



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

### Land and Climate

Kenya lies on the east coast of Africa and is bisected by the equator. It covers an area slightly smaller than France or the U.S. state of Texas. Kenya features two of Africa's Great Lakes: Lake Turkana (Lake Rudolf) lies near the Chalbi Desert, and Lake Victoria overlaps the southwestern border. Mount Kenya, the second-highest point in Africa, rises in the center of the country to an elevation of 17,058 feet (5,199 meters).

Kenya is famous for its abundant and diverse wildlife. Species include lion, hyena, leopard, cheetah, elephant, hippopotamus, rhinoceros, wildebeest, zebra, giraffe, buffalo, and impala. National reserves cover several million acres.

The nation's 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. The climate is moderate in the rich agricultural highlands of western Kenya, a region bisected by the fertile Great Rift Valley. In the southeast, near the coast, the tropical climate is hot and humid.

Kenya has two wet seasons. "Long rains" from April to June are usually reliable and heavy. They are followed by "short rains" from October to November. Climate change has affected weather patterns, however, sometimes extending rainy seasons by a month or two. The country is generally dry and windy from December to March. Droughts are a frequent problem.

## History

### Early History

Kenya's archaeological history dates back millions of years, but not much is known about these early inhabitants. Around 2,000 BC, Cushitic-speaking tribes migrated to the region, comprising various hunting and herding groups that lived on the area's vast plains. Soon after, tribes arrived from the Nile Valley, settling the highlands and plains. The Bantu peoples migrated from the south around 1,000 BC, and by the 15th century AD, Bantu tribes covered much of eastern Africa. Throughout ancient Kenya, individual tribes were led by tribal elders. The only centralized form of government was found in the Wanga Kingdom, which was formed in the 11th century and endured decades of colonial rule.

### Battle for the Coast and Inland Control

The 9th through 19th centuries marked a millennium of foreign influence in the region. Arab explorers set up trading posts along the east African coast, including on Manda Island, which is a part of present-day Kenya. Towns grew around these settled areas and Muslim communities developed. Indigenous peoples often worked as laborers or were enslaved. In 1498, Portuguese explorers arrived and established trading posts of their own, using military prowess to quickly dominate the coast. Arabs drove out the Portuguese in 1729 and after 1740 ruled the Kenyan coast from the island of Zanzibar.

While the coast was controlled by foreigners, inland was dominated by the Maasai, a Nilotic ethnic group. The Maasai conducted raids and formed warring parties against other Indigenous tribes, forcing them to take refuge in the mountains and forests. The Maasai ruled the interior region

until they were forced out of the Rift Valley by British forces in 1904 after being weakened by smallpox epidemics and diseased herds.

### **Colonization**

The 1885 Berlin Conference set in motion European colonization of East Africa, dividing the region into territories to be ruled by Britain, France, and Germany. The British East African Company took control of the British Empire's interests in the region and in 1887 leased the coast from the sultan of Zanzibar. The area of present-day Kenya became a British protectorate in 1895, and British farmers were encouraged to settle its highlands, displacing Africans to infertile land. Because Africans refused to work for the British, thousands of indentured laborers from India and other parts of the empire were brought in to work on large infrastructure projects, including the Kenya-Uganda Railway, which was completed by 1903. By the time World War I began in 1914, thousands of British citizens lived in the East Africa Protectorate, which became a British military base used throughout the war. Thousands of Africans were forced to serve in the British army, and many died. Drought and famine also impacted the population.

In 1920, the British made the East Africa Protectorate a colony and renamed it Kenya. The colonial government pledged to focus on Kenyans' well-being, but no improvements were made. While settlers could participate in the government, Africans and Asians were barred from direct political involvement despite their creation of political groups and demands for representation. However, they were coerced to join British forces once again during World War II, when the colony's borders were threatened by German, Italian, and Japanese interests. The economy, which had recovered in the wake of World War I, again declined. In 1944, as the war was winding down, the colonial government finally permitted an African representative in the legislature; by 1951, eight Africans sat on the Legislative Council.

### **Mau Mau Uprising and Independence**

Kenyans were not satisfied with their political representation and became increasingly agitated under colonial rule. They established organizations to fight against the British. One of these groups, the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, began attacking the British in 1952, which led to a period of violent uprisings known as the Mau Mau Rebellion, the first and largest uprising of its kind in British Africa. By 1956, as many as 11,000 Africans and 100 British had died. Both sides had committed atrocities. Ultimately, the uprising was successful in influencing the British colonial government, which realized that its control of Kenya was waning. The British enacted land reform, allowed Kenyans to grow coffee, and increased the number of seats on the legislature for elected African members.

