The Chronicle
WEEKLY

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Why 'Gen Z' and 'Mt Kenya' voting blocs are myths

OL KALOU REVEALS HOW KENYAN POLITICAL COMMENTARY TURNS COMPLEX ELECTORAL ARITHMETIC INTO CONVENIENT POLITICAL MYTHOLOGY

Why Raila Odinga became Kenya's enduring face of infrastructure

NOW THAT HE CAN NO LONGER CONTEST, CLARIFY, OR CORRECT THE RECORD, THE CLAIMING HAS BECOME EASIER AND MORE WORTH SCRUTINISING

Thirty years, Three pillars: What Kenya's new vision actually proposes

KENYA'S PROPOSED PATH TO "FIRST WORLD" STATUS RESTS ON THREE PILLARS AND A PROMISE TO OUTLAST ELECTORAL CYCLES

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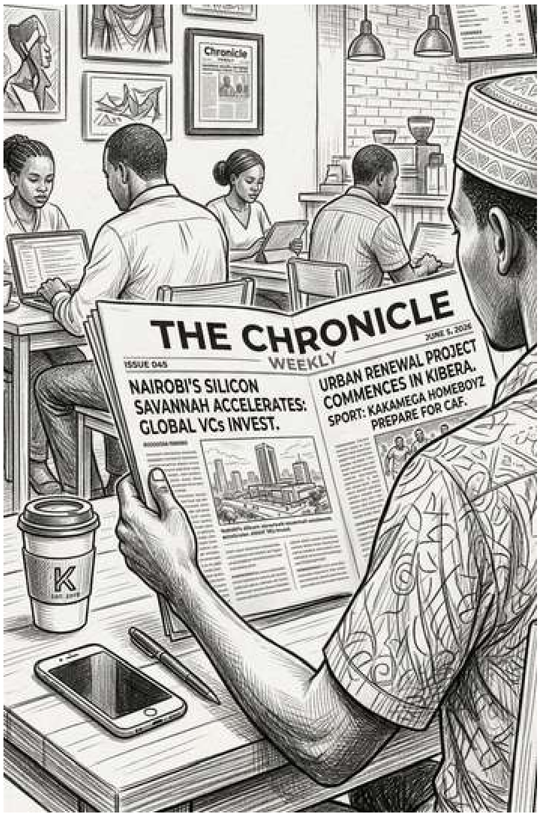

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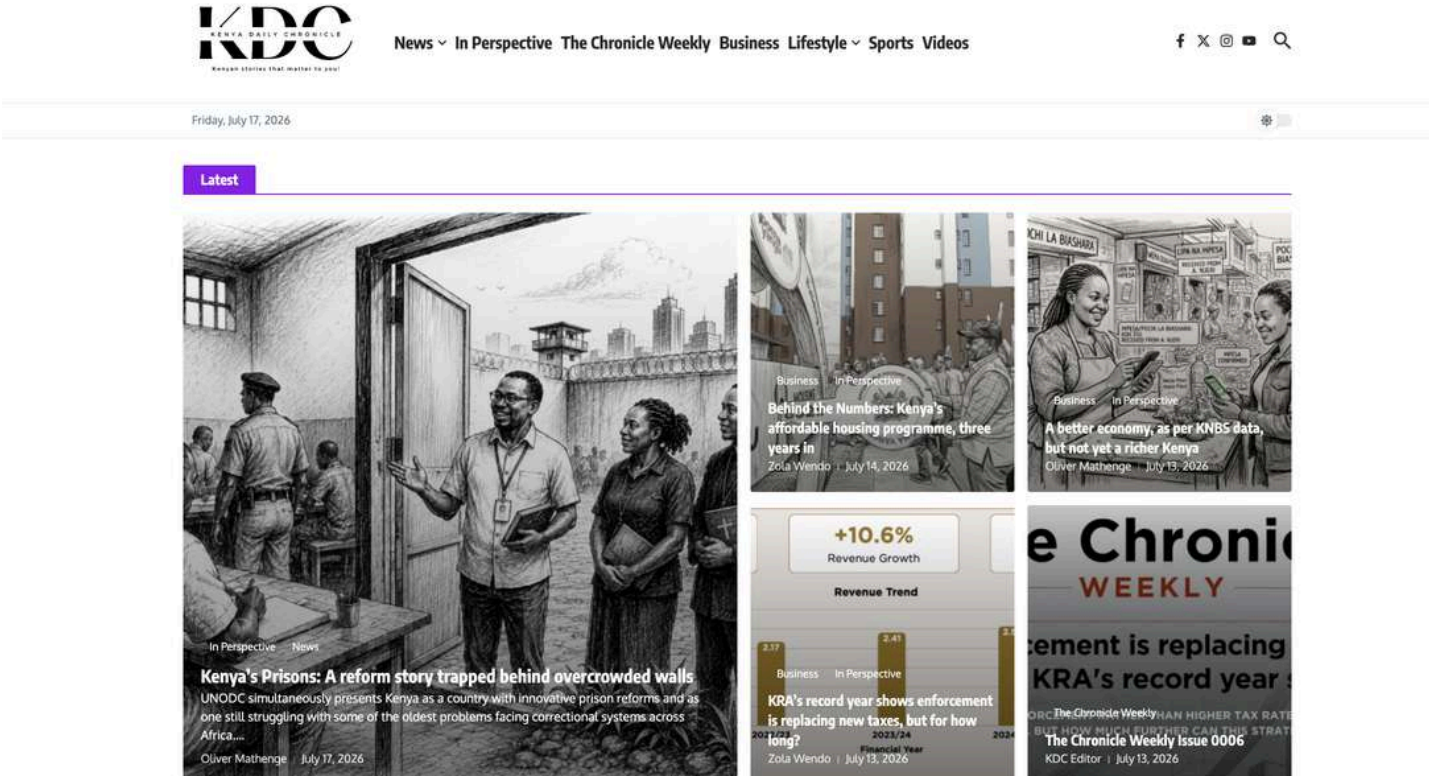

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While the Kenya Daily Chronicle delivers a mix of breaking news and real-time updates across politics, business, health, sports, and lifestyle, the Weekly is its considered, curated counterpart; a deeper read for audiences who want more than headlines.

Published every Monday, The Chronicle Weekly distils the most important stories of the preceding week into a single, authoritative edition. It brings together the Kenya Daily Chronicle's signature editorial strengths: rigorous political reporting, sharp business analysis, contextual perspectives, and vibrant community coverage, in a format designed to be read, saved, and shared.

The Chronicle Weekly occupies a distinct space in Kenya's media landscape: it is neither a wire-driven news feed nor a long-form magazine, but a weekly newspaper of record; structured, comprehensive, and grounded in the journalistic values that define the Kenya Daily Chronicle. Every edition is built around the belief that informed Kenyans make better decisions, stronger communities, and a more accountable nation.

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Editorial Note

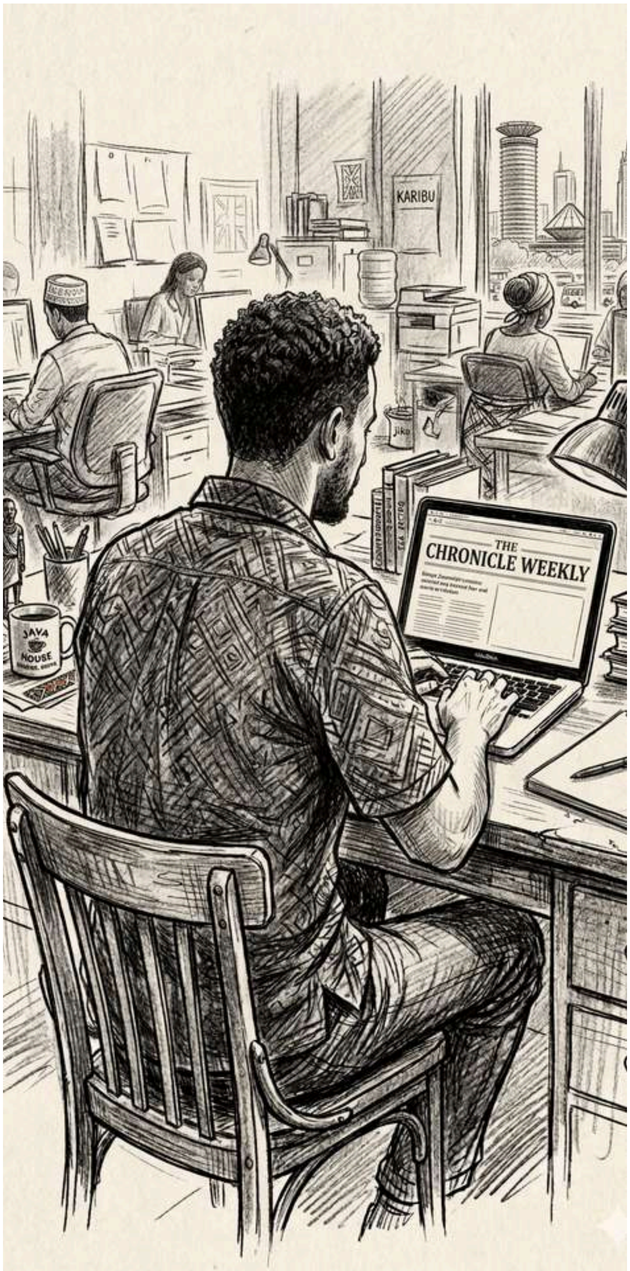
This week's edition is, in one way or another, about the distance between the story a country tells about itself and the numbers underneath it.

Ol Kalou's seven-to-one result has already hardened into a verdict, repeated across newsrooms, television panels and social media timelines within hours of the count: Ruto has lost the Mountain, and with it, 2027. Our cover story returns to the voter register to test that claim, and finds a Kenya far more fractured and far less predictable than the shorthand of "blocs" allows.

Central Kenya, on the broadest possible definition, holds barely a quarter of the national register, formidable yes, but nowhere near sufficient on its own. The Constitution's dual threshold makes a one-region strategy structurally impossible, regardless of the margin any single by-election produces.

The same scrutiny is applied to the idea of a unified Gen Z vote, which recent opinion polling does not support once the cohort is broken down by age band; an 18-to-26-year-old and a 35-year-old classified together as "youth" are, the data suggests, voting from entirely different realities.

Raila Odinga's infrastructure legacy gets the same treatment this week. Now that he can no longer contest, clarify, or correct the record himself, the claims made in his name have multiplied. And therefore the need to separate the projects he actually built from those attributed to him by supporters, successors and rivals alike. We have tried to hold both truths at once: that his imprint on Kenya's development era was real and considerable, and that not every highway, port or railway belongs to him.



The honest record, as our piece argues, lies somewhere between hero worship and revisionism, and readers deserve that middle ground rather than either extreme.

The government has its own mythology to answer for. The new thirty-year "First World" Vision arrives with three pillars, eight enabling foundations, and considerable ambition, but, as our analysis and this week's explainer set out, with fewer answers on financing and political durability than a document of this scale requires. It is strongest when diagnosing Kenya's "development paradox," the tendency to get policy right and then abandon it before it matures, and weakest when it comes to the arithmetic of who pays and what gets prioritised when money runs short.

Meanwhile, the Treasury's own year-end reconciliation reveals a tax shortfall that is quietly offset with additional domestic borrowing, a reminder that the thirty-year vision is financed one fiscal year and one shortfall at a time.

