

A Political History of Northern Kenya

As told through their elected representatives, 1957-2024



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June 2024

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Limitations:

- Excludes local government throughout.

- 1 Gusii
- 2 Meru
- 3 Ukambani
- 4 Embu and Mbeere
- 5 Maasai and Samburu
- 6 Somali
- 7 Nakuru and Laikipia
- 8 Nairobi
- 9 Bukusu Luhya
- 10 Southern Kikuyu
- 11 Northern Kikuyu
- 12 Mombasa
- 13 Kilifi and Kwale
- 14 Kakamega and Vihiga
- 15 Taita and Taveta
- 16 South Nyanza
- 17 Busia
- 18 Northern Kenya

Northern Kenya

A Short History of the North

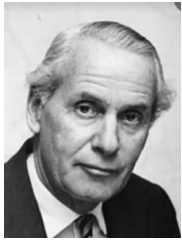
The large semi-deserts of northern Kenya were sparsely inhabited at independence, mostly by nomadic pastoralists. While the east of the region was mostly Somali-speaking and the west Turkana, the central northern part (the subject of this review) was occupied by Cushitic Oromo-language speakers, the pastoralists of the Borana, Gabbra, Sakkuye, Rendille and Aarial (Samburu/Rendille). There were also a few Burji (of Ethiopian origin, who began to settle in Kenya around 1900) in urban areas. The Boran were the largest group, relatively recent arrivals from Ethiopia and with strong connections with Boran in southern Ethiopia. There were also Samburu, Turkana and Somali in the area, and some Meru in the south of Isiolo.

There was no industry to speak of, little development and few schools. There was little of extractive value to interest investors or state capitalists, apart from the raising of cattle. Most land was undemarcated and held as community land, shared by all. The area was extremely sparsely-populated. The majority of northerners were Moslem, with a small minority of Christians.

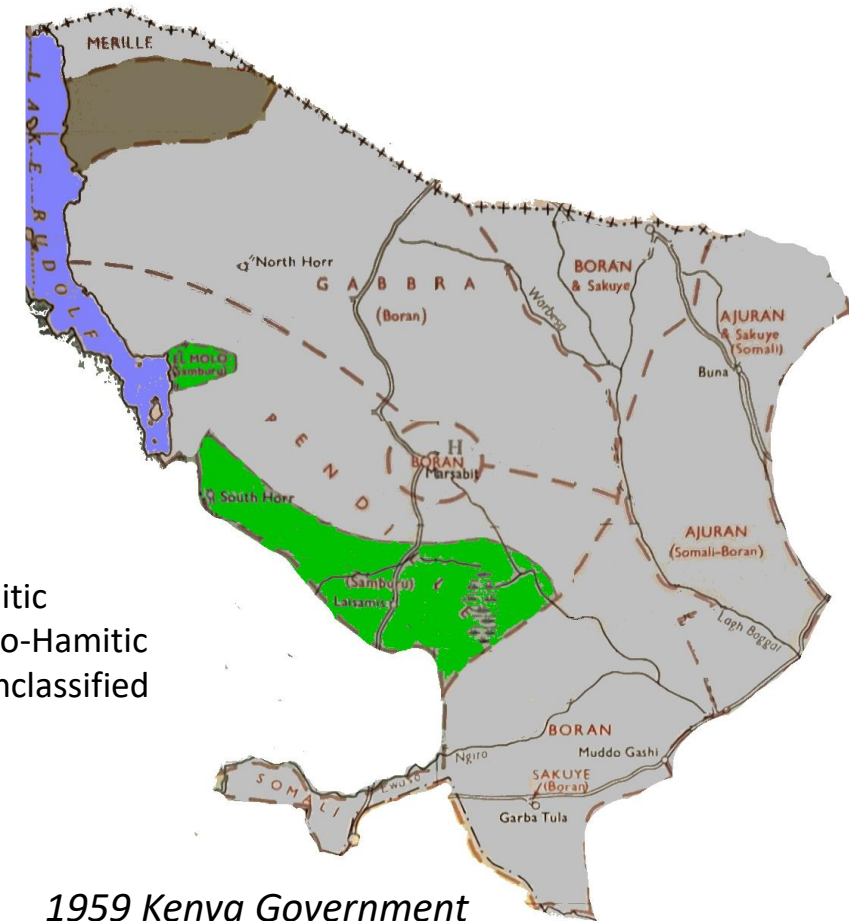
The region was part of the Northern Frontier District until 1963, when it became part of Eastern Region, split off from the Somali North-East. Relations between local pastoralists and the British-led state were guarded, with the colonial state seen as a distant and alien phenomenon. Colonial Kenya took the view that apart from addressing any threats to Kenya's territorial integrity, the locals should be left "to their own customs as far as possible".

Northern Kenya

1957-58: First Votes for an elected African



Governor
Renison



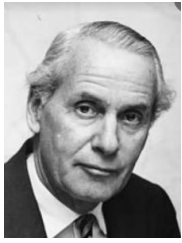
Grey=Cushitic
Green =Nilo-Hamitic
Brown = unclassified

1959 Kenya Government
Ethnographic Map

In 1957, the first African constituencies were created. It is not clear whether any of the north was covered. In 1958, six more constituencies are carved out for African Legislative Council members and elections held, but there is no change here.

Northern Kenya

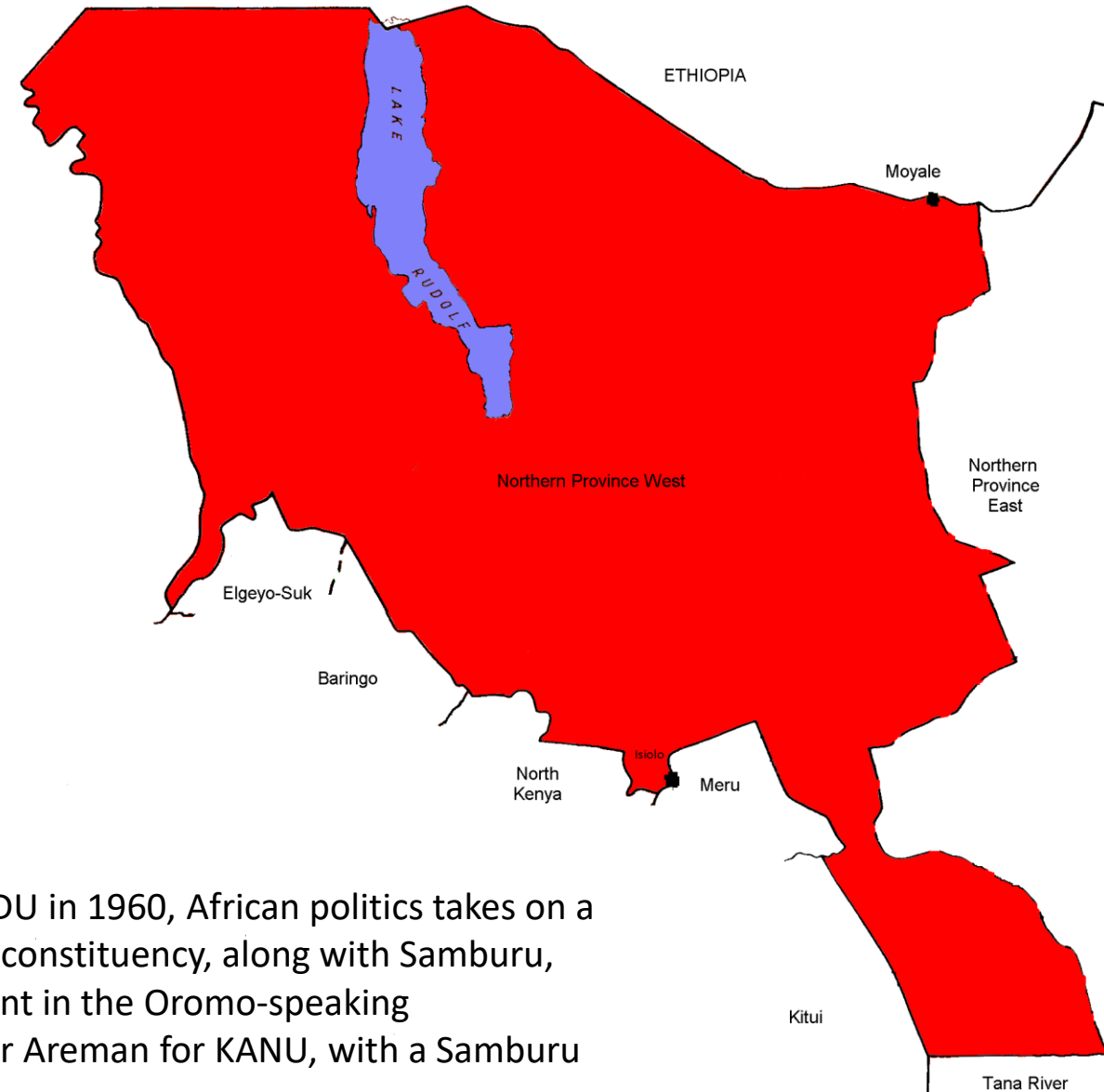
Feb 1961: The Kenyatta Election



Governor Ronald Ngala
Renison (KADU)