Kenyans continued to demand more rights, including universal suffrage, until Britain granted Kenya independence in 1963. Most British and Indian residents of Kenya left the country, settling in Britain. Jomo Kenyatta, leader of the independence movement who was imprisoned at the outset of the Mau Mau Rebellion, served as Kenya's first president until his death in 1978. He formed a strong central government under one political party, the Kenya African

National Union (KANU), which advocated for a socialist society. He was succeeded by Daniel Toroitich arap Moi, whom Kenyatta had groomed as his successor. By this time, multiple political parties had developed along ethnic lines, leading to arguments and violence during later elections.

### **Political Reform and Conflict**

While popular initially, Moi was soon criticized as authoritarian and corrupt. Intolerant of dissent, he strictly maintained one-party rule. 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 2002, divisions within KANU prompted many of its leaders to join with opposition parties to form the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). That same year, NARC candidate Mwai Kibaki secured the presidency with 62 percent of the vote, and NARC won a landslide victory in parliamentary elections, ending four decades of KANU rule.

The following two decades were marked by political controversy and violence. President Kibaki pledged to reverse the nation's economic decline and combat corruption, but his first term was plagued by allegations of graft among senior government officials. When Kibaki narrowly won reelection in 2007, opposition leader Raila Odinga accused him of electoral fraud. The controversy sparked violent clashes in which hundreds of people died. To end the conflict, a power-sharing agreement was signed in which Kibaki remained president and Odinga became prime minister. In the following two controversial elections of 2013 and 2017, Odinga ran for president, losing both times to Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Jomo Kenyatta. Though far less violent than a decade earlier, the 2017 election season included almost one hundred deaths.

### **Kenya Today**

Political instability and corruption continue in Kenya as the country struggles with border control, particularly with Somalia, and political conflict among various ethnic groups. A 2010 constitution included economic and political reforms aimed at reducing political conflict; however, aside from significantly reducing presidential powers, few reforms have been implemented. Kenya's ethnic diversity includes more than two million Somalis, some descendants of those living in the area during colonization and others who sought refuge following the 1991 outbreak of Somalia's civil war. Relations between Kenya and Somalia have been strained since colonial times and remain tense, though in recent years the Kenyan and Somali governments have worked together to fight against al-Shabab, a Somali group affiliated with al-Qaeda. In 2011, Kenyan troops entered Somalia to suppress al-Shabab militants who were raiding settlements along the border. Kenya has since suffered frequent attacks attributed to al-Shabab in which hundreds of people have been killed. The largest was the 2015 attack on a university in Garissa, which killed 148. Human-rights groups have accused Kenyan

security forces of extrajudicial killings and “disappearing” people in their fight against al-Shabab.

Kenya is home to about 500,000 refugees, one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Most come from conflict-ridden Somalia and Sudan. In response to the steady influx of displaced peoples, the Kenyan government has attempted to limit the numbers of refugees in the country, as well as their rights. Although most of these attempts have been blocked by Kenyan courts, the government continues to seek the closure of two refugee camps and the implementation of a repatriation plan. In addition to addressing refugee-related issues, the country is striving to create political unity among Kenya’s many ethnic groups and to grow the economy by expanding infrastructure and increasing trade opportunities.

## THE PEOPLE

### Population

Nearly all of the population is African and is divided among at least 47 distinct ethnic groups, or tribes. The largest of these groups include the Kikuyu (17 percent), Luhya (14 percent), Luo (11 percent), Kalenjin (13 percent), Kamba (10 percent), Kisii (6 percent), and Meru (4 percent). 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.

Each tribe is further divided into clans, or sub-tribes. For example, the Luhya tribe is divided into some 18 clans, which include the Maragoli, Bukusu, Tiriki, Banyala, and Bunyore.

Nairobi, the capital, is home to nearly five million people, but only about 27 percent of all Kenyans live in urban areas. The population is concentrated in the southern two-thirds of the country, where most people reside in rural towns and villages.

### Language

English and Swahili (also called *kiswahili*) are Kenya's official languages. English is widely used in business, education, and government. Swahili is promoted to encourage national unity and was chosen as the national language over other native tongues because of its linguistic commonality with Kenya's other Bantu-based languages. Each ethnic group has its own native tongue, though the use of these ethnic languages is slowly decreasing among younger generations, especially among those raised in urban areas. Communication between ethnic groups usually takes place in Swahili or English. Urban young people sometimes speak Sheng, a mixture of Swahili, English, and Bantu languages.

### Religion

The majority of Kenyans are Christians. Over one-third of Kenyans belong to various Protestant churches. Around 20 percent are Roman Catholic, and around 20 percent are Evangelical. Approximately 11 percent are Muslim. Most Muslims live along the coast and in the northeast. A small

portion of people follow indigenous belief systems or nontraditional Christian faiths.

