



Operation Murambatsvina and its effects on political agency.

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Executive Summary

As we demonstrated in a recent study on risk aversion, *Operation Murambatsvina [OM]* had severe effects upon the population of Zimbabwe (Masunungure et al. 2017). The percentage of Zimbabweans that reported being “*risk takers*” in 1999 was 84%, but this dropped to a paltry 13% in 2005. Possibly the worst example of forced displacement in the past four decades, *OM* was recognised for having extreme adverse effects upon citizens’ shelter, livelihoods, health, and psychological well-being, but there have only been few studies on the long-term effects on citizen’s agency. An Afrobarometer report in 2006 detailed many of the economic and social consequences of *OM* (Afrobarometer. 2006), but what has not been examined in any great detail has been the consequences of *OM* on political agency.

The present study examined the changes in aspects of citizen agency – *political participation, community participation, political trust* and *political affiliation* – as well as *lived poverty* for three periods, 2004, 2005 and 2009. Indices were constructed from the Afrobarometer questions for each of these variables, converted into binary scores, and then analysis done. Comparisons were made for residence – rural or urban, as this has been shown to be a distinguishing factor in the risk aversion study – as well for *political affiliation* as political party affiliation has been shown in previous research to define two very distinct and opposing groups.

The first examination was of the effects of *OM* itself for rural and urban residents. Unsurprisingly, given the nature of the displacement exercise, all effects were significantly worse for urban residents: all 10 indices of the effects of *OM*, from *having a home destroyed* to *having to stay in the open*, were worse for urban residents. However, *Lived Poverty*, measured as shortages of food, water, medical care, cooking fuel, and cash income, was generally worse for rural residents, except that urban residents showed a marked increase in *Lived Poverty* from 2004 to 2005, sustained through to 2009 for access to food, clean water and cooking fuel.

Contrasting rural and urban residents showed a range of different effects from 2004 to 2009. There were differences in all the variables examined, but few returned in 2009 to the levels of 2004.

Political Participation – this was reduced by *OM*, but restored in most ways for both rural and urban residents, but, as always, all Zimbabweans are *careful about what they say in public*.

Community Participation – by 2009, this was reduced from the levels of 2004. Very few in either group reported attending demonstrations or protests, irrespective of the year, and rural residents reported much higher frequencies – largely unchanged over the three years – of *attending community meetings*. This requires careful interpretation since there is strong compulsion to attend meetings, whether called by traditional leaders or political parties.

Political Trust – this remained consistently high over the three surveys for the courts, but trust in the police reduced from 2004 to 2009 for urban residents. Trust in the more political

agents (President, parliament and the ruling party) declined from 2004 to 2005, trust in parliament rebounded strongly in 2009, but not for the President and the ruling party.

Political Affiliation – this showed the greatest changes, with the respondents, both rural and urban, reporting a strong shift from ZANU-PF to MDC-T. By 2009, only 6% of urban respondents and 17% of rural folk who were willing to openly state a preference – supported ZANU-PF.

In conclusion, it seems fair to conclude that *OM* was a contributory *factor* in ZANU-PF's loss in the 2008 Harmonised Elections, but the additional effects of the economic decline, especially in 2007 and 2008, cannot be discounted. Given that risk aversion was on the decline in 2014, and that the economic situation appears to be heading for the same state as 2007-2008, what do these factors mean for the upcoming elections in 2018?

