Ad hoc report *28 Oct 2026*

Digital Pulse: How the IEBC is discussed online ahead of 2027



This snapshot looks at how the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) was discussed on YouTube and TikTok between May and October 2026: whether the conversation was critical or supportive, what drove it and who was speaking. It is part of a planned series of social media analytical reports by zKe and its local partners that seek to support an integrated online/offline approach to peacebuilding and conflict prevention ahead of the 2027 elections.

1. Executive Summary

The following are the main findings of zKe's analysis of 688 YouTube and TikTok posts that named the IEBC in their title or caption between 1 May and 28 October 2026:

Key Finding 1: **Most posts simply reported what the IEBC was doing, but where a post took a side, it was usually critical.**
Of the 688 posts, 53% (362) were neutral reports of announcements, preparations and rulings. Of the 326 that took a position, 63% (204) were critical and 37% (122) supportive. Critical posts also drew 75% of the views these posts received (~952,000, against ~309,000 for supportive posts).

Key Finding 2: **Criticism and support for the IEBC followed political lines.**
Opposition figures were behind 59% of the critical posts (120 of 204), which drew 77% of all views of critical posts. Government and ruling coalition figures were behind 68% of the supportive posts (83 of 122). Of the posts carrying the IEBC's own messages, 89% were informational, and it rarely answered its critics.

Key Finding 3: **The Ol Kalou by-election briefly turned criticism into praise from both sides.**
In the run-up to the 16 July vote, 83% of the posts that took a side were critical, driven by claims of bias and the IEBC's threat to postpone the poll. After the opposition DCP won the seat, leaders on both sides praised the commission, and ruling coalition figures later used that praise to argue that the IEBC can be trusted in 2027.

Key Finding 4: **Gachagua's allegations in late August set off a run of government statements defending the IEBC.**
In the two weeks after Rigathi Gachagua alleged a plot involving the IEBC vice chair and questioned the election technology tender, government and ruling coalition figures appeared in 60 posts defending the commission, most repeating the same message that politicians should keep off the IEBC and let it work. August was the only month in which most posts that took a side were supportive (52%).

Key Finding 5: **From September, distrust shifted to the voter register and to how results will be transmitted.**
Claims about dead voters, voters brought in from Uganda and an unaudited register made September the most critical month: 70% of the posts that took a side were critical (75 of 107). In late October, Parliament's vote to remove the IEBC's legal duty to livestream results drew some of the highest reach of the period, but the anger was aimed at MPs rather than at the commission.

2. Background and context

The IEBC, chaired by Erastus Ethekon, is preparing for a general election on 10 August 2027. During the period under review it asked Parliament for more money, set campaign spending limits, began procuring new election technology and ran by-elections. The main events were:

- **9 to 16 July:** the IEBC threatened to postpone the Ol Kalou by-election over violence and bribery, then ran it on 16 July. The DCP candidate, Sammy Kamau, won.
- **24 to 27 August:** Rigathi Gachagua alleged a plot over the electoral system and questioned the election technology tender. The IEBC rejected his claims.
- **Mid-September:** the IEBC summoned UDA Secretary General Hassan Omar over remarks about dead voters. He appeared before its code of conduct committee on 21 October.
- **19 September:** the High Court ordered the IEBC to open the voter register to political parties and observers.
- **28 September:** KTN stood by its investigation into alleged voter smuggling from Uganda, which the IEBC and the DCI denied.
- **23 October:** MPs passed the Elections (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, 2024, removing the IEBC's legal duty to livestream election results.

3. Methodology

The analysis used Common Data, a social media observatory that monitors YouTube, TikTok, Bluesky, Telegram and podcasts. It collected all posts in Common Data's index that mentioned the IEBC by name or abbreviation between 1 May and 28 October 2026, the six months of data the platform holds, searching both the text of posts and automatic transcripts of what is said in videos.

