



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

▶ AFRICA

## BACKGROUND

**Land and Climate.** Covering 224,961 square miles (582,650 square kilometers), Kenya is about the size of Texas. It is situated on the equator. The semidesert northern plains are hot and arid. The population in that part of the country usually practices nomadic pastoralism, moving from one area to another to take advantage of seasonal grazing patterns. In the southeast, near the coast, the tropical climate is hot and humid. The western highlands are bisected by the fertile Rift Valley. The climate is moderate in the rich agricultural highlands. Wildlife is abundant and diverse. Lake Turkana (Lake Rudolf) lies near the Chalbi Desert, and Lake Victoria overlaps the southwest border. Mount Kenya rises in the center of the country to 17,058 feet (5,199 meters). “Long rains” from April to June are usually reliable and heavy. They are followed by “short rains” from October to November. The country is generally dry and windy from December to March.

**History.** The first inhabitants of Kenya were hunting groups (Dorobo) who lived on the area’s vast plains. They mixed with Bantu peoples who had migrated from the south. By the 15th century the Bantu covered much of eastern Africa. More than half of Kenya’s current ethnic groups have Bantu origins. Other groups (Nilotic) migrated south from North Africa. Today’s descendants of the Nilotic people are the Luo and Turkana. These mixed peoples eventually developed the Kiswahili language.

In 1498, Portuguese explorers established trading posts on the coast. Arabs drove out the Portuguese in 1729 and established their own trading posts. After 1740, Arabs ruled the Kenyan coast from the island of Zanzibar. In 1887, the British East Africa Company leased the coast from the sultan of Zanzibar. Kenya became a British protectorate in 1895 and was

organized as a crown colony in 1920. The British introduced Christianity and brought people from India and other parts of its empire to work on large infrastructure projects, such as the railroad.

Following a period of violent partisan uprisings (the Mau-Mau Rebellion) in the 1950s, Great Britain granted Kenya independence in 1963. It remained in the Commonwealth as a sovereign republic. Jomo Kenyatta, leader of the independence struggle, served as the first president until his death in 1978. He formed a strong central government under one political party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU). He was followed by Daniel Toroitich arap Moi. In 1982, Moi declared KANU the only legal political party, citing a need to avoid having political parties based on tribes. All political candidates had to register with KANU to be eligible for office.

Under international pressure, Moi opened the country to multiparty democracy in 1992 and adopted a two-term limit for the president. A fragmented opposition failed to wrest power from KANU in 1992 and 1997, although most observers declared the balloting unfair due to vote rigging and political harassment. Politicians also stirred ethnic conflict as a means of intimidating voters. In the western Rift Valley alone, more than 1,500 people died as a result of ethnic violence.

In late 2002, Moi prepared to stand down as required by the constitution’s term limit, but he forced KANU to select Uhuru Kenyatta (son of Jomo Kenyatta) as the party’s candidate in the approaching presidential election. Controversy surrounding Moi’s decision led to divisions within KANU. Many of its leaders joined with opposition parties to form the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), which selected Mwai Kibaki as its candidate. In December 2002, Kibaki won the presidency

## Kenya

with 62 percent of the vote and NARC enjoyed a landslide victory in parliamentary elections, ending four decades of KANU rule. Since taking office, Kibaki has sought to reverse the nation's economic decline, combat corruption, reduce unemployment, provide free public education, and improve roads and other infrastructure.

### THE PEOPLE

**Population.** Kenya's population of 31.6 million is growing at 1.3 percent annually. Nairobi, the capital, is home to about two million people, but less than 25 percent of all Kenyans live in large urban areas. The population is concentrated in the southern two-thirds of the country, where the majority resides in rural towns and villages.

