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Kenya: Current Issues and U.S. Relations

Longstanding U.S. ties with Kenya have deepened over the past decade, as successive U.S. administrations have viewed the country as a strategic partner in Africa. Former President Joe Biden hosted Kenya's President William Ruto for a state visit in 2024, and he designated Kenya as the United States' first Major Non-NATO Ally in Sub-Saharan Africa, a designation that conveys defense trade and security cooperation benefits. Ruto was the first African leader to be invited by a U.S. president for a state visit since 2008. The Trump Administration has similarly appeared to value the bilateral relationship with Kenya, describing the country as one of the United States' strongest partners in the region.

Kenya became an important U.S. counterterrorism partner in Africa in the aftermath of Al Qaeda's 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In 2011, the country launched military operations in neighboring Somalia against the regional Al Qaeda affiliate, Al Shabaab, and subsequently joined the UN-authorized African Union stabilization mission there. Al Shabaab launched attacks against soft targets frequented by foreigners, including U.S. citizens, in Kenya's capital, raising the group's international profile. In 2020, Al Shabaab killed a U.S. servicemember and two U.S. contactors in an attack on Manda Bay Airfield, a Kenyan base used by the U.S. military near the Somali border. Al Shabaab, which U.S. officials now describe as Al Qaeda's largest and wealthiest affiliate, continues to pose a threat in Kenya and the broader region, and Kenya hosts an expanding U.S. military presence at Manda Bay that supports regional counterterrorism efforts.

The 2024 state visit highlighted Kenya's importance to the United States not only as a diplomatic and security partner in East Africa, but as an African counterpart on shared global priorities. Kenya participated in Operation Prosperity Guardian, a maritime taskforce launched by the United States in response to Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, and it has been one of the only African members of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group. Kenya's 2024 deployment, with U.S. support, to lead the Multinational Security Support mission in Haiti, further elevated U.S.-Kenya ties, despite outstanding questions about the country's human rights trajectory.

Kenya is often characterized as a comparatively stable and democratic anchor state in a troubled region. Political unrest has threatened its stability several times, however, most recently in 2024, when a protest movement led by young Kenyans and a violent state response spurred a political crisis. Facing a heavy debt burden and the threat of default, President Ruto tried to raise taxes that year, which fanned public anger amid rising costs of living. When legislators passed the tax bill while tens of thousands were in the streets protesting, some demonstrators stormed the parliament. Dozens were killed in the police response to the protests, and over a thousand people were arrested. The nationwide protests highlighted public frustration not only with economic hardships, but with public sector corruption and a perceived lack of accountability. The public display of discontent was an unprecedented challenge for the government, and Ruto ultimately reversed the tax bill, reshuffled his cabinet, and brought several opposition politicians into his government to defuse tensions. Scores of government critics were abducted or killed in the aftermath of the protests, and a series of forcible extraditions of foreign dissidents from Kenya prompted accusations that the government was enabling transnational repression. Ruto has faced calls for his ouster and allegations, including from former allies, of corruption, but his alliance with elements of the opposition co-opted some of his most vocal critics. With the opposition divided, President Ruto is, by some accounts, favored to win re-election in 2027.

Kenya hosts one of the largest U.S. embassies in Africa, routinely receives senior U.S. officials for visits, and is a frequent destination for congressional travel. It has been a leading beneficiary of tariff benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA; P.L. 106-200, as amended), which Congress has extended through the end of 2026. Under the first Trump Administration, the United States and Kenya launched negotiations on a free trade agreement—it would have been the first in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Biden Administration did not continue those talks, instead launching a Strategic Trade and Investment Partnership (STIP). Kenya, which has faced a 10% tariff under President Trump's tariff policy, has engaged the Trump Administration in talks aimed at reaching a new bilateral trade arrangement.

The Trump Administration has maintained a warm relationship with Kenya, despite the tariff issue. Administration officials have described the country as a "longstanding American ally" and emphasized U.S. appreciation for Kenya's deployment to Haiti and leadership on regional peace and security issues. The country, which has regularly ranked among the top recipients of U.S. foreign aid globally, has been affected by the Administration's foreign aid cuts, which have spurred congressional debate and legal action. In late 2025, Kenya became the first country to sign a bilateral agreement with the Trump Administration on global health cooperation. Under the five-year deal, which faces a court challenge in Kenya, the country is expected to gradually assume greater financial responsibility as U.S. assistance for health programs in the country declines.

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Overview

Successive U.S. Administrations have viewed Kenya as an anchor state and a strategic partner in East Africa, and as critical to counterterrorism efforts in the region. The country is Sub-Saharan Africa's third-largest economy and a regional hub for transportation and finance. It hosts the UN headquarters in Africa, one of four major UN offices globally. A popular tourism destination known for its biodiversity and conservation efforts, Kenya is a regional leader in clean energy, drawing roughly 90% of its electricity from renewable sources.¹ It has a vibrant tech scene that has been dubbed the "Silicon Savannah." Kenya's government has pursued opportunities to speak on behalf of Africa in global forums, including on climate change, conservation, and debt relief.

Kenya hosts one of the largest U.S. embassies in Africa and U.S. forces supporting regional counterterrorism operations. In 2024, the Biden Administration designated it as the United States' first Major Non-NATO Ally in Sub-Saharan Africa. Kenya has often ranked among the top U.S. foreign aid recipients globally, with health funding comprising the greatest share of aid, and it has been among the largest African recipients of U.S. counterterrorism assistance. Congressional interests in Kenya are wide-ranging, and it is a frequent destination for congressional travel; legislative action has focused predominately on democracy, human rights, and terrorism concerns. While U.S.-Kenya ties are close, Kenya's government also maintains a strategic partnership with the People's Republic of China (hereafter China), its largest trading partner and bilateral creditor.

Economic hardship, corruption, historical land disputes, and police abuses have fueled grievances in Kenya, and political violence has threatened the country's reputation as an anchor state in a volatile region several times. Perceived impunity for state corruption and other abuses has been a trigger for protests, and police have often responded with violence.² Freedom House ranks Kenya "Partly Free" in its *Freedom in the World* index, noting that despite regular elections, pervasive corruption and police brutality remain serious problems, and while Kenya's media and civil society are vibrant, journalists and human rights defenders face restrictive laws and intimidation.

Kenya's 2022 elections were the most recent in a series of polls that have tested its democratic institutions. With incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta term limited, the race was a close contest between his deputy, William Ruto, and longtime opposition leader Raila Odinga. In a twist, Kenyatta backed Odinga, his formal rival, over Ruto, who led a populist, anti-establishment campaign and won with just over 50% of the vote. Shadows from previous election-related violence and corruption allegations linger over President Ruto, as they did over Kenyatta; both once faced charges of crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court (ICC).³

President Ruto has sought to court foreign investment and position Kenya as a global voice on climate change and an advocate, on Africa's behalf, for climate finance and international financial system reforms.⁴ Politics at home, however, sometimes compete with his international agenda. His administration has faced major economic challenges, including a large debt burden, inflation, and high unemployment. He has promised to transform the economy and reduce the cost of living, but some of his policy decisions have been unpopular.

¹ *Washington Post*, "Kenyan president aims to attract green investment during U.S. visit," May 17, 2024.

² *The Conversation*, "Why violence is a hallmark of Kenyan policing. And what needs to change," June 5, 2020; *The New Humanitarian*, "Kenya police violence is colonial and institutional, as well as political," June 26, 2025.

³ *The Economist*, "Who is William Ruto?," August 16, 2022 and "Will William Ruto serve the people or himself and his pals?," October 25, 2022; and *The New York Review*, "The Political Education of William Ruto," March 8, 2023.

⁴ See, e.g., *Financial Times*, "Kenyan leader says World Bank and IMF are 'hostage' to rich nations," June 23, 2023; *The Africa Report*, "Ruto wants 'fair conversation' over climate finance for Africa," June 20, 2023.

Tax hikes and cost of living concerns have fueled public frustration and protests against Ruto's government. Police violence against protesters and a spate of reported abductions and enforced disappearances of government critics in 2024-2025—which human rights groups attributed to security agents—prompted calls for the president's ouster. Ruto has reshuffled his cabinet several times, and his former deputy, Rigathi Gachagua, who was impeached in late 2024, has become a vocal critic. Gachagua is among several politicians that may challenge Ruto for the presidency in the 2027 elections. The upcoming elections will be the first in over twenty years in which Odinga, who passed away in late 2025 at age 80, is not on the ballot.

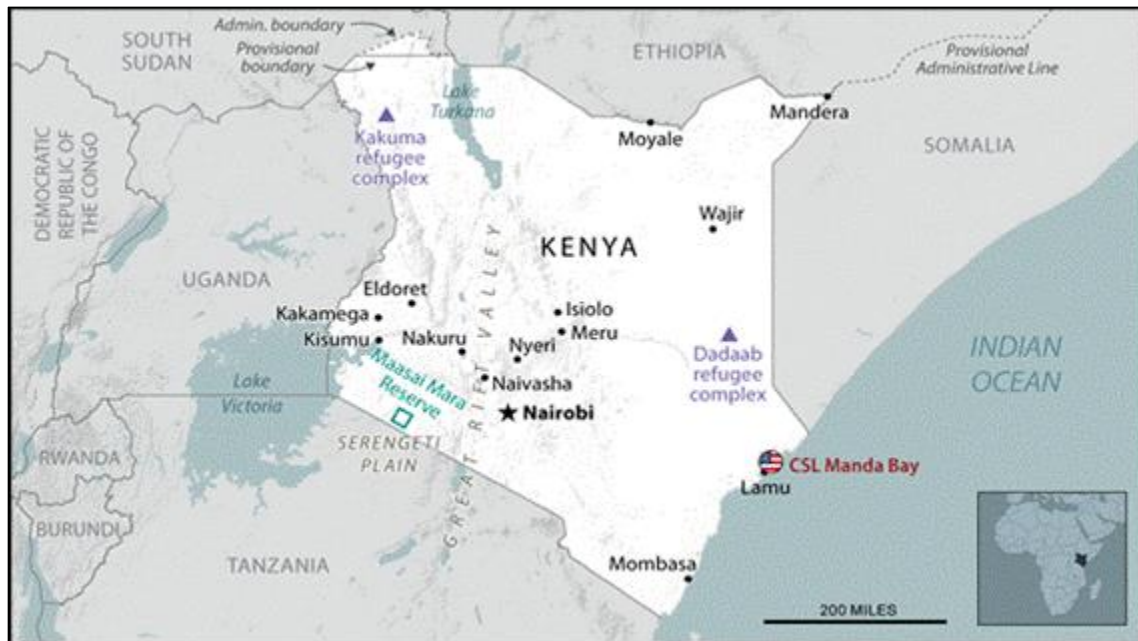
Almost three decades after the 1998 U.S. embassy bombing, Kenya continues to grapple with terrorist threats, primarily from the Somalia-based Al Qaeda affiliate Al Shabaab.⁵ Attacks near the Somali border have been more common, but two high-profile attacks in Nairobi have underscored Al Shabaab's reach. A U.S. citizen was among 21 people killed in the 2019 DusitD2 hotel attack, and several Americans were wounded in the 2013 Westgate Mall attack, in which at least 67 people died. Al Shabaab killed a U.S. servicemember and two U.S. contractors in a 2020 attack on Manda Bay Airfield, a Kenyan base used by the U.S. military near the Somali border.

