Regional Politics in the Time of Devolution

Central: Localised Self-sufficiency

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Abstract
The chapter discusses how devolution has played out in the former Central Province of Kenya, comprising the counties of Kiambu, Kirinyaga, Murang’a, Nyandarua and Nyeri. Devolution was a controversial provision of the Kenyan Constitution and many in central Kenya believed during its early stages that its costs outweighed its benefits. Further, because most voters backed Uhuru Kenyatta for the presidency, there was not the same desire for local self-government as elsewhere in the country. Central Kenya therefore represents the extreme test of the devolution model—if it is to be said to have become a permanent feature of Kenyan political life, it must be embraced there too. Taking this as the challenge, the chapter finds that, somewhat surprisingly, the new local government structure has been strongly endorsed by citizens and politicians of central Kenya due to the culture of localised self-sufficiency that endures within the traditions of the Kikuyu community.

Keywords: Kenya, devolution, decentralization, Kikuyu, Kiambu, Kirinyaga, Murang’a, Nyandarua, Nyeri
There is a proverb in Gikuyu which says: “Wega uumaga na mocie,” that is, the quality of a man is judged by his homestead. [...] The establishment of a homestead gives a man special status in the community; he is referred to as muthuri (an elder), and is considered capable of holding a responsible position in tribal affairs.

—Jomo Kenyatta (1938: 74)

Introduction

Under the 2010 Constitution, provinces were dissolved and their districts renamed as counties, which meant the districts of the former Central Province became the counties of Kiambu, Kirinyaga, Murang’a, Nyandarua and Nyeri. While the grouping of these areas into ‘Central Province’ officially ended, the understanding of a common geographical unit lives on, for these are the Kikuyu heartlands, overwhelming of Kikuyu ethnicity (see Table 47.1). Central Kenya is considered unique as one of the wealthiest areas of the country due to soil fertility, a climate supportive of agriculture, and closer integration with the colonial administration before the country’s independence. The latter afforded opportunities for education, familiarisation with capitalism, and faster political mobilisation in the face of colonialism’s various injustices (Branch, 2011).

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Today, the counties of the former Central Province show mixed feelings about devolution. This evaluation may surprise some readers familiar with Kenya. Many commentators have summarised the region as that part of Kenya most opposed to the Constitution’s devolution provisions. Central is, after all, famed for a close association with a centralised government structure adamantly opposed to the regionalisation and decentralisation
of powers. Kenya’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta, hailed from Kiambu, and opposed the KADU party’s demands for majimbo localisation of state administration, quietly killing constitutional provisions for a regional constitution. His KANU government consolidated de facto one-party rule, and in 1966 scrapped provincial assemblies (see Throup, this volume). Kenya’s third president, Mwai Kibaki, was born in Nyeri and went on to produce the Wako constitutional draft that proposed strong centralised rule through the presidency. The country’s fourth president, Uhuru Kenyatta, was also a Kikuyu. Although he was born in Nairobi, Kenyatta continues the family line and therefore its Kiambu history by association. While he supported the current constitution with its extensive provisions for devolution, Kenyatta was widely touted as one of the ‘melons’ that professed to be ‘green’ for the constitution on the surface, while ‘red’ against it on the inside (Okoth, 2016). As president he purposefully sought to curtail the establishment of county government powers, preferring to instead lend his support to county commissioners (civil service appointees) in a model similar to that established by his father (Burbidge, 2015; Cornel, 2017).

All these commonly understood positions suggest the region to be adamantly opposed to devolution. And there is, of course, an important truth in that: the former Central Province is the least supportive of devolution in the country according to opinion polls (Kajilwa, 2016). However, to say a part of the country is nominally ‘for’ or ‘against’ a certain structure of governance is less important than exploring what that structure of governance is being used for. Professed opposition to devolution has not meant unwillingness to participate.

This chapter argues that the implementation of devolution over the first parliamentary term of the new Constitution (2013-2017) has drawn in the counties of central Kenya to compete on equal terms with other counties. This has reinvigorated Kikuyu notions of self-mastery, whereby the county has become the place for establishing one’s credentials on home
building and leadership (Burbidge, 2019). If devolution cannot be easily removed—the reasoning goes—one may as well be the best at it.

