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### The Voice of Kenya: Competing Visions of Nationhood in a Post-Colonial State

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# THE VOICE OF KENYA: COMPETING VISIONS OF NATIONHOOD IN A POST-COLONIAL STATE

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Throughout the struggle for independence and after its final attainment in December 1963, Kenya's national identity remained in flux, but by 1966 it had become a unitary nation-state that assumed the Western values of stability and accumulative growth. Yet although hindsight suggests that this was certain, the adoption of this sociopolitical form was not predestined, but instead shaped by various constraints. Many other possibilities lived and died in the corridors of independence, such as multi-racialism, ethnic patriotism, *majimboism* (federal nation-statism), and redistributive nation-statism. During the period from 1959–1966, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) became a key site of contestation, used by Kenyan politicians and bureaucrats to articulate their competing visions of the fledgling nation. MIB had partial control of print media and (following 1964) total control of broadcast media, and these actors hence saw it as a pivotal tool in influencing Kenya's media landscape and shaping the national imagination.

Ultimately, only one coalition amongst these actors won out, foreclosing all other possibilities and cementing Kenya's status as an accumulative and unitary nation-state. This victory rested on the unification of three elements: the ambitions of individual bureaucrats, the centralized structure of the state, and the universalizing power of broadcast media to reach across linguistic boundaries. A coalition of end-of-empire colonial officials and African bureaucrats supported this strain of nation-statism partly because it fit their conception of modernity, and partly because it suited their national ambitions. The state and broadcast media formed a highly centralized broadcast-bureaucratic complex that they then used to consolidate their vision. This broadcast-bureaucratic model of nationalism stands in contrast to Benedict Anderson's print-capitalist model, and provides an alternative way to conceptualize nationalism in the post-WWII era of decolonization.