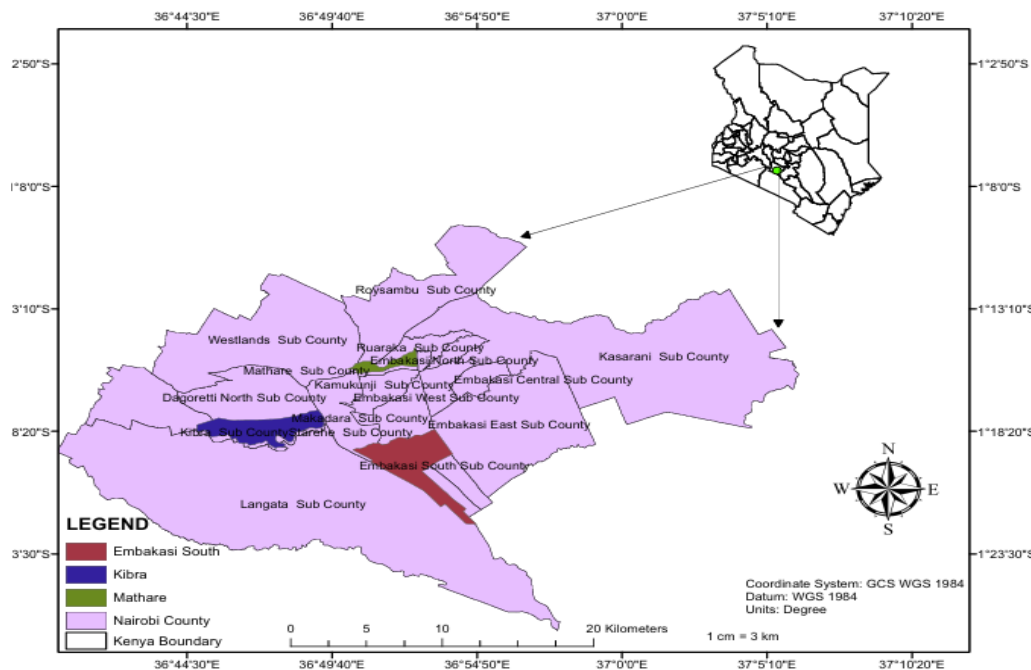


Figure 1: Map of the study area, Nairobi County

Source: Researcher, 2026

The map presented in Figure 1 is a Geographic Information System (GIS)-generated map, designed to provide a spatial representation of the study area. It delineates the locations of Kibera, Mathare, and Mukuru within Nairobi County using georeferenced data, incorporating key cartographic elements



such as administrative boundaries, settlement locations, spatial orientation (north arrow), scale, and coordinate referencing. The GIS mapping enabled spatial visualisation of the study sites and supported comparative analysis by situating the settlements within their broader urban context.

Population and Sampling

The study targeted police officers, community members, representatives of Civilian Oversight Institutions (COIs), civil society actors, faith-based organisations, and local administrative officials operating within the Kibera, Mathare, and Mukuru informal settlements in Nairobi County, Kenya. These categories were selected because they directly interact with policing institutions, accountability mechanisms and conflict management processes during political transition-related conflicts within informal settlements. The total target population for the study was estimated at 635,282 respondents drawn from the three informal settlements and relevant institutional actors. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling framework for determining sample size for a known population, the sample size was computed as follows:

$$s = \frac{X^2 NP(1 - P)}{d^2(N - 1) + X^2 P(1 - P)}$$

Where:

- s = Required sample size
- X^2 = Table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at 95% confidence level (3.841)
- N = Population size (635,282)
- P = Population proportion (0.50)
- d = Degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05)

Substituting the values into the formula:

$$\begin{aligned} s &= \frac{3.841 \times 635,282 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2(635,282 - 1) + 3.841 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)} \\ s &= \frac{3.841 \times 635,282 \times 0.25}{0.0025(635,281) + 3.841 \times 0.25} \\ s &= \frac{1,588.20 + 0.96025}{609,718.34} \\ s &= \frac{1,589.16}{609,718.34} \\ s &\approx 383.67 \\ s &\approx 384 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, the target population of 635,282 yielded a sample size of 384 respondents at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

The simple formula for proportionate distribution across the informal settlements is expressed as:

$$n_i = \frac{N_i}{N} \times n$$

Where:

- n_i = Sample size for each informal settlement
- N_i = Population of each informal settlement
- N = Total population
- n = Total sample size

Example:

Kibera $n_i = \frac{184,000}{635,282} \times 384 = 111.2 \approx 112$



$$\text{Mathare} \quad n_i = \frac{206,000}{635,282} \times 384 = 124.6 \approx 125$$

$$\text{Mukuru} \quad n_i = \frac{245,282}{635,282} \times 384 = 148.2 \approx 147$$

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected between January and March 2026 using structured questionnaires, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and documentary review. The use of multiple methods enabled triangulation and enhanced the study's credibility and comprehensiveness. Structured questionnaires were administered to police officers and community members to generate quantitative data on police professionalism, policing practices, accountability, and oversight effectiveness across the Kibera, Mathare, and Mukuru informal settlements.

