

Voters and the Political Opposition in Africa

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A common explanation of why ruling parties in Africa rarely lose election points to how clientelism can circumvent democratic accountability and keep unhappy voters from supporting the opposition. Opposition parties face tremendous barriers to attaining modest gains in power in government, and even more in ousting the ruling party. Under what circumstances do opposition parties effectively challenge incumbent governments? This question motivates an ongoing research project I am conducting in Tanzania that explores how opposition parties win (or fail to win) power from the dominant Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and what drives such success - failures of the governing party, success of the opposition, or both.

During the summer of 2010, I conducted a survey in Dar es Salaam that studied how voters make decisions over political parties. The survey included over 900 respondents and explored how the political performance of incumbent and opposition parties impacts which party citizens said they would support in the October 2010 elections. Do voters support the opposition because of poor economic policies of the incumbent party? Or do critical voters simply choose the incumbent in exchange for a gift? If opposition parties could offer these private goods, would a voter change their party?

The survey employed new techniques that improve the quality of data about political competition. In Tanzania's dominant party regime, citizens might "self-censor" and be dishonest about issues like taking cash for their votes or supporting violence by the political opposition. I conducted a survey experiment with students at the University of Dar es Salaam in 2009 and found this to be the case. When asked directly if political violence was acceptable for the opposition, about two of every five of individuals agreed. When using less obtrusive question formats—particularly one called a "list experiment"—support was closer to 90% for respondents. The survey conducted in 2010 expanded the use of this technique across Dar es



Salaam.

In October, I am conducted a second round of the survey in Dar es Salaam and (pending research clearance) in Zanzibar. In Zanzibar, the same political parties compete but have been more successful than in the mainland. In a July referendum, Zanzibari voters chose to bring opposition CUF into a power-sharing government with the CCM after the October elections. During the summer of 2010, I conducted extensive qualitative research with political leaders and headed a referendum observation mission on Pemba, Zanzibar's second largest island.

The October survey round compared what strategies work for courting support for the opposition. It implements an important control across the two cases, as the parties themselves are constant between

Dar and Zanzibar. While it remains to be seen what the outcome of the 2010 elections will be, this survey will provide critical insight into political competition that is so fundamental to the development of democracy in Africa.



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