

# **Electoral contestation, goods provision, and construction of devolved government in Northern Kenya<sup>1</sup>**

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Upon election in 2013, the first governors of the forty-seven counties created by Kenya's 2010 constitution assumed responsibility for the construction—in some cases, especially in the historically marginalized north of the country, essentially from scratch—of local administrative apparatuses needed to perform devolved government functions and manage county budgets. This article examines the local electoral drivers of the substantial variation in the new county administrations' capacity and performance. A paired comparison of Turkana and West Pokot counties in Northern Kenya shows that threats to political survival posed by electoral opponents incentivize vertically accountable local leaders to substitute clientelism for state-building. To secure reelection in 2017, the governors of both counties needed to satisfy constituent demands for improved access to state resources. Faced with weak electoral rivals, the Turkana leader did so by extending public service delivery, which required the construction of a capable county government. In contrast, his West Pokot counterpart's vulnerability to electoral competition prompted reallocation of county resources to clients at the expense of investment in administrative capacity and public goods provision.

Keywords: decentralization; state capacity; state-building; clientelism; elections; Kenya

## **Introduction**

In 2013, Josphat Koli Nanok and Simon Kachapin Kitalei became the first governors of Turkana and West Pokot (Map 1), neighbouring counties located in Kenya's arid and sparsely populated northern periphery. The two new counties—created, alongside forty-five others, by the 2010 constitution, which ushered in an ambitious programme of devolution—had much in common: inhabited by largely monoethnic and internally cohesive populations reliant on similar pastoral livelihood practices, customary governance systems, and other sociopolitical arrangements,

Turkana and West Pokot had both suffered a century of neglect at the hands of the country's successive governments. Devolution marked a radical reversal of this pattern of marginalization. Elected by and accountable to their counties' inhabitants, within a few years the two governors, both of them members of opposition parties, used the sizable—and comparable—budgets provided for by the constitution to build, largely from scratch, new devolved government apparatuses responsible for the provision of extensive public services. The speed and scope of this state-building process are no less remarkable than the discrepancy in the Turkana and West Pokot county governments' capacity and performance, terms that I use to refer to their ability to discharge administrative functions and the standard of these operations, respectively. Despite the similarities between the two counties, Nanok constructed a well-functioning state apparatus that extended public service provision across Turkana, while Kachapin's corrupt and ineffectual administration in West Pokot diverted government funds earmarked for service delivery to his clients.

These divergent trajectories of local political development present a compelling empirical puzzle. They also raise a broader question: what explains the capacity and performance of the local governments established in the wake of decentralization reforms undertaken by many African countries in recent decades?

Causes of sub-national variation in local governance identified in other settings—ethnic divisions, historical legacies, and elite allegiances<sup>2</sup>—cannot account for the post-devolution contrast between Turkana and West Pokot, which, as the literature on the two counties shows,<sup>3</sup> exhibit similar values of these and many other potential explanatory variables. Scholars of devolution in Kenya have observed, but are yet to explain, analogous variation across other new

counties.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, their emphasis on the intensity of electoral contestation in the country<sup>5</sup> points to the electoral drivers of state capacity and goods provision, the subject of a growing literature that examines the distinct state-building effects of electoral accountability and competition.<sup>6</sup>

Building on the insights offered by these contributions, I propose that threats to incumbent political survival posed by formidable electoral opponents incentivize elected and vertically accountable leaders of new decentralized administrative units to substitute the distribution of patronage through clientelist networks for state-building and public goods provision. As such, the capacity and performance of such local governments decreases with their leaders' vulnerability to electoral challenges. Elected local officials such as Kachapin and Nanok owe their positions to their constituents, that is, the members of the electorate—oftentimes selected on the basis of shared class, ethnic, partisan, and other affiliations—whose support they need to win elections (as opposed to all voters in a given electoral district). Incumbent reelection requires accommodation of constituent preferences and demands, including for access to the resources controlled by local governments. The pathways to constituent satisfaction depend on prevailing electoral conditions. I identify two such pathways. One leads towards state-building; the other—reliance on clientelism. The absence of rival electoral blocs and other well-defined political divisions hinders supporter identification and incentivizes the provision of public services, which requires capable local government bodies. In such settings, constituent assessment of local leaders' performance and their reelection prospects improve with, and encourage investment in, administrative capacity. This calculus changes where formidable opponents threaten incumbent political survival. Political cleavages between rival electoral blocs facilitate and incentivize distribution of state

resources in the form of particularistic (club or private)<sup>7</sup> goods. With government funds diverted to clients through patronage networks, provision of such goods both impedes and discourages costly investment in administrative capacity.

A detailed explanation of the effects of incumbent vulnerability to electoral challenges on local government capacity and performance follows the next two sections of this article, which introduce the scholarly literature that informs my argument. To substantiate the claims advanced in the article, I develop narratives of local political development—based on analysis of government documents, news media sources, and interview data—that complement a most similar systems design made possible by the distinctive features of Turkana and West Pokot; I present my empirical strategy in a dedicated section of the article. Subsequent sections detail the evidence I have collected in the two counties.

### **Decentralization and devolution in Kenya**

Devolution resulted in far-reaching redistribution of power in Kenya, till then one of the world's most centralized countries.<sup>8</sup> The 2010 constitution provided for powerful county administrations responsible for a wide range of functions previously vested in the central government, headed by officials elected by local populations—the governors, in charge of the new administrations' executive bodies, and members of county assemblies (MCAs), the local legislatures—and funded by substantial transfers from the national treasury. In the years after devolution, the central government often exceeded the constitutional requirement that it remit to counties fifteen percent of its budget; between 2013 and 2017, the total allocations to county governments reached 1 trillion Kenyan shillings (approximately US\$ 9.6 billion at the time of the 2017 elections).<sup>9</sup> The first

governors, elected in 2013, successfully resisted early efforts to limit their prerogatives and budgets<sup>10</sup> and set out to build the county administrative apparatuses needed to perform devolved functions. The construction of the new local government bodies, recognized as ‘one of the most significant changes brought about by devolution’<sup>11</sup>, is yet to attract the scholarly attention it merits, but the literature on Kenya’s contemporary politics offers some indirect evidence of the strategies pursued by the inaugural county leaders and the incentives they faced.

The reforms provided county populations with leverage over the holders of powerful elected offices: in 2017, twenty-one of the forty-three incumbent governors who sought reelection lost their positions. Existing studies of that year’s intensely fought electoral contests have focused on the connections between county and national elites,<sup>12</sup> but other work points to a relationship between local political conditions, including the quality of county governance, and voter assessments of gubernatorial performance. In particular, even though governors ‘emerged as prominent regional spokespeople willing to protect and promote local interests to maintain support’,<sup>13</sup> public services provided by many county administrations remained inadequate.<sup>14</sup> Instead of prioritizing service delivery, some governors recreated in their counties the long-established patterns of political contestation in Kenya.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, scholars have identified multitudinous instances of clientelism,<sup>16</sup> corruption,<sup>17</sup> and elite capture<sup>18</sup> in county governments. Electoral considerations also prompted some local politicians to exploit interethnic and other grievances<sup>19</sup> and, at times, incite conflict.<sup>20</sup>

These post-devolution developments are indicative of substantial cross-county variation, noted<sup>21</sup> but thus far unexplained by studies of contemporary Kenyan politics. Scholars of decentralization in other settings have attributed such sub-national differences to ethnic identity mobil-

ization,<sup>22</sup> historical governance practices,<sup>23</sup> and partisan and other connections between central and local elites.<sup>24</sup> However, none of these explanations elucidates the contrast between Turkana and West Pokot's political trajectories. The two counties' largely ethnically homogenous populations, historically reliant on comparable economic practices and sociopolitical arrangements, both suffered decades of government neglect, which contributed to local voters' support, in both 2013 and 2017, for opposition gubernatorial candidates.