Kenya first deployed troops into Somalia in 2011, to create a buffer zone against Al Shabaab, and it later joined the UN-backed African Union (AU) mission in Somalia. The United States has provided substantial security assistance to support Kenya and other countries contributing troops to the AU mission, and the U.S. military, which has conducted counterterrorism operations in Somalia for over two decades, conducts occasional "collective self-defense" airstrikes in support of AU and Somali forces. Al Shabaab, which has drawn recruits from Kenya's minority Muslim population, says its attacks in Kenya are, in part, retaliation for Kenya's military role in Somalia and characterizes U.S. and Kenyan operations there as part of a Western crusade against Muslims.

In addition to its Somalia deployment, Kenya has led the UN-authorized Multinational Security Support mission in Haiti, with U.S. support, since 2024. Amid competing domestic and regional security concerns, the deployment of Kenyan Police for the mission—which was slowed by legal disputes and hamstrung by shortfalls in international assistance—has been controversial domestically, but it has been praised by both the Biden and Trump Administrations.

⁵ The 1998 Al Qaeda attack on the U.S. embassy killed 213 people, including 12 U.S. citizens, and injured over 4,000. Al Qaeda operatives simultaneously attacked the U.S. embassy in Tanzania, killing 11 people and injuring over 85.

Figure 1. Kenya



Source: CRS graphic. Data from CIA World Factbook, U.S. Census Bureau International Database, UNAIDS, and IMF; 2026 estimates unless noted.

Comparative size: slightly smaller than Texas Population: 57 million, 2.12% growth Official languages: English and Swahili Religions: Christian 86%, Muslim 11%, other 2% Life expectancy: 71.9 years Median age: 21.8 years Population under 15 years of age: 35.1% Fertility rate: 3.04 children born/woman HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate: 3.2% (2023) Adult literacy: 83% male 86% female 80% (2022)	GDP: \$140 billion, 4.86% growth, \$2,595 per capita GDP composition: agriculture 21%, industry 16%, services 56% (2024) External debt: \$41.8 billion (2025) Health expenditure: 4.5% of GDP (2021) Electricity access: 79% (2023) Major exports partners: tea, cut flowers, garments, gold, tropical fruits Uganda 10%, USA 10%, UAE 8%, Netherlands 8%, Pakistan 6% (2023) Major imports partners: refined petroleum, palm oil, wheat, plastics, garments China 22%, UAE 14%, India 10%, Saudi Arabia 5%, Malaysia 4% (2023)
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Politics

Background. Kenya was essentially a one-party state from 1964 to 1991. After the transition to a multiparty system, ethnic identity, rather than ideology, became the primary line of political cleavage. No ethnic group in Kenya has a large enough voting bloc for its political leaders to gain or maintain power alone, however, so politicians form cross-ethnic political alliances, which periodically shift. This fluidity has helped fuel electoral violence and corruption.

For decades after independence, the ethnic groups of Kenya's first and second presidents, the Kikuyu and Kalenjin (the first and third largest ethnic groups), were seen to disproportionately benefit from the allocation of state resources, namely land, government jobs, and contracts. The heartlands of these groups, the central highlands and adjacent central Rift Valley, saw the largest state investment in schools, roads, and health services. Western Kenya (home to the second and fourth largest groups, the Luhya and Luo) and the predominantly Muslim coast and northeast were comparatively underdeveloped. The perception of ethnic favoritism fostered divisions.⁶

Daniel arap Moi, Kenya's long-ruling second president (1978-2002), dominated politics through repression, patronage, and electoral manipulation until, under donor and domestic pressure, he retired. The country's opposition parties came together, briefly, to defeat his chosen successor, Uhuru Kenyatta (son of first president Jomo Kenyatta), in the 2002 elections.

The crisis that followed the next elections, in 2007, remains important for understanding Kenyan politics today. Political realignments prior to the polls created a particularly volatile ethnic dynamic, and when incumbent President Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu, was declared the winner in a close race amid rigging allegations, protests followed and violence ensued, largely along ethnic lines. Some of the worst violence was between Kikuyu and Kalenjin, whose politicians backed Kibaki's main opponent, Odinga, a Luo. Over six weeks, roughly 1,300 people were killed and 600,000 displaced; over 100,000 private properties and almost 500 government properties were destroyed. The crisis hit the economy hard. Kenya was effectively paralyzed for two months before a power-sharing deal was brokered between Kibaki and Odinga by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, with U.S. support. Kibaki formed a coalition government with Odinga in a new prime minister post, agreeing to draft a new constitution and address sensitive land issues.

ICC Cases. After Kenya, an ICC state party, failed to create a tribunal to prosecute those found by an international commission of inquiry to be responsible for some of the worst post-election violence, the ICC confirmed charges against four people in 2012.⁷ Among them were Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta and prominent Kalenjin politician William Ruto, two former Moi protégés who were on opposing sides in 2007; both were accused of criminal responsibility for crimes against humanity. The Prosecutor accused Ruto of, among other crimes, involvement in the burning of a church where hundreds of people, mostly Kikuyu, had sought refuge; at least 28 died in the attack. Kenya's government objected to the cases, and they were prominent in the 2013 elections, when Kenyatta and Ruto ran together on a presidential ticket, portraying the cases as an international conspiracy and emblematic of racial bias by the ICC. The race was extremely close: Kenyatta avoided a runoff against opposition leader Odinga by less than 1% of votes.

Political interference and witness intimidation reportedly plagued the ICC trials. The ICC Prosecutor withdrew the charges against Kenyatta in 2014, and the judges declared a mistrial in Ruto's case in 2016, citing witness intimidation and political meddling. "There was a relentless campaign to identify individuals who could serve as Prosecution witnesses in this case and ensure that they would not testify," per the Prosecutor.⁸ Neither Kenyatta nor Ruto were acquitted, leaving the possibility of future prosecution but allowing them to run for reelection in 2017. The ICC opened a new trial in 2022, against a Kenyan lawyer accused of witness tampering "for the benefit, and in coordination with" Ruto; the lawyer died weeks after Ruto took office.⁹

⁶ For more, see Michela Wrong, *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistle-Blower*, Harper Perennial: 2010.

⁷ The Commission of Inquiry's report is available at https://www.knchr.org/Portals/0/Reports/Waki_Report.pdf.

⁸ Statement of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Fatou Bensouda, regarding Trial Chamber's decision to vacate charges against Messrs William Samoi Ruto and Joshua Arap Sang, April 6, 2016.

⁹ The Prosecutor v. Paul Gicheru, Document Containing Charges, ICC-01/09-01/20-125-Conf-AnxA, March 12, 2021.

The 2017 Election Overturned, Shifting Alliances. Violence, rigging allegations, and police brutality marred Kenyatta's rematch with Odinga in 2017. The opposition challenged Kenyatta's win at the Supreme Court, which nullified the presidential result in a landmark ruling, citing "irregularities and illegalities in the transmission of results that affected the integrity of the poll." The court ordered a new election but the opposition boycotted it, giving Kenyatta an easy victory. The opposition contested his legitimacy and held a mock inauguration to name Odinga "the people's president." The government declared it treasonous, shutting down media outlets and arresting opposition figures. Authorities ignored court orders on the crackdown, leading Kenya's chief justice, among others, to warn that the government's disregard for the judiciary threatened the rule of law.¹⁰ Some Members of Congress and former U.S. diplomats also raised alarm.¹¹

When Kenyatta and Odinga announced a deal, facilitated by the United States, to end the standoff in 2018, Ruto viewed it as a betrayal, and a political reconfiguration ensued.¹² Kenyatta and Odinga's effort to make constitutional changes, ostensibly to make politics more inclusive, was seen by some observers as intended to extend Kenyatta's power and was blocked by the judiciary.

The 2022 Elections. Kenya held elections in 2022 amid public frustration with high living costs, disillusion with the political class, and fear of another post-election crisis. Odinga had the incumbent president's support for his fifth presidential bid, but the alliance alienated some opposition voters.¹³ For some, Kenyatta epitomized "the establishment." Ruto capitalized on economic frustrations and, with a Kikuyu running mate, divided the Kikuyu vote.¹⁴ Odinga also had a Kikuyu running mate, Martha Karua, Kenya's first female candidate on a major ticket.

Ruto, reportedly among Kenya's richest men, had served for years in government, but during the race he emphasized his humble upbringing, casting himself as a champion for the poor and an outsider running against the establishment. He pitched a "bottom up" economic plan and pledged to reduce the cost of living. His alleged role in organizing violence against Kikuyu after the 2007 elections appears not to have dissuaded many Kikuyu from voting for him. Some analysts note that Kikuyu politicians had long branded Odinga as a destabilizing force, and, by some accounts, economic frustration and grievances against the Kenyatta family factored into votes for Ruto.¹⁵

Ruto narrowly avoided a runoff against Odinga, gaining 50.5% of the votes cast. Turnout, the lowest in 15 years, hinted at voter apathy, particularly among young Kenyans. Observers described the elections as more peaceful and transparent than the preceding three, but like past polls they were marred by rigging allegations and other controversies. A record number of women ran in the 2022 elections, and more won parliamentary seats than ever before. Seven female governors were elected. The 2022 polls were reportedly among Africa's most expensive, both in terms of campaign spending and election administration. Kenya invested heavily in election technology, including biometric registration, to improve the credibility of the process; whether it

¹⁰ *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), "Maraga defends Judiciary, says court orders must be obeyed," February 7, 2018.

¹¹ Sen. Cory Booker and Chris Coons, "Statement on Current Political Situation in Kenya," February 7, 2018; Mark Bellamy and Johnnie Carson, "How and why the US should intervene in Kenya," *African Arguments*, February 2018.

¹² *Al Jazeera*, "All you need to know about the clash between Kenyatta and Ruto," August 18, 2019; *Daily Nation*, "Ruto: Handshake between Uhuru and Raila was a stab in the back," March 6, 2022.

¹³ See, e.g., *Deutsche Welle*, "Kenya's disillusioned youth shun election," August 5, 2022; and Nanjala Nyabola, "The Kenyan Kakistocracy," *The Nation* (New York City), August 17, 2022.

¹⁴ Ruto's running mate, Rigathi Gachagua, faced corruption and money laundering charges during the 2022 elections. Before the polls, a court ordered him to forfeit \$1.7 million in state funds it determined he had illicitly acquired.

¹⁵ *Al Jazeera*, "Courting the Kikuyu: Kenyan politicians split biggest voting bloc," August 6, 2022; and Nic Cheeseman, et al., "Three critical questions will determine the Kenyan election," *The Elephant*, July 26, 2022.

improved public trust is debated.¹⁶ After Ruto took office, Kenyan courts dropped corruption cases against his running mate and several of his cabinet appointees at the request of the director of public prosecutions, whom Ruto later appointed as intelligence chief.¹⁷

2024 Protests. In June 2024, young Kenyans—dubbed “Gen Z”—organized protests against the government’s Finance Bill, which proposed \$2.7 billion in new taxes to lower the budget deficit and borrowing. Protesters argued that the tax hikes would raise the cost of living as Kenyans were already struggling, deter investors, and choke the economy. They criticized the government’s spending choices, including on foreign travel, government pay raises, renovations, and the creation of new executive branch offices, such as those of the first lady and deputy first lady.¹⁸ Ostentatious displays of wealth by some legislators and cabinet members fueled ire.¹⁹ When police responded to the initial demonstrations with tear gas, water cannons, arrests, and gunfire, protests grew, and reported abductions by security forces exacerbated public anger.²⁰ Tens of thousands were protesting in Nairobi and other cities when the parliament passed the bill on June 25, 2024, which spurred outrage. Hours later, as police fired on demonstrators outside the gates of parliament, killing several people, some protesters stormed the complex.

