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## APPLICATION OF THE NEWMAN AND SHETH MODEL (1985) OF VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN UNDERSTANDING ELECTORAL DECISION-MAKING AMONG VOTERS: A CASE OF NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA.

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### Abstract

Voters in many democratic nations make their political decisions based on norms, values, identities among other complex factors. This study sought to apply Newman and Sheth Model (1985) of voting behaviour in Nakuru County, Kenya. Newman and Sheth (1985) developed issues and policies, social imagery, candidate image, current events, personal events, emotional feelings and epistemic issues as major factors that influence political choices for voter. This study adopted a mixed methods approach with embedded research design. The quantitative data was collected by using researcher designed questionnaires derived from Newman and Sheth Model while the qualitative data was obtained using the use researcher's designed interview guides to back up the quantitative data collected. A pilot study conducted ensured the reliability of the tools. The study applied multistage sampling procedure. A sample size of 400 participants was selected from 1,054,856 registered voters using Taro Yamane's formula. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Version 25, with descriptive statistics, like frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation being applied. The qualitative data was analyzed and embedded in the quantitative data with inferences done appropriately out of the findings. The various demographic characteristics provided rich data. The results indicated that the factors in the Newman and Sheth model influenced the voting behaviour of the voters differently. The measures ranged from strong to mild influence. Issues and policies (mean= 4.2615), current issues (mean=4.0191), social imagery (mean= 3.6129), candidates image (mean= 3.), emotional feelings (3.3852), epistemic issues (mean= 3.1276) and personal events (mean= 2.7844). This study allows for a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations that drive electoral choices beyond surface-level assumptions of ethnic loyalty or party allegiance. Insights from the study can inform political parties, policymakers, and civic educators in fostering issue-based politics, enhance democratic participation, and reduce reliance on divisive identity politics.

**Key Words:** Newman and Sheth Model, Voting Behaviour, electoral choices, Candidate, influence



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### Introduction and Background

Voters in any democratic nation make their decisions based on many factors. Political science and electoral studies reflect on how citizens make choices that shape governance and democracy. Voting behaviour refers to the decision-making process of individuals when choosing a political party or candidate to vote for, shaped by a complex interplay of cognitive considerations, personal traits, ideological predispositions, social identity, candidate image, and past performance of parties or candidates (Abdullahi, 2023). Most voters vote out of habit, with decisions based on norms and values. Purely purposive-rational voting remains a special case (Becker, 2022). Another approach to voting behaviour is identity-based voting which is based on factors like ethnicity, race and gender among others. In many societies, voting behaviour is influenced by some other complex factors.

Newman and Sheth's Model of Voting Behaviour: 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 of agendas that matter to voters, such as healthcare, the economy, education, foreign policy, and environmental issues. Voters assess candidates based on where they stand on key issues, especially if those issues directly impact them. If a candidate's position aligns with a voter's beliefs, it may increase the likelihood of

support. This meant that voters would consider 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. It includes public perceptions of what a candidate "represents" socially, such as being seen as a "champion of the working class" or "protector of traditional values." Social imagery shapes voter perception of candidates and may affect how relatable or trustworthy they seem. 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. A strong, favorable image can be as persuasive as a candidate's stance on issues. 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. Current events can heavily impact voter behavior by changing what issues are top of mind and influencing how voters view candidates' responses to crises. This meant that immediate, impactful events can sway voting decisions that might otherwise lean in a different direction.



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

In Italy Cantarella, et al. (2023) conducted a study in which they investigated the influence of fake news on the voting patterns in the 2018 Italian elections, particularly concerning populist parties. The findings of this study provided evidence supporting the assertion that exposure to fake news had a positive effect on the popularity of populist parties, irrespective of individuals' prior support for such parties. The British Election Study (2019) conducted a random Probability Survey on post-election to shed further light on how the age cleavage continued to evolve in 2019. The study's ultimate conclusion highlighted the connection between age and voting preferences in the 2019 elections. In a similar element, Simon (2022) explored into the comprehensive understanding of why contemporary British politics exhibit divisions along educational lines. The study's findings underscored that a significant proportion, ranging from 67% to 91%, of education's overall impact on vote choices operated indirectly. In China, a study was done by Guo in 2020. It was a literature

review with an aim of establishing the impact of compliance with election commitments on voters' voting behavior. As a collection of many previous research, the study showed that election commitments had an impact on voters' voting behavior. The research pointed out that the political party's election commitments was the basis for judging voters' voting behavior. This was because voters were seen to evaluate both the party's current policies and the implementation of its previous election commitments.

