

THE INFLUENCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE DECENTRALISATION ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN THREE SELECTED COUNTIES OF WESTERN EQUATORIA STATE, SOUTH SUDAN

4 Abstract

5 This study assessed how administrative decentralization influences service delivery in Tambura,
6 Yambio, and Mundri Counties of Western Equatoria State. A descriptive-correlational design
7 was used, combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative insights
8 from interviews and focus group discussions. From population of 260, a sample of 158
9 respondents per county was studied, including government officials, health personnel,
10 community leaders, civil society actors, and residents. Statistical analysis using SPSS examined
11 the strength of decentralization-service delivery relationships, thematic analysis explored
12 contextual factors. Regression results show uneven effects across counties: Yambio recorded
13 significant positive contribution ($B = 0.205, p = .018$), Tambura showed a smaller but significant
14 effect ($B = 0.044, p = .048$), and Mundri demonstrated a negative, non-significant relationship (B
15 $= -0.037, p = .513$). Although decentralization can enhance accountability and community
16 participation, its impact remains constrained by capacity gaps, limited resources, political
17 interference, and unclear administrative mandates.

18 **Keywords:** *Influence, Administrative decentralization; service delivery; Western Equatoria*
19 *State; South Sudan*

20 1.1 Introduction

21 Administrative decentralization refers to the transfer of operational responsibilities, including
22 planning, personnel management, and implementation of public services, from central authorities
23 to lower levels of government. In theory, this form of decentralization enhances efficiency and
24 responsiveness by bringing decision-making closer to citizens. In fragile and post-conflict
25 contexts such as South Sudan, however, administrative decentralization operates within
26 conditions of limited capacity, political instability, and weak institutions.

27 Since independence, South Sudan has adopted decentralization as a core governance principle,
28 with counties expected to play a central role in service delivery. Evidence from previous studies
29 suggests that decentralization can improve outcomes when local governments possess sufficient
30 authority and capacity. For instance, research in Bor County found that devolved administrative
31 authority was associated with improvements in education services. Nevertheless, other studies
32 highlight persistent challenges, including shortages of skilled personnel, unclear mandates, and
33 tensions between statutory and customary authorities.

34 In Western Equatoria State, these challenges are particularly pronounced in remote and conflict-
35 affected counties. Overlapping authority between county administrations, state ministries, and
36 traditional leadership often creates uncertainty regarding service delivery responsibilities. This
37 study therefore examines how administrative decentralization influences service delivery
38 outcomes in Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri Counties, with the aim of generating empirical
39 evidence to inform decentralization policy in fragile settings.

40 **1.2 Statement of the problem**

41 The central issue addressed under this topic is the persistent gap between the formal transfer of
42 administrative authority to local governments and the actual improvement of basic service
43 delivery at county level in Western Equatoria State. Although administrative decentralization is
44 intended to bring decision-making and delivery closer to communities, local administrations in
45 Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri often lack adequate capacity, resources, clarity of roles, and
46 autonomy to plan and implement services effectively. This misalignment results in weak
47 coordination, delayed service provision, limited accountability, and uneven access to health,
48 education, and other public services. The study therefore focuses on understanding how the
49 design and practice of administrative decentralization shape service delivery outcomes in a
50 fragile, post-conflict context, where institutional weaknesses and political dynamics continue to
51 constrain local governance performance.

52 **1.3 Main Objective**

53 The main objective of the study was to evaluate the effect of administrative decentralization on
54 service delivery in three selected counties of Western Equatoria State, South Sudan.

55

56

57 **1.4 Research Question**

58 What is the effect of administrative decentralization on service delivery in Tambura, Yambio,
59 and Mundri Counties of Western Equatoria State?

60 **2.1 Literature Review**

61 This section reviews relevant literature examined from both theoretical and empirical
62 perspectives on the influence of administrative decentralization on service delivery in three
63 selected counties of Western Equatoria State, South Sudan, as well as in other global contexts.
64 The review is guided by the third specific objective of the study titled "*Decentralization Policy*
65 *and Service Delivery in Three Selected Counties of Western Equatoria State, South Sudan*," with
66 the purpose of identifying existing knowledge gaps. Emphasis is placed on scholarly works,
67 including empirical studies, conceptual analyses, and policy discussions that address
68 administrative decentralization, service delivery, or closely related variables. By synthesizing the
69 arguments, findings, and recommendations of previous scholars, this section situates the current
70 study within the broader body of knowledge and highlights areas that remain insufficiently
71 explored and therefore warrant further investigation.

72 **2.2 The concept of Administrative Decentralization**

73 Administrative decentralization (sometimes referred to as institutional decentralization) involves
74 the full or partial transfer of any array of functional responsibilities to the local level institutions
75 such as health care service, the operation of schools, the management service personnel, the
76 buildings and maintenance of roads and garbage collection (Yusoffetal.,2016). As Stanton,
77 (2009), asserts, administrative decentralization is concerned with the functional tasks of
78 decentralization. It relates to the assignment of service delivery powers and functions across
79 levels of government and determining where responsibility is situated. Administrative
80 decentralization involves transfer of civil servants and public functions to the lower level of
81 government (Olatona&Olomola, 2015). It involves full or partial transfer of functional
82 responsibilities to the sub-national units of governance. The national government assigns local
83 governments the authority to hire and fire local staff without prior approval of central

84 government (Stanton, 2009).