Members of various Christian churches generally interact peacefully, and different denominations may gather for special prayer meetings during which people pray for a common cause. Some churches are closely involved with political events and sometimes influence how their members vote. Before elections, churches may hold political meetings and invite speakers to address the congregation about political topics.

Indigenous beliefs vary by ethnic group. For example, the Kikuyu pray facing Mount Kenya in the belief that this is the location of Ngai (God). Christians often mix aspects of indigenous religions with their practice of Christianity. For example, upon the death of a loved one, the funeral may include both indigenous and Christian rituals.

### General Attitudes

Kenyans tend to be warm and friendly. They are generally proud of their cultural heritage and their nation's accomplishments. In particular, Kenyans take deep pride in the talent of their athletes, especially their endurance runners, who have won numerous Olympic medals and broken world records.

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 generally 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. With current economic strains and the weakening of tradition, some middle-class people resent taking care of extended family members.

While Kenya's ethnic groups generally coexist peacefully, certain qualities are associated with each group. For example, the Luo are seen by some as being proud and outspoken. Among the Kikuyu, those living in Nyeri are believed to be serious and industrious, and those in Murang'a are seen as humble and peaceful. Distinctions are made within ethnic groups as well, and members of each clan are believed to possess different characteristics. Clan and tribe distinction was very important in past generations and was often the basis for choosing spouses and sometimes friends. The younger generation pays less attention to distinctions between tribes, focusing on national unity rather than tribal differences.

Land ownership is a valued indicator of social status. For some of Kenya's ethnic groups, the ownership of cattle, sheep, and goats is also an important indicator of wealth. Kenyans tend to take pride in their efforts to preserve African wildlife. Much 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.

## Personal Appearance

Kenyans tend to 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 in rural areas but are becoming more common in urban ones.

Only children and elderly men wear shorts. Women usually wear dresses, but many young urban women wear pants. Women often wear a *leso* (a rectangular piece of colorful cotton fabric) as a skirt, to cover their clothes, or to shield themselves from rain and wind. It is common for a mother to use a *leso* to carry her baby on her back. Rural and some urban women wear scarves on their heads. 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. Maasai children greet elders with a slight bow; the elder responds by placing an open palm on the child's head.

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 Swahili greeting is *Hujambo* (Hello). *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).

### Gestures

Kenyans pass and accept items with the right hand or both hands. Using the left hand alone is considered improper. The verbal "tch-tch" or a "tss-tss" sound expresses displeasure. Pointing at someone with the index finger is rude. People often point by extending the lower lip or nodding the head in the intended direction. One beckons by waving all fingers of the hand. 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.

### 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 or even a meal. Guests or hosts generally make prior arrangements for long visits. Such a visit (which on the coast is referred to as a *kushinda*) extends from around 10 or 11 a.m. to 5 or 6 p.m. No matter how long a visit lasts, 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. When guests are invited to dinner in the home, they usually socialize with a host while final preparations are being made. After the meal, they stay for more conversation.

Urban visitors might bring flowers and tea leaves to their hosts. Rural people bring edible gifts such as sugar, 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

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.

## LIFESTYLE

### Family

#### Structure

Children are seen as the future of the tribe and are greatly valued. Traditionally, families were large. Among the younger generations, family size has decreased somewhat, and today families have an average of three children, though some families have as many as eight or nine. In rural areas especially, sons are highly valued, so many families continue having children until they have a boy.

Extended families are important, and people generally have close relationships with their aunts, uncles, and cousins. Children usually call a maternal aunt *younger mother* (*mama mdogo*) or *older mother* (*mama mkubwa*) depending on the aunt's age in relation to the child's mother; a paternal aunt is called *aunt* (*shangazi*). Likewise, a paternal uncle is *younger father* (*baba mdogo*) or *older father* (*baba mkubwa*), while a maternal uncle is *uncle* (*mjomba*). Households usually contain multiple generations. A small but growing percentage of the population, mainly the wealthy elite and more Westernized Kenyans, live as nuclear families.

Members of the extended family help one another in times of need, with the understanding that help will be reciprocated in the future. Wealthy family members are obligated to help less fortunate relatives, even those distantly related. In most

tribes, it is common for even distant relatives to arrive at the family home for an unannounced stay. The visitor must be fed and housed for the duration of the visit, and the family usually pays for their return trip home. Upon the death of a family's breadwinner, the extended family supports the widowed spouse and the couple's children. Among the Luo, a widow traditionally married a close relative of her husband, though this practice is becoming less common.

#### ***Parents and Children***

Throughout life, mutual obligations exist between parents and children. Children help with chores from an early age and may work to support the family. In urban areas, kids are often tasked with making their beds, cleaning their rooms, and helping with cooking and laundry. In rural areas, they are often responsible for planting and harvesting crops, tending livestock, fetching water, and caring for younger siblings.

