

World Watch Research

Kenya:

Background Information

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Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Contents

Copyright and sources	2
Map of country	3
Recent history	4
Political and legal landscape	5
Religious landscape.....	8
Economic landscape.....	9
Social and cultural landscape.....	11
Technological landscape	12
Security situation	14
Christian origins	15
Church spectrum today.....	16
Further useful reports.....	16
External Links	17

Copyright and sources

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

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Map of country



Kenya: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
56,203,000	44,852,000	79.8

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Recent history

Since the nation's founding in 1964, tribal-based politics continue to serve as the dominant political trend in the country. However, the new Constitution in 2010, the peaceful elections of March 2013 when Uhuru Kenyatta (the son of Kenya's first president) won the vote for the presidential office, and the devolution of power into a county system, have all helped mitigate some of the tension arising from the ethno-based politics. On a backdrop of serious socio-economic challenges (see below) the increasing incursions of al-Shabaab militants and the general instability in Somalia is a major security concern, particularly in the light of the attacks in 2013 - 2015 in Nairobi and the north-east, especially the attacks on the Westgate shopping mall in September 2013 and Garissa University in April 2015. It is expected that civil unrest and anti-corruption/anti-government sentiment will grow significantly as corruption remains endemic and highly visible. Against this backdrop, devolution of power from the center to localities could be a positive step forward in bringing a regionally more equal level of development and political stability with regards to the country's ethnic tensions.

A major event in 2017 were the general elections held in August. After the Kenyan Supreme Court annulled the result, repeat elections were held in October 2017, again with President Uhuru Kenyatta leading in the polls. The elections were carried out peacefully (in contrast to the 2007 elections which resulted in violence causing the deaths of over 1,200 people). This election proved to be a milestone in working towards reconciliation between the different ethnic groups in Kenya. Also, in 2018, both the president and main opposition leader eventually announced that they had [agreed to work together](#) (DW, 13 March 2018).

Before that announcement, however, veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga, who ran in the August 2017 presidential election as a candidate, continued to contest incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta's victory. On 30 January 2018, Odinga took the unprecedented step of organizing a [mock inauguration ceremony](#) as the 'people's president' (The Guardian, 30 January 2018), despite [warnings](#) from international civil society organizations about the deeper crisis this move could cause in the country (International Crisis Group - ICG, 29 January 2018). On the same day, Kenyan authorities designated the National Resistance Movement (NRM), an activist wing of Odinga's political coalition, [a criminal group](#) in an attempt to crackdown on politicians and lawyers affiliated with Odinga (The Standard, 31 January 2018). In early 2018, the authorities in Kenya [blocked](#) the transmission of at least three television stations for defying the government's order against covering Odinga's mock inauguration ceremony (Human Rights Watch - HRW, World Report 2019).

In early March 2018, President Kenyatta and opposition leader Odinga [vowed](#) to resolve their differences and agreed on a peace deal, signaling an end to an ongoing public feud between the two camps and easing political tensions in the country (Al-Jazeera, 10 March 2018). However, this welcome development could not reverse the government's harsh treatment of opposition voices and [members of the media](#) (HRW, World Report 2019). The government's measures – already seen as stifling freedom of expression and the media - took a new turn on 16 May 2018, when Kenyatta signed a [new law on cybercrime](#) that introduced new offenses and imposed harsh penalties in relation to news reporting (HRW, World Report 2019). However, the harshest fines and provisions that criminalized "false or fictitious" news were later deleted after being judged unconstitutional by the High Court.

Further suspected al-Shabaab attacks were reported in June 2021 as Kenya continued its military operation in Somalia. In June 2021, the USA approved sending [special operations troops](#) to collaborate with Kenyan government forces combating al-Shabaab (The Citizen, 13 June 2021). Christians are often targeted by al-Shabaab and, as a result, many Christians (including civil servants, teachers, health workers etc.) have moved from the northeast leaving schools and healthcare institutions empty.