Turkana
Peter
Areman

Northern Province East



With national political parties permitted and the formation of KANU and KADU in 1960, African politics takes on a more structured form. The region is now part of the Northern Province West constituency, along with Samburu, Turkana and the north of Tana River. With political activity almost non-existent in the Oromo-speaking communities, there are no local candidates. The seat is won by Turkana Peter Areman for KANU, with a Samburu independent second

Northern Kenya

1963: For Self-Government




Governor Macdonald
Kenyatta, Odinga, Mboya (KANU)




Ngei (APP) Ngala (KADU)

Isiolo

NPUA	Sakkuye
Adam Bonaya	

Isiolo

	Meru
M'Nkubitu Lawi	

Isiolo Senator

Marsabit

NPUA	Gabbara
Galgalo Godana	

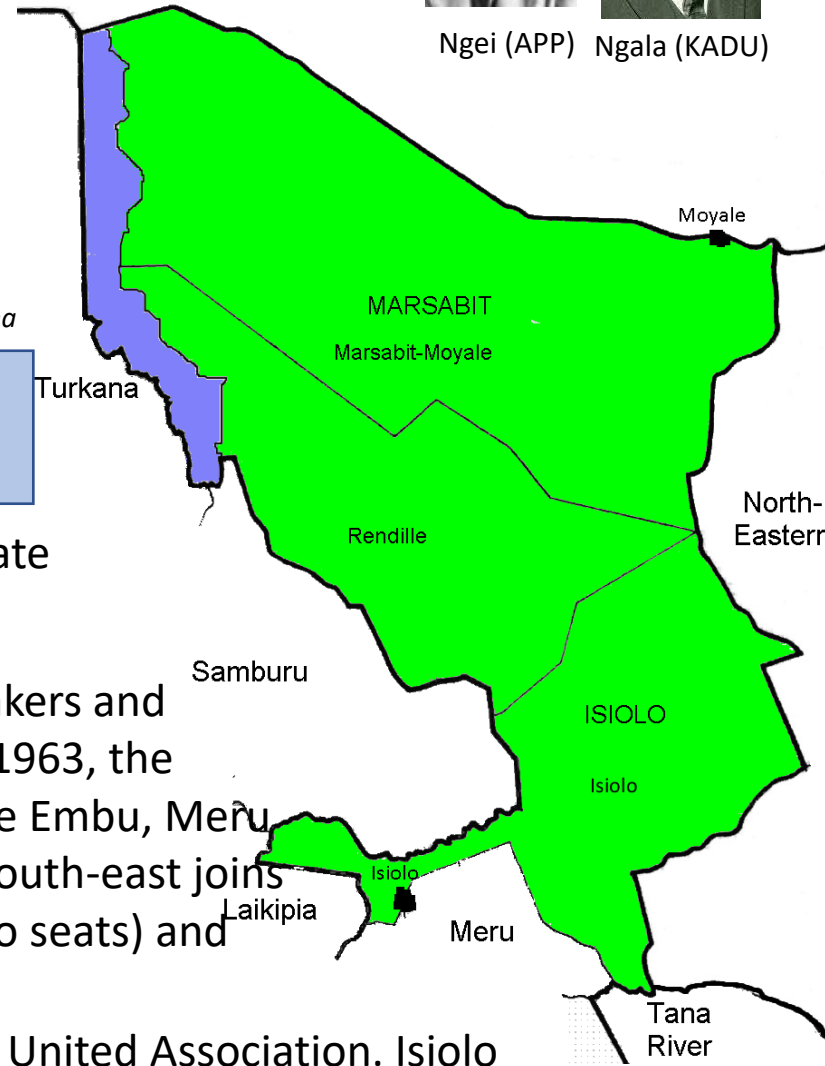
Marsabit-Moyale

NPUA	Burji
Elisha Godana	

Rendille

IND	Borana
Sora Galgalo	

Marsabit Senate



In the 1961-2 referendum, the Somali choose union with Somalia, but the Oromo-speakers and neighbours choose to stay in Kenya. In the common roll, federal, bicameral system of 1963, the region's political structure takes shape. The area is now part of Eastern Region, with the Embu, Meru and Kamba. The Turkana and Samburu are redesignated into Rift Valley, while the far south-east joins Tana River in Coast Region. The area is now divided into northern Marsabit District (two seats) and southern Isiolo district (one seat), both with a senator.

All three MPs seats are won by the anti-secession and KANU-aligned Northern Province United Association. Isiolo Senate is won by a KANU and Marsabit by a Boran independent. KADU is unrepresented. No ministers from the region in Kenyatta's first pre-independence government



One Party State
(Part 1):
1964-66

Northern Kenya

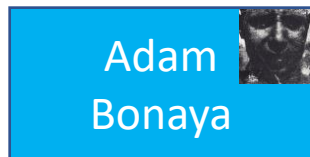
Dec 1964: Republican Constitution



Kenyatta, Odinga, Mboya
(KANU)

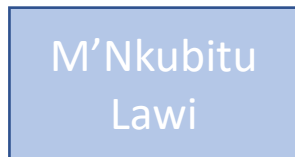
Isiolo

Sakkuye



Isiolo

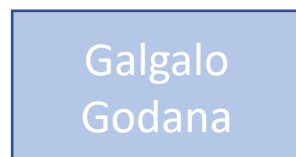
Meru



Isiolo Senator

Marsabit

Gabbara



Marsabit-Moyale

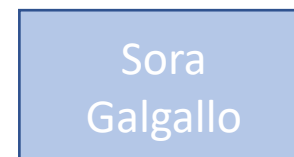
Burji



Rendille



Borana



Marsabit Senate

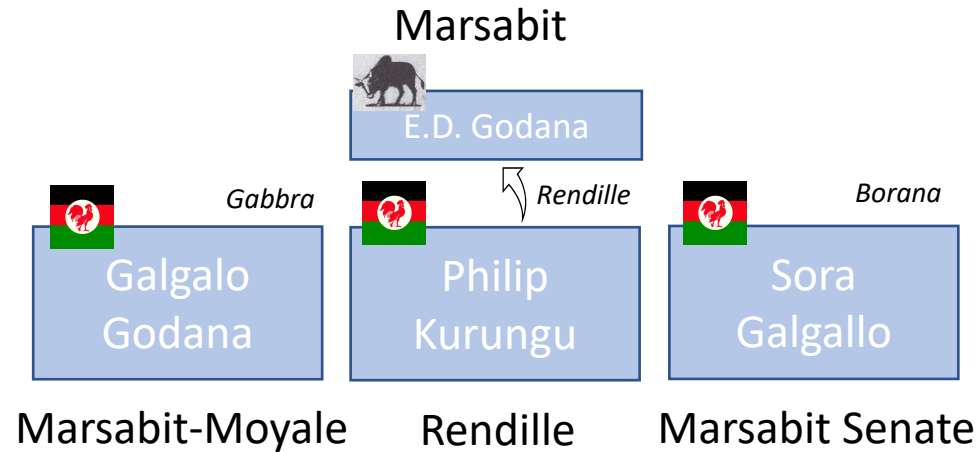
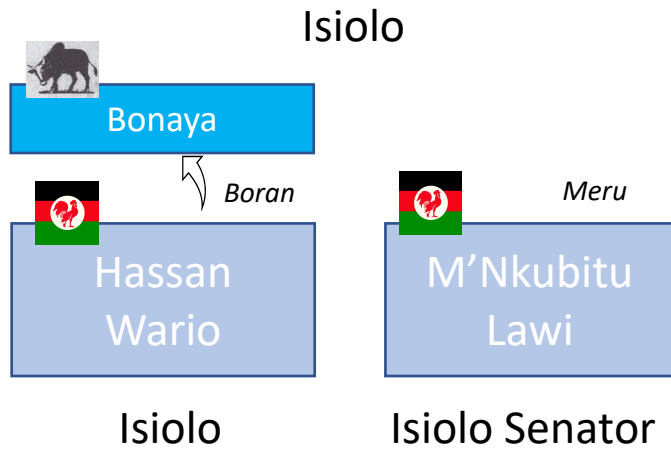
In November 1964, an increasingly irrelevant KADU folds to join KANU. In December, the Republic is established with Kenyatta as President and regionalism ends. No change in Marsabit and Isiolo. In August 1965, the cyclic Senate elections see Sora Ali Galgallo re-elected (for KANU, as the only party). Meanwhile the *shifita* war is under way in the north-east and there are terror attacks and punitive police responses here also. Government policy increasingly emphasizes growth over equity, and concentrates investment in the highest potential regions of Kenya to the south.

