Leadership styles and economic development of Kenya, since 1963

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how the president of Kenya has led the country since it became independent in 1963. It also looks at how different presidents have made decisions. The study had four specific objectives: to look at the leadership style of Jomo Kenyatta and how it affected the Kenyan economy to examine Daniel Moi's leadership style and how it impacted the economy; to study Mwai Kibaki's leadership and how it affected economic development in Kenya from 2002 to 2013 and to look at the leadership styles of presidents in Kenya since 2013 and how they have impacted the economy. The study used an approach and looked at old records, spoke to people who lived through it, and read what other scholars have written. It examined how presidents Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel arap Moi, Mwai Kibaki, Uhuru Kenyatta, and William Ruto have led the country and made decisions. The study used two ideas: the Great Man Theory and the theory of political time. These ideas help us understand how presidents have made decisions and governed Kenya. The study found that the way the president leads has changed over time. Sometimes the president has a lot of power and control; sometimes they focus on reform. Sometimes they try to make the people happy. The study talked to people who have experienced presidents and leadership styles. It used techniques to choose the people to talk to and ended up speaking with 16 people. The study shows that economic decisions are not just based on ideas but on the president's leadership style, their power, and the country's institutions. It looked at what the people said and found patterns and themes. The study found that when the constitution changes, the president still has a lot of power. The economic strategies have also changed, from helping the rich to trying to reduce debt and help the poor. Each president has tried to grow the economy and make the country stronger. The results have been different. The study is important because it shows how the president's leadership affects the economy and the country's development. It found that Kenya's development has been shaped more by the president's influence than by policies. This helps us understand why it is hard to achieve development that includes everyone and is sustainable. The study results are important for understanding how Kenya and other African countries can achieve governance and development. It shows that the president's leadership is crucial in shaping the country's economy and development path. The study's findings can help us learn from Kenya's experiences. Apply them to other countries.

Keywords: Economic Policy, Governance, Kenya, Institutional Reform, Presidential Leadership, Political Economy, Postcolonial State

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I. INTRODUCTION

Kenya's history after colonial rule gives us an example of how leadership and economic management have changed in Africa. Since Kenya became independent in 1963, it has had presidents, each with their own way of leading. These different leadership styles have had an impact on Kenya's economy and politics. The country's presidents have been: Jomo Kenyatta, who focused on development with a caring approach.[1] Daniel Arap Moi, was more authoritarian

[1] Pius Nyamora and Bitange Ndemo, *Kenya's Search for Prosperity: Philosophies and Policies from 1963 to 2022* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2023)

but popular.[2] Mwai Kibaki, who made decisions based on facts and practicality.[3] Uhuru Kenyatta emphasized building infrastructure.[4] William Ruto, is moving towards a populist and nationalist economic approach.[5] Presidential leadership in Kenya has always played a significant role in shaping the country's development, policies and governance culture. The question is: have Kenya's economic policies been mainly influenced by the country's situation or by the leadership style of its presidents? In Africa, leadership often involves power, institutional structures, and networks of support.[6] In Kenya, the president has a lot of power and influence over the country's direction, linking development, ethnicity and governance.[7] This study examines how the leadership styles of Kenya's presidents have influenced the country's policies and outcomes. Although different administrations have aimed for growth and modernization, their successes and failures are closely tied to the institutional dynamics of leadership. The study identifies patterns of continuity and changes in authority. It places each administration within its constitutional and economic context. Kenya's presidency has been a factor in shaping the country's national direction. It has linked development, ethnicity, and governance. The Harambee philosophy and Vision 2030 are examples of the country's visions for growth and modernization. The achievements and limitations of these visions cannot be separated from the institutional dynamics of leadership. The study aims to contribute to the debate about the role of leadership in shaping economic policy priorities and outcomes in Kenya.

In this study, we looked at how presidential leadership styles affect governance. Presidential leadership styles were the factor we tested, and governance was the outcome we measured. Leadership styles were assessed by looking at things like: how presidents make decisions, how control they want, what policies they support, how inclusive they are, how they build coalitions, how they act as leaders, what they believe in Governance was measured by looking at: How economic policies are made; How development plans are create; How public resources are managed; How effective institutions are; How stable politics are; How well democracy works; How accountable leaders are; How well services are delivered; How well the economy and society develop. The study also considered things like the constitution, multiparty democracy, and leadership beliefs. These factors can affect how leadership styles influence governance. We only looked at the president's leadership, not at parts of government unless they affected the president's power and governance. The analysis focused on how presidents used their power, dealt with limitations, and affected politics and the economy during their time in office. Presidential leadership styles were key to understanding governance outcomes. The study examined how presidential leadership styles shaped governance. Leadership styles and governance are connected. Governance outcomes depend on leadership styles. The president's leadership plays a role in shaping governance.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya became independent in 1963. Since then, the country has had presidents; each president has had their own way of doing things. They have tried to develop the country in various ways. Kenya still has problems. The president has a lot of power. Some people get favors from the president. The country is not developing equally. Some parts are rich while others are poor. The government owes a lot of money. This has been going on for a long time. Each president has made some changes, but the big question is, has anything really changed? Are things just the same with different people in charge? Most people who study Kenya have looked at each president individually. They have looked at the changes they made to the constitution. They have looked at how the country became more democratic. They have looked at the policies. For example, Jomo Kenyatta is known for helping to create the country and make it a nation. Daniel arap Moi is known for leading a one-party government. Mwai Kibaki is known for fixing the economy. Uhuru Kenyatta is known for building roads and other big projects. William Ruto is known for his plan to help the economy grow from the bottom up. Nobody has really looked at all the presidents together. Nobody has looked at how their leadership styles have affected the country over time. This means we do not know much about how things have changed or stayed the same. So, this study looked at all the presidents from 1963 to 2025. It looked at what the presidents believed in. It examined how the presidents governed the country. It assessed the changes they made to the government and their policies. The study helped us understand how the presidents have affected Kenya's economy and government.

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[2] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 311–315.
[3] Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 22–67
[4] Pius Nyamora and Bitange Ndemo, *Kenya's Search for Prosperity: Philosophies and Policies from 1963 to 2022* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2023)
[5] William Ruto, *Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda 2022–2027* (Government of Kenya, 2022)
[6] M. Botha, *African Leadership and the Role of the Presidency in African Conflicts: A Case Study of Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni* (doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2012).
[7] Daniel Branch and Nic Cheeseman, "The Politics of Control in Kenya: Understanding the Bureaucratic-Executive State, 1952–78," *Review of African Political Economy* 33, no. 107 (2006): 11–31.

1.2 Research Objectives

i. To examine the presidential styles of Jomo and how they impacted the Kenyan Economy,1963-1978
ii. The place of Daniel Moi's presidential styles and economic governance,1978-2002
iii. Assess Mwai Kibaki's styles of leadership and economic development in Kenya, 2002-2013
iv. Presidential Styles of leadership in Kenya since 2013 and their impact on the economy

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Great Man Theory and Theory of Political Time, which provide complementary explanations of the relationship between presidential leadership and economic development. Great Man Theory was advanced by Thomas Carlyle (1841). It holds that exceptional individuals can significantly influence the course of history through their abilities, decisions and leadership.[8] In this study, the theory provides a basis for examining how the leadership styles, decisions and economic policies of Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Moi, Mwai Kibaki and subsequent presidents influenced Kenya's economic development. It focuses on the role of presidential agency in shaping economic governance.

Theory of Political Time, developed by Stephen Skowronek[9], argues that presidential leadership is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the political order, historical circumstances and conditions inherited by a president.[10] Applied to this study, the theory helps explain how Kenya's presidents exercised leadership within different political, institutional and economic contexts, and why their capacity to initiate economic change varied across periods.

The two theories are complementary. The Great Man Theory emphasizes the president as an individual agent of change, while Political Time emphasizes the political and historical context within which that agency operates. Together, they provide a framework for assessing how presidential leadership styles interacted with prevailing political and economic conditions to influence Kenya's economic development from independence to the present. This combination avoids attributing economic outcomes solely to individual presidents while still recognizing the importance of presidential leadership.

2.2 Empirical review

2.2.1 Jomo Kenyatta's presidential style and the Kenyan economy, 1963–1978

Globally, scholarship has established that presidential leadership styles significantly influence economic governance through policy formulation, institutional development, and the allocation of public resources, while African studies similarly demonstrate that post-independence presidents shaped economic development through varying degrees of state control, centralization, and patronage.[11] In Kenya, scholars including Branch and William R. Ochieng have examined Jomo Kenyatta's presidency in relation to political centralization, land redistribution, Africanization, and capitalist development, highlighting both the economic achievements and the inequalities associated with his administration.[12] However, existing literature has paid limited attention to how Kenyatta's paternalistic leadership style itself influenced Kenya's political economy, a gap that the present study addressed by examining the relationship between presidential leadership, economic governance, and development outcomes during his administration.