On 9 August 2022, Kenyans went to the polls and Deputy President William Ruto was declared the president-elect, winning with 50.49% of the vote. Opposition leader Raila Odinga came in second with 48.85%. After Odinga rejected the outcome, the election had to be decided by the Supreme Court which affirmed Ruto's win and was satisfied that the conduct of the election and declaration of the results met the requirements of the Constitution. There was no serious violence reported while the dispute was resolved by the court (Source: [Carnegie Europe, 6 October 2022](#)).

In 2023, the opposition, led by Raila Odinga, escalated its political activities by staging numerous protests across the country. Raila Odinga even intensified his stance by threatening to transition the protests from a weekly to a daily occurrence. These opposition-led protests were not always peaceful and frequently resulted in clashes between the police and protesters. As reported by [The Guardian](#) on 19 July 2023, violent confrontations in Kisumu, a stronghold of the opposition, led to two fatalities.

In 2024, a series of proposed tax increases in June 2024 caused months of nationwide protests. Despite the withdrawal of the proposed Finance Bill already in June 2024, the heavy-handed police response led to 61 deaths after 2 months of demonstrations ([CNN, 8 August 2024](#)).

On [24 June 2024](#), US President Biden officially designated Kenya as a 'Major Non-NATO Ally' of the United States through a presidential memorandum (The Whitehouse, 24 June 2024). This designation, made under the authority of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, provides Kenya with enhanced military cooperation and access to US defense resources, significantly strengthening its security capabilities. This strategic alliance is expected to bolster Kenya's efforts in combating terrorism, particularly the ongoing threat from al-Shabaab, thereby contributing to greater regional stability in the Horn of Africa.

Political and legal landscape

Kenya is not yet considered to be a true electoral democracy and has seen a relative decline in political and civil liberties. This decline occurred as a parallel development to the ethnic and religious tensions and incidents of violence which occurred nationwide following the 2007 - 2008 elections and in advance of the elections held in 2013. In terms of its level of democracy, Kenya is ranked at the lower end of the "hybrid regimes", showing it to be more democratic than authoritarian regimes, but not as democratic as "flawed democracies". However, despite this, the country has been making progress following the 2010 constitutional referendum.

With regard to the Constitution, several provisions were [amended](#) in 2017 to ensure civil liberties (Constitution of Kenya Amendment Bill, 2017). For example, freedom of speech and press has been strengthened. Under Article 8, the Constitution clearly lays out that the country has no official state religion. Article 32 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, the right to assemble with others to manifest their religion through worship, practice, teaching or observance, including observance of a day of worship and that a person shall not be compelled to act or engage in any act

that is contrary to the person's belief or religion. It also provides under Article 27(4) for the equality of all persons and equal access to and benefits from the law with no adverse distinction based on religion.

As a result of these amendments, many things have started changing: Kenya's press environment remains one of the most vibrant in all of Africa and many privately-owned media outlets are known for routinely criticizing the government and officials. Also, the independence of the judiciary has been strengthened, which was previously subservient to the executive branch. Moreover, the Islamic (*Kadhi*) court system is subordinate to the superior courts of Kenya and is reserved for those adhering to Islam and who voluntarily submit to the courts' jurisdiction. Kadhi courts only adjudicate cases related to personal status, marriage, divorce or inheritance.

In 2021, a Building Bridges Initiative-driven (BBI) constitutional referendum which was to be held in June or July 2021 was ruled as [unconstitutional](#) by Kenya's High Court on 13 May 2021. The suspended bill was to promote the sharing of power among competing ethnic groups in order to reduce cyclical election violence (Al-Jazeera, 14 May 2021). The atmosphere at the August 2022 election was very tense and, as mentioned in *Recent history* above, the results were challenged before the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court upheld the results as announced by the electoral commission and William Ruto was sworn in as new president in September 2022.

