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## THE INFLUENCE OF TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA ON THE VOTING PATTERNS IN NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

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### Abstract

Transgenerational trauma is the transmission of historical wounds, injustices, and collective memories from one generation to the next. Voting behavior is the individual's political participation to share in the social alteration and organizational processes. Nakuru County in Kenya, has experienced repeated episodes of political violence, ethnic clashes, and land-related conflicts causing deep scars that continue to shape community perceptions of security and governance. This study examined the influence of transgenerational trauma on the voting patterns of voters in Nakuru County, a historically volatile region. This study adopted a quantitative correlational research design using researcher designed questionnaires to measure transgenerational trauma indicators and Newman and Sheth Model of voting behaviour. A sample of 400 respondents from Molo, Njoro, Kuresoi North and Kuresoi South constituencies of Nakuru County participated, with 392 responding. Data analysis was done using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis using SPSS Version 26. The descriptive statistics involved frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations to summarize demographic characteristics and responses. The inferential statistics involved Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation to test the strength and direction of the relationship between transgenerational trauma and voting patterns. The results were summarized in tables. The findings generally indicated a correlation with Pearson's  $r = .195$ ,  $p = .000$ , indicating a significant positive correlation between transgenerational trauma and the voting behaviour of the voters. These results concluded that transgenerational trauma influences voting behaviour primarily through emotional feelings, personal experiences, and current issues, rather than through issues and policies, candidate image, or social imagery. The study recommends truth and reconciliation initiatives, psychosocial support for communities, civic education for issue-based voting, and policy frameworks that integrate trauma-informed approaches into governance. The study contributes to the growing field of political psychology in Kenya by highlighting the role of collective memory and trauma in democratic participation.

**Keywords:** *Transgenerational trauma, voting behaviour, political psychology, Newman and Sheth Model, Nakuru County, Kenya* ABSTRACT



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### Introduction and Background

Voters in different places are influenced greatly by rational choice, ethnicity, and party systems among other factors. Some psychological, historical, cultural, and socio-political factors have also been included in shaping political behaviour and attitudes. Among psychological and historical factors is transgenerational trauma. The term 'transgenerational trauma' is generally used to refer to the subconscious transmission of traumatic experiences to subsequent generations and to society (Isobel, 2019). The past elements of unresolved pain, fears, and grievances are passed to the subsequent generations through oral traditions, parenting styles, and socialization. As a result, individuals who did not directly experience the original traumatic events may still carry the burdens of their predecessors.

Various cultural products such as art, commemorations and memorial days, holidays, and museums related to the violent past as well as social movements can further reinforce intergenerational transmission (Allaya, 2022). Victim or perpetrator experiences may shape their behavior later in life and that of the next generations, which may include legacies of political violence (Pieter & Derek 2022). The symptoms and effects of intergenerational trauma include lack of trust, anger, frustration, or irritability, insecurity and poor self-esteem, anxiety disorders and depression, difficulty trusting others, unreasonable fear of injury or death, substance abuse, dissociation and numbing, hypervigilance, separation anxiety, uncharacteristic behavior and acting out, social avoidance and withdrawal and degradation of physical health (Cooks, 2022).

One of the first articles to note the presence of transgenerational trauma appeared in 1966, when Canadian psychiatrist Vivian Rakoff and colleagues documented high rates of psychological distress among children of Holocaust survivors.

A study was done in 2021 by Sarkissian and Sharkey. The title was "Transgenerational Trauma and Mental Health Needs among Armenian Genocide Descendants". It was concerned about the unresolved historical loss of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. It aimed at finding out how Armenian Americans experienced transgenerational trauma and how sociopolitical context, such as genocide denial and subsequent community trauma was transmitted. The results found higher levels of depression, anxiety, and paranoia for children and grandchildren of holocaust survivors as compared to various types of control groups, including descendants of American-born Jewish grandparents and pre- or post-war non-survivor immigrants.

Another study was done by Ahmet Emre Dikyurt in 2023. The title was "Bosnian Americans: transmission of trauma between generations". The purpose of the study was to understand the relationship between the first-generation Bosnian American's trauma and its transgenerational effects on the second generation. The Findings indicated that in the second generation, the psychosocial effects of the Bosnian war had partially been transmitted from the first generation. There was transmission of trauma and emotions from the first generation to the



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second-generation Bosnian Americans indicated by silence, lack of trust, anger and emotional unavailability.

