



What is “honest and responsive government in the opinion of Zimbabwean citizens?”

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Introduction

The match between citizens' aspirations and the promises made by political parties comes to fore most strongly when elections are pending. The presumption is that the parties contesting an election have been building their manifestos in a careful dialogue with their members, as well as finding ways to persuade the electorate at large to have confidence in the manifesto.

The big question is over the extent to which political parties really understand what citizens want from governance, and, has become clear in a major UN survey (MY WORLD. 2015), the desires are a mixture of both service delivery and governance issues. Asking 16 basic questions, the survey asked the respondents to choose the top six issues that they thought were crucial to good governance. Four questions dealt with governance issues: *An honest and responsive government, equality between men and women, freedom from discrimination and persecution, and political freedoms*. “*Honest and responsive government*” is one of the most common desires by citizens internationally, the sample now representing almost 9,736,484 respondents from 194 countries.

Building on the data from an earlier version of this survey, several British workers took a smaller sample from the UN. Using results from only those countries where more than one thousand persons voted, they ended up with a sample of 1.3 million (out of 1.5 million) respondents from 74 countries (Bergh, Menocal & Takeuchi. 2014). The general finding was that citizens' main concerns are whether governments deliver public goods and services, but not to the exclusion of issues around the “form” of governance. The main point made in this ODI study is that issues about governance are probably more important than is often accepted in development assistance:

A crucial message emerging from the analysis, which draws from both the MY World survey and other, more detailed global and regional perception surveys (particularly the regional Barometers), is that, when thinking about governance, people tend to care first and foremost about state effectiveness and the ability of the state to deliver (be it in terms of generating growth and jobs, providing basic services, ensuring a more equitable distribution of the 'goods' provided, etc.). In other words, their view of governance is quite instrumental, based on outcomes and not necessarily on which normative attributes that should be inherent to governance or particular forms it should take. This is clearly illustrated in MY World survey results, which show that respondents overwhelmingly privilege 'an honest and responsive government' over other options that also have important governance dimensions, including 'political freedoms'.(Bergh, Menocal & Takeuchi. 2014. p 13)

How might these findings apply to politics and citizens' perceptions of the form and function of politics in Zimbabwe?

Zimbabwe and governance

Zimbabwe was included in the final MYWorld sample, and now (2018) 16,249 Zimbabweans have voted. The Zimbabwean sample is not strongly representative of Zimbabwe as a whole: there are more males and it appears to be more educated than the 2012 census would show, and sees “*honest and responsive government*” in fifth place as opposed to fourth for whole world sample. Zimbabweans placed education, healthcare, job opportunities, and access to clean

water and sanitation above honest and responsive government. Whilst this last is not included as an option for the most important things that the government should address, the data from six rounds of the Afrobarometer in Zimbabwe seem to endorse the other UN findings. Since 2004, Zimbabweans see state effectiveness and service delivery as the most important issues for the government to address, as seen in Table 1 below. This is probably an unsurprising finding, and found for many African countries.

Table 1: Ten most important issues for the government to address (2004 to 2017)

Source[Afrobarometer surveys]

2004	2005	2009	2012	2014	2017
Economy	Food shortage/	Economy	Employment	Employment	Employment
Employment	Economy	Unemployment	Economy	Economy	Economy
Food shortage	Employment	Education	Food shortage	Corruption	Wages, etc.
Poverty	Transport	Food shortage/	Wages, etc.	Farming/	Infrastructure
Health	Poverty	Wages, etc.	Poverty	Infrastructure	Food shortage
Wages, etc.	Wages, etc.	Health	Farming	Poverty	Poverty
Education	Drought	Poverty	Corruption	Wages, etc.	Corruption
Transport	Democracy	Farming	Water supply	Water supply	Water supply
Rates and Taxes	Farming	Water supply	Education	Education	Farming

Using the Round 4 (2009) Afrobarometer data, Mattes placed Zimbabwe in the top third of 20 African countries in terms of development, community and security infrastructure, suggesting that the Zimbabwe government was doing well comparatively in meeting citizens expectations for service delivery (Mattes.2010). However, as Mattes points out, good service delivery does not necessarily lead to more active citizens:

Controlling for urban-rural differences, all three types of service infrastructure make people more positive about current government performance in the area of service delivery. However, once we move away from evaluations of service delivery, we find few meaningful differences. For example, people in well serviced areas are no less (or more) likely to perceive higher levels of government corruption. They are no more (or less) likely to express trust in government or law enforcement institutions, or see the state as legitimate, or say they are satisfied with the way democracy works in their country. Finally, there is no evidence that it makes people more or less likely to contact their leaders, or take part in political protest. (Mattes. 2019. p. 12)

Zimbabweans clearly see service delivery as key to good governance, but, given that Zimbabweans also rank “*honest and responsive government*” highly in the UN MYWorld survey, this seemed worth investigating more closely. Furthermore, did positive perceptions of service delivery and state responsiveness (“*honest and responsive government*”) lead to more active citizenship?

Methods

Since the more analytical study (Bergh, Rocha & Takeuchi. 2014) used nine questions from the 2008 Afrobarometer surveys, we used the same nine questions from the last round of the Afrobarometer (2017). However, this study was concerned about global measures of countries rather than the characteristics of citizens within the various countries, using average scores of countries. We, on the other hand, wished to understand the preferences of citizens themselves, and used the data from the Afrobarometer Round 7 (2017).

In order to understand citizen's preferences, we constructed a number of indices as follows:

- Lived Poverty
- Service Availability
- Service Delivery
- Active Citizenship
- Perception of Democracy
- Political Trust
- State Responsiveness

The rationale for including lived poverty was the finding that high levels of lived poverty decrease respondents' *approval of government management of the economy, their support for private provision of development services, and their support for economic reform* (Mattes. 2010). The questions were re-coded as binary scores (see Appendix 1), and the mean score was 2.8 (sd.1.4). Lived Poverty was assumed for a score of 4 or more.

We also constructed an index of Service Availability, again based on the items identified in a previous study (Mattes. 2010). These ten items are derived from direct observation by the survey enumerators, and provide a measure of the kinds of services available in each community around the interviewees.¹ Hence, this measure is based on direct observation.

- *Electricity grid accessible to most houses*
- *Piped water system accessible to most houses*
- *Sewage system accessible to most houses*
- *Cell phone service*
- *Post office within easy walking distance*
- *School within easy walking distance*
- *Police station within easy walking distance*
- *Health clinic within easy walking distance*
- *Market stalls selling groceries and/or clothing within easy walking distance*
- *Police in the PSU/EA*

These responses were binary variables and were summed to give an overall index of service delivery. The mean score was 5.4 (sd. 3.2).

A further index, on Service Delivery, was constructed for respondent's actual perceptions of economic and service delivery, using 13 questions on the government's handling of key areas around service delivery and economy.

- *How well government has managed economy*
- *How well government has improved living standards of poor*
- *How well government has created jobs*
- *How well government has kept prices stable*
- *Handling narrowing income gaps*
- *Handling reducing crime*
- *How well government has improved basic health services*
- *How well government has addressed educational needs*
- *How well government has provided water and sanitation services*

¹ For every interview, enumerators record the availability of the services in the area in which the interview is taking place.

- *How well government has ensured everyone has enough to eat*
- *Handling fighting corruption*
- *How well government has maintained roads and bridges*
- *How well government has maintained stable supply of electricity*

The responses were re-coded as binary variables,² and a sum score calculated. The possible total score for satisfaction with service delivery was 13, with a mean of 4.2 (s.dev 3.5).

Since Social Capital has been used in several previous studies (Reeler. 2015; RAU.2018 (a); RAU.2018 (b)), we decided to use this as a measure of wider engagement with the community, and, also, because it showed such strong differences between rural and urban Zimbabweans. Here there are six questions taken from Afrobarometer, and re-coded as binary variables. There is a maximum score of six on this index, with a mean of 2.4 (sd.1.3).