The government generally respects the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion. However, according to Freedom House ([Freedom in the World Index 2023 Kenya / D2](#)), while freedom of religion appears to be widely respected by the government, counterterrorism operations against Somalia-based al-Shabaab have left Muslims exposed to state violence and intimidation. Muslim groups also complain about unequal development opportunities and religion-based discrimination. At the same time, al-Shabaab militants have at times specifically targeted Christians in Kenya. In general, however, civil liberties and the rule of law are being eroded by several factors such as deeply entrenched official and societal corruption and an ineffective police force. The Inspector-General of Police recently revealed that about [2000 Kenyan police officers were mentally unfit to serve](#) and carry out their law enforcement work (Africanews, 20 April 2022). This contributes to crimes being seriously underreported, and domestic violence, trafficking and forced labor typically not being investigated. It has even enabled Islamic militants to transport weapons and ammunition in and out of the country undetected.

Rating the country 'partly free', Freedom House ([Freedom in the World Index 2023 Kenya](#)) provides a succinct yet comprehensive overview of Kenya's complicated socio-political landscape. According to the report, while Kenya does hold regular multiparty elections, the country grapples with rampant corruption and excessive force by security agencies. The media and civil society are dynamic but face restrictive laws and intimidation.

The key developments of 2022 further substantiate this nuanced picture. Presidential elections took place in August, where William Ruto, the then deputy president, narrowly defeated opposition candidate Raila Odinga with 50.49% of the vote. Odinga's subsequent petition to the Supreme Court to contest the election results was rejected, and Ruto was inaugurated. However, not all was smooth sailing for the new administration. In the months of October and November 2022, Director of Public Prosecutions Noordin Haji dismissed corruption charges against several allies of President Ruto,

including the newly elected deputy president Rigathi Gachagua. This move drew sharp criticism from legal experts and opposition leaders.

In 2022, at least 39 bodies were discovered in the River Yala. Although an investigation was ongoing, President Ruto took the surprising step of attributing these deaths to the [Special Service Unit](#) (SSU), a police force previously implicated in forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings (Kenya Talk, 16 October 2022). The SSU was subsequently dissolved by Ruto in October (Capital News, 16 October 2022).

With the devolution of power to local counties, Christians have faced extreme pressure in those counties dominated by the Muslim community. This is particularly the case in counties bordering Somalia and the coastal region.

[In 2024](#), President William Ruto faced significant challenges as his administration dealt with ongoing unrest and violence (ACLED, 19 January 2024). Continuous demonstrations were held, leading to clashes where protesters were killed, further destabilizing the country. At the same time, Kenya experienced low-scale violence across several counties, with al-Shabaab remaining active in regions bordering Somalia. Regionally, tensions also escalated between Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo after the launch of the Congo River Alliance (ACF) in Nairobi, aiming to overthrow the Congolese president. These multifaceted security threats have placed immense pressure on Ruto's government, as resources are stretched thin, and the focus on managing internal unrest may inadvertently create opportunities for al-Shabaab to exploit the situation further.

Gender perspective

According to [Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index \(2019/20, p.39\)](#), Kenya was in the top ten countries that showed the greatest improvements since 2017 in relation to formal legal discrimination. Men and women have broadly equal rights in relation to marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody. An ongoing issue of concern however is the high rate of child marriage, despite the minimum age of marriage being set at 18, with no exceptions ([BBC News, 15 July 2020](#)). According to [Girls Not Brides Kenya](#) (accessed 28 August 2024), 23% of girls – predominately those in the northeastern and coastal regions – marry before the age of 18. A [2017 CEDAW report](#) further highlighted areas of concern, such as limited access to justice, the negative impact of polygamous marriages on women, and the underrepresentation of women in parliament. Whilst Kenya's legislation addresses domestic violence and rape (Protection Against Domestic Violence Act 2015; Sexual Offences Act), victims are slow to come forward due to a lack of awareness of their legal rights, high social tolerance for violence against women and the belief that domestic violence is a private, rather than state matter. Violence against women is sometimes committed in the open, as evidenced by a boda-boda (motorbike taxi) drivers' [attack on a female diplomat in broad daylight](#) in the capital Nairobi (Africanews, 14 March 2022).

