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Research Statement

Why do individuals run on opposition tickets in electoral authoritarian regimes, where chances to win are low and costs are high? How do opposition parties and underrepresented groups win over voters and gain political representation? And, given the challenges of collecting valid survey responses about such topics, how can survey methods be improved in order to answer these questions? My research focuses on political parties, elections, and legislatures with a concentration in sub-Saharan Africa and a specialty in survey methodology. I have secondary research interests in women's representation in the developing world and the politics of nation-building.

Dissertation

My dissertation, a book manuscript, studies opposition candidacy in electoral authoritarian regimes. Electoral authoritarian regimes—where a ruling party permits electoral competition without allowing its power to be truly challenged—are the second most common form of government in the world. What can be gleaned from the literature about candidacy, however, offers few scenarios where opposition candidacy is strategic in such a setting. Why opposition candidates and parties challenge authoritarian incumbents is an understudied area of political science but it is vital to understand how regimes with weak opposition develop into competitive democracies.

I study the puzzle of opposition candidacy in the context of Tanzania, where Chama Cha Mapinduzi has ruled for over 50 years. Drawing from nearly three years of fieldwork, the project uses a first-of-its-kind empirical strategy. It combines (1) in-depth, theory-building interviews, (2) archival work on the internal politics of parties in Tanzania, (3) a collection of 725 CVs of current and former Tanzanian Parliamentarians, and (4) a multi-faceted survey design. The survey includes (a) current Tanzanian legislators, (b) losing candidates from Tanzania's 2010 elections, (c) unsuccessful nomination seekers, and (d) "prospective candidates" from party women's and youth wings who considered seeking nomination but ultimately chose not to. My theory and evidence advance our understanding of candidacy in electoral authoritarian regimes in four major ways.

First, I demonstrate that important differences in intraparty politics between ruling and opposition parties shape the incentives of running for office. While the ruling party has significant advantages in supporting candidates on the campaign trail, a highly skilled and committed pool of prospective candidates make winning nominations challenging. Thus, while most literature on candidacy focuses almost entirely on elections, my research shows that intraparty nominations loom large when individuals consider running for office.

Second, my research also challenges a notion that the benefits of candidacy are similar across parties. By contrast, my original theory of candidacy emphasizes diversity in benefits of office. For example, individuals value benefits like passing symbolic legislation or the financial incentives of office-holding differently. Further, in authoritarian settings where elections represent "winner take all" politics *par excellence*, parties are both heterogenous and constrained in what they can offer candidates and legislators. My research is novel in highlighting the importance of compatibility between candidates preferences over the benefits of candidacy and parties' ability to deliver them. I also illustrate that

prospective legislators can benefit by seeking out party nominations and by running for office, even when they lose. While most literature emphasizes what is to be gained from office-holding, my dissertation sheds light on what prospective candidates gain along the candidacy path.

Third, I show that candidacy costs in electoral authoritarian regimes are not just monetary. Using an approach that measures risk attitudes with cultural proverbs known as *methali*, I find that opposition candidates are more willing to risk bearing the non-financial costs of candidacy against the government.

Lastly, I elucidate the way early life trajectories impact candidacy decisions made years or decades later. Introducing the concept of “career partisanship,” I find that early experience with the ruling party in electoral authoritarian regimes predisposes individuals to later candidacy with that party. By contrast, opposition candidates frequently are first exposed to politics and candidacy aspirations through activism in civil society organizations. My research uses a culturally informed, innovative survey technique known as the “life history calendar” to record information about past party and political experiences. My research is second in political science to employ the “life history calendar.”

I plan to publish my dissertation as a book manuscript with a major academic press. The central findings of my dissertation research also shape a standalone article-length paper which I submit with this application as a writing sample. The extensive data collection effort for my dissertation paves the way for additional substantive and methodological research contributions. I discuss these, along with other projects which are a part of my research agenda, in the sections that follow.

Parties, Party Systems, and Voting Behavior

The first extension of my dissertation research pertains to how candidates win elections. Given the significant incumbency advantages enjoyed in electoral authoritarian regimes, what campaign strategies help opposition candidates win? Comparing survey data collected from winning and losing candidates regarding campaign funding, voter recruitment tactics, and use of various campaign techniques—from rallies to new electronic technologies—can highlight what “works” for candidates. This may shed light on how opposition parties can eventually take the Statehouse. This paper is in early analysis stages.

The second project focuses on what election winners do once they arrive in Parliament. The literature suggests that authoritarian legislatures are designed to co-opt the opposition and confine regime criticism to formal institutions. Yet, legislatures can also become foci of coordination between opposition legislators. This project asks what tactics opposition politicians use to challenge the status-quo power distribution from the floor of Parliament. When a governing party holds a supermajority, how do opposition legislators represent constituents and influence policy? During my field dissertation research, I collected hansards that record the contributions made by Parliamentarians during legislative sessions. I am currently processing the Swahili-language hansards and investigating text-analysis techniques suited for agglutinative and fusional languages (where single words contain multiple grammatical units.)