85

86 Administrative decentralization seek store distribute authority, responsibility, and financial
87 resources for providing public services between different levels of government. Therefore, the
88 responsibility for planning, financing, and managing certain public function is transferred from
89 the central government to subordinate levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities
90 or corporations, or area-wide, regional, or functional authorities (Ozmen, 2014). Administrative
91 decentralization is often seen as part of civil service reform and is generally perceived as then
92 narrowest form of decentralization because local institutions to which tasks are transferred are
93 not based on political representation controlled from below (Yusoff et al, 2016).

94

95 On the other hand, it involves the de-concentration of bureaucratic structures away from the
96 central government to lower levels of structure without removing their accountability to the
97 central government. In this way as Smoke, (2003) reveals, administrative decentralization requires
98 the establishment of administrative bodies, systems and mechanisms at local and regional levels to
99 manage and support the decentralization process while maintaining links between the formal
100 government bodies and other key local actors. The effective decentralization of government
101 administration requires local and regional governments the ability to establish ordinance,
102 regulations or by laws which they consider to be appropriate within their jurisdiction (Yusoff et
103 al., 2016).

104 Akorsu (2015) citing Falleti, (2004) argued that administrative decentralization have either a
105 positive or negative impact on the autonomy of sub-national executives. If administrative
106 decentralization improves local and state bureaucracies, fosters training of local officials, or

107 facilitates learning through the practice of delivering new responsibilities, it will likely increase
108 the organizational capacities of sub-national governments. Nevertheless, if administrative
109 decentralization takes place without the transfer of funds, this reform may decrease the autonomy
110 of sub-national officials, who was more dependent on subsequent national fiscal transfers or sub-
111 national debt for the delivery of public services, (Akorsu, 2015).

112

113 Recently, Feizy, Moghali, Gramipour, and Zare, (2015) asserts that there are two types of
114 administrative decentralization. First, deconcentration which involves transfers of authority and
115 responsibility from one level of the central government to another while maintaining the same
116 hierarchical level of accountability from the local units to the central government ministry or
117 agency which has been decentralized. Secondly, delegation which refers to redistributes authority
118 and responsibility to local units of government or agencies that are not always necessarily
119 branches or local offices of the delegating authority. While some transfer of accountability to the
120 sub-national units to which power is being delegated takes place, the bulk of accountability is
121 still vertical and to the delegating central unit.

122

123 Review of previous research reveals that there is limited evidence on influence of administrative
124 decentralization on services delivery. Majority of research has analyzed the impact of
125 decentralization on services delivery from either political or fiscal decentralization rather than
126 from all three forms of decentralization (fiscal, administrative, or political) simultaneously.
127 Allowing for interaction of all three dimensions of decentralization in the same analysis can
128 bring more robust evidence on the relationship between decentralization and service delivery and
129 hence bring stronger basis for providing policy advice in the future. In this study, administrative

130 decentralization is conceptualized as autonomy to contract services, hire and fire county
131 employees, sign employment contracts and expertise and capacity of the county employees.

132 **2.3 Administrative Decentralization and Service Delivery**

133 Kosec and Mogues, (2015) analyzed the impact that administrative district level decentralization
134 on agricultural and rural service delivery. The study used sample data from eight districts in
135 seven regions in Ethiopia, 1,899 individuals and 1,117 households. The study found that
136 administrative decentralization has led to increased access to agricultural extension services, and
137 to greater use of modern agricultural inputs, such as fertilizer and improved seed. Another study
138 in United States, Saavedra (2010) examined the effects of administrative decentralization on
139 access to two key services: health care and improved drinking water sources. The study provided
140 evidence supporting positive and significant effects of administrative decentralization on access
141 to health care, and improved water provision. In another study, Mobarak, Rajkumar, and Cropper
142 (2006) using data from Brazilian municipalities found that administrative decentralization only
143 provides good results when it is accompanied by good governance.

144

145 A study in South Africa by Stanton (2009) explored to what extent the problems of providing
146 basic services currently experienced by municipalities are influenced by the administrative
147 configuration of the decentralized system of governance. The study concluded that local councils
148 have the authority to pass by-laws with respect to the implementation of their legally assigned
149 functions and responsibilities. However, municipalities had limited autonomy and need
150 provincial approval when contracting out responsibilities and services. In related study,
151 Bogopane, (2014) explored the impact of perceived erosion of the politics-administration

152 dichotomy on good governance and service delivery. The study concluded that strong visionary
153 political and administrative leadership; vibrant a political strong public bureaucracy and
154 integrated political and administrative structures lead to improvement to the functionality and
155 performance of politics-administration dichotomy relations.

156

157 In Ghana, Alornyeku, (2011) carried a case study in Kumasi metropolis on administrative
158 structure and service delivery. The study revealed even though there is a clear practice of
159 division of labour, there is department's lack of technical equipment which results in delays in
160 meeting the expectation of citizen's. In addition, assembly low productivity, due to excessive
161 bureaucracy negatively impacted performance of the central government. In another study in
162 Nigeria, Boris (2015) carried an empirical study to examine challenges confronting local
163 government administration in effective and efficient social service delivery at the grassroots.
164 Using secondary data, the study concluded lack of funds, corruption, and undue political
165 interference amongst others as major constraints to local government service delivery.