Religious landscape

Kenya: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	44,852,000	79.8
Muslim	5,825,000	10.4
Hindu	292,000	0.5
Buddhist	2,000	0.0
Ethnic religionist	4,444,000	7.9
Jewish	290	0.0
Bahai	565,000	1.0
Atheist	2,500	0.0
Agnostic	50,800	0.1
Other	169,820	0.3
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

The Kenyan Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Christians have had the lion's share in shaping modern Kenya. It is a Christian majority nation with Christians making up an estimated 79.8% (WCD 2024 estimate) of the population. Christians tend to be concentrated in the west and central sections of the country while the Muslim population is particularly concentrated in the eastern coastal regions. Many Kenyans include native beliefs in their religious practices.

The death of hundreds by starvation in the [Shakahola Forest tragedy](#) in Kenya (CNN, 19 June 2023) has prompted the country to reassess its legal and governance frameworks surrounding religious organizations. President Ruto responded to this crisis by appointing a task force to recommend changes that could prevent such tragedies in the future. The Senate has also taken action, forming a committee to investigate the circumstances surrounding the deaths and to propose measures for strengthening oversight and ensuring that similar incidents do not occur again. This tragic event has led to a broader national dialogue on how best to balance religious freedom with the protection of citizens.

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Kenya](#)):

- Most of the Muslim population lives in the northeast and coastal regions, with significant Muslim communities in several urban areas of Nairobi and the western part of the country. Religion and ethnicity are often linked, with most members of many ethnic groups adhering to the same religious beliefs. For example, ethnic Somalis and Swahilis living in the coastal region account for

most of the Muslim population."

- "The five largest ethnic groups (the Kikuyu, Luhya, Kalenjin, Luo, and Kamba) are predominately Christian."
- "There are more than half a million refugees and asylum seekers living in several refugee camps, who practice a variety of religions."
- "In April [2023], authorities discovered that hundreds of members of Pastor Paul MacKenzie's Good News International Ministries Church in the Shakahola forest in Kilifi County had apparently starved themselves to death, allegedly on MacKenzie's instructions, to attain salvation. As of the end of the year, the government had exhumed 429 bodies, many unidentified, and the exhumation work continued at year's end. Most of the dead succumbed to starvation, while some died from asphyxiation or blunt trauma. The Senate ad hoc committee report also contained evidence of a group of armed men who allegedly enforced MacKenzie's directives through violence. Civil society sources estimated one-third of the dead were children. ... Following the discovery of the Shakahola deaths, there was robust public debate about how and whether to regulate churches to prevent extremist beliefs".

Economic landscape

Kenya's economy is indeed one of the largest in Africa, consistently ranking among the top ten. It is also the second-largest economy in East Africa, following Ethiopia. The country has a diverse economy with key sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, construction, tourism, and increasingly, information technology and financial services. Nairobi, the capital, serves as a major commercial hub, not only for Kenya but also for the East African region. Despite its economic strengths, Kenya still faces numerous challenges that are inextricably linked with its political and social issues, such as corruption and political instability. These problems can serve as roadblocks to foreign investment and economic growth. Moreover, the income inequality and high rates of unemployment are other significant issues that the country needs to tackle for sustainable development.

The government has undertaken various initiatives to stimulate economic growth, such as Vision 2030, aimed at transforming Kenya into a newly industrialized, middle-income nation. However, for these plans to be fully realized, the political will to address underlying systemic issues is crucial.

According to the [World Bank Kenya overview](#) (last updated 8 April 2024):