Scholarly work on Turkana and West Pokot also cannot account for the differences between Nanok and Kachapin's administrations. It has mostly focused on phenomena that affect both counties, such as the long history of their marginalization<sup>25</sup>—which has shaped local attitudes towards the Kenyan state<sup>26</sup>—poverty,<sup>27</sup> climate change,<sup>28</sup> the decline of pastoralism<sup>29</sup> and customary governance systems,<sup>30</sup> and cattle raiding.<sup>31</sup> The recent politicization of raiding in the region<sup>32</sup> has contributed to the intensification of interethnic tensions between the Pokot and Turkana,<sup>33</sup> also exacerbated by the 2012 discovery of oil in southern Turkana<sup>34</sup> and consequent boundary disputes.<sup>35</sup> Its mineral wealth distinguishes Turkana from West Pokot, but cannot explain their county administrations' capacity and performance because large-scale commercial oil production is yet to commence, although the central government's plans to claim the bulk of future revenues did help Nanok to weaken its local allies in the run-up to the 2017 elections.<sup>36</sup>

### **Elections, goods provision, and state capacity**

Scholars of Kenyan devolution have collected some suggestive evidence of the gubernatorial strategies adopted ahead of the 2017 elections: the first governors both acted in the public interest and fomented division; they built devolved administrations and misappropriated county

funds; and they provided government services and distributed patronage. To explain these seemingly incongruous gubernatorial actions, I draw on insights from the scholarship on state-building, elections, and goods provision.

Much of the state-building literature has focused on incumbent leaders' strategic adaptations to threats to political survival posed by rivals—especially foreign adversaries<sup>37</sup>—and social forces.<sup>38</sup> Incumbents also adapt to changes in the balance of power that may 'arise from the bargaining context between the state and constituents'<sup>39</sup> or exogenous shocks.<sup>40</sup> Such occurrences alter the institutional environments in which leaders operate, either increasing<sup>41</sup> or lessening<sup>42</sup> their 'despotic power', or state autonomy from society.<sup>43</sup> Successful democratization results in especially thoroughgoing reduction of state autonomy.<sup>44</sup> Its effects on state capacity, or the state's 'infrastructural power,'<sup>45</sup> are, in contrast, remarkably variable.<sup>46</sup> While much of the Global North has seen the emergence of the 'consensually strong state equilibrium',<sup>47</sup> '[d]emocratic postcolonial governments are too often infrastructurally weak'.<sup>48</sup> It is not that representative government impedes state-building;<sup>49</sup> rather, democratization requires the adjustment of would-be state-builders' political strategies: 'democracy cannot be expected to routinize the provision of public goods, especially not those necessary to build bureaucratic competence and hence state capacity. Instead, the achievement of these goods will depend on the specific incentives that face political leaders in different political systems'.<sup>50</sup>

The political survival of elected political leaders hinges on their reelection prospects. Democratic elections structure politicians' incentives through two primary channels: vertical accountability (that is, accountability to voters) and competition. Although some contributions

point to accountability-enhancing effects of competition,<sup>51</sup> other scholarship suggests that these two properties of electoral politics exert distinct—even countervailing—pressures on candidates.

Politicians accountable to their constituents ‘act with an eye to future voter approval or sanction’.<sup>52</sup> Since ‘voters can and do rationally use political performance information to inform voting decisions’,<sup>53</sup> constituent assessment of incumbent officeholders’ performance reflects their ability to accommodate demands for goods provision,<sup>54</sup> especially in settings where the salience of programmatic differences between election candidates is low.<sup>55</sup> Electoral accountability can thus encourage provision of government services,<sup>56</sup> ‘incentivizing democratic leaders to build a competent bureaucratic apparatus for delivering such services’.<sup>57</sup> While accountability limits the autonomy of such apparatuses across government levels, elected leaders of decentralized administrative units may be especially susceptible to voter pressure.<sup>58</sup> Kenyan governors’ vulnerability to constituent disaffection attests to the strength of this effect, attributable to the leadership of indigenous elites embedded in local societies<sup>59</sup> and the relative facility of sanctioning poor performers in smaller administrative units.<sup>60</sup>

Electoral competition incentivizes the adoption of much more diverse strategies.<sup>61</sup> In different settings, it has contributed to improved<sup>62</sup> or reduced access to public goods,<sup>63</sup> increased government efficiency<sup>64</sup> or disincentivized investments in state capacity,<sup>65</sup> and encouraged the adoption of programmatic policy platforms<sup>66</sup> or reliance on patronage.<sup>67</sup> The variability of these outcomes suggests that other factors condition politician responses to competition. In particular, scholars have examined the effects of incumbents’ security of tenure,<sup>68</sup> their dependence on co-partisans,<sup>69</sup> and the intensity of threats posed by electoral challengers.<sup>70</sup> These distinct drivers of incumbent behavior all point to the importance of political leaders’ electoral vulnerability and its



effect on their time horizons: ‘When a politician faces a more competitive election, the short-term electoral advantage they gain from giving key voters access to [particularistic goods] outweighs the long-term support’ elicited through public goods provision.<sup>71</sup>

Accountable to their electorates, such leaders remain susceptible to constituent demands for goods provision, but the threat that electoral opponents pose to their political survival incentivizes the distribution of government resources in the form of particularistic goods, channelled through patronage networks,<sup>72</sup> rather than public services.<sup>73</sup> Reliance on patronage has far-reaching state-building consequences: ‘The funds that parties use to pay off clients must come from somewhere, obliging politicians to shift state resources away from public goods’.<sup>74</sup>

To satisfy constituents, accountable incumbents can thus either expand public service delivery, which requires investment in state capacity, or forego such investment and instead distribute particularistic goods through clientelist networks. I explain the adoption of these contrasting political strategies in the next section of the article.

### **Electoral contestation and local government capacity and performance**

My argument elaborates on the connections between electoral pressure, goods provision, and state capacity suggested by existing scholarship. The explanation of the capacity and performance of new local governments that I advance in the article emphasizes the importance of their vertically accountable elected leaders’ strategic responses to the severity of the threats to incumbent survival posed by electoral rivals, which incentivizes (but does not compel) the selection of either state-building or clientelist pathways. This argument therefore distinguishes the effects of electoral accountability from those of electoral competition and applies to settings where recur-

rent elections determine the leadership of decentralized government units and control over their budgets. I also focus on the executive branches of local administrations with low capacity at the time of their creation and in areas lacking preexisting political cleavages.

The leaders of such administrations can accommodate the demands of the constituents to whom they owe their positions through the provision of either public or particularistic goods. Government service delivery requires the construction of capable administrative apparatuses, a costly endeavour that consumes considerable resources, effort, and time that local leaders can alternatively expend on direct outreach to constituents, including the distribution of particularistic goods, which can be channelled to the supporters essential for election victory—and in proportion to their political importance—through weakly institutionalized patronage networks and, therefore, do not necessitate comparable investments in organizational capacity.

State-building poses an especially daunting challenge where decentralization reforms produce administrative units with extensive responsibilities but no history of autonomous governance. In Kenya, the 2010 constitution charged county governments with provision of a range of important services—including early childhood and vocational education, healthcare, and construction and maintenance of transport infrastructure—as well as management of the substantial funds allocated for this purpose. The pre-devolution district administrations, especially weak in the north of the country, lacked the capacity to perform these functions. To fulfill their formal obligations, the first governors needed to devote much of their attention, and the resources they controlled, to investment in the infrastructural power of county governments.

The viability and attractiveness of such prioritization of state-building depends on prevailing political conditions. Only local leaders with relatively long time horizons and few other

claims on their time, attention, and the funds at their disposal can bear the high cost of investment in state capacity. The requisite effort also offers little benefit even to such incumbents if they can accommodate constituent pressure through substitution of patronage for public goods provision. Conversely, constraints on distribution of particularistic goods to constituents incentivize state-building. In settings such as Turkana and West Pokot, the lack of well-defined economic, ethnic, partisan, and similar societal divisions hinders politicians' efforts to distinguish the voters whose support they require from the rest of the electorate.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, incumbent local leaders cannot readily divert government resources directly to constituents.<sup>76</sup> Such conditions encourage dispersement of government resources in the form of public goods and, therefore, investment in requisite administrative capacity.