The protests were unprecedented in scale, highlighting widespread frustration. Polls before the 2022 elections suggested that Kenyans saw the country heading in the wrong direction; the economy was the top issue they wanted the government to address, followed by corruption and unemployment.²¹ Ruto campaigned on these issues. Protesters charged that he failed to deliver.²²

Ruto initially took a tough stance on what he termed the “treasonous events” of June 25, but he later withdrew the tax bill and pledged spending cuts, a pay freeze, and reforms.²³ The U.S. and other Western embassies expressed concern about the violence, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken engaged Ruto on the situation.²⁴ Two weeks later, Ruto dismissed his cabinet and promised a “broad-based” new government. When protests continued, however, Ruto accused the U.S.-based Ford Foundation of sponsoring anarchy and violence by financing civic groups that he claimed had mobilized the protests, and he reappointed several of the ministers he had sacked.²⁵

At least 60 people died and over 600 were injured around the 2024 protests and over 1,370 people were arrested.²⁶ Human rights groups subsequently raised alarm over dozens of abductions of

¹⁶ *The East African*, “Polls body on the spot as Kenyans prepare for region’s most expensive election,” May 6, 2022; Gabrielle Lynch, “Kenya’s elections are proof of change since 2007 violence, but more reform is needed,” *The Conversation*, September 6, 2022.

¹⁷ On Kenyan civil society concerns, see, e.g., Kenya Human Rights Commission, “Nomination by President William Ruto of Mr. Noordin Haji for appointment of spy chief is an affront to the constitution of Kenya 2010,” May 21, 2023.

¹⁸ *The Economist*, “A new breed of protest has left Kenya’s president tottering,” June 27, 2024.

¹⁹ Ellen Ioanes, “What Kenya’s deadly protests are really about,” *Vox*, June 29, 2024; *Africa Report*, “Kenya: How opulence of Ruto’s allies sparked public anger before protests,” July 1, 2024.

²⁰ Statement by the Police Reforms Working Group Kenya, June 25, 2024.

²¹ Afrobarometer, “For the first time in a decade, Kenyans see management of the economy as their most important problem,” December 26, 2023 and “Dissatisfaction, disengagement mark outlook of young Kenyans,” October 3, 2023.

²² TIFA Research, “Year-end poll: Kenyans’ Reflections of 2023,” December 29, 2023.

²³ *Bloomberg*, “Kenya prepares spending cuts after scrapping \$2.3 billion taxes,” June 28, 2024.

²⁴ U.S. Embassy Nairobi, “Joint Statement by Ambassadors and High Commissioners on Protests,” June 25, 2024; State Department, “Secretary Blinken’s Call with Kenyan President William Ruto,” June 26, 2024.

²⁵ VOA, “Ruto falsely accuses Ford Foundation of funding violence in Kenya,” July 25, 2024.

²⁶ Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), *State of Human Rights in Kenya*, November 20, 2024.

government critics and killings that they attributed to state agents as a crackdown on dissent.²⁷ In early 2025, a cabinet member, Justin Muturi, accused Kenya's intelligence service of being behind the abduction of his son during the 2024 protests.²⁸ Muturi was Kenya's Attorney General during the 2024 protests (he lost the post when Ruto sacked most of his cabinet and was then appointed to a different ministry).

Political Realignments. In late 2024, Kenya's parliament impeached Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua, who faced allegations of corruption, inciting ethnic divisions, and supporting the 2024 protests. His impeachment, pushed by the president's allies, highlighted tensions in Ruto's coalition and shifting political alliances. Gachagua, who helped mobilize Kikuyu voters for Ruto in 2022, has hinted he may run against Ruto in 2027 and has sought new allies, including former President Kenyatta, Odinga's former running mate Martha Karua, and Justin Muturi. Muturi has leveled serious corruption allegations against Ruto, implicating him in controversial government deals worth over \$2 billion with India's Adani Group and a purported money laundering scheme with Russian oligarchs.²⁹ Ruto cancelled the Adani deals in late 2024 after Adani's directors were charged in U.S. court with bribery and fraud. Gachagua has also accused Ruto of personal business deals with insurgent groups in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).³⁰

President Ruto, meanwhile, has deepened his alliance with Raila Odinga's party, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Ruto was part of ODM from 2007, when he backed Odinga's presidential bid, until 2013, when he joined Kenyatta's presidential ticket against Odinga. Ruto mended ties with Odinga during the 2024 protests and appointed several ODM politicians to government posts, and he later backed Odinga's failed bid to lead the African Union Commission (the body's secretariat). In early 2025, Ruto and Odinga announced an agreement under which their parties would work together. The deal, reminiscent of Kenyatta and Odinga's 2018 rapprochement, has divided the opposition. After Odinga died in late 2025, his brother Oburu, 82, became the acting head of the party and formalized ODM's exit from the Azimio la Umoja coalition. ODM faces internal divisions as some in the party question the deal with Ruto and oppose backing him in 2027.³¹ The Azimio coalition, meanwhile, is now led by Kalonzo Musyoka, with backing from Kenyatta. Musyoka, 72, served as Kenya's vice president from 2008 to 2013 and was Odinga's running mate in 2013 and 2017.

The political landscape for the 2027 elections is still unfolding, but a crowded field of potential contenders appear to be positioning to challenge Ruto's re-election bid, and the youth vote could be decisive. Voting behavior in Kenya suggests that youth political participation declined over the past decade, and it is unclear whether the mobilization seen in the 2024 protests will translate to greater participation in elections. More educated than previous generations, young Kenyans are using new strategies to engage politically, but they also face new forms of repression.³² The "Gen

²⁷ KNCHR, "Surge of abductions and killings in Kenya: A call for immediate action and accountability," October 31, 2024; CNN, "Kenyan government critics mysteriously disappeared. They came back silenced.," January 9 2025; *Al Jazeera*, "'Very worrying': Fear stalks Kenya as dozens of government critics abducted," March 4, 2025; Defenders Coalition, State of the Nation Address by National Civil Society Organizations, Press Statement, April 14, 2025.

²⁸ *BBC News*, "Kenyan minister alleges intelligence agency behind his son's abduction," January 15, 2025.

²⁹ *Citizen* (Nairobi), "'Irredeemably corrupt': Muturi drops bombshell linking President Ruto to shady multi-billion deals," April 4, 2025.

³⁰ *Middle East Eye*, "Kenya's former vice president calls for Ruto to be sanctioned over Sudan war," April 10, 2025.

³¹ See, e.g., *Africa Confidential*, "The battle for ODM's soul," February 20, 2026; *The Africa Report*, "Kenya: Is Winnie Odinga positioning herself to inherit her father Raila's political mantle?" December 10, 2025.

³² Amnesty International, "*This Fear, Everyone is Feeling It*": Tech-facilitated Violence Against Young Activists in Kenya, November 19, 2025; *The Guardian*, "'This is lawfare': Kenya 'weaponising the law' to silence critics and protesters," August 8, 2025.

Z” movement, which has described itself as “tribeless” and “leaderless”—salient in a political environment long marked by ethnic identities—has expressed disaffection with the current political class, but whether that will translate into a voting bloc remains to be seen.³³

LGBTQ Rights

Human rights advocates have raised concern that Kenya could follow Uganda in passing strict anti-LGBTQ legislation, an issue that has drawn concern from some Members of Congress.³⁴ A colonial-era law criminalizes “acts against the order of nature,” but Kenya has been a relative refuge from persecution for LGBTQ persons in East Africa. Its Supreme Court ruled in 2023 that the government’s refusal to register an LGBTQ rights group was discriminatory and unconstitutional, and the court affirmed the community’s right to associate. Ruto, who has said there is “no room” for homosexuality in Kenya, expressed respect for the court’s decision but said, “it doesn’t mean we have to agree with it.”³⁵ The ruling prompted a backlash, led by conservative politicians and evangelical churches, and anti-gay protests.³⁶ Legislation proposed in 2023, the Family Protection Bill, echoed Uganda’s anti-homosexuality law: if adopted, it would criminalize “promoting” homosexuality; punish same-sex relations with 10–50 years in jail and “aggravated homosexuality” (defined in the bill as same-sex relations with a minor or disabled person, or when a terminal disease is passed) with the death penalty; and ban LGBTQ parades and assemblies, related advocacy, and cross-dressing. The bill was never formally tabled and remains stalled.

The Economy

Kenya is East Africa’s largest economy and one of the fastest growing and most diverse in Africa. Agriculture is the backbone of the economy, but services, manufacturing, construction, and real estate also drive growth. The services sector leads in job creation, and the telecommunications industry is a global pioneer in mobile banking technology. U.S. government reports suggest that Kenya has fostered a positive investment climate, but corruption often influences the outcome of public tenders there and is a barrier to doing business.³⁷

With almost 40% of the population under age 14, a coming surge in the labor force will present challenges and opportunities. Kenya ranks as a lower-middle income country, but over a third of the population lives in poverty, per the World Bank.³⁸ Kenya’s economy has rallied since its COVID-19-related recession of 2020, but many Kenyans continue to struggle due to inflation.

Former President Kenyatta sought to improve Kenya’s business environment and attract foreign investment during his tenure, but his development agenda and spending ballooned public debt.³⁹ China financed and built major infrastructure projects, including a railway and a port near the coastal town of Lamu, a UNESCO World Heritage site.⁴⁰ The railway cost a fifth of the national

³³ Gabrielle Lynch, “Kenya has changed: Gen-Z protests and what they mean,” *Democracy in Africa*, July 16, 2024.

³⁴ Reuters, “Kenya could follow Uganda as East African nations wage war on LGBTQ rights,” June 23, 2023; *The Guardian*, “Exiles from Uganda’s harsh anti-gay laws fear ‘moral panic’ legislation could follow them,” July 7, 2025. On congressional concerns, see, e.g., H.Res. 1324 in the 118th Congress and Congressional Equality Caucus, “Equality Caucus on Ugandan Court Failing to Overturn Anti-Homosexuality Act,” April 3, 2024.

³⁵ Reuters, “‘No room’ for gays in Kenya, says deputy president,” May 4, 2015; and “For LGBTQ Kenyans, court win prompts backlash as threats escalate,” April 20, 2023.

³⁶ *The Guardian*, “Kenya’s LGBTQ community wins bittersweet victory in battle for rights,” March 3, 2023; Evie Brown, “Navigating the politics of backlash: LGBTQ+ rights and the Family Protection Bill in Kenya,” ODI Global, November 5, 2025.

³⁷ U.S. Trade Representative, *2025 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers*, March 1, 2025; State Department, *2025 Investment Climate Statements*, September 26, 2025.

³⁸ World Bank, *Poverty & Inequality Assessment 2023* (most recent available).