Elsewhere in this issue, we examine the economy that elections themselves generate long before a single vote is cast, as well as the consultants, pollsters, and campaign machinery that constitute a genuine industry in their own right. We also examine what the rise of Kenya's "soft life" says about a generation quietly redefining ambition, success and rest on its own terms, against an economic backdrop that makes the old bargain of guaranteed security look increasingly unreliable
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Read together, these stories share a single instruction: check the register, check the reconciliation, check the record. The rest is narrative.

Kenya Daily Chronicle Team

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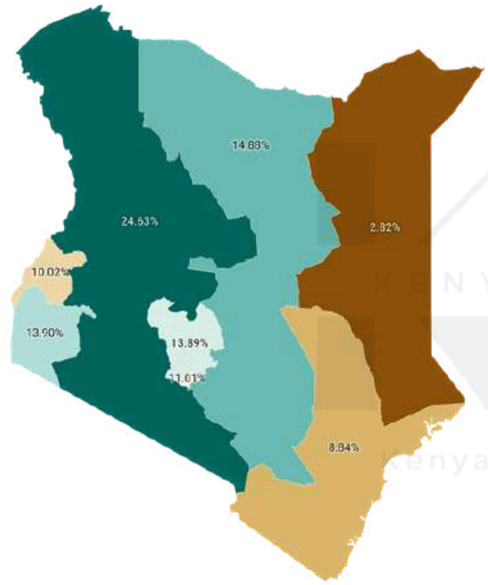
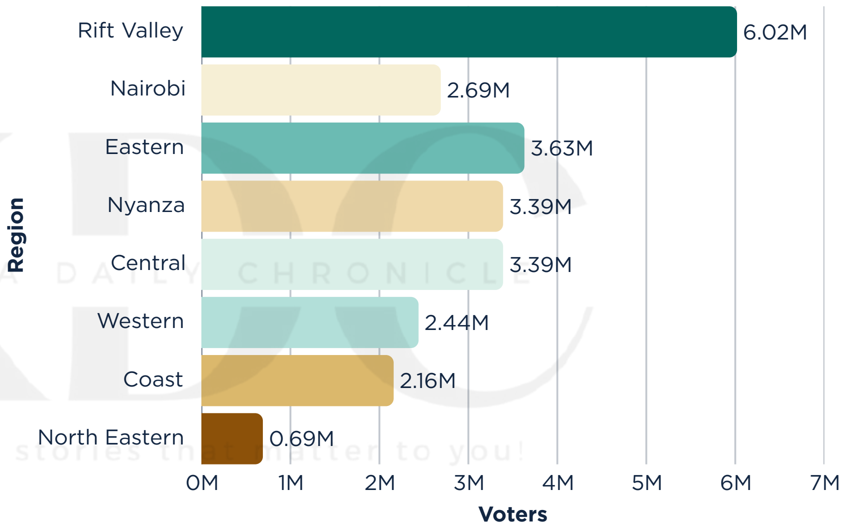
Why the 'Gen Z' and 'Mt Kenya' voting blocs are myths

% OF TOTAL REGISTERED VOTERS (2026)



REGISTERED VOTERS PER REGION (2026)



SOURCE: 2022 REGISTER + 2026 ENROLMENT

Ol Kalou has reignited a long-held belief in Kenyan politics: that Mt. Kenya votes as a unified political entity, where the region's political loyalty is reflected in the performance of a single candidate. The notion suggests that whoever loses the support of the Mountain effectively forfeits the presidency.

It is an argument that sounds persuasive because it is built on a genuine political reality. Central Kenya has, at various moments, delivered enormous electoral margins to presidential candidates. Still, it becomes considerably less convincing when the country is viewed through the less romantic and more unforgiving lens of the voter register.

On July 16, Ol Kalou constituency gave Rigathi Gachagua's Democracy for the Citizens Party an emphatic victory, with DCP's Sammy Kamau Ngotho Waweru securing 35,440 votes against UDA's Samuel Muchina Nyagah's 5,450, a margin of almost seven to one, on a turnout of 57 per cent among the constituency's 73,480 registered voters.

Within hours, the result had hardened into a familiar political shorthand, repeated across newsrooms, television panels and social media timelines: Ruto has lost the Mountain, and a president cannot win Kenya without it.

One analyst told *The Star* that the result left President William Ruto with "no way of winning the Presidency", a conclusion that captures the confidence with which Kenyan political debate often converts a by-election into a national referendum.

The claim has the texture of common sense because Kenyan elections have historically rewarded candidates who dominate particular regional strongholds. Yet the register tells a more complicated story, and that complication matters because the phrase "Mt Kenya" itself is rarely as precise as the political conclusions drawn from it.

The real question, therefore, is not whether Mt Kenya matters. It plainly does. The more consequential question is which Mt Kenya we are talking about, how many votes it actually contains, and what a candidate must win outside it to build a national majority.

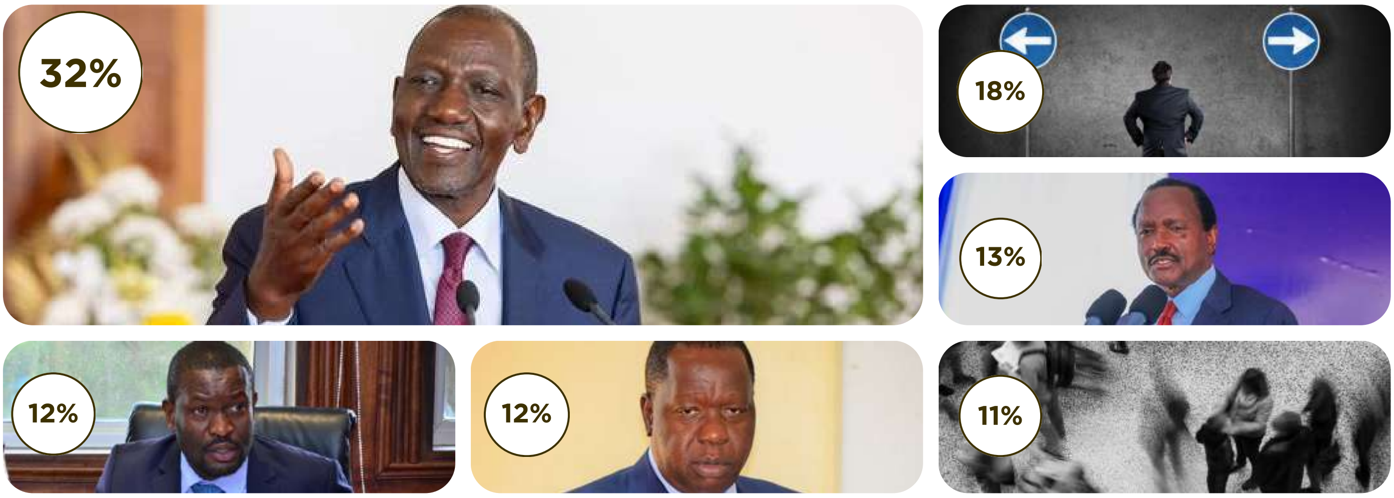
What "Mt Kenya" Actually Means

The phrase is used so casually that it has become almost meaningless as an analytical category. Depending on who is speaking, MtcKenya can refer to the five traditional Central counties of Nyeri, Nyandarua, Kirinyaga, Murang'a, and Kiambu, or the much broader political geography that encompasses Meru, Embu, Tharaka Nithi, Laikipia, and sometimes Nakuru.

That distinction is not academic. It changes the electoral mathematics considerably.

Take the five counties most Kenyans would immediately associate with Central Kenya. Together, Nyeri, Nyandarua, Kirinyaga, Murang'a and Kiambu account for 3,397,835 registered voters, or approximately 13.9 per cent of the national register of 24,455,491 voters.

PRESIDENTIAL RACE (INFOTRAK)



Others (11%) include: Rigathi Gachagua (4%), Babu Owino (3%), David Maraga (2%), Martha Karua (1%) and 1% (George Natembeya, Eugene Wamalwa, Ndindi Nyoro, Okiya Omtatah, Ekuru Aokot, George Wajackoyah, Jimmy Wanjigi)

Even in the most implausible scenario, in which a presidential candidate secured every vote cast in all five counties, that candidate would still have to find 41.9 percentage points of the national vote from the remaining 86.1 per cent of the electorate to cross the constitutional 50 per cent threshold.

That is not to minimise the region's importance. It is to put its importance in perspective.

The argument becomes stronger when ‘Mt Kenya’ is expanded into the ten-county bloc often used in political reporting. Together, these counties account for approximately 6.3 million registered voters, or 25.8 per cent of the national register.

That is unquestionably a formidable electoral constituency.

A candidate who sweeps this entire bloc would begin the national race with more than a quarter of all registered voters behind them, but would still need to secure another 24.2 per cent from the remaining 74.2 per cent of the country.

In other words, even a perfect performance across the broadest conceivable definition of the Mountain leaves a candidate needing roughly one-third of the vote elsewhere. This is where the mythology of regional kingmaking begins to collide with the mathematics of a national election.

No region, however politically influential, can elect a Kenyan president on its own. The Constitution requires not only more than half of all votes cast nationally, but also at least 25 per cent of the vote in more than half of the 47 counties. The electoral system, therefore, makes a one-region strategy structurally impossible.

What Mt Kenya can do, and what it has historically done, is something more subtle and perhaps more important: it can make a winning coalition easier or harder to construct.

A candidate who loses the region does not automatically lose the election. But that candidate must compensate elsewhere, often by winning more decisively in other regions or by broadening the coalition sufficiently to absorb the deficit. The Mountain is therefore not a presidency but a multiplier.

Why The Bloc Story Refuses To Die

The instinct behind the bloc narrative is not entirely irrational, and Kenya's political history provides ample evidence supporting it. Since 2002, Central Kenya has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to move in a relatively coordinated fashion behind dominant political formations. Mwai Kibaki's political rise was anchored in the region. Uhuru Kenyatta inherited much of that political infrastructure.

In 2022, William Ruto successfully persuaded large sections of the same electorate that his political and economic interests were more closely aligned with theirs than those of the incumbent administration. The difference between these moments, however, is often overlooked.

The region did not move because voters possessed some permanent and immutable political loyalty. It moved because political coalitions, elite bargains, local networks, candidate perceptions and national grievances converged at particular moments. That distinction is crucial.

The 2022 election is described as a case in which Ruto's coalition treated Mt Kenya as one of the most important pillars of its national strategy.

POPULARITY OF TOP ASPIRANTS BY AGE GROUP (INFOTRAK)

	18–26 years	27–35 years	36–45 years	46–55 years	Over 55 years	Overall
William Ruto	**28%**	**31%**	**32%**	**38%**	**33%**	**32%**
Kalonzo Musyoka	13%	13%	13%	11%	16%	13%
Edwin Sifuna	20%	14%	10%	9%	5%	12%
Fred Matiang'i	12%	10%	14%	12%	11%	12%
Undecided	4%	21%	20%	23%	24%	18%

President William Ruto leads across all age groups, with his strongest showing among 46–55 year olds (38%) and among men (34%).

The region delivered, and its contribution helped make the Kenya Kwanza arithmetic viable. However, the lesson from 2022 is not that Mt Kenya is permanently attached to whoever wins its political leadership. It is that a presidential candidate who can secure a large share of the region's vote gains a substantial advantage in constructing a national coalition. The political mistake is to confuse importance with inevitability.

Ol Kalou, therefore, matters, but perhaps not for the reason being assigned to it. The by-election is a powerful indicator that Gachagua's political machine has established genuine electoral traction in parts of Central Kenya and that UDA's dominance in the region cannot simply be assumed. A seven-to-one margin is not a statistical footnote; it is a political message.

