Regimes and Randomization: Authoritarianism and Field Research in Contemporary Kenya*

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Objectives. Little is known about how the legacy of authoritarian politics shapes research in countries that have recently transitioned to democracy. How do previous periods of authoritarian rule shape field research that takes place after a regime transition? To what extent are authoritarian tendencies present in the practice of quantitative field research in a democracy? *Methods.* I engage in a reflexive and historical analysis of a number of episodes of field research in Kenya. I describe and categorize the two authoritarian political regimes that have governed Kenya: the colonial regime that governed the country from the early 20th century to independence in 1963 and the bureaucratic executive authoritarian regime that governed the country from 1963 until the 2002 election. I then analyze how the historical legacy of each of these regimes shapes the practice of research in contemporary Kenya, using both my own experiences and historical examples. *Results.* My results indicate that although the liberalization of the Kenyan regime over the past 20 years has permitted the expansion of social science research in the country, authoritarian institutions and practices continue to shape field research in the country in two ways. First, the institutional legacies of Kenya's previous authoritarian regimes continue to shape field research by informally shaping the behavior of both public officials and ordinary citizens. Second, the practice of randomized field research can lead to the reinforcement of authoritarian cultural practices and social norms by emphasizing centralization, control, and compliance rather than democratic norms of deliberation, participation, and collective ownership. *Conclusions.* Both types of authoritarian influences on field research pose both methodological and ethical problems for field researchers in Kenya and other countries that have recently experienced regime change. I summarize the methodological and normative implications of these findings and provide a set of recommendations for field researchers.

During the height of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) single-party rule in the 1980s, political scientists working in Kenya routinely reported being denied permission to conduct research and were extremely constrained with respect to where they could go, who they could talk to, and what questions they could ask (Schatzberg, 1986; Widner, 1992). In part, this was due to the content of their research questions. Western political scientists

studying Kenya during the 1980s were typically interested in issues related to the operation of the KANU regime under both Daniel arap Moi and his predecessor, Jomo Kenyatta, the manner in which the regime stayed in power, and the effects of single-party rule on economic outcomes (Bates, 1984; Barkan and Holmquist, 1989; Holmquist, 1984; Mueller, 1984). The lack of freedom to conduct research was not limited to foreigners. Kenyan academics were similarly limited with respect to what research projects they could undertake and what they could do with the findings (Kipkorir, 2009). Journalists, novelists, civil society advocates, and opposition politicians often bore an even greater brunt of the government's scrutiny, frequently facing censorship, arbitrary detention, and exile for daring to criticize the ruling party (Throup and Hornsby, 1998; wa Thiong'o, 1985; Mutahi, 1991).

Following the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1992, there was a gradual improvement in the protection of civil rights and liberties (Throup and Hornsby, 1998). In 2002, the challenger candidate for president, Mwai Kibaki, running under the banner of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), beat Uhuru Kenyatta of KANU, marking the first transition of ruling parties in Kenya's history. During this time, an increase in freedoms and liberty coincided with the relaxation of restrictions on the ability of Kenyan and foreign academics to conduct research, which led to Kenya becoming an attractive destination for field research. This trend toward greater openness was reversed during the disputed 2007 election and the subsequent violence, leading the growth of research in Kenya to stall briefly, only to resume after the signing of a power-sharing agreement in 2008 and the adoption of a new constitution in 2010.

Although the other articles in this issue are part of a growing literature that examines the conduct of field research under authoritarian conditions, fewer scholars have explicitly examined the politics and practice of fieldwork in countries that have recently undergone transitions to democracy. Given that there is a recent literature in comparative politics that focuses on the impact of authoritarian institutions on democratic politics (Pop-Eleches, 2007; Grzymala-Busse, 2010; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2011; Riedl, 2014), it is natural to ask whether similar dynamics extend to the practice of social scientific fieldwork itself. Identifying the impact of authoritarian legacies in a transitional democracy can help to connect the growing literature on research in authoritarian settings to broader substantive and methodological debates about research design and mixed methods (Brady and Collier, 2004: Paluck, 2010) and the ethics and politics of field research (Wood, 2006; Fujii, 2012; Dionne, 2014; Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read, 2015; Desposato, 2016). It also serves as an important test of the external validity of many of the arguments and lessons contained in this issue, which focus on fieldwork under authoritarian regimes.

In this article, I draw on my experience conducting fieldwork in the Laikipia region of central Kenya from 2006 through 2013 to answer two questions about how authoritarianism shapes research in countries that have recently transitioned to democracy. How do previous periods of authoritarian rule shape field research that takes place after a regime transition? To what extent are authoritarian tendencies present in the practice of quantitative field research in a democracy? To answer these questions, I engage in a critical analysis of a number of episodes from my research experience in Kenya. While this analysis is built around narratives from my fieldwork experience, the intent of this article is to use my experiences as the starting point for analytic discussions of how authoritarianism can shape field research in posttransition contexts. This methodological approach is deeply indebted to Michael Schatzberg's description and analysis of his prematurely ended fieldwork in Kenya in the 1980s (Schatzberg, 1986).