³⁹ *African Business*, “Debt or development: What is Uhuru Kenyatta’s real legacy?” August 22, 2022.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., *New York Times*, “The troubles of Kenya’s China-funded train,” August 9, 2022.

budget; 90% of it was funded with loans from China's Export-Import Bank.⁴¹ The port is part of a large transport corridor project with South Sudan and Ethiopia that envisions a rail and road network, airports, resort cities, an oil pipeline, and industrial areas. A 2019 court ruling blocked plans for Kenya's first coal-fired power plant, in Lamu, over environmental impact concerns.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned Kenya to contain its debt, which rose from 42% of GDP when Kenyatta took office to 68% when Ruto's term began.⁴² Ruto pledged to cut spending, promised greater transparency on Chinese loans, and signed up for a new IMF package to reduce debt risks.⁴³ The IMF offered additional funding, bringing its commitment to over \$4.4 billion. Ruto's government asked China for another \$1 billion to finish stalled road projects and a slower repayment schedule. The IMF lauded Ruto's initial economic reforms, but the protests underscored domestic opposition to his tax proposals, and his government has struggled with how to balance public resistance to new taxes against the risk of debt default and IMF pressure to increase tax revenue.⁴⁴ Ruto has been vocal in calling for international finance system reforms, asserting that African nations pay more, on average, to borrow than wealthier countries, and debt burdens leave many struggling to meet development goals and respond to climate change.⁴⁵

In early 2025, the IMF and Kenya prematurely terminated a four-year \$3.6 billion deal; they are negotiating a new support program. In the meantime, Kenya secured a \$1.5 billion loan from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to help finance its budget and a major trade and investment deal, and in late 2025 Kenya converted three Chinese railway loans from U.S. dollars to Chinese yuan to lower interest payments. In December 2025, President Ruto announced that the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) had agreed to a \$1 billion debt-for-food security swap that would allow Kenya to replace costly existing debt with lower-cost financing on the condition that savings go to programs to boost food security.⁴⁶

Climate Change and “Green Growth”

As the Kenyan government has emphasized, Kenya faces a range of climate-related threats and risks, including prolonged droughts, rising temperatures, severe flooding, and coastal sea levels rising faster than the global average.⁴⁷ Kenya's climate is highly variable, given its diverse geography, and it experiences significant rainfall variability, with parts of the country sometimes experiencing higher-than-average rainfall while other areas face prolonged dry spells. Kenya has struggled with recurrent drought since 2020, and while conditions improved in 2024, the situation has since deteriorated. Kenya has also experienced periods of intense rainfall and severe flooding, which has contributed to displacement, property and agricultural damage, and loss of life.

⁴¹ *Los Angeles Times*, “‘China has conquered Kenya’” August 7, 2017.

⁴² Total public debt is estimated at \$80 billion, of which \$35 billion is owed to foreign lenders. Per the IMF's 2023 Debt Sustainability Analysis, multilateral creditors account for 47% of Kenya's external debt and bilateral creditors 28%. Almost 65% of Kenya's bilateral debt is to non-Paris Club members, mainly loans from China.

⁴³ Reuters, “Kenya publishes loan documents for Chinese-built railway,” November 7, 2022.

⁴⁴ *Deutsche Welle*, “Kenya: Bumpy first year in office for William Ruto,” September 12, 2023; *New York Times*, “Behind the deadly unrest in Kenya, a staggering and painful national debt,” June 26, 2024.

⁴⁵ William Ruto, “If you want our countries to address climate change, first pause our debts,” *New York Times*, October 8, 2023.

⁴⁶ Reuters, “Kenya, US agency to proceed with \$1 billion debt-for-food swap,” December 4, 2025.

⁴⁷ World Meteorological Organization, “Kenya State of the Climate Report highlights growing climate risks,” 2024.

The country has increasingly positioned itself as a regional leader in addressing climate change.⁴⁸ Kenya's economy is highly dependent on its natural resources, and its tourism sector centers on its fragile ecosystems. The country generates most of its electricity from geothermal and hydroelectric sources. Drought affects its hydropower generation, which accounts for almost 30% of its electricity generation and a quarter of installed capacity; the country is working to further develop geothermal power, its largest energy source, to reduce its vulnerability.⁴⁹ Kenya is also developing its wind power capacity and hosts Africa's largest wind farm. Ruto has pledged to phase out the use of fossil fuels for electricity by 2030 and urged other African leaders to embrace renewables.⁵⁰ He has also, however, expressed support for mining Kenya's coal deposits.⁵¹

President Ruto has led Africa's negotiating group at the UN Climate Conference of the Parties (COP) talks, highlighting climate impacts that he calls a "living nightmare for millions of Kenyans, and hundreds of millions of Africans."⁵² Kenya hosted a continental summit on climate action in 2023, during which 17 African leaders signed the Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change, Africa's first joint position on the issue. Ruto is pushing a new Africa Green Industrialization Initiative, pursuing investment in renewable power projects, and he wants to attract investment from companies seeking to build factories powered by renewable energy to reduce their carbon footprint.⁵³ Kenya is also developing carbon capture facilities.⁵⁴ The country estimates that it needs \$40 billion in investment over the next decade to meet its climate goals, per its climate action plan under the Paris Agreement; funding gaps, among other challenges, may constrain implementation.⁵⁵ Some reports suggest cuts in U.S. assistance for renewable energy programs could slow Kenya's effort to fully transition to clean energy sources.⁵⁶

Humanitarian Issues

Drought, Floods and Food Insecurity. Recurrent drought and high food prices have driven food insecurity in Kenya. Pastoral communities were hit hard by a prolonged 2020-2022 drought in which almost 3 million livestock reportedly died, destroying livelihoods. El Niño-driven rains in 2024 facilitated some drought recovery, but also brought devastating flooding that killed several hundred people and displaced 280,000. The rainy seasons have since been below-average, and extremely poor rainfall during the late 2025 short rains season has intensified dry conditions

⁴⁸ See Robina Abuya, *Kenya's Green Leadership – Shaping Africa's Climate Future*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 2025; and President of the Republic of Kenya, "Kenya to be Africa's Voice on Climate Change at the UN Security Council, President Kenyatta Says," November 1, 2022.

⁴⁹ International Energy Agency data.

⁵⁰ *Bloomberg*, "Kenya's Ruto breaks ranks, says Africa must leapfrog fossil fuel," October 4, 2022; William Ruto, "Walking Our Talk on Climate Action," Project Syndicate, May 2023.

⁵¹ *Business Daily*, "Treasury targets coal excise duty as President Ruto backs local mining plans," January 1, 2024.

⁵² For Ruto's speech, see <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/full-speech-read-ruto-s-stinging-message-at-cop27-4012092>.

⁵³ President of the Republic of Kenya, "Green growth is the answer to climate change," December 2, 2023; *Bloomberg*, "Africa's self-appointed climate champion makes the hard sell," December 8, 2023; and *Washington Post*, "Kenyan president aims to attract green investment during U.S. visit," May 17, 2024.

⁵⁴ "Diana Kruzman, "Welcome to Kenya's Great Carbon Valley: a bold new gamble to fight climate change," *MIT Technology Review*, December 22, 2025.

⁵⁵ For more, see Abuya, *Kenya's Green Leadership*.

⁵⁶ Shadrack Omuka, "USAID freeze puts Kenya's renewable energy ambitions at risk," *The Progressive*, June 4, 2025.

in early 2026, fueling food insecurity in the country's arid and semi-arid areas.⁵⁷ By some estimates, as many as 3 million people in Kenya may face acute food insecurity this year.⁵⁸

Refugee Issues. Kenya hosts over 835,000 refugees and asylum seekers, 87% of whom live in camps.⁵⁹ A majority are from Somalia and South Sudan (460,000 and 203,000, respectively, as of early 2026), where conflict, insecurity, and humanitarian need have driven rising refugee flows into Kenya. Funding shortfalls have led aid agencies to reduce assistance to refugees in Kenya at the same time that humanitarian operations in Somalia and South Sudan are also struggling with serious funding gaps.⁶⁰ Abrupt ration cuts in early 2025, prompted by the Trump Administration's aid freeze (see "U.S. Relations and Assistance") and other donor cuts, spurred violent clashes in one of Kenya's refugee camps; the aid cuts have increased food insecurity in the camps.⁶¹

The Kenyan government's stance toward refugees has shifted significantly over the past decade. In 2015, after a major Al Shabaab attack in Kenya, then-Deputy President Ruto demanded that the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) relocate refugees from Dadaab, Kenya's largest refugee camp complex, where Kenyan authorities alleged Al Shabaab had ties.⁶² The Obama Administration intervened: then-Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to the country, praised its role as a refugee host, and pledged additional U.S. aid to help Kenya support refugees.⁶³ In 2016, the government declared that Kenya would no longer host refugees, again citing security concerns. Officials later clarified that the aim was to close Dadaab, which at the time had over 340,000 refugees, most from Somalia. Kenya's High Court blocked Dadaab's closure, ruling it discriminatory and unconstitutional. Authorities threatened to close Dadaab again in 2019 and told UNHCR in 2021 that camp residents would be expelled if UNHCR did not devise a plan to close both the Dadaab and Kakuma complexes by 2022 (Kakuma is near the border with South Sudan and has historically hosted refugees from there). Humanitarian activists, arguing returns to countries in conflict were not sustainable, urged the government to offer refugees durable solutions in Kenya.

The government adopted a progressive law in 2021 that provides new opportunities, rights, and protections for refugees within Kenya. Refugee advocates say it offers a promising model for refugee integration at a time when many countries are tightening restrictions.⁶⁴ The new policy, known as the Shirika Plan, aims to move from a camp-centric model toward one of local integration. It enjoys public support, but bureaucratic impediments pose challenges to its implementation.⁶⁵ Under the plan, the camps around Dadaab, with over 400,000 refugees, and Kakuma, with over 300,000 refugees, are being transformed into integrated municipalities.

⁵⁷ FEWS NET, "Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes expanding as anomalous dry conditions intensify," January 2026.

⁵⁸ Action Against Hunger, "Escalating Malnutrition and Acute Food Shortage in Kenya's ASAL Counties Amid Worsening Drought," February 18, 2026.

⁵⁹ UNHCR, "Refugee and Asylum-seekers in Kenya," Operational Data Portal, data as of January 31, 2026.

⁶⁰ World Food Program, "WFP warns of catastrophic shortfalls in Somalia with millions at risk of deepening hunger crisis," February 20, 2026 and "Conflict and funding cuts fuel soaring hunger in South Sudan," November 18, 2025.

⁶¹ WFP, *WFP Kenya Country Brief, March 2025*, March 31, 2025; *The Guardian*, "Refugees in Kenya's Kakuma camp clash with police after food supplies cut," March 5, 2025; *The New Humanitarian*, "Cut to the bone, The cost of ration cuts and delivery delays in Kenya's refugee camps," August 26, 2025.

⁶² CNN, "Kenyan official to U.N.: Relocate world's largest refugee camp, or we'll do it," April 11, 2015.

⁶³ State Department, Remarks by Secretary Kerry, Press Availability in Nairobi, Kenya, May 4, 2015.

⁶⁴ Refugees International, *Removing Red Tape to Get Kenya's Refugee Act Right*, March 13, 2025.

⁶⁵ *The New Humanitarian*, "Kenya embraces refugee integration – and citizens are on board," April 21, 2025.

Security Issues

Terrorist threats and conflict in neighboring countries have led Kenya to take an increasingly active role in regional security, although banditry, cattle rustling, poaching, and intercommunal disputes place competing domestic demands on Kenya's security resources. Kenya has suffered multiple international terrorist attacks, and the concentration of potential targets in Nairobi is a serious concern for Kenyan and foreign security officials. Jihadist recruitment in Kenya is also a problem: Kenyans reportedly comprise the largest share of Al Shabaab's foreign fighters, and in 2024, a Kenyan national was convicted in U.S. court of conspiring to conduct a 9/11-style terrorist attack in the United States on Al Shabaab's behalf.⁶⁶ Studies suggest that local grievances in Kenya, including the perceived marginalization and mistreatment of Muslims, and security force abuses have contributed to radicalization.⁶⁷ Al Shabaab attacks in Kenya have been sporadic in the past five years, primarily consisting of ambushes and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) targeting security forces, and largely concentrated in the northeast, near the Somali border.