A total of 18 Key Informant Interviews were conducted involving police commanders, Civilian Oversight Institution officials, civil society representatives, community policing actors and local administrative officials. The interviews generated institutional and operational perspectives on policing strategies, accountability mechanisms, and the management of political transition-related conflicts. Additionally, six Focus Group Discussions were conducted, comprising two FGDs in each settlement with 8–10 participants per group drawn from youth groups, women representatives, community leaders and local residents. The FGDs captured shared community experiences and perceptions regarding police conduct, conflict management and accessibility of oversight mechanisms. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, at which point no substantially new themes emerged. Documentary review involved examination of policy documents, IPOA reports, KNCHR publications, legal frameworks and human rights reports relating to policing and civilian oversight in Kenya.

Pre-testing of research instruments was conducted in December 2025 within the Dandora informal settlement in Nairobi, due to its socio-economic and policing characteristics that are comparable to those of the study areas. The pilot study involved 10% of the study sample and assessed the clarity, consistency and suitability of the instruments. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Content validity was strengthened through expert review while construct validity was enhanced through methodological triangulation across questionnaires, KIIs, FGDs and documentary review.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28, employing descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, Pearson correlation, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and multiple regression analysis. These statistical procedures enabled the study to examine patterns, settlement-level variations, and relationships among police professionalism, civilian oversight, and spatial socio-economic inequalities. The Police Professionalism Index (PPI) was computed as a composite percentage score derived from questionnaire items measuring six dimensions of police professionalism: legality, accountability, political neutrality, proportional use of force, ethical conduct and community engagement. Each item was coded on a five-point Likert scale, where one represented very low professionalism and five represented very high professionalism. The weighted mean score across the six dimensions was converted into percentages using the formula: $\text{PPI} = (\text{Mean Professionalism Score} \div \text{Maximum Possible Score}) \times 100$. The aggregate mean score of 2.30 out of five yielded a PPI score of 46%, indicating a moderate but spatially uneven level of police professionalism across Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru informal settlements.



Qualitative data generated from key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) were transcribed verbatim, organised and analysed thematically using NVivo 14 software. The analysis adopted a hybrid inductive–deductive coding framework in order to integrate theory-driven interpretation with participant-generated insights. Deductive coding was guided by the study objectives, conceptual framework, and theoretical perspectives underpinning the study, thereby enabling the systematic categorisation of themes relating to police professionalism, accountability, political neutrality, proportional use of force, civilian oversight, and police–community relations. Concurrently, inductive coding facilitated the identification of emergent themes, localised experiences, and contextual dynamics arising directly from participants’ narratives, without being restricted to predefined categories. The coding process involved data familiarisation, generation of initial codes, thematic categorisation and interpretation of recurrent patterns and relationships associated with policing practices and political transition-related conflicts within informal settlements. Integration of qualitative findings with quantitative results enhanced contextual interpretation and strengthened methodological triangulation. Findings were subsequently presented through tables, figures and narrative explanations to provide a coherent synthesis of statistical trends and experiential evidence.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were observed throughout the study due to the sensitive nature of researching police professionalism, civilian oversight and political transition-related conflicts within informal settlements characterised by histories of police violence and strained police–community relations. Ethical approval was obtained from the Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) Institutional Ethics Review Committee, while research authorisation was granted by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and relevant county and local administrative authorities. Participation in the study was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the purpose, procedures, potential risks and significance of the research. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through coded identifiers, secure handling of data and conducting interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in neutral and secure environments to minimise fear, retaliation and psychological distress associated with discussing police violence and political conflicts. Participants were informed of their right to decline sensitive questions or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Data collected during the study were used strictly for academic purposes and handled in accordance with established research ethics, confidentiality principles and professional research standards.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Population

This section presents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents who participated in the study.

Response Rate

The study targeted an overall sample of 384 respondents comprising questionnaire respondents, Key Informant Interview (KII) participants and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants. Of the 307 structured questionnaires administered across the Kibera, Mathare, and Mukuru informal settlements, 237 were successfully completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 77.2%. The qualitative component included 78 participants, comprising 18 KII respondents and 60 FGD participants drawn from six FGDs of 10 participants each. Overall, the study obtained 315 respondents across both quantitative and qualitative components, representing a response rate of 82.0%. The achieved response rate was considered adequate for statistical analysis and interpretation of findings.