For each vignette, I present a brief narrative or set of narratives, and then critically analyze those experiences using two theoretical lenses: institutional theories of authoritarian regimes (Branch and Cheeseman, 2006; Brownlee, 2009; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, 2014) and cultural theories of authoritarian cultural practices and power dynamics (Ferguson, 1990; Scott, 1990; Wedeen, 2007). Although this mode of analysis is most commonly practiced in contemporary cultural anthropology, it has an affinity with the methods and approach used in interpretivist political science research (Wedeen, 2002).

My central argument is that although the liberalization of the Kenyan regime over the past 20 years has permitted the expansion of social science research in the country, authoritarian institutions and practices continue to shape field research in the country, posing a number of major methodological and normative challenges. The article proceeds as follows. First, I describe and categorize the two authoritarian political regimes that have governed Kenya: the colonial regime that governed the country from the early 20th century to independence in 1963 and the bureaucratic executive authoritarian regime that governed the country from 1963 until the 2002 election. I then analyze how the historical legacy of each of these regimes shapes the practice of research in contemporary Kenya, using both my own experiences and historical examples. Next, I describe the rise of randomized field experiments in political science research, and the origins and design of the specific field experiment that I implemented in the Laikipia region as part of my dissertation research. I then describe and analyze the subtle authoritarian practices that are embedded within the practice of randomized field experiments. In the conclusion, I summarize the general methodological and normative implications of these findings and provide a set of tips and recommendations for field researchers.

Authoritarian Legacies and Contemporary Social Science Fieldwork in Kenya

In order to assess the impact that the legacies of authoritarian rule have on fieldwork in contemporary Kenya, it is necessary to identify and categorize the country's past and current political institutions. Given that "democracy" and "authoritarianism" remain essentially contested concepts (Gray, 1977; Collier and Adcock, 1999), a full engagement with the vibrant literature on classifying varieties of political regimes is beyond the scope of this article. As a result, I rely on a variety of data sets and political science articles along with the historical literature on Kenyan politics. First, for classifying Kenya's regime type as democratic or authoritarian in a given year, I use three different data sets: the Alvarez, Cheibub, Limongi, Przeworski (ACLP) dichotomous measure of regime type (Alvarez et al., 2000), the Freedom House scale, and the Polity IV scale. For classifying types of authoritarian regimes, I use Geddes, Wright, and Frantz's classification of authoritarian regimes into personalist, military, dominant party, monarchic, oligarchic, or hybrid regimes (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, 2014). For classifying the level of electoral competition within authoritarian regimes, I use Levitsky and Way's classification of hybrid regimes into closed authoritarian, hegemonic electoral authoritarian, and competitive electoral authoritarian (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Brownlee, 2009).

A second challenge with categorizing Kenya's previous regime types is determining when Kenya's period of authoritarian rule began and ended. Studies of political regimes typically set the year of independence as the first observation for a given country. However, for the purposes of the study of authoritarian legacies in Kenya, this tendency forecloses the possibility of analyzing the long-term consequences of colonial rule. Colonial regimes in Africa were typically ruled as oligarchies in which settlers or African elites participated in

legislatures and local governments, but in which the majority of the African population was ruled by a colonial administration, either through direct rule by colonial agents or indirect rule through local chiefs—what Mamdani described as "decentralized despotism" (Mamdani, 1996; Firmin-Sellers, 2000).

Colonial government in Kenya broadly fit this pattern from the establishment of the settler-dominated Legislative Council in 1907 until independence in 1963 (Bennett, 1957; Gertzel, 1966; Berman and Lonsdale, 1992). Political participation was largely limited to white settlers, although Africans were increasingly given a say in the Legislative Council and African District Councils in the aftermath of the Mau Mau rebellion (Gertzel, 1966; Anderson, 2005). As with other British colonies in Africa, African populations were largely governed through indirect rule by local chiefs (Meek and Lugard, 1937). As I discuss in greater depth below, indirect rule by local chiefs in Kenya was often backed by the coercive power of the colonial administration (Branch and Cheeseman, 2006). As a result, I classify the Kenyan colonial regime from 1907 to 1963 as a competitive electoral authoritarian regime in which a settler oligarchy ruled through institutions of decentralized despotism.

Classifying the date of Kenya's transition to democracy is also challenging. The ACLP data set places the transition in 1997, after Kenya's second multiparty election (Alvarez et al., 2000). In contrast, Freedom House and Polity both code Kenya as nondemocratic from 1997 to 2002, due to the high level of electoral malfeasance in the 1997 election and violations of civil liberties and press freedom in the intervening years. As a result, both of these data sets place Kenya's transition after the 2002 election in which the opposition NARC coalition defeated KANU, making the country's first transition of ruling parties. In this article, I follow this classification, coding 2002 as the end of the dominant party authoritarian regime.