My interests in how challenger parties court voters and grow over time has extended into a number of co-authored projects. I have published two papers on voting behavior in other settings in sub-Saharan Africa. Both co-authored with Staffan I. Lindberg (Gothenburg), we focus on Ghana’s 2008 elections where a former ruling party turned opposition party returned to government. The first paper (*Democratization*, 2011) draws on surveys collected before and after the elections in order to research what wins over voters for opposition parties. In contrast with a literature citing identity and clientelism as drivers of vote choice, we find that voters are responsive to government (under)performance in public and club good provision.

My second paper with Staffan I. Lindberg (*American Journal of Political Science*, 2013) asks what drives “swing voting” in sub-Saharan Africa. Our paper contributes to the voting behavior literature substantively and methodologically. We identify the short-comings of conventional measures of swing versus core voters and propose a more complete operationalization that considers multiple observable indicators of propensity to swing vote. This measure further distinguishes policy-driven motivations from clientelistic reasons for swing voting. We find that clientelism can “swing” voters, but that public and club goods performance influence voting decisions too.

My research also addresses the topic of elections, parties, and voters from a macro perspective. In a paper with Michael Bernhard (Florida) published in *Comparative Politics Studies* (2014), we explore the state of party systems in Africa. Africa is a region whose party systems are frequently portrayed as exceptional, featuring ideologically weak and poorly organized parties built upon ethnic cleavages. We develop a theory of party system institutionalization that accommodates the unique nature of Africa’s party systems alongside lessons from the broader literature on party system development. Our paper offers the most comprehensive dataset of African party systems to date. It is the first analysis of sub-Saharan Africa’s party systems to distinguish between volatility generated by entry and exit of parties from the legislature (“Type A” volatility) from volatility arising from healthy competition between established legislative parties (“Type B”). We demonstrate that volatility in Africa is indeed high, but due to the rise “Type B” volatility alongside a 25 year decline in “Type A” volatility.

Women’s Representation

While representation is core to democracy, women are consistently under-represented in electoral politics. In a project building on my dissertation, I speak to the question of why women run for legislative office (or not). Many previous studies lack an empirical strategy that allows direct comparisons between candidates and “prospective, non-candidates.” Surveys of female legislators combined with ones implemented in the women’s wings of Tanzania’s two major opposition parties provide empirical leverage to truly address why women run for office in developing-country settings. How do parties recruit female candidates and prepare them for legislative duties? Pending funding, I will collect additional survey data for candidates from Tanzania’s 2015 elections.

I have two additional papers on women’s representation, both co-authored with Kristin Michelitch (Vanderbilt University). In our first paper, we speak to a broad literature which has debated the role of religion—specifically Islam versus Christianity—in shaping attitudes towards gender equality and female political leaders. To date, many cross-national studies find that gender conservative attitudes abound in predominantly Muslim countries. If religion is fluid, however, it is subject to interpretation by local religious leaders. Further, gender attitudes are influenced by these leaders and are endogenous to country-specific factors like economic development. Our goal is to conduct analyses of the role of religion on gender attitudes *within* mixed Muslim-Christian countries, which are mostly found in sub-Saharan Africa. We analyze Afrobarometer data using a matching procedure that better isolates the direct impact of Islam on attitudes on women’s participation in politics. We find that there is significant variation in whether Muslims hold (or do not) more conservative views towards female leaders. Religious homogeneity—regardless of the religion—is strongly associated with conservative attitudes, suggesting that cross-national findings regarding Islam and gender may arise from a lack of religious diversity rather than a particular religious faith. We plan to submit this paper for review by the end of 2015.

Our second paper looks more specifically to the role that religious leaders play in shaping willingness to vote for female candidates. In settings where literacy and access to information are low,

information gate-keepers like religious and political leaders play a role in providing citizens with political performance information. Gender-based legislative quotas raise descriptive representation and aim to change attitudes towards female leaders, but reports on how women serve as legislators are still filtered through these gate-keepers. Thus, we test whether performance information impacts opinions on the viability of female leaders and the role that information gate-keepers play in the process of attitude change. We implemented a survey experiment where respondents were presented with one of two messages regarding women's parliamentary performance in Tanzania. The messages were sometimes accompanied by an endorsement of a co-religious figure. Our paper finds that Muslim respondents are more likely to identify with views that women perform poorly as political leaders. However, we also find that Imam endorsements of positive performance records have the strongest marginal impact on willingness to vote for female leaders. We anticipate this paper will be under review in early 2016.