Education level of respondents

The study sought to establish respondents' education levels to examine the educational background of officers involved in policing political transition-related conflicts within informal settlements.

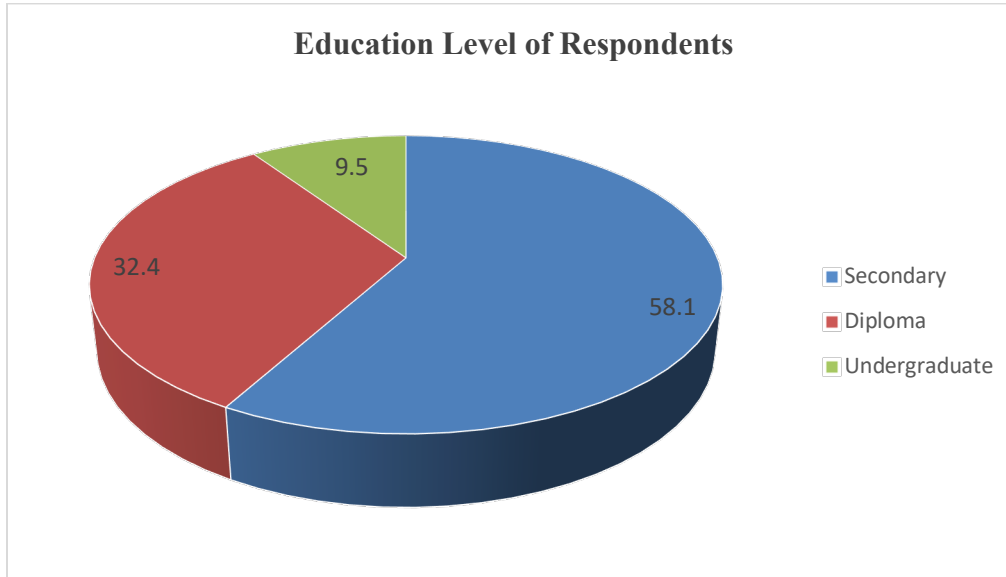


Figure 2: Education Level of Respondents

Source: Researcher (2026)

Findings indicate that 58.1% of respondents had attained secondary education, 32.4% had attained diploma education, and 9.5% had attained undergraduate education. The distribution shows that the majority of officers relied primarily on foundational formal education complemented by institutional police training and operational experience.



Gender of respondents

The study examined the gender composition of respondents in order to establish the distribution of male and female officers within operational policing structures.

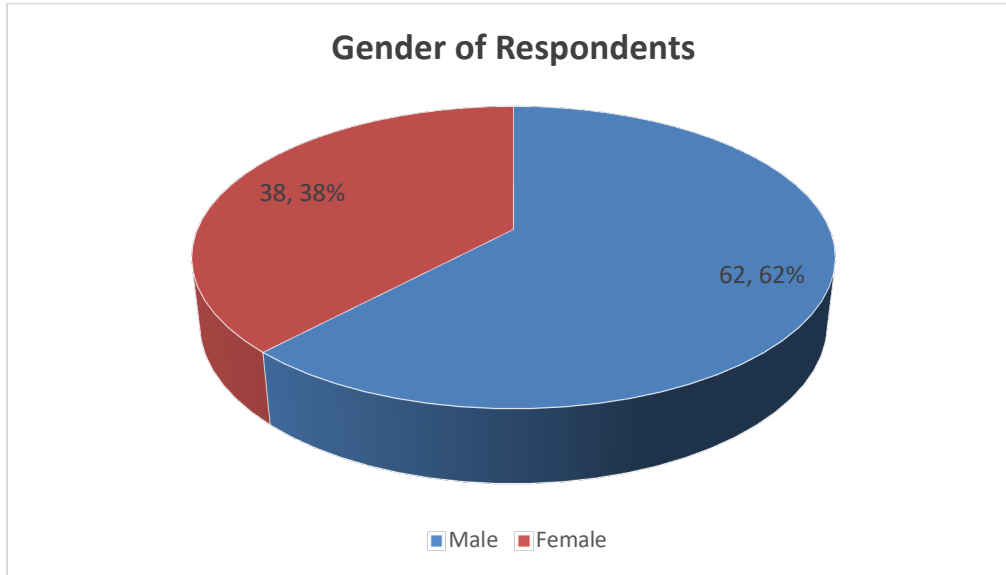


Figure 3: Gender of Respondents

Source, Researcher (2026)

The findings indicate that 62.0% of respondents were male, while 38.0% were female. The distribution demonstrates that policing operations within Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru remain predominantly male-oriented. Although the findings are descriptive rather than inferential, the predominance of male officers within deployment structures may have implications for operational approaches, communication patterns and crowd management practices during political transition-related conflicts.