2.2.2 Daniel Moi's presidential style and economic governance, 1978–2002

Across the world, studies on authoritarian leadership have shown that highly centralized presidential styles often combine political control with state-directed economic management, while African scholarship similarly demonstrates that post-independence leaders frequently relied on patronage networks, personal rule, and centralized institutions to sustain political authority and influence economic outcomes.[13] In Kenya, scholars such as Nic Cheeseman and Jennifer Widner have examined Daniel arap Moi's presidency, highlighting the Nyayo philosophy, one-party rule, structural adjustment reforms, patronage politics, and the centralization of executive power as key features shaping the country's political economy.[3] Similarly, David Throup and Charles Hornsby, in *Multi-Party Politics in Kenya*, examined Moi's

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[8] C. N. Oko-Otu and C. G. Chidume, "Objectivity and the Great Man Theory in Historiography," *Cogito* 13, no. 3 (2021): 124–138.

[9] Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[10] Jean Broschek, "Prime Ministerial Leadership in Political Time: Stephen Skowronek's Framework in Canadian Context," *Canadian Political Science Review* 12, no. 1 (2018): 1–23.

[11] James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

[12] William R. Ochieng', *A Modern History of Kenya, 1895–1980* (London: Evans Brothers, 1989), 142–183.

[13] Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000); Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa: Prince, Autocrat, Prophet, Tyrant* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

presidency by emphasizing one-party rule, the Nyayo philosophy, and patronage politics.[14] However, existing scholarship has devoted limited attention to how Moi's authoritarian-populist leadership style itself influenced the interaction between political control, economic reform, patronage, and institutional performance. The present study therefore addressed this gap through historical analysis of archival records, oral testimonies, and documentary evidence

2.2.3 Mwai Kibaki's leadership style and economic development, 2002–2013

Scholarship has demonstrated that presidential leadership styles influence economic development through policy formulation, institutional reform, public investment, and economic management. In Kenya, studies of Mwai Kibaki's presidency indicate that his administration emphasized economic recovery, institutional reform, macroeconomic stability, and investment in infrastructure. The Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERSWEC), launched in 2003, focused on rapid economic growth, strengthening institutions of governance, expanding physical infrastructure, and investing in human capital.[15] Pinto further observes that economic growth accelerated following Kibaki's election in 2002, with improved political stability and the investment climate contributing to better economic outcomes.[16] These studies associate Kibaki's leadership with the use of experienced technocrats and efforts to strengthen economic institutions, although political competition and institutional constraints affected the implementation of reforms. However, existing scholarship has paid comparatively limited attention to how Kibaki's leadership style itself influenced the interaction between economic reform, institutional development, public investment, and economic growth. The present study therefore addresses this gap by examining the relationship between Kibaki's leadership style, economic governance, and development outcomes during the period 2002–2013.

2.2.4 Presidential leadership styles in Kenya since 2013 and their impact on the economy

Pius Nyamora and Bitange Ndemo, in *Kenya's Search for Prosperity: Philosophies and Policies from 1963 to 2022*, examined Uhuru Kenyatta's development agenda by highlighting the Big Four Agenda, infrastructure expansion, and digital transformation; however, they devoted comparatively limited attention to how Kenyatta's developmental leadership style itself shaped Kenya's political economy through debt-financed development, digital modernization, executive centralization, and institutional accountability, a gap that the present study addressed through historical analysis of archival records, oral testimonies, and documentary evidence.[17]

Peter Kagwanja in his work, *The Politics of Transition in Kenya: From KANU to the National Rainbow Coalition*, and subsequent writings on Kenyan governance, examined the evolution of populist politics and state transformation; however, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to how William Ruto's Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda has shaped Kenya's political economy through the interaction of populism, fiscal consolidation, digital governance, agricultural reform, and executive authority, a gap that the present study addressed through historical analysis of archival records, oral testimonies, and documentary evidence.[18]

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative historical-comparative research design to examine how presidential leadership styles and constitutional frameworks influenced Kenya's governance and economic development from 1963 to 2025. It covered the period after independence, from Jomo Kenyatta to the current president, who is William Samoe Ruto. This longitudinal scope captured transitions from nationalist consolidation, authoritarian centralism, democratization, and constitutional reform to contemporary populist presidentialism. Periodization was organized around constitutional milestones and leadership transitions: 1963 (independence and Westminster Constitution), 1969 (republican constitution), 1982 (one-party consolidation), 2002 (political liberalization), 2010 (new constitution), and 2022 (populist revival under a devolved system). The study treated each regime not as isolated episodes but as interconnected phases in the evolution of Kenya's presidential governance. The archival sources from the Kenya National Archives were used during the study, which examined presidential speeches, government gazettes, policy statements, constitutional documents, and parliamentary debates preserved at the Kenya National Archives. These primary materials were supplemented by secondary scholarly sources such as books, journal articles, and institutional reports to provide interpretive depth and historical context. The study employed thematic interpretation where chronological comparison across different presidencies was used. Triangulation between archival, oral, and published sources enhanced reliability,

[14] Nic Cheeseman, *Democracy in Africa: Successes, Failures, and the Struggle for Political Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 112–136; Jennifer A. Widner, *The Rise of a Party-State in Kenya: From "Harambee!" to "Nyayo!"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 87–126.

[15] International Monetary Fund, *Kenya: Staff Report for the 2003 Article IV Consultation and Request for a Three-Year Arrangement Under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2003).

[16] Brian Pinto, *How Does My Country Grow? Economic Advice Through Story-Telling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[17] Pius Nyamora and Bitange Ndemo, *Kenya's Search for Prosperity*, 201–245.

[18] Peter Kagwanja, *The Politics of Transition in Kenya: From KANU to the National Rainbow Coalition* (Nairobi: Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2003), 15–58.

while rigorous source criticism ensured authenticity and contextual accuracy. Ethical considerations guided the collection and interpretation of data, particularly in the use of oral testimonies from retired officials and historians.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Findings

The findings of the study are presented according to the four research objectives.

4.1.1 The presidential styles of Jomo and how they impacted the Kenyan Economy

The study revealed that the presidency of Jomo Kenyatta was substantially moulded by a paternalistic and highly centralized style of leadership that dramatically influenced Kenya's early postcolonial political economy.[19] Kenyatta carefully developed the image of Mzee, the wise patriarch of the nation, building upon both anti-colonial legitimacy and deeply established African traditions of elder authority to place himself as the moral custodian of national unity. This paternal symbolism was not only rhetorical; it formed the conceptual underpinning upon which executive control was justified and established. As observed by Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, Kenyatta merged nationalist politics with a patriarchal moral order that saw devotion to the president as synonymous with loyalty to the state.[20]

Archival presidential speeches reviewed in this study regularly depicted unity, obedience, and discipline as requirements for national growth. This idea was publicly expressed in Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965, which favoured a state-managed capitalist economy under strong executive authority while warning against political pluralism as a threat to stability.[21] Parliamentary Hansards from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s further demonstrated a progressive loss of legislative independence, as opposition voices were methodically co-opted into the ruling party or politically neutralized.[22] The study therefore found that Kenyatta's nation-building project equated economic progress with political centralization, producing a governance structure in which policy formulation increasingly revolved around the presidency rather than participatory institutions.

This leadership style had obvious economic effects, most notably in the management of land redistribution, which emerged as the principal material embodiment of paternalistic authority. While settlement plans were publicly characterised as restorative measures for colonial land dispossession, archival land transfer records evaluated in this study indicated that access to land became increasingly conditioned by political loyalty. Scholars like as Christopher Leo and Jennifer Widner have shown that land functioned as a significant weapon of patronage, solidifying support for the ruling elite.[23] Oral testimony from retired provincial administrators and cooperative officials obtained during this investigation substantially validated this interpretation. Interviewees consistently revealed informal directions guiding land allocation committees to reward party loyalists and politically connected persons.[24] The study thus revealed that land policy, rather than removing colonial economic inequalities, reconfigured them around postwar political power, maintaining inequality inside networks of executive patronage.