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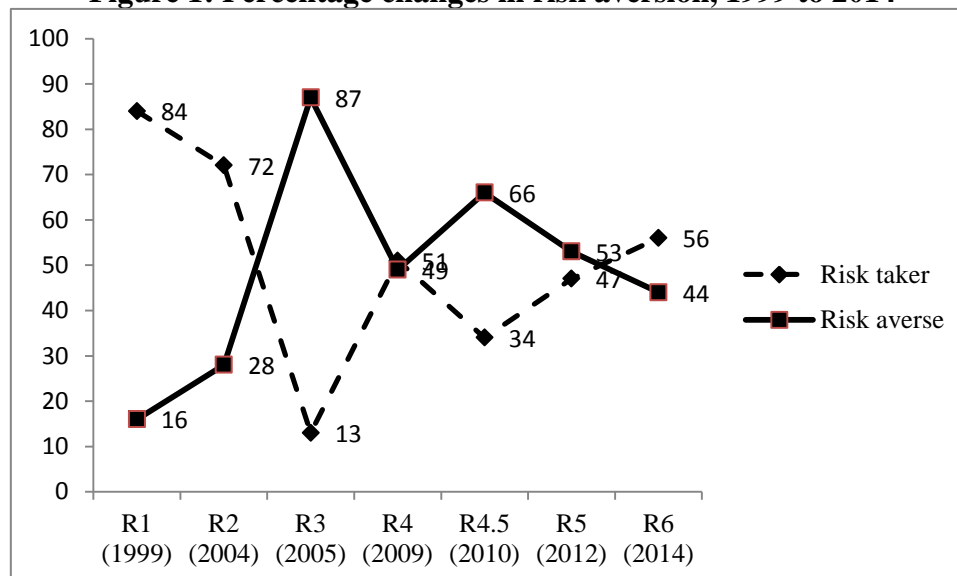
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Background

Whilst *Operation Murambatsvina* in 2005 was a shocking example of forced displacement in Zimbabwe, it was merely the latest in a number of large-scale, forced displacements that have taken place over the past three decades. Since 2000, Zimbabwe has witnessed the forced displacement of commercial farm workers, supporters of the MDC, and other perceived opponents of the ZANU-PF Government. Furthermore, there has been the steady migration, both legal and illegal, of millions of Zimbabweans, mainly to South Africa and the United Kingdom, due to the massive down turn in the economy and the attendant political instability as well as fleeing the political violence (SACST.2008). Previously, Zimbabwe has witnessed the migration of people during the Gukurahundi period in the 1980s, and, before this, the forced displacement of enormous number of Zimbabweans into the “protected villages”, the “keeps”, and also into exile during the Liberation War (RAU. 2016). Of course, there was the steady displacement of Zimbabweans from the land during the colonial period.

However, *Operation Murambatsvina* was different in that the displacements were firstly urban (and peri-urban), and secondly were national without exception (ActionAid. 2005; SPT. 2005(a); SPT. 2005 (b); Forum 2005 (a); Forum. 2005 (b); Forum. 2006). In most of the previous periods, displacements took place over time. For example, the forcing of rural people into “keeps” during the Liberation War occurred over several years, and, as the security situation demanded this locally. Again, the displacement of farmworkers occurred on a farm-by-farm basis, and over nearly sixteen years now. By contrast, *Operation Murambatsvina [OM]* took place over a very short period, it happened in virtually every single urban environment in the country, and the targets were seemingly indiscriminate. With such massive implementation, *OM* attracted enormous local and international attention, and a considerable number of reports emerged dealing with the humanitarian, psycho-social and legal consequences (Vambe. 2014): the displacements even led to some analysts arguing they were a crime against humanity (Tibaijuka. 2005; OPBPG. 2005).

Figure 1: Percentage changes in risk aversion, 1999 to 2014



[Source: Masunungure et al. 2017]

What is evident is that *OM* was undoubtedly the single most powerful event for depressing risk-taking in the Zimbabwean citizenry: from a high of 84% of Zimbabweans reporting in

1999 that they were risk takers, this dropped to a low of 13% in 2005 (Masunungure et al. 2017). Not even the extensive political violence that took place between 2000 and 2004 (when the second Afrobarometer survey was carried out) had such an effect. The drop between 1999 and 2004 was only 12 percentage points – from 84% to 72%. There has been a very slow return to risk taking from the low of 2005, and by 2014, a majority (58%) of Zimbabweans now describe themselves as risk takers.