The danger in treating it as a national verdict is that it encourages a kind of political determinism in which the future is assumed to be contained entirely within the past. If Gachagua wins Central Kenya, the argument goes, Ruto loses. If Ruto loses Central Kenya, the presidency is lost. The election is therefore reduced to a regional tug-of-war, with the rest of Kenya functioning as an afterthought.

But the register does not work that way. Nairobi alone accounts for roughly 11 per cent of the national register, nearly as much as the five traditional Central counties combined. Kiambu, by itself, represents approximately 5.7 per cent. Nakuru, which is frequently included in the broader Mt Kenya electoral calculation, accounts for about 4.7 per cent.

The political symbolism of the Mountain may be enormous, but the numerical reality of the Kenyan electorate is distributed across a much larger and more complicated map.

A strategist interested in winning an election rather than a political argument would therefore have to look beyond the Mountain to Nairobi, Nakuru, the Rift Valley, the Coast, Western Kenya and the emerging urban vote. The question would not be who owns Mt Kenya, but who can construct the broadest coalition after the regional arithmetic has been exhausted.

The Other Myth

There is another political shorthand that deserves the same scrutiny, and it has become increasingly fashionable since the 2024 anti-Finance Bill protests: the idea of "the Gen Z vote".

The phrase has entered political commentary in almost the same way as "the Mt Kenya vote", as though millions of Kenyans born into a particular age bracket constitute a single political constituency with a shared worldview, a common candidate and an instinctive hostility to the political establishment.

The polling data suggests otherwise. Infotrak's July 2026 numbers show that among voters aged 18 to 26, President Ruto records 28 per cent support, his weakest showing across the age groups, while Edwin Sifuna records 20 per cent, his strongest performance among the cohorts measured.

Yet among those aged 27 to 35, Sifuna's support falls to 14 per cent while the undecided share rises sharply. The undecided among the 18 to 26 cohort is 4 per cent, while among the 27 to 35, those yet to make their mind up are at 21 per cent.

The difference matters because it exposes the danger of treating "youth" as an electoral bloc when the people within that category are at different stages of life, exposed to different economic pressures and forming political opinions through divergent experiences.

POPULARITY OF TOP ASPIRANTS BY REGION (INFOTRAK)

ASPIRANT	Overall	Coast	North Eastern	Eastern	Central	Rift Valley	Western	Nyanza	Nairobi
William Ruto	**32%**	**33%**	**59%**	19%	12%	**46%**	**35%**	**40%**	19%
Kalonzo Musyoka	13%	9%	6%	**40%**	13%	9%	4%	4%	9%
Edwin Sifuna	12%	13%	8%	7%	11%	12%	26%	10%	14%
Fred Matiang'i	12%	9%	6%	10%	19%	9%	8%	17%	16%
Rigathi Gachagua	4%	-	4%	3%	12%	3%	1%	1%	3%
Undecided	18%	24%	13%	13%	**26%**	14%	19%	11%	**24%**

The 20-year-old university student confronting unemployment, the 29-year-old navigating the informal economy and the 35-year-old supporting a young family may all be classified as young voters, but they do not necessarily approach an election with the same priorities or political incentives.

Kalonzo Musyoka's numbers reinforce the point from another direction. His support remains relatively stable across most age brackets before rising among voters aged over 55, suggesting a political base that is not primarily being driven by the younger generation.

The more interesting conclusion from the data is therefore not that young Kenyans are uniformly anti-establishment, nor that they are naturally predisposed towards reform candidates. It is that the category itself is too blunt to explain how young voters will behave.

The same is true of Mt Kenya; a region is not a voter, a generation is not a voter, a county is not a voter. Individual citizens are. They vote according to a combination of identity, economic interests, local politics, candidate appeal, political memory, ethnic affiliation, generational experience and, increasingly, the immediate question of whether they believe their vote can make a difference.

The political narratives that overlook this complexity are often the most attractive because they make elections easier to understand, but they are also the narratives most likely to be wrong.

Where The Math Actually Bites

The real significance of Ol Kalou, then, is not that it proves Gachagua has "won" Mt Kenya or that Ruto has "lost" it.

Its significance lies in what it reveals about the evolving intensity of political competition. A 57 per cent turnout combined with a seven-to-one margin is evidence of a highly energised local electorate. It suggests that Gachagua's political project has moved beyond elite declarations and acquired the capacity to translate sentiment into votes.

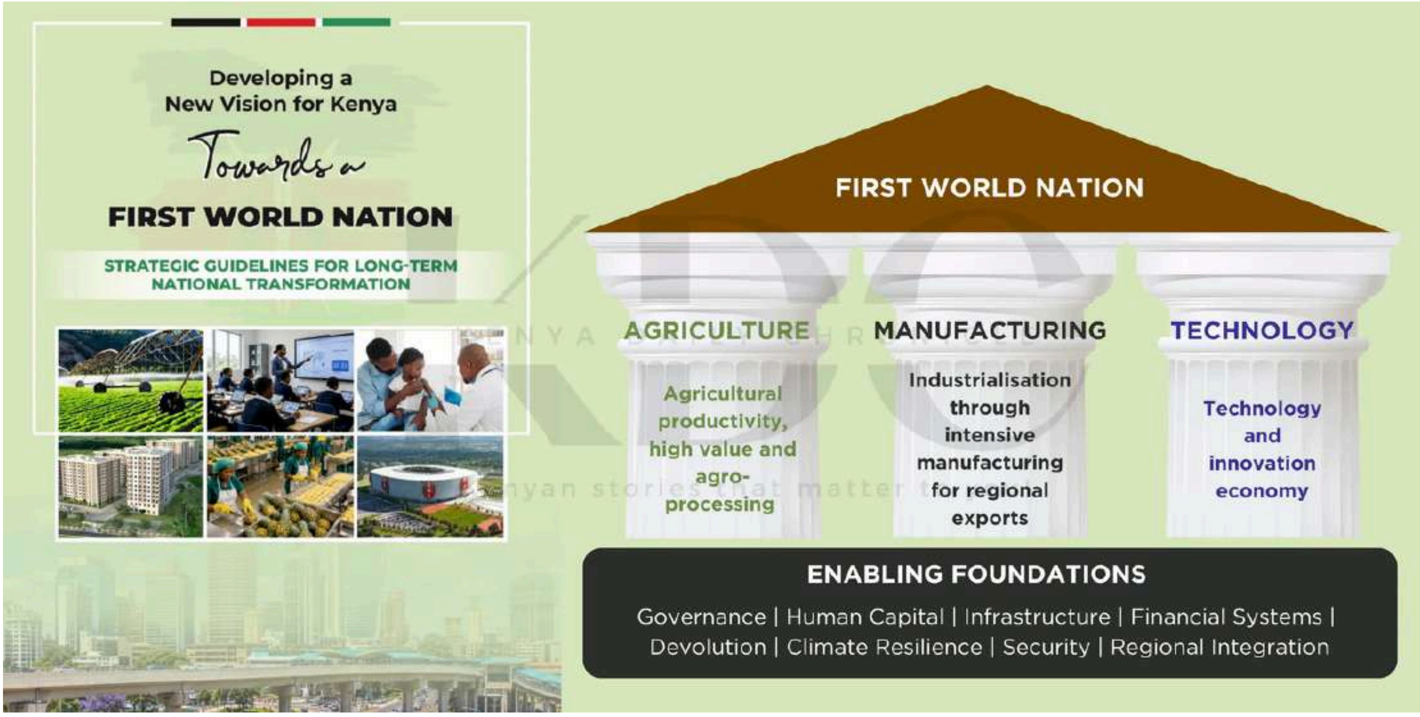
That is consequential, but the leap from "Gachagua can win in Ol Kalou" to "Ruto cannot win Kenya" is precisely the kind of analytical shortcut that makes political commentary entertaining while making it less useful.

The result demonstrates that the voter is "king" captures a key lesson from the by-election: political endorsements do not automatically translate into votes. Yet the deeper lesson may be that the Kenyan electorate is increasingly difficult to organise into the neat regional and generational blocs that political elites prefer to imagine. This is where the 2027 contest could become genuinely unpredictable.

The election will not be decided by whether Mt Kenya is "with" Ruto or "with" Gachagua in the abstract. It will be decided by how many votes each candidate can actually garner from specific counties, constituencies and demographic groups, and by whether those votes are sufficient to build a coalition that satisfies both the national threshold and the county threshold.

The same applies to the youth vote. The question will not be whether Gen Z is for or against the government. It will be which young voters turn out, which issues mobilise them, which candidates they trust, and whether their political enthusiasm translates into actual votes on election day. That distinction between political mood and electoral behaviour may ultimately be one of the most important questions of 2027.

Thirty years, Three pillars: What Kenya's new vision actually proposes



Kenya's proposed path to "First World" status rests on three pillars and a promise to outlast electoral cycles, but the report's own numbers, its silence on financing and political cost, suggest the harder questions haven't been tackled. What Kenya has been presented with is less a finished development plan than the opening argument for one.

Developing a New Vision for Kenya: Strategic Guidelines for Long-Term National Transformation sets out a 30- to 40-year path from lower-middle-income status to what it calls a "First World" nation, defined not just by higher GDP but by high incomes, strong human development, effective institutions, reliable public services, formal employment, rule of law, safety, innovation and lower poverty and inequality.

Its central insight is also its most uncomfortable: Kenya's problem has not been a lack of plans, but an inability to sustain progress.

The report labels this Kenya's "development paradox"; a cycle in which growth and reform are repeatedly interrupted by political crises, governance failures, policy reversals and new priorities before earlier ones mature. Kenya has shown it can get development right, but has struggled to keep doing so long enough.

That is the real challenge behind the new Vision. The three pillars matter, but they are not the whole story.

Kenya cannot become a high-income industrialised society by choosing the right sectors alone. It must build the state, workforce, infrastructure, financial system and political consensus needed to sustain those choices over decades.

East Asian Sequence

The report argues that raising smallholder productivity is the fastest route to higher incomes, poverty reduction and food security. Its prescriptions include irrigation, stronger extension services, agricultural research, better access to seeds and fertiliser, climate-resilient farming, rural roads, secure land tenure and stronger markets.

However, the goal is not subsistence agriculture with better inputs, but a shift toward higher-value production, agro-processing and stronger links between farms and industry.

The second pillar is industrialisation through manufacturing and value addition, with an emphasis on export-oriented production. Kenya's high cost of production is identified as a major constraint, and the proposed response is to position the country as a manufacturing and assembly hub for domestic and regional markets.

Here, the report draws heavily from East Asia, where governments supported firms with credit, infrastructure and technology, but expected them to become competitive.

The lesson for Kenya is that industrial policy cannot become a permanent subsidy for weak firms. The state must create the conditions for growth, but firms must deliver productivity and performance.

The third pillar is technology, innovation and the knowledge economy. Kenya already has a digital base, but the report argues that technology must become an economy-wide productivity tool, not just a feature of selected sectors.

Research institutions, universities, technical training and innovation finance must be tied to industry. The plan does not imagine Kenya becoming a technology economy simply by expanding internet access. It argues that technological capability is built through production: firms learn by making, competing, exporting and upgrading.

Agriculture and manufacturing, therefore, provide the base from which Kenya can move into higher-value activities. In short, the report is not proposing three parallel pillars so much as a chain: agriculture creates surplus and demand; manufacturing turns that into industrial capability; technology lifts the economy into higher-value activities.

The Foundations

But that chain only works if the foundations beneath it hold. The foundations are where the real battle lies.