166 **2.4 Research Gap**

167 Most existing studies on decentralization in South Sudan emphasize political or fiscal
168 dimensions, with limited attention to administrative decentralization as a distinct driver of
169 service delivery. Moreover, few studies examine decentralization outcomes comparatively across
170 counties or consider inter-county spill-over effects. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing
171 administrative decentralization across three counties and by integrating quantitative and
172 qualitative evidence.

173 **3.1 Methodology**

174 The study employed descriptive and Correlation research design. This design is preferred
175 because it gives a report on things as they are or happen. Correlational design measures the
176 correlation between two variables. The study employed purposive and simple random sampling
177 to select the sample and the sample elements. This resulted to a sample size of 158 respondents
178 each County. Both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interviewing) data collection
179 approaches was used in order to achieve a high degree of reliability and validity of results. The
180 two methods complemented one another because the whole research here wants to address the
181 inadequacies of each method. A questionnaire and Interview guide as data collection instruments
182 was used. The field data was statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social
183 Scientists (SPSS) and MS Excel to generate descriptive and inferential statistics analyses.

184 **3.2 DataCollectionmethods**

185 The main objective in this study was to examine the decentralization policy (independent
186 variable) on service delivery (dependent variable) with e-government being a moderating
187 variable. Several methods were used in this study to obtain quantitative and qualitative data.
188 These will include questionnaires survey, interview guide, Focus Group discussion, observation
189 and review of primary and secondary documents. As observed by (Research Directory, 2014)
190 data collection methods were used to collect the information required from various sources to
191 provide insights and answers required by the set objectives and hypotheses for quantitative data
192 and research questions for qualitative information.

193 **3.3 Study Population**

194 The Study population refers to the specific group of individuals or subject that a researcher is
195 interested in studying. It presents a larger target population from which the sample is drawn.
196 According to Amin (2005: 235), a target population is the population to which the researcher

197 ultimately generalized the results. Each of the three selected counties have an estimated
198 population of 113,051 people according to South Sudan Population of 2010. The study
199 constituted categories of respondents from each selected county and they include Area residents,
200 Local government officials, Political leaders, non-governmental organizations, religious leaders
201 and Clan leaders because they are all important stakeholders as guided by Trochim, (2006) in
202 as far as service delivery in three selected counties in Western Equatoria State, in South Sudan is
203 concerned.

204

205 **3.4 Sample size for each selected county.**

206 The same sample size of the population in this study (as illustrated in table 4.1 below) was made
207 of 158 respondents and was selected from each of the three counties above basing on a formula
208 for determining Sample size by Yamane (Yamane, 1967, p.886). Respondents will include area
209 residents, local government officials, political leaders, non-governmental organizations, clan
210 leaders. Formula is illustrated below-

$$211 n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{260}{1 + 0.65} = 158$$

212 Where

213 n - Sample size

214 N - Population size

215 e - Level of precision

216 Therefore, the sample size expected to be used here is **158**

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228 **3.5 Sampling Selection Techniques and Procedure**

229 The study used both simple random sampling and purposive sampling procedures. Purposive
230 sampling was used to select different activities in the area of investigation to get first-hand
231 information from the key informants. Simple random sampling was used because respondents
232 had equal chances of being selected. The sampling process was guided by the table below-

233

234

235

236 *Table 1. Sampling Procedures*

SN	Category	Target Population	Sample size	Sampling procedure
1	Area residents	242	140	Simple random sampling
2	Local government officials	3	3	Purposive sampling

3	Political leaders	4	4	Purposive sampling
4	Non-governmental organizations	4	4	Purposive Sampling
5	Religious leaders	4	4	Purposive Sampling
6	Clan leaders	3	3	Purposive Sampling
	Grand Total	260	158	

237 *Source; Primary data, (2023) and Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D.W. (1970)*

238 **3.6 Preparation for Data collection**

239 Data collection and preparation was done systematically so as to accurately collect information
 240 from various sources to provide insights and answers, such as testing a hypothesis or evaluating
 241 an outcome. In this study, the procedure for data collection was guided by the study objectives,
 242 hypotheses and research questions. The main objective in this study is to examine the
 243 decentralisation policy being a independent variable and e-governance as a mediating variable
 244 and service delivery being dependent. In order to collect data on variables from area residents, a
 245 questionnaire was developed in accordance with the guidelines given by Rotter (1966), Bandura
 246 (1997), Boles et al. (2000) as per the study objectives. In addition, an interview guide was
 247 prepared for data collection from the key informant's.i.e local government officials, political
 248 leaders, religious leaders, NGOs officials and clan leaders according to the study research
 249 questions and an observation checklist.

250 Before going to the field, the researcher obtained introductory letters from Nkumba
 251 University,Directorate of Post-Graduate Studies and Research studies off to the three selected
 252 Counties namely Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri west Counties in Western Equatoria State -

253 South Sudan. Research assistants was identified and trained for data collection. They were
254 trained on the procedures of data collection using the different research instruments, local
255 government structure of South Sudan, decentralization policy and the nature of service delivery
256 to be observed.

257

258 **3.7Methods of Analyzing Quantitative Data**

259 The quantitative approach to data analysis involved the presentation of the findings descriptively
260 in form of frequency tables with varying percentages. Descriptive statistics was used to describe
261 the basic features of the data. SPSS software version 17.0 was used to obtain inferential
262 statistics, to reach conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data alone and to make
263 inferences from the data to more general conditions (Cohen et al 1998). The following
264 multivariate statistical techniques was employed in generating inferences on the population:
265 descriptive statistics, linear regression analyses and Pearson's Product Moment coefficient.