An Afrobarometer report in 2005 detailed many of the economic and social consequences of *OM* (Afrobarometer. 2006), but what has not been examined in any great detail has been the consequences of *OM* on political agency. This current report examines the effects of *OM* more specifically, contrasting the findings of the Afrobarometer surveys in the years before and after *OM*; this is a contrast between Round 2 (2004), Round 3 (2005), and Round 4 (2009).

Methods

The data from Rounds 2 (2004), 3 (2005) and 4 (2009) were compiled in a single Excel data base. A code book of all relevant Afrobarometer questions related to this study was created, and a new coding structure applied to reduce the results into a binary format. The questions were chosen for comparability between the three surveys, and included the following:

- **Demography** – age, gender, education, employment and place of residence (rural or urban);
- **Lived poverty index** – questions related to lack of food, water, medical care, cooking fuel and cash income. These questions were chosen to see whether *OM* had affected their material lives differentially for rural and urban residents;
- **Political Participation** – questions about being able to *say what you think*, *join the political party of one's choice*, *vote for the party of one's choice*, and *not careful what you say in public*. Elections since 2000 have been frequently violent, as was particularly the case for 2002 and 2008. Fear of political violence may affect citizen's willingness to participate in politics;
- **Community Participation** – questions about *discussing politics with friends and family*, attending community meetings, *joining others to raise an issue*, and *attending a demonstration or protest march*. These questions were chosen to see in what way *OM* had affected citizens participation, and was predicated on the previous study's demonstration that *OM* had resulted in a massive increase in risk-aversion;
- **Political Trust** – questions about trust as this is seen by many as being a critical factor in engendering agency: *trusting the President*, *trusting parliament*, *trusting the ruling party*, *trusting the police* and *trusting the courts*;
- **Political Affiliation** – question about which political party the respondents were close to. Previous research has shown that explicit political party support – ZANU-PF or MDC-T – defines two distinct groups with very differing points of view (RAU. 2015).¹

¹ Here we only included those respondents that actually expressed a political affiliation. Nearly a third of respondents consistently do not answer this question, either refusing to answer or stating that it is inapplicable to them. It is risky to assume the actual affiliations of these two groups, and hence we concentrated on those with explicit affiliation only.

The rationale for choosing these indices out of the enormous range of possible indices that can be derived from the Afrobarometer data was pragmatic: we wanted a simple range of questions to reflect the ways in which citizens might have changed as a consequence of *OM*. Thus, we identified questions (and hence indices) that showed how citizens' perceptions of the government had changed as well as ways in which they felt that they themselves had changed. A particular interest was in seeing whether there were differences between rural and urban respondents given the focus of *OM* on urban and peri-urban areas and especially because our earlier study on risk aversion shows a long-term difference between rural and urban residents, with urban residents remaining more risk averse than rural residents following *OM*.²

A combined index was constructed for each of the above, using a simple score for each based on the sum of the re-coded binary scores for each question. The data was combined in an Excel spreadsheet and frequencies calculated for all measures.

Results

Below we report the findings for the contrast between the three rounds according to the themes identified – *political participation, community participation, political trust, and political affiliation*. However, at the outset we examine the differences between the two groups, urban and rural, in their perceived consequences of *OM* on their lives.

Effects of *OM*

Given the finding that urban citizens remained more risk averse following *OM* than their rural counterparts, it is worth at the outset examining one aspect of *OM* not explicitly canvassed in the Afrobarometer (2006) report, the contrast between urban and rural residents.

Table 1: Urban versus Rural – the effects of *OM*

	Urban [n=336] ³	Rural [n=710]
Destruction of home/dwelling on your property	67%	41%
Evicted from place of residence	44%	33%
Destruction or closure of business	48%	23%
Arrested for engaging in illegal trade	28%	13%
Loss of job	33%	21%
Moved in with relatives	54%	34%
Relocated to a rural area	36%	35%
Taken to transit camp	13%	5%
Stay in the open	27%	17%
Now operates business from home	35%	12%
Government's Operation Murambatsvina "good"	17%	37%

It is evident that the effects were considerably more serious for urban as opposed to rural residents. Every consequence covered in the Afrobarometer Round 3 survey was worse for