A study was done by Michael Bratton, Ravi Bhavnani and Tse-Hsin Chen in 2011. The title of the study was "Voting Intentions in Africa: Ethnic, Economic Or Partisan?" It was a first comprehensive account of popular voting intentions in Africa's new electoral democracies. The general findings indicated that competitive elections in Africa were more than mere ethnic censuses or simple economic referenda. Instead, Africans engage in both ethnic and economic voting. In addition, the study revealed that many voters in Africa consider policy performance, especially the government's perceived handling of unemployment, inflation, and income distribution. Moreover, a great number are also motivated by partisan considerations indicating that they vote for established ruling parties because they expect that incumbents will win (Chen, 2011). In South Africa, Paret and Runciman (2023) sought to examine the role of racial identities in shaping voting behavior in post-apartheid South Africa. The study's findings presented a complex picture. On one hand, it was observed that Black voters were notably more inclined to vote for the African National Congress, while colored, Indian, and particularly white voters tended to favor the Democratic Alliance.

In Kenya A study entitled "Modus Operandi of Oppressing the "Savages: The Kenyan British Colonial Experience" was done by Karari Peter in 2018. The findings indicated that the postcolonial ethno-political violence in Kenya can be linked to British colonialism. For example, the colonial constitution, which was



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meant to dominate the natives, was inherited by post-independent elites and used for ethnic political patronage. This implies that in Kenya, voting behaviour is often shaped by ethnic identity, party affiliation, candidate appeal, and socio-economic issues. Nakuru County, one of the most politically diverse and cosmopolitan regions, provides a unique setting for examining these dynamics. The county has historically reflected both ethnic voting patterns and issue-based politics, making it an important case for applying Newman and Sheth theoretical model of electoral behaviour.

### METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed methods approach with embedded research design. Here the researcher combined quantitative and qualitative research techniques and methods. The quantitative data was collected by using researcher designed questionnaires to measure how different elements of Newman and Sheth Model influenced the voting behaviour of the voters while the qualitative data was obtained using researcher-designed interview guides to back up the quantitative data collected.

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:

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

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

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

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

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.

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

Entire  
population

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

$$327,132$$

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

$$327,132$$

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

$$327,132$$

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

$$327,132$$

The third stage employed simple random sampling to select the participants from the





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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	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 research were researcher's designed questionnaire and interview guide to measure how the elements in Newman and Sheth model would influence the voting behaviour of the voters in Nakuru County. The questions in the questionnaire were designed from the seven issues in Newman and Sheth model of voting behaviour. These were in form of statements where the participants indicated their levels of agreement or disagreement with the statements provided. The scoring formula used the statistical means of the descriptive statistics of the statements whereby a mean of 1 indicated "no influence" by the factor, a mean of 2 indicated "mild influence" of the factor, a mean of 3 indicated "moderate influence" by the factor, a mean of 4 indicated a "strong influence" by the factor and a mean of 5 indicated a "very strong influence" by the factor.

The in-depth interview guide consisted of researcher's designed questions based on the seven elements of Newman and Sheth model of voting behaviour. They were designed to collect the qualitative data from the participants making them to freely provide the required information in the area of study. The questionnaires were delivered to the participants who filled them and returned them to the researcher. The interviews were conducted from eleven participants in a friendly way.

This research used two types of validity to assure the quality of the data collection instruments. These were face validity which was determined by peer reviewers on the researcher's designed questionnaires and content validity, which was ensured by the pilot study that checked for any difficulties with the test items. To ensure reliability in this study, the researcher together with the research assistants explained one item at



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a time to the participants. 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 results of the pilot study assessing the factors that influence the voting behaviour of the voters were found to be reliable with Cronbach's Alpha reliability value of .877.

The analysis of quantitative data was done using statistical analysis using SPSS Version 25. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were employed and summarized in tables. The data collected from the interview guide was analyzed and embedded in the quantitative data with inferences done appropriately out of the findings.

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 and interviews. 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 results were based on the assessment of the considerations that voters make as they vote for their political leaders. This assessment was guided by the seven elements of voting behaviour outlined by the Newman and Sheth model of voting. The demographic characteristics were as follows:

Table 2: Age of the participants

Item	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 18-35	114	29.1	29.1	29.1
36-50	167	42.6	42.6	71.7
Above 50	111	28.3	28.3	100.0
Total	392	100.0	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).