Beyond its domestic anti-terrorism efforts and military operations near the Somali border, Kenya has conducted military operations in Somalia since 2011. The number of Kenyan troops in the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), declined in 2025 with the mission's transition to a new mandate. Kenya is expected to contribute 1,410 of AUSSOM's 11,900 personnel. AUSSOM faces funding gaps as international donors continue to differ on how to finance it; the United States opposes the AU proposal to use UN assessed contributions in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2719 (2023) to help finance the mission.⁶⁸

Alongside terrorist threats, Kenya has struggled with pastoralist militia activity, including cattle-rustling and banditry, in the northwest.⁶⁹ The government deployed the military in 2023 to curb attacks and small arms proliferation. The deployment lowered the scale of violence, but persistent insecurity fueled public frustration with the government's decision to deploy police to Haiti.⁷⁰

Police Abuses and Calls for Reform

Police abuses and extrajudicial killings (EJKs) in Kenya have repeatedly drawn an international spotlight, including in the context of anti-terrorism efforts.⁷¹ The State Department's most recent human rights report listed security force abuses, including torture, unlawful killings, and enforced disappearances among Kenya's most serious human rights problems, noting "numerous reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings ... particularly during the youth-led, nationwide 'Gen Z' demonstrations" in 2024. The report described impunity as a problem "at all levels of government" and a serious problem across security agencies. Accountability mechanisms such as the Independent Police Oversight Authority have been criticized for failing to prosecute

⁶⁶ Justice Department, "Cholo Abdi Abdullah sentenced to life in prison for conspiring to commit 9/11-style terrorist attack on behalf of al-Shabaab," December 22, 2025.

⁶⁷ Tricia Bacon, "Inside the Minds of Somalia's ascendant insurgents: An Identity, Mind, Emotions and Perceptions Analysis of Al-Shabaab," Program on Extremism at George Washington University, March 2022; UN Development Program (UNDP), *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and Tipping Point for Recruitment*, 2017.

⁶⁸ Partha Moman, "With AUSSOM's funding challenges here to stay, what are the options for the Mission's future in Somalia?" International Peace Institute, January 16, 2026; U.S. Mission to the United Nations, Explanation of Vote – UN Security Council Resolution on AUSSOM, December 27, 2024.

⁶⁹ For more on pastoralist and ethnic militia activity, see, e.g., ACLED, "Increasing Security Challenges in Kenya," March 2, 2023 and "Kenya: Government operation brings calm to North Rift region," August 4, 2023.

⁷⁰ *The New Humanitarian*, "Kenya's security paradox: Police sent to Haiti as banditry plagues North Rift," September 4, 2024; *Nation*, "Renewed bandit attacks in Kerio Valley undermine government peace efforts," January 28, 2025.

⁷¹ See, e.g., *New York Times*, "Haiti, desperate for peace, turns to police notorious for violence," October 4, 2023; *CNN*, "Dozens 'disappeared' by security forces, rights group says," July 19, 2016; and *Washington Post*, "Kenya's heavy-handed war on terror," May 7, 2015.

misconduct. A 2021 Kenyan parliamentary report described EJKs and enforced disappearances as a grave concern, noting over 1,000 cases since 2013. Missing Voices, a coalition that tracks police killings and disappearances, documented over 800 cases from 2019-2023 and 159 cases in 2024 (104 EJKs and 55 enforced disappearances).⁷²

Police abuses around elections have been a recurrent problem. Police were implicated in over 400 deaths after the 2007 elections and over 100 deaths after the 2017 polls.⁷³ Ruto pledged to end police abuse and enhance police oversight in his campaign; after he took office, Kenyan prosecutors charged 12 police officers with crimes against humanity over the 2017 post-election violence.⁷⁴ In 2023 and 2024, however, the police response to protests reportedly resulted in dozens of deaths, and senior government officials dismissed allegations of excessive force.⁷⁵ A taskforce directed by Ruto to study police problems recommended far-reaching changes to the police and prisons services, citing underfunding, “endemic” corruption, leadership gaps, and poor human capital management as key challenges.⁷⁶ The taskforce noted that police routinely rank in polls as Kenya’s most corrupt institution, and assessed that the failure to address the problem was fueling a culture of impunity in the force; they also recommended raising police salaries. The Biden Administration pledged \$7 million in new aid during Ruto’s 2024 state visit to help modernize and professionalize Kenya’s National Police Service and over \$2 million to support prison service reforms. The United States has also supported the Kenyan police for their deployment to Haiti.

Selected Foreign Relations Issues

East Africa. Kenya has played a peacemaking role in its troubled region on multiple occasions, hosting the talks that led to Sudan’s 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and facilitating negotiations on conflicts in Ethiopia, DRC, and South Sudan. With U.S. support and President Ruto’s approval, former President Kenyatta played a leading role in the AU-mediated ceasefire deal between Ethiopia’s government and Tigray authorities in 2022, and a Kenyan general continues to lead the AU ceasefire monitoring team there. On several occasions, U.S. diplomats have worked closely with Kenya on mediation efforts, including during the CPA and Tigray talks.

Some political actors and other observers have questioned Kenya’s neutrality in some of the region’s conflicts.⁷⁷ Former Deputy President Gachagua, for example, has accused Ruto of profiting from the conflicts in Sudan and DRC and helping warring factions smuggle gold from those countries through Kenya.⁷⁸ According to Gachagua, Ruto has had business ties with RSF leader Hemedti since 2023, and also has links with the M23 rebel group in DRC. Reports from non-governmental organizations have named Kenya as a hub for illicit gold flows from conflict-affected countries in the region to the UAE.⁷⁹

Ethiopia. Sometimes seen as competitors, Kenya and Ethiopia have generally maintained cordial relations, but instability in Ethiopia has been a concern for Kenya in recent years.⁸⁰ The two countries sometimes collaborate on shared security concerns, both in Somalia and along their

⁷² Missing Voices, *2023 Annual Report*, April 2024 and *2024 Annual Report*, May 2025.

⁷³ Human Rights Watch, “*Kill Those Criminals*”: *Security Force Violations in Kenya’s 2017 Elections*, October 2017.

⁷⁴ AFP, “Kenyan police charged with crimes against humanity over 2017 crackdown,” October 28, 2022.

⁷⁵ Kenya Human Rights Commission, “Kenya marching slowly into a police state,” July 21, 2023; HRW, “*Unchecked Injustice*”: *Kenya’s Suppression of the 2023 Anti-Government Protests*, November 5, 2024.

⁷⁶ *Report of the National Taskforce on Police Reforms*, November 2023.

⁷⁷ Al Jazeera, “Peacemaker or peacebreaker? Why Kenya’s good neighbour reputation is marred,” March 6, 2025.

⁷⁸ *The Africa Report*, “Kenya: Ex-allies lambast Ruto, accuse him of war profiteering,” April 11, 2025; *The Standard* (Nairobi), “Gachagua drops diplomatic bombshell on Ruto,” April 8, 2025.

⁷⁹ Bloomberg, “Kenya serves as a hub for smuggled gold from region,” June 3, 2025; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, *Tarnished hope: Crime and corruption in South Sudan’s gold sector*, May 2023.

⁸⁰ Mvemba Dizolele et al., *Vying for Regional Leadership in the Horn of Africa: Kenya and Ethiopia, Competitors or Partners?* February 24, 2025; President William Ruto, *The Annual Report to Parliament on the State of National Security*, November 2025.

shared border. They conducted joint operations against one of Ethiopia's rebel groups, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in early 2025, and subsequently signed a new defense pact, upgrading an arrangement last negotiated in 1963. Ruto has offered to mediate between Ethiopia and Egypt in their dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), although Egypt may see Ruto, who has described the dam as a "monumental achievement" for Ethiopia, as partial.⁸¹ Kenya has increased its electricity imports from Ethiopia to meet growing energy demands, and plans to buy power produced from the GERD.⁸² In 2023, the two countries opened the Ethiopia-Kenya Electricity Highway, a \$1.2 billion World Bank project through which they now share power.⁸³

Somalia. Kenya-Somalia relations are complex. Ethnic Somalis comprise an estimated 6% of Kenya's population: while some arrived in recent decades as refugees, Kenya's colonial boundaries incorporated areas inhabited by ethnic Somalis, who are the predominant group in northeast Kenya. Historically marginalized, Somali Kenyans have nevertheless sometimes played prominent roles in Kenya's government, and currently hold several of the top security posts.⁸⁴

In the early 2000s, Kenya hosted peace talks that led to the formation of Somalia's transitional federal government. It operated from Nairobi for several years until regional security operations enabled its move to Somalia. After Al Shabaab took control of much of south-central Somalia in the late 2000s, Kenya sought to create a buffer zone between its border and Al Shabaab territory. In tandem with its military incursion into southern Somalia, Kenya backed local militia and was pivotal in the establishment of Jubaland, which became one of Somalia's most autonomous federal states.⁸⁵ Jubaland has sometimes been a point of friction between the governments of Kenya and Somalia.⁸⁶ Kenya's ties with the breakaway Republic of Somaliland is another area of tension: Kenya maintains a liaison office there, and in 2025 allowed Somaliland to open its own liaison office in Nairobi.⁸⁷ Kenya and Somalia also have an unresolved maritime boundary dispute.⁸⁸ Ruto announced in early 2026 that Kenya would reopen its land border with Somalia, which has been officially closed since 2011.⁸⁹

DRC. Kenya deployed troops to eastern DRC in 2022 to lead an East African force to stabilize areas affected by a Rwandan-backed rebellion; the force withdrew in late 2023 after DRC authorities complained that East African troops were unwilling to aggressively confront the rebels. Kenya has facilitated peace talks on the eastern DRC crisis, despite apparent suspicion by some Congolese about Kenya's interests in the country. DRC's president accused Ruto in 2024 of taking Rwanda's side in the conflict.⁹⁰ Former President Kenyatta has nevertheless remained involved in regional mediation efforts as an AU envoy. The African-led peace process is part of a

⁸¹ CapitalFM, "Ruto says Kenya backs fair Nile water use, urges Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan to pursue good-faith talks," September 9, 2025.

⁸² *The Africa Report*, "Kenya's power crisis reality: Why Ethiopia still holds the switch," February 16, 2026.

⁸³ CNN, "The \$1 billion electricity highway that allows Ethiopia and Kenya to share their power," December 14, 2024.

⁸⁴ Tabea Scharrer, "'Ambiguous citizens': Kenyan Somalis and the question of belonging," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, June 16, 2018; Keren Weitzberg, *We Do Not Have Borders: Greater Somalia and the Predicaments of Belonging in Kenya*, Ohio University Press: 2017; HRW, "Victory for Kenyans denied citizenship," February 26, 2025.

⁸⁵ For more, see International Crisis Group, *The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia*, February 15, 2012 and "Jubaland in jeopardy: The uneasy path to state-building in Somalia," May 21, 2013.

⁸⁶ *New York Times*, "Somalia severs diplomatic ties with Kenya," December 15, 2020; ICG, "Ending the dangerous standoff in Southern Somalia," July 14, 2020; *DefenseWeb*, "The Jubaland Forces incursion: Safeguarding Kenya's territorial integrity amid regional volatility," October 7, 2025.

⁸⁷ *The Africa Report*, "Somaliland's Nairobi gambit: Embassy or provocation?" May 30, 2025.

⁸⁸ *New York Times*, "Why a sea dispute has Somalia and Kenya on edge," October 12, 2021.

⁸⁹ For more, see *Deutsche Welle*, "Security fears linger as Kenya set to open Somalia border," February 24, 2026.