266 **3.8 Descriptive statistics**

267 In analyzing the responses from the Likert scale of the questionnaire, Descriptive statistics which
268 included means and standard deviation generated through the SPSSpackage was obtained and an
269 appropriate scale to interpret the means was used. Generally, thescalehinged
270 ofthefollowingcategorization:

271 *Table2: Likert scale of the questionnaire*

Mean Range	Response Mode	Interpretation
4.51-5.00	Strongly agree	Highly Exceeds Expectation
3.11-4.50	Agree	Exceeds Expectation
2.51-3.10	Neutral	Meets Expectation

1.00-2.50	Disagree	Lowly Meets Expectation
Less than1	Strongly disagree	Does not Meet Expectation

272

273 The variables in the questionnaire was measured using ordinal scale andusinga5-point-
 274 likertscaleformat(StronglyDisagree=1;Disagree=2;Notsure=3;Agree=4 and Strongly Agree = 5)
 275 adopted from Firdaus (2006) andmodifiedaccordingtotheobjectivesofthestudy.TheSelf-
 276 Administered Questionnaire was divided into sectionsbasedontheconstructsas per the fourstudy
 277 objectives.

278 **3.9 Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient**

279 Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine how strongly the scores of two
 280 variables are associated with each other in the following objectives: Pearson's Correlation
 281 Coefficient was used to test hypothesis 3 that established the relationship
 282 betweendecentralization policy and service delivery in three selected counties in Western
 283 Equatorial.

284 **DataAnalysis**

285 Data collected was entered into the SPSS and analysis was done descriptively, by regression and
 286 correlation analysis for quantitative data. Qualitative data on the other hand was analyzed
 287 thematically within the context of the study findings as per the research questions. Concurrent
 288 triangulation for qualitative andquantitativedatawas doneat thesametimewithin thestudy.

289

290 **4.1 Results of the study**

291 This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the study's findings on objective three which is
 292 the relationship between administrative decentralization and service delivery in three selected
 293 counties in western Equatorial state in South Sudan. The chapter begins by examining the
 294 response rate of the administered research instruments, subsequently, the core findings are
 295 systematically presented and interpreted in alignment with the study's specific objective three
 296 and research questions of objective three

297 **Table 3. Descriptive Statistics on Administrative decentralization and service delivery in three**
 298 **Selected Counties in Western Equatorial.**

Descriptive Statistics						
County	Administration Decentralization and Service Delivery	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Citizens enjoy Local governance Administration efficiently	142	1	5	3.02	1.15
	There are Mechanism for participation, responsiveness, equity, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability	142	1	5	3.1	1.11
	The local governance authority is always supported financially by the central government of South Sudan	142	1	5	3.37	1.08
	There is capacity development of western equatorial state	142	1	5	2.82	1.18
	There is collaborative stakeholder relationships exist in Local governance administration	142	1	5	3.15	1.12
	Efficient, effective, and responsive service in your local governance are always practiced in your administration	142	1	5	3.23	0.97
	Participatory decision-making process is always open and fair to every member	142	1	5	3.51	1.04
	The local governance administration promotes the personal participant of citizens to clearance	142	1	5	3.43	1.07
	The local governance administration management is free from corruption	142	1	5	3.08	1.11
	Citizens enjoy Local governance Administration efficiently	142	1	5	3.18	1.21
	There are Mechanism for participation, responsiveness, equity, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability	142	1	5	2.76	1.07
	The local governance authority is always supported financially by the central government of South Sudan	142	1	5	3.22	1.15
	There is capacity development of western equatorial state	142	1	5	2.85	1.09
	There is collaborative stakeholder relationships exist in Local governance administration	142	1	5	3.03	1.16
	Efficient, effective, and responsive service in your local governance are always practiced in your administration	142	1	5	3.44	1.04
	Participatory decision-making process is always open and fair to every member	142	1	5	2.65	1.14
	The local governance administration promotes the personal participant of citizens to clearance	142	1	5	3.39	1.06
	The local governance administration management is free from corruption	142	1	5	3.41	1.09
	Citizens enjoy Local governance Administration efficiently	142	1	5	2.92	1.12
	There are Mechanism for participation, responsiveness, equity, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability	142	1	5	3.06	1.07
	The local governance authority is always supported financially by the central government of South Sudan	142	1	5	3.11	1.10
	There is capacity development of western equatorial state	142	1	5	2.88	1.22
	There is collaborative stakeholder relationships exist in Local governance administration	142	1	5	3.12	1.16
	Efficient, effective, and responsive service in your local governance are always practiced in your administration	142	1	5	3.05	1.16
	Participatory decision-making process is always open and fair to every member	142	1	5	3.06	1.10
	The local governance administration promotes the personal participant of citizens to clearance	142	1	5	3.35	1.11
	The local governance administration management is free from corruption	142	1	5	2.79	1.20
	Valid N (listwise)	142				