The report highlights eight enabling foundations: integrity, governance and state effectiveness; human capital and social wellbeing; infrastructure and connectivity; devolution, urbanisation, and social development; supportive financial systems; environmental sustainability and climate resilience; peace, security, and social cohesion; and regional integration and global competitiveness.

The report is clear: transformation requires an ethical professional and capable public service able to implement policy consistently.

The East Asian examples it mentions were not just stories of clever economics, but governments that could coordinate investment, discipline institutions, and maintain direction over time.

Kenya's own record demonstrates why this matters. Corruption, weak accountability, poor public finance management and limited institutional capacity have continually hindered implementation.

The solution is not simply another reform programme, but a restructuring of the machinery through which the state delivers development. A stronger developmental state will also have more discretion, which makes transparency and accountability even more essential.

Education, skills, healthcare, housing and social protection are treated as part of the agenda, not as separate social policies. Kenya cannot industrialise while treating its population as cheap labour. It requires a workforce that can move into skilled manufacturing, services, technology and innovation.

The third foundation is infrastructure and connectivity. The report goes beyond roads and bridges to include irrigation, electricity, logistics, digital connectivity and urban infrastructure as part of the productivity system. This is also where ambition meets fiscal reality.

Rising debt and high debt-servicing costs are already crowding out development spending, yet the transformation proposed will require sustained investment.

DATA STORY

Chronicle WEEKLY

KENYA BORROWED

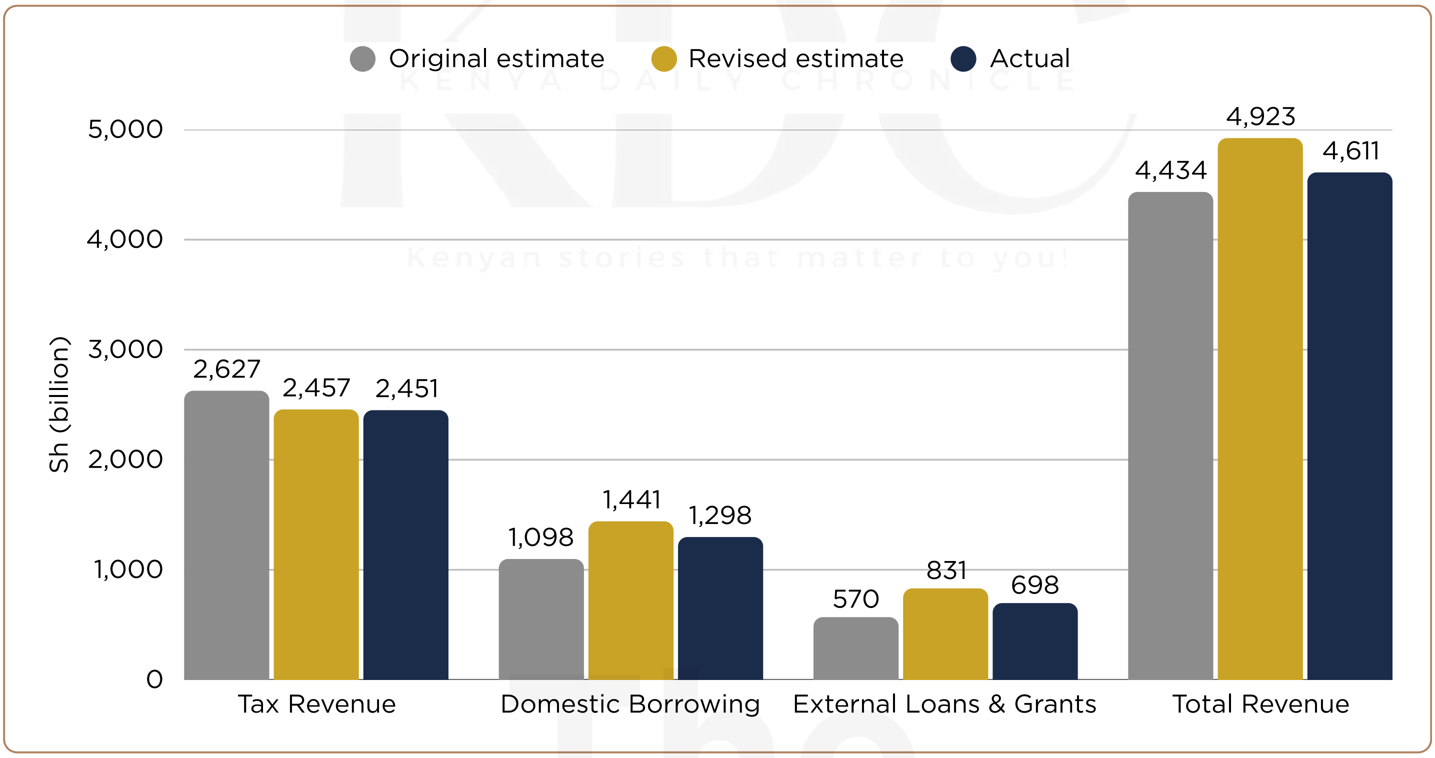
ITS WAY PAST A TAX SHORTFALL

The National Treasury's own year-end reconciliations for the 2025/26 Financial Year show tax collection missed its revised target, while domestic borrowing rose to cover the gap.

KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE

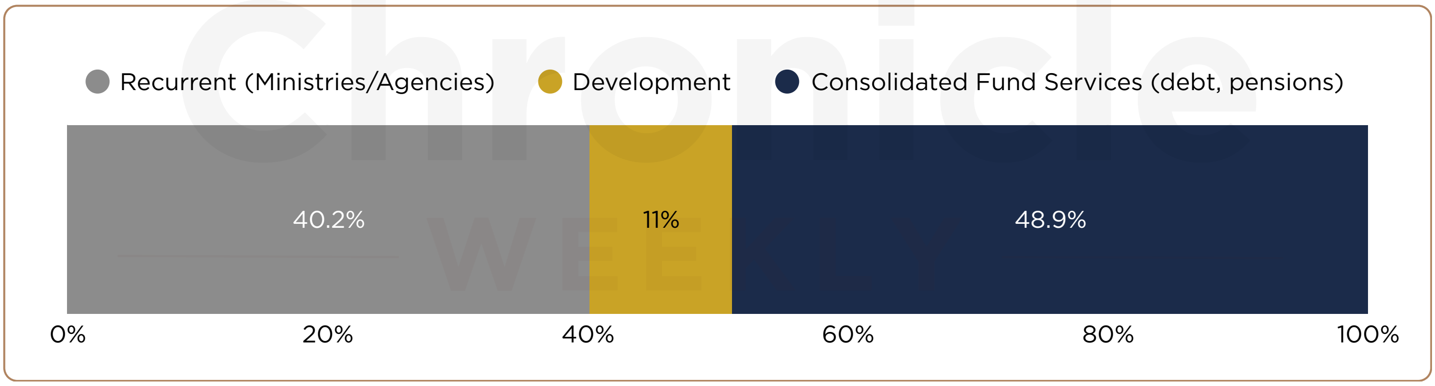
Sh2.45 trillion	Sh1.29 trillion	Sh1.67 trillion
TAX REVENUE	DOMESTIC BORROWING	RECURRENT SPEND

REVENUE & FINANCING: PLAN VS. REALITY



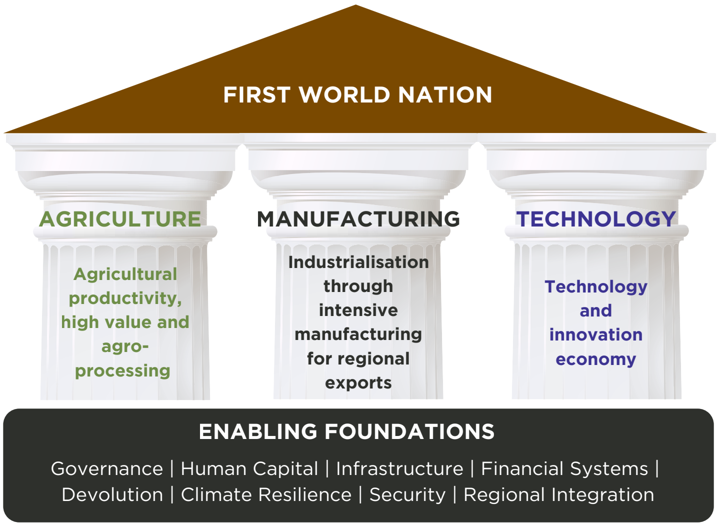
Tax revenue undershot both the original and the downwardly revised estimate. Domestic borrowing, revised up by Sh342bn over plan, closed most of the gap alongside external loans and grants.

WHERE THE MONEY ACTUALLY WENT



Debt service and pensions (Consolidated Fund Services) consumed more than recurrent ministry spending and nearly four and a half times development spending combined.

Source: The National Treasury and Economic Planning, Statement of Actual Revenues and Net Exchequer Issues as at 30th June 2026 (Kenya Gazette Vol. CXXVIII No. 120)



The report says financing must mobilise resources for productive investment while remaining fiscally sustainable. That is right, but the real test will be whether the full plan shows the arithmetic: what it will cost, what will be public or private, what role development finance will play, and what gets prioritised when resources fall short.

Devolution, Urbanisation and Inclusion

The report recognises that Kenya will become majority urban around 2050 and argues that housing, transport, livelihoods, education and health must be planned accordingly. This is inseparable from devolution. Agriculture, health, water, urban development and local infrastructure are shared, or devolved functions, and the report calls for national and county governments to integrate plans and "deliver as one."

The diagnosis is correct, but the challenge is huge. Kenya's development system is shared between two levels of government with distinct mandates, resources, and incentives. Coordination will require clear responsibilities, predictable financing and mechanisms for resolving disputes.

The report notes that climate shocks already cost Kenya almost 5 per cent of GDP annually, while droughts and floods affect millions. Agriculture, manufacturing and urbanisation all depend on infrastructure and production systems that can survive a changing climate.

The Missing Foundation: Political Economy

The report also includes peace, security, social cohesion and national identity, plus regional integration and strategic partnerships. These are not decorative. A 30- to 40-year programme requires a society that can absorb disruption without losing common purpose.

The report proposes a national development law requiring Medium-Term Plans, county plans, sector strategies and annual budgets to align with the Vision. It even suggests that party and presidential manifestos should be consistent with it.

The rationale is clear: Kenya's priorities have too often been reset after elections. But the proposal raises a hard question: how does Kenya protect long-term continuity without narrowing democratic choice?

The proposed answer is the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), supported by an independent delivery secretariat. It is to coordinate implementation, review progress, commission research, and recommend corrections across national and county governments, the private sector, academia and other stakeholders.

This is perhaps the report's most important institutional idea, because a 30- to 40-year transformation cannot be managed as a series of disconnected five-year plans. However, the NESC will only matter if it has authority and independence to tell politicians when policies are failing.

The document is strongest when explaining why Kenya needs a new development model and what successful transforming economies had in common.

It is also strongest when it acknowledges Kenya's constraints: manufacturing is still low, most employment is informal, youth joblessness remains severe, debt is squeezing fiscal space, climate shocks are costly, and institutions remain weak.

These are not problems that can be solved by writing a better plan.