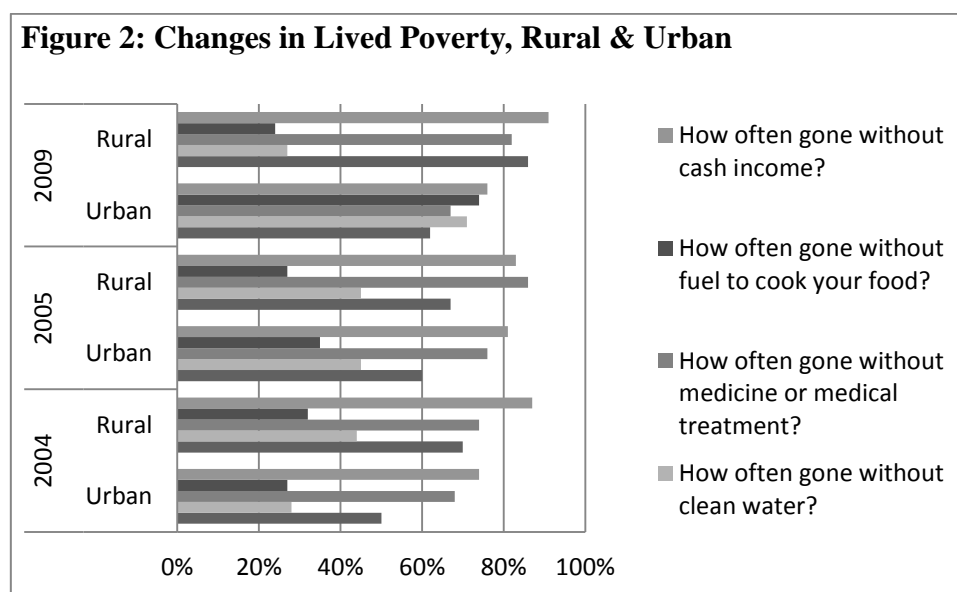
² Masunungure, E., Reeler, A., Kokera, R., Mususa, D., Ndoma, S. & Koga, H (2016), *Are Zimbabweans Revolting? An examination of Risk-taking and Risk-Aversion since 1999*, March 2017. MPOI & RAU.

³ For every consequence of *OM* the difference was strongly statistically significant (χ^2 : $p=0.0001$).

urban citizens. This is obvious given that *OM* was specifically targeting the urban areas. However, it is difficult from the data to disaggregate the genuinely rural from those living in peri-urban areas and hence there is the possibility of both over and under-estimating the effects. However, using the questions about residence, and how long people had lived in the area, did not show any major differences, and, the general finding that urban citizens suffered greater hardship stands.⁴

Lived Poverty

Given the above, it would then be expected that *Lived Poverty* would be significantly worse for urban citizens in 2005 as a consequence of *OM*, but also that poverty would be greater for rural citizens generally, as is usually the case in Zimbabwe.



As can be seen from Figure 2, Lived Poverty is higher for rural residents as opposed to urban residents before, during and after *OM*, but it is also evident that Lived Poverty increased significantly for urban residents in 2005. For every indicator urban folk reported an increase in poverty, and some of these had even worsened in 2009: access to food, clean water, and cooking fuel, all worsened in both 2005 and 2009. The higher rates of Lived Poverty for rural citizens are an expected finding, but it is also evident that urban citizens were significantly affected by *OM*, and these were sustained through to 2009 at least.

