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Freedom House (Author)

Freedom in the World 2025 - Kenya

Partly Free

51

/ 100

Political Rights 22 / 40

Civil Liberties 29 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

52 / 100 Partly Free

A country or territory's Freedom in the World status depends on its aggregate Political Rights score, on a scale of 0–40, and its aggregate Civil Liberties score, on a scale of 0–60. [See the methodology.](#)

Overview

Kenya holds regular and competitive multiparty elections. However, pervasive corruption and brutality by security forces remain serious problems. While the country's media and civil society sectors are vibrant, journalists and human rights defenders are vulnerable to restrictive laws and intimidation.

Key Developments in 2024

- The government selectively evicted residents and demolished homes located along rivers that experienced extreme flooding in May. The authorities' heavy-handed approach to enforcing the evictions resulted in six deaths, leading the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) to sue the government.
- In June, public dissatisfaction with President William Ruto's policies, particularly a set of tax increases proposed in the 2024 Finance Bill, led to nationwide protests. Police responded violently to the demonstrations, killing dozens of people, injuring hundreds more, and abducting activists.

- Under pressure from the protests, Ruto withdrew the Finance Bill in late June and dismissed nearly his entire cabinet in July, though he later reappointed many of the same individuals. In October, Parliament voted to impeach and remove Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua based on charges including corruption, incitement of ethnic divisions, and support for violent protesters in June. Gachagua insisted that the charges were politically motivated.
- Kenya experienced another increase in murders of women during the year, prompting a series of large demonstrations by activists calling for stronger government action to address femicide and other gender-based violence.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? **3 / 4**

The president and deputy president, who can serve up to two five-year terms, are directly elected by majority vote, and are required to win 25 percent of the votes in at least half of Kenya's 47 counties.

Despite polls predicting a win for longtime opposition leader Raila Odinga, who had been endorsed by incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta, then Deputy President William Ruto was elected president in 2022 with 50.49 percent of the vote, narrowly avoiding a runoff. The results were supported by parallel vote tabulation, but Odinga and his supporters filed a petition with the Supreme Court shortly after the election that sought to nullify the results, alleging that foreigners had obtained unauthorized access to the digital systems of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and that results forms had been altered. The Supreme Court ultimately rejected the petitioners' claims and unanimously upheld the election results.

The election was widely seen as Kenya's most transparent and technologically advanced to date. The IEBC employed biometric voter identification kits and uploaded results forms to a public online portal, with more than 90 percent uploaded within a day of the election. Both major candidates urged their supporters to remain peaceful and committed to respecting the outcome of the court challenge.

Nevertheless, there were reports of irregularities and instances of intimidation and violence, including the abduction and murder of an election official. In its 2023 report, the newly formed National Dialogue Committee (NADCO) recommended an expert review of the election.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected 3 / through free and fair elections? 4

The bicameral Parliament consists of the 349-seat National Assembly and the 67-seat Senate. In the National Assembly, 290 members are directly elected from single-member constituencies. A further 47 special women representatives are elected from the counties, and political parties nominate 12 additional members according to their share of seats won. The Senate has 47 elected members representing the counties, 16 special women representatives nominated by political parties based on the share of seats won, and 4 nominated members representing youth and people with disabilities. Both houses have speakers who are ex-officio members.

In the 2022 parliamentary elections, held alongside the presidential vote, the Ruto-led Kenya Kwanza coalition secured a one-seat advantage in the Senate, with 34 seats, while the Odinga-led Azimio la Umoja took 33. In the National Assembly, Azimio la Umoja led with 173 seats, followed by Kenya Kwanza with 161; smaller parties and independents captured the remaining 15. Ruto's government was eventually able to secure a working majority through defections from Azimio. As with the presidential election, some irregularities were reported, including printing mistakes that rendered a number of ballots invalid and caused the IEBC to delay voting for eight positions.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they 2 / implemented impartially by the relevant election management 4 bodies?