Politics of Decentralization and Nation-Building

The arbitrary way colonial powers drew national boundaries in sub-Saharan Africa has left behind a number of challenges for governments. Ethnic, religious, and other pre-colonial identities often remained strong through independence, creating a legitimate rival to state allegiance. While Tanzania's nation-building has been heralded as the most successful in Africa, Zanzibari identity remains strong. A sovereign state prior to Tanzanian unification in 1964, this subnational identity has persisted in Tanzania's federal structure and foments political instability. The literature would suggest that such subnational identities weaken national identities, leading to low civic and political participation. Yet, original survey research I have conducted in Zanzibar suggests that national and subnational identities are *complementary* rather than *substitutes*. If strong attachment to a subnational identity is associated with more civic duty for that subnational identity and *also for the national identity*, then nation-building strategies in divided societies may work differently than scholars have theorized.

One strategy for building national consensus is devolving authority to subnational entities through constitutional reform. This affords legitimacy to the subnational identity in the context of the broader nation. Tanzania from 2013-2015 has embarked on a constitutional reform project with a specific focus on (1) devolving further authority to Zanzibar and (2) involving citizens in creating the document. The majority of Tanzanians prefer a highly devolved federal structure, but what will go to referendum in 2015 extends little additional autonomy to Zanzibar. Using a mobile-based panel surveys carried out in mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar, this research studies whether participation in constitutional reforms over subnational autonomy builds or breaks down national identities. Does it reinforce the complementary nature of Zanzibari and Tanzanian identities or does it instead exacerbate the consequences of weak national identity? Data collection for this paper will conclude in March 2016.

A second strategy for nation-building is through fostering national identities. Throughout history, leaders have employed cultural media like language, traditional ceremonies, and national anthems to strengthen nationalism. Radio and music have been particularly important tools for African leaders to build legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. Literature on nation-building has emphasized three message types which are effective: (1) unity through diversity, (2) unity in commonality, and (3) unity in comparison to an outgroup. In Tanzania, the *taarab* musical style is central to Zanzibari identity and has been used historically by the government for each of these three strategies. Kristin Michelitch (Vanderbilt University) and I are currently designing a lab-in-field experiment where respondents listen to *taarab* songs composed by local musicians bearing one of these three messages. They then complete a survey regarding national and subnational identity, as well as political and civic attitudes. The current period

is the most salient moment for Zanzibari identity since independence and thus the research has both academic and real-world significance. This project is being developed through a partnership with the State University of Zanzibar and we anticipate implementing the experiment in late 2015 or early 2016.¹

Survey Methodology

In order to carry out my dissertation research, I developed an interest in the topic of survey methodology and also hope to publish in this area as well. I focus on techniques for overcoming challenges to (a) implementing successful panel designs, (b) collecting retrospective data about decisions and risk attitudes, and (c) eliciting truthful responses about sensitive topics.

Challenges common to panel surveys are exacerbated in poor infrastructure settings, making panel research in sub-Saharan Africa very difficult. While Africa lacks land-based infrastructure, however, it has exceptional mobile network coverage. Taking advantage of nearly complete (~99%) mobile coverage in Zanzibar, I am a lead researcher on one of the first-ever high-frequency, mobile-based panel surveys in Africa. In collaboration with a local partner, we have conducted 24 monthly based mobile rounds to date. Our current retention rate of 79% has demonstrated a promising model for panel research in Africa. Our research has also contributed to the World Bank's manual on high-frequency panel surveys via mobile phones. With co-authors Sterling Roop (ILPI, Norway) and Elvis Muishi (of *Twaweza*, implementing a similar mobile-panel design in mainland Tanzania), we will produce a manuscript for a methodology journal with practical lessons on mobile-based panel designs when the project closes in March 2016.

If previous political behavior is a robust predictor of subsequent political activism, then researchers must be able to understand risk and time attitudes retrospectively. However, conventional approaches towards measuring risk through "lottery-style" behavioral games encounter a number of challenges when studying past decisions. I am developing a paper which employs cultural proverbs commonly used in East Africa—*methali*—to assess risk and time perspectives regarding retrospective decisions. Cultural proverbs play an important role in youth education and in popular culture through songs, conversation, and even fabrics used for clothing. Preliminary analysis shows that attitudes towards cultural proverbs can consistently identify risk-tolerant versus risk-averse individuals. Sterling Roop and I plan to have a working paper by the end of 2015.

A final component of my survey methods research agenda relates to accurate measurement of attitudes and behaviors that are sensitive or illegal. The list experiment has emerged as a promising approach to alleviate concerns over sensitivity-driven bias, but much is still to be learned about the technique. Eric Kramon (George Washington University) and I have implemented eight experiments in Kenya and Tanzania from 2010-2012 studying the properties of the list experiment and why it breaks down. We find that the list experiment is prone to failure in low-development settings, especially where literacy and numeracy skills are low. However, modifications to the list experiment technique—including cartoon visual aids—improve the technique's performance. Preliminary findings from this research are published in the newsletter of APSA's Organized Section on Experimental Political Science *The Experimental Political Scientist*. Our manuscript will be submitted for review by the end of 2015.

¹Approval of the project is contingent on permissions from politicized government research agencies, and thus it is not likely to receive approval until after the October 2015 national elections.