Using these concepts and classifications, it is possible to identify two main authoritarian regimes in Kenya's history—the oligarchic colonial regime that lasted from 1907 to 1963 and the dominant party regime ruled by KANU from 1963 to 2002. The postcolonial authoritarian regime can be grouped into three distinct phases that vary with respect to the level of electoral contestation—the hegemonic single-party electoral contestation during Jomo Kenyatta's government and the first years of Daniel arap Moi's rule (1963–1982), the closed authoritarian period of Moi's rule in the 1980s (1982–1992), and the competitive electoral authoritarian period following the reintroduction of multiparty elections in the 1990s (1992–2002). Despite the variations in the degree of electoral contestation between these periods, I classify the entire period from 1963–2002 as one regime because of two common features: the dominance of KANU as the ruling party and the importance of "bureaucratic executive" governance through the provincial administration (Branch and Cheeseman, 2006). In the two sections that follow, I describe the colonial and postcolonial authoritarian regimes in more detail and analyze how the legacies of each of these regimes continue to shape the practice of field research in contemporary Kenya.

British Colonial Rule: Administration, Boundaries, and Separation

As noted above, Kenya's colonial government can be characterized as a competitive electoral authoritarian regime ruled by a settler oligarchy. This regime's enduring impact on the practice on research in Kenya is closely linked to the institutions that the regime created to alienate African lands for use by European settlers and to then protect those externally imposed property rights. Although the British colonial government in Kenya followed the broad imperial policy of delegating local governance to chiefs (Meek and Lugard, 1937),

in Kenya these chiefs were incorporated in a much larger administrative bureaucracy, the Provincial Administration (Branch and Cheeseman, 2006; Gertzel, 1966). The Provincial Administration was the portion of the executive branch of the colonial government that had jurisdiction over the African population of the colony. The local European representatives of the Provincial Administration, District Commissioners, and District Officers were responsible for recruiting and overseeing chiefs (Branch and Cheeseman, 2006; Gertzel, 1966). Partitioning the African population into separate reserves for each tribe often meant that the British created or codified previously fluid or permeable social and territorial boundaries (Posner, 2005). In the Laikipia region of north-central Kenya, this meant making often arbitrary distinctions between cattle-herding Maasai communities, who were to be moved to reserves in southern Kenya, and hunting/foraging Dorobo communities, who were to stay in the Mukogodo native area (Hughes, 2005, 2006; Cronk, 2002, 2004).

As in many other British colonies, the colonial enterprise in Kenya was closely intertwined with the purportedly objective classificatory tools of social science. Provincial administrators often turned to social science research, especially anthropology, to help identify and manage so-called "native" institutions and customary laws (Abel, 1969; Humphrey, 1947). Colonial administrators frequently were aware of the findings of scholarly theses, dissertations, and monographs based on research in Kenya, and in several cases anthropologists were asked to conduct research on the behalf of the administration (Weule, 1909; Tate, 1904; Farler, 1879).

Yet, as I learned reading through colonial archives, the application of this knowledge did not always have the intended effect. In 1959, British anthropologist Paul Spencer was sent to the Mukogodo area by the Provincial Administration to resolve a border dispute between two jurisdictions. The District Officer in charge of the Mukogodo area charged that the Ile Uaso (Ewaso) Dorobo were invaders from Samburu District (where Spencer was conducting fieldwork) and needed to be moved back to that jurisdiction. The District Commissioner of the Samburu area asserted that "the various sections inhabiting Mukogodo are, in fact, so intermingled that the II Uaso can no longer reasonably be regarded as a separate entity" (Spencer, 1959). At the end of his two-week visit to Mukogodo, Spencer sided with the commissioner of Samburu, recommending (among other measures) that the Il Uaso not only be recognized as legitimate inhabitants of the area but that they be given their own chief (Spencer, 1959). The administrators in charge of the Mukogodo area rejected this suggestion. "I do not consider their conduct as thieves deserves recognition and to encourage their existence here would be to admit defeat in moving them to Samburu" (Spencer, 1959). The issue was ultimately left in a stalemate and was unresolved at the time of independence.

Rather than being an artifact of an earlier era in Kenya's history, the story of Spencer's research becoming part of a politicized boundary dispute is indicative of how the legacies of Kenya's settler oligarchy continue to shape the conduct of social scientific field research in the country. In particular, the institutionalized relationship between race, power, and research that was established during the colonial period continues to operate through the political and social salience attached to the identity label of *mzungu*—the Swahili word for "white person." In Laikipia, the politics of the usage of the *mzungu* identity label are closely linked to the relationships between ranchers and researchers that were established during the colonial regime.

Although I noticed a variety of uses of the *mzungu* label during my time in Laikipia, the most salient use in the region is "*Rancher.*" Given the fact that a large proportion of the European families that had settled in Laikipia in the first half of the 20th century kept their land and remained in the area after independence, they remain highly visible

throughout the region. These ranchers still do engage in commercial beef production, but most have shifted their land use to wildlife conservation and tourism, turning the region into Kenya's largest destination for safaris outside of the major national parks. In Laikipia, the political salience of the rancher label stems from conflict between pastoralist communities and ranchers over access to land. For the last 10 years, a variety of local civil society organizations have rallied communities under the banner of reclaiming the traditional land rights of indigenous communities, using the term "Laikipia Maasai" to encompass the set of precolonial peoples who lived in the region. This campaign briefly turned violent in 2004 when demonstrations demanding the return of lands led to invasions of private ranches by community members. During these invasions, one community elder was shot and killed by police (Hughes, 2005).