The ethnic dimension of Kenyatta's paternalism also influenced economic opportunities. Archival cabinet rosters and senior civil service appointments between 1964 and 1978 revealed a sustained concentration of individuals from Kiambu and nearby districts in important economic and security ministries.[25] As Jacqueline Klopp and William Ochieng claim, this concentration of power produced restricted ruling elite that dominated access to state resources. The study concluded that this ethnicized leadership structure had clear economic ramifications, including access to financial facilities, agricultural marketing boards, industrial licenses, and state contracts.[26] Oral histories from early African entrepreneurs recruited for this study suggested that economic success was frequently based upon government favour rather than market competitiveness.[27] Consequently, Kenyatta's leadership not only concentrated political authority but also organized economic mobility along ethnic and political lines, entrenching uneven regional and social growth.

Kenyatta's paternalism was further fostered through clever political communication. Archival broadcasts from Voice of Kenya demonstrated a consistent moral interpretation of economic conduct. Presidential addresses emphasized hard work, loyalty, and respect for authority as civic duties essential to prosperity, while dissent was portrayed as socially

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[19] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Presidential Speeches and Public Addresses (Jomo Kenyatta)*, OP/1/1, 1964–1972.

[20] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 311–315.

[21] Government of Kenya, *Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965: African Socialism and Its Application to Planning in Kenya* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1965).

[22] Parliament of Kenya, *Kenya National Assembly Official Report (Hansard)*, 1965–1972.

[23] Christopher Leo, *Land and Class in Kenya* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 92–95; Jennifer Widner, *The Rise of a Party-State in Kenya: From "Harambee!" to "Nyayo!"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 67–70.

[24] Timothy Kiplangat, oral interview, Kapseret, 5 February 2025.

[25] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Cabinet Office Records and Civil Service Appointment Registers*, OP/2/1, 1964–1978.

[26] Jacqueline Klopp, "Pilfering the Public: The Problem of Land Grabbing in Contemporary Kenya," *Africa Today* 47, no. 1 (2000): 7–26; William R. Ochieng', *A Modern History of Kenya, 1895–1980*, 198–202.

[27] Joseph Kitonga, oral interview, Majengo, 10 February 2025.

destructive and economically irresponsible.[28] This rhetorical tactic effectively translated structural economic imbalances into individual moral faults. The study revealed that such discourse functioned to discipline labor, inhibit political mobilization over inequality, and justify elite accumulation as a natural reward for loyalty and dedication.

Economically, Kenyatta pursued a pragmatic capitalist strategy that blended foreign investment with Africanization of commerce and industry. Through institutions such as the Industrial and Commercial Development Corporation, African entrepreneurs were supported with loans and technical support meant to encourage indigenous capitalism. Archival economic reports from the Ministry of Finance during the late 1960s and early 1970s indicated consistent national development driven mostly by agricultural exports and foreign capital inflows.[29] However, these same statistics revealed rising wealth gaps and substantial concentration of capital among politically linked elites. Oral testimonies from cooperative leaders and smallholder farmers further demonstrated how rural producers remained exposed to shifting commodity prices while a restricted elite diversified into real estate, transport, and industry.[30] The study therefore showed that Kenyatta's developmental pragmatism delivered economic prosperity without wide redistribution, strengthening class segregation rooted in political patronage.

Political repression evolved as a vital method by which this economic order was maintained. Archival court documents and security reports from the 1970s documented rampant incarceration without trial of dissidents who protested land grabs, corruption, and injustice.[31] As assessed by Daniel Branch, coercive state authority progressively functioned to eliminate economic resistance. Oral memories and archive newspapers both highlighted the death of J.M. Kariuki, whose political program placed a strong emphasis on equitable development, as a pivotal moment in the suppression of popular economic criticism.[32] Interviewees frequently pointed out that open opposition to elite accumulation were deterred by fear of repression, which allowed patronage capitalism to grow with little opposition.

In synthesis, the study found that Kenyatta's paternalistic leadership style was not merely a political posture but a governing logic that structured Kenya's early economic institutions. Centralization enabled swift policy implementation but dismantled accountability; land redistribution became a tool of loyalty rather than justice; ethnicized patronage shaped access to opportunity; capitalist growth favored elites; and repression insulated economic privilege from social challenge. While Kenyatta's presidency succeeded in establishing political stability and fostering national growth in the early postcolonial period, it simultaneously embedded executive dominance, inequality, and patron-client capitalism into the foundations of the Kenyan state.

The study therefore concludes that many of Kenya's subsequent struggles with corruption, ethnicized politics, and uneven development are historically rooted in the leadership style of the first presidency itself. Kenyatta's paternalistic nation-building fused unity with control and development with patronage, producing a political economy in which economic outcomes were inseparable from loyalty to executive power.

4.1.2 Daniel Arap Moi (1978–2002): Authoritarian Populism and Patronage Economics

According to the study, Daniel Arap Moi's presidency signaled a significant change in Kenya's political economy toward what is best characterized as authoritarian populism maintained by firmly established networks of patronage.[33] Although Moi publicly presented his leadership as carrying on Kenyatta's legacy of nation-building through the Nyayo philosophy of peace, love, and unity, the study's analysis of oral and archival evidence showed that this ideology served more as a tool for political control than as a true means of fostering civic engagement. Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 and cabinet memos frequently stressed loyalty, discipline, and moral rectitude as the cornerstones of progress, so reframing submission to the president as a requirement for economic stability.[34]

Oral testimonial from former educators, public servants, and municipal administrators provided striking examples of how this ideological framework was implemented in day-to-day governance. The respondent recalled mandatory public professions of commitment, increased political screening in public service, and the widespread use of loyalty oaths following the attempted coup in 1982.[35] Due to these tactics, the state became a surveillance tool where political compliance was required for company permits, employment opportunities, promotions, and credit availability.

[28] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Voice of Kenya Broadcast Transcripts and Presidential Addresses*, VOK/1/2, 1965–1978.
[29] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Ministry of Finance Economic Reports and Development Reviews*, FIN/1/2, 1965–1975.
[30] Pamela Ndungu, oral interview, Lurambi, 20 February 2025.
[31] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Judicial Proceedings, Detention Orders, and Security Intelligence Reports*, SEC/2/4, 1970–1978.
[32] Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011*, 108–112; *Daily Nation* and *East African Standard*, March–April 1975, coverage of the assassination of J. M. Kariuki.
[33] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Cabinet Memoranda and Policy Papers (Office of the President)*, OP/2/6, 1978–1988.
[34] Government of Kenya, *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986: Economic Management for Renewed Growth* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1986).
[35] Francis Wanyama, oral interview, Mung'etho, 16 February 2025.

Therefore, the study discovered that Moi's populist moral discourse concealed an increasingly oppressive system that combined material survival with political allegiance.

The consolidation of presidential power was further illustrated by parliamentary Hansards from the mid-1980s. The weakening of institutional autonomy was reflected in the legislative debates, which increasingly focused on praising Moi rather than conducting in-depth policy analysis.[36] According to David Throup and Charles Hornsby, this era marked the height of Kenya's neo-patrimonial system, with formal institutions mostly serving to justify individualised executive authority.[37] This interpretation was supported by interviews done for the study, in which former district commissioners described how political allegiance, rather than technical necessity, frequently dictated the distribution of resources from development funding to cooperative loans. A strongly militarised provincial government served to further solidify this concentration of authority. Internal security briefs and archival circulars from the Office of the President demonstrated the growth of district and village-level intelligence networks responsible for keeping an eye on opposition.[38] Moi developed an authoritarian populism that combined widespread compulsion with grassroots accessibility, as noted by Daniel Branch. According to the study, presidential tours, public demonstrations, and barazas fulfilled both pragmatic and symbolic functions, identifying and punishing political rivals while simultaneously showing paternal concern.[39]

During a time of severe external pressure, Moi's leadership style had a significant impact on economic policy outcomes. Budget statements from the 1980s and 1990s that were archived revealed a state grappling with diminishing export earnings, growing debt, and donor conditions imposed by organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.[40] In an apparent effort to boost productivity and expansion, structural adjustment programs brought about trade liberalisation, privatisation, and public sector layoffs. The study did discover, however, that these reforms were applied selectively in a manner that maintained elite control over financial resources. State firms and lucrative public contracts were regularly transferred to politically connected persons, according to procurement reports and archival privatisation data. Oral accounts from former parastatal employees verified that while managerial elites profited from asset acquisition, restructuring frequently led to widespread layoffs for common people.[41] According to Thomas Callaghy's conceptualisation, these regimes functioned under "personal rule under pressure," striking a balance between the necessity of regime survival and donor expectations. This resulted in change without accountability and liberalisation without democratisation in Kenya.[42]

Data on recurring expenditures also showed that public funds were increasingly being diverted from long-term development investments to security, administration, and presidential patronage networks. Rent-seeking behaviour in state institutions was reinforced while development budgets stalled and politically strategic spending increased. Accordingly, the study discovered that Moi's autocratic rule not only restricted political liberties but also fundamentally warped economic reform, turning adjustment measures into instruments for the enrichment of the elite rather than promoting widespread prosperity. Important information about how this political economy was felt at the local level came from oral histories. Moi's numerous travels of rural Kenya, especially in towns like Kapsabet, where he portrayed himself as a modest and approachable leader sensitive to local complaints, were recalled by many respondents. Particularly among marginalised communities that felt previously left out of state attention, these interactions fostered a sense of paternal care and intimate connection. This inclusion was, nevertheless, severely limited.[43] Church leaders, pro-democracy activists, university professors, and student activists described ongoing intimidation, harassment, and incarceration.