299

300 The descriptive statistics presented provide critical insights into the status of administrative
301 decentralization and service delivery in the counties under study, with a consistent sample size of
302 142 respondents across all variables. The results reveal that participatory decision-making
303 processes recorded one of the highest mean scores ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.04$), indicating that
304 respondents generally perceive decision-making in local governance as relatively inclusive and
305 fair. This aligns with literature emphasizing the importance of democratic participation in
306 enhancing administrative legitimacy and local responsiveness (Rondinelli, 1981; Smoke, 2003).
307 Nonetheless, slight variations across counties suggest uneven implementation, possibly due to
308 structural or institutional constraints at the sub-national level.
309 Financial support from the central government of South Sudan is another dimension that scored
310 relatively high ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.08$), signaling that fiscal decentralization mechanisms are in
311 place to some extent. This finding resonates with the fiscal decentralization theory, which argues
312 that adequate financial backing is essential to enhance the capacity of local governments in
313 delivering services (Bird & Vaillancourt, 1998). However, while funding is evident, the capacity
314 development of the Western Equatorial State remains one of the lowest-rated items ($M = 2.82$ –
315 2.88), suggesting a disconnection between fiscal transfers and long-term institutional or human
316 resource development. This contradiction reflects limitations in decentralization design where
317 financial transfers are not necessarily coupled with technical or managerial empowerment.
318
319 Moreover, the findings show mixed perceptions on stakeholder collaboration and corruption.
320 While collaborative stakeholder relationships in local governance scored a moderate mean ($M =$
321 3.03–3.15), the belief that local governance administration is free from corruption fluctuates (M
322 = 2.79–3.41), highlighting variability in transparency and accountability frameworks across

323 different counties. This echoes scholarly critiques that decentralization, in the absence of strong
324 institutional checks, can localize rather than reduce corruption (Manor, 1999; Crook & Manor,
325 1998). Therefore, despite structural devolution, the governance culture and regulatory
326 environments remain critical to performance outcomes.

327 Lastly, citizens' enjoyment of efficient local governance services yielded mean scores around
328 3.0, indicating neutral to moderately positive perceptions. The relatively high standard deviations
329 across variables (ranging from 0.97 to 1.22) point to heterogeneous experiences among
330 respondents. This reinforces empirical insights from the decentralization literature that local
331 governance efficacy depends significantly on contextual factors such as administrative capacity,
332 leadership, and historical marginalization (Boex & Yilmaz, 2010). Overall, while the data shows
333 some progressive elements of decentralization, it also reflects underlying institutional and
334 operational disparities that must be addressed for equitable and efficient service delivery.

335

336

337 **Table 4: Correlation results on the relationship between administrative decentralization and**
 338 **service delivery in three selected Counties in western Equatoria State**

		Administration decentralization Tambura	Administration decentralization Yambio	Administration decentralization Mundri	Service Delivery Tambura	Service Delivery Yambio	Service Delivery Mundri
Service Delivery Tambura	Pearson	1	.094	.751 **	.127	.108	-.054
	Sig. (2-)		.266	.000	.131	.200	.521
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
Service Delivery Yambio	Pearson	.094	1	-.073	-.017	.018	.055
	Sig. (2-)	.266		.387	.840	.833	.513
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
Service Delivery Mundri	Pearson	.751 **	-.073	1	.049	.197 *	-.073
	Sig. (2-)	.000	.387		.562	.019	.388
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
Administration decentralization Tambura	Pearson	.127	-.017	.049	1	-.084	-.133
	Sig. (2-)	.131	.840	.562		.318	.116
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
Administration decentralization Yambio	Pearson	.108	.018	.197 *	-.084	1	-.051
	Sig. (2-)	.200	.833	.019	.318		.545
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
Administration decentralization Mundri	Pearson	-.054	.055	-.073	-.133	-.051	1
	Sig. (2-)	.521	.513	.388	.116	.545	
	N	142	142	142	142	142	142
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							

340 The correlation matrix reveals key interrelationships between administrative decentralization and
 341 service delivery across the counties of Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri, reflecting how variations
 342 in governance structures may impact service outcomes. Notably, there is a statistically significant
 343 and strong positive correlation between administrative decentralization in Mundri and service
 344 delivery in Tambura ($r = .751$, $p < .01$). This suggests a potential regional influence where
 345 administrative practices in one locality could positively shape or mirror service delivery

346 experiences in another, possibly due to spill-over effects, shared resources, or coordinated
347 governance mechanisms across counties. This inter-county dynamic resonates with the
348 decentralized governance theory, which posits that when local units are empowered, they often
349 collaborate, learn from each other, and optimize resource allocation for mutual benefit (Smoke,
350 2003; Faguet, 2014).

351 In addition, the data shows a statistically significant positive correlation between administrative
352 decentralization in Yambio and service delivery in Mundri ($r = .197$, $p < .05$). Although this
353 correlation is moderate, it aligns with the literature suggesting that decentralization does not
354 function in isolation but within a network of regional interdependencies, especially in post-
355 conflict states like South Sudan where governance systems are still maturing (Boex & Yilmaz,
356 2010). This finding implies that reforms in administrative functions in one county could catalyze
357 improved public service outcomes in a neighboring jurisdiction, reinforcing the value of regional
358 integration in decentralized settings.