Even after children marry, they may be supported financially by their parents. The family's youngest adult son inherits the family home and cares for his aging parents. All children are obligated to support their parents by sending money to them each month. The elderly are greatly respected and hold the highest status in society. It is considered unacceptable to disrespect elders, and people rarely go against their counsel. In some parts of Kenya, it is believed that elders are capable of casting spells and curses on wayward family members.

#### ***Gender Roles***

Gender roles are clearly defined. The man is primarily responsible for supporting the family financially and is considered the head of the household, particularly in rural areas. Few men do household chores or cook. Women care for the home, children, and garden. Homes located in rural areas, as most in Kenya are, usually lack modern appliances, running water, and electricity. Therefore, women must carry water and firewood over what are often long distances, making cooking a time-consuming chore.

In urban areas, some couples share household responsibilities. However, care of the home and children is still seen as primarily the woman's responsibility. Educated women often choose to avoid traditional roles in favor of marriages in which both parents work and the family hires someone, often a young female relative, to take care of the children and household.

Many women work outside the home, often running salons or market stands. Women in urban areas have more opportunities for education and employment. Rural women are responsible for much of the family's agricultural output but own very little land themselves. Efforts are underway to raise awareness of women's rights, reserve government positions for women, and encourage families to send their girls to school. Such efforts have met with varying degrees of success.

### **Housing**

#### ***Urban***

In urban areas, people usually live as nuclear families. The style and size of homes varies greatly. At one extreme are opulent suburban mansions; at the other extreme are large slum areas, where thousands of people live in cramped

dwellings without sufficient sewage facilities. Large townhouse developments are growing in popularity. Also common are gated communities containing roughly five to twenty houses. Urban planning often seems nonexistent, with high-rise apartment buildings springing up next to urban slums. Urban homes are surrounded by concrete walls for security.

Garbage collection is sporadic in most areas, and streets are often littered. While electricity is available in urban areas, it is very expensive, so many people use their electricity sparingly.

#### ***Rural***

In rural areas, extended families live in small compounds, which contain several mud brick huts, either square or round, with thatched roofs. Wealthier families may build brick or stone houses with red brick or tin roofs. Huts usually have four rooms at most and contain simple wooden furniture. Traditionally, as sons marry, each is given a hut within the compound to live in with his wife.

Each nuclear family cooks its own meals, but all share a well, a shower, and an outhouse. Running water is a luxury; water is more often collected from a river or spring, sometimes located several miles from the home. Electricity reaches a growing number of rural areas, but many areas still lack access. In the poorest rural areas, very few people have electricity.

Tribes that have retained a nomadic lifestyle, such as the Samburu, live in small, dome-shaped huts made of animal skins laid over a frame of sticks. These can be dismantled and packed away when the household moves on in search of fresh pasture for the animals. Furniture is minimal in these huts; people sleep and sit on grass mats.

#### ***Interiors***

Furniture is extremely expensive in Kenya, due to taxes and lack of infrastructure associated with building and transporting goods. Most families view furnishing their home as a lifetime undertaking. People may buy items piece by piece as they have the money, or they may take out a loan to buy furniture.

#### ***Ownership***

Land ownership is highly prized and is closely aligned with social status and tribal identity, as most tribes are associated with a certain area of the country. In rural areas, most people have access to land on their family's property. Plots get smaller as each generation divides the land among the adult sons. Today, many men must purchase land in addition to their inheritance because their share of the land is too small for their needs.

Purchasing a home is difficult for the average Kenyan. Mortgages are only available to the wealthy. It is somewhat easier to obtain a loan for a plot of land. However, loans for building homes are not widely available. Many in urban areas opt to rent their homes while saving up to build a house in their home village, where most people retire.

### **Dating and Marriage**

#### ***Dating and Courtship***

Dating starts in the early teenage years, and most young people choose their own partners. Dating customs have been

greatly altered by the advent of technology. Because young people now do much of their socializing online and via text message, parents and tribal leaders have far less influence than they did in previous generations. Casual sexual relationships, previously rare, are increasingly common. In urban areas, couples usually go on dates to restaurants, movies, or night clubs. In rural areas, options are more limited and few people can afford to spend much money on dating, so young people usually socialize at home or while running errands.

### **Engagement**

While dating practices no longer adhere to traditional customs, most engagements and marriages follow established patterns. Before a couple gets engaged, the woman's family invites the man's family to their home to get to know one another and discuss the bride-price, which the groom's family pays the bride's family as a way to thank them for raising her and to compensate them for losing her. This payment was traditionally made up of livestock but is now most often cash.

For this meeting, in rural areas, it is customary for the woman's family to slaughter a goat or sheep and a number of chickens in honor of the guests. In urban areas, the family purchases the meat. If this is not done, it is considered a sign that the woman's family is not in favor of the marriage, and the courtship generally ends. More determined couples may elope, but most people avoid going against their family's wishes. If the first meeting goes well, then the woman's family is invited to the man's family home to finalize wedding plans.

