

# Supporting Traditional Leaders to Mitigate Community-Level Conflict

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My current research analyzes politics in contexts where the state has a limited role in the provision of basic public goods. Can community leaders in a highly politicized environment be encouraged to administer power neutrally? In such a setting, can actions by local leaders alone significantly reduce community tensions and levels of violence? I am the principal investigator for a randomized evaluation funded by USAID that examines the effects of training programs for traditional leaders in Zimbabwe on their level of professionalism and the amount of division within their communities. Recent UF PhD (SNRE) Shylock Muyengwa has been collaborating with me on this project.

Traditional leaders in Zimbabwe have often been implicated in the electoral violence and intimidation that has

taken place before recent elections. They have been accused of denying food aid to opposition supporters and making partisan judicial decisions. As a result, a NGO based in Zimbabwe has initiated a training program for traditional leaders to remind them of their responsibilities under the law, and the basic standards of professionalism. Approximately 600 villages are involved in the study, one half of which will receive a training program in 2012-2013, and the other half of which will not receive training until 2013-2014 and can therefore serve as the control group during the first year of the program. The study will examine both whether bureaucratic training for local leaders can depoliticize their administrations, and whether bringing together diverse community leaders to participate in training sessions can help reduce political tensions.

This research project involves track-

ing community governance and levels of political polarization across the 600 study villages before and after the training sessions. The data collection involves surveying households and community leaders in each of the 600 villages, and conducting ethnographic research and open-ended interviews in two dozen villages. It has been uniquely challenging to develop and implement a survey on these topics in this sensitive environment, but the project is employing a range of techniques to protect the identities of respondents and measure sensitive phenomena, including survey codes, list experiments, and endorsement experiments.

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