Fierce electoral contestation that threatens incumbent political survival—whether because of officeholders' underperformance or their rivals' acumen, connections, popularity, and/or wealth<sup>77</sup>—removes the incentives and opportunities to follow the state-building pathway. The prospect of electoral loss diverts local leaders' attention to campaign activities and other efforts to secure their positions; early emergence of formidable opposition in particular deters them from initiating investments in state capacity. Viable challenges also encourage voters to sort themselves into rival electoral blocs. Such sorting allows local leaders to identify and channel government resources directly to constituents. In these conditions, incumbents derive no political advantage from expansion of public service delivery and attendant construction of capable administrative apparatuses, which they can substitute with the distribution of patronage to clients. Intense electoral rivalry not only produces the political cleavages that enable particularistic goods provision, but also incentivizes reliance on patronage because it elevates the importance of

voters who are either unaligned or willing to defect and of powerbrokers able to deliver additional votes, especially where supporters express preferences for particularistic goods. In close contests material inducements offered to such individuals can alter election results.<sup>78</sup> The cost of patronage prompts diversion of the public funds needed for government operations to clientelist networks, further compromising local administrations' ability to provide services.

The threats to the political survival of vertically accountable elected leaders of new decentralized administrative units posed by electoral challengers thus incentivize the adoption of the political strategies responsible for local government capacity and performance. Depending on the intensity of electoral contestation, incumbents can address constituent demands and enhance reelection prospects through either investment in state capacity and service delivery or substitution of distribution of patronage through clientelist networks for the challenge of state-building. To examine this claim, illustrated in Table 1, I make use of the research design and data I introduce in the next section.

### **Research design and methods**

My empirical investigation of the validity of the argument advanced in this article relies on a most similar systems design that leverages the features of Turkana and West Pokot's political environments between 2013 and 2017. I pair this design with narratives of the two counties' post-devolution political development, which allow me to trace the causal connections between prevailing electoral conditions and local government capacity and performance.

The Pokot and Turkana people occupy neighbouring territories in Kenya's northern drylands. Most members of both ethnic communities have historically relied on pastoral livelihoods,

challenged in recent decades by climate change and the commodification and politicization of cattle raiding, previously used to replenish stocks lost to disease and drought and authorized by customary leaders, who continued to perform most governance functions in the area long after its nominal integration into the Kenyan state in the early twentieth century; despite the brutality of conquest, successive colonial and postcolonial governments had little interest in projecting their authority in the remote Pokot and Turkana territories. Although over time local agents of powerful Kenyan politicians began to acquire some influence—as that of customary leaders gradually waned—any consequent improvements in public service provision were negligible. The shared experiences of poverty and marginalization contributed to the cohesion of the Pokot and Turkana societies, reinforced by the salience of their ethnic identities, defined largely in terms of animosity towards ethnic adversaries located outside the borders of the two future counties, both of them largely monoethnic.<sup>79</sup> These experiences also fuelled a sense of alienation from the Kenyan state, at times expressed through support for election candidates from political parties in opposition to those in power in Nairobi; in particular, the winners of Turkana and West Pokot gubernatorial contests in both 2013 and 2017 represented opposition parties. Although they would put them to very different uses, upon their election in 2013 Kachapin and Nanok assumed identical formal authority—the result of the exogenous shock of Kenya’s constitutional reforms<sup>80</sup>—as well as control over large and broadly comparable county government budgets that dwarfed previous government spending in the area.<sup>81</sup> The two governors needed those funds to accommodate the demands of their constituents, who had regularly demonstrated their willingness to hold poor-performing representatives to account.<sup>82</sup>

The ‘logic of correlation’<sup>83</sup> that underpins most similar systems designs makes it possible to hold the many commonalities between Turkana and West Pokot constant and attribute the cross-county variation in county government capacity and performance to covariant properties of local political environments. Except for gubernatorial vulnerability to electoral challengers only its antecedent variables—such as Kachapin, Nanok, and their respective rivals’ experiences, skills, connections with local and national elites, financial bases, and other individual characteristics, which differed markedly and collectively help to account for the correspondingly varied intensity of electoral contestation in Turkana and West Pokot—appear to covary with governance quality, although the existence of unidentified covariates cannot be conclusively ruled out in an observational study. While my research design does not allow me to disaggregate these antecedent variables’ effects, the values of the independent variable for which they are responsible enable explanation of the covariant dependent variable. Identification of this association is indicative of, but does not establish, causation. Accordingly, I complement this analytical strategy with narratives of Turkana and West Pokot’s political development that facilitate identification of the mechanisms linking the independent and dependent variables and, therefore, permit fuller explanation of the causal connections between them. Because it minimizes the problem of causal heterogeneity, a paired comparison is especially well suited for this purpose.<sup>84</sup>

The findings presented in the article are the product of analysis of county and national government documents, news media articles, and interviews with Turkana and West Pokot parliamentarians, MCAs, high-ranking government officials, customary leaders, and other well-informed individuals. I rely on multiple respondents and/or sources to corroborate my claims in order to minimize the risk of bias resulting from potential misrepresentation of the empirical

reality by interviewees and source authors. In accordance with the data protection requirements of the study's institutional review board approval,<sup>85</sup> I only disclose non-identifying respondent characteristics. To further reduce the risk of respondent identification, I also limit the use of direct quotations to statements attributable to multiple individuals. Moreover, the claims I reproduce are, especially given the passage of time, unlikely to arise much controversy in Turkana and West Pokot, neither of which has experienced intra-county political violence that could give rise to concerns about respondents' physical safety. Supplementary material contains the data, derived from Kenya's Office of the Controller of Budget and Office of the Auditor-General documents, and R script used to create the plots that I present later in the article, following my discussion of electoral conditions and gubernatorial strategies in the next section.

### **Electoral contestation in Turkana and West Pokot**

The inaugural governors of Turkana and West Pokot both had their work cut out for them when they assumed office in 2013. Elected by, and accountable to, voters long deprived of access to the Kenyan government's resources, Kachapin and Nanok knew they needed to satisfy the demands of their constituents even as they set out to establish administrative apparatuses capable of managing the substantial county budgets and performing the many devolved functions. As Kachapin has noted: 'Our people, like many Kenyans, are quite enlightened and they demand what is theirs. They know their rights unlike before [and] are keen to monitor what the county is doing and how their resources are being used'.<sup>86</sup> In most respects, the two governors confronted political pressures as similar as their counties. The new leaders' standing in relation to other in-

fluent political figures differed, however, markedly, setting the stage for subsequent divergence in the trajectories of Turkana and West Pokot's political development.

Josphat Nanok was already an established political figure on the eve of devolution. As the member of parliament (MP) for Turkana South and deputy minister in the national government, he had built substantial popular following as well as relationships with other Turkana political players and with the leaders of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), at that time Kenya's main opposition alliance. He also readily recognized the value of the gubernatorial office. Ahead of the 2013 elections, Nanok allied himself with John Kiyonga Munyes, then a fellow MP (for Turkana North), who believed that the formal oversight responsibilities of the new Senate, also created by the 2010 constitution, would allow its members to control county governments. Following their election victory, Munyes filled Turkana's senatorial seat, while Nanok assumed the gubernatorial office.