The IEBC is tasked with conducting free and fair elections and operates under a robust legal framework. However, the 2022 elections exposed continued rifts and politicization within the commission. As the IEBC chairperson prepared to announce the official results, four of the seven commissioners held a separate press conference to state that they could not endorse the same results, claiming opacity in the tabulation process. The Supreme Court ultimately found that the IEBC had carried out its constitutional responsibilities and upheld Ruto's presidential victory.

Following major opposition protests in 2023, Kenya Kwanza and Azimio la Umoja formed NADCO, which recommended an evaluation of the 2022 elections and a reconstitution of the IEBC's selection panel. Both sides publicly supported implementing NADCO's recommendations, and in July 2024, President Ruto signed a bill establishing a new selection committee for IEBC members.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, 2 / and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of 4 these competing parties or groupings?

Citizens are free to organize into political parties. Kenyan parties represent a range of ideological, regional, and ethnic interests, but are notoriously weak and are often amalgamated into coalitions designed only to contest elections. Under the Political Parties Act, parties that receive at least 5 percent of the votes cast in a national election are eligible for public funds.

In 2024, a group of political activists and lawyers formed a new youth-focused political party, Injection of National Justice, Economic and Civic Transformation (INJECT), to contest the 2027 general elections.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its 3 / support or gain power through elections? 4

Opposition parties and candidates are competitive in Kenyan elections. In the 2022 presidential vote, then Deputy President Ruto, who portrayed himself as standing outside the country's established political dynasties, defeated five-time candidate Odinga, who had been endorsed by Kenyatta. Unlike the previous presidential election, the 2022 vote was not boycotted by opposition groups. However, in 2023, the opposition launched a wave of protests over the 2022 election results, the high cost of living, and tax increases.

In 2024, tensions increased between Ruto and Deputy President Gachagua following antigovernment protests that began in June. Several Gachagua allies were criminally charged with planning and financing the protests, and in October, Parliament voted to impeach and remove Gachagua from office.

Also in October, the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee of the National Assembly rejected NADCO's recommendation to form an official "leader of the opposition" role in the chamber, arguing that such a change would require a constitutional referendum.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces 2 / that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that 4 employ extrapolitical means?

People's political choices are somewhat free from undue influence by powerful, democratically unaccountable actors. However, groups such as Mungiki, a gang affiliated with the Kikuyu ethnic group, exert control over daily services such as matatu (minibus) routes in some regions, and may use violence, intimidation, and other extrapolitical means to influence

local and national electoral outcomes. Little has been done to bring to justice the perpetrators of political violence that took place in previous years.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 2 / 4

Ethnicity remains the most salient organizing principle in Kenyan politics, and two ethnic groups—the Kikuyu and Kalenjin—have dominated the presidency since independence. The 2010 constitution was intended to reduce the role of ethnicity in elections, and fiscal and political devolution, implemented in 2013, has served to generate more intraethnic competition at the county level. Nevertheless, the politicization of ethnicity at the national level still hinders effective representation of different segments of Kenya's diverse population, limits voter choice, and impedes meaningful policy debates. While ethnicity played a less prominent role in the 2022 presidential election—with Ruto's campaign focused on economic issues, and voters in Kikuyu strongholds voting for the Kalenjin Ruto over the Kikuyu Kenyatta's endorsed candidate, Odinga—long-standing political mistrust between the Kikuyu and the Luo ethnic group, to which Odinga belongs, may have contributed to his loss.

The stipulation that all voters must possess a national identity card hinders historically marginalized groups from obtaining greater access to the political process, particularly the nearly seven million pastoralists from the upper Rift Valley and North Eastern Province. There are significant implicit barriers to the participation of non-Christian and LGBT+ people in national politics. Somali Kenyans have been the target of government crackdowns ostensibly combating the Shabaab militant group, and are underrepresented politically. People with disabilities are also underrepresented in elected positions, despite quotas intended to guarantee their inclusion.