Northern Kenya

1966: The KPU



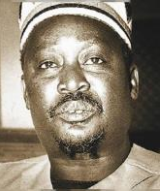
Kenyatta, Mboya, Ngala
(KANU)



The 1966 KPU rebellion follows years of growing conflict between left and right. In the 1966 'little general election', KANU forces their KPU opponents to go back to the people after defecting to the new party. In the north, there is originally some support for the KPU as an alternative to KANU, but that swiftly withers in the fact of state hostility. Two MPs join the party and lose their seats in the polls.

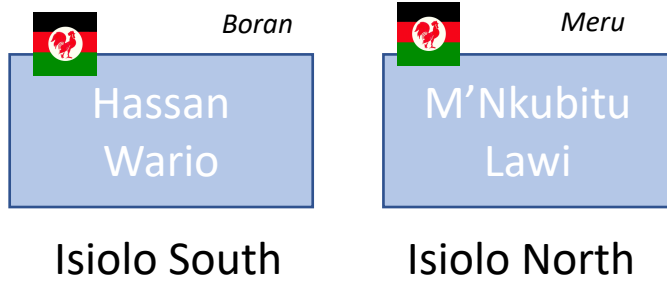
Northern Kenya

1967: Unicameralism

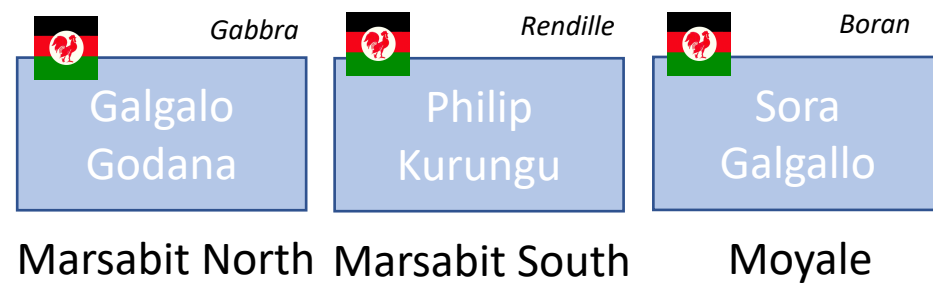


Kenyatta, Mboya, Ngala
(KANU)

Isiolo



Marsabit



In 1967, with the seat redistribution which follows the abolition of the Senate, Isiolo is split into a bizarrely structured north (including the urban area) and south. Marsabit-Moyale, as it is now known, is split in three.

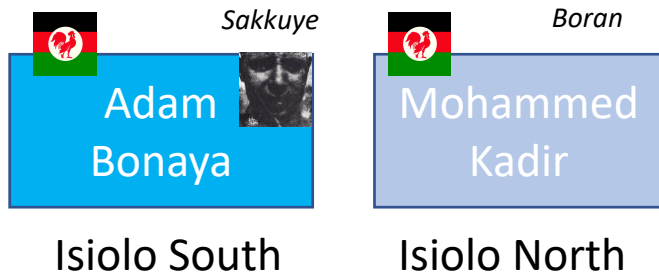
Northern Kenya

1969 General Election

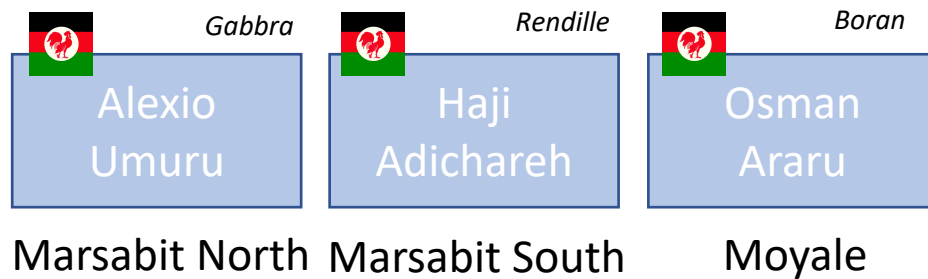


One Party State
(Part 2):
1969-82

Isiolo



Marsabit



Isiolo Census 1969:

Boran	15,883	53%
Somali	4213	14%
Sakkuye	3432	11%
Turkana	2804	9%
Meru	1631	5%
Other	1463	7%
Samburu	84	0%

Marsabit Census 1969:

Rendille	17,686	34%
Gabbra	15,890	31%
Boran	13,432	26%
Turkana	1,036	2%
Samburu	901	2%
Somali	871	2%
Other	1765	3%

In 1969, Tom Mboya is murdered and four months later, the KPU is banned; return of the one-party state. In Isiolo, Bonaya, now in KANU, returns. Four of five incumbents lose. In Isiolo, 53% of the district is Borana, 11% Sakkuye, 14% Somali, 9% Turkana and 5% Meru. In Marsabit, the Rendille, Gabbra and Boran are roughly equal. The Burji are not identified separately.



Northern Kenya

1972-3: Jail and By-Elections

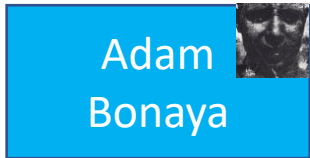


One Party State
(Part 2):
1969-82

Isiolo

Sakkuye

Boran



Isiolo South

Isiolo North

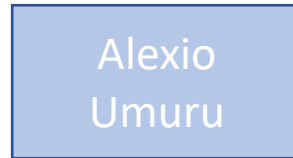
Marsabit



Gabbara

Rendille

Borana



Marsabit North

Marsabit South

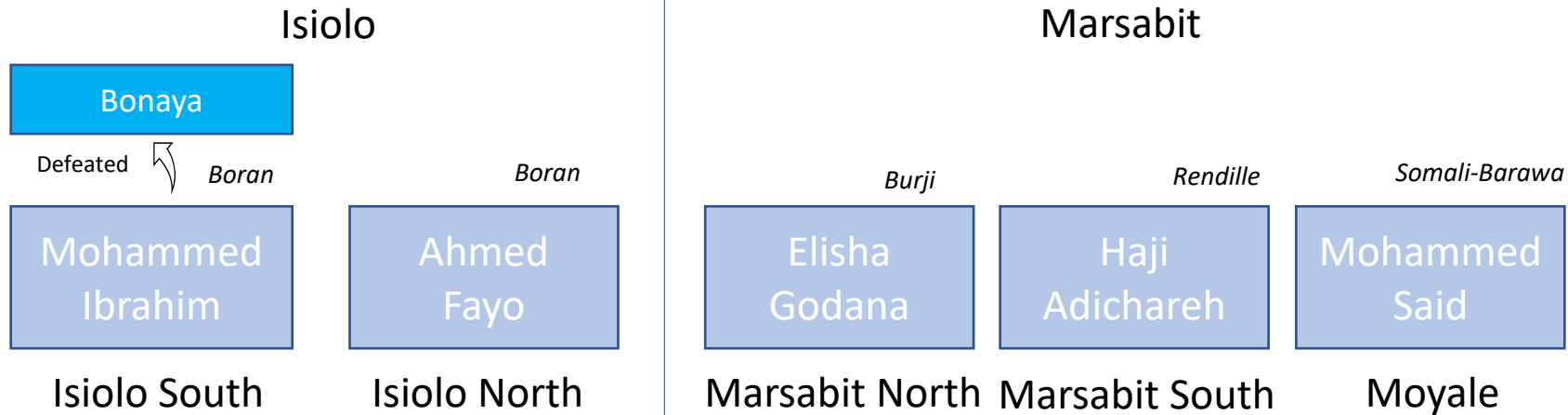
Moyale

In March 1972, Alexio Umuru is jailed on theft charges. His appeals last until March 1974, at which point a by-election is held, which he somehow wins. In April 1973, Bonaya is also jailed on mileage fraud charges. His appeals last until the dissolution, allowing him to hold the seat technically until the general election.