Simon Kachapin had no comparable experience, prominence, or connections. A high school principal, he owed his rise to power to the patronage of John Krop Lonyangapuo, a former university administrator and lecturer turned civil servant—he is universally known as 'Professor' in West Pokot—who, after an unsuccessful parliamentary bid in 2007, had skillfully leveraged his relationship with former president Daniel arap Moi's powerful family to build a large power base.<sup>87</sup> Like Munyes, Lonyangapuo chose to contest the senatorial seat and entrusted the task of running the new county government on his behalf to his client Kachapin. Thanks to Professor's charisma, personal popularity, political skill, and connections, the two candidates won the elections, in which they ran on the ticket of the Kenya African National Union (KANU).<sup>88</sup>



Lonyangapuo and Munyes had miscalculated. Like their counterparts throughout the country,<sup>89</sup> the Turkana and West Pokot governors quickly established control over the county administrations. Nanok in particular took advantage of his constitutional powers and sidelined erstwhile allies soon after the elections. Kachapin complied with his patron's directives for a few months, but, having 'piggybacked on Lonyangapuo,' as a West Pokot MCA puts it, he too 'realized that the governor had powers, that he could employ people without consulting [Lonyangapuo]. So, they parted ways.'<sup>90</sup> Another MCA relates:

The governor felt that there were a lot of privileges to be had over the senator. [...] The governor, after amassing power, feared that he would not enjoy the privileges if he shared with others. He wanted to be the sole decision maker. He didn't want to share power with anyone, including with the senator.<sup>91</sup>

Concentration of power in gubernatorial hands generated considerable resentment among parliamentarians, MCAs, and other powerbrokers. Unable to influence county government operations and access devolved funds, disaffected politicians set out to challenge Kachapin and Nanok in the 2017 elections. The two governors' vulnerability to these challenges varied in line with their political standing.

In Turkana, Nanok's opponents coalesced around Senator Munyes, their 2017 gubernatorial candidate, and joined President Uhuru Kenyatta and Deputy President William Ruto's Jubilee Party. The challengers' decision to align themselves with the national government, which their constituents—particularly wary of attempts to rob them of the county's recently discovered oil wealth—regarded with suspicion, backfired. When President Kenyatta vetoed the Petroleum (Exploration, Development and Production) Bill and returned it to parliament with a stipulation

that the Turkana local communities' share of revenue be reduced from 10 to 5 percent, Nanok's response was swift. Positioning himself as the defender of Turkana interests, endangered by the national government and its local allies, the governor vowed to stop petroleum exploration in the county and called for an increase of the Turkana share of oil rents to 30 percent. Already elevated by this proposal, Nanok's popularity throughout the county further increased after Kenyatta's well-publicized outburst, when the agitated president called the Turkana governor 'a fool and a devil'.<sup>92</sup>

Weakened by the association with Jubilee, Munyes and his allies tried to improve their election prospects by stoking both interethnic and intra-Turkana tensions. While the incitement of interethnic enmity, including towards the Pokot, proved somewhat efficacious, analogous efforts to divide the cohesive Turkana society—most prominently, the Turkana South MP James Lomenen's campaign for a larger share of petroleum extraction rents to the inhabitants of his constituency, the location of the oil-rich Lokichar Basin—had little effect. A Turkana MP's complaint illustrates the oppositionists' predicament: 'The governor has become entrenched. He has used his position. It will be difficult to remove him. But we shall prevail'.<sup>93</sup>

Not all of the MP's colleagues shared his optimism. With the success of their challenge to Nanok in question, some dropped their opposition. Another parliamentarian describes his position thusly:

Members of parliament are fighting the governor. The governor is not involving them. [...] It is a difficult relationship between me and the governor. But as MPs we're divided, because some want to work with those who are elected, and some say we need to have a new governor. So, I stand for compromise. He is my governor. He was elected. I work with him.<sup>94</sup>

Outmaneuvered by Nanok, unable to build a distinct electoral bloc, and internally divided, his competitors did not seriously threaten the governor's hold on power.<sup>95</sup>

Kachapin, who took office with little independent support, faced much stronger opposition from Lonyangapuo and his many clients and allies. To reduce his vulnerability to the pressure they exerted, the West Pokot governor set out to build his own power base, a task complicated by the county population's internal cohesion. 'This county is one tribe', notes a pro-Lonyangapuo MCA. 'You cannot be against your own tribe. [...] If we had different tribes, it would be different'.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the two politicians' rivalry set the stage for the emergence of internal divisions conducive to constituent identification.

In preparation for the 2017 elections, Kachapin and Lonyangapuo formed alliances with other local political agents, especially those who commanded their own popular following. To this end, the governor made common cause with non-KANU MCAs, the four West Pokot MPs representing Deputy President Ruto's United Republican Party (URP), and Samuel Moroto, the KANU MP for Kacheliba. He also secured the national government's support. When Ruto integrated the URP into the Jubilee Party, Kachapin was appointed the ruling party's gubernatorial candidate in West Pokot.<sup>97</sup> Lonyangapuo's patronage network included, meanwhile, the KANU MCAs; Samuel Losuron Poghisio, the 2013 ODM senatorial candidate, joined KANU in exchange for the promise of the Senate seat that Professor would vacate to vie for the gubernatorial office.<sup>98</sup> Kachapin and Lonyangapuo also integrated different sections of Pokot elders into their electoral blocs.<sup>99</sup> According to a Pokot MP, 'they made deals, divide-and-rule, and they divided

people and made two parties, two factions, so you are either with the governor or against him, with Professor or against him'.<sup>100</sup>

Such alliance-making required material inducements. Kachapin allegedly funded his expenses largely with county government funds.<sup>101</sup> A former mayor of Kapenguria, West Pokot's county town, claims that 'the governor has treated the county like his own property'.<sup>102</sup> In one interviewee's hyperbolic assessment, 'three-quarters [of the county government budget] have been used to benefit individuals, not the community'.<sup>103</sup> A month before the 2017 elections, in what a member of the Senate's anti-corruption committee has described as 'a clear case of blatant theft of public resources', Kachapin's administration made an unexplained withdrawal of 112 million shillings (\$1.1 million) from county accounts.<sup>104</sup> Allegations of corruption in the West Pokot county government were rife.<sup>105</sup> In addition to enriching himself, Kachapin reportedly redirected substantial amounts of money to clients, a choice encouraged by Lonyangapuo's willingness to leverage both his own wealth and access to Moi family funds to encourage defections from the governor's electoral bloc.<sup>106</sup>

Nanok also faced allegations of corruption. He reportedly channelled county government resources to supporters, primarily from Turkana East,<sup>107</sup> who have been linked to several corruption cases.<sup>108</sup> The scale of misappropriation was, however, much smaller than in West Pokot. While the intense rivalry between Kachapin and Lonyangapuo created political cleavages that facilitated the distribution of patronage demanded by their respective constituents, Nanok confronted a very different electoral landscape. The Turkana oppositionists' failure to mount a significant electoral challenge and divide the electorate limited his ability to identify constituents and expand the small patronage network he had built as an MP beyond Turkana East. Nanok also had

little need to ally himself with Turkana powerbrokers, but nonetheless remained vulnerable to constituent demands for access to government resources, which he could not easily channel to voters willing to support his reelection bid. According to another MP, ‘this is the challenge he has: all voters are Turkana, same tribe, so he has to benefit all Turkana. He cannot give only to some; he will be defeated’.<sup>109</sup> Unable to effectively channel patronage, Nanok chose to provide public goods to all Turkana. The MP’s colleague adds:

You see now, one of the advantages of the county government in Turkana is that they distribute everything equally, to six [parliamentary] constituencies. [...] So, even those who are against the county government, their people still get the same services. Because the governor is not of one constituency, he’s for the whole county. So, he cannot favour one place, but he distributes development equally.<sup>110</sup>

The need for such equitable distribution of public goods had considerable repercussions, as did Kachapin’s decision to prioritize provision of patronage. I discuss these consequences in the next section.

### **County government capacity and performance in Turkana and West Pokot**

The varying severity of the threats that electoral rivals posed to Kachapin and Nanok’s political survival incentivized the governors to adopt contrasting strategies of goods provision. These strategic choices encouraged correspondingly variable investment in the capacity and performance of the Turkana and West Pokot county governments.