Women's interests are not well addressed by the political system, and women face some practical obstacles to political participation. In the 2022 elections, voters elected a historic 29 women to Parliament; however, this still fell short of the constitutionally mandated gender balance, which requires that no more than two-thirds of an elected body be of the same gender.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 2 / 4

The ability of elected officials to set and implement policy is undermined by corruption and dysfunction. Although the 2010 constitution reduced

the powers of the executive branch and improved the oversight role of Parliament, corruption limits the independence of the legislative branch, and in practice, Parliament is generally subordinate to the president.

The mass protests and related violence that began in June 2024, in response to an unpopular tax bill, led to some instability in the government. In addition to the impeachment and removal of Deputy President Gachagua in October, President Ruto fired nearly his entire cabinet in July, though he later reappointed several of the same individuals.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Corruption continues to plague national and county governments in Kenya, and state institutions tasked with combating corruption have been ineffective. The Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) lacks prosecutorial power and has been largely unsuccessful in pursuing corruption cases. The EACC's weakness is compounded by shortcomings at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) and within the judiciary.

The 2022 election of Deputy President Gachagua was criticized as emblematic of general impunity for those accused of corruption. In 2021, Gachagua had been charged with six counts related to corruption; he was ordered to repay \$1.7 million in state funds less than two weeks before the election. After the election, the ODPP withdrew charges against Gachagua and a number of Ruto's allies, purportedly due to insufficient evidence.

In 2024, an investigative report by Africa Uncensored found that the government sold fake fertilizer to farmers at a time when a quarter of the population faced food insecurity. The report was later confirmed by the Kenya Bureau of Standards. Separately, after an explosion at a liquid petroleum plant in Nairobi left three people dead and hundreds injured in January, President Ruto blamed corruption, and four members of the National Environment Management Authority were suspended.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 2 / 4

Elaborate rules govern public finance in Kenya, but enforcement is often lacking. Parliament's Budget and Appropriations Committee effectively delegates the budget process to the Treasury, and the legislature has demonstrated limited willingness to ensure that the Treasury respects budget-making procedures. When budget information is made available, it is generally released long after the planning stages during which stakeholders could offer input.

Many of the central government's expenditures are not disclosed. While budget transparency at the county level is gradually improving, the availability of financial information in many counties is insufficient to ensure adequate public participation in budgetary processes.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 2 / 4

Kenya has one of Africa's more vibrant media landscapes, with journalists actively working to expose government corruption and wrongdoing. However, several laws restrict press freedom. The government and security forces regularly harass journalists, and such incidents are rarely investigated by police. The combination of restrictive laws on press freedom and the potential for harassment and violence leads to self-censorship in some cases. Women journalists generally face greater harassment and risk of attack.

As in past years, dozens of media personnel were harmed while covering protests in 2024. Several journalists were physically attacked and arrested by police during the protests against tax increases in June. Also that month, KTN News reported that authorities had threatened to shut down the station over their coverage of the protests.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 2 / 4

The government generally respects the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion. However, counterterrorism operations against the Somalia-based Shabaab militant group have left Muslims exposed to state violence and intimidation. Shabaab militants have at times specifically targeted Christians in Kenya.

In 2023, following the discovery that hundreds of followers of a religious cult had died of starvation, the government banned the group along with four others as part of a regulatory review of cults and extremism. In February 2024, the leader of the cult in question and 29 of his associates were formally charged with the murder of 191 children.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 3 / 4

Academic freedom in Kenya is traditionally robust. However, student union elections have led to allegations of fraud and violent protests. Police have also arrested and used tear gas on protesting students and staff,

including in Nairobi during a nationwide strike by two public university staff unions in 2024. There is evidence that ethnic considerations have influenced university hiring, leaving the staff of some institutions with significant ethnic imbalances.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 3 / 4

The relatively unfettered freedom of private discussion in Kenya has suffered somewhat from state counterterrorism operations, intimidation by security forces, and the activities of ethnically affiliated gangs. The government has used its broadly defined surveillance powers to monitor mobile phone and internet communications.