Although 99 percent of the population is African, it is divided among at least 47 distinct ethnic groups that developed largely along linguistic lines. The largest of these groups include the Kikuyu (22 percent), Luhya (14), Luo (13), Kalenjin (12), Kamba (11), Kisii (6), and Meru (6). Smaller groups include the Embu, Maasai, Mijikenda, Samburu, Somali, Taita, Teso, Turkana, and others. About 1 percent of the population consists of Europeans, Asians, and Arabs.

**Language.** English and Kiswahili (also called Swahili) are Kenya's official languages. English is widely used in business, education, and government. Kiswahili was chosen as the national language over other native tongues because of its linguistic commonality with Kenya's other Bantu-based languages. Kiswahili is promoted to encourage national unity. Each ethnic group speaks its own native tongue and communicates with other groups in Kiswahili or English.

**Religion.** The majority of Kenyans are Christians. About 40 percent belong to various Protestant churches and 30 percent are Roman Catholic. Approximately 6 percent are Muslim. Most Muslims live along the coast and in the northeast. About 10 percent of the people follow indigenous belief systems or nontraditional Christian faiths.

**General Attitudes.** Kenyans are proud of their cultural heritage and their nation's accomplishments. They respect the national flag. When and wherever it is raised or lowered, people stop to observe the short ceremony before moving on. Kenyans are warm and friendly. The family is society's most important group, followed by the tribe. Failing to maintain close ties with the extended family is considered rebellious behavior. Family needs take precedence over personal interests. Individuals traditionally share their wealth with poorer family members. For instance, a man with adequate finances may be expected to pay school fees for his less-fortunate brother's children. Wealthier individuals are also expected to help their community. Unfortunately, with current economic strains and the loss of tradition, many middle-class people resent taking care of extended family members. Land ownership is a valued indicator of social status. For some groups, ownership of cattle, sheep, and goats is also an indicator of wealth.

Kenyans take pride in their efforts to preserve African wildlife. Thirty percent of Kenya's wildlife lives on several million acres of national reserves. Kenyan preservation values come from an ancient heritage that emphasized coexistence with animals. By the mid-1990s, the once-decimated elephant population had made a strong comeback and other animal groups were thriving. However, success has its drawbacks; elephants and other wildlife are increasingly responsible for crop destruction, human deaths, and other damage.

**Personal Appearance.** Kenyans dress conservatively, particularly in rural areas. Western-style clothing, with some African variations, is the norm. Imported secondhand clothing from Europe and North America is very popular and affordable; an entire commercial industry has developed around its trade. Light fabrics and short sleeves are common because of the warm climate. Sleeveless dresses or blouses are considered immodest.

Only children, tourists, and elderly men wear shorts. Women usually wear dresses, but many young urban women wear pants. Women often wear a *kanga* (long, colorful, cotton cloth) as a skirt, to cover their clothes, or to shield themselves from rain and wind. Mothers use a *kanga* to carry children on their backs. Rural and some urban women wear scarves. Small groups such as the Maasai, Samburu, and Turkana retain traditional dress.

### CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

**Greetings.** Each ethnic group generally uses a unique variety of salutations for different age groups and situations. However, a handshake is common and important throughout the country. Supporting the right forearm with the left hand while shaking shows special respect for a leader or elder. Kenyans are friendly and greet others with warmth and politeness. They often ask about each other's family and welfare. In coastal areas, a traditional Kiswahili greeting is *Jambo!* (Greetings!). *Habari gani?* (What is the news?) or just *Habari?* is common in noncoastal areas. The usual response is *Mzuri* (Good) or *Salama* (Peaceful). English greetings are also acceptable. Upon departing, Kenyans might say *Tutaonana* (We will see each other), or in the evening, *Lala salama* (Sleep peacefully). Maasai children greet elders with a slight bow; the elder responds by placing an open palm on the child's head.