In order to deliver extensive public services throughout Turkana’s massive territory, Nanok needed to construct a capable administrative apparatus. This was no easy task: in the 2013–

2014 financial year (FY) the newly created county government could only absorb 41.9 percent of its budget; its absorption capacity was at the time the second lowest in Kenya. Given Nanok's dominant political position in Turkana, he could, however, devote the attention, effort, time, and resources that Kachapin needed to expend on containing the threat posed by Lonyangapuo to the expansion of the infrastructural power of his county government. The apportionment of county funds in particular casts light on the Turkana governor's strategy. Nanok prioritized new spending initiatives needed to recruit qualified administrators, build office buildings, purchase vehicles and office equipment, and provide public services. As of the 2016–2017 FY Turkana had allotted a higher proportion of its budget to such new spending—denoted as development expenditure—than all but one other Kenyan county.<sup>111</sup> The 64.3 percent of the Turkana budget allocated for this purpose between 2013 and 2017 significantly exceeded the national average of 41.2 percent (Plot 1). Nanok used these funds to build a remarkably well-functioning administrative apparatus.<sup>112</sup> By the 2016–2017 FY, the Turkana county government's absorption capacity had nearly doubled, reaching 77.9 percent. The rate of improvement was the fastest of all Kenyan counties, which on average had only improved their absorption capacity by 14.1 percent in this period, compared to Turkana's 36 percent (Plot 2). The county government also projected its infrastructural power through sub-county and ward administrations it established throughout Turkana, helping Nanok to communicate with the population, gauge public mood, address grievances, deliver services, and, thereby, satisfy constituent demands.<sup>113</sup>

This administrative apparatus allowed the governor to effect the largest and most rapid expansion of public service provision in Turkana's history. In 2013, there were approximately 650 early childhood education (ECD) centres in Turkana; by 2018, the county government had

constructed 180 more. It also recruited 268 ECD teachers. Although post-ECD education is the national government's responsibility, the county administration built sixty-two primary school classrooms, hired (and paid the salaries of) 165 primary and thirty-nine secondary school teachers, and covered operation costs for the underfunded (national-government) county director of education's office. Moreover, Nanok's administration took over the only polytechnic in Turkana from the Catholic Diocese of Lodwar and built six new ones.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, the Diocese transferred responsibility for the Kakuma Mission Hospital to the county government, which also spent 190 million shillings (\$1.8 million) on new equipment for the existing public Lodwar Hospital<sup>115</sup> in addition to constructing four new sub-county hospitals and 120 health centres.<sup>116</sup> The number of public medicine dispensaries increased from 71 in 2012 to 131 in 2015.<sup>117</sup> Nanok's staff also dug boreholes—in 2015, there were 606 boreholes in Turkana, 105 more than two years earlier—and supported the pastoral economy through provision of extension services, animal vaccination campaigns, and construction of a multiplication and breeding centre, livestock holding grounds, and sale yards.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, as of early 2018 the county government had graded 13,300 kilometres and gravelled 3,435 kilometres of roads.<sup>119</sup>

The capacity and performance of Turkana's devolved government contrast with those of the administrative apparatus built by Kachapin. The West Pokot governor also established ministries and other county government bodies, including sub-county and ward administrations, and employed officials, but within months of the 2013 elections began to prioritize the development of his patronage network, especially as the feud with Lonyangapuo prevented him from devoting sufficient attention to organizational matters, and, at times, directly interfered with county government operations.<sup>120</sup> As a result, the West Pokot county government's absorption capacity only

increased 11.8 percent from 2013 to 2017 (Plot 2); remarkably, its capacity to absorb recurrent expenditures—that is, expenditures not devoted to new initiatives, to which Kachapin’s administration only allocated 41.3 percent of the county budget (Plot 1)—declined in this period. (In Turkana, it increased by 56 percent, more than anywhere else in Kenya.)

Low government capacity translated into relatively limited and poor-quality public service provision in West Pokot. Road construction in the county, where by 2016 Kachapin’s administration had built only 1,250 kilometres of roads, lagged behind Turkana.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, the West Pokot county government built twenty-four new health centres, a fifth of those constructed in Turkana. Unlike Nanok, Kachapin did not build any new hospitals, although he upgraded the Kapenguria County Referral Hospital.<sup>122</sup> The number of new ECD centres in West Pokot, sixty, was a third of those in Turkana.<sup>123</sup> Kachapin’s administration also dug boreholes—thirty-four of them in the 2015–2016 FY alone (compared to 105 drilled in Turkana between 2013 and 2015)—and provided extension services, led animal vaccination campaigns, and constructed sale yards to support the pastoral economy.<sup>124</sup> Overall, however, both the extensiveness and quality of public services provided by the West Pokot county government, which also did not take on any national government functions, trailed Turkana.

Diversion of government funds to Kachapin’s patronage network proved insufficient to contain the electoral threat posed by Lonyangapuo, who won the 2017 gubernatorial elections. This result underscores the intensity of electoral contestation in West Pokot, but it does not negate the benefits that Kachapin derived from his decision to substitute clientelism for state-building. Within just a few years, the former school principal established a power base that allowed him to stand toe to toe with the experienced and well-connected Lonyangapuo, whom he would



in fact go on to defeat in the 2022 gubernatorial contest. Kachapin's political success did, however, come at the cost of state capacity and public service provision in West Pokot. In contrast, the weakness of the electoral challenge to Nanok's political dominance in Turkana enabled and encouraged him to prioritize state-building as well as defeat Munyes and secure a second and final term in office.

## **Conclusion**

Between 2013 and 2017 the Turkana and West Pokot governors established the administrative apparatuses responsible for the wide range of functions that Kenya's 2010 constitution devolved to the new county governments. Nanok devoted substantial effort, time, and resources to the construction of capable government bodies that he used to enact the largest and swiftest expansion of public service provision that Turkana has ever experienced. In contrast, Kachapin only made minimal investment in state capacity and public goods provision; instead, the West Pokot governor diverted county funds meant to pay for government operations and services to his clients. This cross-county variation in local government capacity and performance belies Turkana and West Pokot's similar ethnic demography, physical environment, historical governance and livelihood practices, and contemporary economic conditions as well as their shared experience of government neglect followed by the election of opposition candidates, both equally accountable to constituents, to the powerful gubernatorial positions. These many commonalities, which offer an opportunity to control for several potential predictors of governance quality, contrast with Kachapin and Nanok's vulnerability to electoral challenges in the 2017 elections.

The weakness of the opposition to Nanok's reelection bid freed the Turkana leader to prioritize his state-building obligations; it also impeded his ability to identify and, therefore, channel particularistic goods to constituents, providing a powerful impetus for investment in the administrative apparatus needed to deliver government services throughout Turkana. The West Pokot governor had to contend with a much more formidable electoral challenge, which incentivized him to substitute clientelism for state-building. Fierce electoral contestation diverted Kachapin's attention away from his formal responsibilities even as the consequent emergence of rival political blocs in the otherwise cohesive county electorate helped and encouraged him to accommodate the demands of his constituents through distribution of patronage.

Evidence from Turkana and West Pokot draws attention to the electoral drivers of local political development, helps to disaggregate the effects of electoral accountability and competition, and evinces the substitutive relationship of clientelism and state-building. Vertically accountable elected leaders of new decentralized government units such as Kenyan counties need to accommodate popular demands for resource access, which they can provide through the distribution of either public or particularistic goods, if they wish to serve more than one term in office. In settings with weak political cleavages and low state capacity at the time of decentralization the viability and attractiveness of the two modalities of goods provision depends on the severity of the threats that electoral rivals pose to incumbents' political survival: weak electoral challenges both encourage and—because they allow local leaders to bear the high cost of state-building—enable public goods provision, while fierce electoral contestation prompts diversion of government resources to clients, at the cost of underinvestment in state capacity and service delivery.