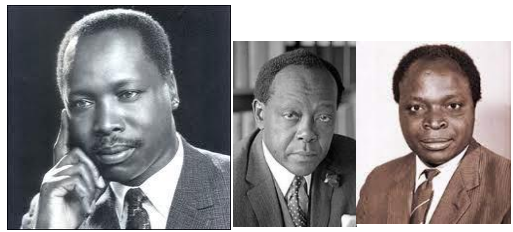


Northern Kenya

1974 General Election and After



In the 1974 election, Bonaya loses, as does Umuro. Elisha Godana returns. Only one Incumbent, Adichareh, is reelected. The tensions and ferment of the next five years mostly pass the region by. Little changes when Moi takes office in 1978

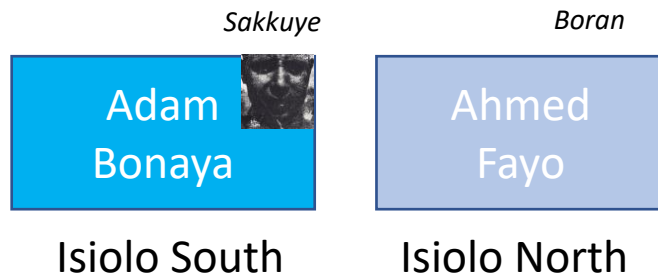


Northern Kenya

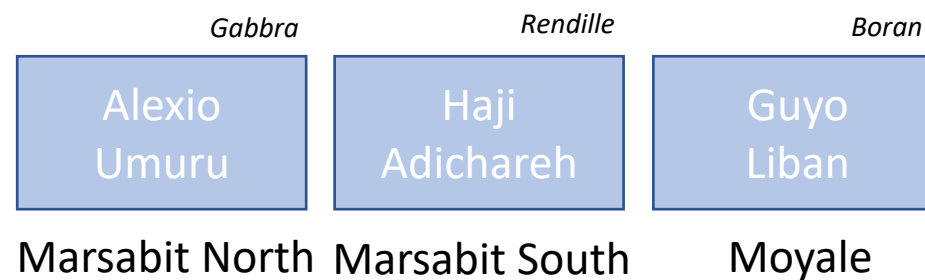
1979 General Election



Isiolo



Marsabit



Isiolo Census 1979:		
Boran	21392	49%
Somali	8323	19%
Turkana	4533	10%
Samburu	2944	7%
Other	2629	6%
Meru	2512	6%
Kikuyu	1088	3%
Sakkuye	57	0%

Marsabit Census 1979:		
Boran	30,444	32%
Gabbra	23,410	24%
Rendille	19,856	21%
Somali	7059	7%
Samburu	3990	4%
Turkana	2929	3%
Other	8528	9%

Moi's first election sees Bonaya's return, again. Only 2 incumbents are re-elected. Meanwhile the second census shows Marsabit district has doubled in ten years, including significant numbers of Boran, Somali, Samburu and Turkana, making the Boran the largest group in both districts. In Isiolo, the Sakkuye have vanished (nominally) while many Samburu have moved in.



Northern Kenya

1982: Deaths



Isiolo

Fayo

Died ↶

Adam
Bonaya 

Isiolo South

Ahmed
Fayo

Isiolo North

Marsabit

Umuru

Died ↶

Abdikadir
Boru

Marsabit North

Haji
Adichareh

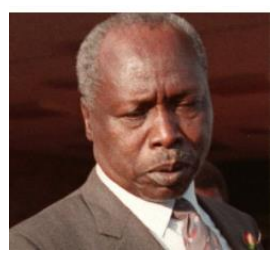
Marsabit South

Guyo
Liban

Moyale

Luca Daudi
Galgallo
PC Coast 1980-

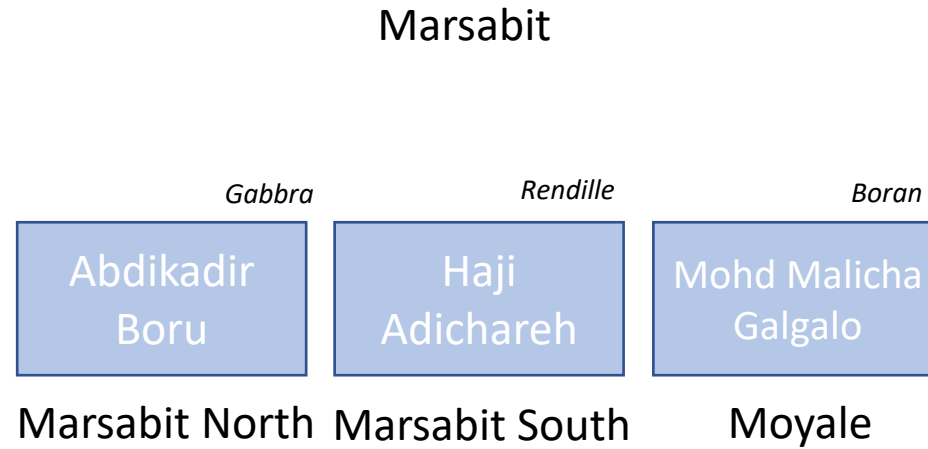
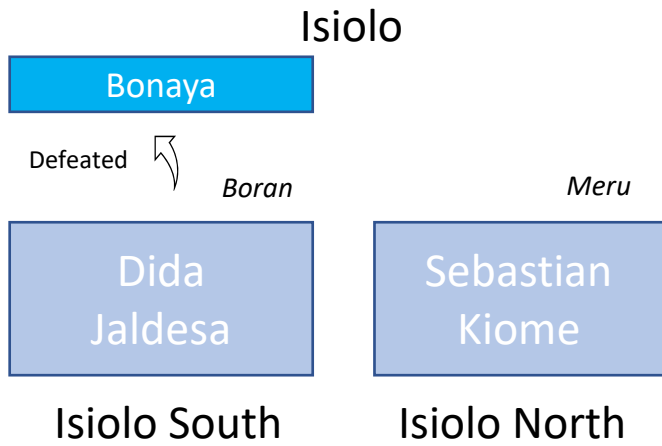
In 1982, Umuro is murdered by *shifita* (reportedly). A newcomer, Boru, replaces him. In early 1983, Ahmed Fayo dies and is replaced in a by-election by his brother, Haji. Meanwhile a Boran, Luca Galgallo, replaced Eliud Mahihu as PC for Coast



Northern Kenya 1983: Snap General Election



One Party State
(Part 3): De Jure
1982-91

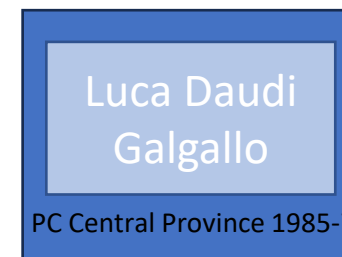


Njonjo's fall in 1983 after the 1982 coup is followed by a snap general election. Bonaya and two others are defeated, Adichareh and Boru return.