Kenyan internet users are sometimes exposed to disinformation. Online disinformation campaigns increased during the 2022 presidential election. Anti-LGBT+ disinformation has accelerated since 2023, placing LGBT+ people at heightened risk of discrimination or violence and incentivizing them to self-censor.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 1 / 4

The constitution guarantees the freedom of assembly. However, the law requires organizers of public meetings to notify local police in advance. In practice, police have regularly prohibited gatherings on security or other grounds, and violently dispersed assemblies that they had not explicitly banned. Security forces displayed some restraint during the 2022 electoral period, but killed an estimated 30 people and arrested more than 300 others during opposition-led protests in 2023.

In June 2024, public frustration with Ruto's policies—particularly tax increases proposed in the 2024 Finance Bill—prompted a wave of protests that spread to 43 of Kenya's 47 counties. When protestors in Nairobi attempted to occupy the Parliament building, police responded with tear gas and lethal force, killing at least 13 people on June 25 alone. The protests continued into July, and their themes expanded to include demands for the president and his cabinet to resign. As a result, President Ruto dismissed most of his cabinet, and the inspector general of Kenya's police resigned. Also in July, police sought to ban protests in Nairobi, but a court suspended the ban and affirmed the right to peaceful assembly. Overall, dozens of people were killed and hundreds more were injured during the protests, which lasted for more than seven weeks. Internet disruptions were reported. The KHRC found that at least 82 protestors and government critics were abducted and detained without due process.

during and after the protests, including prominent activist Boniface Mwangi.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because security officers killed, injured, or abducted large numbers of protesters who participated in antigovernment demonstrations during the year.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 2 / 4

Kenya has an active civil society, but NGOs have faced growing obstacles, including repeated government attempts to deregister hundreds of groups for alleged financial violations. In 2023, over government objections, the Supreme Court affirmed the right of LGBT+ groups to register as NGOs. In 2024, President Ruto falsely accused the Ford Foundation, a US-based philanthropy that provides support to Kenyan civil society organizations, of funding antigovernment protests. Ruto also accused at least one Kenyan NGO of financing protests against the 2024 Finance Bill. Separately, several environmental activists have been killed in Kenya in recent years.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 3 / 4

The 2010 constitution affirmed the rights of trade unions to establish their own agendas, bargain collectively, and strike. Unions are active in practice. However, labor leaders sometimes experience intimidation, notably in the wake of strike actions. A number of strikes have taken place in the past several years, including a nearly two-month strike by public-sector doctors in 2024.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 3 / 4

While judicial procedures are inefficient, the Kenyan judiciary is generally considered to be independent, and the courts have demonstrated this through a series of high-profile rulings in recent years. In 2022, for example, the Supreme Court ruled against the incumbent government to unanimously uphold the results of the presidential election, bolstering its role as the independent final arbiter of electoral disputes. In March 2024, the High Court suspended the implementation of the NADCO report while a challenge regarding its constitutionality was considered.

The government has occasionally refused to comply with court orders and ignored the recommendations of the Judicial Service Commission. In 2023, President Ruto increased the judiciary's budget following several years of

funding disputes between the judiciary and the Kenyatta administration. However, judges continued to rule against several provisions of President Ruto's finance policy agenda during 2024; Ruto responded by accusing the judiciary of corruption and indicating that his administration would not comply with the decisions. In May, the president sent hundreds of Kenyan police officers to lead an international security mission in Haiti, despite a High Court ruling that the deployment was unconstitutional.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4

Constitutional guarantees of due process are poorly upheld. There remains a significant backlog of court cases, contributing to a large number of lengthy pretrial detentions.