Identification of these two distinct pathways makes it possible to locate the sources of the capacity and performance of newly established decentralized governments—and, conversely, of the political value, and prevalence, of clientelism—in their leaders’ adaptations to local electoral environments. Incumbent strategy choices may change along with electoral conditions, which potentially also generate different incentives at later stages of local political development. These possibilities suggest intriguing opportunities for future research, as does investigation of the state-building effects of local electoral politics in settings where other scope conditions of my argument do not apply, including those where officeholders have subverted accountability mechanisms and face few threats to political survival. Such effects also point to the importance of, and need for further scholarly inquiry into, antecedent conditions responsible for the properties of electoral environments and other contemporary local drivers of state-building. In particular, as developments in Turkana and West Pokot indicate, these local factors mediate the impacts of decentralization initiatives such as Kenya’s devolution. Accordingly, the article sheds new light on the causal connections—which also merit further research—linking countrywide political processes, local political conditions, and state-building.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in the *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, available online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2024.2359150/>.

<sup>2</sup> Boone, *Political Topographies*; Miguel and Gugerty, “Ethnic Diversity”; Wilfahrt, “Precolonial Legacies and Institutional Congruence.”

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Greiner, “Guns, Land, and Votes”; Lind, “Devolution”; Shanguhya, “Insecure Borderlands.”

<sup>4</sup> Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis, “Decentralisation in Kenya”; Cornell and D’Arcy, “Plus Ça change?”; Elfversson and Sjögren, “Do Local Power-sharing Deals?”; Waddilove, “Support or Subvert?”

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Gadjanova, “Traacherous Coattails”; Waddilove, “Support or Subvert?”

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. Driscoll, “Why Political Competition Can Increase Patronage”; Gjerløw et al., *One Road to Riches?*; Grossman and Slough, “Development Responsiveness in Developing Countries”; Sanford, “Democratization, Elections, and Public Goods”; Wilfahrt, “Citizen Response to Local Service Provision.”

<sup>7</sup> Nathan, “Does Participation Reinforce Patronage?”

<sup>8</sup> Burbidge, “Transition to Subnational Democracy”; Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis, “Decentralisation in Kenya.”

<sup>9</sup> CRA, “Total Allocations to County Governments.”

<sup>10</sup> Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis, “Decentralization in Kenya.”

<sup>11</sup> Burbidge, “Transition to Subnational Democracy.”

<sup>12</sup> Gadjanova, “Treacherous Coattails”; Waddilove, “Support or Subvert?”

<sup>13</sup> Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis, “Kenya’s 2017 Elections”, 224.

<sup>14</sup> Bennett, “Delivering on the Promise of Peace?”

<sup>15</sup> Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis, “Kenya’s 2017 Elections”, 224; D’Arcy and Cornell, “Devolution and Corruption.”

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> D’Arcy and Cornell, “Devolution and Corruption.”

<sup>18</sup> Achiba and Lengoiboni, “Devolution.”

<sup>19</sup> Czuba, “Political Mobilization”; D’Arcy and Nistotskaya, “Intensified Local Grievances.”

<sup>20</sup> Elfversson and Sjögren, “Do Local Power-sharing Deals?”

<sup>21</sup> Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis, “Decentralisation in Kenya”; Cornell and D’Arcy, “Plus Ça change?”; Elfversson and Sjögren, “Do Local Power-sharing Deals?”; Waddilove, “Support or Subvert?”

<sup>22</sup> Miguel and Gugerty, “Ethnic Diversity.”

<sup>23</sup> Wilfahrt, “Precolonial Legacies and Institutional Congruence.”

<sup>24</sup> Boone, *Political Topographies*; Miguel and Gugerty, “Ethnic Diversity.”

<sup>25</sup> Lind, “Devolution”; Shanguhya, “Insecure Borderlands.”

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Schilling et al., “For Better or Worse.”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Mkutu et al., “New Oil Developments.”

<sup>30</sup> Greiner, “Land-use Change.”

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- <sup>31</sup> Eaton, ‘Revenge, Ethnicity and Cattle Raiding.’
- <sup>32</sup> Greiner, ‘Guns, Land, and Votes.’
- <sup>33</sup> Lind, ‘Devolution.’
- <sup>34</sup> Orr, ‘Renegotiating the Periphery.’
- <sup>35</sup> Greiner, ‘Land-use Change.’
- <sup>36</sup> Orr, ‘Renegotiating the Periphery.’
- <sup>37</sup> Tilly, ‘War making.’
- <sup>38</sup> Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue*; North and Weingast, ‘Constitutions and Commitment.’
- <sup>39</sup> North and Weingast, ‘Constitutions and Commitment’, 806.
- <sup>40</sup> Garfias, ‘Elite Competition.’
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue*; North and Weingast, ‘Constitutions and Commitment.’
- <sup>43</sup> Mann, ‘The Autonomous Power of the State.’
- <sup>44</sup> Acemoglu, ‘Politics and Economics.’
- <sup>45</sup> Mann, ‘The Autonomous Power of the State.’
- <sup>46</sup> Slater, ‘Can Leviathan Be Democratic?’
- <sup>47</sup> Acemoglu, ‘Politics and Economics.’
- <sup>48</sup> Slater, ‘Can Leviathan Be Democratic?’, 253.
- <sup>49</sup> Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue*; North and Weingast, ‘Constitutions and Commitment’; Slater, ‘Can Leviathan Be Democratic?’
- <sup>50</sup> Geddes, *Politician’s Dilemma*, 41.
- <sup>51</sup> Ashworth, ‘Electoral Accountability,’ 183; Zimbalist, ‘How Electoral Competition Shapes Local Public Goods Provision.’
- <sup>52</sup> Wilfahrt, ‘Citizen Response.’
- <sup>53</sup> Grossman and Slough, ‘Government Responsiveness’, 137.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- <sup>55</sup> Bleck and van de Walle, ‘Valence Issues.’
- <sup>56</sup> Gjerløw et al., *One Road to Riches?*; Harding, ‘Attribution and Accountability’; Wilfahrt, ‘Citizen Response.’
- <sup>57</sup> Gjerløw et al., *One Road to Riches?*, p. 19; also Acemoglu, ‘Politics and Economics.’
- <sup>58</sup> Faguet, ‘Decentralization and Governance’, 5.

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<sup>59</sup> Foa, “Decentralization.”

<sup>60</sup> Miguel and Gugerty, “Ethnic Diversity”.

<sup>61</sup> Harding and Stasavage, “What Democracy Does”, 244.

<sup>62</sup> Harding and Stasavage, “What Democracy Does”; Zimbalist, “How Electoral Competition Shapes Local Public Goods Provision.”

<sup>63</sup> Gottlieb and Kosec, “The Countervailing Effects”.

<sup>64</sup> Ashworth et al., “Competition in the Political Arena.”

<sup>65</sup> Fergusson, “Political Competition”, 2815.

<sup>66</sup> Dyzenhaus, “Patronage or Policy?”

<sup>67</sup> Driscoll, “Why Political Competition Can Increase Patronage.”

<sup>68</sup> Dyzenhaus, “Patronage or Policy?”; North and Weingast, “Constitutions and Commitment”, 807; Sanford, “Democratization.”

<sup>69</sup> Geddes, *Politician’s Dilemma*.

<sup>70</sup> Driscoll, “Why Political Competition Can Increase Patronage”; Geddes, *Politician’s Dilemma*.

<sup>71</sup> Sanford, “Democratization”, 149.

<sup>72</sup> D’Arcy and Cornell, “Devolution and Corruption.”

<sup>73</sup> D’Arcy and Cornell, “Devolution and Corruption”; Nathan, “Does Participation Reinforce Patronage?”; Weitz-Shapiro, “What Wins Votes.”

<sup>74</sup> Corstange, “Clientelism”, 23.

<sup>75</sup> In contrast, the existence of such divisions facilitates and encourages the distribution of patronage to constituents, whom Kenyan politicians commonly identify on the basis of shared ethnic identities. Czuba, “Political Mobilization.”

<sup>76</sup> In other settings, the risk of prosecution may similarly discourage patronage, but Kenya’s weak anti-corruption mechanisms are unlikely to deter election candidates.

<sup>77</sup> The intensity of electoral contestation is thus a function of individual characteristics of politicians as much as of electoral environments.

<sup>78</sup> Driscoll, “Why Political Competition Can Increase Patronage.”