- *How often felt unsafe walking in neighbourhood*
- *Attend a community meeting*
- *Join others to raise an issue*
- *Member of voluntary association or community group*
- *How often careful what you say*
- *Like, dislike or not care as neighbours: people of different ethnicity*

As a measure of State Responsiveness, we derived an index based on five questions asking about aspects of this:

- *How often MPs listen*
- *How often local government officials listen*
- *Better or worse: government assists people to resolve problems*
- *Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? Your Member of Parliament*
- *Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? Your elected local government councillor*

These five questions were re-coded as binary variables, giving a maximum score of five, with a mean of 1.71 (sd.1.57).

We also included three demographic variables that have been shown in previous Zimbabwean research to determine citizens' perceptions of governance: age, gender, and residence (rural or urban).

Reliability for all the indices was generally acceptable, but was highly acceptable for the main indices of interest – Service Delivery (0.86), Service Availability (0.74), State Responsiveness (0.703), and Political Trust (0.76).³

There were a number of hypotheses that we were interested to test here, given the continual demand for service delivery in the Afrobarometer surveys:

² Handling managing the economy, etc. *1* = (4=Very well; 3=fairly well); *0* = (1=Very Badly; 2=Fairly badly; 8= refused; 9=Don't know/haven't heard enough)

³ Cronbach's Alpha: Lived Poverty (0.62); Service Delivery (0.74); Service Availability (0.86); Social Capital (0.44); Support for Democracy (0.56); Political Trust (0.76); and State Responsiveness (0.703).

- Lived Poverty (LP) would be higher in rural as opposed to urban residents;
- Service Availability (SA) would be greater in urban as opposed to rural areas;
- Service Delivery (SD) should be worse in rural as opposed to urban areas;
- Based on previous research, Social Capital (SC) would be higher in rural areas;
- Support for Democracy (Dem) should be higher in rural areas;
- Political Trust (PT) should be higher in rural areas;
- Finally, State Responsiveness (SR) should be higher in rural areas given the ruling party's reliance of the rural areas as a reservoir of political support and the use of patronage to achieve this.

The data was analysed in SPSS (20). Frequencies, correlations and tests of means were carried out.

Results

The first analysis was in examining the relationships between the various indices.

Table 2: Correlations between indices

	RurUrb	SA	SD	LP	SC	SD	PT	SR
RurUrb	1	.629**	-.080**	-.130**	-.317**	-.039	-.111**	-.203**
Service Availability (SA)		1	-.032	-.066*	-.217**	-.006	-.108**	-.141**
Service Delivery (SD)			1	.299**	.255**	.475**	.446**	.594**
Lived Poverty (LP)				1	.082**	.181**	.107**	.157**
Social Capital (SD)					1	.232**	.227**	.284**
Support for Democracy (SD)						1	.385**	.353**
Political Trust (PT)							1	.531**
State Responsiveness (SR)								1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

State Responsiveness was associated with Service Delivery, Lived Poverty, Social Capital, Political Trust and Support for Democracy, but Service Availability and Residence (RurUrb) were not. Since Service Delivery was the more direct contribution from the state, this supports the overall theory that it is actual delivery that matters to citizens, as suggested by other research (Bergh, Rocha & Takeuchi. 2014).

It was interesting that urban residence (RurUrb) was negatively associated with all indices apart from Service Availability, which suggests, as with other research on Zimbabwean citizens, a strong split in views between urban and rural citizens. Thus, beliefs in State Responsiveness (*honest and responsive government*) are not universally distributed amongst Zimbabweans as suggested by the UN MYWorld.

Testing hypotheses

In order to test for causality, the directionality of the association, we examined this by testing for differences in means on the indices.

There were no differences according to gender: male and females have the same views on all the indices. However, there were differences due to age. Interestingly, younger Zimbabweans saw that there was good service availability, but not so service delivery. Older Zimbabweans were distinguished by having higher Social Capital and greater Political Trust.

When we asked the question about residence, then our working hypotheses were tested more clearly.