In Rwanda, more than one million Rwandans were killed over a span of one hundred days during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis (Kagoyire, Kangabe, & Ingabire, 2023). These events traumatized both adult survivors as well as young people, including those who were born after the genocide, who were believed to have experienced similar genocide-related trauma. The methods for killing were typically quite brutal, with crude instruments often employed to pummel or hack away at victims. Rape was also used as a weapon and the deliberate use of perpetrators infected with HIV/AIDS saw many Tutsi women being intentionally infected with HIV/AIDS (Kagoyire, Kangabe, & Ingabire, 2023). Some long-term elements of trauma included the youth growing up in uprooted families, having parents who are physically disabled and/or traumatized by violent experiences during the genocide and some parents having developed chronic diseases making them unable to adequately respond to their children's needs across the lifespan (Plagge & Kolk, 2021).

In Kenya, there was a report entitled "Generational Trauma: Pain Passed Down". This was done by Olive Ndiang'ui based on interviews conducted between November 2014 and October 2015. The interviews were done in different parts of Nairobi, Rift Valley, Western, Nyanza, and Coast regions. The participants were 163 females and 9 males who were survivors and witnesses of post-election violence. Other participants were civil society actors, health workers, lawyers, government officials, and donors.

The report documents the ongoing physical, mental, social, and economic impact of sexual violence together with other human rights abuses committed against women and girls and men and boys during the post-election violence in Kenya. A more recent element of transgenerational trauma is the fear of the high presence of police and memory of their role in 2007 and 2008 postelection violence which is still a painful and vivid memory for many Kenyans, including those living in Nakuru county (Mutahi & Ruteere, 2023). This collective trauma has tempered the emotions of anger and frustration with the memory of mass killing being fresh in people's minds. In Kenya there were experiences of deterrence through fear and memory as an emotion induced by real or perceived threats (Karari, 2018).

Voting behavior is that activity and effectiveness practiced by individuals who occupy a certain social role in order to contribute to life regulation and demarcation of the centers of power in the society (Kulachai & Homyamye, 2023). Globally, the scientific study of voting behavior is marked by three major research schools: the sociological model, the psychosocial model and the rational choice model (Jorge, 2014). The sociological model focuses on the influences of social factors to the voting behavior (Havard, 1991). The psychosocial model assumes that party identification is the main factor behind the behavior of voters while the rational choice model puts emphasis on variables such as rationality, choice, uncertainty and information (Jorge, 2014). Renshon (1974), gives some factors that influence the individual's voting behaviour. These include reward, where the political system is seen as the only source of



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certain goods or services; and punishment, where the political system interferes with the individual's pursuits and political obligation, where the individual experiences a sense of civic obligation to fulfill participatory responsibilities.

To explain these complex dynamics of the factors determining voting behaviour, Newman and Sheth (1985) developed a comprehensive model of voting behaviour that adapts consumer

decision-making theories to the political context. Their model identifies seven major influences on voter choice. These are issues and policies, social imagery, candidate image, current events, personal events, emotional feelings and epistemic issues. By integrating psychological, sociological, and political perspectives, the model provides a multidimensional lens for analyzing voter decision-making. The model defined the influences in their context. Issues and Policies are the specific topics or agendas that matter to voters, such as healthcare, the economy, education, foreign policy, and environmental issues. Voters assess candidates based on how closely a candidate's policies reflect their personal priorities. Social Imagery involves the associations and stereotypes tied to certain candidates, parties, or political movements. This meant that voters often align with candidates whose imagery resonates with their social identity or the norms of the groups they associate with.

Emotional Feelings refers to the emotional reactions voters have toward a candidate, party, or issue, such as trust, fear, hope, or anger. Emotional appeal can significantly sway voting decisions, even

beyond logical assessment of issues. Candidates who evoke strong positive emotions (e.g., hope or pride) may gain more support, while negative emotions (e.g., fear or distrust) can deter voters. This meant that voter's emotional response to a candidate affects their likelihood of support. Candidate Image is the overall perception of a candidate's character, competence, trustworthiness, and likability. A candidate's image influences whether voters see them as capable and honest leaders. This meant that voters often decide based on their perception of the candidate's personal attributes. Current Events are the significant events at the national or international level, such as economic downturns, conflicts, or social movements. This meant that immediate, impactful events can sway voting decisions that might otherwise lean in a different direction.