Age of the respondents

The study examined the age distribution of respondents to determine the operational age categories within the study population.

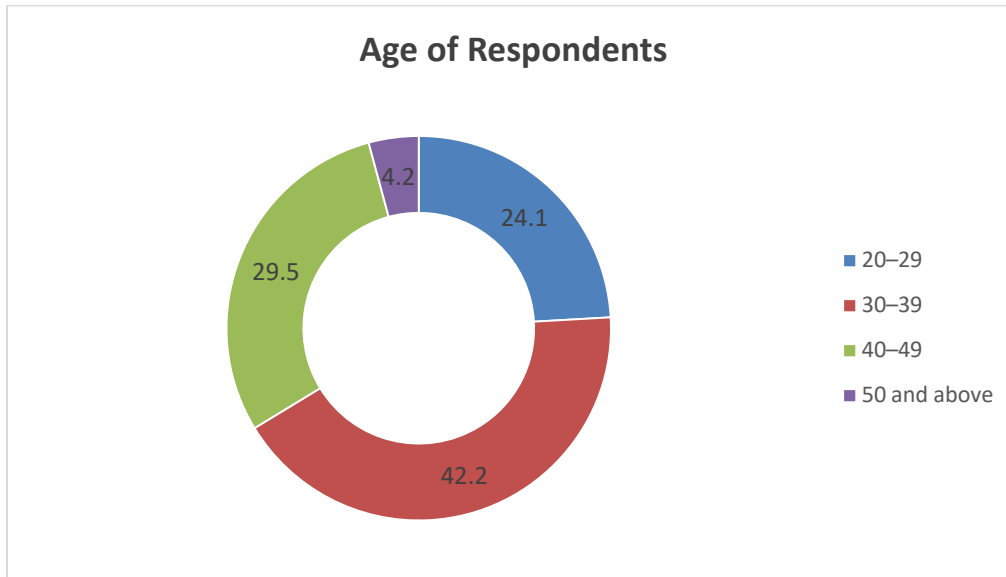


Figure 4: Age of Respondents

Source: Researcher (2026)

The findings show that 42.2% of respondents were aged 30–39 years, 29.5% 40–49 years, 24.1% 20–29 years and 4.2% 50 years and above. The distribution indicates that the majority of respondents fell within the operationally active age categories.

Rank of Officers

The study examined the rank distribution of respondents to establish the operational hierarchy within the sample.

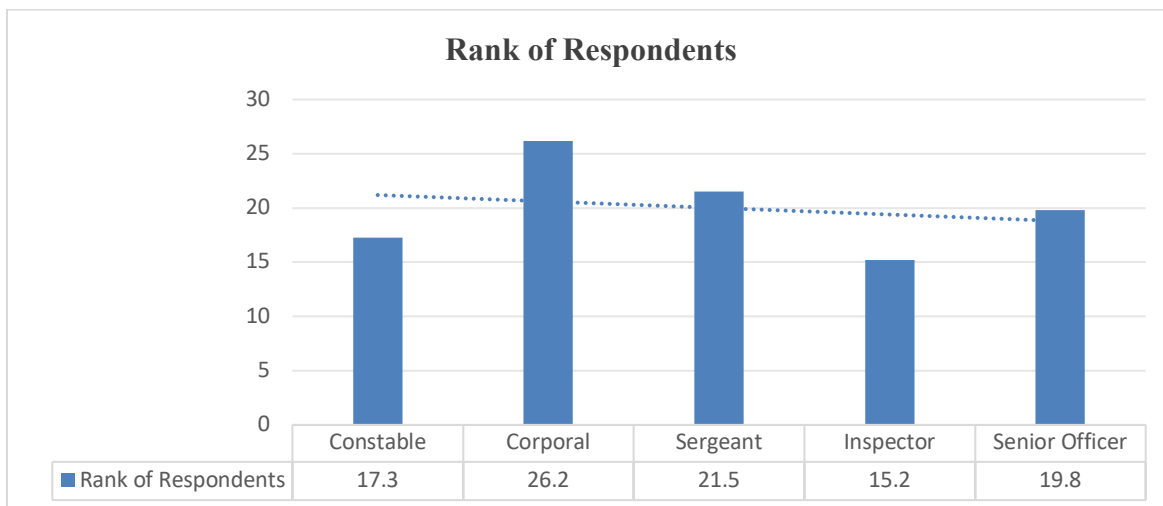


Figure 5: Rank of Respondents

Source: Researcher (2026)



Findings show that 26.2% of respondents were corporals, 21.5% sergeants, 19.8% senior officers, 17.3% constables and 15.2% inspectors. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents were drawn from lower and middle-level operational ranks directly involved in frontline policing and supervision during political transition-related conflicts.