⁹⁰ *Africanews*, "Conflict in eastern DRC: Tshisekedi criticizes Ruto on Nairobi process," August 13, 2024.

broader set of international diplomatic efforts focused on the security crisis in eastern DRC, which include a major U.S.-led mediation effort between DRC and Rwanda.⁹¹

Sudan. President Ruto has also offered to facilitate talks between Sudan's warring parties, but Sudan's military government has accused him of bias toward the insurgent Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Kenya's relations with Sudan's government deteriorated in 2024 after Ruto hosted a visit by RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, aka "Hemedti," and hit a new low in early 2025 when Kenya allowed the RSF to announce a parallel government in a Nairobi conference facility owned by the Kenyan government. Sudanese authorities called it "tantamount to an act of hostility."⁹² Experts subsequently identified Kenyan ammunition among weapons reportedly captured from the RSF.⁹³ Ruto's former deputy has accused him of allowing the RSF to launder money from gold through Nairobi.⁹⁴ Kenyan officials assert that they are neutral on the conflict and have called for sanctions on the warring parties' leaders for obstructing humanitarian aid.⁹⁵ The U.S. Treasury Department reported in early 2026 that one of Hemedti's brothers, whom Treasury sanctioned in 2024 for his role in procuring weapons for the group, holds a Kenyan passport.⁹⁶

Haiti.⁹⁷ In July 2023, Kenya responded to an appeal from the government of Haiti for help with rising gang violence, offering to lead a multinational force to assist Haitian police in restoring order.⁹⁸ The UN Security Council authorized the Multinational Security Support mission (MSS) in October 2023, with Kenyan police expected to comprise roughly half the force. Kenya's deployment faced legal challenges and delays; the first contingent arrived in Haiti in mid-2024.⁹⁹ Hamstrung by funding, personnel, and equipment shortfalls, the MSS struggled to carry out its mission, reaching barely 1,000 of the authorized 2,500 personnel (a majority Kenyan), and the security situation in Haiti continued to worsen.¹⁰⁰ Several Kenyan police officers were killed.

In September 2025, the UN Security Council authorized the transition of the MSS into a Gang Suppression Force (GSF), which has a more robust mandate and is slated to have up to 5,500 military and police officers.¹⁰¹ Like the MSS, the GSF is not a UN mission and is reliant on voluntary contributions, but the GSF is now supported logistically by a UN Support Office in Haiti (UNSOH), which is funded through assessed peacekeeping contributions. The GSF is led by a Standing Group of Partners, which includes the United States, Canada, Kenya, and other nations that contributed forces to the MSS.

⁹¹ See also CRS Insight IN12619, *Peace Process in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Issues for Congress*.

⁹² *New York Times*, "Amid regional diplomatic furor, Sudan's paramilitaries forge a rival government," February 23, 2025.

⁹³ *Bellingcat*, "Kenyan weapons linked to Sudan's civil war," June 15, 2025.

⁹⁴ *Middle East Eye*, "Kenya's former vice president calls for Ruto to be sanctioned over Sudan war," April 10, 2025.

⁹⁵ *Nation*, "Mudavadi: Kenya wants warring Sudan leaders sanctioned," April 16, 2025.

⁹⁶ Treasury Department, "Treasury Sanctions Sudanese Rapid Support Forces Procurement Director, October 8, 2024 and Specially Designated Nationals List Update, February 19, 2026.

⁹⁷ For more on the Haiti situation, see CRS Insight IN12331, *Haiti in Crisis: Developments Related to the Multinational Security Support Mission* and CRS Report R47394, *Haiti: Recent Developments and U.S. Policy*.

⁹⁸ Foreign Minister Alfred Mutua (@DrAlfredMutua), X Post, July 29, 2023.

⁹⁹ Kenya's parliament approved the government's request to deploy police to Haiti in late 2023, but its High Court blocked the deployment, ruling that it required a "reciprocal arrangement" with a host government, which Kenyan and Haitian officials signed in early 2024. *BBC*, "Kenya court blocks police deployment to Haiti," January 26, 2024; *The Guardian*, "Kenya's offer to send police to Haiti sparks human rights concerns," August 5, 2023; *New York Times*, "Haiti, desperate for peace, turns to police notorious for violence," October 4, 2023.

¹⁰⁰ *The New Humanitarian*, "The new Gang Suppression Force and what it means for Haitians," December 3, 2025.

¹⁰¹ The Security Council authorized the GSF in Resolution 2793 (2025), sponsored by the United States and Panama..

Israel/Gaza. Kenya has longstanding ties with Israel, which Kenyan officials call a “special partnership.”¹⁰² Ruto expressed solidarity with Israel over the October 2023 attacks by Hamas, but has faced domestic pressure over Israel’s military operations in Gaza.¹⁰³ Kenya often supports Israeli positions at the United Nations, but has also voted in favor of full UN membership for Palestine. Kenya supported resolutions calling for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

Iran. In 2023, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi made Kenya the first stop on a trip aimed at bolstering Iran’s ties with Africa (Raisi also visited Uganda and Zimbabwe), and he signed a range of cooperation agreements with President Ruto, describing the visit as a turning point in Iran-Kenya relations.¹⁰⁴ It was the first visit by an Iranian leader to Kenya in over a decade—during which time Iranian agents were implicated in several possible terrorist plots purportedly targeting Western or Israeli interests in Kenya.¹⁰⁵ In response to the U.S. and Israeli military operations against Iran, the Ruto Administration has called for de-escalation and diplomacy, and it has condemned the retaliatory strikes by Iran on the Gulf states.¹⁰⁶

Russia/Ukraine. Kenya was a vocal critic of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 when it sat on the UN Security Council.¹⁰⁷ The Ruto administration took a more ambiguous stance in early 2023, hosting the foreign ministers of Belarus and Russia and announcing plans for a trade pact with Russia. (Russia-Kenya trade is limited, particularly in comparison to U.S.-Kenya trade; imports from Russia consist primarily of iron, wheat, and fertilizers; Kenya’s main export to Russia is tea.) Kenyan officials subsequently called Russia’s decision to exit the Black Sea Grain Initiative “a stab in the back” that would disproportionately harm the drought-affected Horn of Africa.¹⁰⁸ Ruto did not attend Russia’s 2023 Africa Summit, and in early 2024, Kenya joined the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, a coalition of countries that supports the defense of Ukraine.

Hundreds of Kenyans, meanwhile, have reportedly been recruited or forcibly conscripted into the Russian army to fight in Ukraine.¹⁰⁹ Some say they were recruited with offers of gainful employment in Russia, but then forced to fight in Ukraine, while others, including some former members of Kenya’s security forces, were reportedly recruited to fight as mercenaries. Kenyan authorities assess that as many as 1,000 Kenyan citizens have been recruited to fight for Russia and have called for Russia to bar the conscription of Kenyans.¹¹⁰ The government has shut down recruitment agencies and is prosecuting several individuals on human trafficking charges.

China. China is Kenya’s largest trading partner and largest bilateral lender. PRC loans, estimated at over \$8 billion, account for almost 17% of Kenya’s external debt (the World Bank is its largest external creditor).¹¹¹ While Ruto has sought to strengthen U.S. ties, he has also sought to maintain

¹⁰² *The East African*, “Kenya, Israel agree to enhance cooperation on health and security,” July 29, 2021.

¹⁰³ *The Star* (Nairobi), “Kenya stands with Israel, Ruto says amidst war with Palestine,” October 8, 2023; President William Ruto (@WilliamsRuto), X Post, February 1, 2024.

¹⁰⁴ VOA, “Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi Kicks Off Africa Tour in Kenya,” July 12, 2023.

¹⁰⁵ *The Star*, “Police uncover terror plans by an Iranian national in Kenya,” November 28, 2021.

¹⁰⁶ President William Ruto (@WilliamsSRuto), X post, March 2, 2026.

¹⁰⁷ NPR, “Kenyan U.N. Ambassador compares Ukraine’s plight to colonial legacy in Africa,” February 22, 2022.

¹⁰⁸ *BBC News*, “Russia’s grain deal exit is a stab in the back—Kenya,” July 18, 2023.

¹⁰⁹ AFP, “Lies, horror, trauma: Kenyans recount forced Russian recruitment,” February 9, 2026; *Washington Post*, “Kenyan job seekers were lured to Russia, then sent to die in Ukraine,” February 2, 2026.

¹¹⁰ *BBC News*, “Over 1,000 Kenyans enlisted to fight in Russia-Ukraine war,” February 19, 2026.

¹¹¹ Fergus Kell, “Kenya’s debt struggles go far deeper than Chinese loans,” Chatham House, May 31, 2023; Africa Center for Open Governance, *Kenya’s Debt Treadmill: The China Portfolio 2000-2024*, December 2024.

a “robust friendship” with China, despite his anti-China rhetoric during his campaign.¹¹² When Ruto was Kenyatta’s deputy, their coalition cultivated ties with the Communist Party of China, an effort Ruto’s party continued after his election.¹¹³ Ruto attended China’s 2023 Belt and Road Forum and its Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2024, and China hosted him for a state visit in April 2025. China’s foreign ministry described the state visit, the first by an African leader since FOCAC, as aimed at deepening the relationship and “promoting the solidarity and cooperation of the Global South.”¹¹⁴ Ruto sought funding for new infrastructure projects, cooperation on green energy initiatives, trade deals, better loan terms, and China’s support for reforms to multilateral institutions.¹¹⁵ Chinese companies reportedly signed deals worth \$823 million in new investments. In January 2026, Kenya announced a preliminary trade deal with China that would remove tariffs on over 98% of Kenyan exports to the Chinese market. Opinion polls suggest most Kenyans view Chinese investment in their country positively but see the amount of debt Kenya owes to China as a serious problem.¹¹⁶

Renditions. The abduction and rendition of several foreign dissidents from Kenya has prompted alarm from human rights advocates, including Amnesty International, which describes them as part of a “growing and worrying trend in transnational repression.”¹¹⁷ Several prominent cases were reported in 2024: the rendition of Ugandan opposition leader Kizza Besigye in November, four Turkish refugees in October (seven Turkish nationals were abducted; three were released), and 36 Ugandan opposition supporters in July.¹¹⁸ A Rwandan human rights defender, Yusuf Ahmed Gasana, and a South Sudanese dissident, Morris Mabior Awikjok Bak, were abducted in Kenya and forcibly returned to their countries in 2023. Bak’s rendition followed several renditions to South Sudan during Kenyatta’s term; Bak, like the other South Sudanese, was registered as a refugee in Kenya. In January 2025, Tanzanian activist Maria Sarungi Tsehai, a prominent critic of her country’s government, was abducted by unknown assailants in Nairobi but released several hours later. What role, if any, Kenyan security agents played in these incidents is debated, but the cases have tarnished Kenya’s reputation as a relative safe haven in the region.¹¹⁹

Wildlife and Environmental Conservation

Heavily reliant on tourism for foreign exchange earnings, Kenya has implemented measures to conserve its wildlife resources and is recognized as a leader in countering wildlife trafficking in Africa. It has a stringent regulatory and legislative environment around poaching and trafficking, and has enjoyed a dramatic drop in elephant and rhino poaching in the past decade.¹²⁰ Many anti-trafficking initiatives are implemented through the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), which

¹¹² During his campaign, Ruto pledged to deport Chinese nationals doing jobs that could be done by Kenyans. On his post-election shift, see, e.g., VOA, “After anti-China campaign, Kenya’s Ruto does about-face,” September 29, 2022.

¹¹³ *CapitalFM*, “Kenya: UDA seeks support of Communist Party of China to Strengthen Structures,” August 17, 2023.