Personal Events are the significant events in an individual voter's life, such as a job loss, illness, or family crisis, which might influence how they view specific policies or candidates. Personal experiences may make certain issues (like healthcare or economic stability) more important to voters, directly affecting their decisions. In the model, personal events add a personal, situational layer to voting behavior, causing voters to prioritize candidates based on their immediate personal needs or concerns. Epistemic Issues relate to a voter's desire for knowledge, novelty, or new experiences, driving them to seek out information or make choices that satisfy curiosity or intellectual engagement. Voters with a high epistemic motivation may actively seek information, fact-check claims, and engage more deeply with political discourse. This meant that a voter's intrinsic motivation to understand and





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explore political ideas, leads them to be more discerning and potentially open to new or alternative candidates and policies.

Studies have been done to establish the relationship between transgenerational trauma and the voting behaviour of voters. A study by Caterina Alacevich and Dijana Zejcirovic was done in 2020. The title of the study was “Does violence against civilians depress voter turnout? Evidence from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim was to investigate the effect of violence against civilians on voting. The findings indicated that violence against civilians led to a persistent decrease in voting behavior and this effect can be interpreted as a disruption of trust in institutions and inter-personal relations. Another study entitled “The Impact of Violence on the Voting Behavior: A Critical View” was done in Egypt in 2015. This was by Muhammad Saqib Khan, Irfanullah Khan, Hamid Rauf, Siraj-u-Din, Farooq Jan\_M.Phil, Raqibaaz Khan, and Riaz Ahmad\_M. Phil. The findings indicated that respondents got information about violence from media, peer groups and families. This information about violence influenced the voting behaviour of the students.

In Kenya a study entitled “The Impact of Intergenerational factors on voting behavior” was done by Githae in 2016. The research sampled one hundred (100) youth registered as voters in Kajiado county. The researcher wanted to find out how intergenerational factors affected voting behavior of residents of Kajiado county. The findings indicated that a majority of the respondents (51 of 90) stated that there were intergenerational elements that had impact on their voting behavior.

### **Nakuru County as the Area of Study**

Nakuru County, situated in Kenya’s Rift Valley region and the town has been elevated to the status of a city. It is one of the most ethnically diverse and politically competitive counties. It has experienced frequent electoral clashes, particularly during the 1992, 1997, and 2007 general elections (Nyaga, Mose, Ichuloi, & Okeche, 2020). The result has been undesired traumatic experiences that have affected the people in the area. This has created deep mistrust among communities, disrupted livelihoods, and fractured social cohesion. The traumatizing events have left the residents with memories of loss, fear, and betrayal. This is perceived to have influenced the political behaviour and decisions of these people. The implication is that transgenerational trauma associated with these events continues to shape voting patterns in the county. The affected communities have made electoral choices influenced not only by current issues but also by inherited collective memories of past trauma.

There have been many commissions to evaluate the causes of political violence with the aim of preventing it in the future. Although peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts have been suggested, there are possibilities that subsequent generations still inherit past narratives of violence, injustices and victimization. This may have influenced their electoral decisions. However, few studies have examined how these intergenerational psychological effects translate into voting behaviour in contemporary Kenya. This creates a critical knowledge gap. Therefore, there is a critical need to investigate how transgenerational trauma influences voting patterns in Nakuru County. This will fill a gap in political



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psychology and electoral studies in Kenya and at the same time provide insights for policymakers, peacebuilders, and counselors working to address transgenerational trauma. This will eventually promote democratic participation free from the burdens of inherited trauma.

This study sought to establish the influence of transgenerational trauma on the voting behaviour of voters in Nakuru County. The indicators of transgenerational trauma were summarized as wars, deaths, tribal clashes, confiscation of land, destruction of people's culture and forced abandonment of people's religion. The voting behavior had the indicators based on

Newman and Sheth model of voting behaviour (1985) consisting of issues and policies, emotional feelings, candidate image, epistemic issue, social imagery, current events and personal events.

### Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative correlational research design. The purpose of this design was to determine whether, and to what extent, transgenerational trauma (independent variable) influences voting patterns (dependent variable) among voters in Nakuru County. A correlational design was justified by the fact that the study seeks to establish statistical relationships between variables without manipulating them. In this study, the researcher cannot control historical trauma but can measure its presence and examine its influence on voters' electoral behaviour. The Independent Variable (IV) of the study was transgenerational trauma while the Dependent Variable was the voting patterns. The control variables were

demographic factors such as age, gender, religion and education level.