Years of Operation

The study examined respondents' years of service to determine how operational experience influences police professionalism during political transition conflicts.

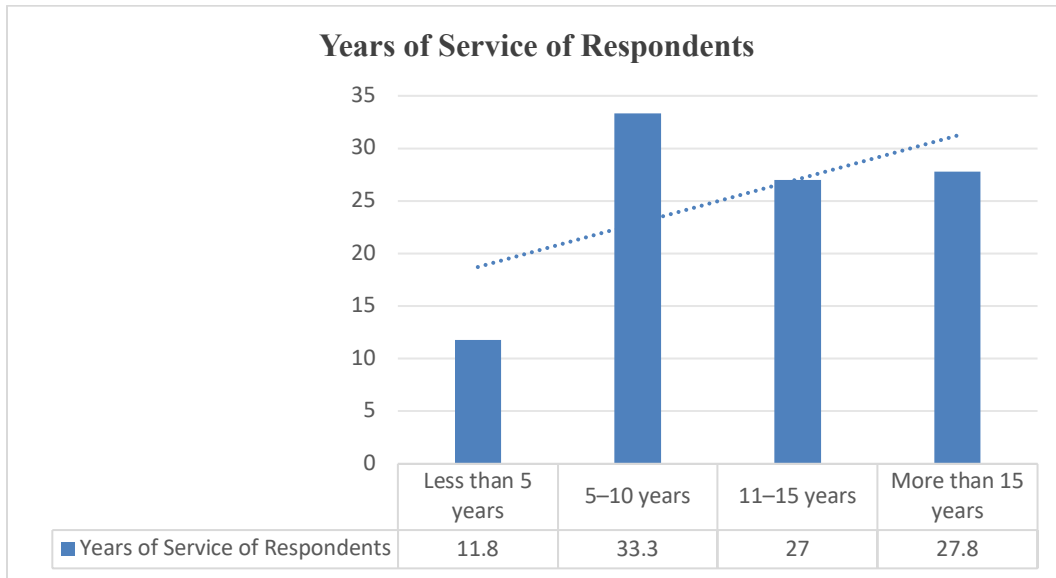


Figure 6: Years of Service of Respondents

Source: Researcher (2026)

Findings show that 33.3% of respondents had served between 5-10 years, 27.0% between 11-15 years, 27.8% over 15 years and 11.8% below five years. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents possessed considerable operational and institutional experience.

Current Deployment Area of Respondents

The study examined respondents' deployment areas in order to establish the spatial distribution of policing operations across the three informal settlements.

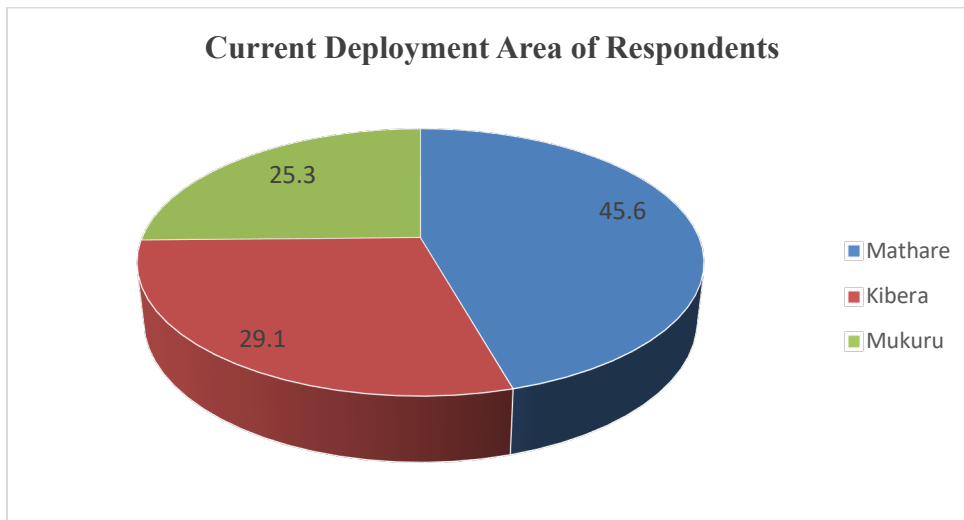


Figure 7: Current Deployment Area of Respondents

Source: Researcher (2026)

Findings show that 45.6% of respondents were deployed in Mathare, 29.1% in Kibera and 25.3% in Mukuru. The distribution indicates that a substantial proportion of respondents were drawn from Mathare, which recorded comparatively higher levels of confrontational policing experiences during political transition conflicts.