The financial incentives of devolution

There is money in the counties, and while this may not be large in national terms, it is large per capita, and on this measurement the counties hold even more potential than Nairobi. Table 47.2 provides estimates on the GDP and GDP per capita of each county of central Kenya, alongside that of Nairobi. While Nairobi does of course carry the day on total GDP size, the overcrowding caused by rural-urban migration means its GDP per capita is actually lower than that of Nyeri, Murang’a and Kiambu. Indeed, the GDP per capita of Kiambu is nearly twice that of Nairobi.

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Significantly, decentralization has done little to redistribute wealth away from Central Kenya. The Commission on Revenue Allocation has been clear from the start that the amount of money sent as intergovernmental transfers from the national to the county level will be determined by the county’s population, a ‘basic equal share’ that provides a fixed amount to all counties—effectively dampening the effect of more progressive indicators—and poverty and land considerations (See Table 47.3) (D’Arcy, this volume). The ‘poverty’ parameter used in the calculation does ensure that some funds are transferred to the poorest counties. However, this should not be misunderstood as a strategy to end inequality—it supports those counties with high numbers below the poverty line, rather than a high Gini coefficient, and in any case is only used to allocate a small proportion (one-fifth) of the funds. ‘Land area’ is neutral on the question of how much wealth a county contains, and the parameter ‘fiscal responsibility’ in fact benefits the better organised counties, as it acts as a bonus to counties that have managed
to increase their own local revenue generation, which is much easier to do in economically
dynamic parts of the country.

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Given this, the index is broadly supportive of the economically more developed counties of central Kenya. Furthermore, because local revenue generated by the counties is theirs to keep, counties with robustly monetarised economies benefit. Most local revenue in Kenya comes from land rates, which gives a financial advantage to those counties that have privatised property holdings (as opposed to communal ownership). On this front, central Kenya again bears the greater capacity, and this was borne out in the Kiambu county government’s drive during its first period in office to collect data on all land holdings and land rates. Figure 47.1 shows the local revenue generation of counties of central Kenya as compared to the national average for counties.

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The financial structure provided by devolution is therefore fairly beneficial to the counties of central Kenya. Although the prevailing view is that devolution will undermine the growth of Nairobi, and that the counties to its immediate north are therefore damaged by association, in fact central Kenya is the region most likely to gain economically from the re-distribution of funds and the increased capacity to enforce land rates. Supporting the view that the former Central Province has been a dynamic place for investment in the run-up to the implementation of devolution, figures on annual GDP growth by county reveal healthy growth between 2000 and 2012 (See Figure 47.2).

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Division and dissent in the history of central Kenya
Central Kenya was the part of the country most deeply exposed to missionary education and the colonial economy (Kiruthu and Mbataru, 2014: 65). The exposure was not only one-way, however, as the Kikuyu people also shaped the trajectory of colonial development. Colonial assertions of land ownership in the highly fertile Central Province led to the confinement of the Kikuyu in what was understood as their traditional areas, but this soon led to intense overcrowding and the overworking of the limited farmland that remained available to them. Widespread squatting by Africans on what was known as the ‘White Highlands’ followed. In 1918 the practice was banned unless the squatter worked at least 180 days a year for the landowner, creating a pseudo-feudal system of obligation (Leys, 1975). The economic strife and political frustration generated by forced displacements formed the basis of the Mau Mau uprising, whereby the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (the Mau Mau’s official name) resisted with force the colonials and those loyal to them. In terms of Central Province’s political trajectory, the uprising split the population into those for and against Mau Mau: many in Murang’a and Nyeri supported Mau Mau, while those of Kiambu became associated as loyalists to the colonial government instead (Lonsdale, 1994; 2004).

To try and mitigate the deeper economic causes for the uprising, after 1954 the government developed the Swynnerton Plan, which involved ‘consolidating land fragments into single holdings and issuing registered freehold titles to individuals’ (Leys, 1975: 52). The aim was to make agriculture more productive by organising larger, enclosed farmlands that would grow cash crops and be owned by private individuals who could then use the land as collateral for bank loans. As John S. Henley (1976: 174-175) explains,

those who remained “loyal” were allowed to expand their land holdings, often at the expense of the dissidents […]. Land reform during the later stages of the Emergency in Central Province, completed by 1959, gave the Kikuyu “loyalists” a head start in the
production of cash crops over other areas. As a consequence, at independence Kenyatta was faced with deep divisions in his own political homeland. The “loyalists” had legal tenure to much of the best land and were becoming increasingly affluent […]. In contrast, those who had been in detention or had taken to the forest as “freedom fighters” were highly conscious of the losses they had suffered both at the hands of the colonial administration and their clansmen who had supported the Whites.