Within the sociopolitical landscape of Laikipia, an alternative *mzungu* identity label was attached to me: *researcher*. The largest body of research in Laikipia is primarily on ecology and wildlife biology. These wildlife researchers are largely identified with ranchers, leading to an implicit expectation that these researchers and ranchers drive similar kinds of cars, wear similar clothes, and frequent the same restaurants, bars, and shops. Although this close association with the rancher community provides access to many research sites, as well as to social circles with familiar language, culture, and standards of living, researcher affiliation with ranchers can also close doors. Although many individual ranch owners (and researchers affiliated with these ranchers) maintain excellent relationships with local communities, others are viewed with distrust and distance.

A second set of *mzungu* researchers in Laikipia are closely affiliated with the network of Laikipia Maasai civil society groups and NGOs active in the region, including those that are actively involved in the land rights campaign. Host groups provide researchers with an office in Nanyuki (the largest town in the region), translators and research assistants, and access to interviewees in the rural communities. In return, these organizations expect assistance in grant and report writing and expect that the findings of research will be useful to the organization's mission. Although this method of affiliation has the advantage of facilitating entry into local communities, this is also highly mediated by the group's leaders, to the extent that on multiple occasions, I heard group leaders refer to particular researchers as "our *mzungu.*"

My initial affiliation in Laikipia was in fact with one of the local civil society organizations working on the land disputes. I was actually unaware of the dispute and the organization's role in it until after I had already been identified on "their side." My affiliation with this organization all but ensured my exclusion from rancher social networks and associated research opportunities. For instance, during my very first interview with the head of a local conservation organization, he became visibly uncomfortable when I introduced myself and told him which organization was hosting me in the region, and went to great lengths to convince me that his organization is not a "rancher organization" but seeks to ensure sustainable development for all residents of Laikipia. In addition, among community members, announcing my affiliation with my host group created a set of perceptions about what my research was about and expectations about what it would accomplish. On multiple occasions, interviewees asked me: "What is this research going to do to help us get our land back?"

Though laden with a wide set of expectations due to my links to the organization, I actually received rather limited support. With my research funds depleting, I modified day-to-day research behavior. I adopted the same means of transportation as my research assistants, a combination of walking, hitchhiking, and riding in the back of livestock transports. While in Mukogodo, I stayed in the homes of my friends' parents and participated in both daily household activities, such as caring for livestock, and community ceremonies

and celebrations. As a result of this need to practice research in an unorthodox way, I attempted, with varying degrees of success, to conduct research under my own auspices and to forge an identity as a researcher that was distinct from both the "rancher researchers" and an "organization's *mzungu*."

The Researchers and the Bureaucratic-Executive State

Rather than dismantling the colonial regime, upon independence Jomo Kenyatta reinforced and appropriated the bureaucratic apparatus of the Provincial Administration, using it largely as a counterweight against potential political opposition (Branch and Cheeseman, 2006; Kipkorir, 2009). In contrast to many other postcolonial African regimes, the Kenyatta government had access to an extensive administrative bureaucracy that deeply penetrated nearly every rural part of the country (Branch and Cheeseman, 2006; Gertzel, 1966).

Kenyatta was able to tie the colonial era's Provincial Administration to his own personal legitimacy as a leader of the independence movement (Branch and Cheeseman, 2006). During this period, the Office of the President was by far the most important vehicle for the distribution of patronage and the cooptation of opposition. KANU, the one legal political party, remained underdeveloped by comparison. Though President Daniel arap Moi tried to reinvigorate KANU in the 1980s, he did little to dismantle the linkage between the Office of the President and its extensive network of rural offices and administrators. Throughout Moi's rule during both the party-state era of the 1980s and the KANU-dominated multiparty era of the 1990s, the Provincial Administration continued to play an important role in both implementing rural development projects and ensuring that KANU stayed in power (Throup and Hornsby, 1998; Fox, 1988; Leonard, 1991; Rutten, Mazrui, and Grignon, 2001).

Examining the regulation of research in postcolonial Kenya provides a fascinating case study of how the bureaucratic-executive state operated in practice, and the ways in which this institutional structure has persisted even after the transfer of power from KANU to NARC in 2002 (Branch and Cheeseman, 2006). During both the Kenyatta and Moi regimes, the Office of the President controlled the process of approving and regulating research by both Kenyans and foreigners. Applicants were required to first obtain a formal affiliation with a Kenyan university or approved research institute. They then had to submit a detailed research permit application to the National Council for Science and Technology, which operated directly under the Office of the President (Butler, 2001). The process of approving permits was frequently quite slow, and in many cases permission was denied outright. Researchers were then expected to take both this permit and a letter from the Office of the President to the District Commissioner in charge of the area where they would be working, who would write them a letter of introduction that could be used when conducting research locally (Schatzberg, 1986).