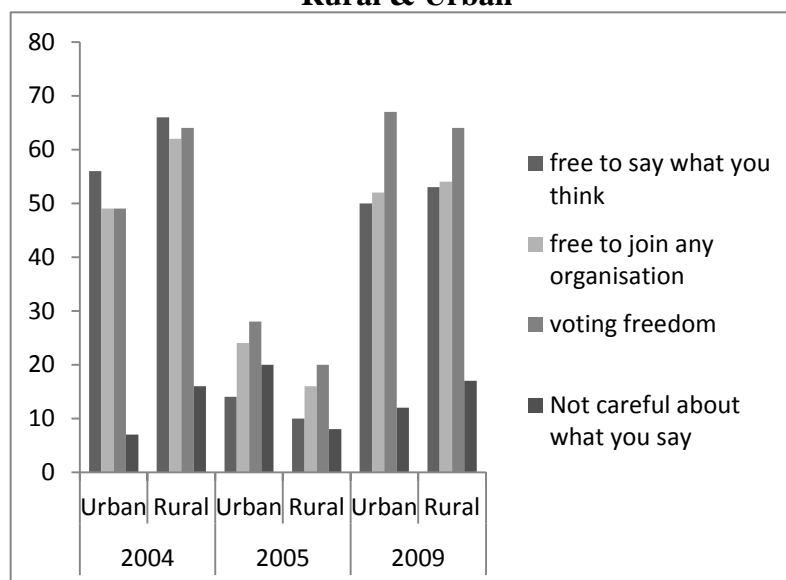
Political Participation

Political Participation has to do with citizens' participation in the socio-political life of the country, and, as seen above, the measure was constructed from four questions from the Afrobarometer surveys.

⁴ **Question 4A:** How recently did you come to stay in this area? **Question 5:** Before you came to stay here, where were you living?

As was found with risk aversion, there are pronounced differences between rural and urban citizens. Firstly, there are expected changes in all measures between 2004 and 2005 for both the rural and urban respondents. Very few in either group are not careful what they say in public, but it is interesting that, in 2009, the urban respondents show greater frequencies in three of the variables than they did in 2004.

Figure 3: Changes in Political Participation, Rural & Urban

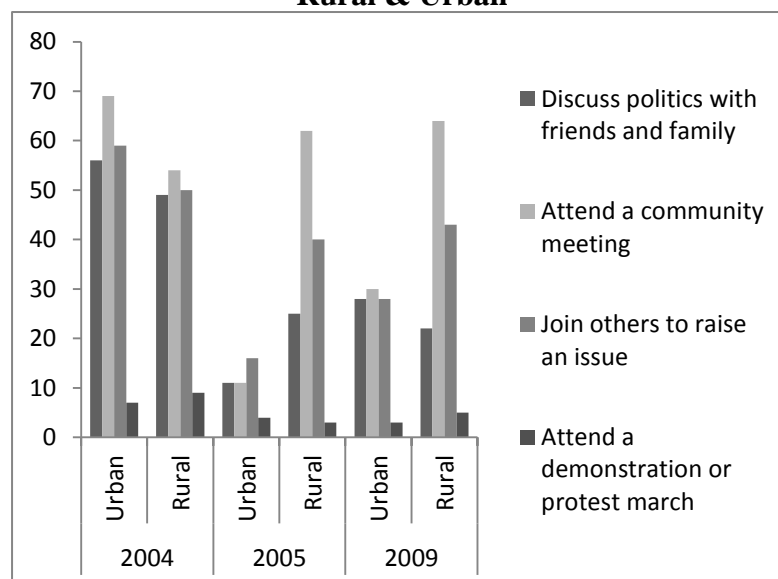


The converse may be true for the rural respondents who show lower frequencies on the three variables – free to say, free to join and free to vote – which may be a consequence again of the 2008 elections and the violence that accompanied the election, especially in the rural areas (see section on *Political Affiliation* also).

Community Participation

Whilst *Political Participation* may be risky in Zimbabwe, it might be hypothesised that *Community Participation* might be less so, and particularly for urban residents.

Figure 4: Changes in Community Participation, Rural & Urban



There are again differences between the two groups, but for rural respondents not such a marked change due to *OM* as for the urban group. Few in either group report attending demonstrations or protests, but the big difference between the two groups is the very marked in all types of *Community Participation* for the urban group. There is very large change from 2004 to 2005, but a minimal increase by 2009, about half of what it was in 2004.