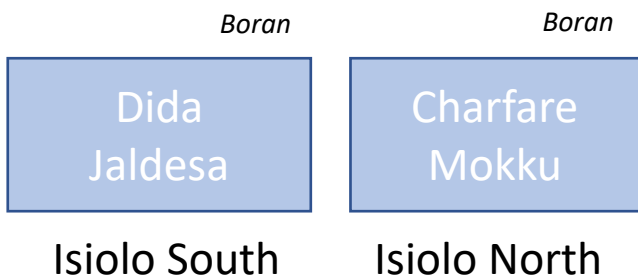


Northern Kenya

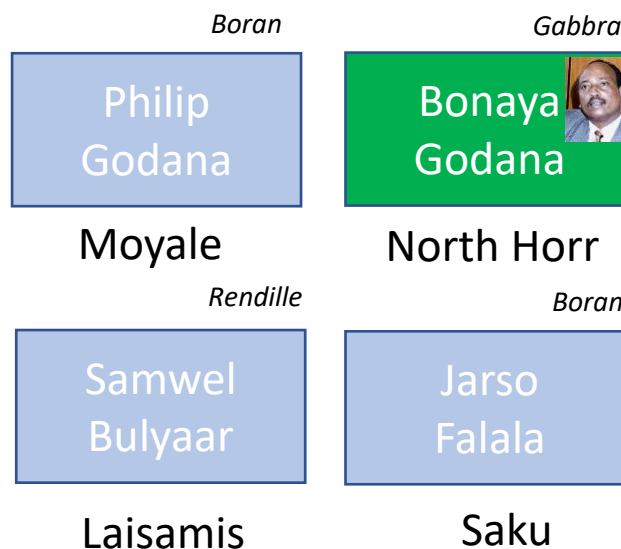
1988 (Public Queue Voting)



Isiolo



Marsabit



Isiolo Census 1989:

Boran	23,937	34%
Somali	11,362	16%
Turkana	8101	12%
Sakkuye	6502	9%
Samburu	6243	9%
Other	6155	9%
Meru	5776	8%
Kikuyu	2002	3%

Marsabit Census 1989:

Boran	36,447	28%
Gabbra	30,213	23%
Rendille	23,585	18%
Somali	8777	7%
Turkana	7343	6%
Samburu	5887	5%
Other	17,010	13%

The first boundary redistribution since 1967 sees no change in Isiolo but one more seat for Marsabit. Moyale remains (mostly Borana), Marsabit North becomes North Hoor (the predominantly Gabbra seat) and Marsabit South is split into Laisamis (mostly Rendille) and Saku. In the primaries and general elections that follow, many seats nationwide are rigged, and there are serious concerns about Laisamis here. Newcomers include law lecturer Dr Bonaya Godana. The 1989 census shows little change (except that the Sakkuye have returned). For the next three years, change in the rest of Kenya has little impact here and there are few obvious consequences from the fight for multi-party democracy.



Northern Kenya

Late 1992: Multi-Partyism



Isiolo



Isiolo South

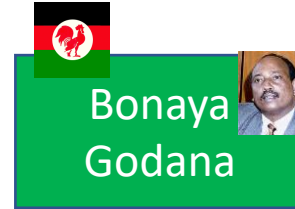


Isiolo North

Marsabit



Moyale



North Horr



Laisamis



Saku

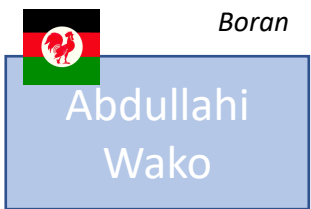
Multi-party democracy returns in December 1991. As FORD and the DP strengthen, KANU remains the dominant party in the arid north. No MPs defect.

Northern Kenya

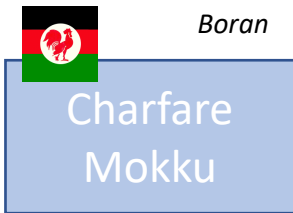
December 1992: Multi-Party General Elections



Isiolo



Isiolo South

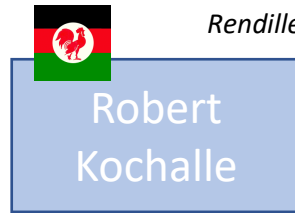


Isiolo North

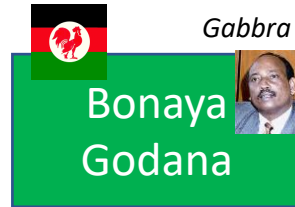
Marsabit



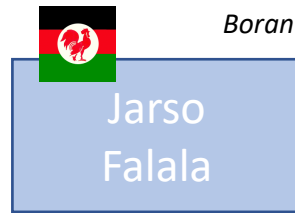
Moyale



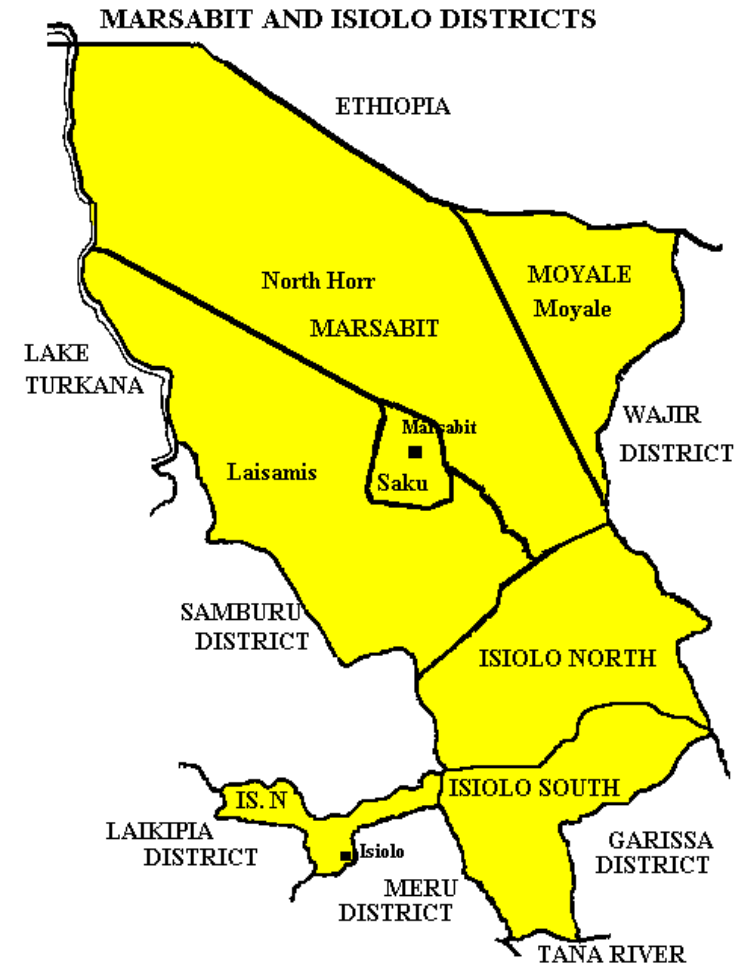
Laisamis



North Horr



Saku



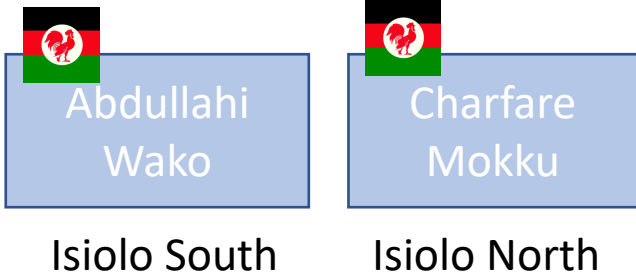
In the 1992 multi-party elections, KANU wins narrowly nationwide against a split opposition. In Isiolo and Marsabit, Moi wins every seat in both the presidency and parliament. Most incumbent MPs however are defeated in competitive KANU primaries; Bonaya Godana and Charfare Mokku are exceptions. The DP are the main opposition locally but perform poorly.

Northern Kenya

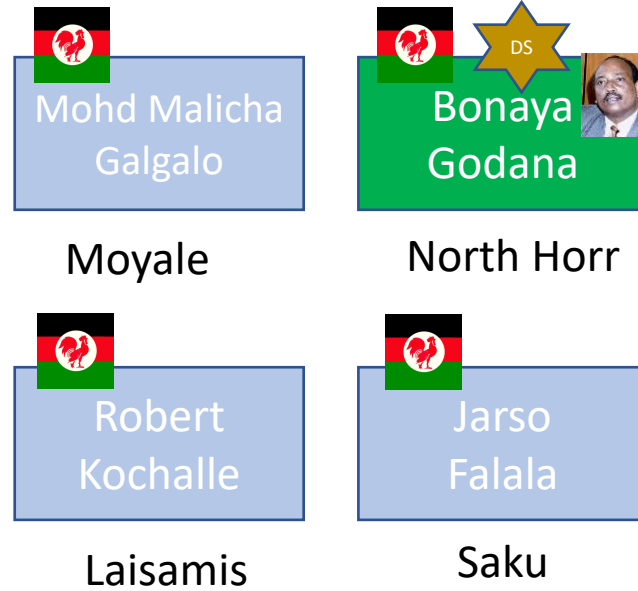
1993-97: Crisis and Reforms



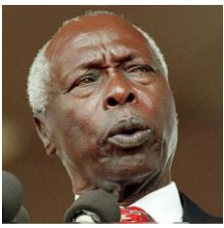
Isiolo



Marsabit



There are no changes in leadership locally during 1993-7, and the region remains relatively calm, a safe KANU zone. Bonaya Godana is chosen as KANU's nomination for Deputy Speaker during 1993-7. Multiparty KANU relies on the pastoralist voting blocks for survival and builds a new Rift-Valley focused synthetic KAMATUSA (Kalenjin –Maasai-Turkana-Samburu) quasi-ethnic political structure, but the Oromo north is not part of this. In 1997, nationwide protests for constitutional reform leads to violence and in mid-1997, the 'IPPG' deal is done, which Jarso Falana (Saku) plays a key enabling role to deliver. New constituency boundaries do not involve changes here.