359 On the other hand, the correlations between administrative decentralization within individual
360 counties and their corresponding service delivery scores were mostly weak and statistically
361 insignificant. For instance, administrative decentralization in Tambura showed a weak and non-
362 significant relationship with service delivery in Tambura ($r = .127$, $p = .131$). Similarly, Yambio
363 ($r = .018$, $p = .833$) and Mundri ($r = -.073$, $p = .388$) did not demonstrate statistically meaningful
364 intra-county associations. These findings echo concerns from decentralization critiques which
365 argue that structural devolution alone is insufficient to guarantee service improvements unless it
366 is accompanied by capacity development, accountability mechanisms, and adequate resource
367 transfers (Ribot, 2002; Manor, 1999).

368

369 Moreover, service delivery across counties appeared largely uncorrelated, with the exception of a
370 significant correlation between service delivery in Tambura and Mundri ($r = .751$, $p < .01$),
371 indicating perhaps a harmonized or jointly influenced implementation approach. This pattern
372 reinforces the argument that service outcomes under decentralization can be influenced by
373 broader institutional contexts rather than localized administrative reforms alone. The high
374 interdependence between service delivery outcomes in different counties underscores the need
375 for a coordinated decentralization strategy that accounts for both local autonomy and regional
376 coherence to enhance effectiveness and equity in public service delivery (Oates, 1999; Shah &
377 Thompson, 2004).

378 **4.3 Regression results on the relationship between administrative decentralization and**
379 **service delivery in three selected Counties in Western Equatoria State**

380 *Table 5: Model summary on the relationship between administrative decentralization and*
381 *service delivery in three selected Counties in Western Equatoria State*

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.695 ^a	.483	.623	.57279

a. Predictors: (Constant), Administrative Decentralization at Mundri, Administrative Decentralization at Yambio, Administrative Decentralization at Tambura

382 *Source: Primary Data 2025*

383 Regression results demonstrate differentiated effects of administrative decentralization across
384 counties. Yambio County exhibited a strong and statistically significant positive effect on service

385 delivery ($B = 0.205$, $p = .018$). Tambura County showed a modest but significant effect ($B =$
 386 0.044 , $p = .048$). In contrast, Mundri County displayed a negative and non-significant
 387 relationship ($B = -0.037$, $p = .513$). The model explained approximately 48% of the variance in
 388 service delivery, indicating moderate explanatory power.

389 **Table 6: Coefficients on the relationship between Administrative decentralization and service**
 390 **delivery in three Selected Counties in Western Equatorial.**

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.404	.366		6.573	.000
	Administrative Decentralization at Tambura	.044	.063	.039	.695	.048
	Administrative Decentralization at Yambio	.205	.086	.200	2.387	.018
	Administrative Decentralization at Mundri	-.037	.057	-.055	-.655	.513

a. Dependent Variable: Service Delivery

391 **Source: Primary Data 2025**

392 The coefficient analysis in Table 28 provides nuanced insights into the differential effects of
 393 administrative decentralization across Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri on service delivery in
 394 Western Equatoria. The overall model reveals a statistically significant constant ($B = 2.404$, $p <$
 395 $.001$), suggesting a baseline level of service delivery even in the absence of decentralization
 396 initiatives. Among the counties, Yambio exhibits the most substantial and statistically significant

397 positive contribution to service delivery ($B = 0.205, p = .018$), with a corresponding standardized
398 beta of .200, indicating its relative strength in the model. This aligns with decentralization
399 literature, such as by Smoke (2003) and Crook & Manor (1998), which emphasizes that effective
400 decentralization hinges on local capacity and institutional maturity factors likely more robust in
401 Yambio. Conversely, the coefficient for Tambura, though positive ($B = .044$), is marginal and just
402 reaches significance ($p = .048$), implying a weaker yet present contribution to service delivery,
403 possibly reflecting partial implementation or nascent administrative capacity. In stark contrast,
404 Mundri shows a negative but statistically non-significant effect ($B = -0.037, p = .513$), which
405 may suggest administrative inefficiencies or governance challenges that undermine the intended
406 outcomes of decentralization in that locale. These results echo the arguments of Agrawal and
407 Ribot (1999), who caution that without institutional coherence, local autonomy does not
408 automatically translate into improved service outcomes. Hence, the findings underscore the
409 contextual and heterogeneous nature of administrative decentralization's impact, reinforcing the
410 imperative for tailored governance reforms responsive to localized institutional realities.

411

412 The insights into administrative decentralization among the counties, Yambio exhibits the most
413 substantial and statistically significant positive contribution to service delivery ($B = 0.205, p-$
414 value = .018). In stark contrast, Mundri shows a negative but statistically non-significant effect (B
415 = -0.037, p-value = .513). Conversely, the coefficient for Tambura, though positive ($B = .044$), is
416 marginal and just reaches significance ($p = .048$), implying a weaker effect.

417 **4.4. Focus Group Discussion Findings on the Role of Administrative Decentralization on**
418 **Service Delivery**

419 This section presents findings from FGDs held in Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri Counties
420 regarding how administrative decentralization has affected public service delivery. Discussions
421 were held with local government officials, civil society actors, service providers, and community
422 members to understand how shifting administrative authority to the local level influences the
423 quality, accessibility, and efficiency of services.

424

425 **A. Tambura County**

426 In Tambura, FGD participants were largely critical of the administrative decentralization
427 process, citing a lack of qualified personnel, poor coordination, and limited decision-making
428 powers at the county level.