Police Professionalism During Political Transition Conflicts

Respondents reported that policing within Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru during political transition periods was largely force-oriented and reactive. Police responses during protests and demonstrations were characterised by anticipatory deployments, crowd-control operations and reliance on coercive enforcement measures.

Participants indicated that policing approaches differed across settlements depending on operational conditions and perceived security threats. One respondent stated:

“In areas like Kibera, policing is more forceful, but in other areas it is calmer and more controlled” (KII, Kibera, 2026).

Findings further revealed uneven adherence to procedural fairness, accountability and proportional use of force across the settlements.

Spatial and Socio-Economic Disparities Influencing Police Professionalism

Findings demonstrated that policing practices were significantly shaped by spatial and socio-economic conditions within informal settlements. Respondents reported that overcrowding, high population density, poor infrastructure and limited operational accessibility constrained policing operations, particularly during demonstrations and political unrest.

One respondent observed:

“There are areas where there is no proper lighting, so even at night it becomes very difficult to see what is happening or to respond well” (KII, Police Officer, Kibera, 12.03.2026).

Respondents additionally indicated that poverty and limited financial resources constrained residents’ ability to pursue complaints and legal redress following incidents of police misconduct.



Influence of Civilian Oversight Institutions on Police Professionalism

Findings revealed that civilian oversight mechanisms within informal settlements remained constrained by institutional, financial and accessibility challenges. Respondents indicated that fear of retaliation, weak witness protection mechanisms, bureaucratic procedures and long travel distances discouraged reporting of police misconduct.

One participant stated:

“There are places where people have to move a long distance to reach oversight offices, so sometimes they just decide not to report” (KII, NGO Representative, Mathare, 10.01.2026).

Participants further reported that accountability processes frequently depended on media exposure, civil society intervention and public pressure before institutional action could occur.

Challenges and Opportunities Shaping Collaboration Between Police and Civilian Oversight Institutions

Findings identified weak communication structures, institutional distance, resource limitations, and low community trust as major barriers to collaboration among police institutions, oversight bodies, and community actors. Respondents indicated that the limited accessibility of oversight institutions, such as IPOA offices and complaint-reporting mechanisms, constrained community engagement with accountability processes. Separately, inadequate distribution of police posts weakened operational responsiveness and contributed to strained police-community relations during political transition-conflicts.

Inferential Analysis

Inferential statistical analysis was undertaken because descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were only useful in summarising respondent characteristics and response patterns. While descriptive analysis explained the distribution of responses within the sample, it could not establish the nature, strength or statistical significance of relationships among the study variables. Consequently, inferential analysis was conducted to examine the influence of spatial socio-economic inequalities, civilian oversight and institutional collaboration on police professionalism within Nairobi’s informal settlements.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between spatial socio-economic inequalities and police professionalism ($r = 0.868$, $p < 0.001$). Civilian oversight effectiveness was also positively correlated with police professionalism ($r = 0.735$, $p < 0.001$), while collaboration between police institutions and oversight actors demonstrated a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.651$, $p < 0.001$). The statistically significant p-values indicated meaningful relationships between the independent variables and police professionalism.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis established that spatial socio-economic inequalities, civilian oversight and institutional collaboration jointly explained 83.2% of the variation in police professionalism ($R^2 = 0.832$, $F = 367.25$, $p < 0.001$). Spatial socio-economic inequalities emerged as the strongest predictor of police professionalism ($\beta = 0.52$), followed by civilian oversight ($\beta = 0.33$) and institutional collaboration ($\beta = 0.24$). The findings therefore suggest that policing professionalism within Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru was significantly shaped by localised socio-economic conditions, oversight effectiveness and institutional coordination during political transition-related conflicts.