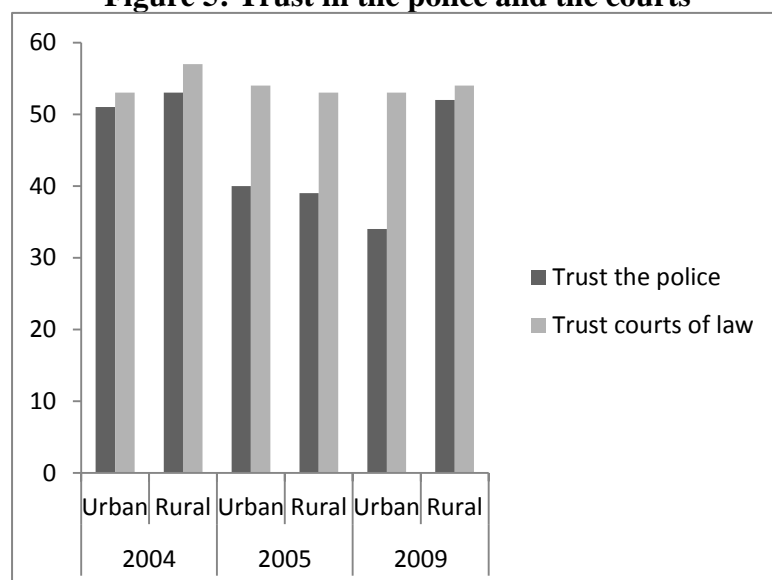
For the rural group, there is little change in *attending a community* meeting over the three surveys, but this must be treated with caution: this may not represent voluntarism but rather the compulsion that affects many rural residents for attending meetings called by traditional leaders or political parties (Matyszak. 2010; ZPP. 2017).⁵ This notion seems bolstered, in the aftermath of the 2008 violence, by the reduction, from 2004 to 2009, in the frequencies of *discussing politics* and *joining others to raise an issue*.

Overall, it seems fair to conclude that *OM* had a sustained effect upon participation generally, more marked for the urban than the rural, but, of course, the effects of the violent election in 2008 *and* the massive decline in the economy cannot be eliminated as other contributory factors inhibiting citizen agency. The travails of daily living may well have diminished interest in participating in any but survival activities. Of course, it cannot be discounted that this too was an intended effect of *OM*: making people poor might be a strategy for inhibiting political participation, but clearly a risky strategy (see *Political Affiliation* below).

Political Trust

When a government undertakes an action such as *OM*, it might be expected that this would make the government highly unpopular with the citizenry, and certainly those affected by the policy. Overall, there are appreciable drops in political trust from 2004 to 2005, and, interestingly, greater drops for rural than urban respondents. There is rebound in 2009 for both groups, but not uniformly. For the urban group, there is a big jump, of 22% from 2004 and 18% from 2005, in trust in parliament – presumably because of the GPA – but no other form of trust returns to the 2004 level, again suggesting a long-term consequence of *OM*.

Figure 5: Trust in the police and the courts



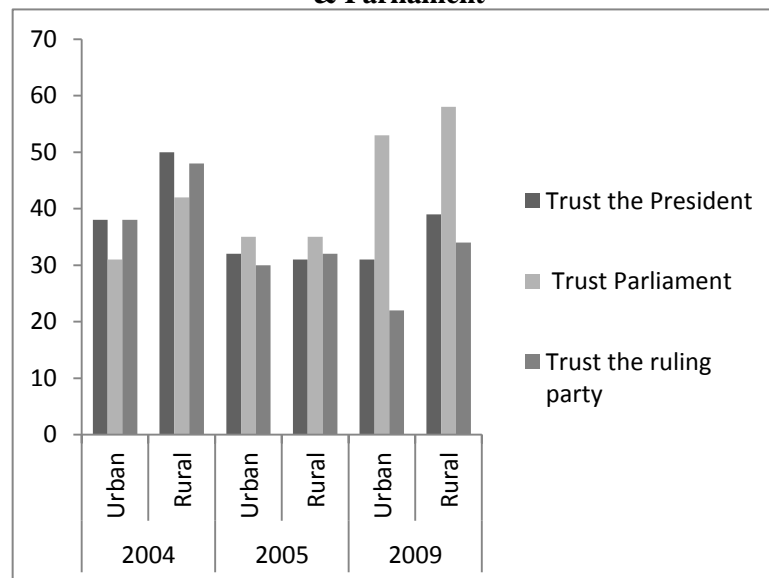
There are, however, some interesting differences in various forms of trust. As can be seen in Figure 5, Trust in the courts of law seems to have been unaffected, and consistently over 50% of respondents, rural and urban, trust this institution.