### **Marriage and Society**

Because the family is a great source of pride, most Kenyans expect to marry and have children. Kenyans traditionally married someone from their tribe but generally not from within their clan, because members of the same clan are considered relatives. Tribal affiliation is decreasingly a factor in marriage decisions, especially in urban areas, although in rural areas where tribes are not geographically separated, marrying within one's tribe is still common. In Muslim communities, most marriages are arranged, and any one-on-one dating is expected to lead to marriage.

While in the past people married relatively young, today most people marry in their mid- to late twenties. Many couples wait until after they finish their education or establish themselves financially to marry. Many unmarried couples choose to live together before or instead of marrying. After a couple lives together for six months, the relationship is considered a common-law marriage. A new constitution adopted in 2010 granted many of the rights associated with marriage to common-law relationships. While polygamy is practiced in some areas, it is slowly disappearing. Few men are able to financially support multiple wives and many children. Infidelity is widespread among men, and it is common for a man to have a mistress (and sometimes children) whom he supports in addition to his wife.

Sexual relations between same-sex partners are illegal in Kenya and are punishable with prison sentences that may extend to 14 years or longer; same-sex civil unions and marriages are not legally recognized.

### **Weddings**

Wedding details are handled largely by the families. Many weddings are elaborate, expensive affairs. A wedding ceremony may be civil, religious, or traditional. Some weddings contain both religious and traditional elements. In order to be considered legal, a marriage must be registered with the government. Some couples choose to avoid the expenses associated with a religious or traditional wedding by marrying civilly.

Christian weddings are generally held in a church and follow Western wedding traditions. After the church ceremony, most couples hold a reception. The elaborateness of the celebration varies according to the couple's families' incomes. Many couples hold an outdoor party, setting up tents for guests to sit under. Guests arrive at the reception while the bride and groom take wedding photos at the church or at nearby locations. When the couple arrives, they are welcomed with singing and dancing. A special meal is served, and guests give speeches wishing the couple luck in their life together. The couple then cuts the wedding cake, feeding one another a small piece. Then the bride serves pieces of cake to the groom's parents while the groom serves the bride's parents. The reception ends with a prayer.

Muslim weddings contain multiple events and may last several days. Various events are attended by different groups (such as only women or only men). Before the wedding, the bride is adorned with elaborate clothing and jewelry and has designs drawn in henna on her skin. Guests are served special foods, which usually include *pilau* (spiced rice with meat or vegetables), *biriani* (rice with curry and chicken or vegetables), *mahamri* (similar to doughnuts), and a stew of beans and coconut. On the last day, the events culminate with the actual wedding ceremony, which takes place in the evening at the bride's or groom's family home.

Traditional weddings are held at the groom's family home, and celebrations may last up to two days. Elders invoke the spirits of the ancestors, perform wedding rituals (which vary from group to group), and bestow blessings on the couple. A cow is slaughtered in honor of the union; the meat is cooked and served at the wedding feast. Guests bring gifts for the couple, often food (such as grains and beans) and livestock. While traditions vary among groups, no Kenyan wedding is complete without traditional dancing and celebratory ululations (high-pitched trilling sounds).

More conservative Muslims and practitioners of traditional beliefs generally do not take honeymoons. Christian and more liberal Muslim couples leave for a honeymoon directly after their wedding reception. Popular destinations include coastal areas, Mombasa, and neighboring countries. Honeymoons may last a few days to a few weeks.

### **Divorce**

Divorce is fairly common. A legal divorce is expensive and can take several years to be finalized. Courts usually require that the couple take some time to attempt to resolve their disputes before granting a divorce. The 2010 constitution provides for the equal division of property in the event of divorce and requires parents to pay child support. In practice, these laws are often not enforced, and corruption affects many family court cases. In rural areas, where clan influence is strong, clan members step in to settle many family disputes,

in most cases taking the place of legal action.

Some stigma is associated with divorce, and people find themselves more closely observed in the community after a divorce. However, despite this stigma, most people remarry after a divorce, though men usually remarry more quickly than women.

## Life Cycle

### Birth

Pregnancy is cause for great celebration, and expectant mothers are carefully watched over by their family. In some cases, the woman's mother comes to live with her during pregnancy. After the baby is born, friends and relatives give the family gifts ranging from items for the baby to livestock.

The naming of a newborn is important and can reflect many things. Names often emphasize family connections, and children are often named after their grandparents. Parents may name their children after the time or season of the birth. For example, a Luo child born at night may be named Atieno (for a girl) or Otieno (for a boy); both names come from the Luo word *otieno* (night). A Luhya child born during the rainy season may be named Nafula (for a girl) or Wafula (for a boy), as *fula* means "rain" in Bukusu. Names may also reference recent events. Many children born in the years after the 2008 U.S. presidential election bear the names Obama or Michelle, after former U.S. president Barack Obama (who has Kenyan heritage) and former first lady Michelle Obama. Christian children are usually given both a Christian name and a traditional name.