Northern Kenya

December 1997: General Election



Isiolo


Boran



Abdullahi Wako

Isiolo South

Boran




Charfare Mokku

Isiolo North

Marsabit


Boran



Gurach Galgalo

Moyale

Rendille



Robert Kochalle

Laisamis


Gabbra




Bonaya Godana 

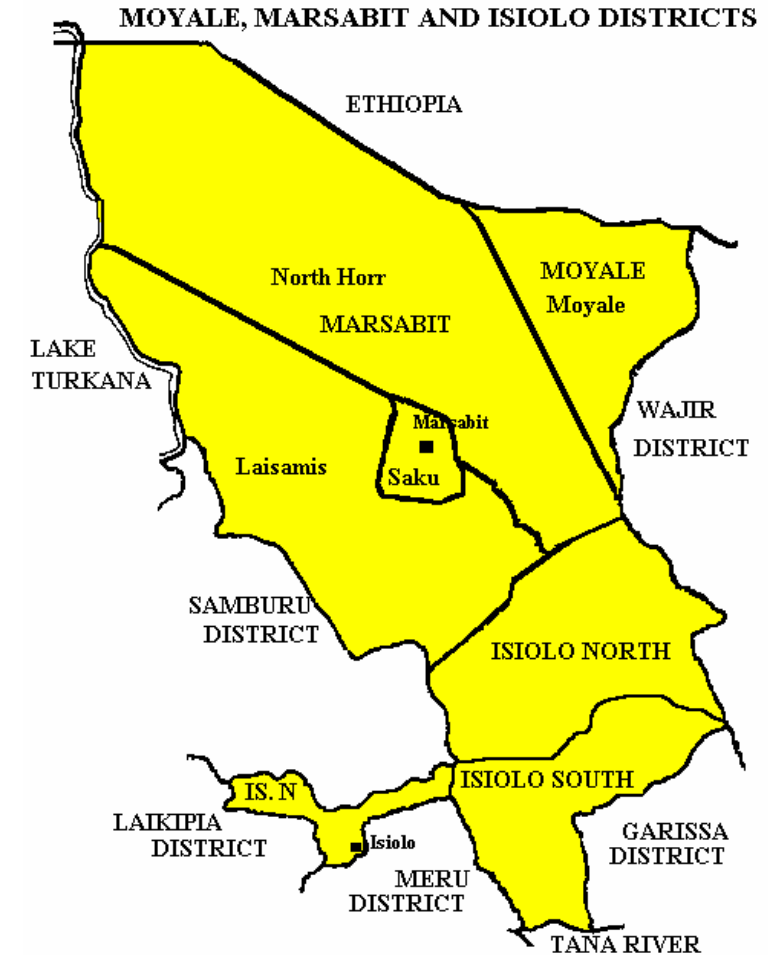
North Horr

Boran



Abdi Sasura

Saku



In the 1997 elections, facing four regional opponents (Raila, Wamalwa, Kibaki and Ngilu) KANU again wins nationwide. In northern Kenya, KANU remains dominant, with no single opponent - Moi and KANU won all seats but the second ranked presidential candidate was Kibaki in Isiolo, Wamalwa in Moyale and Odinga in North Horr. In the January 1998 government, Godana is elevated to ministerial office as Foreign Minister.

Northern Kenya 1998-2002



Isiolo



Isiolo South



Isiolo North

Marsabit



Moyale



Laisamis

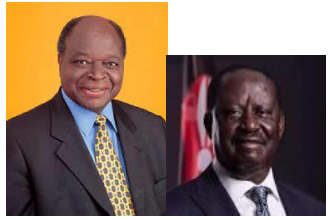


North Horr



Saku

As Moi seeks allies in the opposition, KANU is riven by internal strife. Raila leads the NDP into cooperation with KANU and seeks power from within. In 2000, Isiolo's Charfare Mokku is sacked as assistant minister but restored to office six months later. In 2002, Raila realises that Moi has had no intention of passing the succession baton to him and leads a rebellion within KANU against Moi's choice of Uhuru Kenyatta as his successor. With the "rainbow rebellion" joining the National Alliance (NAK) of Kibaki, Wamalwa and Ngilu, the political tide nationwide shifts sharply against KANU. Here however, all MPs again remain loyal.




Northern Kenya

2002: Moi Retires, Kibaki Elected



Isiolo


Boran




Abdul Bahari

Isiolo South

Boran-Sakkuye




Mohammed Kuti 

Isiolo North


Marsabit


Boran



Gurach Galgalo

Gabbra




Bonaya Godana 

Moyale

North Horr


Rendille



Titus Ngoyoni

Laisamis

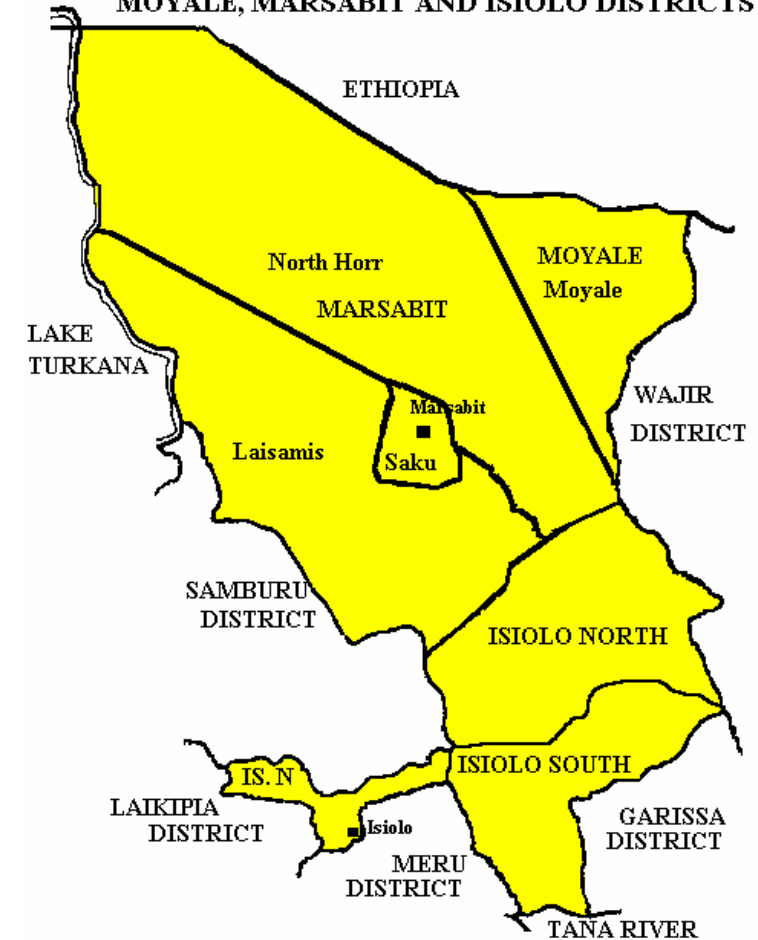
Boran



Abdi Sasura

Saku

MOYALE, MARSABIT AND ISIOLO DISTRICTS



Moi retires and his chosen successor Uhuru is defeated for the Presidency by Kibaki. But KANU and Kenyatta wins every seat in the north again in parliament and the Presidency. Bonaya Godana is re-elected and is joined in Isiolo by medical doctor Mohammed Kuti. The region has no senior level representation in the troubled 2003 Kibaki-led government.



Northern Kenya



2005-7: Second Coalition Government

Isiolo




Abdul Bahari

Isiolo South


Mohammed Kuti



Isiolo North

Marsabit

Galgalo



Died ↖ Boran

Wario Galgalo

Moyale

Ngoyoni



Died ↖ Aariel/Rendille

Joseph Lekuton

Laisamis

Godana



Died ↖ Gabbra

Ukur Yattani



North Horr

Sasura



Died ↖ Boran

Hussein Sasura

Saku

After two years of internal strife, NARC cracks in half after the failed referendum of 2005. All six northern seats vote Orange (No), though narrowly. Kibaki drops all the “Orange” ministers (who voted against the Wako constitution) and reaches out to allies anywhere he can find them while the new ODM gains support nationwide. Kuti is made a minister. But the most significant event of the period in the north is the 10 April 2006 plane crash, which kills all four Marsabit MPs: Bonaya Godana, Gurach Galgalo, Titus Ngoyoni and Abdi Sasura. By-elections elected Joseph Lekuton and Wario Galgalo for KANU, while Bonaya Galgalo was succeeded by ex-District Commissioner Ukur Yattani and pro-Kibaki NARC-Kenya also won Saku through Sasura’s brother.