The study tested the following hypotheses:

**H1:** There is a statistically significant relationship between transgenerational trauma and voting patterns of voters in Nakuru County.

**H0:** There is no statistically significant relationship between transgenerational trauma and voting patterns of voters in Nakuru County.

The target population of this research was the registered voters, living and having voted in Nakuru county at least once in a general election. According to IEBC (2023) Nakuru County has a total population of 1,054,856 registered voters. The reason for this study population is that they have voted in a particular pattern and therefore able to give the factors that lead them to vote.

This research used a multistage sampling technique. The first stage was where the researcher purposively sampled four out of eleven constituencies in Nakuru county. The purposefully selected constituencies were Molo, Njoro, Kuresoi North and Kuresoi South constituencies. These have frequently shown prevalence of political violence. The number of registered voters in these constituencies according to IEBC (2023) is Molo 77,027, Kuresoi South 66,168, Kuresoi North 70,663 and Njoro 113,274 registered voters, totaling to 327,132 voters. To get the sample size, the researcher employed Taro Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$
 where  $n$  is sample size,  $N$  is population,  $e$  is margin of error (0.05).

$$n = 327,132 \div 1 + 327,132(0.05)^2$$

$$n = 327,132 \div 818.83$$

$$n = 399.51 \text{ estimated to } n = 400$$



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The second stage was stratified sampling method to allocate proportionately the number of participants according to the size of the constituency. This assisted the researcher to get the participants from each of the selected constituencies.

327,132

$$\text{From Kuresoi North number of participants} = \frac{70,663}{327,132} \times 400 = 86$$

$$\text{From Njoro number of participants} = \frac{113,274}{327,132} \times 400 = 139$$

*Formula in stratified sampling =  $\frac{\text{total sample size}}{\text{sample size}} \times$*

*Entire population*

$$\text{From Molo number of participants} = \frac{77,027}{327,132} \times 400 = 94$$

$$\text{From Kuresoi South number of participants} = \frac{66,168}{327,132} \times 400 = 81$$

The third stage employed simple random sampling to select the participants from the selected constituencies. The inclusion criterion for sampling was those voters who lived and were registered as voters in the selected constituencies. This led the researcher to get relevant respondents who would give the right information about the voting behaviour of the voters in the selected constituencies. Table 1 below shows the sampling matrix.

Table 1: Sampling Matrix

Study Area		Constituencies	Registered voters		Sample Size		Stratified Sample
Nakuru County	Purposeful Sampling	Molo	77,027	Yamane	400	Stratified	94
		Kuresoi South	66,168				81
		Kuresoi North	70,668				86
		Njoro	113,274				139
Total		4	327,132				400

The instruments used in this study were researcher's designed questionnaires administered to a representative sample of registered voters. The questionnaires were constructed based on the indicators of the variables. They were in form of statements and the respondents were to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statements at the scale of 1 to 5. There was a

pilot study to establish the reliability of the instruments. The pilot study was conducted at Runyenjes Constituency, Embu County, Kenya. The study used a sample size of 41 participants who had similar demographic characteristics as those in the main study. The analysis of the pilot data was done before the main study commenced. The items that assessed the prevalence of transgenerational



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trauma were found to be reliable with Cronbach's Alpha reliability value of .878.

The items that assessed the Newman and Sheth Model's influence to the voting behaviour of the voters were found to be reliable with Cronbach's Alpha reliability value of .877. The reliability test from the pilot study gave the researcher an assurance for the main study. The responses were quantified, coded, and analyzed using statistical methods to test relationships and hypotheses.

The study first assessed the prevalence of transgenerational trauma among the voters in Nakuru County, Kenya. This data was collected using researcher's designed questionnaires based on the indicators of transgenerational trauma. These indicators were wars, deaths, tribal clashes, confiscation of land, destruction of people's culture and forced abandonment of people's religion. The tools were designed to have a level of 1-5 accompanying the statements on how the participant agreed or disagreed with the statements. To score the tools, the researcher designed a scoring manual with a range of 10 – 50. From 10-20 (1) there was an indication of no exposure to trauma, 20-30 (2) indicated exposure to mild trauma, 30-40 (3) indicated exposure to moderate trauma and 40-50 (4) indicated exposure to severe trauma.