### Milestones

Young people are considered adults at age 18. However, often little changes in a young person's life after this age, and people generally don't take on any additional responsibilities. Traditionally, young men spent several years living in the bush, learning survival skills like food gathering and hunting. Young men moved into adulthood in groups, usually in their mid-teens, and coming-of-age ceremonies were especially important. The ceremonies often included acts to demonstrate one's bravery, such as the killing of a wild animal. Today, these traditions are practiced mainly among nomadic tribes.

Male circumcision is a rite of passage practiced among many ethnic groups. However, a growing number of male babies are circumcised shortly after birth. Despite laws prohibiting the practice, in many areas, girls are circumcised (a practice also referred to as female genital mutilation) around age nine, which is both painful and dangerous.

### Death

News of a death is met with wailing, shouting, singing, and drumming. These rituals express mourners' grief and also notify the community of the death. Traditionally, it is considered bad manners or an expression of ill will for a woman not to wail in the event of a relative's death. The family of the deceased must provide food for the mourners, an expense that can leave the family in debt. Sometimes people from the community give donations to help defray these costs.

Funerals are generally religious even if the deceased rarely attended church. It is not considered acceptable to speak ill of the dead, so the service is dominated by praise for the

deceased. Family members give speeches, and more traditional families organize dances and ceremonies to honor the dead. For example, it is customary to slaughter a bull in honor of a man and a cow in honor of a woman. The meat is used to feed the mourners and is also distributed among family members and the religious leader presiding over the burial ceremony.

If a person dies away from his or her traditional tribal area, it is common for the body to be returned there for burial. Some traditional Kenyans fear that evil spirits will haunt the family if this is not done. Muslims bury their dead within 24 hours of the death whenever possible. Among other groups, burial usually takes place within three days of death, unless more time is needed to transport the body or for close family members to return to the home village. Relatives of the deceased often keep a vigil at the gravesite for three days after the burial. The vigil ends at dawn on the third day, when religious leaders lead a prayer for the family.

Christian graves may be marked with an engraved headstone or a cross. The size and style of grave markings depend on what the family can afford. Some graves are marked by planting a tree or a bed of flowers. The Kikuyu bury their dead in communal cemeteries. Muslims generally do not mark their graves.

## Diet

The most common meats in Kenya are goat, beef, lamb, chicken, and fish. Staple foods include milk, *ugali* (a stiff dough made from cornmeal, millet, sorghum, or cassava), *uji* (porridge made from *ugali* ingredients), red bean stew, *mandazi* (a doughnut-like food), *githeri* (corn and beans), and *chapati* (a flat bread). *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. European cuisine is prevalent in major cities, and Nairobi and Mombassa have restaurants with a wide variety of international cuisine.

## Recreation

### Sports

Soccer is the most popular team sport in Kenya. 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. Men often congregate in bars and cafés to drink and watch televised sports, especially soccer games. Many Kenyans have little interest in the country's professional soccer team but enthusiastically follow European teams.

Track-and-field activities join soccer as Kenya's national sports. The nation has produced world-famous long-distance runners and other athletes. Urban residents might play field hockey, tennis, cricket, or rugby. Basketball is enjoyed by the wealthy. Some girls also enjoy playing netball (similar to basketball). In western Kenya, bullfighting is popular, and people breed special varieties of bulls for this purpose.

### Leisure

Poverty severely limits most rural Kenyans' recreational time and choices. Activities are often improvised. Many Kenyans

enjoy a traditional strategy game (sometimes called *bao* or *ajua*) played with pebbles or seeds. Storytelling, riddles, and proverbs are also popular. Children often lack toys, so they make their own from whatever materials they can find. Many people garden for both recreation and subsistence.

In urban areas people do usually have more regular leisure time. They spend it doing things like swimming, working out at fitness clubs, eating out at restaurants, going to movie theaters, and relaxing at parks.

#### **Vacation**

Vacations are unaffordable for many. Middle-class families often visit the coast, sometimes renting a small cabin, or one of Kenya's national parks. Some families rent tents and go camping for a weekend or holiday.

#### **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**

Kenyans celebrate New Year's Day (1 January), Easter (Good Friday to Easter Monday), Labor Day (1 May), Madaraka Day (1 June), Mashujaa Day (20 October), Jamhuri Day (12 December), Christmas (25 December), and Boxing Day (26 December).