Reports from organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International corroborated widespread political repression throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[44] Detention without trial, torture, and suppression of independent media became routine instruments of governance.[45] The study found that this climate of fear effectively neutralized organized resistance to economic inequality and corruption, allowing patronage capitalism to flourish with minimal public accountability. In synthesizing archival, economic, and oral evidence, the study concluded that Moi's leadership

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[36] Parliament of Kenya, *Kenya National Assembly Official Report (Hansard)*, 1983–1988.

[37] David Throup and Charles Hornsby, *Multi-Party Politics in Kenya: The Kenyatta and Moi States and the Triumph of the System in the 1992 Election* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), 58–62.

[38] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Office of the President Circulars and Internal Security Intelligence Briefs*, OP/3/2, 1980–1990.

[39] Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011*, 136.

[40] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Ministry of Finance Budget Statements and Structural Adjustment Policy Reports*, FIN/3/1, 1980–1995.

[41] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Privatization Commission Records and Public Procurement Files*, PRIV/1/2, 1985–1995.

[42] Thomas M. Callaghy, "The State and the Development of Capitalism in Africa: The Case of Zaire," in *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, ed. Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 89–94.

[43] Dennis Kiptoo, oral interview, Kapsabet Town, 21 February 2025.

[44] Human Rights Watch, *Kenya: Taking Liberties—Human Rights Violations in Kenya* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 12–18.

[45] Amnesty International, *Kenya: Torture, Ill-Treatment and Political Detention* (London: Amnesty International, 1992), 9–14.

style institutionalized a model of authoritarian populism in which political survival depended on the strategic distribution of economic favors alongside systematic repression. While this approach ensured regime stability for over two decades, it severely weakened state institutions, undermined economic productivity, and entrenched corruption within the core of governance. Market reforms were distorted by patronage networks, public resources were redirected toward political control, and inequality deepened across regions and social classes.

In the end, the paper concludes that Moi's presidency changed Kenya's political economy from the Kenyatta era's paternalistic elite consolidation to a fully formed neo-patrimonial authoritarian system. Leadership style was a structural force that influenced institutional deterioration, economic opportunity, and fiscal goals rather than just being a question of personal control. Long after 2002, Kenya's governance landscape was still shaped by the persistent legacy of this era, which included centralised executive power, politicised resource distribution, and diminished accountability. These factors shaped the post-Moi era's challenges for democratic reform and equitable economic development.

4.1.3 Mwai Kibaki's styles of leadership and economic development in Kenya

Kibaki made the presidency a place where experts could work together, not a place for rewarding friends. The documents from the Ministry of Planning and Vision 2030 Secretariat showed a focus on long-term planning, giving bureaucrats more freedom and clear economic goals. Kibaki's speech in 2002, when he became president, talked about recovering the economy through leadership, being careful with money, and making institutions trustworthy.[46] This was a return to leading the country in an accountable way. The presidency under Kibaki was about using knowledge. Kibaki's presidency focused on management. The economy was an area for Kibaki. Kibaki made recovery a priority. Kibaki's leadership style was very different.

People who used to work in the Treasury said that the government officials who made decisions were really good at their jobs. They said that it was more important to be good at your job than to just agree with the people in charge. The ministers and secretaries were allowed to make some decisions on their own as long as they followed the rules. This was very different from how things used to be. Before, people were always watching each other. Making sure everyone was loyal. When Kibaki was in charge, things changed. Kibaki's leadership style changed the way the president and the government workers interacted. Now, the people who were good at their jobs got to make the decisions, not the people who knew the right people.

When Kibaki took over, the country was in shambles. The economy was not doing well roads and buildings were falling apart. People did not trust the government. The World Bank looked at what was happening. Said that corruption, lack of investment, and too much politics had made it hard for the country to grow. So Kibaki's team came up with a plan to fix the economy. They called it the Economic Recovery Strategy. This plan focused on making sure the economy was stable, fixing the government and spending money on things. If you look at what the government spent money on from 2003 to 2007, you can see that they started spending on roads, schools and making sure they had enough money. Many experts say this was the plan Kenya has had since it became independent. The Economic Recovery Strategy was a part of this plan, and it helped the country to start growing again. Kibaki's team used the Economic Recovery Strategy to make changes in Kenya.

The economy got a lot better because of these changes. The country's growth got much stronger with the GDP going up by six percent in the mid-2000s. This was really good. The International Monetary Fund said it was one of Kenyas best periods of growth since it became independent. People from the Central Bank who were interviewed for the study said that things got better when the government stopped interfering much and started collecting taxes properly. This made investors feel more confident. The study showed that Kibaki's leadership, which was based on knowledge helped to make the economy stable. It also showed that having professional people in charge is very important for making the economy better. One thing that you could see happening was that the infrastructure was being modernized.[47] Reports from the African Development Bank said that the roads, energy production and transport systems were being expanded more, than before. The roads were getting better, more energy was being produced, transport corridors were being improved. This was all because of the approach that was being taken.[48] The Thika Superhighway and other big projects really changed how people moved around cities and how things were traded in regions. These projects made travel times a lot shorter. Helped get rid of problems that were slowing down business. What is interesting about the Thika Superhighway and other early projects is that they did not rely much on money borrowed from other countries. Instead, the money to pay for these projects came from within Kenya. From special funding that had good terms. This shows that Kibaki wanted to be careful with money and make sure that Kenya could afford its projects in the term. The

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[46] Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, *Economic Survey* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2004–2008); International Monetary Fund, *Kenya: Staff Report for the 2007 Article IV Consultation*, 5–7.
[47] Pamela Ndungu, oral interview, Lurambi, 20 February 2025.
[48] African Development Bank, *Kenya: Infrastructure Development and Transport Sector Review* (Abidjan: African Development Bank, 2012), 22–28.

Thika Superhighway and other big projects like it made Kenya better at producing things without making the country go far into debt right away. This was a thing, for Kenya.[49] The Thika Superhighway and similar projects helped Kenya become stronger and more able to make things without running into money problems.

Kibaki wanted to develop the people of his country. So he made education a big part of his plan. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization has records that show a lot of kids started going to school when the Free Primary Education program began in 2003. In fact, over a million kids went to school in just one year. People who work in education and teachers from areas said that this program changed what families thought was important. Especially families that did not have a lot of money and could not send their kids to school before.[50] The Free Primary Education program really helped these families. Kibaki's Free Primary Education program made a difference. The study found out that Kibaki's way of doing things was not about making money but it also included spending on people to help the economy grow in the long run. Kibaki's leadership helped Kenya get a spot, in the new digital economy that is coming up. When we looked at records of telecommunications policies and rules, we saw that Kibaki's government made a conscious effort to open up the information and communication technology sector and get private companies to come up with new ideas. Kibaki's leadership and Kibaki's government did this to help Kenya and the information and communication technology sector. The SEACOM arrived in 2009. This really changed everything.[51] It made the internet a lot cheaper and more people got access to broadband. This was a deal for Nairobi because it helped people start new digital businesses and create technology hubs. When you talk to people who started these businesses on they all say that the digital changes, in Kenya happened because of decisions made by President Kibaki. The study showed that the government made it easy for people to innovate and start businesses by building the right infrastructure and making good rules. This all came together to create parts of the economy. The SEACOM and these policy decisions really helped digital entrepreneurship and technology hubs grow across Nairobi.