Trust in the police fluctuates over the three periods. It drops in 2005 for both groups, but not hugely; still nearly 40% of both groups report trusting the police.

⁵See *Formal Structures of Power in Rural Zimbabwe* for a detailed analysis of the considerable powers of rural authorities over citizens and reports of the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) for reports of forced attendance at meetings.

The urban group, however, shows diminishing trust in the police over time, dropping in 2005 and a further drop in 2009. Given the role of the police during *OM*, the first drop in trust seems obvious, but it is not obvious why the drop in trust continues into 2009 while trust in the police is restored completely for the rural respondents.

Figure 6: Political Trust – President, Ruling Party, & Parliament



Looking at the more obviously political agents – President, parliament and the ruling party – there are more marked differences than with the police or the courts.

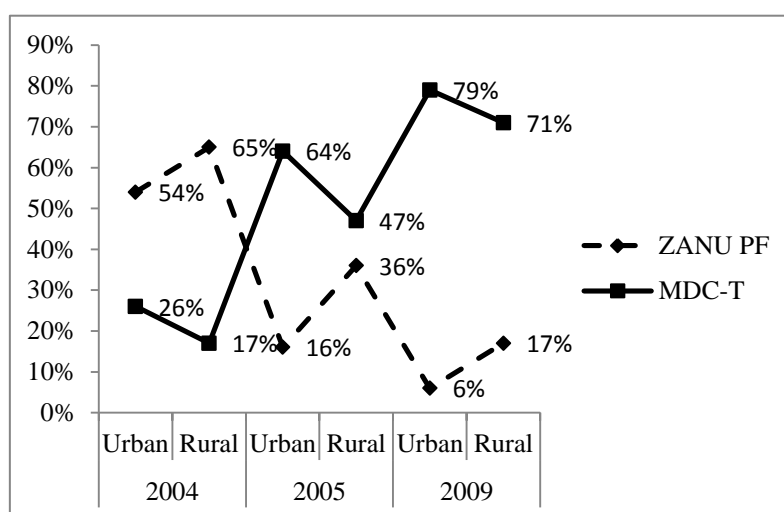
Both groups show an increased trust in parliament in 2009 compared with 2004, again presumably because of the Inclusive Government. But both groups also show diminished trust over time in the ruling party and some diminution in trust of the President over time.

Trust in the President for both groups does not return, in 2009, to the 2004 levels. It does appear, therefore, that one possible consequence of *OM* was a sustained drop in support for ZANU-PF, which some bearing on the 2008 elections and the party losing its majority in parliament. The effects of the catastrophic decline in economy must not be discounted as an additional factor here influencing the outcome of the election.

Political Affiliation

Political trust seems to have been affected by *OM* (amongst other factors), but how was explicit political party support affected. As can be seen very clearly from Figure 7 (over), the effect upon political affiliation was dramatic. There is a clear relationship between the drop in support for ZANU-PF from the level of 2004, and this was sustained through to 2009. The effect was found for both rural and urban respondents, with rural folk dropping from 65% support for ZANU-PF in 2004 down to a mere 17% in 2009: a 48 percentage drop, and this within the long-standing support base for the party.

Figure 7 : Political party affiliation – Rural versus Urban



What is more remarkable is the huge growth in support from the rural respondents for MDC-T, paralleling the drop in support for ZANU-PF and clearly reflected in the success had by MDC-T in elections in 2008. The shift for urban respondents from support for ZANU-PF is equally dramatic, from 54% in 2004 down to a mere 6% in 2009.