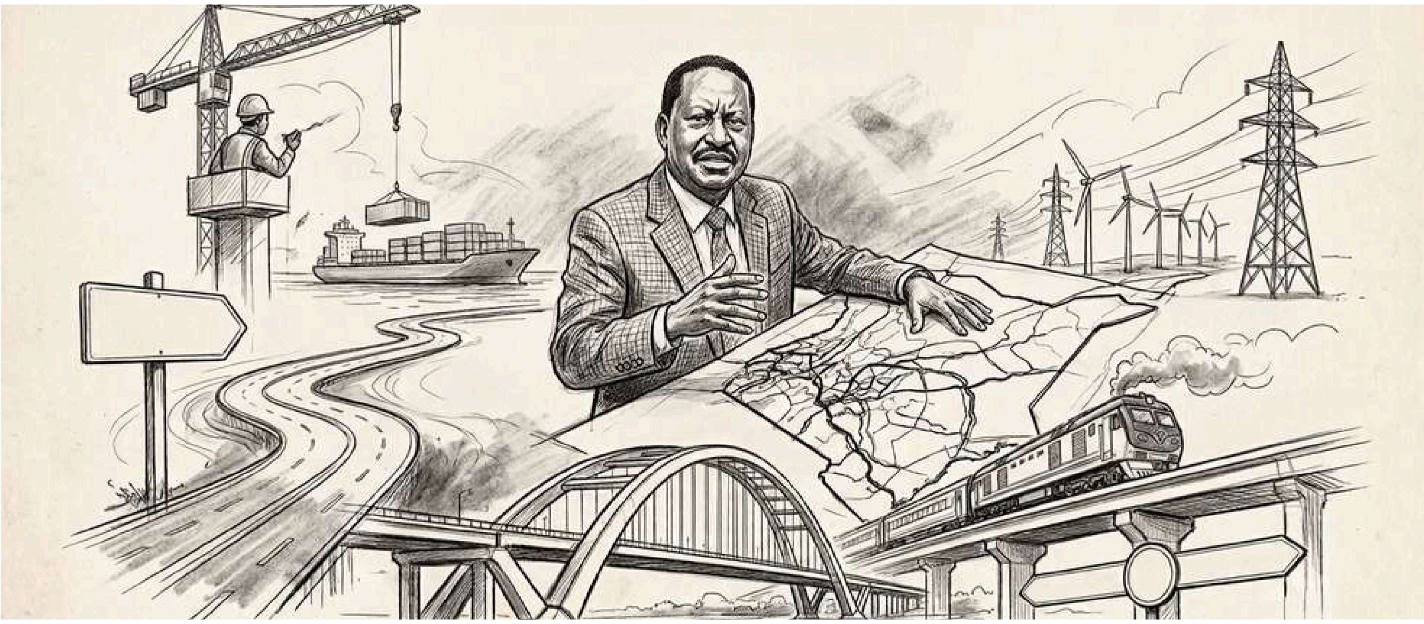
The report's next steps - sector strategies, flagship projects, a five-year Medium-Term Plan and national consultation - show that this is a beginning, not a blueprint. The real plan has not yet been written.

The next stage must turn three pillars and eight foundations into choices about money, institutions and trade-offs. It must decide who pays, who implements, what gets prioritised and how success will be judged.

Kenya's new Vision rests on a sound premise: countries do not become prosperous by accident. They do so through sustained policy choices, capable institutions, productive investment and political commitment. Now comes the harder part: proving that Kenya can build the state strong enough to carry the weight of its own ambition.

Chronicle WEEKLY

Why Raila Odinga became Kenya's enduring face of infrastructure



There is a familiar ritual in Kenyan politics whenever a new highway opens, a railway is launched, an airport expansion begins, or a bridge is commissioned.

Supporters of former Prime Minister Raila Odinga are quick to claim it as part of his legacy. His critics are equally quick to dismiss those claims as political mythology. Yet, months later, another road, another port or another bypass will spark the same debate all over again.

Supporters point to the Thika Superhighway, the Southern and Northern bypasses, the expansion of the Port of Mombasa, LAPSSET, Konza Technopolis and even the Standard Gauge Railway as evidence of Raila Odinga's transformative vision.

His critics often push back, arguing that many of these projects were financed, built and commissioned by governments in which he either played a limited role or no role at all. Yet the remarkable thing is not that the argument exists. It is that it never really goes away.

Successive presidents, from Mwai Kibaki to Uhuru Kenyatta and now William Ruto, have found themselves governing in the shadow of Raila's infrastructure reputation.

Even projects initiated years after he left the executive office are routinely linked to him, sometimes by supporters, sometimes by politicians seeking continuity, and occasionally even by his political rivals.

How did one politician become synonymous with Kenya's physical transformation? The answer lies not in who built every road, but in who came to embody the idea of building itself.

Minister Who Changed the Conversation

When Raila Odinga was appointed Minister for Roads, Public Works and Housing in 2003, Kenya's infrastructure was in poor condition. Only about 10 per cent of Kenya's roughly 60,000 kilometres of roads were paved, following years of stagnation under the outgoing Moi government.

His ministry launched a National Roads Improvement Programme, a three-year, Ksh20 billion initiative targeting 3,000 kilometres of Class A and B roads, and had contracted 24 projects covering more than 1,200 kilometres by early 2005.

He resurrected the Thika Superhighway from a dormant early-1990s blueprint, secured financing, and authorised demolitions of encroaching commercial structures to clear the route, a decision that drew accusations of ethnic targeting at the time and that he defended as a necessary "sacrifice for modernisation.

The highway itself would only be completed years later under President Kibaki.

But the project became closely associated with Raila because he was the politician who transformed it from an idea into a government priority.

That distinction would define much of his later reputation.

Infrastructure Has Long Political Timelines

One reason Raila continues receiving credit for projects completed by later administrations is that infrastructure simply does not fit within electoral cycles.

Major highways, railways and ports take years to conceptualise, finance, design and construct. The politician who launches a feasibility study is rarely the one who commissions the completed project.

This creates overlapping political ownership. The Standard Gauge Railway illustrates the point.
Its construction, financing and commissioning largely occurred under President Uhuru Kenyatta.

Yet discussions around modernising Kenya's railway system had gained momentum during the Grand Coalition Government in which Raila served as Prime Minister.

Supporters, therefore, argue that he helped lay the groundwork. Critics counter that groundwork is not the same as construction. Both arguments contain elements of truth, as infrastructure is cumulative and every administration inherits projects at different stages of completion and passes others to its successor.

The temptation is to assign ownership to individuals when, in reality, most major projects are institutional achievements stretching across multiple governments.

The Grand Coalition Legacy

Between 2008 and 2013, Raila occupied a position unlike any previous Kenyan politician. As Prime Minister in the Grand Coalition Government, he became one of the administration's principal advocates for large-scale public investment.

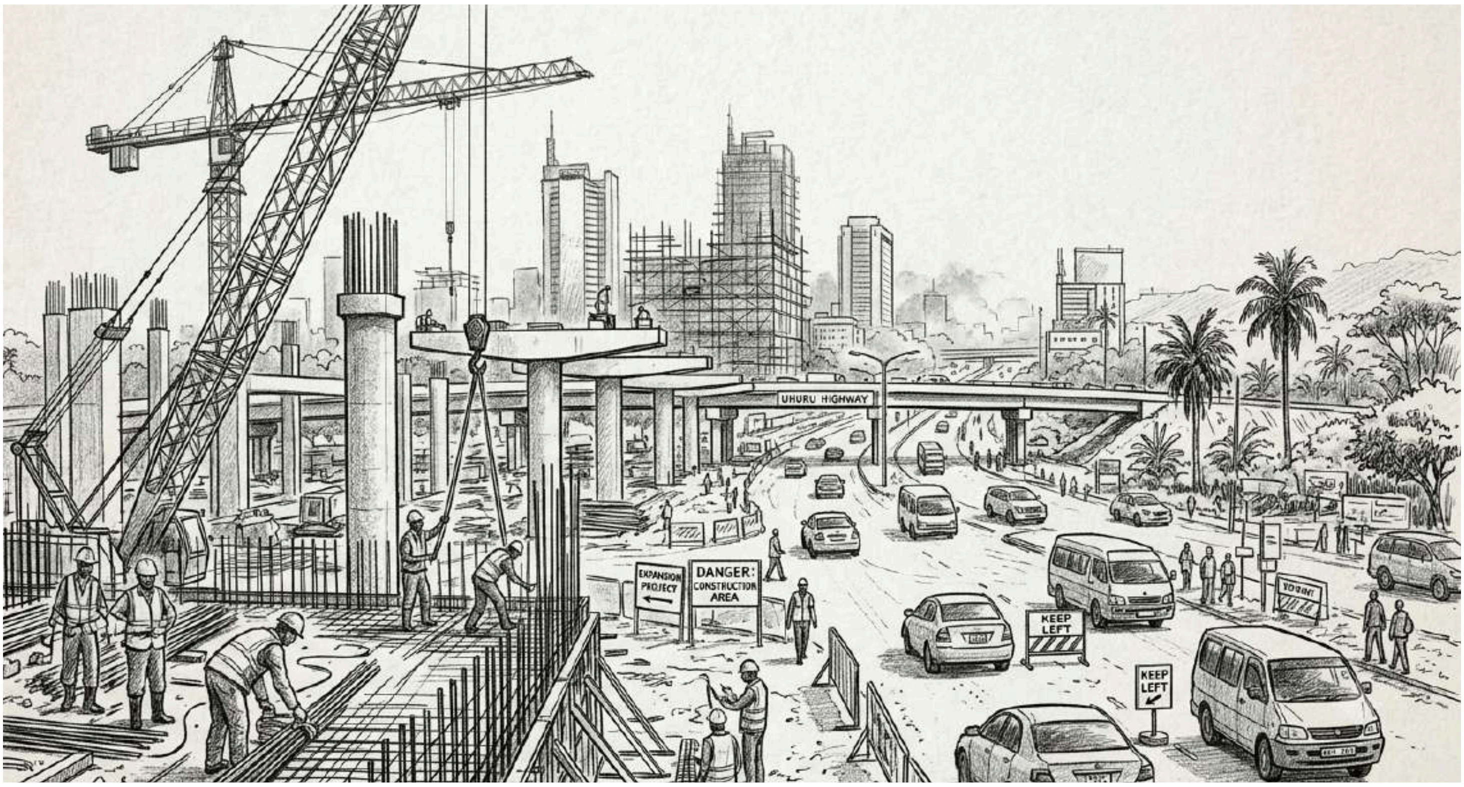
Road expansion accelerated, port development gathered pace, urban transport planning received renewed attention, Konza Technopolis entered the national development agenda, and Regional transport corridors became central to Kenya's Vision 2030 ambitions.

Although President Kibaki remained Head of State and retained ultimate executive authority, Raila became the administration's most visible political salesman for infrastructure-led growth. Cabinet decisions may be collective, but public memory often attaches them to the politician most closely identified with the idea. That is precisely what happened.