Kibaki was in charge of making changes to how the government works in Kenya. He did this after Kenya got its freedom from countries. The new constitution that was made in 2010 was a deal. There are documents that show Kibaki and his team wanted to make changes to how the government is set up. They wanted experts to help make these changes. The new constitution gave the courts freedom to make their own decisions. It also gave power to the counties to make their own decisions about money. This meant that the people in charge had to be more accountable for what they did. All of these changes really changed how the government works in Kenya. Kibaki and his team made a lot of changes, to the government through the 2010 process. Although Kibaki himself maintained a low-profile political style, oral testimonies from constitutional lawyers involved in the process emphasized that his administration shielded reform institutions from political sabotage, allowing technical expertise to drive structural change.[52]

The study found that Kibaki's way of doing things had some problems. When people talked to leaders of groups and people who study politics, they said that Kibaki was not really connected to the people and just managed things, which made people less interested in politics. This also did not help with the disagreements between different ethnic groups in Kenya when it was time to vote. The important people in charge were more worried about sharing power among their ethnic groups than making sure the government was fair.[53] Even though the economy was doing well this did not make the government seem legitimate to everyone. After the elections in 2007 that many people disagreed with there was a lot of violence and groups that watch out for rights wrote about it. This showed that just being good, at managing things was not enough to make people forget about problems or to stop some groups from treating others unfairly. Kibaki's way of doing things could not fix these problems.

The study found that Kibaki restored professionalism in government made the economy grow and reformed institutions. He still worked with a small group of powerful people chosen more for their ethnic background than for representing many different views. Kibaki focused on making economic decisions rather than building agreement among different groups. This led to progress in development but he did not fix the social issues that are important for a stable democracy. Kibaki's approach helped the economy. It did not fully address the need for broader political inclusion. The study shows that Kibaki's leadership was good for growth but not for building an inclusive politics.

The study shows that Kibaki's way of doing things changed Kenya's policy in a big way. When the government was run by professionals, the country started to grow, people's money was safer, roads and buildings were fixed, more people went to school, and the internet became a big part of the economy. Even with all these good things, the country still had big problems. Kibaki's time as president shows that being good at economics can make the country do well fast,

[49] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Kenya* (Paris: UNESCO, 2005), 56–60.

[50] World Bank, *Kenya Public Expenditure Review: Infrastructure and Growth* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2013), 30–35.

[51] Stephen Makori, oral interview, Kapseret, 24 February 2025.

[52] Human Rights Watch, *Ballots to Bullets: Organized Political Violence and Kenya's Crisis of Governance* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008), 15–22.

[53] Dorcas Mwangi Eshirumba, oral interview, Eshirumba, 22 February 2025.

but if the leader does not also make sure people are happy and feel included, then the country can still have big problems. The time when Kibaki was president teaches us that the way a leader runs the country is not about getting things done; it is about making the country a better place. Kibaki's practical way of running the country, where experts made decisions, helped Kenya have its best economic recovery since it became independent, but it also showed that just fixing the economy is not enough in a country where people are very different and have been hurt by past problems.

4.1.4 Uhuru Kenyatta (2013–2022): Developmentalism Amid Debt and Digital Modernity

The study looked at the presidency of Uhuru Kenyatta. Found that it was a new version of Kenya’s way of developing the country. This was influenced by things like globalization and the use of a lot of debt to finance projects. Uhuru Kenyatta’s leadership was different from the leader, Kibaki who was more restrained. Kenyatta liked to get things done and make changes that people could see. He thought that building roads, railways and ports was important for Kenya’s economy to grow. He said this in many of his speeches and budget plans from the National Treasury of Kenya.[54] Uhuru Kenyatta and the National Treasury of Kenya believed that infrastructure was the key to making Kenya’s economy strong. They thought that roads, railways, ports and energy would help Kenya’s industries grow and make the country more competitive. This is similar, to what people thought a time ago about how countries should develop. They believed that the government should invest money in projects to help the country change and grow. Uhuru Kenyatta’s presidency and the National Treasury of Kenya followed this idea.

The study found that Uhuru Kenyatta’s presidency was a version of Kenya’s way of developing the country. This was influenced by things like globalization using technology to govern and borrowing a lot of money. Uhuru Kenyatta’s leadership was different from the way Mwai Kibaki led the country. Kenyatta had a way of making decisions and he started many modernization projects that people could see. These projects were meant to show that Kenya was changing. When you look at the speeches made by Uhuru Kenyatta and the budget statements from the National Treasury of Kenya you can see that they always talked about infrastructure as the key to making the economy grow.[55] They said that roads, railways, ports and energy networks were necessary for industries to grow and for Kenya to be competitive in the region. This is similar to what people who study development say, which's that the government should invest money in certain areas to help the country change and grow. Uhuru Kenyatta’s presidency and the National Treasury of Kenya believed in this idea. They used it to guide their decisions, on infrastructure and economic development. People who support these projects say they will help us connect better and be more productive in the future. People who do not support them say that a lot of these projects are done to make politicians look good and to leave a legacy rather than to really help the economy. Some experts who study how politics and economy work together say that the people in charge did not always think about what would work best they thought about what would help them get elected. This means that big projects were used to show that the government is working than to really help the country develop in a good way. This is a problem because it shows that when a government is strong and can get things done it can still make bad choices if nobody is watching to make sure they are doing what is best for everyone. The big problem is that these projects can be about showing off than really helping people and that is not what they should be, about.[56]

When you look at how Kenya's borrowing money the debate gets more interesting. If you check the debt records and what people are saying about the economy now you can see that Kenya’s debt has grown really fast. This is mostly because of loans and money from China to build roads and other big projects.[57] The National Democratic Institute has written reports that show the debt is growing faster than the money the government is making which makes people worry that the country is not safe financially. Some economists think that what Kenyatta is doing is an idea they think he is just borrowing a lot of money now so he can build things that will help the country a lot in the future. Kenyatta says the thing he says he is using "other people’s money" to build things that will be good, for the country. Kenya’s borrowing strategy is still a topic of discussion.

Some people do not think Kenya is doing well as others say. They think that when Kenya was moved to a middle-income country it was harder to get money that does not have to be paid back right away. This meant Kenya had to borrow money from places that charge a lot of interest which made it expensive to pay back the debt. The people who are against this idea say that this made it harder for Kenya to have money for things like health, education and helping people who are poor. The reports from the Auditor-General show that Kenya was spending money than it had and a lot

[54] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Presidential Speeches and Treasury Budget Statements*, FIN/5/2, 1995–2004.
[55] Calestous Juma, *The New Harvest: Agricultural Innovation in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 214–218.
[56] International Monetary Fund, *Kenya: Debt Sustainability Analysis* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2018), 6–10.
[57] National Democratic Institute, *Kenya: Fiscal Governance and Public Debt Analysis* (Washington, DC: National Democratic Institute, 2019), 14–18.

of that money was going to pay back debt.[58] The economists who were talked to for this study said that even though Kenya was building roads and other things it was also getting into a lot of debt. They think that this will make it hard for Kenya to make choices about how to develop in the future. When people were asked what they thought in Nairobi, Nakuru and Eldoret they had feelings.[59] A lot of professionals were happy about the new roads, trains and electricity. They said Kenya was finally starting to look like a country that is doing well. At the same time people who work for the government and own small businesses were worried about how much they had to pay in taxes and the high cost of living. They also thought that the country was borrowing much money without being responsible about it. Some people even said that they thought the reason Kenya was getting into much debt was because of corruption especially when it came to building new infrastructure.[60] This is what some scholars were worried about that the people, in charge of the money were not using it in a way that helps everyone. Kenya and its people are still talking about this issue of debt. How it affects Kenya.

Alongside infrastructure Kenyatta's presidency worked hard to modernize digital systems. The government made online services available on its platforms introduced biometric identity cards and tech hubs grew in Nairobi. Many experts on governance think this change made administrative tasks more efficient and made Kenya a leader in technology in East Africa. More people got access to the internet, which led to businesses, mobile banking and digital public services. This made Kenya look like a hub for innovation in Africa. However, some people have views on this. Those who are optimistic think digital governance can help Kenya skip over problems and include more people. On the hand some analysts are more cautious. They say that weak rules, concerns about data privacy and unequal access to systems limited the impact of these changes. People from counties who were interviewed for this study had feelings. Many were happy with services and less paperwork. However, others talked about system failures, people who can't use systems and some officials still controlling access, to public services informally.[61]

Politically Kenyatta's way of developing the country happened when the president had a lot of power. Some people who study this say Kenyatta's leadership was a mix of planning and nationalist ideas that the media talked about. They called it "populism". The media liked to talk about projects as a way to show that the country was making progress. At the time there were problems with corruption when it came to buying things for the country especially in health and infrastructure. This made people trust the government less and think that only certain people were getting the benefits of development. The president having a lot of power also did not work well with the system of governance in Kenya where power is divided among parts of the country.[62] Even though the Constitution from 2010 tried to give power to local governments they still got most of their money from the national government. When people from governments were asked about this, they said that they often had to wait a long time to get the money and that the money came with conditions. This meant that the president still had a lot of control over what happened in parts of the country. Many people said that the system was decentralized on paper but the president still had all the power in reality which shows that the president was still, in charge even after the Constitution was changed.

