

Kenya's soft power status in the Eastern Africa region

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Abstract:

Kenya has arguably enjoyed the position of both advantage and responsibility among its neighbours in the Eastern Africa region and has had in that regard, a significant positive influence on political and economic affairs within and among these countries. This study is an assessment of such influence as Kenya has had in the region from the conceptual and analytical stand point of Joseph Nye's notion of soft power; that is capacity to influence others through attraction rather than coercion. The study shows that Kenya's soft power hegemony stems from admirable characteristics especially non belligerent approach in external relations under the policy of good neighborliness, economic prosperity through open markets, aptness to promote peace in the region through mediation of internal and external conflicts. The success of soft power heavily depends on the actor's reputation within the international community, as well as the flow of information between actors. Thus, soft power is often associated with the rise of globalization and regional integration theory. Kenya's leadership role in eastern Africa region through regional bodies like East Africa Community and IGAAD and Nairobi geostrategic position in the regional business and commerce are significant factors in shaping Kenya's soft power status in the region. This study attempts to investigate and demonstrate what gives the country leverage over the other countries in the region. The study investigates Kenya's hegemonic status from a soft power stand point since the country has not been engaged in any major armed conflict (hard power) with its neighbours since independence. Consequently, soft power becomes Kenya's means for the country to realize its goals in the eastern Africa region.