This returned 1,502 YouTube and TikTok videos, with ~12.3 million views between them. Of these, 54% (814) mentioned the commission only in passing, in speech or in a long description. The analysis focuses

on the 688 posts that named the IEBC in their title or caption (567 on YouTube and 121 on TikTok, ~2.5 million views), in which the commission is the subject; 77% of them (530) came from channels on the project's Kenya election monitoring lists. Each post was reviewed and classified by tone towards the IEBC, speaker and issue.

Bluesky added ~110 posts about the IEBC, almost all from automated headline feeds with little or no engagement, and no podcast episode in the Common Data catalogue mentioned the Kenyan commission. Neither is analysed further.

How was each post classified?
Critical: questions the IEBC's independence, competence, preparedness or integrity, accuses it of bias or inaction, or warns it against rigging.
Supportive: defends the IEBC, praises its work or expresses confidence in it, including the commission's own rebuttals of claims made against it.
Neutral: reports the IEBC's activities, announcements or rulings, or calls on it to act, without judging it.
Speaker: the person or group whose view the post carries, usually the politician quoted in the title.

The analysis has the following limitations:

- Common Data does not cover Facebook, X, Instagram or WhatsApp, where much of Kenya's political conversation takes place, and Telegram was not available to this account.
- Posts were classified from their titles and captions, not from the full video or the comments beneath it, so the reaction of viewers is not measured.
- Six broadcasters (Citizen TV, KTN, NTV, KBC, K24 and Inooro TV) posted 491 of the 567 YouTube posts. Their headlines usually report what a politician said, so the tone measured is mostly that of the person quoted.
- Each post was classified once, by a single reviewer, without a second check.
- Views show reach, not agreement, and were recorded at the time of collection.

4. Key findings

Finding 1: **Most posts were neutral, but criticism outweighed support where posts took a side**

Of the 688 posts, 53% (362) reported the IEBC's work without judging it: preparations for by-elections, budget requests, campaign spending limits, voter education and warnings to politicians. Of the 326 posts that took a position, 63% (204) were critical and 37% (122) were supportive. The gap is wider when measured by reach: critical posts drew 75% of the views of posts that took a position (~952,000, against ~309,000 for supportive posts).

TikTok was more opinionated than YouTube: 31% of TikTok posts were neutral (38 of 121), against 57% on YouTube (324 of 567). TikTok clips mostly carry a politician's words in the caption, while broadcasters' YouTube titles more often report events.

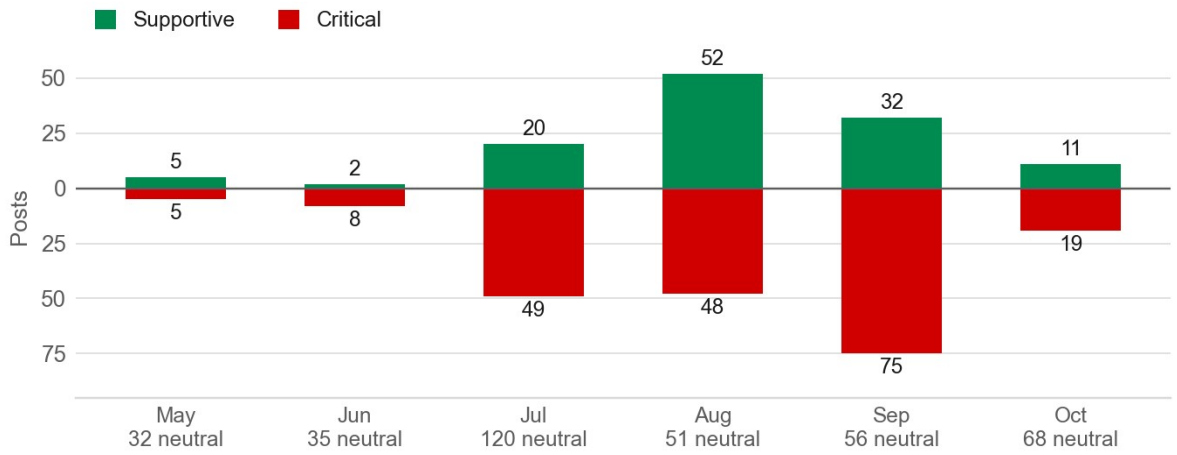


Figure 1: Critical and supportive posts about the IEBC by month, May to October 2026 (Source: YouTube and TikTok via Common Data)