The analysis of the quantitative data was done using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis using SPSS Version 25. The descriptive statistics involved frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations which were used to summarize demographic characteristics and responses.

The inferential statistics involved Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation which was used to test the strength and direction of the relationship between transgenerational trauma and voting patterns. The level of significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . The results were summarized in tables.

The study was guided by some ethical considerations. Before field work, the researcher obtained a research license from the National Commission for Science and Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) with the license number NACOSTI/P/24/34944. The researcher went ahead to get clearances from the relevant county offices in Nakuru county. The researcher then obtained consent from the participants and ensured that they participated voluntarily and freely. Anonymity of participants was ensured by not letting them indicate their names on the questionnaires. The researcher tried as much as possible to ensure that the research would not elicit any psychological issues to the participants. The researcher observed the sensitivity of human dignity in the whole process of the study.

### Results

The participants who completed and returned all the questionnaires were 392 out of the sampled 400, forming 98% response rate. The results were based on the assessment of the prevalence of transgenerational trauma and the considerations that voters make as they vote for their political leaders, guided by the seven elements of voting behaviour outlined by the Newman and Sheth model of voting. The demographic characteristics were as follows:





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Age	F	%	Cumulative Percent
18-35	114	29.1	29.1
36-50	167	42.6	71.7
Above 50	111	28.3	100.0
Total	392	100.0	

The above table indicates that the participants in the study ranged from 18 years to above 50 years. The majority of the participants were between 36-50 years

(42.6%) followed by those between 18-35 years (29.1%) and then by those above 50 years (28.35).

Age	F	%	Cumulative Percent
Male	180	45.9	45.9
Female	212	54.1	100.0
Total	392	100.0	

The female gender had more participants (54.1%) than the male gender (45.9%).

Item	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Christian	376	95.9	95.9
Muslim	13	3.3	99.2
Hindu	3	.8	100.0
Total	392	100.0	

The table above indicates that Christians formed the majority of participants, 376

(95.5%) followed by the Muslims, 13 (3.3%) and then the Hindus, 3 who formed 0.8%.



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Level of Education	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Primary	186	47.4	47.4
Secondary	160	40.8	88.3
Tertiary	46	11.7	100.0
Total	392	100.0	

The data in the table above indicates that the participants who had gone up the primary level (47.4%) participated more, followed by those who had gone to the secondary level (40.8%). The participants who had gone up to the tertiary level of education formed 11.7% of the participants.

## The prevalence of Transgenerational Trauma among the Voters in Nakuru county

The findings of the study on exposure and prevalence of TT are shown by the frequency as follows:

Table 6: The prevalence of Transgenerational Trauma among the Voters

Item	F	%
No exposure to transgenerational trauma	160	40.8
Mild exposure to transgenerational trauma	143	36.5
Moderate exposure to transgenerational trauma	59	15.1
Severe exposure to transgenerational trauma	30	7.7
Total	392	100.0



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The above data indicated that 160 participants (40.8%) had not been exposed to transgenerational trauma while 232 participants (59.2%) had been exposed to transgenerational trauma in various measures. According to the researcher's scoring manual, 143 participants forming 36.5% were exposed to mild. The correlation between transgenerational trauma and emotional feelings had Pearson's  $r = .209$ ,  $p = .000$ . This indicated a significant, moderate positive correlation

The correlation between transgenerational trauma and current issues had Pearson's  $r = .104$ ,  $p = .039$ . This indicated a small but significant positive correlation between transgenerational trauma and the current issues as a consideration in the voting behaviour of the voters.

The correlation between transgenerational trauma and personal events had Pearson's  $r = .189$ ,  $p = .000$ . This indicated a significant positive correlation between transgenerational trauma and personal events as a consideration in the voting behaviour of the voters.

The correlation between transgenerational trauma and epistemic issues had Pearson's  $r = .092$ ,  $p = .069$ . This indicated a weak, borderline non-significant correlation between transgenerational trauma and epistemic issues as a consideration in the voting behaviour of the voters.

### Discussion

The data of the findings of the study on the influence of transgenerational trauma

transgenerational trauma, 59 forming 15.1% to moderate

The correlation between transgenerational trauma and issues and policies had Pearson's  $r = .052$ ,  $p = .309$ . This indicated a weak, non-significant correlation between transgenerational trauma and issues and policies as a consideration in voting behaviour of the voters.

between transgenerational trauma and emotional feelings as a consideration in the voting behaviour of the voters.

on voting behaviour among voters in Nakuru County, Kenya were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. There was a particular focus on Pearson's correlation analysis to establish the relationships between transgenerational trauma and the seven dimensions of voting behaviour as proposed in the Newman and Sheth (1985) model.