**Gestures.** Kenyans pass and accept items with the right hand or both hands. Using the left hand alone is improper. The verbal "tch-tch" or a "tss-tss" sound expresses displeasure. Pointing at someone with the index finger is rude. One beckons by waving all fingers of the hand. People often point by extending the lower lip or nodding the head in the intended direction. Approval may be shown with both thumbs extended up. It is improper to touch an elder. It is often considered improper to photograph another person without permission. Public displays of affection (including holding hands) are not acceptable in most areas, although they are increasingly common in Nairobi. Eye contact is important, as people are more willing to trust a person who will look them in the eye.

**Visiting.** Because of strong family ties and friendships, visiting is a common activity among Kenyans. Sunday is a popular day for making visits. Most visits are unannounced; people often drop by for conversation and a cup of tea. No rules exist about how long a visit lasts, but it is impolite for a host to ask guests to leave. Hosts endeavor to make guests comfortable and they nearly always serve tea. Enjoying afternoon tea is a daily custom throughout the country.

Urban visitors might bring flowers and tea leaves to their hosts. Rural people bring edible gifts such as sugar, instant coffee, flour, or cornmeal. Such gifts are presented in a *kiondo* (Kikuyu word for a woven bag). The host returns the bag at the end of the visit, having placed in it gifts for the visitor. It is impolite to return an empty bag. It is also impolite to say good-bye at the door. Hosts commonly walk with departing visitors for some distance before returning home.

**Eating.** When guests are invited to dinner, they usually social-

ize with a host while final preparations are being made. After the meal, they stay for more conversation. Depending on the situation and family tradition, people may eat their meal with the right hand or with utensils. Rural Kenyans more often use their right hand, but urban residents do so only for certain foods. When diners use utensils, they hold a knife in the right hand and a spoon in the left. One washes one's hands before and after eating, often in a bowl at the table. In some traditional families, children do not eat with adults. Men are often served first. Among the Samburu, warriors avoid eating in the presence of women. European cuisine is prevalent in major cities, and Nairobi and Mombassa have restaurants with a wide variety of international cuisine.

## LIFESTYLE

**Family.** The average family is very large. Kenyans are often close to their uncles, aunts, and cousins. Children in some ethnic groups call a maternal aunt *younger mother* or *older mother* depending on the aunt's age in relation to the child's mother. A paternal aunt is called *aunt*. Likewise, a paternal uncle is *younger father* or *older father*, while a maternal uncle is *uncle*. Urban families tend to be smaller, and nuclear-family households are becoming more common. Rural households usually contain more than one generation. The family's youngest adult son cares for aging parents. Because the family is a great source of pride, most Kenyans expect to marry and have children. Women care for the home, children, and garden. Most homes do not have modern appliances, so cooking can be a time-consuming chore; water and firewood must often be carried from long distances. Men do not do household chores, and they rarely cook.

An increasing number of educated women are choosing to avoid traditional roles for wives in favor of marriages in which both parents work. In such circumstances, the family will hire someone, often a young female relative, to take care of the children. Urban women comprise one-third of the labor force, one-third of college students, and as many as half of all graduate students. Rural women are responsible for most agricultural output but own very little land themselves.

**Dating and Marriage.** Dating starts at about age 18 in cities but is still rather uncommon in villages. Usually young people choose their partners, but some marriages are still arranged. Men and women usually marry in their early twenties. Wedding details are handled largely by the families. The groom's family pays the bride's family a dowry (traditionally livestock but now most often cash) as a way to thank them for raising the bride and to compensate them for losing her.

**Diet.** The most common meats in Kenya are goat, beef, lamb, chicken, and fish. Milk, *ugali* (a stiff dough made from cornmeal, millet, sorghum, or cassava), *uji* (porridge made from *ugali* ingredients), red bean stew, *mandazi* (a doughnutlike food), *githeri* (corn and beans), and *chapati* (a flat bread) are staple foods. *Sukuma wiki* (collard greens) is grown in nearly every garden and is a popular side dish to *ugali*. Abundant fruits include pineapples, mangoes, oranges, bananas, plantains, and papaya. Sweet potatoes, avocados, and cassava are also common.