<sup>79</sup> Although the Kenyan government has not made county-level ethnic distribution data publicly available, Turkana and West Pokot’s relative ethnic homogeneity can be inferred from official records. The vast majority of the 778,000 Kenyan Pokot recorded in the 2019 census live in West Pokot (home to 621,000 people) and East Pokot (80,000) in neighbouring Baringo. Turkana County (population 927,000) likewise accounts for most of the 1 million Turkana, small numbers of whom also live in Laikipia and Marsabit.

<sup>80</sup> Since few Turkana and Pokot contributed to constitutional negotiations, the reforms can be thought of as exogenous to the two counties.

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<sup>81</sup> Between 2013 and 2017, the national government transferred to Turkana over 49 billion shillings (\$471 million), or 53,000 shillings per person and 686,000 shillings per km<sup>2</sup> of its area of 71,600 km<sup>2</sup>. For West Pokot, with an area of 8,400 km<sup>2</sup>, the equivalent figures are 28 billion shillings (\$270 million), 29,000 shillings, and 2.1 million shillings. While Nanok had more money to fund the expansion of public service provision to Turkana's larger population, his county's size made it much harder to reach; conversely, West Pokot's more compact size and higher population density facilitated service delivery even if Kachapin's budget was smaller in absolute terms.

<sup>82</sup> Incumbents were reelected in thirteen of Turkana and West Pokot's twenty-nine contests for parliamentary seats held between the first multiparty elections in 1992 and 2013 (excluding new constituencies).

<sup>83</sup> Tarrow, "The Strategy of Paired Comparison."

<sup>84</sup> Caporaso, "Is There a Quantitative-qualitative Divide?"; Tarrow, "The Strategy of Paired Comparison."

<sup>85</sup> University of Toronto SSHEREB Protocol #32509.

<sup>86</sup> *The Star*, "Interview with Simon Kachapin, Governor of West Pokot County: West Pokot Once Marginalised But Now a Model County." May 9, 2016. [https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2016/05/09/west-pokot-once-marginalised-but-now-a-model-county\\_c1313336](https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2016/05/09/west-pokot-once-marginalised-but-now-a-model-county_c1313336).

<sup>87</sup> Interview, KO98, former mayor of Kapenguria, Makutano, September 27, 2016; Interview, KO152, West Pokot MCA, Kapenguria, October 6, 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Lynch, "Electing the Alliance", 101.

<sup>89</sup> Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis, "Decentralisation in Kenya."

<sup>90</sup> Interview, KO152.

<sup>91</sup> Interview, KO149, West Pokot MCA, Makutano/Kapenguria, October 5–6, 2016.

<sup>92</sup> Agutu, Nancy, "Uhuru Calls Nanok a Foolish Devil." *Star*, March 9, 2017. [http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/03/09/uhuru-calls-nanok-a-foolish-devil-for-raising-queries-on-oil\\_c1521372](http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/03/09/uhuru-calls-nanok-a-foolish-devil-for-raising-queries-on-oil_c1521372); Orr, "Renegotiating the Periphery."

<sup>93</sup> Interview, KO9, Turkana MP, Nairobi, March 9, 2016.

<sup>94</sup> Interview, Turkana MP (code withheld to protect the respondent's identity).

<sup>95</sup> Interview, KA12, Turkana professional, Napeikar, April 5, 2016; Interview, KA13, Turkana Catholic priest, Lodwar, April 6–7, 2016; Interview, KO8, Turkana MP, Nairobi, March 7, 2016; Interview, KA21, Turkana development worker, Lodwar, January 9, 2018.

<sup>96</sup> Interview, KO128, senior West Pokot County Government (WPCG) official, Kacheliba, October 3, 2016; Interview, KO149; Interview, KO151, West Pokot MCA, Kapenguria, October 6, 2016; Interview, KO152.

<sup>97</sup> Interview, KO149.

<sup>98</sup> Chai, Marryann, "Poghisio to Run for W Pokot Senator on KANU Ticket." *Star*, September 27, 2016. [http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2016/09/27/poghisio-to-run-for-w-pokot-senator-on-kanu-ticket\\_c1426743/](http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2016/09/27/poghisio-to-run-for-w-pokot-senator-on-kanu-ticket_c1426743/).

<sup>99</sup> Chai, Marryann, "Pokot Elders Split in Choice of Spokesman." *Star*, January 10, 2017. [http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/01/10/pokot-elders-split-in-choice-of-spokesman\\_c1484207/](http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/01/10/pokot-elders-split-in-choice-of-spokesman_c1484207/).

<sup>100</sup> Interview, KO4, Pokot MP, Nairobi, February 23, 2016.

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- <sup>101</sup> *Rift Valley News*, “Clash of the Titans: Kachapin, Lonyangapuo Battle for Political Supremacy.” August 16, 2015. <https://riftvalleynews.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/clash-of-the-titans-kachapin-lonyangapuo-battle-for-political-supremacy/>; Interview, KO149; Interview, KO151.
- <sup>102</sup> Interview, KO98.
- <sup>103</sup> Interview, KO111, Pokot professional, Makutano, September 28, 2016.
- <sup>104</sup> Otieno, Rawlings, “County Officials Withdrew Sh112million in Cash Before 2017 Elections.” *Standard*, May 31, 2019. <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/work-life/article/2001327884/ex-governor-faces-probe-on-2017-cash-pull-outs>.
- <sup>105</sup> Interview, KO98; Interview, KO112, Pokot former local authority councillor, Makutano, September 29, 2016; Interview, KO113, Pokot human rights activist, Makutano, September 20, 2016; Interview, KO149; Interview, KO151; Interview, KE402, Pokot elder, Kacheliba, October 1, 2016; Chai, Marryann, “Leaders Want Kachapin Prosecuted.” *Star*, July 20, 2017. [https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/07/20/leaders-want-kachapin-prosecuted-for-misusing-west-pokot-resources\\_c1600635/](https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/07/20/leaders-want-kachapin-prosecuted-for-misusing-west-pokot-resources_c1600635/).
- <sup>106</sup> Interview, KO112; Interview, KO149.
- <sup>107</sup> Turkana East was part of Turkana South until the 2013 elections.
- <sup>108</sup> Thuku, Wahome, “Sh14m Graft Probe Against Turkana Governor Still Under Way.” *Standard*, May 26, 2015. <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000163477/sh14m-graft-probe-against-turkana-governor-still-under-way-eacc/>.
- <sup>109</sup> Interview, KO6, Turkana MP, Nairobi, February 26, 2016.
- <sup>110</sup> Interview, KO8.
- <sup>111</sup> *Standard*, “Governors Who Spent Most to Run Offices.” January 7, 2018. <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001265183/governors-who-spent-most-to-run-offices/>.
- <sup>112</sup> Interview, KA9, Catholic priest, Lodwar, April 1, 2016; Interview, KA10, Catholic priest, Lodwar, April 1, 2016; Interview, KA11; Interview, KO8; Interview, KO13, senior Turkana County Government (TCG) official, Lodwar, April 6, 2016; Interview, KO21 senior TCG official, Lodwar, April 7, 2016.
- <sup>113</sup> Interview, KA10; Interview, KA11; Interview, KA13; Interview, KO4; Interview; Interview, KO9.
- <sup>114</sup> Interview, KO28, senior TCG official, Lodwar, April 9, 2016; Interview, KO166, senior TCG official, January 8, 2018.
- <sup>115</sup> *Mediamax*, “Turkana Reaps Devolution Fruits as 90 Clinics are Built.” January 26, 2016. <http://www.mediamaxnetwork.co.ke/people-daily/194669/turkana-reaps-devolution-fruits-as-90-clinics-are-built/>; Interview, KA9.
- <sup>116</sup> Letting, Joan. “Nanok to Face Munyes in Fierce Battle for Governor of Turkana.” *Standard*, April 11, 2017. <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001235867/nanok-to-face-munyes-in-fierce-battle-for-governor-of-turkana>; Interview, KO169, TCG official, Lodwar, January 9, 2018.
- <sup>117</sup> Schilling et al., “For Better or Worse.”
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*; Interview, KO35, senior TCG official, Lodwar, April 8, 2016.
- <sup>119</sup> Letting, “Nanok to Face Munyes”; Interview, KO167, TCG official, January 8, 2018.