429 A health officer stated:

430 *“Even though we are supposed to manage local services, decisions still come from the state or
431 national ministries. We have little authority to act independently.”*

432 Many participants felt that the decentralized structures exist only nominally, with local offices
433 operating with inadequate staff, limited training, and poor logistical support. Administrative
434 responsibilities were reportedly duplicated or overlapped between county and state authorities,
435 causing inefficiencies.

436 A local leader mentioned:

437 *“We don’t know who is really in charge sometimes. The commissioner says one thing, but then
438 the state ministry contradicts it.”*

439 This confusion often led to delays in service delivery, especially in education and health, where
440 personnel deployment, procurement, and supervision are slow due to bureaucratic bottlenecks.

441

442

443

444 **B. Yambio County**

445 In Yambio, participants acknowledged some progress in administrative decentralization,
446 particularly in terms of local-level staffing and planning capacity. However, challenges persist
447 related to authority, resource allocation, and inter-governmental coordination.

448 A county education officer shared:

449 *“We can now hire some teachers and plan school calendars locally. That’s a big step forward.*
450 *But we still rely heavily on approvals from Juba for many things.”*

451 Participants noted that while there is a clearer administrative structure at the county and payam
452 levels, many decisions—especially on personnel and infrastructure—still require central or state-
453 level clearance, leading to slow service response.

454 Civil society actors advocated for more capacity building and training for local administrators to
455 enhance effectiveness:

456 *“Decentralization is not just about moving offices closer to the people; it’s about building real*
457 *local authority and competence.”*

458 Overall, Yambio shows moderate administrative decentralization, but progress is undermined by
459 weak capacity, inconsistent delegation of authority, and limited local discretion.

460

461 **C. Mundri County**

462 In Mundri, FGD participants were frustrated by administrative instability and frequent turnover
463 of local officials, which they said undermines service continuity and planning.

464 A local education officer commented:

465 “We get new directors every year. How can we plan long-term when there is no consistency in
466 leadership?”

467 There were also concerns about interference from state-level officials, who were reported to
468 override or undermine local administrative decisions. This has created a perception that
469 decentralization is partial and politically manipulated.

470 A women’s leader remarked:

471 “Our local departments are often sidelined by people from outside. Even though the offices are
472 here, the real decisions are made somewhere else.”

473 Many participants felt that local authorities lack the operational independence and resources to
474 implement decisions, making the whole administrative structure heavily dependent on higher
475 levels. Recruitment, performance management, and project oversight remain weak at the county
476 level.

477 **4.5 Cross-County Themes**

478 *Table 7: Summary of Key Themes Across the Three Counties*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Tambura</i>	<i>Yambio</i>	<i>Mundri</i>
<i>Local Administrative Capacity</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>Autonomy in Decision-Making</i>	<i>Very limited</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Limited</i>
<i>Staff Stability & Skills</i>	<i>Inadequate</i>	<i>Improving</i>	<i>Unstable</i>
<i>Inter-governmental Coordination</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Improving</i>	<i>Weak</i>
<i>Impact on Service Delivery</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Negative</i>

479 Across the three counties, common challenges included limited administrative capacity, unclear
480 mandates, weak intergovernmental coordination, and insufficient accountability mechanisms.
481 Yambio emerged as relatively better positioned, while Tambura and Mundri faced more severe
482 constraints.

483 **4.6. Discussion**

484 **Linking focus group discussion findings on administrative decentralization and service
485 delivery on existing literature**

486 The focus group discussions held across Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri counties provided
487 valuable perspectives on how administrative decentralization has shaped the quality and
488 accessibility of public service delivery. While administrative decentralization in South Sudan
489 aims to transfer decision-making authority, personnel management, and service implementation
490 responsibilities to sub-national units, the actual experience in these counties is marked by uneven
491 progress, limited local autonomy, and persistent capacity constraints.

492 Participants in all three counties consistently noted that administrative functions are nominally
493 devolved but often remain under the influence or control of central-level authorities. This reflects
494 a core critique in decentralization literature, particularly by Rondinelli (1981) and Grindle
495 (2007), who argue that without genuine devolution of authority and local administrative
496 discretion, decentralization risks becoming symbolic rather than functional. The concerns
497 expressed in Tambura and Mundri about delayed approvals, centralized personnel decisions, and
498 inadequate autonomy at the county level affirm this concern.

499 In Yambio, however, some participants acknowledged modest gains in local responsiveness and
500 flexibility in managing education and basic health services. This suggests that administrative

501 decentralization can facilitate improved service delivery when accompanied by capable local
502 leadership and clear functional responsibilities. Such observations align with Manor (1999) and
503 Smoke (2003), who emphasize that the success of decentralization depends heavily on the ability
504 of local governments to make independent decisions and manage resources effectively.

505 A recurring theme across FGDs was the mismatch between devolved responsibilities and the
506 limited administrative capacity available at the county level. Respondents frequently cited lack
507 of skilled personnel, inadequate infrastructure, and confusion over roles between county and
508 state authorities. These findings echo Bossert's (1998) "decision space" framework, which posits
509 that even where decentralization is formally implemented, the scope of local discretion may be
510 restricted by technical, legal, or political constraints. Participants in Mundri, for instance, spoke
511 of county officers being unable to plan or act without lengthy consultations with state officials—
512 an indication of limited local control and bureaucratic inefficiency.

513 Another critical insight from the discussions was the fragmentation of authority and overlapping
514 mandates between administrative tiers. This ambiguity often led to service duplication or neglect,
515 particularly in health and agricultural extension services. The literature warns against such
516 institutional fragmentation; Smoke and Lewis (1996) highlight that lack of clear administrative
517 delineation can erode accountability and reduce efficiency in service delivery.