However, following these procedures was no guarantee that a researcher would be able to conduct a research project as planned. Schatzberg sheds particular light on this through his narration and analysis of a fieldwork trip to Kenya in the early 1980s that was ended abruptly by the intervention of the Provincial Administration (Schatzberg, 1986). Although Schatzberg followed the required procedures and received what he thought was sufficient clearance to begin fieldwork on the study of authority relationships in the town of Eldoret, his research permit was revoked by an administrator who arbitrarily decided that he did not like the questions that Schatzberg was asking (Schatzberg, 1986).

By the time that I arrived in Kenya to conduct fieldwork in 2006–2007, control over the process of approving and managing research permits had been formally moved from the Office of the President to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (MHEST) (Butler, 2001). As the MHEST is headed by a member of parliament rather than an official from the Office of the President, this move ostensibly reflects the shifting of power to the legislature that was expected to coincide with the end of Moi's presidency and the transfer of power to Mwai Kibaki. Under this system, I easily obtained my research permit in February 2007, and experienced none of the delays, arbitrariness, or political influence that previous researchers had reported.

However, when I attempted to use my permit to visit all seven rural provincial headquarters throughout the country for the purpose of accessing administrative records regarding state presence and law enforcement outcomes in rural areas, I came into direct contact with the enduring legacy of the bureaucratic-executive state. When I traveled to the first provincial headquarters on my list to start collecting the data, the bureaucrat who I spoke with told me that my permit did not matter and that he needed a letter. I called the head of the research permits office at the MHEST, who sent me a letter from his office authorizing my research. I returned to the headquarters, and the bureaucrat turned me away once again, saying only that the letter was still insufficient, but providing no further information.

Confounded, I traveled to the next provincial headquarters on my list, hoping that my experience had simply been the result of the individual bureaucrat with whom I had interacted, rather than something systemic. Much to my dismay, my experience in the next province was identical to what had happened before. However, in that province, one bureaucrat mentioned in passing that I would not have any luck obtaining the data that I was requesting without a letter from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Provincial Administration in the Office of the President. He gave me the name of the official to contact in Nairobi and sent me on my way. When I went to the Office of the President in Nairobi, I had very low expectations. Much to my surprise, I was given an appointment to the official that the regional administrator had recommended. After explaining my research to him, this official wrote a letter for me to all provincial commissioners on behalf of the Permanent Secretary, summarizing my research project and detailing the specific files and data to which I was to be given access.

From that point onward, each visit to provincial headquarters was successful, including my return trips to the first two that I had visited. Upon presenting my letter from the Permanent Secretary to the senior administrator, he/she would forward me to a junior administrative officer, who would set me up with a workspace and would arrange for the relevant files to be brought to me so that I could enter them directly into my computer. Upon completing data entry, I would be given a letter from the provincial commissioner to district commissioners that instructed them to assist me as necessary.

Comparing and contrasting my research permit experiences with those of researchers such as Schatzberg and Pickford who worked in Kenya in the 1970s and 1980s reveals both change and continuity in the underlying nature of the Kenyan state. On one hand, the extreme openness and willingness to accommodate and share current administrative documents with a foreign researcher stands in stark contrast to the environment of secrecy, suspicion, and xenophobia that characterized much of the Moi regime's approach to research by foreigners. On the other hand, other aspects of my experience indicate that bureaucratic-executive practices continue in contemporary Kenya, even in the face of formal institutional and legal change. In particular, the continued importance of the Office of the President in regulating research and the continued key role of letters down the hierarchical

chain of command as the vessel for delegating authority both indicate the persistence of the institutional framework that was the cornerstone of authoritarian rule during both the colonial and postcolonial periods.

Authoritarian Practices in Randomized Field Experiments

As discussed above, my experiences collecting data on governance from archival, interview, and administrative sources illuminated how the enduring institutional legacies and power dynamics related to the core institutions of the colonial and postcolonial state continue to shape field research in contemporary Kenya. In addition, my work leading a randomized evaluation of a community-based waste management project in Laikipia revealed much more subtle dynamics related to the intersection of knowledge, identity, and power (Ferguson, 1990; Malan, 1999; van der Riet, 2008).

Discourse, Experimentation, and Action in Field Research

Over the past decade, field experiments (also known as randomized controlled trials) have become an increasingly prominent—and prestigious—research method in political science (Wantchekon, 2003; Paluck and Green, 2009; Moehler, 2010; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2009; Habyarimana et al., 2007; Fearon, Humphreys, and Weinstein, 2009). The methodological premise of these experiments is that the random assignment of research subjects to treatment and control groups can be taken out of the laboratory and used to rigorously identify causation in real-world social, economic, and political contexts (Duflo, Glennerster, and Kremer, 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2009). The turn toward rigorous, empirical evaluation of development projects and policies has also started to transform the landscape of development policy making, as international donors provide substantial research funds to researchers who will design experiments to evaluate a given program.

Development economists have been at the forefront of the move to use evidence garnered from field experiments as the basis for policy advising and advocacy. One of the biggest victories of this research-policy nexus took place in Kenya, where a coalition of researchers and NGOs used the results of an evaluation of school-based distribution of deworming drugs to convince the Kenyan government to implement a nationwide policy of distributing free deworming drugs through public schools (Miguel and Kremer, 2004).