### The prevalence of transgenerational trauma among the voters in Nakuru County

The findings indicated that more participants were exposed to at least mild to severe transgenerational trauma. Only 160 participants (40.8%) had not been exposed to transgenerational trauma. This was in line with Narayan et.al. (2019) who affirm that the children may not experience trauma from the parents who had experienced trauma in their lives. The participants who were exposed to transgenerational trauma fell to the category of the offsprings who experienced the trauma experienced by their fore parents. This indicated that parents who



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have experienced trauma may exhibit behaviors or attachment styles that affect their children's emotional development (Kostova and Matanova (2024). This was also in line with DeAngelis, (2023) who holds that there are traces of anxiety, depression, and PTSD in trauma survivors and their progeny. The survivors are among those who are emotionally detached, intolerant of weakness in others, and who maintain a “conspiracy of silence” within the family, being like fighters. This implies that that survivors’ progeny try and repair the world for their parents, their grandparents, and themselves and this happens largely unconsciously. Moog et. al. (2021) discusses how exposure to war-related stress in parents can affect the neurodevelopment and mental health of their children. This implied a direct impact of the past wars to the subsequent generations.

### Correlation between Transgenerational Trauma and Overall Voting Behaviour

This was a general correlation between the transgenerational trauma of the voters and their consideration of Newman and Sheth Model’s factors of voting behaviour. The results were Pearson’s  $r = .195$ ,  $p = .000$  indicating a significant positive correlation. The implication was that higher transgenerational trauma is associated with slightly higher reliance on Newman and Sheth Model’s factors of voting behavior. Trauma was seen to meaningfully shape how voters generally engage with politics. This aligns with previous studies (e.g., Hirsch, 2019; Tesler, 2022) which argue that historical injustices and collective suffering continue to influence political decisions across generations. In the Kenyan context,

past episodes of ethnic clashes and land dispossession may create enduring sensitivities that shape how individuals evaluate politics. This led to rejection of the null hypothesis that “There is no statistically significant relationship between transgenerational trauma and voting patterns of voters in Nakuru County”. This led the study to adopt the alternative hypothesis that “There is statistically significant relationship between transgenerational trauma and voting patterns of voters in Nakuru County “. Each factor in the model related differently with transgenerational trauma. This was presented below.

### Correlation between Transgenerational Trauma and Issues and Policies

The results were Pearson’s  $r = .052$ ,  $p = .309$ , indicating a weak, non-significant correlation. This meant that transgenerational trauma does not appear to strongly influence how voters evaluate issues and policies. This indicates that transgenerational trauma did not strongly affect the consideration of party manifestos, policy platforms, or campaign promises, among others. The findings also suggest that considering issues and policies may not be the primary channel through which transgenerational trauma is expressed politically. This is in line with Bratton & Logan (2020) who argues that issues and policies appear to be shaped more by present economic and social conditions rather than inherited traumatic experiences.

### Correlation between Transgenerational Trauma and Social Imagery

The results were Pearson’s  $r = .070$ ,  $p = .165$  indicating a weak, non-significant correlation. This meant that transgenerational





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trauma does not significantly influence the consideration of social imagery of the candidate. Social imagery may be more strongly shaped by political marketing and media representation rather than intergenerational historical experiences. This was supported by the fact that in contexts similar to Kenya, political campaigns deploy branding and imagery tactics through social media and traditional media to shape voters' perceptions. This often overshadows inherited historical narratives found in transgenerational trauma as a tool for social imagery (Sophocleous et al., 2024; Abbas et al., 2021; Tanusondjaja et al., 2023; Masinde et al., 2024).

### Correlation between Transgenerational Trauma and Emotional Feelings

The results were Pearson's  $r = .209$ ,  $p = .000$  indicating a significant, moderate positive correlation. This meant that trauma is strongly tied to emotional responses in politics. Voters with trauma backgrounds are more likely to experience heightened fear, anger, loyalty, or resentment when engaging politically. This finding supports affective theories of voting behaviour which argue that emotions act as mediators between personal history and political action (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2017). Having experienced past electoral conflicts, voters in Nakuru county would have trauma heighten their emotional sensitivity and may be pushed towards candidates or parties that resonate with their fears or hopes. This is in line with Gutiérrez-Romero & LeBas, (2020) who held that exposure to prior violence may condition how some individuals respond to the appeals, decreasing support for candidates who employ divisive rhetoric.