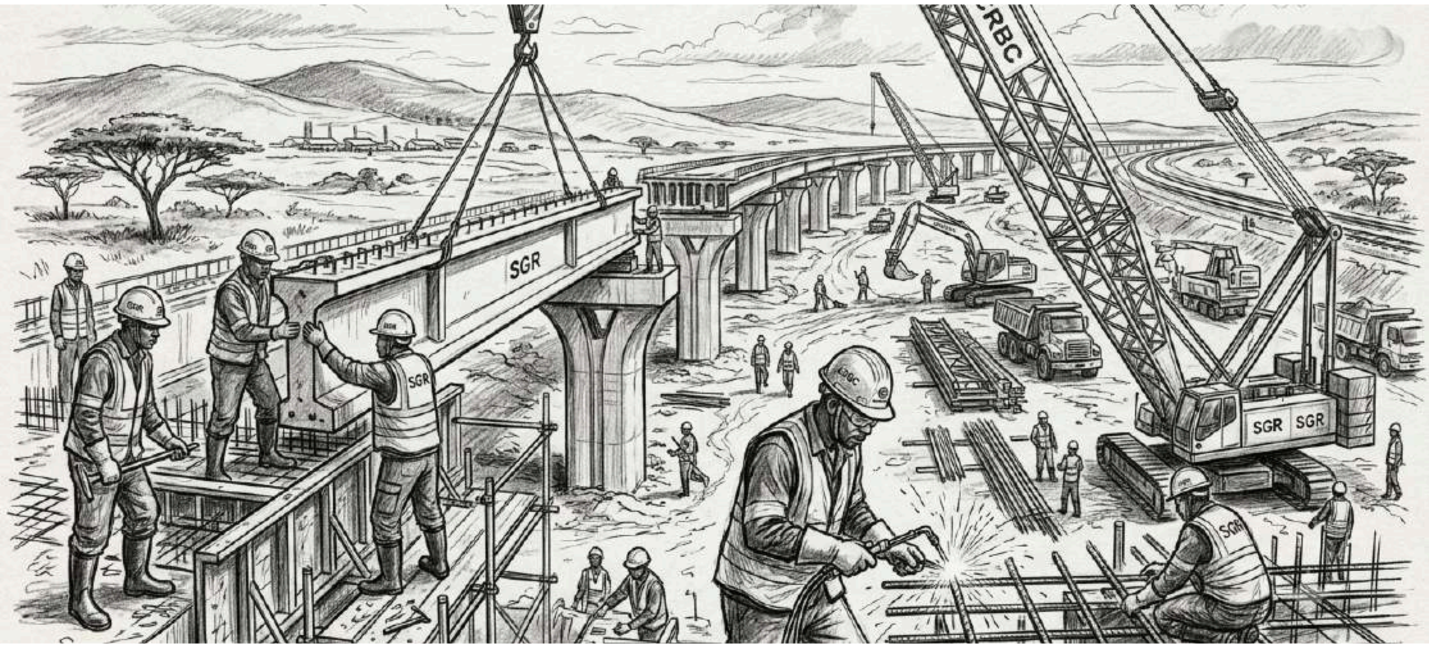
From Politician to Symbol

Over time, Raila ceased to represent only the projects he directly supervised.
He came to symbolise a broader philosophy of development.

Unlike many politicians whose public messaging revolved around welfare programmes or political reform, Raila consistently spoke the language of roads, ports, railways, industrial parks and regional integration.



Chronicle
WEEKLY



Infrastructure became central to his political identity, and his supporters reinforced that narrative with every completed highway. Opponents, often unintentionally, strengthened it further by arguing over the extent of his contribution.

The result is that Raila's name became attached not merely to projects but to the very concept of modernisation.

Why Every Government Invokes Him

Successive administrations have discovered that infrastructure is one of the few areas where political continuity carries more benefits than costs. Roads do not belong to political parties, ports outlive governments, and railways survive generations of leaders.

Governments often prefer presenting themselves as continuing a national development journey rather than starting entirely new ones.

Raila's reputation makes him useful in that narrative, and his supporters interpret new projects as proof that his vision is being realised. Governments can describe infrastructure expansion as building on foundations laid decades earlier.

Even critics rarely dismiss his contribution entirely because doing so would require discounting one of Kenya's most visible periods of public investment.

Separating Legacy from Myth

None of this means every infrastructure claim attached to Raila is historically accurate.
Some projects frequently attributed to him were conceived before he entered government. Others were financed, procured and completed entirely under later administrations. Still others evolved so dramatically during implementation that they bear little resemblance to their original proposals.

Equally, it would be misleading to suggest he deserves no credit simply because others completed the work. The honest historical record lies somewhere between hero worship and revisionism.

Raila neither built every road in Kenya nor merely watched others do so. He was one of the architects of an era that placed infrastructure at the centre of national development policy.

The Legacy That Outgrew the Man

The clearest measure of Raila Odinga's infrastructure legacy is not the number of roads he personally initiated.

It is the fact that Kenyans instinctively invoke his name whenever a major public works project is announced. Few politicians retain that kind of association long after leaving executive office. It reflects not simply memory but branding.

Raila successfully positioned himself as a champion of modern infrastructure at a moment when Kenya was beginning one of the most ambitious periods of public investment in its history.

Whether subsequent governments expanded, accelerated or completed the projects is an important historical question. But it does not erase the political reality. In Kenya today, infrastructure has become part of Raila Odinga's identity.

The Week in Numbers

Sh5.47 bn

SAVINGS

Amount of money the government says Kenyans have saved for the purchase of affordable housing units.

45,000

HOUSES

Number of affordable housing units that the government says will be completed by the end of 2026.

18/08/2026

COURT DATE

The court will set a sentencing date for former Migori Governor Obado & 2 others for the murder of Sharon Otieno.

Sh170,000

BRIBE

The amount Kangema Magistrate Martin Mutegi and a Principal Probation Officer allegedly demanded to influence a case.

Quote of the Week

Perhaps the single most important lesson to be learned from our planning experience since independence is the need for sustained political support for the overall national development vision, regardless of political party and across electoral cycles

- Kisumu Governor Prof. Anyang' Nyong'o

KDC Explainer: "First World" Vision, at a glance

What It Is: A proposed 30–40 year roadmap from lower-middle-income status to "First World" status, defined by high incomes, strong institutions, formal employment and lower poverty, not GDP alone.

The Core Diagnosis: Kenya's problem is not a shortage of plans; it is the inability to sustain them past the next political disruption. The report calls this the "development paradox."

The Three Pillars:

- **Agriculture:** smallholder productivity, agro-processing, stronger farm-to-industry links
- **Manufacturing:** Export-oriented industrialisation, positioning Kenya as a regional assembly hub
- **Technology:** An economy-wide productivity tool built through production, not just internet access

The Eght Enabling Foundations: Governance | Human Capital | Infrastructure | Financial Systems | Devolution | Climate Resilience | Security | Regional Integration

The Institutional Fix: A proposed National Development Law binding Medium-Term Plans, county plans and even party manifestos to the Vision, overseen by a new National Economic and Social Council (NESC) with an independent delivery secretariat.

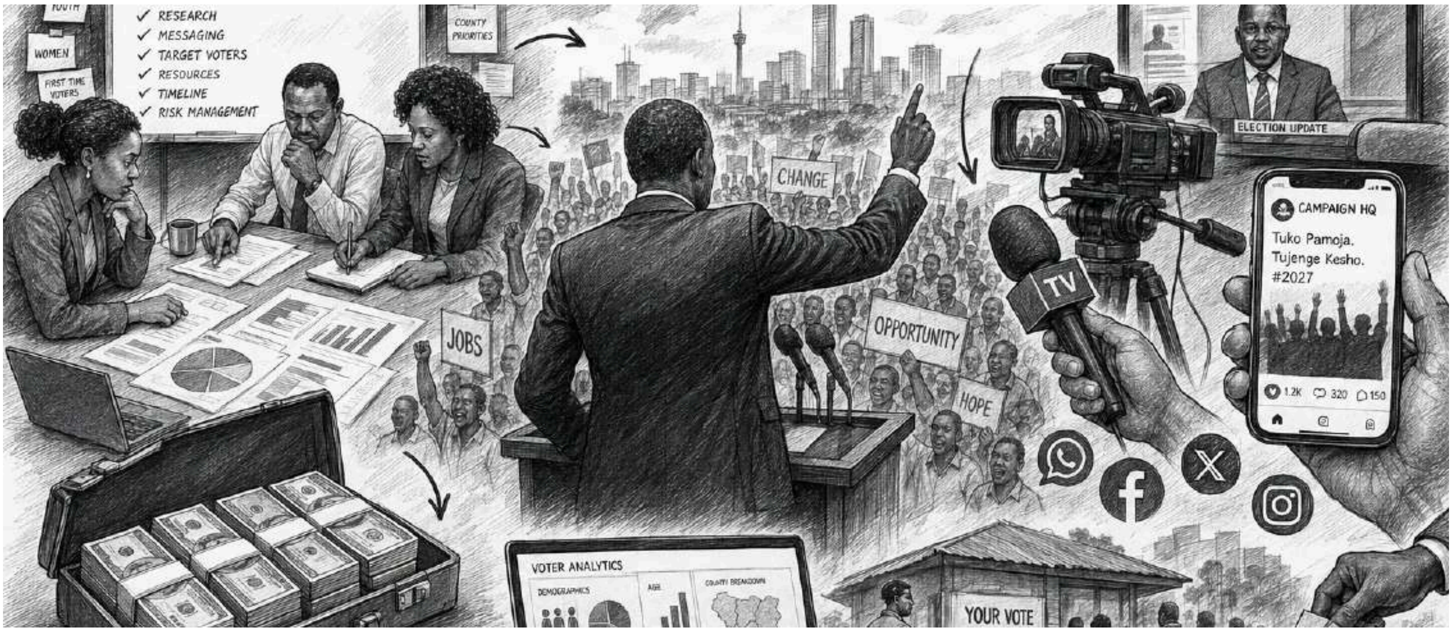
The Missing Link: The report does not yet publish costings: what the transformation will cost, what share is public versus private, or what happens to prioritisation when revenue falls short.

The Open Question: Can a 30–40 year plan bind future governments without narrowing democratic choice? The NESC's authority, and whether it can tell a sitting president that a policy is failing, is where that tension will be tested.

Next Steps:

- Sector strategies
- Flagship projects
- A five-year Medium-Term Plan
- National consultation

The business of votes: Understanding Kenya's elections economy



Elections are often presented as contests of ideas, personalities and competing visions for the country, but in Kenya, as in most democracies, political competition is a substantial economic enterprise.

Every election creates its own ecosystem of consultants, advertisers, pollsters, media houses, event organisers, transporters, designers, technology companies, security providers, lawyers, strategists and thousands of temporary workers whose fortunes rise and fall with the electoral calendar.

As Kenya moves towards the 2027 General Election, that ecosystem is already beginning to stir. Political parties are reorganising, aspirants are testing messages, opinion research is being commissioned, digital audiences are being built, and the machinery of mobilisation is gradually moving from preparation to operation. Long before voters enter polling stations, the business of winning will already have generated its own economy.

The real question is not simply how much money will be spent on the next election. It is what that money will buy, who will benefit from it and what the increasingly professionalised political marketplace tells us about the nature of power in Kenya.

Economic Event

Kenya's elections have become increasingly sophisticated exercises in communications and logistics. The days when political campaigns could rely almost entirely on rallies, posters and roadside banners are gone.

Today's campaigns operate across television, radio, newspapers, WhatsApp groups, social media and increasingly sophisticated digital targeting systems.

A serious campaign now requires research before messaging, message development before advertising, rapid response during crises and constant monitoring of public sentiment.

Candidates need photographers and videographers, graphic designers, social media managers, speechwriters and media handlers. They need people who can interpret polling data, understand constituency dynamics and identify the local issues that can shift a campaign.

The result is a political industry that increasingly resembles the commercial communications industry, except that the product being sold is not a phone, a bank account or a packet of flour. It is a candidate, a political identity and a promise of governance.

This is where the campaign strategist has become as important as the rally organiser. Winning elections increasingly depends on the ability to build a coherent narrative across multiple audiences and maintain it under pressure. The campaign that understands what voters are thinking before its competitors do has a significant advantage.

Politics of Spending

Every large political campaign creates demand for transport, accommodation, food, event production and security. Rallies require tents, sound systems, stages and generators.