##### **Christian Holidays**

Christmas and Easter are the most widely celebrated holidays. Christianity is greatly emphasized during both holidays, and attendance at church services is high. Non-Christians participate in the secular aspects of the holidays. They celebrate by spending time with family, going on picnics or to the beach. Some might enjoy a meal or a night in a local hotel, while others vacation elsewhere in the country.

Easter is especially important to Catholics. The Easter season begins with Ash Wednesday (the seventh Wednesday before Easter). Palm leaves collected the previous year are burned and the ash is reserved. After a special church service, a cross is drawn in ash on the forehead of each person in attendance. Ash Wednesday also marks the beginning of Lent, during which Catholics fast and give up something (such as a bad habit) as an indication of their Christian faith. During this time, people gather at churches to follow the stations of the cross (a series of prayers said in front of depictions of the last events in Christ's life). Lent ends shortly before Easter Sunday. On Good Friday, Catholics attend a mass to mark Christ's death. On Easter Sunday, people attend a mass to celebrate Christ's resurrection, and then families

gather for a meal of roasted meat.

Business in the country essentially shuts down 24–30 December. Most people travel to be with family at this time, and gifts are exchanged between relatives and friends. The religious spend Christmas Eve at church, celebrating the birth of Christ. On Christmas Day, people gather for drinks and roasted meat. The day after Christmas, people celebrate Boxing Day, which comes from the British tradition of presenting small boxed gifts to service workers, tradesmen, and servants. It is now primarily a day for visiting family and friends.

##### **Islamic Holidays**

The Islamic population observes a variety of Muslim holidays. One of the most important is *Eid al-Fitr*, a three-day feast at the end of *Ramadan* (the holy month of fasting). 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 sunset, after which they eat meals and visit one another.

##### **Independence Holidays**

Kenyans celebrate their country's independence on Madaraka Day and Jamhuri Day. Madaraka (Swahili for "power" or "position") Day commemorates Kenya's 1963 declaration of self-rule. Jamhuri Day celebrates the day, six months later, that the British handed control of the country to Kenyans. Both holidays are commemorated with pomp and ceremony, with the head of state leading celebrations at Independence Square in Nairobi. People also gather for a military parade.

Until 2010, Mashujaa (Swahili for "heroes") Day was called Kenyatta Day and honored Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta. In 2010, the scope of the holiday was broadened to include all Kenyans who struggled for their country's independence. On this day, people gather in public places to commemorate their national heroes.

## **SOCIETY**

### **Government**

#### **Structure**

Kenya's president serves as both head of state and head of government. The president is elected by popular vote to a five-year term, with a two-term limit. The legislature is formed by a bicameral parliament. Members of both houses of parliament serve five-year terms.

The parliament's lower house is the 349-seat National Assembly. Voters directly elect 290 members through a majoritarian system. An additional 47 are women elected to represent each of Kenya's 47 counties, and 12 more members are nominated by political parties represented in the National Assembly.

The 67-seat Senate is parliament's upper house. Forty-seven members of the Senate are directly elected to represent each of Kenya's 47 counties. An additional 16 women are nominated by political parties in the Senate, and 2 members each (one man and one woman) are nominated to represent youth and persons with disabilities. The Speaker of the Senate also holds a seat.

A constitutional referendum in 2010 drastically changed



the structure of the country's government. Changes included the creation of the Senate, the creation of 47 counties to replace Kenya's 8 districts, the abolition of the office of prime minister, and the transfer of some presidential powers to the counties.

### ***Political Landscape***

Many political parties operate, and they represent a wide range of interests. Party alliances tend to be ethnically based. Major parties include the right-wing Jubilee Party and the center-left Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Parties tend to change, and coalitions are often formed to win elections.

The government faces significant challenges from instability caused by ethnic tensions, challenges in implementing constitutional changes, government conflict with wildlife poachers, and Islamist militant attacks resulting from Kenya's military involvement with Somalia.

### ***Government and the People***

Kenya's 2010 constitution promises to protect some basic rights, including freedom of speech, the press, and assembly, though government practices often limit free speech and free press. Freedom of religion is respected. Despite some government efforts to decrease it, corruption remains a serious problem in Kenya. Police brutality is widespread, and little legal action is taken against it. Elections have often been plagued with fraud and other problems, but they are becoming more fair and transparent. The voting age is 18.

## **Economy**

Though weakened by a series of factors, including political turmoil, severe drought, market reforms, rampant corruption, and insecurity, the Kenyan economy remains one of the largest in Africa and has seen steady growth in recent years. Foreign investment is important to further growth. The nation is dependent on loans from foreign donors, and most people still struggle to meet basic needs. The government has successfully battled high inflation and currency devaluation in recent years.

Agriculture is important for Kenya, as it employs 61 percent of the workforce. The chief cash crops are tea, coffee, and horticultural products. Other agricultural products include corn, wheat, sugarcane, fruit, vegetables, dairy and meat products, and pyrethrum (a flower used to make insecticides). While traditionally self-sufficient in food production, in recent years Kenya has struggled to adequately feed its population. Industries focus on small-scale manufactured items.