### Correlation between Transgenerational Trauma and Candidate Image

The results were Pearson's  $r = -.025$ ,  $p = .624$  indicating a negative, non-significant correlation. This meant that transgenerational trauma does not influence the voting behaviour of the voters considering the candidate personality/image. This was in agreement with Ajwang, Abboud, and Lugano (2024), who held that candidate evaluation appears to be shaped more by present-day performance and media portrayal rather than historical trauma. The candidate-centered politics in Kenya is therefore not pegged on historical trauma.

### Correlation between Transgenerational Trauma and Current Issues

The results were Pearson's  $r = .104$ ,  $p = .039$  indicating a small but significant positive correlation. This meant that that transgenerational trauma slightly influences how voters consider present-day challenges such as insecurity, land disputes, and justice as they vote. This aligns with observations by Aloyo, Dancy, and Dutton (2023), who note that 'individuals exposed to war and mass violence exhibit more "prosocial behavior", meaning they are more likely to cooperate with others in their in-group. They further held that the individuals who are directly affected by war violence also show greater hostility to rival groups. Nakuru County is known to have voters with traumatic legacies who may bend towards the issues of security, land rights, and justice making them to vote for the candidates who would appear to offer protection and solutions to such issues.

### Correlation between Transgenerational Trauma and Personal Events



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The results were Pearson's  $r = .189$ ,  $p = .000$  indicating a significant positive correlation. This meant that transgenerational trauma would significantly influence the voters to consider personal events of the candidate as they vote for them. It indicates that voters with higher transgenerational trauma scores are more likely to rely on family and personal experiences in their political decision-making. They may filter politics through personal stories, grievances, or family suffering. This agreed with literature on collective memory and politics (Hirsch, 2019), which highlights how traumatic experiences are transmitted through family narratives and continue to influence political perceptions across generations.

### Correlation between Transgenerational Trauma and Epistemic Issues

The results were Pearson's  $r = .092$ ,  $p = .069$  indicating a weak, borderline non-significant correlation. This meant that transgenerational trauma has a small effect on deeper reflective/knowledge-based concerns (epistemic issues). Transgenerational trauma was seen to shape voting behaviour in a less direct way. It exerts little influence on deeper reflective or knowledge-based political concerns. Supporting this view, Isobel, Graham, and Mkhize (2025) argue that inherited trauma can affect cognitive processes such as memory, learning, and decision-making, but its impact on higher-order reflective or knowledge-based engagement such as ethical reasoning is much less pronounced.

### Conclusion

The study found that a majority of respondents reported high levels of transgenerational trauma from past political violence and historical injustices. The correlation analysis indicated a significant positive relationship between transgenerational trauma and voting patterns. With such a study the literature on voting behaviour is expanded by integrating psychological and historical perspectives, particularly the concept of transgenerational trauma, into electoral studies in Kenya. Insights for policymakers, electoral commissions, and peacebuilding organizations seeking to design interventions that address deep-rooted causes of political polarization have been provided. Civil society groups, religious leaders, and community organizations can use the findings to develop trauma-informed approaches to civic education, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) would design voter education campaigns that encourage issue-based voting and reduce fear-driven decision-making. County and national leaders should institutionalize peace committees that actively mediate inter-community tensions before, during, and after elections. Local NGOs, faith-based organizations, and schools should implement trauma-informed programs to help families process inherited trauma. Since youth represent a large proportion of voters, forums should be created to discuss political issues beyond ethnicity, helping reduce the perpetuation of divisive narratives. Media houses should adopt trauma-sensitive reporting to prevent the reactivation of painful memories that can reinforce group divisions.



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Since the study did not address all the areas, some recommendations would be to combine a mixed-methods approach combining surveys with in-depth interviews which could provide richer insights into how trauma narratives are transmitted and politicized. Studies could include other counties with histories of electoral violence to compare patterns across different contexts in Kenya. The role of resilience and coping strategies in moderating the impact of trauma on voting behaviour could further be explored. A study on psychological interventions like counseling, civic education, or community dialogues would be useful in testing whether they reduce trauma-driven voting behaviours.

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