The police service is thoroughly undermined by corruption, misconduct, and extrajudicial killings. Although Parliament established the Independent Policing Oversight Authority in 2011, the agency secured the conviction of only 30 officers between September 2018 and August 2024, out of more than 20,000 complaints and 4,865 investigations.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 1 / 4

The Somalia-based Shabaab militant group has continued to pose a security threat, pledging to maintain its campaign of violence until Kenyan troops withdraw from Somalia. The Shabaab were blamed for multiple attacks on police officers in Mandera County in 2024.

Severe drought and food shortages have exacerbated violent communal conflict in the north and east, and local NGOs have called for a stronger government response to alleviate hunger and reduce the pressures that drive conflict. In 2023, security forces began an operation in the Rift Valley region to combat livestock theft and curb violence.

Violence against suspects and detainees by security forces remains a serious concern, and abuses are rarely punished. Extrajudicial killings are more prevalent in low-income areas in Nairobi.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 1 / 4

Constitutional and legal protections against discrimination based on gender, race, or ethnicity are not well enforced. Consensual same-sex sexual activity is criminalized, with a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison. While this law is rarely applied, LGBT+ people face discrimination, abuse, and violent attacks in practice. Several LGBT+ individuals have been murdered in high-profile cases in recent years. A 2023 Supreme Court ruling that affirmed the right of LGBT+ groups to register with the

government's NGO office was met with protests and increased threats against LGBT+ people.

The 2022 Children Act provides intersex children with legal recognition and equal access to services.

Police abuses against refugees and asylum seekers continue to be reported. Somali Kenyans are often stereotyped as refugees and terrorists and have been targeted in government crackdowns as a result. Coastal communities have long experienced government underinvestment and political marginalization, resulting in worse educational, health, and economic outcomes for residents.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 2 / 4

While the constitution provides protections for freedom of movement and related rights, they are impeded in practice by security concerns and ethnic tensions that lead many residents to avoid certain parts of the country.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 1 / 4

Kenya has established legal protections for property rights and a robust private sector; however, organized crime continues to threaten legitimate business activity. Political corruption and ethnic favoritism also affect the business sector and exacerbate existing imbalances in wealth and access to economic opportunities, including public-sector jobs.

Forced evictions without compensation are prevalent in low-income areas, particularly in Nairobi. Following significant flooding in May 2024, the government ordered evictions and demolitions of buildings located near rivers, displacing some 200,000 people. At least six people, including three children, were killed by bulldozers that razed informal settlements after the floods. More than 20 activists involved in protesting the demolitions were arrested. The KHRC sued the government over the evictions and for alleged negligence in responding to flood warnings.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 2 / 4

The constitution recognizes marriage as a union between two people of the opposite sex, but otherwise does not place explicit restrictions on

freedoms related to marriage, divorce, and other personal status issues. Polygamy is legal, and approximately 10 percent of the married population are in polygamous marriages. Domestic and gender-based violence, including attacks by intimate partners, are common but rarely prosecuted. Reported cases of femicide have increased in recent years, with one NGO counting 152 in 2023 and 160 in 2024; police documented at least 97 murders of women between August and October 2024 alone. High-profile cases during the year included the July arrest of a suspected serial killer accused of dumping nine dismembered female bodies in a Nairobi informal settlement, and a September attack in which Olympic athlete Rebecca Cheptegei was set on fire and killed by her former partner following a dispute. A series of large demonstrations during the year called on the government to take stronger action to combat the problem.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from 2 / economic exploitation? 4

Kenya remains an unequal society, with wealth generally concentrated in towns and cities. The arid and semiarid north and northeastern parts of the country have particularly high poverty rates.

Legal safeguards against exploitative working conditions are not effectively enforced, especially in the informal sector. Refugees and asylum seekers from neighboring countries, particularly children, have been vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor in Kenya, though Kenyan children are also subject to such abuses. Kenyan workers are recruited for employment abroad in sometimes exploitative conditions, notably in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

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