518 Furthermore, participants across the counties expressed concern about poor supervision and
519 weak monitoring mechanisms for frontline service providers. Teachers and health workers were
520 reportedly irregular in some areas due to weak enforcement and oversight. This aligns with
521 WorldBank (2004) findings that in fragile and decentralized systems, absence of strong
522 administrative mechanisms can result in service delivery breakdowns, especially in rural and
523 conflict-affected areas.

524 Despite these challenges, the FGDs also revealed potential for community involvement in
525 administrative functions. Some respondents in Yambio cited increased local participation in
526 planning and oversight committees, suggesting that administrative decentralization can improve
527 responsiveness when linked with citizen engagement. This supports Olowu (2001) who argues
528 that decentralized systems perform better when local governments are accountable not just
529 upward to central ministries, but also downward to the local population.

530 **5. Conclusion and Contribution to New Knowledge**

531 This chapter examined the relationship between administrative decentralization and service
532 delivery in Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri counties of Western Equatoria State. Drawing on
533 quantitative analysis and qualitative evidence from FGDs, the findings demonstrate that
534 administrative decentralization has a statistically significant but uneven influence on service
535 delivery outcomes in fragile contexts such as South Sudan.

536 The descriptive results show that participatory decision-making and fiscal transfers are present to
537 a moderate degree, suggesting that decentralization structures formally exist. However, weak
538 capacity development, inconsistent accountability, and variable perceptions of corruption
539 indicate that administrative decentralization has not translated uniformly into effective service
540 delivery. Correlation results further reveal that service delivery outcomes are more strongly
541 associated across counties than within individual counties, highlighting regional
542 interdependencies rather than purely localized administrative effects. Regression analysis
543 confirms that administrative decentralization explains a meaningful proportion of variation in
544 service delivery (48.3%), but its impact differs by context: Yambio demonstrates a positive and

545 significant effect, Tambura shows only marginal gains, while Mundri records no meaningful
546 contribution.

547 Qualitative findings reinforce these patterns. FGDs reveal that in Tambura and Mundri,
548 decentralization is largely nominal, characterized by limited autonomy, staff instability, unclear
549 mandates, and persistent interference from higher levels of government. In contrast, Yambio
550 illustrates that where administrative capacity, leadership continuity, and partial decision-making
551 space exist, decentralization can modestly improve responsiveness and planning. Overall, the
552 chapter concludes that administrative decentralization alone is insufficient to guarantee improved
553 service delivery in fragile states; its effectiveness depends on how authority, capacity, and
554 accountability are operationalized at the local level.

555 **6. Recommendations**

556 The study recommends targeted capacity-building interventions in counties with weak
557 administrative systems, clearer delineation of roles across levels of government, timely and
558 predictable fiscal transfers, and strengthened inter-county collaboration frameworks. Protecting
559 county-level decision-making from excessive political interference is essential for realizing the
560 benefits of decentralization.

561 **7. Contribution to New Knowledge**

562 Based on these findings, this study contributes new knowledge to the decentralization literature
563 in fragile and post-conflict states in three keyways:

564 **1. Decentralization as a Networked, Not Isolated, Process**

565 The strong inter-county correlations suggest that service delivery in fragile settings is
566 shaped by regional administrative spill-over effects, shared resources, and coordinated
567 practices rather than by isolated county-level reforms. This challenges conventional
568 decentralization assumptions that local service outcomes are primarily determined within
569 individual jurisdictions.

570 **2. The Capacity–Authority Gap as a Central Constraint**

571 The study empirically demonstrates a persistent gap between devolved responsibilities
572 and actual administrative capacity and decision space at the county level. This refines
573 existing theories by showing that in fragile states, decentralization failure is less about the
574 absence of structures and more about misaligned authority, skills, and institutional
575 support.

576 **3. Context-Sensitive Administrative Decentralization**

577 The differentiated outcomes across Tambura, Yambio, and Mundri confirm that
578 administrative decentralization functions as a context-dependent intervention, not a
579 uniform policy tool. This supports the need for a fragility-responsive approach in which
580 decentralization reforms are sequenced, adaptive, and tailored to local political stability,
581 leadership continuity, and institutional maturity.

582 To address administrative decentralization challenges in South Sudan, the study proposes a shift
583 from symbolic devolution toward functionally empowered decentralization, characterized by: (i)
584 clear delineation of administrative roles across levels of government; (ii) sustained investment in
585 local human and institutional capacity; (iii) protection of county-level decision-making from
586 excessive political interference; and (iv) stronger horizontal coordination mechanisms among

587 counties. By embedding decentralization within a fragility-responsive governance framework,
588 South Sudan can better align administrative reforms with realistic service delivery outcomes in
589 conflict-affected environments.

590 **Declaration of Interest**

591 The authors declare that there are no known financial, professional, or personal interests that
592 could have influenced the research reported in this manuscript titled "*The Influence of*
593 *Administrative Decentralization on Service Delivery in Three Selected Counties in Western*
594 *Equatoria State, South Sudan.*" The study was conducted independently, and the supervisors'
595 involvement was limited to academic guidance and oversight. All views and conclusions
596 expressed in the manuscript are solely those of the authors.

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