Discussion

Police Professionalism During Political Transition-Related Conflicts

The findings demonstrate that police professionalism within Nairobi's informal settlements remains moderate, spatially differentiated and operationally inconsistent during political transition-related conflicts. Although policing reforms and constitutional restructuring formally institutionalised principles of accountability, legality, and rights-based policing within the National Police Service, operational policing in Kibera, Mathare, and Mukuru continued to reflect historically embedded enforcement-oriented practices, socio-economic inequalities, and uneven accountability structures. The overall Police Professionalism Index (PPI) score of 46%, therefore, illustrates a persistent gap between constitutional policing reforms and actual operational conduct during political transition-related conflicts. Descriptive findings revealed recurring concerns regarding aggressive crowd-control practices, procedural inconsistency and uneven protection of constitutional rights, particularly during demonstrations and politically sensitive periods. Inferential findings further strengthened this interpretation by establishing statistically significant relationships between police professionalism, spatial inequalities, civilian oversight and institutional collaboration.

The findings primarily reinforce the study's main anchoring theory, Social Contract Theory. The theory explains that state institutions derive legitimacy from their ability to protect citizens through fairness, accountability, legality and procedural justice rather than coercive force alone. Respondents consistently associated police professionalism with restraint, respectful treatment, transparency and accountability during police-community interactions. Consequently, the findings strongly support Tyler's (2023) procedural justice argument that police legitimacy depends not merely on enforcement capacity but on fairness and lawful conduct. The findings similarly reinforce Hills' (2023) argument that colonial policing legacies continue to shape operational policing cultures within post-colonial African states, particularly through coercive crowd-control approaches and securitised public order management.

At the same time, the findings demonstrate that professionalism outcomes during political transitions cannot be fully understood without considering the political and structural environment within which policing occurs. In this regard, Regime Theory serves as a complementary explanatory lens, reinforcing how political contestation, regime stability concerns and securitised governance influence police deployments and operational conduct during elections and protests. The findings strongly agree with Nasong'o's (2024) and Oloo's (2025) arguments that political transitions in Kenya frequently intensify securitised state responses, particularly within opposition-supporting and socio-economically marginalised settlements. Consequently, coercive policing within informal settlements reflected not only operational failures but also broader struggles over political legitimacy, state authority and regime security during political transitions.

The findings further support Conflict Transformation Theory by demonstrating that sustainable management of political transition-related conflicts requires more than institutional reform or reactive security deployment. Persistent tensions between police institutions and residents within informal settlements reflected deeper structural inequalities, marginalisation and adversarial state-society relations. The findings, therefore, suggest that long-term professionalism cannot be achieved solely through operational policing reforms unless broader socio-spatial inequalities and exclusionary governance structures are also transformed.

These findings suggest that police professionalism within Nairobi's informal settlements during political transition conflicts remains constrained by the enduring tension between constitutional reform and historically embedded coercive policing practices operating within politically securitised



and socio-economically unequal urban environments. The results further highlight the significance of context-specific professional competencies in de-escalation, procedural justice, proportional use of force, negotiation and human rights compliance in shaping policing outcomes during political transition deployments within informal settlements.

Spatial and Socio-Economic Inequalities and Police Professionalism

The findings further demonstrate that spatial and socio-economic inequalities significantly shape policing outcomes within the informal settlements of Kibera, Mathare, and Mukuru. Descriptive findings showed that aggressive policing levels were highest in Mathare (57%) compared to Kibera (48%) and Mukuru (34%), indicating substantial spatial variation in police professionalism across the settlements. Qualitative findings further revealed that Mathare experienced comparatively lower professionalism outcomes due to recurrent protest mobilisation, entrenched political activism, dense settlement structures and longstanding adversarial police-community relations. Respondents indicated that narrow pathways, poor accessibility and congested settlement layouts constrained police mobility and visibility during demonstrations, thereby encouraging rapid escalation and aggressive crowd-control tactics. KIIs additionally suggested that operational deployments within Mathare were frequently securitised because security agencies often perceived the settlement as a high-risk protest environment during political transitions.

In contrast, Mukuru was described as less politically confrontational and more operationally manageable due to dispersed settlement patterns, lower protest intensity, and improved police-community engagement structures. Kibera reflected an intermediate pattern characterised by periodic protest mobilisation alongside relatively stronger civil society presence and accountability networks. Inferential findings reinforced this interpretation, as Pearson correlation and regression analyses identified spatial socio-economic inequalities as the strongest determinant of professionalism outcomes ($\beta = 0.52$).

These findings strongly support Wacquant's (2023) urban marginality thesis and Murunga's (2024) argument that informal settlements are structurally marginalised urban spaces characterised by uneven state presence, exclusionary governance and securitised policing practices. The findings therefore demonstrate that police professionalism is not uniformly applied across informal settlements but is mediated by localised political dynamics, settlement configurations and broader socio-spatial inequalities. Regime Theory further explains how politically sensitive settlements frequently attract heightened surveillance and securitised deployments because they are perceived as spaces of political contestation and potential instability during transitions.