Enthusiasm for field experiments has not been universal, however. As field experiments started to become more prominent in political science, many scholars saw the method as a continuation of the hegemony of quantitative methods that dominated mainstream political science throughout the 1990s (Laitin, 2003). For instance, when I shared an early version of an idea for a field experiment with one qualitatively-oriented political scientist, he/she responded: "Even if it is wildly successful in your terms, it seems to me that the social science value-added is pretty small . . . I am inclined always to try to observe action that would, as near as one can tell, have happened without your prompting or you as an observer."

I decided to design and implement a field experiment during my dissertation research, though, because I became increasingly convinced that such pure observation of action would be both next to impossible and, indeed, undesirable. At a basic level, given the local salience of the meanings associated with being both a *mzungu* and a *researcher*, my mere

presence in rural villages was anything but inconspicuous, even after I had been living and working in the region for quite a long time. In addition, my research activities themselves shaped and interacted with local power dynamics because I needed to work with local youths in order to conduct interviews in the Maasai language and complete household survey questionnaires. Both the prestige associated with working with a *mzungu* researcher, as well as the material benefits associated with being paid a salary, influenced the local social status of the enumerators who worked with me, and in turn shaped how the members of the community viewed me and the research project. For example, during an initial survey exercise, the survey team started to refer to themselves as "the network of influence."

I initially interpreted this as a self-aware joke poking fun at the extent to which working as a research assistant was a coveted and reasonably high-status position within local communities. There was some element of truth beneath the surface of this joke. In particular, given the relatively small member of translators or enumerators that I could work with on a given data collection activity, it was likely that individuals from various social groups would be excluded at a given point in time. The presence or absence of women, youth, or individuals from locally prominent families on my research team was a constant source of comment and discussion that intersected with the substantive interviews on the history of governance in the Mukogodo area. As I discussed my research (and myself) with a broader cross-section of the community, I discovered that various facets of my identity—race, age, gender, nationality, religion, and class—were interpreted and understood in a wide variety of ways by community members and revealed aspects of the local norms, practices, and politics surrounding each of these dimensions. Although I attempted to mitigate some of the major sources of inequity created by the material benefits of working on my project by actively getting to know and working with individuals from across a spectrum of gender, age, class, and family/clan, this still did not change the fact that my presence and research process consistently had an impact on local communities.

Furthermore, as I went forward with oral history interviews with men and women from across the Mukogodo area, I also became intensely aware that my mere ability to engage in research itself reflected and reinforced global inequalities and power dynamics. This dynamic was summed up succinctly by one elderly man who I interviewed, who at the end of the interview asked me what my research would do for him, as he said he knew that I would go back to America and become a professor, while he would remain poor. One of my local research assistants put a different spin on this same idea one day while we were working on translating questionnaires. I told him what I was "interested" in understanding with that particular research exercise, and he responded by saying that foreign researchers were lucky that they could choose topics based on what "interests" us, whereas in his community every decision is decided by "need" rather than "interest."

As a result of these experiences, I became increasingly convinced that unobtrusive observation and measurement was neither feasible nor desirable in this particular context. My emerging belief in the need for combining action with observation in my fieldwork in Laikipia interacted with my prior interest in field experiments. As I started thinking about revising my research design, designing a field experiment was not a step away from interpretive and ethnographic methods toward uncritical positivism. The process of designing and implementing an experiment in the field bears remarkable similarities to a variety of praxis-oriented forms of ethnography and action research (Lewin, 1946; Brown and Tandon, 1983; Wacquant, 2002, 2004, 2005). Put differently, my goal was to design a field experiment that could bridge the gap between quantitative researchers focused on causal inference and interpretivist scholars interested in reflexive examination of culture and power.

Based on these goals, I started to spend much of my downtime in the field brainstorming with my Kenyan friends about activities and projects that we could initiate and whether we could design an experiment that linked those activities to the research project we were working on. Throughout our discussions, one possible project that came up consistently was community-based waste management. As we traveled throughout Laikipia conducting interviews, there appeared to be no effective system for removing and storing waste in small rural commercial centers, resulting in substantial piles of plastic and organic waste. When I asked my friends and other residents about public waste, they said that waste removal was the responsibility of the Laikipia County Council (the elected local government), but that the council did very little in the way of organizing trash collection or providing basic infrastructure such as trash cans or dumpsites. Civil society organizations and ranchers occasionally donated trash cans or led community cleanups, but those trash cans were often stolen, leading to new accumulations of trash shortly after a cleanup.

These local explanations for the persistence of public waste raised a research question that I saw as being tightly linked to the core questions of my dissertation project: Is linking the monitoring and enforcement of a waste management project to community governance institutions more effective than working with the Provincial Administration, in terms of reducing public waste and reducing littering behavior? The end result of these initial brainstorming sessions was that we developed a plan for a waste management and an anti-littering program. I then submitted a proposal for funding to conduct a field experiment evaluating this project to a grant program at Yale devoted to supporting field experiments by graduate students. At the same time, my Kenyan friends and I jointly formed and registered a local NGO called the SAFI (Sanitation Activities Fostering Infrastructure) Project. We spent several months developing and testing outcome measures of public waste and littering behavior (while continuing to conduct interviews and collect data on other topics), and by late November 2007, we were ready to implement our field experiment (Sheely, 2013).