The division during the Mau Mau uprising became, therefore, entrenched through colonial and independence policies of land consolidation in favor of those loyal to the political establishment (Kiruthu and Mbataru, 2014: 67-68). Perhaps the clearest example of the continued rupture was the 1975 assassination of Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, MP for Nyandarua. The assassination took place in the context of uncertainty over who would succeed the elderly Jomo Kenyatta as president, with Kenyatta representing the Kiambu elite and J. M. Kariuki portraying himself as leader of the poor of Nyandarua—and the poor elsewhere in Central Province—who had been hitherto excluded and unable to enjoy the fruits of independence (Throup, this volume).

**Competitive self-sufficiency**

While this history of division and dissent in central Kenya may at first sight look peripheral to the topic of devolution under the new Constitution, in fact it is at its core. Economic and social development in central Kenya has come as part of a process of mastery over ‘town’ and ‘government’, whereby the inconsistencies and arbitrariness of the two are tamed and made to work for one’s homestead over time. From the point of view of the rural areas of central Kenya, the strategy was one of building up resources through agriculture that could then be used for investments that master modernity through education and technology. The elite of central
Kenya have something of a history of converting agricultural success into Nairobi-based investments and better education for their children (Kamau, 2013).

The model of agricultural surplus allowing for capital development has, however, been reversed through devolution. One no longer looks at rural areas as a springboard to town but as a zone of investment and prosperity in themselves. Devolution thus moved investors and politicians back to the counties, with a strength that took many by surprise. The new political dispensation creates new opportunities to receive government recognition and support, and while the counties of central Kenya already enjoy a long and established history of positive relations with the central government, many have not benefitted. Working in one’s own county government is not incompatible with the Jubilee government’s reservations over devolution; it is a question of the type of work done. The ‘national government’—as it is termed in the Constitution, precisely to avoid a centre versus county dichotomy—fears the heavy costs associated with the new constitution, such as the various independent commissions, the high wage bill for the swathes of new politicians, and the expanded bureaucracy (Franceschi et al., 2015). The job of framing devolution as part of the state’s burgeoning costs has unwittingly been helped by county governors themselves campaigning for a larger share of national revenue (Cheeseman et al., 2016). And, indeed, because central Kenya is a place of widespread support for the Jubilee national government, concerns over the Constitution’s escalating costs tended at first to trump—at least in political rhetoric—any preference for devolution.

Consequently, politicians and citizens from central Kenya have criticised corruption in the rest of the country’s devolved governments and refused to side with the other governors in demanding more money from the centre. It is a common refrain among residents of Nairobi and central Kenya that the move to devolution under the 2010 Constitution has been a waste of national resources and has, in fact, increased corruption. As one Murang’a resident explained, following an audit report released in 2016 that identified failed public works projects...
in the counties, ‘We devolved corruption. You know, it was there, it was in the country before but now it has been brought to the roots’ (KTN News, 2016, translated from the original by the authors). However, that many Kenyans feel devolution to be riddled with corruption (Transparency International Kenya, 2015) does not mean that they are not keen to use the available funds for their own ends.

Indeed, politicians in central Kenya tend to see the material benefits of local self-government more starkly than in the rest of the country. There are three reasons for this. The first is that the region has historically been favoured by central government, and so has seen that development really can happen locally (Burgess et al, 2013). Secondly, and relatedly, the core support that counties of central Kenya gave the Jubilee administration in the first election following promulgation of the new Constitution means the national government has a vested interest in delivering development there.