A fair conclusion from the findings is that launching *OM* did ZANU-PF no favours when it came to political party support and voting.

Conclusions

Here we were concerned with the less material consequences of *OM*: how Zimbabwean citizen's agency was affected, and, in particular, examining the finding from the previous study that risk aversion remained more common in urban than rural citizens. Even in the context of an increase in risk taking by 2014, urban citizens were less likely to be risk takers than rural citizens.

It is not remarkable that *OM*, as an urban-focused exercise, would result in severe consequences for the targets, but it is very interesting that the effects were so much more widespread than merely the displacement and impoverishment of urban residents. We have found effects for every measure we took: *OM* resulted in greater immediate *Lived Poverty*, lowered *Political* and *Community Participation*, reduced *Political Trust*, and hugely influenced changes in *Political Affiliation*. The effects were generally worse for urban residents: there were similar effects for rural folk, but generally of lower magnitude.

The most startling effect was upon *Political Affiliation*. If the oft-speculated intention behind *OM* was to undermine the support base for MDC-T, this clearly backfired, and the consequence was an enormous shift in allegiance from ZANU-PF to MDC-T, and remarkably, in the traditional support base for the party in the rural areas. Thus, in retrospect, the result of the election in 2008 is not surprising. However, the period from 2005 to 2008 was also a time of hyperinflation and severe stress upon everyone's livelihoods. It is probable that *OM* and economic hardship combined to produce the electoral result of not only giving MDC-T a majority in parliament, but also winning a significant number of rural seats.

However, voting is a minimalist form of citizen agency, and it was just this that sparked the interest in examining risk aversion. As was seen (Tables 3 & 4) there was a marked effect upon citizens' *Political* and *Community Participation*. For both rural and urban citizens, their participation in social and political life was greatly reduced in 2009 from the levels in 2004. Similarly, for *Political Trust*, there was a significant decline in trust in the police, although more so for the urban citizens, with trust in the president and the ruling party not returning to the 2004 levels. And the decline in *Political Trust* must be interpreted with the changes in political party affiliation, making the results of the 2008 elections more intelligible.

How might this help us in understanding the current context?

Firstly, it is evident that the widespread political violence between 2000 and 2004, and the mass displacements of farmers, farm workers and MDC supporters reduced the propensity of Zimbabweans for risk taking, but the majority were not risk averse in 2004: risk taking had declined 12 percentage points from 84% to 72% (see Figure 1). *OM* then reduced the risk taking population to 13%, for both urban and rural citizens, a drop of 59 percentage points and hence it took a national scale event to cow the population, much greater in effect than the violent elections in 2000 and 2002.

Secondly, while this reduced risk taking, political participation, community participation, and political trust, it also caused, with the economic hardships, a massive shift in the political affiliation of Zimbabweans, which definitely did not work to the advantage of ZANU-PF. *OM*, was probably at least a contributory factor in their losing the 2008 poll.

Thirdly, whilst *OM* has had short-term effects upon *Political Participation*, *Community Participation*, and *Political Trust*, it is evident that risk taking has re-emerged by 2014 (see Figure 1), and currently Zimbabweans display considerably more political astuteness than they have done for many years. Protests and demonstration have been highly visible in 2016, and, apart from these forms of participation, citizen voice through the use of social media has exploded. The two critical components of citizen agency, *voice* and *participation*, are more present than they have been for nearly a decade.

Fourthly, have the two conditions that seem to have caused the 2008 electoral upset re-emerged ahead of 2018: risk taking has increased from 13% in 2005 to something around 50% in 2009 (and 56% in 2014), and the economic conditions seem similar to those in 2008. Will these factors combine once again to produce an electoral upset, or will they combine into wholly new forms of political action? Time will tell, but it would seem that the government should not tempt fate by trying large-scale coercion on a national scale ahead of the elections in 2018.

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