- Kenya has made substantial progress in economic growth and social development over the past decade, underpinned by key political and economic reforms. The country's economy has demonstrated resilience, maintaining an average growth rate of 4.8% per year between 2015 and 2019, with a strong recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic shock. The agricultural sector, a cornerstone of the economy, played a crucial role in this recovery, especially after the pandemic led to a contraction in other sectors. In 2023, the economy expanded by an estimated 5.4%, driven by a stronger-than-expected rebound in agriculture, which contributed to a reduction in the poverty rate. However, challenges such as poverty, inequality, youth unemployment, climate change, and weak private sector investment remain pressing concerns.
- Kenya's growth is projected to average 5.2% from 2024 to 2026, with the private sector expected to play a more significant role as business confidence strengthens and the public sector scales back. Despite this positive outlook, the economic future is fraught with uncertainties. Debt

vulnerabilities, heightened by global financial conditions, pose significant risks, alongside potential climate hazards that could exacerbate food insecurity and inflationary pressures. Furthermore, slower-than-anticipated growth in developed countries could dampen the recovery of key sectors such as tourism, exports, and remittances. The World Bank continues to support Kenya's development goals, aligning with the Vision 2030 strategy, which emphasizes sustainable growth, reduced inequality, and the transformation of key sectors like agriculture, healthcare, housing, and the digital economy.

According to the [Africa Development Bank's Kenya Economic Outlook](#) (accessed 24 September 2024):

- Kenya's economy grew by 5.2% in 2023, up from 4.8% in 2022, with significant contributions from the agricultural sector and moderate growth in services. Services accounted for 69% of the growth, while agriculture contributed 23%. On the demand side, household consumption played a crucial role, accounting for 70% of the growth.
- Inflation slightly increased to 7.7% in 2023, driven by core inflation, fuel prices, and cost-push factors. The central bank responded by raising the policy rate to 12.5% and implementing measures to anchor inflation expectations.
- The fiscal deficit widened to 7% of GDP, and public debt rose to 70.2% of GDP, exacerbated by exchange rate depreciation. Despite these challenges, the current account deficit narrowed, and the capital adequacy ratio remained above the prudential minimum.
- Kenya's GDP is projected to grow by 5.4% in 2024 and 5.6% in 2025, with services and household consumption continuing to drive growth. Inflation is expected to decrease, allowing for more accommodative monetary policy. The fiscal deficit is projected to narrow as part of a revenue-led fiscal consolidation program, while the current account deficit is also expected to reduce due to a recovery in global trade. However, the economic outlook is subject to significant risks, including tight global financing conditions, potential droughts, and political instability in neighboring countries. To mitigate these risks, Kenya aims to build fiscal and external buffers, strengthen disaster preparedness, and accelerate structural transformation to improve governance, infrastructure, and human capital development.
- Kenya's GDP growth between 2019 and 2023 averaged 4.6%, falling short of the 10% target outlined in Vision 2030. The growth has been noninclusive, contributing little to poverty reduction and employment creation due to minimal structural transformation. Kenya requires an annual GDP growth of 5.8% to absorb the growing labor market, with accelerated structural transformation potentially increasing GDP growth to 7.3%, creating 1.36 million jobs, and reducing unemployment. To meet its development goals, Kenya needs substantial financial resources, estimated at \$12 billion annually by 2030. The country is advocating for reforms in the global financial architecture to secure concessional finance and enhance its role in global decision-making processes.

According to the [2024 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- Kenya's economic freedom score is 53.6, placing it 120th out of 184 countries globally and 20th out of 47 in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. This score marks a 1.1-point improvement from the previous year, but Kenya's economy remains classified as "mostly unfree." The country's economic freedom score is below the global average yet slightly above the regional average.

- Key Economic Freedom components are as follows:

Rule of law: Kenya struggles with a weak rule of law, evidenced by low scores in property rights (40.8), judicial effectiveness (47.7), and government integrity (31). These factors, coupled with political interference and widespread corruption, undermine entrepreneurial activity and economic progress.

Government size: The country has relatively high tax burden and government spending scores, with top tax rates of 30% for both individual and corporate taxes. However, fiscal health remains poor, with a score of 11.1, and public debt is high at 68.4% of GDP.

Regulatory efficiency: Kenya's regulatory environment is somewhat established but lacks efficiency. Business freedom and labor freedom scores are slightly below and above the global average, respectively, while monetary freedom is relatively high at 73.2.

Open markets: The country's trade freedom is limited by a high average tariff rate of 11.4%, and foreign investment is restricted in some sectors. The financial sector, while open to competition, is hindered by the presence of state-owned enterprises.