**Recreation.** Soccer is the most popular team sport in Kenya. Soccer leagues exist throughout the nation. Highly organized but poorly equipped leagues operate in even the poorest areas. They are valued for giving youth a chance to develop discipline, teamwork, and physical skills. Track-and-field activities join soccer as Kenya's national sports. The nation has pro-

duced world-famous long-distance runners and other athletes. Urban residents might play field hockey, cricket, or rugby. Many Kenyans enjoy a traditional strategy game (sometimes called *bao* or *ajua*) played with pebbles or seeds. Storytelling, riddles, and proverbs are also popular.

**The Arts.** Music in Kenya's cities is heavily influenced by Western imports, particularly gospel, as well as Congolese *lingala* music. One of the most popular locally-developed styles is the contemporary dance music known as *benga*. First popularized during the 1970s, *benga* fuses traditional rhythms of the Luo ethnic group with modern instruments such as the electric guitar. In rural areas, homemade drums and guitars commonly accompany dancing. The style of indigenous music and dance varies by region. *Taraab* music has Arab roots and developed in coastal areas. The Maasai are renowned for singing multipart harmonies. The Luo play the *nyatiti*, an eight-string lyre, to accompany lyrics about fables and legends. The Kenya National Theater in Nairobi offers drama, concerts, and dance programs.

**Holidays.** Kenya celebrates New Year's Day; Easter (Friday–Monday); Labor Day (1 May); Madaraka Day (1 June), marking the birth of the republic; Kenyatta Day (20 Oct.), celebrating Jomo Kenyatta's arrest in 1952 for opposing British authorities; *Jamhuri* Day, or Independence Day (12 Dec.); Christmas; and Boxing Day (26 Dec.). Boxing Day comes from the British tradition of presenting small boxed gifts to service workers, tradesmen, and in the past, servants. It is now primarily a day for visiting family and friends. Special parades, speeches, meals, and church services often mark official holidays.

For the Islamic population, the country also observes the three-day feast at the end of the month of *Ramadan*, called *Idul-Fitr*. The first day is an official holiday for Muslims, but celebrations on the next two days occur after working hours. During *Ramadan*, Muslims do not eat or drink from sunrise to dusk. They eat meals and visit one another after the sun goes down.

**Commerce.** Business and government hours are generally from 8 a.m. to noon or 1 p.m. and from 2 to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Some businesses are also open Saturday mornings. While prices are fixed in urban shopping areas, bargaining is common in rural markets and at roadside stands. Open-air markets operate twice a week, and roadside stands sell fresh fruits and vegetables every day.

## SOCIETY

**Government.** Kenya is led by a president (currently Mwai Kibaki), who is head of state and head of government. The president is directly elected to a five-year term and selects a vice president (currently Moody Awori) from the 224 members of the National Assembly (*Bunge*). Members of the National Assembly also serve five-year terms. Voters directly elect 210 members, the president appoints 12 members, and two positions are reserved for the National Assembly's speaker and the attorney general. All citizens may vote at age 18. The nation is divided into eight provinces, each with a local government.

**Economy.** Kenya's economy has suffered badly in recent years from political turmoil, market reforms, global recession, rampant corruption, and other events. Although tight fiscal policies led to moderate economic growth in the 1990s, severe drought and a lack of foreign investment have caused increased unemployment and higher inflation. The nation is

## Kenya

dependant on loans from international donors such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The revitalization of the economy will depend on greater social stability. Although the per capita gross domestic product is double what it was in the 1960s, most people still struggle to meet basic needs.

Kenya's economy is based on agriculture, which provides nearly 65 percent of all export earnings and employs 75 percent of the workforce. The chief cash crops are coffee, tea, and horticultural products. Other agricultural products include pyrethrum (a flower used to make insecticides), livestock, corn, wheat, rice, cassava, and sugarcane. Kenya traditionally has been self-sufficient in food production but recently has been unable to feed its population. Industries focus on small-scale manufactured items.