¹¹⁴ PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Conference, April 17, 2025.

¹¹⁵ *Citizen*, “Inside President Ruto’s China state visit,” April 20, 2025. *Star* (Nairobi), “President Ruto takes the mic in Beijing, calls for global shake-up,” April 23, 2025.

¹¹⁶ Pew Research Center, “Views of China in Middle-Income Countries,” July 15, 2025.

¹¹⁷ Amnesty International (AI), “Uganda: Opposition politician’s abduction in Kenya continues a “growing and worrying trend in transitional repression,” November 20, 2024.

¹¹⁸ OHCHR, Comment by UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk on abduction of Ugandan opposition leader Kizza Besigye,” November 21, 2024; BBC, “UN ‘deeply concerned’ Kenya returned Turkish refugees,” October 21, 2024.

¹¹⁹ *The Africa Report*, “Is Kenya the new haven for international abductions?” January 17, 2025; BBC News, “‘We live in fear – forced expulsions taint Kenya’s safe haven image,’ November 6, 2024; VOA, “Top Kenyan official claims Kenya is ‘safe haven’ as cases of state-sanctioned abductions surge,” November 28, 2024.

¹²⁰ *Financial Times*, “How Kenya turned the tide against ivory poachers,” April 27, 2021.

enforces wildlife laws and regulations and manages the national parks and reserves. Despite its efforts to curb the illicit wildlife trade, Kenya remains a transit country. Corruption and weaknesses in enforcement and prosecution of trafficking laws are an ongoing concern.

The U.S. government has long partnered with Kenya's government and civil society to address these issues and support other conservation efforts. The United States has provided training and equipment to the KWS and supports programs to protect the country's parks and animals. Roughly 65% of Kenya's famous wildlife live outside its KWS-protected parks, and conservation groups have worked with communities to establish over 200 community conservancies to protect wildlife and promote sustainable land use. The United States has supported these conservancies, which protect over 7 million hectares of land. Tourism, much of it wildlife-related, is an important source of revenue (\$3.5 billion in 2024) and jobs.¹²¹ Kenya lost an estimated \$1 billion in tourism-related revenue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deforestation is a long-standing concern for Kenya. Kenya's Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win the Nobel Prize, was recognized for her tree-planting campaign and broader contributions to sustainable development, democracy, and peace. President Ruto has proposed to plant 15 billion trees by 2023 to combat climate change, but in 2023, he directed an end to a six-year-old logging ban, ostensibly to create jobs. A court suspended the decision, leaving the ban in place. Environmentalists warn that lifting the logging ban would risk reversing the gains the country has made to improve its tree cover.¹²² Among other environmental initiatives, Kenya has sought to stem plastic pollution, including by banning plastic bags and single-use plastics in 2017. With stiff penalties, the law was initially successful, but the smuggling of bags from neighboring countries presents enforcement challenges.¹²³

U.S. Relations and Assistance

The United States and Kenya have historically close ties. The country is a popular destination in Africa for American tourists: over 300,000 Americans visited Kenya in 2024.¹²⁴ U.S. Embassy Nairobi is designated a high-threat, high-risk post, given terrorism concerns, and hundreds of U.S. servicemembers, civilians, and contractors are in Kenya to support counterterrorism (CT) efforts in the region. Some are deployed to Camp Simba, a U.S. forward operating location adjacent to a Kenyan naval base on the coast near the Somali border.

Governance, human rights, and corruption concerns in Kenya sometimes complicate the bilateral relationship, and abuses by Kenyan security forces have posed challenges at times for security cooperation. Successive U.S. Administrations have pushed for greater accountability for political violence and unresolved corruption cases. In 2024, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), of which the United States is a member, added Kenya to its "grey list" of countries subject to increased monitoring for money laundering and terrorism financing.

Bilateral relations have fluctuated in the past two decades. The ICC cases were a significant point of friction, and President Kenyatta looked to other foreign partners, notably China, for diplomatic and economic support. In the tense period after the 2017 polls, however, U.S. diplomats helped to facilitate Kenyatta and Odinga's rapprochement, a sign of continued U.S. influence. The first Trump Administration took steps to improve ties, and announced a Strategic Partnership when

¹²¹ *Citizen*, "Kenya's tourism sector hit record Ksh.452 billion earnings in 2024," September 23, 2025.

¹²² Lisa Fuchs, "Kenya's logging ban has been lifted—it's a political decision and a likely setback for conservation," *The Conversation*, July 22, 2023.

¹²³ *NPR*, "The toughest plastic bag ban is failing: A tale of smugglers, dumps and dying goats," August 9, 2023.

¹²⁴ Kenya Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, *Annual Tourism Sector Performance Report 2024*.

Kenyatta visited the White House in 2018. Nearly \$900 million in commercial deals were announced during the visit, and direct flights, once blocked over U.S. security concerns, started later that year. First Lady Melania Trump visited Kenya on her first solo international trip. The Trump Administration launched a Bilateral Strategic Dialogue with Kenya in 2019 and free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations in 2020.

Relations continued to improve under the Biden Administration. Kenya was the opening stop on Antony Blinken's first trip to Sub-Saharan Africa as Secretary of State, during which he attended the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue. He highlighted the strategic partnership and Kenya's regional peacemaking role during the 2022 U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, when the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on civil nuclear cooperation. First Lady Jill Biden visited Kenya in early 2023, and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin went to Kenya on his first Sub-Saharan Africa tour, during which a five-year Framework for Defense Cooperation was finalized. The heads of the Central Intelligence Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation both visited in 2024.

The Biden Administration expressed support for a range of Kenyan initiatives, including on climate action and renewable energy. During Ruto's 2024 state visit, the two governments made commitments on democracy, human rights, public health, security, and countering corruption, among other issues.¹²⁵ They announced new initiatives on education, climate action, clean energy, carbon management, and sustainable development, and unveiled a partnership on semiconductor manufacturing in Kenya to strengthen the global supply chain. They launched the Nairobi-Washington Vision, which called on the international community to help developing countries manage debt while investing in economic growth. The Biden Administration pledged new funds for police professionalization, prison reforms, health, education, agriculture, and civil society. Two resolutions introduced during the visit, S.Res. 704 and H.Res. 1254, recognized Kenya's strategic importance to the United States and celebrated the 60th anniversary of bilateral ties.

President Biden's ambassador to Kenya, prominent American business executive Meg Whitman, focused on pitching Kenya to U.S. businesses and investors, and trade and investment were top priorities for Kenya during Ruto's state visit.¹²⁶ Microsoft and Coca Cola, among other U.S. businesses, announced major private sector deals around the visit. The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), which has facilitated investments in renewable energy, e-mobility, digital connectivity, and infrastructure in Kenya, revealed new commitments during the visit that brought the DFC's Kenya portfolio to over \$1 billion. The Biden Administration, instead of continuing FTA negotiations, pursued a Strategic Trade and Investment Partnership (STIP) with Kenya, which the U.S. Trade Representative described as an "ambitious roadmap for enhanced cooperation." For more, see CRS In Focus IF11526, *U.S.-Kenya Trade Negotiations*.

The current Trump Administration has characterized Kenya as an important U.S. ally in Africa.¹²⁷ Secretary Rubio has publicly engaged more often with President Ruto than other African leaders, discussing the conflicts in DRC, Sudan, Somalia, and South Sudan; praising Kenya's "pivotal" role in the turbulent region; and expressing appreciation for the Haiti deployment.¹²⁸ President Ruto has publicly challenged the Trump Administration on some issues, including climate change

¹²⁵ White House, *Fact Sheet: Kenya State Visit to the United States*, May 23, 2024.

¹²⁶ *POLITICO*, "Meg Whitman's trying to be a different kind of US ambassador. Washington is noticing," May 22, 2024.

¹²⁷ See, e.g., State Department, "United States and Kenya sign five-year, \$2.5 billion Health Cooperation Framework," December 4, 2025 and "Advancing Trump Administration priorities in Sub-Saharan Africa," September 25, 2025.

¹²⁸ See, e.g., State Department, Secretary Rubio's Meeting with Kenyan President Ruto," September 24, 2025 and "State Department, Secretary of State Marco Rubio with Kenyan President Ruto at the Signing of a Health Framework of Cooperation," December 4, 2025, and State Department readouts of Secretary Rubio's calls with President Ruto.

and the defunding of some UN agencies.¹²⁹ The post of U.S. ambassador to Kenya has been vacant since the end of President Biden's term.

The Trump Administration's aid cuts (discussed below) and decision to dissolve the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have reduced the U.S. footprint in Kenya. The U.S. embassy now hosts one of four foreign aid "hubs" on the continent, however, and the DFC has based a regional representative in the country. The DFC has yet to announce new projects in Kenya, but President Ruto reported in late 2025 that, in addition to the debt-for-food security swap, the DFC was willing to collaborate with Kenya on food security, infrastructure, energy, and information and communications technology.¹³⁰ Kenya was the first country to sign one of the Administration's new "Health Cooperation Frameworks," under which the State Department has committed to continue global health funding for the next five years, albeit with planned assistance levels declining during that period.

U.S. Trade. U.S. goods trade with Kenya rose from \$1.5 billion in 2024 to over \$1.8 billion in 2025, with over \$990 million in U.S. exports to Kenya last year and almost \$860 million in imports.¹³¹ The U.S. goods trade surplus for 2025 was almost \$132 million, up from \$45 million in 2024. Kenya has been a leading exporter under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, Title I of P.L. 106-200, as amended) trade preference program and the largest textile exporter to the United States under AGOA. The country has faced a 10% tariff on exports to the United States per the Trump Administration's April 2025 trade action; the U.S. Trade Representative cited Kenya's 50% tariff on imports of U.S. corn and "burdensome regulatory requirements" on corn imports as among the "unfair trade practices" facing U.S. exporters.¹³² Kenya has sought relief from the tariff and lobbied for the extension of AGOA, which Congress reauthorized in January 2026 through the end of the year.¹³³ The February 20, 2026 U.S. Supreme Court ruling on tariffs imposed by President Trump under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA, 50 U.S.C. §§1701 et seq.) invalidated the April 2025 tariffs, but President Trump has declared new tariffs under a different statute, leaving Kenya with a 10% tariff on most exports to the United States.¹³⁴ The AGOA reauthorization does not override this duty.

U.S. Assistance. Kenya has routinely been among the top recipients of U.S. foreign aid in sub-Saharan Africa. The Biden Administration allocated roughly \$479 million in FY2024 bilateral aid for Kenya, largely focused on HIV/AIDS and other health programs; more than \$340 million in FY2023/FY2024 emergency humanitarian aid; and over \$60 million in FY2023/FY2024 for early

¹²⁹ *Financial Times*, "Kenya's Ruto says western leaders have broken 'climate blood pact'," September 8, 2025; *France24*, "'Unless the UN is reformed, its own survival is at stake,' Kenya's Ruto says," September 25, 2025; *Daily Nation*, "Kenya says defunding UN will be disastrous amid UN withdrawal," February 10, 2026.

¹³⁰ President William Samoei Ruto (@Williamsruto), X post, December 3, 2025.

¹³¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Trade in Goods with Kenya," accessed February 2026.

¹³² The White House, "Regulating Imports with a Reciprocal Tariff to Rectify Trade Practices that Contribute to Large and Persistent Annual United States Goods Trade Deficits," April 2, 2025; U.S. Trade Representative (@USTradeRep), X post, April 7, 2025.

¹³³ AGOA was reauthorized in Div. I, §5019, of the FY2026 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 119-75). On AGOA and tariffs, see *CQ*, "Ways and Means signs off on Africa and Haiti trade programs," December 10, 2025.