Conflict transformation theory is particularly relevant to explaining these differentiated outcomes because it emphasises that conflict management requires transforming structural inequalities and exclusionary governance systems that reproduce tensions between the state and marginalised communities. The findings, therefore, extend existing scholarship by empirically demonstrating how uneven urban governance and spatial marginalisation directly shape professionalism outcomes during political transitions within Nairobi's informal settlements.

These findings suggest that policing outcomes within informal settlements are fundamentally shaped by spatial and socio-economic inequalities, indicating that policing reforms are unlikely to achieve sustained effectiveness when implemented through generalised approaches detached from localised urban realities. The results highlight the relevance of spatially responsive policing strategies centred on equitable resource distribution, localised operational planning, infrastructure-sensitive crowd



management and strengthened community engagement, particularly within highly marginalised settlements such as Mathare.

Civilian Oversight, Accountability and Institutional Collaboration

The findings further demonstrate that civilian oversight institutions play an important but operationally uneven role in promoting police accountability during political transition-related conflicts. Respondents acknowledged the importance of institutions such as IPOA and human rights organisations in documenting abuses, facilitating complaints and monitoring police conduct. However, qualitative findings revealed that oversight effectiveness remained constrained by institutional inaccessibility, delayed investigations, fear of retaliation and weak enforcement capacity. Accountability processes within informal settlements frequently depended on media visibility, civil society advocacy and external pressure before institutional intervention occurred.

Inferential findings further established statistically significant positive relationships between civilian oversight, institutional collaboration and police professionalism. Civilian oversight effectiveness showed a strong positive relationship with professionalism ($r = 0.735$, $p < 0.001$), whereas collaboration between police institutions and oversight actors showed a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.651$, $p < 0.001$). Regression analysis similarly established civilian oversight as a significant predictor of professionalism outcomes ($\beta = 0.33$). These findings support broader democratic policing scholarship that argues that independent oversight institutions remain critical checks on legality, operational restraint, transparency, and public trust, particularly during politically sensitive periods.

The findings strongly reinforce social contract theory by demonstrating that police legitimacy is primarily associated with fairness, accountability and responsiveness rather than coercive enforcement alone. They also expose persistent inequalities in citizenship experiences, as residents of marginalised settlements reported delayed accountability and uneven access to justice. Consistent with complementary insights from regime theory, the findings suggest that oversight effectiveness during political transitions may be constrained where security institutions prioritise regime stability and public order management within politically sensitive contexts. Conflict transformation theory further illuminates the importance of collaborative governance, institutional adaptation and the transformation of adversarial state–society relations in fostering sustainable conflict management. Collectively, the findings underscore the central role of civilian oversight institutions in advancing democratic policing, while indicating that their effectiveness is closely shaped by operational accessibility, institutional responsiveness and sustained engagement with marginalised communities.

Conclusion

The study concludes that police professionalism during political transition-related conflicts within Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru remained moderate, spatially uneven and operationally inconsistent despite constitutional policing reforms and the existence of civilian oversight institutions, with socio-economic marginalisation, securitised policing practices, political contestation and weak accountability mechanisms continuing to shape policing outcomes across the informal settlements. Although oversight institutions such as the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA), Internal Affairs Unit (IAU), Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) and the Independent Medico-Legal Unit (IMLU) contributed towards accountability and the protection of constitutional rights, their effectiveness was frequently constrained by delayed investigations, limited accessibility and weak enforcement capacity during politically sensitive periods.

The study further established that sustainable democratic policing within informal settlements requires strengthened civilian oversight, context-specific professional training, decentralised



accountability systems, technology-driven complaint monitoring and spatially responsive policing approaches grounded in procedural justice and human rights compliance. The findings also highlighted the critical contribution of National Community Policing stakeholders, civil society organisations, Justice centres, Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO), community-based organisations (CBOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs), whose sustained grassroots presence, local visibility and direct engagement with residents provided more immediate accountability support, civic awareness and conflict mitigation than many formal oversight structures.

The study demonstrates that advancing police professionalism during political transitions requires more than institutional reforms and formal oversight mechanisms. Its effectiveness depends on addressing the spatial inequalities, governance deficits and state-society relations that continue to shape policing practices within Nairobi's informal settlements. In this regard, democratic policing during political transitions is not solely an institutional accountability concern but a broader governance challenge requiring responsive oversight systems, professional policing practices, inclusive citizenship and equitable access to justice within marginalised urban communities. Such an approach is essential for strengthening public trust, enhancing police legitimacy and fostering sustainable peace and security during political transitions in Nairobi's informal settlements.

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