As a result of these two factors, many of the disputes that have complicated the implementation of devolution in other parts of Kenya have been less pronounced in the Kikuyu heartlands. For example, disputes over how intergovernmental transfers would be organised sparked a lively debate over whether county governments could create their own private bank accounts, and whether they could propose alternative software for organising transfers as opposed to the Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) initiative of the National Treasury. The stalemate on many of these issues, with national officials pushing back against the demand for greater local autonomy, led to a serious financial standoff that saw the funds for many county governments frozen for parts of the 2013–2014 financial year. However, the close relationship between the national government and central Kenya meant that there was not the same distrust, and so these counties led the pack when it came to fitting in to top-down frameworks: drafting budgets, processing audited accounts, and hence receiving intergovernmental transfers.
The third reason that politicians in central Kenya have been quick to see the material potential of local self-government is due to some of the core tenets of Kikuyu political thought. From a historical angle, Lonsdale (2005: 562) describes how the ‘Gikuyu strove for self-mastering moral agency, wiathi.’ Wiathi is a concept usually translated as ‘freedom’, though a heavy caveat is required. There are many distinct notions of freedom in political philosophy and wiathi can, more specifically, be translated as that type of freedom which ‘consists in the absence of dependence on another for material needs’ (Hobson, 2008: 460). The wisdom of elders is considered constituted by their experience in decision-making, which they have generated by organising the things under their domain over the years. As Hobson (2008: 460-461) explains, an elder should be understood as an agent who ‘decides for himself. […] It is one’s capacity to manage one’s private affairs and household by which a man’s civic virtue is measured.’ Without building up one’s own household and managing it successfully, there can be no true development because there would be no self-mastery. Pointing this out in a speech in Nyeri in 1952, Jomo Kenyatta remarked, ‘[w]e want to get fat on our land so that our children grow up in prosperity; we do not want that removed to feed others’ (Hobson, 2008: 459). The meaning here was not just that he wanted the districts of Central Province to amass wealth; it was that the process of spreading wealth randomly around the country would, in his view, disconnect communities from a sense of their moral obligations. Lonsdale (2005: 571) summarises, ‘[f]ree riders, by implication the unpatriotic poor, had no right to debate moral ethnicity.’

Lonsdale’s now famous use of the term ‘moral ethnicity’ goes beyond simplistic notions of tribalism to emphasise the internal ethical deliberation at play in Kikuyu thought. This is not Kikuyuness as a single school of thought or a kind of ideology, but Kikuyuness as a realm of dialectical deliberation, a zone of intellectual contestation. For example, in exploring Kenyatta’s political and social thought, Lonsdale (2005: 562) notes: ‘any attempt to create a
wider Gikuyu authority in the name of a single ancestry was a moral affront to the self-mastery which each household owed to God and their more immediate ancestors.’ A notion of a single tribe or ethnicity that binds members to a single view would, therefore, be anathema to the development of moral deliberation within the group.

This point comes out even more explicitly in Lonsdale’s contrasting of ‘moral ethnicity’ with ‘political tribalism’—the latter referring to inter-tribal identity politics at the national stage (Cheeseman, 2009: 99-100). The distinction frees up exploration of what constitutes localised moral deliberation, in the context of what one could term ‘ethno-ethical traditions’. As Lonsdale (1994: 132) defines it, moral ethnicity is ‘the common human instinct to create out of the daily habits of social intercourse and material labour a system of moral meaning and ethnical reputation within a more or less imagined community.’ For the Kikuyu, the dominant group of central Kenya, such ‘moral meaning and ethnical reputation’ centres around questions of self-sufficiency, for which the model of local self-government through devolution actually fits neatly.

Against this background, one of the most significant implications of devolution is that it has set loose the already existing intra-regional competitiveness of central Kenya, and the rivalry that was rooted in division between those who resisted the colonial regime and those who remained loyal. While from the point of view of other traditions such competition would be damaging, within the ‘ethno-ethical’ tradition of the Kikuyu it in fact re-establishes notions of self-mastery into the practice of local development. In other words, central Kenya features a genuine political will for financial self-sustainability over and above the other devolved government administrations; a willingness to lead in practice on devolution despite it being felt, in principle, deplorable for the nation as a whole.

**Aspiring towards self-sufficiency in practice**
The final section of this chapter considers specific examples of how devolution has played out in central Kenya over the course of the first full parliamentary term following the promulgation of the new Constitution. The aim is to indicate particular details and draw from them general themes, and so the account first explores the experiences of Kiambu, followed by discussion of the other four counties. Overall, it is shown that the process of implementing devolution has inevitably drawn in the counties of central Kenya to compete, reinvigorating notions of self-sufficiency through local government.