Table 3:

	Urban [n=448]	Rural [n=752]	df	<i>t</i>	Sig. 2-tailed
Service availability	8.00	3.86	1198	28.02	0.0000
Service delivery	3.86	4.44	1198	-2.76	0.0058
Lived Poverty	2.56	2.94	1198	-4.53	0.0000
Social Capital	1.85	2.70	1198	-11.58	0.0000
Support for democracy	1.46	1.54	1198	-1.34	ns
Political trust	0.99	1.33	1198	-3.86	0.0001
Responsiveness	1.30	1.96	1198	-7.17	0.0000

Our hypotheses were not wholly confirmed as seen in Table 3. Lived Poverty was greater in rural than urban residents, but also Service Delivery, Social Capital, Political Trust and State Responsiveness. Urban residents saw Service Availability as greater in the urban areas, which is not surprising, but it is perhaps not obvious that Service Availability and Service Delivery were not correlated (Table 2). Thus, we conclude as follows:

- Lived Poverty (LP) was higher in rural as opposed to urban residents (hypothesis disconfirmed);
- Service Availability (SA) was greater in urban as opposed to rural areas (hypothesis confirmed);
- Service Delivery (SD) was not better in urban as opposed to rural areas (hypothesis disconfirmed);
- Social Capital (SC) was higher in rural areas (hypothesis confirmed);
- Support for Democracy (Dem) was not significantly different (hypothesis disconfirmed);
- Political Trust (PT) was higher in rural areas (hypothesis confirmed);
- State Responsiveness (SR) was higher in rural areas (hypothesis confirmed).

Conclusions

Once again we find the “rural factor” operating in understanding how Zimbabweans view their world. It is hardly a new understanding that Lived Poverty is greater in rural compared to urban areas, and perhaps reassuring that both groups value democracy, but some of these findings are counter-intuitive at first glance.

It would seem generally that Service Availability and Delivery should be related: why should there be poorer delivery when there is greater availability? The answer would seem to lie in the

type of data. Service Availability is based on the reports of enumerators as they move through the various communities and make observations of what facilities they see. There can, of course, be bias and error in making these direct observations, but, by-and-large, these measures are probably independent of bias or error. The questions about Service Delivery, on the other hand, are derived from the opinions of the respondents, and all the 13 questions ask about how well the government is doing in providing each of the services.

It is possible that the rural residents are “faking good” about how the government is doing, but it is also the case that the ZANU-PF government is assiduous in ensuring that the rural population remains loyal to the party. Hence, the difference between the two groups, urban and rural, represents a real difference. Urban residents will be much more reliant on municipalities for the services they receive, and it is evident that such services have shown marked deterioration over the past decade. It is also the case that urban areas have been the stronghold of opposition parties since 2000, and these years have been marked by hostility by the government, even to the extent of undertaking mass displacements in the urban areas with *Operation Murambatsvina*, which showed interesting differences between urban and rural citizens (Reeler. 2017).

The biggest finding, however, is the bifurcation between Service Availability and Service Delivery, and the relationship between the latter and State Responsiveness. This conforms to the general notion that the government that delivers is seen as “responsive” and will maintain the loyalty of its supporters. This is scarcely news to political scientists, but what is news is that this works to the advantage of the ZANU-PF government in its consistent patronage to the rural areas. This is no gold-plated advantage as shown in the analysis of the effects of *Operation Murambatsvina*, and it is probable that the disruptions to those living in urban areas spilled over to the rural areas, losing ZANU-PF votes in the 2008 elections (Reeler. 2017). After all, the bifurcation between town and country is much more fluid than is often apparent, and, with the greater Lived Poverty of the rural areas, the support of urban family members for their rural relatives is an important part of alleviating that poverty. Disrupt that link and this can easily lead to support dwindling. In the context of the disputed 2018 elections, and the opacity about the actual results, did this support actually dwindle? Whether this is the case or not, these findings support the notion that the country is now deeply divided, and divided along the lines that we have shown (Bratton & Masunungure. 2018).

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