Northern Kenya

2007: General Election and Subsequent Chaos



Isiolo

Marsabit

Boran



Ali Bahari

Isiolo South

Boran-Sakkuye




Mohammed Kuti




Isiolo North

Boran



Mohamud Ali




Moyale

Yattani

Defeated ↖


Gabbara



Francis Ganya

North Horr


Aariel/Rendille



Joseph Lekuton

Laisamis

Boran



Hussein Sasura

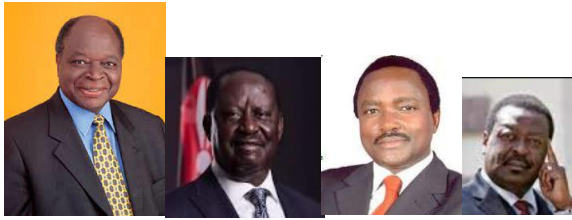
Saku



Another decade, but there is no boundary redistribution in 2006. The 2007 election is an ODM-PNU battle nationwide (with Musyoka only influential in Kamba areas) and in northern Kenya every seat is closely contested. With KANU now favouring Kibaki, he wins the presidential vote in five of six seats., In the Parliamentary polls, it's a chaotic result. Ganya for ODM beats Yattani for the PNU and businessman Mohamud Ali wins Moyale, Sasura defect to Musyoka's ODM-Kenya and wins, while Lekuton is re-elected for KANU. In the short-lived Kibaki-Musyoka government of January-April 2008, as Kenya burns, Kuti is dropped and the region has no ministers.

Northern Kenya

April 2008-12: The Grand Coalition



Isiolo

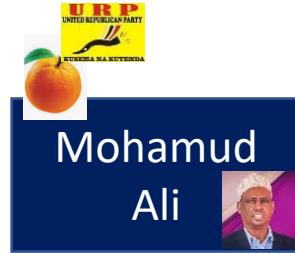
Marsabit



Isiolo South



Isiolo North



Moyale



North Horr



Laisamis



Saku

In the grand coalition (PNU-ODM-ODM-K), the ODM team returns, now taking half the enlarged cabinet's posts. Kitui somehow becomes livestock minister on the PNU side. Against all the odds, in 2010, the coalition crafts and the population votes for a new constitution. All Isiolo and Marsabit votes Green (yes). The new constitution is promulgated in 2010 and comes into effect over the next 2-3 years. Defeated MP Yattani is made an ambassador. There are no by-elections, but in 2012 Kuti moves to Ruto's new pro-pastoralist URP as does Ali, Sasura now favours Kenyatta's TNA, while Lekuton moves to ODM.

Northern Kenya 2013: New Constitution



Nominated Senator



Isiolo

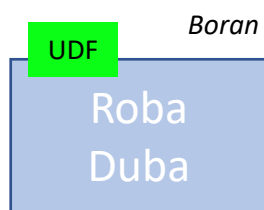


Isiolo South

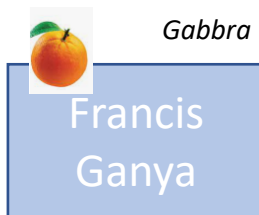


Isiolo North

Marsabit



Moyale



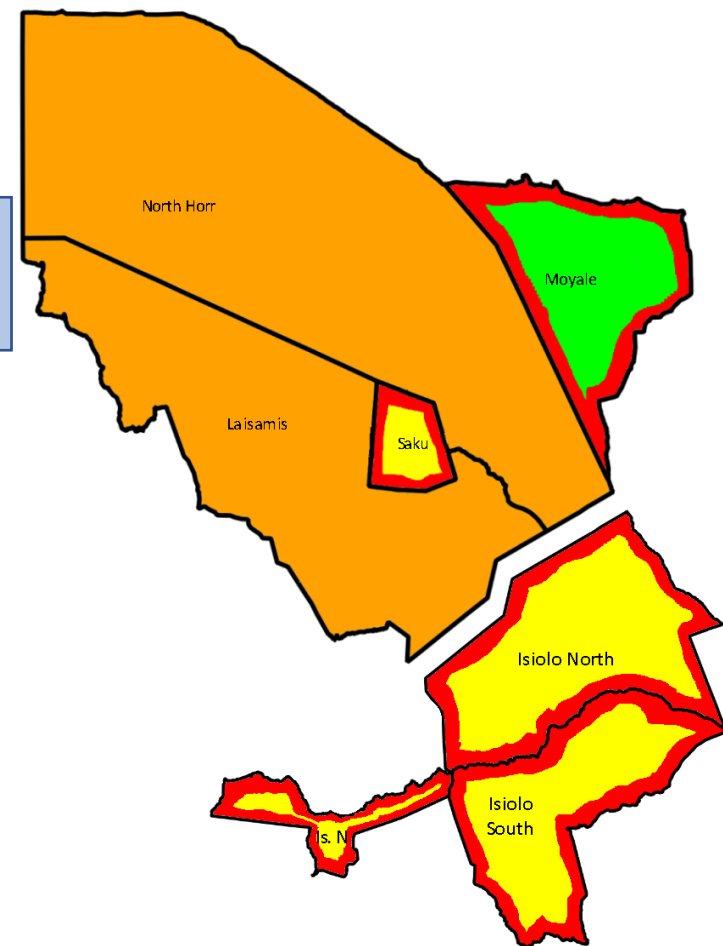
North Horr



Laisamis



Saku



Governor



Senator



Women Rep



Governor



Senator

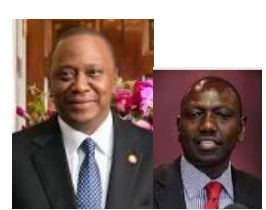


Women Rep

2013 brings a new constitution, new bicameral parliament, Governors. Ministers (Cabinet Secretaries) no longer MPs. 80 more seats nationwide but this are ais already overrepresented in population terms. TNA and URP in alliance defeat Odinga's ODM and Mudavadi's UDF, and here too the result is mixed. The Jubilee alliance (led locally by URP) dominates Isiolo, with Kutu becoming Senator and a newcomer governor, Godana Doyo, but Marsabit is dominated by ODM, and Yattani returns to become the first (ODM) Governor.

Northern Kenya

2014-17: Tug of War



Nominated Senator



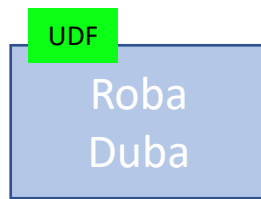
Isiolo



Isiolo South



Isiolo North



Moyale

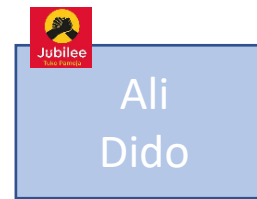
Marsabit



North Horr



Laisamis



Saku



Governor



Senator



Women Rep



Governor



Senator



Women Rep

In 2016-17, TNA and URP merge to form the Jubilee party, and politicians nationwide defect to join them, including most of the ODM team in Marsabit, led by Yattani