Overall, while Kenya has made some progress in economic freedom, significant challenges remain, particularly in enhancing the rule of law, improving regulatory efficiency, and creating a more open market environment.

Gender perspective

Gender gaps in relation to education access and labor force participation are small. However, women and girls continue to remain more economically vulnerable within Kenya's patriarchal society. Cultural and societal norms related to family obligations often impede women's career advancement ([Open Capital, 2020](#)) and customary practices often deny women and girls of their due inheritance.

Social and cultural landscape

According to [World Factbook Kenya](#) (accessed 28 August 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Kenya has more than 40 ethnic groups. Kikuyu 17.1%, Luhya 14.3%, Kalenjin 13.4%, Luo 10.7%, Kamba 9.8%, Somali 5.8%, Kisii 5.7%, Mijikenda 5.2%, Meru 4.2%, Maasai 2.5%, Turkana 2.1%, non-Kenyan 1%, other 8.2% (2019 est.)
- **Main languages:** English (official), Kiswahili (official), numerous indigenous languages
- **Population growth rate:** 2.06% (2024 est.)
- **Urban population:** 29.5% (2024 est.)
- **Median age:** 21.2 years (2024 est.)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 70.4 years (2024 est.) - male: 68.6 / female: 72.2 years
- **Literacy (15 years and older):** 82.6% - male: 85.5% / female: 79.8%
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 5.68% (2023 est.)
- **Unemployment, youth (15-24 years):** 12.2% (2023 est.) - male: 8.1% / female: 16.3%
- **Population below poverty line:** 36.1% (2015 est.)

According to the [UNDP Human Development Report Kenya](#) (updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **Expected years of schooling:** 11.4 years for male and female
- **Labor force participation rate (ages 15 and older):** Male: 72.6% / female: 62.9%
- **Human Development Index (2022):** Kenya is ranked #146 out of 193 countries with a human development value of 0.601 points
- **Gender Development Index (2022):** 0.948
- **Gender Inequality Index (2022):** 0.533 This score is a composite measure reflecting inequality in relation to reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. Providing an indication of how it performs, Kenya ranked #139 out of 166 countries.

According to ([UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 29 February 2024](#)):

- **Refugees in Kenya:** 744,747 registered refugees and asylum seekers. The majority of refugees originate from Somalia, DRC, Burundi, Ethiopia and Sudan.

According to [IDMC \(as of 27 August 2024\)](#):

- **IDPs:** "In terms of conflict and violence, 7,700 internal displacements were reported during 2023, a 50 per cent reduction compared to the previous year. Communal violence accounted for 90 per cent of all movements, the majority of which took place in Samburu county at the beginning of March. Additionally, Al-Shabaab attacks triggered displacement, particularly in counties along the border with Somalia, including Lamu, Garissa, Wajir and Mandera. Only limited data was available, however."
- "Across the country, a total of 171,000 people were internally displaced as of the end of 2023, of whom 131,000 were displaced by disasters and 40,000 by conflict and violence."

Gender perspective

Whilst women are not legally obliged to obey their husbands, social norms place men at the head of the household in both rural and urban settings. Domestic violence is widely tolerated, and reportedly increased as a result of COVID-19 restrictions ([HRW, 8 April 2020](#)). Widespread protests against gender-based violence occurred in 2019 ([HRW, 17 April 2019](#)).

Technological landscape

Kenya continues to experience significant growth in digital adoption and usage across various platforms. According to [DataReportal Digital 2024: Kenya](#) (23 February 2024) / survey date - January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** There were 22.71 million internet users in Kenya, representing an internet penetration rate of 40.8%. This indicates that a substantial portion of the population is connected online, enabling access to information, services and digital communication tools.
- **Social media usage:** Kenya had 13.05 million social media users at the start of 2024, which equates to 23.5% of the total population. This growing number reflects the increasing influence of social media in daily life, including in areas such as communication, business and entertainment. 43.2% of Kenya's social media users were female and 56.8% male.