¹³⁴ The White House, "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Imposes a Temporary Import Duty to Address Fundamental International Payment Problems," February 20, 2026. See also CRS Legal Sidebar LSB11398, *Supreme Court Rules Against Tariffs Imposed Under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)*.

recovery, risk reduction, and resilience (ER4) food security programs.¹³⁵ The Biden Administration's FY2025 bilateral aid request for Kenya was over \$496 million.

The United States has been the largest donor to Kenya's health sector, which saw child mortality drop by more than half and life expectancy rise by over 15 years from 2000-2020.¹³⁶ The United States has cumulatively invested over \$8 billion there under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) since 2003. From 2013 to 2023, HIV infections in Kenya fell 78% and related deaths dropped by 68%. The U.S. Embassy reported in 2023 that Kenya, which has roughly 1.4 million people living with HIV-AIDS, was on the verge of achieving the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets (95% of people with HIV diagnosed, 95% of people who know they have HIV on anti-retroviral therapy, and 95% of those on treatment virally suppressed).¹³⁷

Some implementers of U.S.-funded health programs in Kenya reported that suspension of most U.S. foreign aid by the Trump Administration in late January 2025 hindered their ability to maintain programs, despite public directives from Secretary Rubio to continue life-saving activities, including under PEPFAR.¹³⁸ The Administration has not published data on how much aid previously obligated for Kenya was subsequently cut, but reports suggest that scores of aid contracts for Kenya were terminated. According to one analysis of the cuts, by late March 2025, the Trump Administration had terminated roughly \$225 million in U.S. assistance for Kenya.¹³⁹

PEPFAR represented over half of the funding for Kenya's HIV programming before the aid cuts, and while the United States and Kenya were planning a transition toward self-sustainability for the HIV response by 2030, the abrupt changes reportedly left Kenyan health authorities struggling to find nearly \$260 million to sustain critical programs.¹⁴⁰ UNAIDS reported in April 2025 that the U.S. funding disruption had resulted in HIV treatment facilities working at reduced capacity, human resource shortfalls, and HIV prevention programs scaled down.¹⁴¹ Per UNAIDS, roughly 41,500 health care and community health workers funded under PEPFAR in Kenya were sent home or directed to stop work under the initial freeze; by the end of March, roughly a quarter of them were back at work.¹⁴² The funding freeze also reportedly affected tuberculosis treatment and malaria programs.¹⁴³ Kenya's health ministry reportedly warned in March 2025 that U.S. aid disruptions triggered a "domino effect that imperils every link in the healthcare chain."¹⁴⁴ Other reports have since documented impacts of the U.S. aid changes on Kenya's healthcare system.¹⁴⁵

The U.S. assistance disruptions and cuts have had implications beyond the health sector. In March 2025, protesters and police clashed in Kakuma refugee camp after the World Food Program

¹³⁵ USAID, *Kenya Assistance Overview*, August 2024. For aid obligations, see foreignassistance.gov/cd/kenya/.

¹³⁶ State Department, "The United States and Kenya: Strategic Partners," November 16, 2021. Alongside U.S. foreign assistance programs, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research-Africa have long-standing partnerships with Kenya, including on disease surveillance. The United States donated over 12 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to Kenya.

¹³⁷ U.S. Embassy Nairobi, "PEPFAR in Kenya," August 10, 2023, available at <https://ke.usembassy.gov/pepfar/>.

¹³⁸ See, e.g., *Washington Post*, "Trump's PEPFAR cuts upend the lives of Kenyan families battling HIV," April 5, 2025.

¹³⁹ Justin Sandefur and Charles Kenny, "USAID Cuts: New Estimates at the Country Level," Center for Global Development (CGD), March 26, 2025.

¹⁴⁰ *Washington Post*, "Trump's PEPFAR cuts upend the lives of Kenyan families battling HIV," April 5, 2025.

¹⁴¹ UNAIDS, "Impact of US funding freeze on HIV programmes in Kenya," April 5, 2025.

¹⁴² *Washington Post*, "Trump's PEPFAR cuts upend the lives of Kenyan families battling HIV," April 5, 2025.

¹⁴³ *New York Times*, "Tuberculosis resurgent as Trump funding cut disrupts treatment globally," March 11, 2025.

¹⁴⁴ Devex, "Kenyan govt internal memo warns of 'domino effect' of US health cuts," March 26, 2025.

¹⁴⁵ Physicians for Human Rights, *"The System is folding in on itself": The Impact of U.S. Global Health Funding Cuts in Kenya*, July 2025.

reduced rations due to funding shortfalls, and some reports suggest the U.S. assistance cuts led to deaths in the camp.¹⁴⁶ Aid cuts have also led relief agencies to scale back food aid to Kenyans affected by severe drought.¹⁴⁷ U.S. support for wildlife conservation, primary education, food security, anti-corruption, and election integrity were also among the programs reportedly terminated.¹⁴⁸ In August 2025, as a result of the Administration's foreign aid review, the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) terminated a \$60 million MCC threshold program that aimed to improve transport and land use in Nairobi.

New Health Framework. In December 2025, the State Department announced Kenya as the first country to sign a "Health Cooperation Framework," a new bilateral arrangement through which the Trump Administration plans to provide assistance under its America First Global Health Strategy.¹⁴⁹ Under the Kenya deal, the United States would provide \$1.6 billion in global health funding to the country over the next five years, supporting not only medicine and care but also health care infrastructure, while Kenya would increase its domestic health expenditures by \$850 million over the five-year period, assuming greater financial responsibility as U.S. support decreases. According to the State Department, the compact would address "priority health programs in Kenya including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), malaria, maternal and child health, polio eradication, disease surveillance, and infectious disease outbreak response and preparedness."¹⁵⁰ The deal has been controversial in Kenya, in part due to data privacy concerns, and a Kenyan court has suspended its implementation pending a constitutional challenge.¹⁵¹

Security Cooperation. The United States has supported various efforts to help build Kenya's capacity to counter terrorist attacks, secure its borders, contribute to multinational stabilization operations, professionalize its security forces, and foster police accountability. The extent to which these programs have been affected by the Trump Administration's foreign aid cuts remains unclear. Kenya, which routinely receives U.S. military assistance, has also regularly been the largest sub-Saharan African recipient of State Department-administered Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) for law enforcement. Reports suggest that training and aid via the U.S. Special Program for Embassy Augmentation and Response (SPEAR), which is funded through ATA, helped an elite Kenyan unit respond rapidly to Al Shabaab's 2019 attack on the DusitD2 hotel in Nairobi, significantly limiting the loss of life.¹⁵² Among other recent security assistance obligations, the State Department has provided over \$71 million in funding for a major runway expansion at Kenya's Manda Bay Air Base, the latest U.S. upgrade at the site.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁶ *New Yorker*, "The shutdown of U.S.A.I.D. has already killed hundreds of thousands," November 5, 2025 and "Rovina's Choice," November 4, 2025; *The New Humanitarian*, "Cut to the bone, The cost of ration cuts and delivery delays in Kenya's refugee camps," August 26, 2025; and *Pro Publica*, "Inside the Trump Administration's Man-Made Hunger Crisis," December 17, 2025.

¹⁴⁷ Reuters, "Drought deepens hunger in northern Kenya as aid cuts bite," February 19, 2026.

¹⁴⁸ Devex, "How the US foreign aid freeze threatens African conservation work," February 2025; AfriNews, "Kenya wildlife park fears poacher resurgence after USAID cuts," August 26, 2025; "The Independent," "The struggle to protect wildlife around the world as Trump's aid cuts start to bite," August 1, 2025; *TIME*, "Her small business helps disabled kids learn. USAID cuts have pushed it towards bankruptcy," March 4, 2025.

¹⁴⁹ For more, see State Department, *America First Global Health Strategy*, September 2025.

¹⁵⁰ State Department, "United States and Kenya Sign Five-Year, \$2.5 Billion Health Cooperation Framework," December 4, 2025.

¹⁵¹ Jurist, "Kenya dispatch: High Court halts Kenya-US health deal over constitutional concerns," December 30 2025. On the data privacy concerns, see, e.g., Allan Maleche et al., "Health data protection and governance under the Kenya-US Health Agreement," *Harvard Health and Human Rights Journal*, December 17, 2025.

¹⁵² Reuters, "After Westgate Debacle, Quick End to Latest Kenyan Attack Shows Progress," January 20, 2019.

¹⁵³ Task & Purpose, "US starts \$70 million upgrade to Kenyan airfield used in Somalia operations," February 1, 2026; (continued...)

The Department of Defense (DOD) has notified over \$500 million in CT “train and equip” support for Kenya in the past two decades, including to support its role as in the AU mission in Somalia. State Department-funded security assistance has also supported Kenya’s deployment to Somalia, and ongoing deliberations over funding for AUSSOM have implications for the mission’s future. Some Members of the 119th Congress have sought to restrict the use of assessed contributions to the United Nations to support the AU mission through S. 1583.¹⁵⁴

The Biden Administration was a leading advocate for the MSS mission in Haiti and Kenya’s role in it. Under Biden, the State Department and DOD pledged over \$380 million in support for the mission, including training, equipment, logistics and life support services, and salary support for participating officers; the Biden Administration reportedly overrode congressional holds in mid-2024 to obligate funds for Kenya’s deployment.¹⁵⁵ Some Members of Congress raised concerns about the mission, but Secretary Rubio stated in his confirmation hearing that Kenyans “deserve a lot of credit for being willing to take on that mission,” and he reported in early 2025, after the Administration’s aid review began, that U.S. support for the MSS would be excepted from the aid freeze.¹⁵⁶ Under the Trump Administration, the State Department has reported that the United States has provided over \$1 billion to support the MSS; U.S. officials have asserted that “America cannot continue shouldering such a significant financial burden” and called on other international donors to step up support.¹⁵⁷ Kenya’s role in the new Gang Suppression Force remains unclear, but the Administration has pledged continued support for the mission.

The new head of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), Gen. Dagvin Anderson, has described Kenya as “a key partner for peace and security in Africa” and characterized the security partnership as one “built over many years around shared interests, shared challenges, and a shared commitment to regional stability.”¹⁵⁸ Kenyan forces routinely participate in joint exercises organized by AFRICOM and Kenya often hosts Justified Accord, AFRICOM’s largest exercise in East Africa, which is focused on enhancing peacekeeping capabilities. In 2025, Kenya co-hosted the African Chiefs of Defense Conference with AFRICOM, bringing together military leaders from more than three dozen African countries. The Massachusetts National Guard is paired with Kenya in the National Guard State Partnership Program.

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Stars & Stripes, “Living quarters upgrade in works at Kenya camp key to US operations in Somalia,” November 18, 2025.

¹⁵⁴ Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), “Risch, Cruz, Scott Introduce Bill to protect American taxpayer dollars from African peacekeeping operation,” May 2, 2025.

¹⁵⁵ SFRC, “Risch on Biden Admin’s Decision to Override Congress on Haiti MSS Funding,” June 20, 2024.

¹⁵⁶ SFRC, Hearing on Pending Nominations, January 15, 2025; and State Department, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Dominican President Luis Abinader at a Joint Press Availability, February 6, 2025.

¹⁵⁷ US. Mission to the United Nations, Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on Haiti, April 21, 2025; State Department, “Advancing U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities in Haiti: Deliverables and Next Steps,” September 24, 2025.

¹⁵⁸ AFRICOM, “U.S.-Kenyan partnership advances security cooperation,” January 29, 2026.

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