Political parties need agents across polling stations and coordinators across constituencies.

Around every candidate exists a second campaign that is less visible but equally important: the campaign to secure contracts and access. For businesses, elections can be both an opportunity and a risk.

The spending generated by political competition can temporarily stimulate sectors of the economy, but it can also create distortions. Companies that become dependent on political contracts can find themselves exposed when alliances change.

Suppliers who flourish under one administration may struggle under another. The election economy reflects Kenya's political economy, where relationships and access matter as much as price and efficiency.

This is why political campaigns should be understood not merely as expensive exercises in persuasion, but as temporary economic systems. They attract money, redistribute it and create networks that can survive long after the election is over.

New Political Marketplace

The next generation of Kenyan political campaigns will be more data-driven, digital and segmented. Candidates will increasingly be expected to understand not just where their voters live but what they watch, search for, fear, and share.

The political consultant is therefore becoming a hybrid professional: part strategist, part researcher, part communicator and part crisis manager.

But this creates a paradox. As campaigns become more sophisticated, the greater the danger that politics becomes a competition between communication machines rather than competing visions of government.

A well-produced video can create the impression of competence. A carefully targeted advertisement can manufacture momentum. A viral clip can dominate a news cycle. Yet none of these necessarily tells voters whether a candidate can manage a county, run a ministry or repair a broken institution.

The business of winning can therefore become detached from the business of governing, and that distinction matters. A campaign can be exceptionally good at winning attention while being completely unprepared to exercise power. It can have a robust communications strategy and no credible economic programme. It can understand the electorate's emotions without understanding the country's structural problems.

The Election After the Election

The most consequential part of the election economy, however, begins after the votes have been counted. Political campaigns create expectations among supporters, financiers and business interests. Those expectations do not disappear when the winner is declared. They become part of the informal political economy of the new administration.

This is where the cost of political competition becomes more difficult to measure. The campaign money is visible; the networks created around that spending are not. The contracts, appointments, influence and access that may follow are harder to track but often more consequential.

Kenya's electoral cycles have therefore become periods in which political competition and economic competition increasingly overlap. Businesses watch elections because policy matters. Investors watch them because stability matters. Professionals watch them because appointments matter. Communities watch them because development promises matter.

Everyone, in one way or another, is trying to understand what winning will mean for them.

Chronicle
WEEKLY

From wellness to brunch: The rise of the Kenyan 'soft life'

There was a time when the good life in Kenya was easy to describe: a steady salary, a plot of land, a house rising slowly on the outskirts of town and, if fortune smiled, a Toyota parked in the driveway. Success had visible markers then, things you could point to, count and show off with confidence.

The new Kenyan dream is less concrete and far more fluid. It may look like a weekend in Diani, a reservation in Westlands, a Pilates class on a Tuesday morning, a flight to Dubai or an afternoon spent in a beautifully lit coffee shop.

It may also mean working from home, turning down a meeting, taking leave without guilt or simply enjoying a day that does not revolve around productivity.

This, in Kenyan terms, is the soft life: a lifestyle built around comfort, leisure, wellness, experiences and the deliberate refusal of unnecessary struggle. At first glance, it can seem frivolous, yet it reveals something deeper about a country whose ideas about work, money and aspiration are changing.

From Survival to Self-Care

The rise of the soft life partly reflects a growing fatigue with the culture of exhaustion that has shaped urban Kenya for years.

For many professionals, especially in Nairobi, adulthood has long been framed as a bargain in which suffering today guarantees security tomorrow: work hard, save, build, sacrifice and repeat.

Young Kenyans are entering adulthood in an economy where jobs are harder to find, housing is more expensive, and the traditional signs of stability seem increasingly out of reach.

They have watched older generations labour without always receiving the security they were told to expect. The result has been a quiet shift in priorities; if the future feels unstable, then living should not be postponed indefinitely.

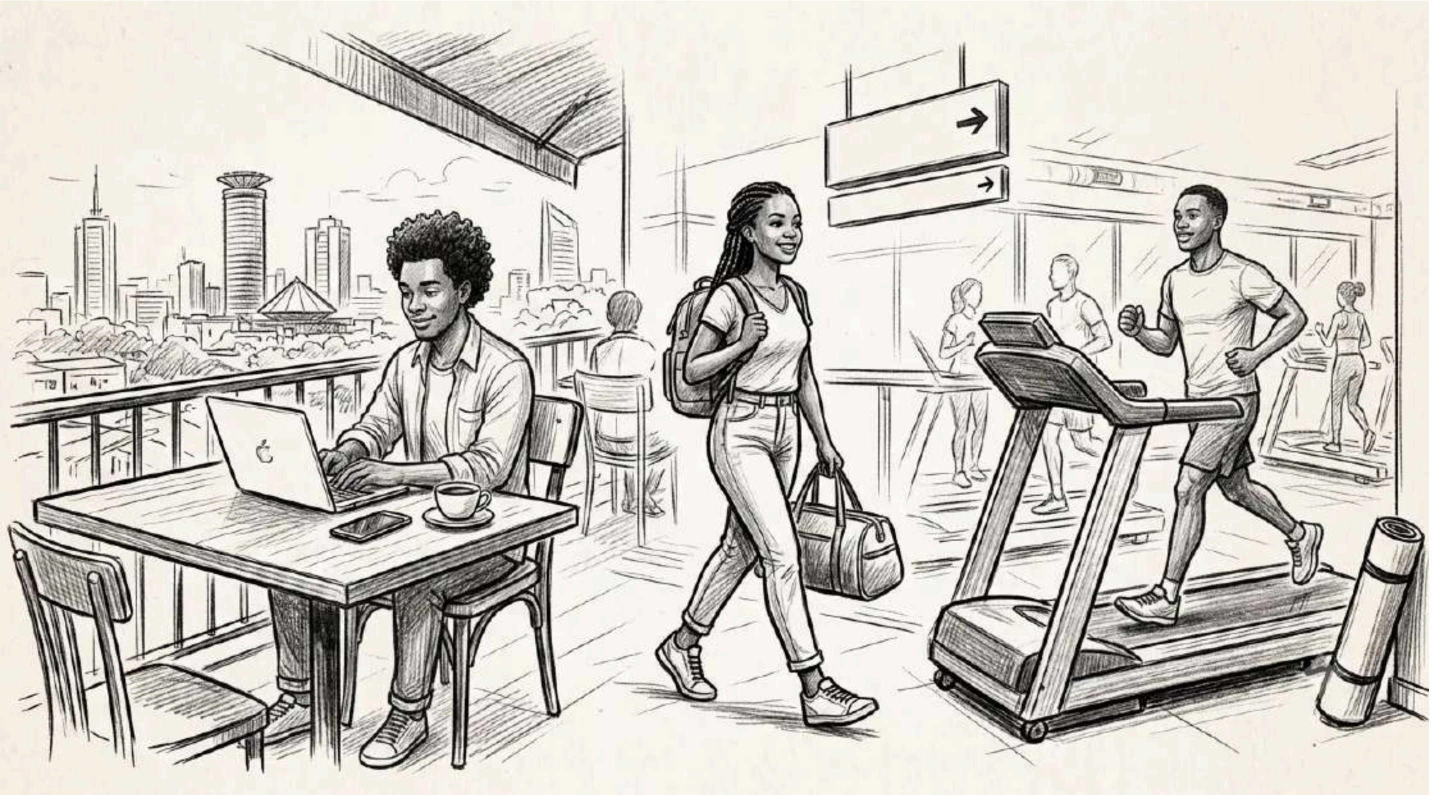
This is where the soft life becomes more than a social media trend and turns into a cultural response to the idea that a meaningful life must always be earned through suffering.

The weekend trip becomes a testament to the importance of rest, the expensive coffee becomes a small reward, the wellness class becomes an investment in one's health, and the dinner out becomes an attempt to build a life that extends beyond work.

The Instagram Effect

Instagram and TikTok have transformed lifestyle aspiration by making other people's leisure visible in ways previous generations never experienced. A decade ago, one might have known that wealthy people lived differently; today, one can watch the difference unfold in real time.

The hotel room, the airport lounge, the gym, the outfit, the cocktail and the restaurant table all appear as part of a carefully curated digital identity built around travel, beauty, fitness, food and luxury.



Lifestyle itself has become content, but the problem is that social media collapses the distance between seeing and having. A person scrolling through TikTok may see a Zanzibar weekend presented as casually as a supermarket run, or a designer handbag described as a basic necessity.

What rarely appears in the frame is the economic context: debt, rent, school fees, family obligations or the anxiety of unstable income. That absence can turn aspiration into pressure.

The person who cannot afford the lifestyle may begin to feel behind, even when they are not. Social media promises freedom while quietly creating new expectations, and the soft life can become another form of labour, one that requires dressing, photographing, posting and maintaining.

The Business of Feeling Good

The soft life has also created an economy of its own. Wellness centres, gyms, spas, beauty businesses, boutique hotels, coffee shops, restaurants, travel companies and lifestyle brands have all benefited from consumers who are increasingly willing to spend on experiences.

Kenya's middle and upper-middle classes are not only buying products; they are buying feelings.

A restaurant sells atmosphere as much as food, a gym sells confidence, a holiday sells escape, a spa sells restoration, and a boutique hotel sells the temporary possibility of becoming someone else.

That is why lifestyle businesses have become so attentive to experience. Lighting, music, architecture and even the Instagram corner now matter almost as much as the product itself. In the experience economy, memory often matters more than the item purchased.

For businesses that understand this shift, the opportunity is significant. Many young Kenyan consumers may not have the money for expensive assets, but they are willing to spend smaller amounts on moments that make life feel better.

The challenge lies in understanding the difference between luxury and value, because the most successful brands may not be the most expensive ones, but the ones that make ordinary consumers feel well-lived without making them feel reckless.

Soft Life, Hard Economy

There is, however, an uncomfortable tension at the centre of the movement. Kenya remains a country where many households struggle to meet basic needs, while young people face an uncertain job market and a high cost of living.

Against that backdrop, the celebration of luxury can sometimes feel detached from reality.

Still, dismissing the soft life as shallow would be too easy. People have always sought pleasure, beauty and escape, even in difficult times; what has changed is the visibility of that consumption and the language used to describe it.

The soft life is not necessarily about being rich. For some Kenyans, it simply means taking a walk instead of working late, leaving a toxic job, spending Sunday with family, travelling once a year or refusing to measure personal worth by income.

That more democratic version, rooted less in champagne and more in boundaries, may prove the more lasting one.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the soft life is that it is changing what Kenyans value. For years, wealth was displayed through things; now, increasingly, it is displayed through time.

The person who can take a long lunch on a Wednesday is perceived differently from the person who cannot leave the office.

The person who can work remotely from the coast appears to have achieved something that a large salary alone cannot guarantee. Time has become a status symbol.

That helps explain why remote work, flexible schedules and location independence have become such strong aspirations among young professionals.

The ultimate luxury is no longer simply owning more; it is needing less, whether that means less commuting, less stress, less dependence on a single employer or less obligation to live a life that does not make sense.

At its best, the soft life is not a rejection of ambition, but a rejection of the belief that ambition must always look like exhaustion.

The Life After the Hustle

Kenya's soft-life movement will keep growing even as the economy remains difficult.

The contradictions will remain too: people will complain about the cost of living while posting brunch photos, discuss financial pressure while saving for holidays and talk about minimalism while buying the latest phone.

Yet that contradiction is not uniquely Kenyan and reflects a generation trying to reconcile economic uncertainty with the desire to enjoy life.