Finding 2: **Criticism and support followed political lines, and the IEBC rarely answered its critics**

Opposition figures were the main source of criticism. They were behind 59% of the critical posts (120 of 204), and those posts drew 77% of all views of critical posts (~735,000). The most-viewed was Fred Matiang'i's warning that "The IEBC is walking the country into a crisis" (104,868 views), followed by Ndindi Nyoro asking "IEBC, are your commissioners clear minded that whatever is happening in OL Kalou is the right thing?" (89,600 views) and Rigathi Gachagua's promise to expose a plot by President Ruto, CS Hassan Joho and the IEBC vice chair over the electoral system (67,600 views).

Government and ruling coalition figures were behind 68% of the supportive posts (83 of 122). They rarely criticised the commission (9 posts), and six of those came from Health CS Aden Duale, who told the IEBC on 6 September to put its act together and warned commissioners against taking their duties lightly. The opposition's rare praise came after Ol Kalou (Finding 3) and in late October, when the united opposition warned Parliament against interfering with the IEBC's independence.

The IEBC itself was the speaker in 246 posts, 89% of them (219) neutral announcements. It rejected Gachagua's claims about the technology tender and ruled out ending the live streaming of results, but such rebuttals were few (27 posts) and reached far fewer people than the attacks they answered, with ~74,000 views in total. When media and commentators took a side, 90% of their posts were critical (38 of 42), mostly questioning the IEBC's readiness and the public's trust in it.

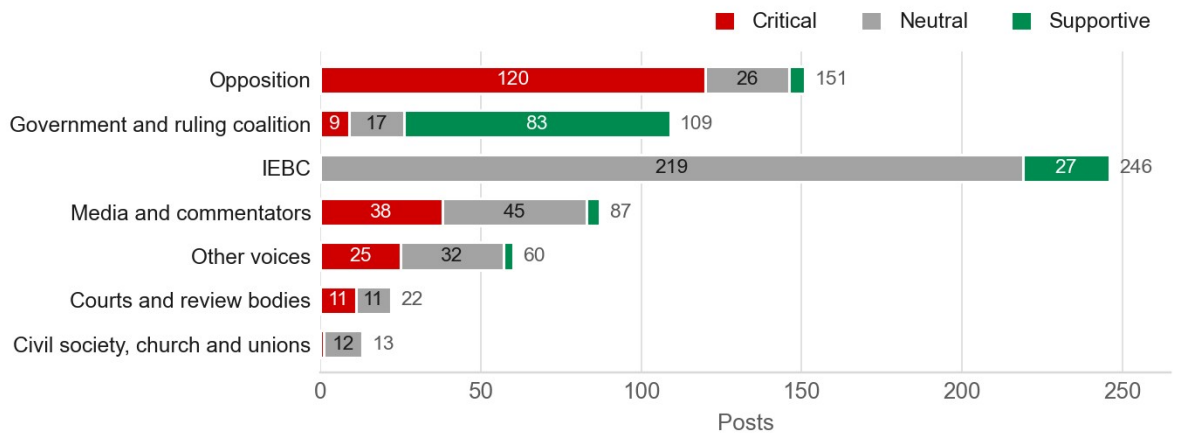


Figure 2: Tone of posts about the IEBC by who is speaking, May to October 2026 (Source: YouTube and TikTok via Common Data)

Finding 3: **Ol Kalou: criticism before the vote, praise from both sides after it**

The Ol Kalou by-election on 16 July, which KTN described as the IEBC's first big test before 2027, made July the busiest month (189 posts). In the run-up, the commission's threat to postpone the vote over violence and bribery drew attacks from across the opposition: Gachagua said it could not be trusted to deliver free and fair elections (36,276 views), and Kalonzo Musyoka told it "You have an opportunity to prove you are not a William Ruto commission". Between 1 and 16 July, 83% of the posts that took a side were critical (45 of 54).