A clear case is Kiambu County, considered the strongest performer in collecting local revenue in the region (Nyawira, 2016). As noted previously, in part because the population of Kiambu is relatively small (compared to Nairobi, its immediate southern neighbour), it enjoys high GDP per capita and high local tax revenue—the perfect combination for making a success of devolution. Moreover, though small compared to Nairobi, Kiambu’s total population is large relative to counties that do not contain cities important nationally, at 1.6 million. This is in most part due to the populous urban area of Thika now being incorporated into Kiambu County. The restructuring of the previous districts under the new Constitution saw the deletion of Thika District, which was in any case a later addition to the district system, a creation intended to generate political support from the area. Thika used to host factories for the production of clothing and linen, but the large-scale importing of second-hand clothes, combined with Kenya’s general economic slowdown in the 1980s through application of structural adjustment policies, ruined the industry. Residents of Thika remain, however, a source of low-cost labour for surrounding areas while, politically, the incorporation of Thika into Kiambu has put its relatively lower-income residents under the leadership of the higher-class Kiambu elite, an arrangement unlikely to hold in the long term due to the sway over local elections commanded by Thika voters.
While Kiambu is economically vibrant, its county politics features a number of controversial figures. Governor William Kabogo of Kiambu was accused of causing the death of University of Nairobi student Mercy Keino in 2011, although he was found innocent in the Kehancha Law Courts of Migori in 2016 (Standard, 2016). It is important to note that the event occurred before Kabogo was elected governor in 2013, and ensured that a certain climate of fear and uncertainty permeated public views of the governor’s leadership. Keino’s parents have remained active in the media in continuing to portray the governor as morally responsible (Tanui, 2016).

In terms of post-2013 county politics, it is the county assembly that was accused of muddying the political landscape. In the run-up to the Jubilee primaries of 2017, three aspiring Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) went missing. The first, Kenneth Kinyanjui, was ‘hijacked by unknown people’ and the second, Margaret Wanjiru Kibe, simply disappeared (Maichuhie, 2017; Majale, 2017). The third MCA aspirant, Charles Chege, was kidnapped and his bullet-ridden vehicle left abandoned (KTN News, 2017c). About a day later, he was found in a weak condition in a Narok dam, having been heavily drugged by his kidnappers, but otherwise unharmed (Sayagie, 2017). The disappearances, while sadly under-reported and under-investigated, indicate the intensity of local political battles, entirely distinct from the ruminations of Nairobi-based politicians and civil society activists. Both journalism and academic research in Kenya has a long way to catch up with the shift in importance toward the local brought about by devolution.

Notwithstanding the context of these controversial political dynamics, economically-speaking Kiambu County’s aspiration for self-sufficiency has been ever-present. County efforts to tax burials provides an illustrative example. Given the symbolic importance to all Kenyans of burial in one’s traditional homeland, the proposed burial tax caused national outrage as it seemed to be taking advantage of citizens at the time in which they would be most
in need of sympathy. From the point of view of the Kiambu county government, however, it was a chance to get money from those who use land in Kiambu for their burial but work and make money elsewhere, particularly in Nairobi. Because county governments can only collect revenue by means of land rates or in return for services provided, a burial tax was one of the few tax ideas that would fall within the scope of county governments as set out by the Constitution. The episode demonstrated the county’s focus on raising local revenue rather than simply campaigning for an increased share of national revenue—endorsing the practical realities of what devolution offers while avoiding criticising the Jubilee government for not devolving further funds.

Taxing burials was, however, not to be. As KTN News (2013) reported at the time: ‘Businessmen in the county have announced their intention to oppose the proposed new levies. They have threatened to relocate their businesses if the bill is passed. And the church in Kiambu has also opposed the proposed tax on the church.’ Such outright willingness to defy state authority is intriguing and indicates how dynamic intra-county political debates have become. In reaction, the Kiambu county assembly reduced the level of the tax, especially for those originally from the county, before passing the finance bill (Gicheha, 2013). But the tax, along with the finance bill as a whole, was nullified by the High Court on the grounds of a lack of public participation in its formulation. Somewhat indicative of political life in central Kenya, the Kiambu county government had only consulted with business elites (hosting them in one of the county’s most expensive hotels), which the court described as insufficient for the constitutional requirement of public participation in county government budgets.

While Kiambu of course has its specificities, the attention towards economic self-sufficiency through devolved governance is shared by the other counties of central Kenya. Take, for example, the comments of journalist Gitau Warigi (2010):
The creation of counties has brought heightened activity across Kiambu, Murang’a, Nyeri, Kirinyaga and Nyandarua. The tension between politicians and professionals on how to exploit the opportunities the counties present is actually healthy. And so is the fact that the traditional competitive spirit amongst the five counties has got a fresh shot in the arm. […] Setting up viable entities for this purpose will require not just considerable capital infusion, which the county governments can afford, but also a lot of professional and feasibility savvy, [sic] which is best left to business people and financiers. […] [T]he old model where residents used their savings to buy property on Nairobi’s River Road will not work well today.