Table 3; Gender of the participants



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Item	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	180	45.9	45.9	45.9
Female	212	54.1	54.1	100.0
Total	392	100.0	100.0	

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

**Table 4: Religious Affiliation of the Participants**

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

**Table 5: Education Level of the Participants**

Item	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Primary	186	47.4	47.4	47.4
Secondary	160	40.8	40.8	88.3
Tertiary	46	11.7	11.7	100.0
Total	392	100.0	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.



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Table 6: Demographic Information of Participants for the Interview and Interview Dates

Code	Gender	Age	Religion	Education Level	Date of Interview
PI01	F	43	Christian	Secondary	15/10/2024
PI02	F	54	Christian	Primary	15/10/2024
PI03	M	37	Christian	Secondary	16/10/2024
PI04	M	38	Muslim	Tertiary	16/10/2024
PI05	M	52	Christian	Primary	23/10/2024
PI06	M	44	Christian	Secondary	23/10/2024
PI07	F	53	Christian	Primary	23/10/2024
PI08	F	50	Christian	Primary	28/10/2024
PI09	F	44	Christian	Primary	05/11/2024
PI10	M	37	Hindu	Tertiary	05/11/2024
PI11	F	52	Christian	Primary	07/11/2024
PI12	M	37	Christian	Tertiary	07/11/2024

The above table indicates that 3 participants had the ages of 43-44 years, those between 37-38 years were 4 participants and those at the ages between 50-54 years were 5 participants. There were 6 males and 6 females. The Christians were 10 and Hindu and Islam religions had only one participant for each. The participants who were at primary level of education were 6 while those at secondary and tertiary levels were 3 for each.

Each factor had statements that showed how the factor influenced the voting behaviour of the voters in Nakuru county. A scale of 1-5 was used to indicate the level of agreement or disagreement with the statements for the factors. Descriptive statistics means were used with the values of 1= "no influence", 2 = "mild influence" 3 = "moderate influence", 4 = "strong influence" and 5 = "very strong





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influence” by the factor. The different means of different factors is shown by the table below:

Table 7: The Factors that Influence the Voting Behaviour of Voters

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
issues and policies	392	1.00	5.00	4.2615	.88241
current issues	392	1.00	5.00	4.0191	.96234
social imagery	392	1.50	5.00	3.6129	.72066
Candidate’s image	392	1.33	5.00	3.5157	.60672
emotional feelings	392	1.00	5.00	3.3852	.85882
epistemic issues	392	1.00	5.00	3.1276	1.39200
personal events	392	1.00	5.00	2.7844	.90241
Valid N (listwise)	392				

The results indicated that the factors influenced the voting behaviour of the voters from strongly to mildly with issues and policies (mean= 4.2615), current issues (mean=4.0191), social imagery (mean= 3.6129), candidate’s image (mean= 3.5157), emotional feelings (3.3852), epistemic issues (mean= 3.1276) and personal events (mean= 2.7844).

### Discussion

The results indicated that the voters were interested in a leader who would be willing to address the issues and policies and current issues as indicated by means of 4.2615 and 4.0191 respectively. This aligns with Newman and Sheth’s model, which defines issues and policies as the specific topics or agendas that matter to voters, such as healthcare, the economy, education, foreign policy, and environmental issues. Social amenities like infrastructure health and education are a major concern for all the citizens. Health is a critical issue to the people in general. Among the health challenges include inadequate funds allocated for promotions and

recruitment of healthcare workers, disease outbreaks in specific areas overwhelming the local healthcare facilities, shortage of drugs which has jeopardized the effective treatment and control of diseases, among others, as indicated by a comprehensive overview of Nakuru County’s Health Sector performance from 2020/21 to 2022/23. This explains clearly why the voters would be moved by a leader who either addresses such issues or even promises to address them once elected. Kariuki & Ndani (2019) found out that financial challenges inhibited the acquisition of materials, equipment and development of standard and adequate health facilities. The above implied that any leader addressing the issues would be favoured by the voters. A participant held:

*I can only vote for a leader who has a past history of developments. Leaders are not elected for their own benefit but for the benefits of common mwanainchi (citizen). Anyone addressing the issues that touch our lives is our leader. I can only identify with a leader who checks the roads, education, hospitals, water and*



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*other developments*” (Participant P111, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).