- **Active cellular mobile connections:** There were 66.04 million active cellular mobile connections in early 2024, a figure that surpasses the total population, with a penetration rate of 118.7%. This suggests widespread use of multiple mobile devices per individual and underscores the importance of mobile technology in Kenya's digital landscape.

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (Publication date: August 2024):

- "Kenya's telecom market continues to undergo considerable changes in the wake of increased competition, improved international connectivity, and rapid developments in the mobile market. The country is directly connected to a number of submarine cables. Mombasa is the landing point for LIT's newly completed East and West Africa terrestrial network, while Nairobi country serves as a key junction for onward connectivity to Ethiopia, the Arabian states, and the Far East. While the additional internet capacity has meant that the cost of internet access has fallen dramatically in recent years, allowing services to be affordable to a far greater proportion of the population, the telecom infrastructure remains woefully inadequate. Many millions of people lack any internet access, and what services are available are comparatively slow and expensive."
- "The government is channeling investment in a 100,000km fibre backbone, which is scheduled to be complete by the end of 2026. While thousands of governments offices, schools and health centres will access broadband as a result, much more work needs to be done if Kenya is to realise its potential as a regional ICT hub."

According to [Freedom on the Net 2023 Kenya](#):

- Kenya is rated as 'partly free'.
- Internet freedom in Kenya declined slightly during the coverage period. Hate speech and information manipulation circulated online before and after the August 2022 general elections.
- The Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act (CMCA), which was adopted in May 2018 and subsequently challenged in court, threatens to further restrict freedom of expression online.

Kenya is one of the few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with relatively advanced technology. It was in Kenya that M-Pesa (mobile money) was first invented in 2007, a system whereby subscribers send cash to other phone-users by a simple SMS message. The country's young talents are also becoming entrepreneurs. A [Newsweek](#) article from 27 December 2016 stated: "New innovations are destroying old ways of doing business, and smart young startup entrepreneurs are at the forefront of this quiet but historic transformation. Teams of skilled developers and programmers have sprung up in innovation hubs, incubators, and accelerators across the country to build information and telecom solutions that capitalize on the country's mix of challenges and opportunities."

A Harvard Business Review article from 18 February 2021 states: "Kenya is an example in becoming a global hub of Fintech Innovations, having seen skyrocketing mobile penetration rates, with subscriptions surpassing the total population amount by 12%. In recent times, Kenya's Equity Bank has collaborated with international telco Airtel to give users an innovative product – Equitel, a mobile virtual network operator competing with Safaricom's M-Pesa, which is pushing for financial inclusion even further by offering a full suite of banking services on mobile devices".

Kenya is a member of the East African Economic Community and it wants to see technology playing a [key role](#) in the economic development of the region (UNESCO, 4 July 2018). In 2020, the country was

listed as having the highest number of "[tech hubs](#)" in Sub-Saharan Africa after South Africa (Kenyan Wall Street, 24 February 2020).

Security situation

As mentioned above, there were continuous demonstrations [in 2024](#), leading to clashes where protesters were killed. At the same time, Kenya experienced low-scale violence across several counties, with al-Shabaab remaining active in regions bordering Somalia, particularly in Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa (ACLEd, 19 January 2024). The group's persistent attacks, including a deadly ambush in Garissa and other violent incidents, have been compounded by sporadic violence from armed pastoralists in the North Rift region. The Kenyan government expanded operations against these militias, but the security situation remains precarious. Regionally, tensions also escalated between Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo after the launch of the Congo River Alliance (ACF) in Nairobi, aiming to overthrow the Congolese president.

Kenya, a Christian-majority country, has increasingly become a target of religious persecution, primarily orchestrated by the jihadist group al-Shabaab. Christians living near the north-eastern border with Somalia face particularly dire circumstances, as al-Shabaab has entrenched itself within local communities, making it extremely difficult for security forces to effectively combat the group. This persecution has forced many Christians, especially those with Muslim backgrounds, to abandon their homes and relocate to safer areas like Nairobi, or in some cases, leave the region altogether. The situation has led to the closure of numerous churches and a significant reduction in Christian presence in these volatile areas.