The study of Kenyatta's presidency shows that it had both bad things about it. Kenya had a lot of roads and buildings and it got better at using technology. The government was also good at finishing projects. At the same time Kenya was borrowing a lot of money and it was not spending enough on things that help people. The government was also not very strong. Some people were getting too much power. Some people think Kenyatta was good at making Kenya a better place for the world. Others think that Kenya was just building a lot of big things like highways without really making life better for most people. They think Kenya was getting into trouble with money and that its institutions were not very strong. When we talked to people, they told us that they could see the buildings and roads but they were still worried, about money and their daily lives. The study of Kenyatta's presidency is an example of this it shows that Kenya had Kenyatta's presidency with both good and bad things.

The study says that Uhuru Kenyatta's way of leading had an impact on Kenya's economy today. He was good at getting things done quickly like building roads and getting more people online. He was not very good at making sure people were honest and he borrowed a lot of money. This caused some problems. Uhuru Kenyatta's time as president shows that if a country wants to grow and develop it can make a lot of progress. If the government is not transparent and does not spend its money wisely this progress can actually make things worse for some people. It can make them less equal and less stable, in the run. Uhuru Kenyatta's leadership and Kenya's economy is an example of this.

4.1.5 William Ruto Leadership styles and Economic governance

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[58] Office of the Auditor-General Kenya, *Report of the Auditor-General on National Government Accounts* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2005–2006).
[59] Brian Simiyu, oral interview, Mung'ethos, 16 February 2025.
[60] George Odhiambo, oral interview, Kaptenwo, 25 February 2025.
[61] Ibid
[62] Bruce Berman, *Unhappy Valley*, 214.

The papers from the president about what to do the budget plans from the National Treasury. The early plans for the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda between 2022 and 2024 show that the president of Kenya is trying to change the way people think. Ruto said his plan for the economy is not about changing policies it is about completely changing the way things are done because he thinks the economy is controlled by a few powerful families. He called this "capture" of the economy. In his speeches, which are kept in government papers and on the president's website Ruto always talks about working hard being proud of your work and helping small businesses grow. People who sell things in markets, in Nairobi, Nakuru and Eldoret told us that they really like what Ruto is saying. The Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda means a lot to people who work informally drive motorcycles and young people who start their businesses because they think the government is finally listening to them.[63] The president of Kenya, Ruto and his Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda are giving people hope that things will get better.

The thing is, beneath all the talk about helping people the government did not have a lot of room to make changes because of the money it owed to other countries and the rules it had to follow. In 2022 the people in charge of money said that paying back debt was becoming a problem so they had to focus on getting more money instead of spending it on social programs. This made it hard for Ruto to do what he wanted and it is called "populism". This means he wanted to help people but he did not have a lot of money to do it. The Hustler Fund is an example of this. The government said it was a way to lend money to small business owners and it would help them without needing banks. When you talk to the people who got the money, they say it helped a little but they were also worried about paying it back quickly and owing more money. Some people who study policy said that while more people could get money it was not really changing anything in a way. The Hustler Fund was a way for the government to show it cared. It was not a real solution to the problems people were facing. The Hustler Fund was, like a symbol of the government trying to help. It was not really making things better.

Ruto's time as president was very tough. The country had financial problems that needed to be fixed. To solve these problems the government did what international lenders suggested. They tried to get money by cutting back on things and making people pay more for some things. Between 2023 and 2024 the government passed budget laws. These laws removed subsidies, on fuel and food that people had gotten used to for a time. This made a lot of people angry and they protested. The International Monetary Fund watched what the government was doing to make sure they were following the plan. The goal was to reduce the deficit. The people who were hurt the most by these changes were the poor people who live in cities. Ruto's presidency had to deal with these issues. Ruto said that these changes are hard but they are necessary to be free from debt in the run. On the hand people who organize labor and workers who do not have formal jobs said that Ruto's reforms are a betrayal of what he promised to the common people. This shows that there is a contradiction in the way Ruto leads. Ruto's leadership style is based on being popular, with the people but at the same time he has to follow strict financial rules that are required by the global financial system. Ruto's style is a mix of talking about helping the poor and following rules that are set by the financial architecture. Ruto's reforms are still a topic of discussion and Ruto's leadership is being questioned by the people who thought he would help them.[64]

Internationally, Ruto tried to show Kenya as a leader in the Global South in climate finance and green growth. He positioned Kenya as a supporter of climate funding combining justice with economic nationalism. This strategy aimed to create funding sources and boost Kenya's global influence. However internal reviews by the Treasury showed that climate financing was not enough to solve Kenya's debt and revenue problems. This highlighted the limitations of efforts as a replacement for domestic economic reforms. In Kenya Ruto's governance showed both continuity and a focus on control. Documents on county-level funding revealed conditions attached to national funds strengthening the president's control over local development plans. The Institute of Economic Affairs noted that while devolution still existed real budget control was moving back to the branch. County finance officers said they had freedom to choose projects following Kenya's past pattern of presidential control, over development planning despite constitutional changes.

When it comes to politics Ruto's way of leading is very argumentative. It divides people. He keeps saying that society is made up of hustlers and dynasties. This makes people think about their problems in a new way and it becomes a part of who they are, in politics. If you look at what Ruto said during his campaign and after the election he always makes the other leaders sound like they are trying to hurt people not like they are just competing with him. This way of talking got him a lot of support from people. It also made people more divided. Amnesty International Kenya, which watches over rights saw that the government used violence to stop people from protesting about taxes in 2023–2024. This shows that Ruto's government can be very forceful when people disagree with him.

Agricultural reform under BETA is an example of Ruto's pragmatic approach to helping people. The digital fertilizer subsidy programs made it easier to get fertilizer to people. Reduced some of the corruption that was happening.

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[63] International Monetary Fund, *Kenya: Staff Report for the 2022 Article IV Consultation and Request for an Extended Fund Facility* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2022), 9–12.

[64] National Treasury of Kenya, *Finance Act* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2023).

The Food and Agriculture Organization looked at how these programs were working. They said that things were getting better. When you talk to small farmers, they say that they are still having a hard time paying for fertilizer and that the weather and markets are still big problems. These problems have been around for a time and they started because of the way land was divided up a long time ago and because of problems with the markets after Kenya became independent. Agricultural reform under BETA and Ruto's pragmatic approach are still not fixing the problems. Looking at how the government spent its money in 2023–2024 it is clear that Kenya is still relying much on borrowing money from other countries and on taxes that hurt poor people. The government is also still giving a lot of money to companies. This means that Ruto's presidency is not really changing the way the economy works it is just changing the way it looks. Agricultural reform, under BETA is a start but it is not enough to fix all the problems. Ruto's pragmatic approach is helping. It is not a complete solution.

Oral interviews, with policy analysts put it clearly: BETA changed how politicians talk and included more people symbolically but did not change the root causes of inequality. Ruto made the states goals more inclusive.[65] The actual way to share wealth did not change much because of debt, global finance and the strong influence of wealthy elites. William Ruto leads as president by mixing mobilizing peoples support with following expert advice. Oral interviews with policy analysts said it simply: BETA changed the way people talk about politics and made some people feel included but it did not fix the old problems of inequality. Ruto made people think the state was, for everyone. The state still had a hard time-sharing wealth because of debt and powerful people who want to keep their money. William Rutos way of leading the country is a mix of listening to the people and being controlled by experts. BETA is still a thing to talk about and it affects what William Ruto does as president. William Rutos leadership style is a deal because it is a mix of populist mobilization and technocratic constraint. Ruto does things differently than Mwai Kibaki who was a leader or Uhuru Kenyatta who focused on development for the rich. Ruto uses people's emotions and the economy to get support. He takes the problems people are upset about and makes them into reasons why he should be in charge. If you look at old financial records, plans and what people say you will see that Ruto is actually doing a lot of the same things as before. He has a lot of power he is careful with money. He does not do much to help people who are poor. Ruto's way of governing is still, about having control and following the economic rules as before.