Field Experiments, Participatory Ethics, and Authoritarian Practices

The evaluation of the SAFI Project Waste Management Project is relatively unique among field experiments in the extent to which it was conceived and designed in the field as part of an act of joint collective action between a researcher and members of the local community. At the same time, examining the social processes involved with designing the experiment, implementing the treatment and control groups, and analyzing and using the data from the experiment reflect some of the inherent tensions between the practice of political science field experiments and approaches to field research that emphasize participation and collaboration between researchers and subject communities (Malan, 1999; van der Riet, 2008). These tensions can be briefly illustrated by a set of observations describing some of the power dynamics that I observed at each stage of designing and implementing the SAFI Project experiment.

At the stage of designing the experiment, power dynamics within the research team may have shaped both the articulation of the research questions and the design of the interventions. My description of the process of creating the SAFI Project emphasized the close, collaborative friendship between my research team and me. Throughout the process of working together over the course of several years, we have developed enough mutual trust and respect to debate and deliberate alternative ideas and to give and accept criticism from one another. At the same time, I am also intensely aware that our relationships were

(and continue to be) shaped by various aspects of my position as a foreign researcher. Especially in the early phases of my fieldwork, I found that my team went out of its way to agree with and affirm my ideas and rarely challenged any of my suggestions.

As a result, it is possible that my team members failed to voice objections while designing the experiment for fear of losing the opportunity to continue working with the project (along with the associated income and social prestige). As a result, what I perceived as collaborative brainstorming about potential projects may have in reality been more of a one-sided process driven by my preoccupation with trash. Similarly, it is certainly the case that focusing the experimental treatments on monitoring and enforcement by state versus community institutions was driven by my own research interests. At the same time, at the encouragement of my research team, I also included a third treatment group, which focused only on collective action by civil society groups to remove public waste, rather than any kind of third-party punishment for littering. Although I was skeptical about the effectiveness of this treatment (due in part to my prior experiences with civil society groups in Laikipia), the long-term effectiveness of this treatment (vis-à-vis the groups in which littering was punished by Provincial Administration chiefs or community elders) turned out to be the strongest finding from the entire experiment (Sheely, 2013).

The actual implementation of the randomly assigned treatment and control groups uncovered a different set of anti-democratic tendencies associated with the conduct of experimental research in this context. On one hand, all three of the treatment groups in the experiment incorporated elements that were developed in consultative focus groups with community members and were based on other participatory development projects in the region. In addition, the implementation of the treatments involved community meetings and collective action to clean the village center, and a volunteer committee led the ongoing management of the waste management program in each village.

On the other hand, a random number generator, rather than a participatory process, determined whether or not communities received the implementation of the waste program and which variant of the program they would receive. Moreover, a key element of obtaining compliance with the randomization was working directly with Provincial Administration chiefs as the first point of contact in each community and throughout the process of implementation. Thus, although much of the long-term success of the project as a development intervention may have been be due to its participatory elements, much of its success as a randomized field experiment may have been due to the authoritarian elements in the design and implementation.

The process of analyzing the experimental data and using the results for policy advocacy reveals a final set of power dynamics that run somewhat counter to participatory ethics. The data collection for the SAFI Project experiment involved the long-term, regular collection of data on the amount of trash on the ground and the frequency of littering behavior by a set of dispersed, committed community facilitators in each treatment and control center. The idea underlying this method of organizing data collection was for these facilitators to also be a first point of contact for organizing community feedback meetings and translating the research results into a format that was both intelligible and useful to community members. In practice, the movement of data was largely unidirectional, from community facilitators, to the core SAFI Project team, to my computer. Although I have worked on making Stata graphs and writing up village-specific impact reports in my spare time, the process of making the analysis and use of experimental data a collaborative act between myself and the communities was often secondary to the process of using the data in my academic publications.

Some of these observations may be specific to the idiosyncrasies of this particular case (the aforementioned politics of Laikipia, the personalities and positions of me and my research team). However, to the extent that the patterns in these examples are symptomatic of larger anti-participatory biases in experimental research, they raise a set of difficult ethical and political questions for experimentally inclined political scientists (Desposato, 2016). One possible response, which might be advocated by some partisans of qualitative research, is to stop conducting field experiments altogether. However, this option is unsatisfying. Simply pointing out that there are problematic power dynamics involved in conducting field experiments is unlikely to undermine the legitimacy of the method among positivist political scientists, economists, and the broader international development community. Simply abandoning field experiments in favor of more traditional forms of participatory research may in fact limit the extent to which participatory projects and research are viewed as legitimate and worthy of support by governments and donors.