This focus on money and economic self-sufficiently permeates political debate in the other counties of central Kenya, though there is insufficient space to go into this in detail. Highlights include how in Nyandarua opponents to the governor conducted their own public forums to explain the contents of an audit report on the governor, at which copies of the report were sold for 20 shillings a-piece (Njoroge and Munyeki, 2015). In Kirinyaga, there has been a charged debate between MCAs, youth groups and the county government over failures to implement development projects (Kamau, 2016a). To make matters worse, county executive committee member Harry Mugo resigned when accused of stealing public land (Kamau, 2016b), and, in a separate development, the clerk of the county assembly was directed to recover two million shillings from four MCAs who had ‘exaggerated sitting, travel and subsistence allowances’ (Kamau, 2017).

The most concerning and widely reported public works issue in these early stages of devolution in central Kenya was the Northern Collector Water Tunnel, planned to assist the supply of water to Nairobi through river sources in Murang’a. Although initially agreed on by the Murang’a county government, the project came under fire from senators at a time when
they were worried that their exclusion from having a formal say in the distribution of development projects would undermine their ability to secure re-election. Specifically, the senators complained that the project had been insufficiently tested for its impact on the environment (Ngige and Gikandi, 2016; Obala, 2016). Doubts then emerged more generally over the lack of drinking water in Murang’a itself, and the lack of financial remuneration for the county in return for its part in supplying Nairobi. Opposition leader Raila Odinga further raised the stakes by describing the water pipes as ‘secret tunnels of death’ ahead of a political rally in Murang’a (Mungai and Gikandi, 2016).

In the midst of all these debates on projects and county financing, the question of economic self-sufficiency continues to resonate. One commentator posited that what made Murang’a and Nyeri richer than Nyandarua was its sheer entrepreneurship:

The people of Murang’a and Nyeri did not have the privileges of good land like Nyandarua had or of proximity to Nairobi that Kiambu had. And yet, they were able to turn their adversities into advantage by sheer hard work, tenacity, risk-taking and a willingness to challenge the colonialists at every opportunity, including engaging them in a brutal humiliating war. They also realised that to prosper, you must literally get out of the box and fight for your rights. (Kimura, 2016).

This statement effectively fuses support for entrepreneurialism with opposition to colonialism. While the argument could be made effectively the other way around—that those who colluded with colonialism were the most entrepreneurial—in fact the popular narrative runs differently, i.e. that the Mau Mau rebellion was a manifestation of economic self-sufficiency.

Conclusion
This chapter has shown that even in a part of the country historically more supportive of centralised executive power, discussions of how devolution should be done have come to the fore, evoking and drawing from local understandings of moral leadership. Consider, to conclude, the death of Governor Nderitu Gachagua of Nyeri County on 24 February 2017. The funeral brought together the high and mighty of Kenya, who set themselves the task of honouring the life of a politician whose stature had grown as Governor of Nyeri, assumed by all to be a significant upgrade from his previous role as MP of Mathira. Gachagua’s reputation had been enhanced despite the fact that the governor had suffered an impeachment attempt during his time in office, led by MCAs over alleged misappropriation of county funds (Mwau, 2016; Kanyi, 2016). Although the governor survived the impeachment when the Senate voted to reject the claims (Mbaka, 2016), it was still remarkable that he was shown such support from a range of prominent national politicians of all political stripes. For example, at the funeral Raila Odinga delivered a speech in which he said:

These governors, together with the national government being led by Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, have been like pioneers: carrying out this new Constitution. […] Devolution, we said, is an idea whose time has come, but you are dealing with people who are used to the old system, a centralised system of government. (KTN News, 2017b; translated from the original by the authors).

Speaking next, Uhuru Kenyatta quipped that it was a historic day, for unusually he felt compelled to agree with Odinga. Although Kenyatta had often acted in ways contrary to the implementation of devolution (Burbidge, 2015), in Nyeri he attributed setbacks to a lack of knowledge of the process and the fact that MCAs did not understand their constitutional role of oversight but instead obstructed democratically elected governors unnecessarily:
These [county] governments are in place. But, we are very saddened when seeing money that arrives, let’s say, in the county, but it is not able to get to the people because leaders don’t understand what to do. […] If you don’t like the person’s agenda, if you don’t like his policies, if you don’t like his programmes, then bide your time; you will remove him through the next election and return someone for the people, but don’t obstruct the projects as they are going on. And so, Gachagua, for the first time in a long time, you have made me agree with Raila. (KTN News, 2017a; translated from the original by the authors).

Standing by the body of a former governor, this represented a significant acceptance from the country’s most influential political leader—proof from a part of the country where devolution should not be working that it is, in fact, here to stay.

Bibliography