The real question is whether the soft life remains an aesthetic or becomes a deeper cultural shift.

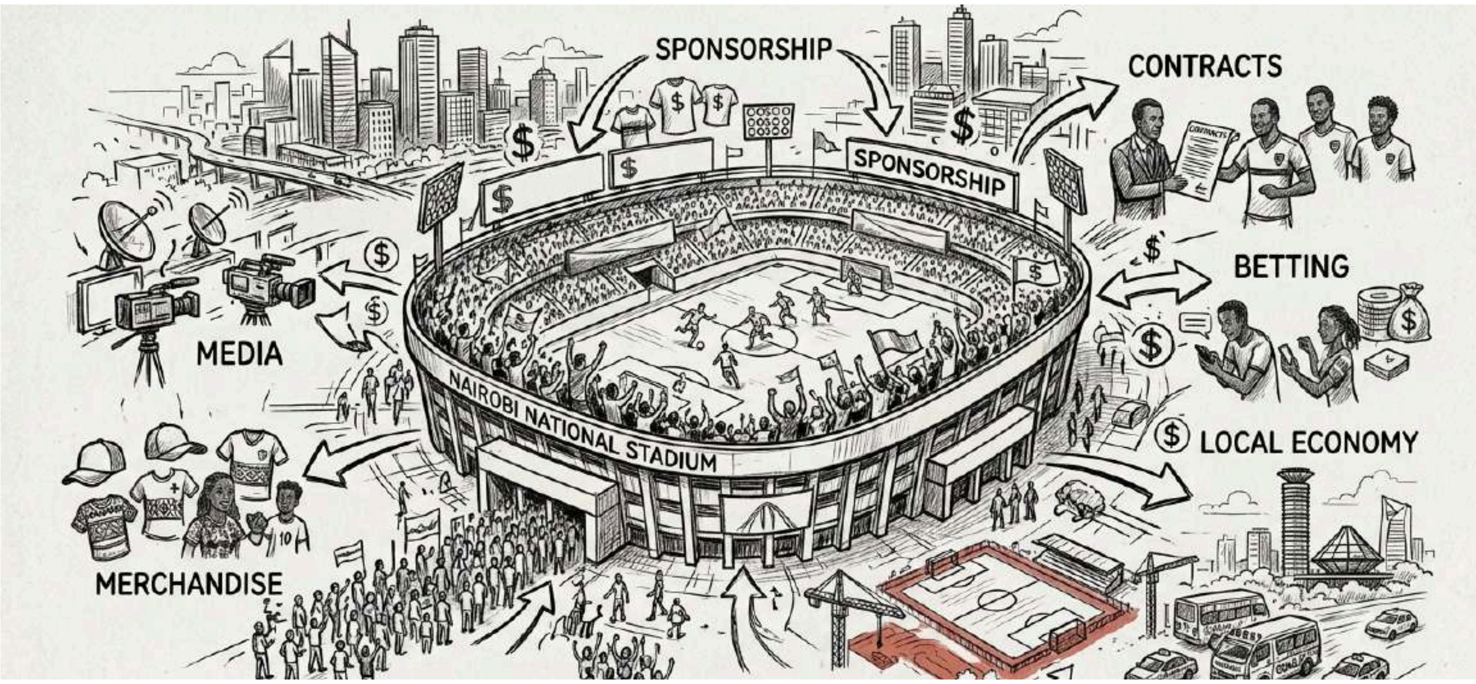
If it stays an aesthetic, it will simply become another marketing category, another way to sell holidays, skincare, apartments and expensive coffee. If it becomes a philosophy, it could reshape how Kenyans define success.

Perhaps success will no longer mean only how much one earns, owns or accumulates, but how much control one has over time, relationships and peace.

In a country that has spent decades glorifying the hustle, that would be a profound change. The soft life may have started on Instagram, but the idea behind it is older and more human.

After years of being told to work harder, Kenyans are beginning to ask a different question: what if the point of all this work is to eventually have a life worth living?

Kenya has the athletes. Where is the sports economy?



Kenya has spent decades producing athletes who are recognised globally, yet the country has never fully converted its sporting talent into a sporting industry. Kenyan athletes win medals, break records and dominate global conversations, but the economic infrastructure around them remains surprisingly thin.

The country has produced global sporting stars without a sufficiently powerful ecosystem of clubs, broadcasters, academies, merchandise, venues, sports science, management and commercial entertainment to support the wider industry.

This contradiction is one of the great missed opportunities in the Kenyan economy, as sport is no longer simply about competition. Globally, it is a business built around media rights, sponsorships, betting, tourism, hospitality, technology, merchandising and intellectual property.

The Athlete Is the Product

The first problem is that Kenya has traditionally treated athletes as individuals rather than as assets. When a Kenyan runner wins a major race, the national conversation usually focuses on the athlete's personal achievement. We celebrate the medal, the record and the prize money, but the value generated by that athlete extends far beyond the race.

There are sponsorship opportunities, broadcast audiences, tourism potential, merchandise sales and global brand associations. Some stories can be packaged and sold to audiences around the world.

The international sports ecosystem has become extremely sophisticated at commercialising African talent. Global brands understand the power of Kenyan athletes, international race organisers understand the commercial value of Kenyan distance running, and broadcasters understand the audience.

Meanwhile, Kenya often remains content with celebrating the outcome, but a country that consistently produces world-class talent should also be producing world-class sports businesses.

Beyond Athletics

Kenya has passionate audiences for football, rugby, volleyball, basketball and motorsport. The country has a growing interest in combat sports and e-sports, while cycling and adventure sports have enormous tourism potential. The problem is that these sports often exist as isolated ecosystems rather than as components of a coherent sports economy.

Football has fans but struggles to build commercially sustainable clubs. Rugby has a strong local following but limited professional structures; basketball is growing rapidly, but remains underdeveloped commercially, while women's sports continue to produce exceptional performances without receiving comparable investment.

Kenyans are willing to consume sport; they watch, discuss, travel, and spend money around it. The question is why so little of that value is captured locally.

The Stadium Is Not Enough

Kenya's infrastructure debate has often focused on stadiums, but a sports economy requires much more than physical facilities. A modern sporting ecosystem needs training academies, medical and rehabilitation facilities, sports science, professional management, digital platforms and commercial partnerships.

It needs venues that can generate revenue seven days a week rather than sitting empty between major events. It needs broadcasting arrangements that make local competitions accessible to audiences.

It needs merchandise systems that allow fans to buy authentic jerseys and products. It needs youth development structures that can identify talent early and provide a pathway from school sport to professional competition. And it needs governance that gives investors confidence. A stadium can host a match, but an industry creates value around the match, and that distinction is critical.

The Athlete as Media Company

The most interesting transformation may be taking place outside the traditional sports institutions. Social media has given athletes a direct relationship with their audiences. An athlete can now build a personal brand, publish content, attract sponsorships and engage fans without depending entirely on a federation, club or broadcaster.

The modern athlete is increasingly a media company. Their Instagram following, YouTube channel, TikTok audience and personal story can be as valuable commercially as their performance on the field or track.

Kenyan athletes have enormous potential in this space, but many have yet to fully exploit it. The opportunity is not simply to secure a sponsorship deal, but to build a long-term personal brand that survives retirement.

This requires professional management, storytelling, content production and business planning. The athlete who wins today can become the entrepreneur of tomorrow, but only if the systems around them help convert sporting fame into sustainable economic value.

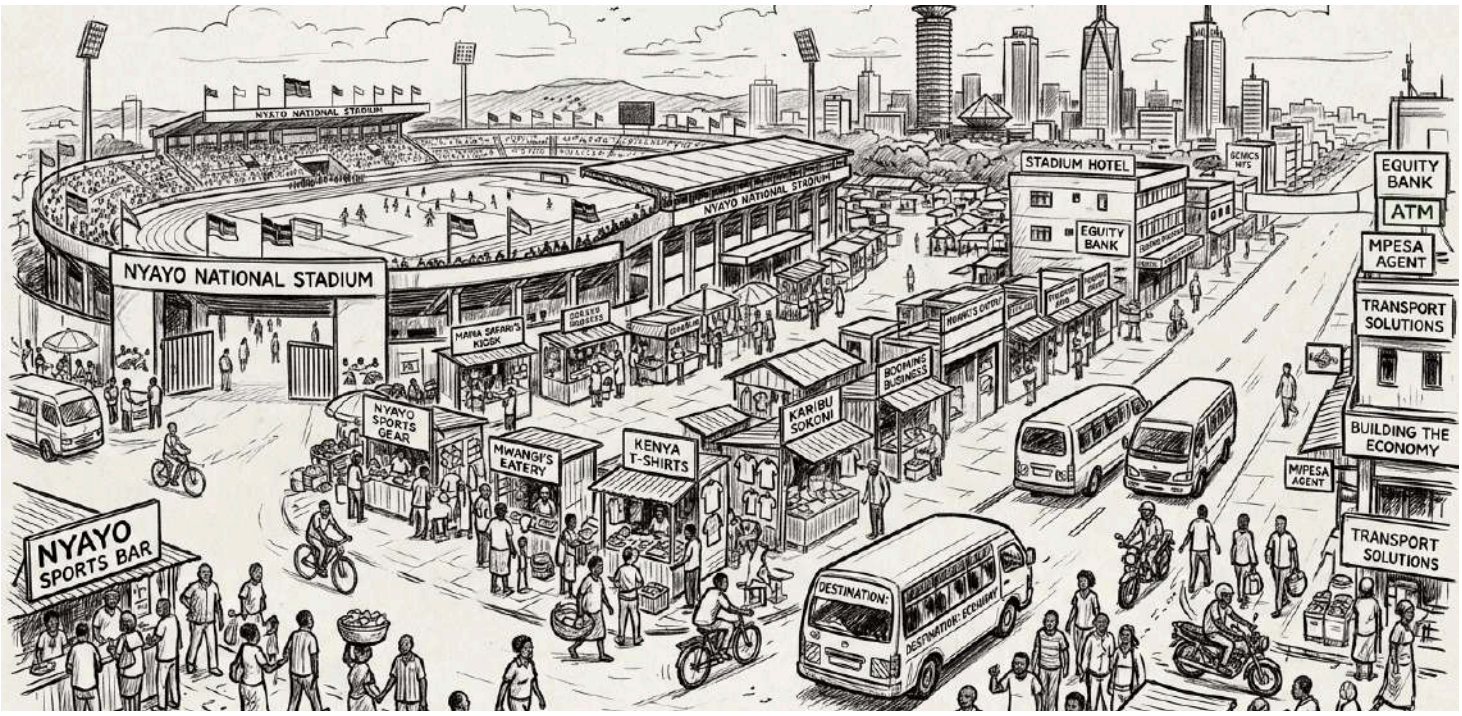
The Tourism Opportunity

Kenya could also build a much stronger connection between sport and tourism. International visitors already travel to Kenya because of wildlife and beaches and there is no reason why sport cannot become another reason to visit.

Imagine international running tourists travelling to train in Iten, cycling routes marketed as premium adventure experiences, international rugby tournaments becoming tourism events or athletics competitions packaged with cultural and hospitality experiences.

Sport can fill hotels, move people between counties, create jobs and build international visibility. But this requires treating sporting events as economic platforms rather than isolated competitions.

The next phase of Kenyan sport should not be measured only by how many medals the country wins. It should also be measured by how many jobs sport creates, how much investment it attracts, how many businesses emerge around it and how much value remains within the country.



Harambee Startlets in action against Morocco at the their WAFCON opening match. Morocco won the game 4-0.

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