This was supported by Kulachai (2023) who held that voters would consider the leaders who address issues and policies that affect them. In addition, the study revealed that many voters in Africa consider policy performance, especially the government’s perceived handling of unemployment, inflation, and income distribution. A participant held:

*“When these leaders come to us, they promise good things about what they will do for us. Many promise that they will build roads and schools for us. We doubt their genuineness but we only vote from the ultimate good faith that they will fulfill their promises. They are all over perpetuating lies. For me I assess what the leader has done in the past.”* (Participant P109, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).

This calls for more considerations of the promises that the leaders make during campaigns so that the voters don’t feel that they were short changed during the campaigns. In matters of social imagery of the leader, the findings indicated that moral uprightness (mean = 4.31) and a leader not being corrupt (mean= 4.06) would influence the voting behaviour strongly. The strong influence on moral uprightness and not being corrupt for leaders was also addressed by Manara et.al. (2023) who asserts that corruption taints the image of a candidate. This moral uprightness was considered to be a strong characteristic not only benefiting the leader but also some other people. A participant held:

*“A morally upright person is approachable and trusted. Such a person is also a role model in the society, and*

*our young people can emulate them. Such a leader is reliable and can always find a position in the society”* Participant P107, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).

Burrell et.al. (2020) posit that corruption can have wide-reaching negative effects, such as undermining public trust, weakening institutions, and slowing economic development. The findings indicated that the participants had some parameters of measuring corruption. This means that for the participants, corruption was not just a word remaining in the air. There were some descriptions of what the participants took corruption to mean. A participant held:

*“Many leaders are involved in corrupt activities that include bribery so as to get some favor and rights, embezzlement and diversion of the public funds into personal use, fraud especially on identifying with projects that are not theirs, favoritism to their family members and the people who voted for them and abuse of power for personal gain”* (Participant P106, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).

Concerning the areas where corruption is experienced, a participant held:

*“Corruption can occur in various sectors, including government offices, personal business of the politicians, influence of the politicians to the law enforcement and implementation of projects in schools, hospitals, roads and general community development”* (Participant P102, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).



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The eloquence and the convincing power of speech of the leaders were found to have only mild influence (mean= 2.89) and moderate influence (mean= 3.20) respectively. This implied that the voters would not greatly consider the speech of the leaders as a criteria for voting speeches can distort public discourse, mislead voters, and undermine trust in democratic institutions (Mattes et. al., 2023).

Regarding emotional feelings as a factor that determines the voting behaviour, the findings indicated that some emotive issues would influence voting behaviour greatly. Many voters would consider a leader who addresses their financial needs (a mean of 4.05). others would consider a leader who assures the voters of better days ahead (a mean of 3.28). This indicated that assurance of better days ahead cast moderate influence on the voting behaviour. Gender issues were found to cast mild influence on the voting behaviour of the voters (a mean of 2.88). This matched with Newman and Sheth model that explains the emotional feelings as the emotional reactions voters have toward a candidate, party, or issue, such as trust, fear, hope, or anger. The theory further posits that 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 implies that the voters would not only vote from rational influence, but also from the emotional point of view.

The financial matters found to cast strong influence on the voting behaviour of the voters in Nakuru County, Kenya agreed with Ferguson & McDonald (2004) who held that financial issues are a great factor to be considered in the voting behaviour. This indicates that candidates' financial status, particularly personal wealth, can influence voter preferences, with wealthier candidates potentially gaining favor in some

contexts due to perceived similarity to wealthier voters or ability to fund campaign activities. Though this is on the side of the status of the candidate, it has a direct influence to the voters who find the potential of such a candidate to address their financial needs. With the current financial strains, the voters would be swayed to a politician who gives out money to meet the needs of the voters. A participant held:

*“Although personally I would not sell my vote, there are many people who are greedy for money and can sell their votes even on the day of election. This for me is a short-term solution. I would vote for a voter who has ways of multiplying whatever we have in terms of creating more wealth for everyone. Unfortunately, we have very few of such leaders. They only think of enriching themselves and their close friends”.* (Participant P104, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).

This was in agreement with a study done in South Africa about clientelism where De Jager, (2017) discusses how patronage networks have contributed to corruption within South African local governments, where politicians use clientelist tactics to secure votes while benefiting from personal gain. Clientelism can also refer to individualized exchange of goods and services, that is, social grants and the distribution of food parcels during elections as a vote-buying strategy to gain political support (De Jager, 2017).