The tourist industry is a major contributor to the economy but is threatened by insecurity in the country caused primarily by attacks carried out by the Somali militant group al-Shabab. 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* (14-seater vans) run throughout the country, but drivers are often reckless and accidents are common. Traffic is often congested. Many people get around

on foot. Rural people rarely have cars, so for distances that they cannot walk they rely on *matatus*, which run on regular routes but without schedules. In 2014, the government introduced a cashless payment system on *matatus* in an effort to decrease corruption and increase tax revenue; however, implementation of the new system has been slow. Taxis are plentiful in Nairobi. *Tuktuks* (small, three-wheeled vehicles) and *bodabodas* (motorbikes) also function like taxis. 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 cellular phone technology. Today, cellular phones far outnumber landlines in the country. Access reaches even many remote rural areas without access to electricity. In these areas, people may charge their phones using solar power. A growing number of people use the internet, and Kenya has one of the highest rates of internet usage in Africa. Most Kenyans listen to radio broadcasts, which are offered in Swahili, English, and various local languages. The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation is a private corporation indirectly controlled by the government. Several private television and radio stations offer extensive programming. There are several national newspapers as well.

## **Education**

### ***Structure and Access***

Primary school consists of eight grades that begin at age six and is free and compulsory. After primary school, students take the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exam to determine which secondary school they can attend. Students study hard before the exam, and the stress level is high. Students who don't pass can repeat the previous year of school and then try again.

Secondary school lasts four years and is also free. Public secondary schools may be classified as either national, provincial, or district. National schools are the highest quality, and positions are highly sought after by both teachers and students. The next tiers are occupied by provincial schools and then district schools. Many private schools are Christian- or Muslim-run, but the average Kenyan family cannot afford the tuition. High-achieving students may be awarded scholarships to more prestigious, expensive schools. Attendance at boarding school is common, regardless of the family's income, often from an early age.

Kenyans generally view education as the path to a better life. Families sometimes sell possessions or portions of land in order to send their children to good schools. Since free primary school was introduced in 2003, enrollment rates have increased significantly. Students must provide their own uniforms, text books, and school supplies. Nearly all students complete primary school, but fewer go on to secondary school. In rural areas especially, if a family cannot afford to send all of their children to school, they often send only their sons. Though increasingly uncommon, girls sometimes marry as soon as they reach puberty, and few continue their education after marriage.

### ***School Life***

Rural children are first taught in Swahili or sometimes their

ethnic tongue. English is introduced in first grade and is the language of instruction for all subjects (except Swahili language classes) after the third grade. Urban schoolchildren usually begin instruction in English. Most schools focus on math and science education. Teaching styles are generally authoritarian and focus on memorizing information for exams. Teachers and students do not generally have close relationships and rarely interact outside of class time.

Public schools (especially in rural areas) suffer from considerable underfunding. Some teachers take second jobs to supplement inadequate salaries. Classes are large. Many schools lack classrooms and supplies for all students, and classes may be held outside under trees. In remote areas, many students travel long distances to reach the nearest school. Few schools have computers or other technology.

**Higher Education**

Public and private universities operate in Kenya, but only a small percentage of Kenyans are able to attend. Those who do are often aided by sponsorships or scholarships from local businesses, politicians, communities, or churches. Officially, students' grades in secondary school and scores on a national exam determine which universities they will be accepted to, but the application process is widely viewed as corrupt and disorganized.

Those students who can afford it seek higher education abroad, usually in the United States or the United Kingdom. People may also enter two-year vocational schools to study subjects like information technology, teaching, auto engineering, computer repair, and tourism.

**Health**

Many Kenyans, especially in rural areas, do not have access to basic health care. Rural Kenyans often avoid government hospitals because they have inadequate medical supplies. Patients in hospitals must often provide their own medications and meals. 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. However, a relatively high rate of HIV infection has lowered life expectancy. Diseases such as malaria are prevalent in low-lying regions, though illnesses and deaths due to malaria in particular are decreasing because of government and private programs.

**AT A GLANCE**

**Contact Information**

Embassy of Kenya, 2249 R Street NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 387-6101; web site [www.kenyaembassydc.org](http://www.kenyaembassydc.org).

**Country and Development Data**

Capital	Nairobi
Population	54,685,051 (rank=27)
Area (sq. mi.)	224,081 (rank=48)
Area (sq. km.)	580,367
Human Development Index	147 of 189 countries
Gender Inequality Index	134 of 162 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$4,200
Adult Literacy	85% (male); 78% (female)
Infant Mortality	29 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	64 (male); 69 (female)
Currency	Kenyan Shilling

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