The tone flipped once the DCP won. DCP Senator John Methu said "We are very happy and very satisfied" (52,800 views), and ruling coalition figures turned the result into an argument for trusting the commission. Gladys Wanga told the opposition "IEBC asanteni sana because you have delivered a credible by-election, tukishinda 2027 msiseme tena IEBC iko na shida yoyote!" (IEBC, thank you very much because you have delivered a credible by-election; if we win in 2027, do not say again that the IEBC has a problem), and Oscar Sudi said "IEBC haijawahikuwa na makosa" (the IEBC has never been at fault) in a clip with 62,700 views. Between 17 and 31 July, 73% of the posts that took a side were supportive (11 of 15). Two months later, Ayub Savula said "We were very happy to lose the Ol Kalou by-election so that the credibility of IEBC can be accepted by the opposition".

Finding 4: **Gachagua's late-August allegations set off a run of statements defending the IEBC**

On 24 August Gachagua promised to reveal a plot over the electoral system and alleged a conspiracy to award the IEBC's technology tender to a South Korean company. Kalonzo Musyoka had already warned the IEBC on 10 August that he would reject any tainted election technology (42,500 views). The IEBC said the tender was open and transparent.

The ruling side answered quickly and consistently. Between 24 August and 8 September, government and ruling coalition figures appeared in 60 posts defending the commission, 72% of all their supportive posts

in the six months. Speaker Moses Wetang'ula told politicians to "respect the referee", Deputy President Kithure Kindiki warned the opposition against claims of a rigging plot and Majority Leader Kimani Ichung'wah told it to keep off IEBC operations, with similar messages from Aaron Cheruiyot, Farouk Kibet, Kipchumba Murkomen and Musalia Mudavadi. As a result, August was the only month in which most posts that took a side were supportive (52%, 52 of 100).

The defence did not end the dispute. On 4 September the procurement review board ordered the IEBC to revise the tender over procurement shortcomings, and opposition leaders accused the commission of bias the same day.

Finding 5: **From September, distrust shifted to the voter register and to how results will be transmitted**

September was the most critical month: 70% of the posts that took a side were critical (75 of 107). After UDA Secretary General Hassan Omar's remarks about dead voters, the opposition asked the IEBC to clean up the voter register (22,297 views). KTN's investigation into alleged voter smuggling from Uganda, which the IEBC and DCI denied, was the month's most-viewed critical post (40,894 views), and Kalonzo Musyoka told Kenyans "Safari hii haitawezekana, Bwana Ruto na IEBC, muibe kura" (This time it will not be possible, Mr Ruto and IEBC, for you to steal votes). Between 12 September and 1 October, the critical share rose to 87% (46 of 53).

In October the focus moved from the commission to Parliament. After MPs voted on 23 October to remove the IEBC's legal duty to livestream election results, a Maisha TV video on calls for Gen Z protests against the bill drew 103,265 views, the second most-viewed YouTube post of the period, and another asked "MPs Kill IEBC Livestream of Results: Plan to Rig 2027 Elections?" (21,549 views). Most of these posts were neutral towards the IEBC itself: the suspicion was aimed at MPs, and opposition leaders warned Parliament against interfering with the commission's independence.

5. What to watch

- **The voter register:** claims about dead voters, foreign voters and voter transfers drove criticism from September and are likely to return with each registration drive.
- **Results transmission:** the livestreaming dispute ties the IEBC's credibility to a legal change it did not make. How the commission explains result transmission under the new law is likely to shape rigging claims ahead of 2027.
- **A partisan referee:** because criticism and support follow political lines, each IEBC decision is likely to be read as favouring one side. The commission's own messages, mostly announcements, reach far fewer people than the attacks on it.
- **Coming tests:** the IEBC's ruling on Hassan Omar, the election technology contract, further by-elections and its funding gap are the next likely flashpoints.