The gender of the candidate casted mild influence on the voting behaviour. These findings contradicted the concept of “gender gap” in voting as suggested by CAWP, (2025) who held that gender was a key and significant factor in the voting behaviour of the voters. The study further aimed at assessing how candidates' image would influence the voting behaviour of the voters. The education of the candidate (mean of 4.43) had a strong influence on the voting behaviour. The



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youthfulness of the leader (mean of 3.79), family status of the candidate (mean of 3.70) and financial stability of the candidate (mean of 3.67) would cast moderate influence to the voting behaviour of the voters. The physical attractiveness and good grooming of the candidate were found to have mild significance to the factors influencing the voting behaviour of voters, with means of 2.68 and 2.74 respectively.

The Newman and Sheth model defined candidate's image as the overall perception of a candidate's character, competence, trustworthiness, and likability. Education of the candidate was rated the highest in terms of the influence on the voting behaviour of the voters. The demographic characteristics of the study indicated that 52.6 % of the participants had gone to the secondary level of education. The implication was that the voters would go for a person who is educated since they had gone through education themselves. A participant held:

*"I am educated just like many of us here. We need someone who is educated and enlightened just like we are. An educated leader will promote the education of our children and support them fully. When he speaks to us and in other places, we will not be embarrassed by him".* (Participant P108, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).

A youthful candidate was seen to be having some future in leadership and therefore was preferred to the old aspirants. Age became a factor of consideration though the number of the years was not specified for the candidate. Financial stability and family stability were other factors that had a moderate consideration. These are factors that are to some extent related to education of the candidate.

The study went ahead to examine current issues would influence the voting behaviour of the voters in Nakuru county. The findings indicated many voters would strongly favor a leader who brings new ideas (mean 4.48) and moderately consider the one who addresses the

current events (mean 3.56). The model of Newman and Sheth define Current events as those significant at the national or international level, such as economic downturns, conflicts, or social movements. The model further posits that current events can heavily impact voter behavior by changing what issues are top of mind and influencing how voters view candidates' responses to crises. The implication is that immediate, impactful events can sway voting decisions that might otherwise lean to a different direction. The factor of new ideas is related to current issues which may form part of the novelty of ideas as affirmed by Miller & Shanks Theory (1996). The theory known as "Newcomers Theory" held that the newness of ideas coming from a political candidate can significantly influence voter behavior. This mainly occurs in contexts where voters are seeking change, innovation, or alternatives to the status quo. The candidates who offer fresh, new ideas may appeal to the voters who are dissatisfied with the existing policies and systems, or who believe that a new approach could solve persistent problems. A participant held:

*"We are tired of same stories year in year out. I like a leader who comes with original ideas not repeating what has been perpetually said by the others. Many leaders bore me when they come talking always about stima na maji (electricity and water). These are projects that have become campaign tools together with the roads. I would vote for a leader who would bring new approaches of developments and show us the other aspects of life"* (Participant P103, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).

The current issues and new ideas are quite connected. A leader addressing new issues would be addressing the current issues indirectly. This would favor such a candidate in way that they would be voted for.





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Regarding personal events, the findings indicated that the events would only influence the voters in a mild way. Ethnicity, religion, money and identification with the voters' problems would influence the voting behaviour of the voters in a mild way. Newman and Sheth model defined personal events as 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. The model saw these events as a situational layer to voting behavior, causing voters to prioritize candidates based on their immediate personal needs or concerns.

The personal events were seen to be touching the immediate needs of the voters and therefore regarded as not greatly influential to the voting behaviour of the voters. This may be attributed to the fact that many voters may tend to support leaders who advocate for long term decisions and not merely immediate satisfying decisions. This is affirmed by Brunello & Rocco, (2020) who found that voters in Europe have historically supported long-term policies such as investments in public goods during times of economic hardship. However, at other times the support for these policies often fades when voters face immediate economic pressures or when short-term economic gains are promised. This implies that while voters recognize the value of long-term policies, short-term concerns (e.g., job losses or inflation) tend to take precedence in election outcomes (Paret & Runciman, 2023). A participant held:

*"I don't care about the religion, tribe or where a leader comes from. What I would consider is how the leader addresses what is most critical in the society. Some of the issues are immediate and others are long term. There are urgent matters requiring a swift attention and at the same time there are other matters that need long duration to be implemented".*  
(Participant P110, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).