The way the government is run is very similar. Moi's government made all the decisions about development from the Office of the President. This meant that other institutions did not have say in what happened. Now under Ruto even though the constitution says that power should be spread out the government in Nairobi is still making a lot of the decisions about money. They are doing this by controlling how money is transferred to areas by choosing which projects to prioritize and by making plans for development that are led by the president. The methods are different. The idea that the president is in charge is still the same. When it comes to the economy Ruto's approach is similar to Moi's approach in the years. Moi said he would help Kenyans but he also did what the International Monetary Fund told him to do, which made things harder for a lot of people. He cut back on spending. Opened up the economy, which made the gap between rich and poor even bigger in the 1980s and 1990s. Ruto says he wants to help people from the bottom up. He is also doing what the global lenders want him to do. He is removing subsidies raising taxes and cutting back on spending. In both cases the government says it is helping people. It is also doing what other countries and organizations want it to do. The government says it is populist meaning it is helping people but at the same time it is following economic policies that are set by other countries and organizations. Moi's government and Ruto's government both say they are helping people. They are also making decisions that are good, for the economy according to other countries and organizations.

The way Kenya is run has not changed much over time. Moi's government made all the decisions about development from the Office of the President and this meant that other institutions did not have much say in what happened. Now under Ruto even though the constitution says that power should be spread out the government in Nairobi is still making most of the decisions about money. This is happening because the national government is controlling how money is transferred to areas and it is also deciding which projects are most important. The Office of the President is still in charge of development. This is similar to how it was under Moi. Ruto's economic policies are also similar to Moi's policies. Moi said he would help Kenyans but he also did what the International Monetary Fund told him to do, which made it harder for many people. Ruto is doing something he says he wants to help people from the bottom up but he is also doing what global lenders want him to do, like removing subsidies and increasing taxes. In both cases the government is trying to be popular with the people. It is also listening to what other countries and organizations are telling it to do. The way Ruto is running the economy is like the way Moi ran the economy with a focus on pleasing the people but, on following the rules set by other countries.[66]

[65] Timothy Kamau, oral interview, Bondeni, 23 March 2025.

[66] Kenya National Archives (KNA), *Office of the President Development Planning and Administrative Control Files*, OP/3/5, 1978–1990.

The way things are done with archives and governing shows that some things stay the same. Moi’s government made sure that the Office of the President was in charge of planning and this made other institutions less important. Now with Ruto even though the constitution says that power should be spread out the government is still making a lot of decisions about money. This is happening because the government is giving money to parts of the country but only if they do what the government wants. The government is also deciding which big projects to do. The president is making a lot of the decisions about how the country should develop. The way they are doing things is different. The president is still in charge. When it comes to money Ruto is doing some things that're similar to what Moi did. Moi said he would help people in Kenya but then he did things that actually made it harder for them. He worked with the International Monetary Fund to make changes to the economy and this made a lot of people poorer. Ruto is saying that he wants to help people from the bottom up. He is also doing things that will hurt them. He is taking away subsidies, raising taxes, and making sure the country's money is in order because that is what the people lending money to Kenya want. In both cases, the government is saying that it is helping people. It is also listening to what other countries and organizations want.

Ruto’s way of connecting with people has made more marginalized groups interested in politics just like Moi did when he got support from rural areas to make his government seem legitimate. However, Ruto faces the problem that Moi did. Kenya is not in control of its own economy because it owes a lot of money and is part of a global economic system. This means Ruto is not changing Kenya’s path but rather rebranding it. He is replacing Moi’s nationalism and Kenyatta’s top-down development approach with a more popular moral capitalism. He is still keeping a lot of power centralized and not really redistributing wealth. So Ruto’s presidency has a lot of meaning but not much real power to make big changes. In the end the relationship between Moi and Ruto shows that there is a pattern in Kenyan politics. The presidency keeps changing how it presents itself to gain support. It still has the same basic structure and economic issues. Ruto’s leadership is not really different from Moi’s; it’s an updated version that shows how populism can work within a democratic system without really changing the core of how the state works. The way Ruto and Moi relate shows that Kenya’s presidency often finds ways to justify itself but still keeps the same basic institutions and economic problems. Ruto is building on Moi’s legacy not breaking away, from it. This shows how populist movements can adapt to democratic systems.

4.1.6 Comparative Analysis of Presidential Leadership Styles and Econo-Political

Across Kenya’s sixty years of being on its own the people in charge like Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel arap Moi, Mwai Kibaki Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto show us that it is not about who is in charge but also about the big problems that Kenya has with its government and economy. If we look at records talk to people who were there and read what experts have to say we see that the same issues keep coming up. These issues are about who has power, who gets to be part of the government how the people in charge stay in power how they want to make the country and not having enough money. As Thuku and Mwangi say, Kenya’s government has changed in some ways. In other ways it is still very much about the people, in charge which is a big contradiction that affects every president of Kenya.

Jomo Kenyatta was a president who set up a system where the presidents like a father figure and this gave him the power to make big decisions. People saw him as Mzee, a person with a lot of authority and this made it okay for him to have a lot of control. Moi took this idea. Made it more about being in charge and telling people what to do but he also tried to be friends with the people by having lots of meetings and being nice to them. At the time he made sure to reward his friends and punish his enemies. Kibaki was different he was more about getting things done and making the government work better. He thought that if he could make the government more efficient and get the people in charge then Kenya would be a better place. He wanted to make sure that people were doing their jobs and that the government was working for the people. Uhuru Kenyatta was a mix of Kibaki and the old way of doing things. He talked about making the government work better. He also wanted to make big changes and build new roads and buildings. He worked with important people to get things done but it was not always clear if it was good for everyone. William Ruto is trying to do something he says that he is on the side of the people who do not have a lot of money or power. He says that the people in charge have had it too good for long. That it is time for a change. He calls the people in charge "dynasties". Says that they are stopping the "hustlers" from getting ahead. Jomo Kenyatta, Moi, Kibaki Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto they all have ways of being the president of Kenya but they all want to be, in charge.

The way the presidents ran the country was different. The structure of presidential authority was pretty much the same. Jeniffer Widner said that Kenyatta made the bureaucracy stronger by getting elites on his side than making the institutions better. Moi took this a step further. Created a system where loyalty was more important than being good at your job. Kibaki changed things. Made the bureaucracy work better and he also did a good job with the economy, which is clear when you look at how Kenya is using digital technology. When Uhuru was president there were project units that were very professional but at the same time there were also systems in place where politicians got to decide who got contracts. Now with Ruto in charge the central government still has a lot of control, over things that are supposed to be handled even though he says he wants to help the ordinary people.

Despite these differences in style the structure of power remained very consistent. Jeniffer Widner noted that Kenyatta controlled the bureaucracy by bringing in officials rather than making institutions stronger. Moi took this further. Created a system where loyalty was more important than professionalism. Kibaki's changes improved the bureaucracy. Helped manage the economy better which is clear in how Kenya handled its digital transformation. Uhuru's time as president saw professional project teams working alongside a system where politics decided who got contracts. Ruto's government still keeps a lot of control over areas that were supposed to be given power, to local areas even though they talk about helping the people.

The way things have happened in Kenya's history tells us something. When we look at how the presidents of Kenya have done things using records what people have said and what other scholars have written we see that the president has always been very powerful. This has been true when the country's rules and economy have changed. From Kenyatta's way of being like a father to Ruto's way of being popular with the people each leader has made the president's office the important place for deciding what the country should do.

The study of records shows that the way the presidents have made budgets come up with policies and talked about development has been more about how they like to lead than about what they believe in. Kenyatta and Moi made the state stronger by being loyal to their friends and using force. Kibaki and Uhuru changed the way the state worked by using experts and modernizing the country's infrastructure. Ruto is trying to become a leader by talking about morals in a way that is popular with the people. All of the presidents have shown that the presidency is what makes the country grow and work.

When we talked to people from parts of the country, they told us that they do not really experience leadership through the rules of the country but through how easy it is to talk to the president, how generous the president is and how charming the president is. The presidency of Kenya is still the important thing, for making the country grow and work. Kenya's presidency is what makes things happen in the country.

The study of Kenya's presidency after it got independence shows that the way the president works has changed a bit. It is still very much about the person in charge. The country's economy is always connected to the president's personality the way they do politics and how they make friends with politicians. This look at Kenya's history says that the country's progress will depend on more than being good at managing things or getting people excited about change. It will also depend on solving a problem: the president has a lot of power to make the country better but this power is limited by the things that keep the president in charge like having all the power in one place giving favors to friends borrowing money from other countries and making decisions without asking others.