The tourist industry is a major contributor to the economy, but it has been negatively impacted by general insecurity in major towns and highly publicized attacks on tourists. Beach resorts and diverse wildlife are the primary attractions. The currency is the Kenyan shilling (KES).

**Transportation and Communications.** Kenya has good international and domestic air links. Travel by train or bus is slow and unreliable due to neglect of the nation's infrastructure. Most rural roads are unpaved. Large buses and *matatus* (small pickup trucks with cabs on the back) run throughout the country, but are often driven recklessly, with frequent accidents. Rural people rarely have cars, so for distances that they cannot walk they rely on *matatus*, which run on regular routes but without schedules. Taxis are plentiful in Nairobi. Traffic moves on the left side of the road. Mombasa is the primary shipping port, serving a number of East African countries.

Kenya has one of Africa's best telecommunications systems. The phone network is expanding, driven largely by mobile phone technology. Most Kenyans listen to radio broadcasts in both Kiswahili and English. The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation is a private corporation indirectly controlled by the government. Five private television and three private radio stations offer extensive programming. There are three daily national newspapers.

**Education.** Primary school is compulsory and free for ages six to fourteen. Secondary schooling lasts for four years. Most children are enrolled. In 2003, the new government began investing heavily to ensure adequate facilities for all primary-age children. Rural children are first taught in Kiswahili (or sometimes their native tongue). English is introduced in the first and second grades and is the language of instruction for all subjects (except Kiswahili language classes) after the third grade. Urban schoolchildren usually begin instruction in English.

Public schoolteachers are employed by the government. However, in recent years, schools in general (and especially rural schools) have suffered from considerable under-funding. Some teachers take second jobs to supplement inadequate salaries. Private schools are common; parents are often willing to pay to enable their children to get a better education. Boarding school is common, even from an early age, and the hunt for schools in which to place one's children is a regular undertaking for parents. A university education is available to compe-

### DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank . . . . .	146 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women . . . . .	115 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita . . . . .	\$980
Adult literacy rate . . . . .	90 percent (male); 77 (female)
Infant mortality rate . . . . .	63 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy . . . . .	45 (male); 48 (female)

tent students and to those who can afford the tuition.

**Health.** Only about half of all Kenyans have access to basic health care. In rural areas, people often avoid government hospitals because they have inadequate medical supplies. A number of private facilities exist for those who can afford them. Rural Kenyans continue to rely on traditional healing methods, although Western medicine is becoming more widely accepted. Infant mortality rates have dropped in recent years. Unfortunately, a high HIV infection rate and deaths occurring from AIDS have lowered overall life expectancy by nearly 20 years. Diseases such as malaria are prevalent in low-lying regions.

### AT A GLANCE

#### Events and Trends.

- A constitutional review commission was supposed to have finished drafting a revised constitution by 2003, but the process has been delayed by disagreements about how much power the president should hold. Some politicians wish to lessen the president's authority by establishing the position of prime minister.
- The IMF reinstated loans to Kenya in 2003 after an interruption of three years. The loans were granted due to President Kibaki's ability to pass anticorruption legislation.
- The government announced in December 2003 that Daniel arap Moi, Kenya's former president, would not be charged during the nation's ongoing anticorruption campaign. However, the government alleges that as much as \$4 billion in public funds may have been stolen during Moi's rule, and other members of his administration are targets of prosecution.
- Although the December 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections were marred by some violence and ballot irregularities, observers declared the elections to be largely free and fair. The governing NARC coalition is comprised of the Democratic Party, the National Party of Kenya, the Liberal Party, and other parties.
- In November 2002, a bomb destroyed an Israeli-owned hotel north of Mombasa, killing 12 people, most of them Kenyans. At the same moment, ground-to-air missiles narrowly missed an Israeli charter aircraft as it took off from Mombasa Airport. The attacks were the most high-profile acts of terrorism to take place in Kenya since the 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi.

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