Northern Kenya 2017: General Elections



Cab Sec



Isiolo

KPP *Boran*
Abdi Koropu

Isiolo South

KPP *Boran*
Hasan Hulufu

Isiolo North

Marsabit

Jubilee *Boran*
Qalicha Wario

Moyale

FAP *Gabbara*
Francis Ganya

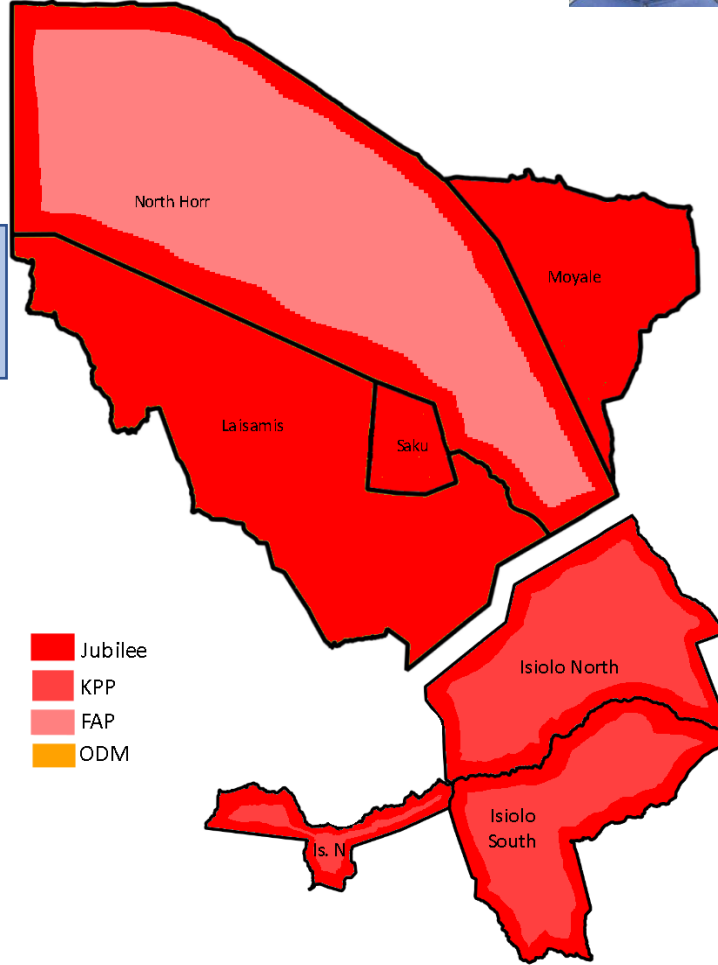
North Horr

Jubilee *Rendille*
Marselino Arbelle

Laisamis

Jubilee *Boran*
Ali Dido

Saku



- Jubilee
- KPP
- FAP
- ODM

Doyo
Defeated *Boran-Sakkuye*
IND
Mohammed Kuti

Governor

PDR *Sakkuye*
Fatuma Dullo

Senator

Jubilee *Boran*
Rehema Jaldesa

Women Rep

Yattani
Defeated *Gabbara*
Jubilee
Mohamud Ali

Governor

Jubilee *Rendille*
Abubakar Hargura

Senator

Jubilee *Boran*
Safia Adan

Women Rep

Wiper rejoins ODM, the ANC and FORD-Kenya in NASA, but NASA loses to Jubilee nationwide. In the north, the Frontier Alliance Party (FAP) is formed in early 2017 as a pro-Jubilee factional offshoot in Marsabit and the Kenya Patriots Party (KPP) similarly in Isiolo. Kenyatta and Ruto win every seat for the presidency, with only Isiolo North close. In the remaining seats, Honours are split between the factions, but jubilee dominates. ODM and NASA have vanished. Kuti loses the Jubilee nomination but then defeats all comers to take the governorship as an independent. Yattani (FAP) loses to his old opponent Mohamud Ali (Jubilee). Fatuma Dullo for Godana Doyo's pro-Jubilee Party of Development and Reform (PDR) is the first women elected in a non-reserved seat here since independence. Yattani is made a cabinet secretary



Northern Kenya

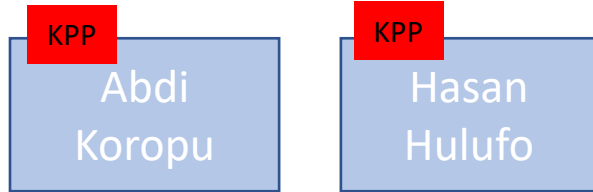
2018-22: The Handshake and the Divorce



Cab Sec



Isiolo



Isiolo South

Isiolo North

Marsabit



Moyale

North Horr

Laisamis

Saku



Governor

Senator

Women Rep

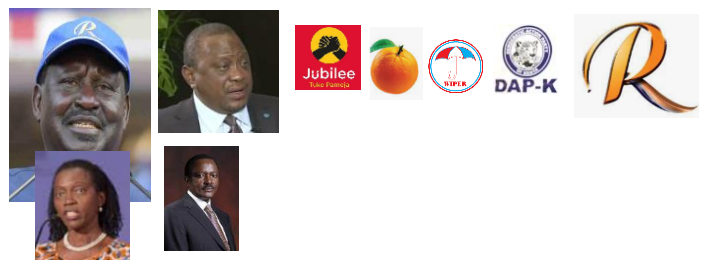


Governor

Senator

Women Rep

After the repeat presidential election, growing tensions and the 2018 handshake between Odinga and Kenyatta, Kenya takes a different course. With Ruto out of favour and the handshake the main driver of politics, the situation becomes tougher for the Ruto team. Eventually, Jubilee and ODM cooperate to form a new supra-alliance Azimio, with Odinga their candidate. Here, Kuti falls seriously ill and goes overseas for treatment. In Isiolo, Dullo and Jaldesa join Ruto's UDA, but later defect to Jubilee and UDA is weak. In Marsabit, Ganya and Dido are arrested in 2018 over local clashes but not prosecuted. Safia Aden defects to ODM, several others favour UDA, but the situation is unclear



Northern Kenya 2022: Ruto's Revenge

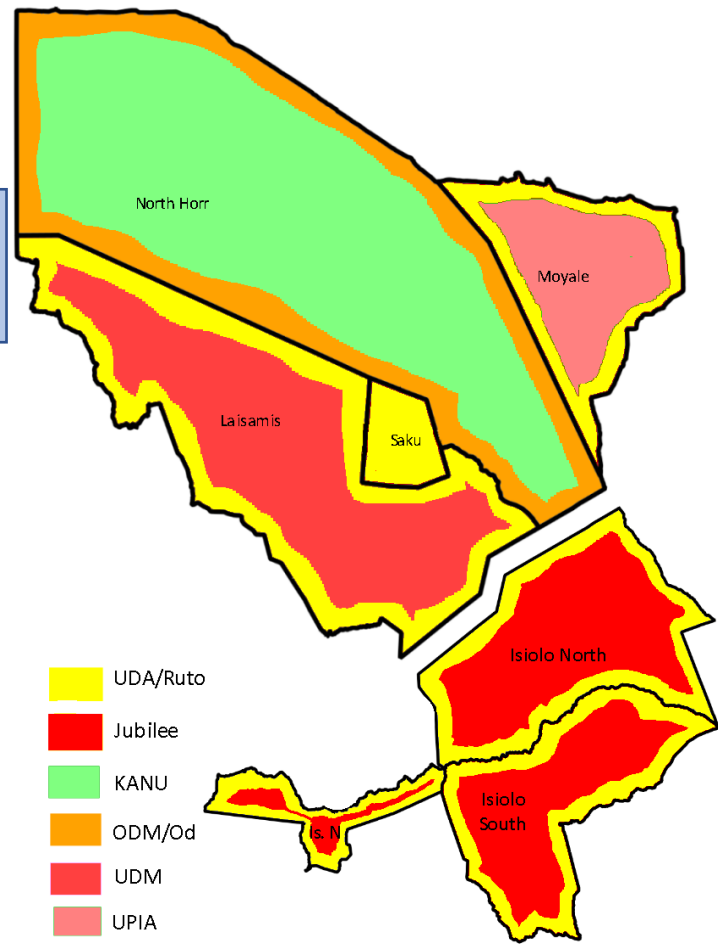


Isiolo

Boran Mohamed Bidu Isiolo South	Turkana Joseph Lomwa Isiolo North	
Boran-Sakkuye Abdi Ibr Hassan Governor	Sakkuye Fatuma Dullo Senator	Boran Mumina Bonaya Women Rep

Marsabit

Boran Guya Jaldesa Moyale	Gabbra Wario Adhe North Horr	Aariel/Rendille Joseph Lekuton Laisamis	Boran Ali Dido Saku
Gabbra Mohamud Ali Governor	Burji Mohamed Chute Senator	Boran Waqo Jilo Women Rep	



In 2022, the north is a swing region, torn between Ruto's UDA and its URP roots, and the government largesse and promises of the Odinga-Kenyatta Azimio alliance. Ruto beats Odinga in five of six seats for the presidency, with only North Horr returning to its ODM roots. In the other seats, however, Jubilee dominates Isiolo while Marsabit is divided between UDA on one side, and pro-Azimio UDM (under whose ticket Ali was reelected as Marsabit Governor) UPIA and KANU. After the poll, UDM immediately defects to join the winning team.