The moderate influence by the factors of religion, ethnicity, a leader giving out money and a leader identifying with the problems of the voters, is an indication that the voters are more than personal.

The findings on personal events and voting behaviour contradicts a study done on ethnicity as a factor. Kisaka & Nyadera, (2019) held that people tend to evaluate actions of their own group or team members much more favorably than those of outgroup members. This explains why regional party identification is experienced in Kenya. The result has been seeing others as political outsiders who have nothing in common with the in-group members. This explains why political activities are performed in a common way by the people in a particular region. The implication is that there were those who feel a sense of discrimination against their cultural group. The advocates of identity voting drew attention to a citizen's sense of belonging to cultural collectivities like ethnic and linguistic groups. This would lead to blocs of voting.

The study finally assessed how epistemic issues would influence the voting behaviour of the voters. The findings of the study indicated that leaders who would challenge their opponents would get moderate favor (mean of 3.13) from the voters. The model of Newman and Sheth describes epistemic issues as those relating 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. The model further holds that voters with a high epistemic motivation may actively seek information, fact-check claims, and engage more deeply with political discourse.

In the model, the implication was that a voter's intrinsic motivation to understand and explore political ideas, would lead them to be more discerning and potentially open to new or alternative candidates and policies. This implies that the spread of misinformation (false or misleading information without intent to deceive) and disinformation (deliberate falsehoods) from





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opponent candidates has a profound impact on voting behavior. Voters may be swayed by inaccurate or misleading information, which can distort their perceptions of candidates, policies, or political events (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). The factor here is about the presence of other candidates. Kulachai et. al. (2023) asserts that voters' preferences are influenced by the characteristics and positions of all candidates in the political race. In multi-candidate systems, voters may reassess their choices based on candidates' stances on key issues, leadership qualities, and electability. This dynamic can lead to shifts in voting behavior as voters seek candidates who align most closely with their preferences. A participant held:

*“Sometimes we get confusing information from the leaders who are opposing each other. I tend sometimes to believe some of the things they say about each other since I believe they know each other well. Wanachafuana sana, (they taint the image of each other greatly). All in all, I evaluate the information and know where to cast my vote. However, I know that many voters make haste decisions that keep changing till the day of elections to the point that they are not very sure of who to vote for” (Participant P104, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).*

The presence of other candidates in a political race matter to the voters since they have many options to choose from. The indication was that there is a room for counter campaigns. This could be rooted on the fact that the voters may have gone above the mere candidate image and are being led by issues and policies. This agrees with other findings in this study, that indicate that the voters are more influenced by the issues and policies as addressed by the leaders, more than just blind voting, based on candidate preference. It contradicts the study done in South Africa on the voting behavior, which found that the voting

behavior was influenced by party support, identification, and loyalty (Yolanda, et. al, 2016). Here it was seen that political workers are unaware of the party's program or charter, and many voters have blind love for leaders. Their personalities, roles or characters influence them. So, parties and leaders influence their voting attitude without much considerations to other factors.

### Conclusion

Studying the voting behaviour of voters in Nakuru County through the Newman and Sheth model is significant because it offers deeper insights into the underlying motivations that drive electoral choices beyond the common assumptions of ethnic loyalty or party allegiance. By analyzing how voters in Nakuru respond to issues, policies, candidate images, social identities, and emotional appeals, this study demonstrates that the Newman and Sheth framework provides a robust lens for explaining voter behaviour in the Kenyan context.

This inquiry contributes not only to the academic discourse on electoral behaviour but also to practical applications. Insights from the study can guide political parties, policymakers, and civic educators in promoting issue-based politics, strengthening democratic participation, and reducing reliance on divisive identity politics. Applying the Newman and Sheth model in Nakuru County thus offers both theoretical and practical contributions to understanding voting behaviour in emerging democracies. Nevertheless, the study had limitations that should be acknowledged. It was geographically confined to Nakuru County,



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which means the findings may not be fully generalizable to other counties in Kenya where cultural, ethnic, and political dynamics differ. The exclusive reliance on the Newman and Sheth model may have excluded insights from other theoretical frameworks that also explain voter behaviour. Additionally, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, which may have constrained participants from fully expressing politically sensitive opinions. Finally, the cross-sectional design limited the ability to capture changes in voter behaviour across multiple election cycles or in response to specific political events over time. Future studies could address these limitations by adopting longitudinal designs, incorporating multiple theoretical perspectives, and including diverse geographic regions for broader comparative insights.

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