Al-Shabaab's activities have not only had a profound socio-cultural impact but have also coincided with broader geopolitical shifts in the region. The reopening of the Kenya-Somalia border points and the withdrawal of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) have created a security vacuum that al-Shabaab has exploited. Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLEd) indicates that incidents involving al-Shabaab nearly doubled in mid-2023, particularly in June, as the group intensified its use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). While the primary focus of these attacks has been on Kenyan security forces, civilians, and especially Christians, have often been caught in the crossfire or deliberately targeted by the group, which views them as obstacles to their broader objectives.

The violence perpetrated by al-Shabaab is further exacerbated by systemic issues within Kenya, such as organized crime, corruption, and a lack of accountability for human rights violations by security forces. Human Rights Watch has documented numerous instances where Kenyan authorities have failed to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for abuses committed by security forces. This culture of impunity has made northeastern Kenya an increasingly hazardous area, not just for Christians, but also for essential service providers like teachers and healthcare workers, many of whom have fled due to the escalating violence and insecurity.

Moreover, Kenya's unresolved security challenges extend beyond al-Shabaab's activities. The country's handling of refugee camps, such as Daadab and Kakuma, has also come under scrutiny. In 2022, Kenyan authorities issued an ultimatum to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, to close these camps, citing security concerns. However, the government has been criticized for failing to provide concrete evidence to support these claims, further complicating the security situation in the region. The ongoing

conflict, coupled with these unresolved issues, continues to strain Kenya's security apparatus and destabilize the region, leaving many civilians, particularly Christians, vulnerable to ongoing violence and persecution.

Al-Shabaab's presence in Kenya, particularly in the border counties of Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa, has remained a significant threat, even as Kenyan security forces have intensified their operations. Between [December 2023 and January 2024](#), al-Shabaab was involved in several attacks, resulting in the deaths of five civilians and multiple clashes with security forces. These incidents highlight the group's persistent capability to carry out attacks despite the Kenyan government's efforts to curb its influence. The complex interplay of local, national, and regional dynamics continues to fuel al-Shabaab's resilience, making it a formidable challenge for Kenya and its partners in the fight against terrorism.

Gender perspective

In this complex and volatile environment, Christians in northeastern Kenya live in a state of perpetual insecurity. In this context of Islamist attacks, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and rape. In extreme cases they may face abduction by al-Shabaab and be subjected to sexual slavery, as well as intense pressure to convert to Islam ([The Standard, 23 December 2017](#)). Christian boys and men risk physical assault and death at the hands of radical Muslims, particularly in the north-eastern region.

Christian origins

Christianity was introduced into the region of present-day Kenya by the Portuguese during the 16th century. The Portuguese were driven out of the coastal region of Kenya in 1698 by the forces of Oman. As a result, Christianity could not establish itself in Kenya until 1844 when the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) sent Johann Ludwig Krapf. In 1862, British Methodists came to Mombasa. White Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church came to Kenya in 1889. In 1910, Pentecostalism arrived with representatives of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. The Salvation Army started work in Kenya in 1921.

The arrival of Christianity from abroad was followed by the establishment of indigenous churches in the country: The Momiya Luo Mission was established by former Anglicans in 1914. The African Church of the Holy Spirit was founded in 1927. The Kenya Foundation of the Prophets Church was also established in 1927, the National Independent Church of Africa in 1929, and the Gospel Furthering Bible Church in 1936.

Church spectrum today

Kenya: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	392,000	0.9
Catholic	13,077,000	29.2
Protestant	26,858,000	59.9
Independent	9,643,000	21.5
Unaffiliated	922,000	2.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-6,041,000	-13.5
Total	44,851,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	17,928,000	40.0
Pentecostal-Charismatic	18,797,000	41.9

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world’s 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

Christians dominate the central and western regions, and the majority of the major cities in the country. Muslim communities dominate the northeastern, eastern and coastal areas of the country, where life for Christians is very much more difficult.

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Kenya>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.

External Links

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