As an alternative to abandoning field experiments, I am currently leading an ongoing research project in Laikipia, in which the SAFI Project staff and I are exploring the extent to which it is possible to develop a model of participant-driven evaluation. The core idea of participant-driven evaluation is to combine the core tools and normative commitments of existing participatory research methodologies with the best practices of experimental social science research. The central question of this project is whether the participatory incorporation of community members in research design, data collection, and analysis can enable communities to use research as an empowerment tool, assisting them in planning development activities and holding politicians and civil society organizations accountable for project performance. To the extent that the results are positive, we will use this experience to develop a set of methodological tools that can be used by communities, researchers, and civil society organizations to implement their own participant-driven experiments, countering some of the authoritarian tendencies in field experiments while also bringing participatory methods into the mainstream of quantitative development research.

Conclusion: Practical and Theoretical Lessons for Field Research

A reflexive analysis of my fieldwork reveals two distinct ways in which authoritarianism itself shapes the conduct of research, even after Kenya's transition to democracy. First, the institutional legacies of Kenya's previous authoritarian regimes continue to shape field research by informally shaping the behavior of both public officials and ordinary citizens. Second, the practice of randomized field research can lead to the reinforcement of authoritarian cultural practices and social norms by emphasizing centralization, control, and compliance over deliberation, participation, and collective ownership.

Both of these types of authoritarian influences on field research pose both methodological and ethical problems for field researchers in Kenya. The legacy of the colonial oligarchy continues to shape field research by shaping the discourse around racial and ethnic identity and by drawing researchers into political conflicts over access to land. These conflicts can limit researchers' access to subject populations and the willingness of respondents to respond to questions openly and truthfully. The legacy of the KANU bureaucratic-executive regime shapes field research through the strong and pervasive role of the Provincial Administration as a gatekeeper for access to communities and data, even in the wake of attempts to formally democratize and devolve research administration. A failure to understand the de facto authority of the administrative state in research and governance exposes researchers

and research participants to many different kinds of obstacles and risks. The authoritarian practices embedded in randomized experiments can lead to noncompliance problems that undermine experimental protocols and can ultimately divide and disempower communities, undercutting the desire of many experimentalists to use field experiments to have a direct impact on development polices and outcomes.

In addition to identifying the problems that authoritarian legacies and practices can pose for field research, it is possible to use the analysis in this article to extract two practical lessons for scholars conducting political science field research. First, when planning and designing field research, whether or not your research is historical in orientation, researchers must try to develop a substantive understanding of previous political regimes and how they operated. This is not simply a general injunction to "get to know the context" before starting fieldwork. Rather, the idea is that political scientists embarking on field research can and should draw on both general comparative politics research and the area studies literature to enable themselves to understand, interpret, and respond to research challenges as political scientists. Thanks to my efforts to link my field experience with both the literature on comparative politics and Kenyan history, I came to understand that the politics of *mzungu* research affiliation and the research permit process were not just idiosyncratic nuisances, but were manifestations of deeper structural aspects of Kenyan politics.

Second, when designing and implementing randomized field experiments (and other quantitative field research such as representative sample surveys and lab-in-field experiments), researchers should carefully examine the potential ethical and political implications of such research (Dionne, 2014; Desposato, 2016). Again, this advice is not simply reiterating what scholars already do as part of obtaining human subjects approval for their research. Rather, the advice is that where possible, scholars conducting field experiments should actively map and describe the relationship between their intervention, data collection, and local communities and find ways to generate more active, participatory involvement at every stage of the research process. While this type of reflexive analysis of positionality and power is becoming more common in qualitative research, my analysis of the authoritarian undercurrents in randomized field experiments indicates that quantitative researchers should start to borrow from the toolkit of interpretivist political science to understand and prevent unintended social and political consequences of randomized field experiments.

Beyond these practical implications, the arguments and analyses in this article make a broader contribution to debates on the power and purpose of multimethod research in political science. Because these authoritarian effects on research are a result of institutions and culture, they are substantively meaningful and can be prevented and mitigated using the concepts and theories that are central to comparative politics research.

In the introduction to *Designing Social Inquiry*, King, Keohane, and Verba argued that "the content is the method," succinctly encapsulating a paradigm in which the scientific method and causal inference constitute the core of research (King, Keohane, and Verba, 1994). From the perspective of this paradigm, the primary value of multimethod research is its ability to provide additional leverage in making inferences by triangulating the strengths and weakness of different methods of data collection and analysis (Laitin, 2003). My experience and findings turn this logic on its head. By undertaking ethnographic, archival, and field experimental research in Kenya, I revealed unexpected and important aspects of authoritarianism that are present in contemporary Kenya. In turn, these authoritarian legacies and cultural practices have an enduring impact on the conduct of each of these types of research activity in Kenya, shaping both the quality of data and the ethical implications of conducting research.

This presents a radically different vision of the relationship between content and methods in political science research. Rather than simply borrowing methodological tools from other disciplines based on concerns of scientific inference, the potentially distinctive role of the political scientist is to reflect upon both the findings of research and the deeper political factors uncovered through the practice of research itself and to use the dialogue between inference and interpretation to inform the practice of politics and policy making (Gray, 1977; Hoppe, 1999). Understanding how politics shape all elements of the process of research will not only ensure better research, it will help to increase the likelihood that political science research can actually have a positive impact on politics.

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