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<sup>120</sup> *North Rift News*. “Sacked West Pokot County Ministers Reinstated by Court”. July 14, 2015. <http://northrift-news.com/sacked-west-pokot-county-ministers-reinstated-by-court/>; Interview, KO98.

<sup>121</sup> WPCG, “Annual Report.”

<sup>122</sup> Interview, KO131, WPCG official, Kapenguria, October 4, 2016.

<sup>123</sup> Interview, KO114, senior WPCG official, Kapenguria, September 29, 2016.

<sup>124</sup> WPCG, “Annual Report”; Interview, KO140, senior WPCG official, Kapenguria, October 5, 2016; Interview, KO142, senior WPCG official, Kapenguria, October 5, 2016.

## Disclosure statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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## Figures

Map 1

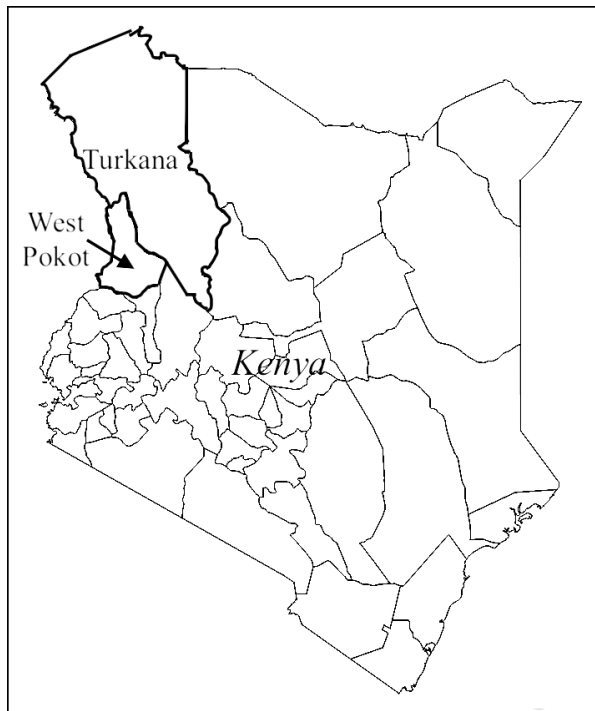
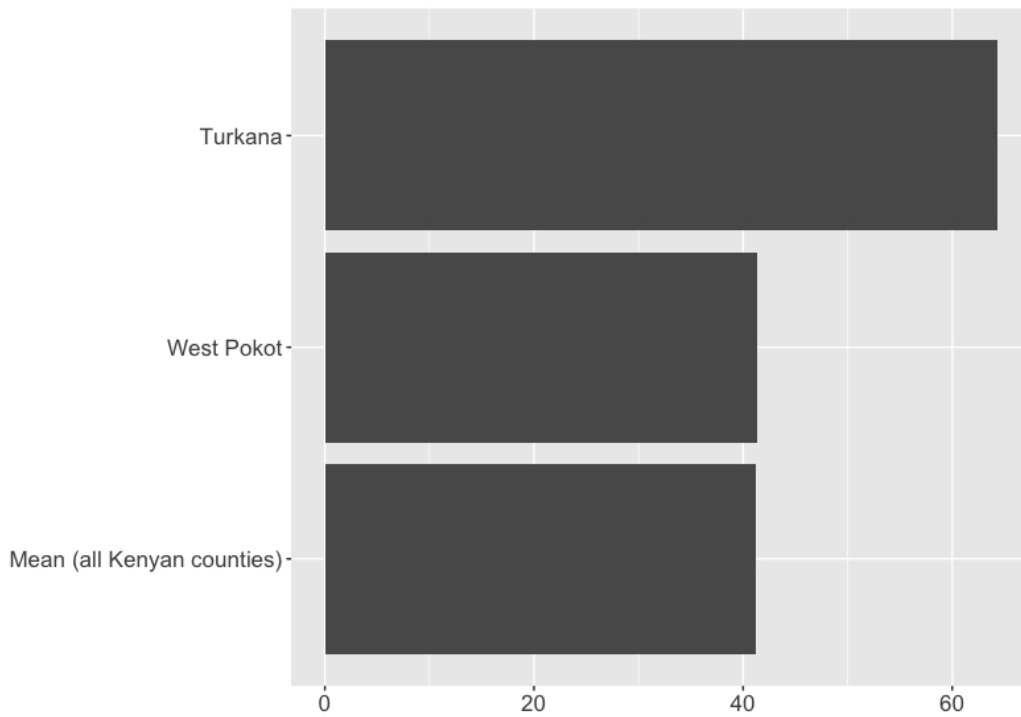


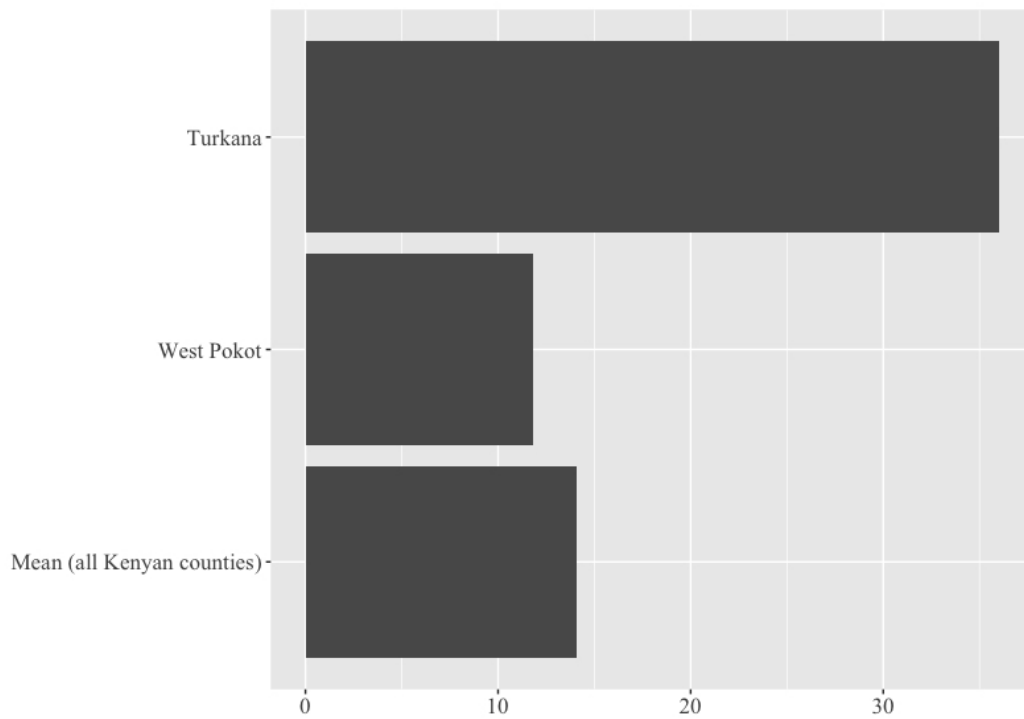
Table 1

State-building pathway	Clientelist pathway
Weak electoral challenges ↓	Electoral challenges threatening incumbent survival ↓
Difficulty of constituent identification (in the absence of preexisting societal cleavages) ↓	Facility of constituent identification + increased importance of clients ↓
Preferability of public goods ↓	Preferability of particularistic goods ↓
Investment in state capacity ↓	Diversion of government resources to clients ↓
Local government capable of delivering public services within its purview	Poor local government capacity and performance

Plot 1



Plot 2



**Figure captions**

Map 1. Turkana and West Pokot

Table 1. Electoral contestation and local government capacity and performance

Plot 1. Average development budget as proportion of overall budget 2013–2017 in percent

Plot 2. Budget absorption change 2013–2017 in percent