Kenyatta was a president who made people thinks of him as a father figure someone who brought the country together and helped people get jobs. He used the fact that he helped Kenya get independence to make people respect him. He also used the fact that he was older and wiser to get people to listen to him. Kenyatta made sure that all the power was in his hands and he helped his friends get rich by giving them access to money and land. If you look at records of how land was given out how money was lent to farmers and how the country was developed you can see that the president was in charge of all these things, not the government institutions. People who worked for the government back then say that they thought of development as a gift from the president, which made them loyal to him. It also made some people richer than others. The way Kenyatta mixed government power with business helped the economy grow but it also made some people richer than others and some parts of the country got more help, than others.

The way Daniel arap Moi ran the country was very controlling and strict. Daniel arap Moi went on a lot of trips to the countryside. Talked about morality, which made people think he cared about them. Actually, the government was watching people and only giving them help if they supported Daniel arap Moi. Teachers, chiefs and former government workers all say that to get a job or start a business you had to show that you supported Daniel arap Moi. This was a hard time for people because the economy was not doing well and the government was not providing enough services. The people in charge were still getting richer by taking advantage of the system.

When Mwai Kibaki became the leader things changed a bit. Mwai Kibaki was more interested in getting advice and making decisions based on facts. The government started to work and makes more sense. The people in charge of money and planning were able to do their jobs without Mwai Kibaki interfering all the time. This helped the economy get better. The government was able to start new projects. However, the underlying problems were still there. The people in charge were still making deals based on their groups and excluding others. This eventually led to a lot of violence after the election in 2007-2008. Mwai Kibakis time as leader showed that even if the government is run in a modern way it does not mean that the deeper problems, in the system will be fixed. The way Kenya is run is still a problem because it is based on who you know and what group you belong to, not on what's fair.

The presidency of Uhuru Kenyatta changed how the executive branch worked through projects and infrastructure development. Budget plans and debt agreements showed an increase in state-led projects especially in transport, energy and digital systems. Development was seen as making changes with the presidency as the leader of a modern Kenya. People who worked with the government and contractors said infrastructure helped connect areas but also made some people rich with connected firms getting contracts. Economically these investments changed the economy but were financed through borrowing increasing public debt and limiting future spending. Uhuru's leadership mixed planning with deals leading to modernization but also financial vulnerability. Ruto's presidency is a change in how the executive branch works like Moi's time. He framed politics as a fight between outsiders and rich families making people feel attached to his narrative of helping the bottom up. Data shows that not much changed financially. Debt payments take most of the money. Austerity measures control policy choices. The central government still controls development funds despite the constitution saying power should be shared. Ruto's leadership is a mix of populism and traditional economic policies making some changes but keeping structures. Looking at these administrations, the Kenyan presidency has stayed strong. The way of governing changed from an approach to a more controlling and populist style but the executive branch still controls resources, policy and legitimacy. With the 2010 Constitution, which aimed to give more power to counties the central government still holds significant control over finances. Kenya's economic path shows adaptation than big changes. The country moved from capitalism to being managed by donors then to stabilization, infrastructure growth funded by debt and now to redistribution within limited spending. At each stage of dependence, on finance reduced policy freedom, tying presidential goals to global economic systems.

The way we look at what happened in the past what people say and what scholars think shows that the president of Kenya has changed the way things are done. It is still all about the person in charge. What happens with the economy is not really about ideas it is more about how each president gets people to listen to them makes people think they are doing the right thing and deals with problems. For people in Kenya the government is not really about rules and systems it is about the president. This makes the president very important.

The big problem for Kenya is that the president has a lot of power to make the country better. This power is used in ways that help a few people, not everyone. The president gets help from friends, people who have money and power and from countries but this does not help the country grow in a way that is fair for all people. The president might change the way they do things or tell a story or make new policies sound exciting but the basic way things work does not change. The president is still, in charge. Until this changes Kenya will keep going forth between getting better and getting stuck because of what the president does not because the country's systems are strong. Kenya's economy will not really get better until the way the president has power is changed.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that the evolution of Kenya's presidency since independence has not followed a straightforward path from authoritarianism to democratic institutionalism, but rather a complex process of continuity within changes a gradual reconfiguration of formal structures under the enduring logic of personalized rule. Early in 1963, the centralisation of power began to spread. The fundamental grammar of executive domination was created by Kenyatta's paternalistic nation-building initiative. The presidency became the nation's metaphorical father and the primary distributor of economic opportunity thanks to liberation symbolism and Mzee's moral authority. By integrating access to land, capital, and governmental resources into networks of elite patronage, the Harambee ethos both fostered early growth and group effort while solidifying inequality. This combined unity and hierarchy in the new republic by establishing a political economy where material advancement was mediated by allegiance to the presidency.

Under Daniel Arap Moi, who transformed paternal authority into authoritarian populism, this model was strengthened rather than eliminated. A highly coercive and clientelist regime where political engagement and economic existence became dependent on public allegiance was concealed by Moi's moral discourse of peace, love, and unity. Oral memories of daily government, loyalty customs, and archival security systems show how the presidency permeated local life through fear, patronage, and monitoring. Under external pressure, economic liberalisation reconfigured elite privilege rather than eliminating it, resulting in accumulation for regime insiders and hardship for the rest. As a result, Moi's time solidified the presidency's dual roles as a protector and a punisher, making it both materially and symbolically inclusive.

Without a complete structural change, the switch to Mwai Kibaki represented a major stylistic break. Kibaki improved institutional capacity, increased infrastructure, stabilised macroeconomic governance, and restored bureaucratic rationality. The capacity of technocratic leadership to restore state efficacy after decades of deterioration was demonstrated by the economic recovery and the resurgence of investor confidence. However, under administrative modernisation, exclusive political agreements, individualised talks, and elite ethnic coalitions persisted. Under Uhuru Kenyatta, executive authority was rearticulated through developmental spectacle and infrastructural nationalism. Massive investments in transport, energy, and digital systems physically transformed the country and symbolically positioned the presidency as the architect of modern Kenya. While connectivity improved and growth expanded in select sectors, fiscal vulnerability deepened and inequality persisted. Uhuru's tenure thus exposed the contradiction of contemporary developmentalism: rapid physical transformation accompanied by rising debt, weak accountability, and constrained social redistribution.

Ruto’s presidency represents the most explicit moral reframing of executive legitimacy in Kenya’s postcolonial history. By mobilizing a narrative of economic outsiders versus entrenched dynasties, he transformed popular grievance into political identity and renewed emotional attachment to the presidency among marginalized groups. Yet archival fiscal realities and governance structures demonstrate continuity beneath the populist discourse. Heavy debt servicing, austerity-driven reforms, centralized fiscal control, and constrained policy autonomy continue to shape outcomes. Like earlier presidents, Ruto governs within a postcolonial state whose dependence on global finance limits redistributive ambition. His leadership illustrates how populism can transform political symbolism without dismantling inherited economic constraints. Ultimately, the study concludes that sustainable transformation in Kenya cannot be achieved through constitutional engineering or economic policy alone. It requires confronting the deeper historical structure of personalized power that links political loyalty to economic opportunity and concentrates national destiny within the presidency. Until institutional accountability supersedes charismatic authority and collective governance replaces elite brokerage, Kenya’s development will continue to oscillate between progress and constraint. Kenya’s postcolonial experience, therefore, offers a broader lesson for African political economy: modernization can proceed rapidly in form while remaining deeply traditional in power relations. The challenge ahead is not merely to elect new leaders or design new policies, but to complete the unfinished transition from personal rule to truly institutional governance, the final threshold of postcolonial state transformation.

5.2 Recommendations

The Government of Kenya should build up the independence and ability of oversight institutions. This includes Parliament, the Judiciary, and constitutional commissions. These steps will help lower excessive executive power and encourage responsible governance. National and county governments should establish clear and fair methods for distributing public resources and development projects. This will help reduce favoritism, regional imbalances, and resource distribution based on politics. The government should improve the financial independence of county governments. It should also strengthen public debt management, transparency, and accountability. This will help ensure that development financing supports sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Political leaders and public institutions should encourage constitutional governance, civic education, and merit-based public administration. This will help change Kenya's political culture from personalized leadership to strong, lasting institutions that can support long-term economic and political development.

Declaration of Interest

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