

Party Cadres Threaten Peaceful Elections and Everyday Life in Urban Africa

Lessons from the 2021 Zambian Electionⁱ

Main findings

- Party cadres contribute to a climate of fear in Zambians' lives during election periods.
- Overall, party cadres have increased voter turnout, but the impact varied between urban and rural areas.
- Fear of party cadres is stronger in urban than in rural areas.
- Patriotic Front (PF) party cadre behavior likely contributed to the PF losing the 2021 election.

Policy Issue

Many of Africa's young democracies struggle to ensure peaceful elections and transparent governance. Weak state capacity and rule of law, heightened political polarization, authoritarian and colonial legacies, and poverty can all undermine the electoral process. Africa's rapid urbanization further complicates matters, placing additional pressure on governments to provide jobs, security, and housing in dense city neighborhoods, especially in slums and informal settlements.

In this context, political parties often use party cadres to enforce everyday governance. Cadres are "groups of organized young men operating in the public sphere to deploy control and violence and to collect fees at markets and bus stations" from consumers, bus drivers, and vendors.ⁱⁱ In addition to extorting and intimidating the public, they are also frequent perpetrators of inter-party violence during election campaigns, making them key drivers of increasing electoral violence.ⁱⁱⁱ

Politicians and political parties often use cadres as security details and the fees cadres collect for

day-to-day campaigning. Having existed since the 1980s, the influence of cadres grew dramatically in Zambia during the last six years of the PF administration.^{iv}

While the phenomenon of party cadres is not unique to the PF in Zambia, this brief focuses on the impact of the then-dominant PF cadres on three related areas: 1) citizens' everyday lives; 2) their perceptions of the former ruling party; and 3) the impact of cadres on voter turnout and election outcomes.

The Zambian Election Panel Survey

The Zambian Election Panel Survey (ZEPS) was conducted with almost 1700 respondents by telephone both before and after the August 12 election (Figure 1).^v Respondents were primarily located either in (a) the urban and peri-urban areas of Lusaka or (b) small towns and rural areas in the Eastern and Muchinga provinces, along the border with Malawi (Figure 2). Although the samples of the three survey rounds are not nationally representative, they include approximately 32% urban, 29% peri-urban, and 39% rural respondents.

ⁱ Cite this brief as: Nicole Beardsworth and Matthias Krönke. "Party Cadres Threaten Peaceful Elections and Everyday Life in Urban Africa: Lessons from the 2021 Zambian Election," *The Program on Governance and Local Development at the University of Gothenburg*, April 22, 2022.

Figure 1: Zambian Election Panel Survey Timeline

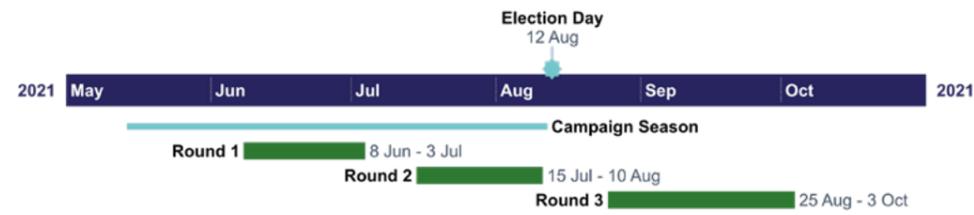
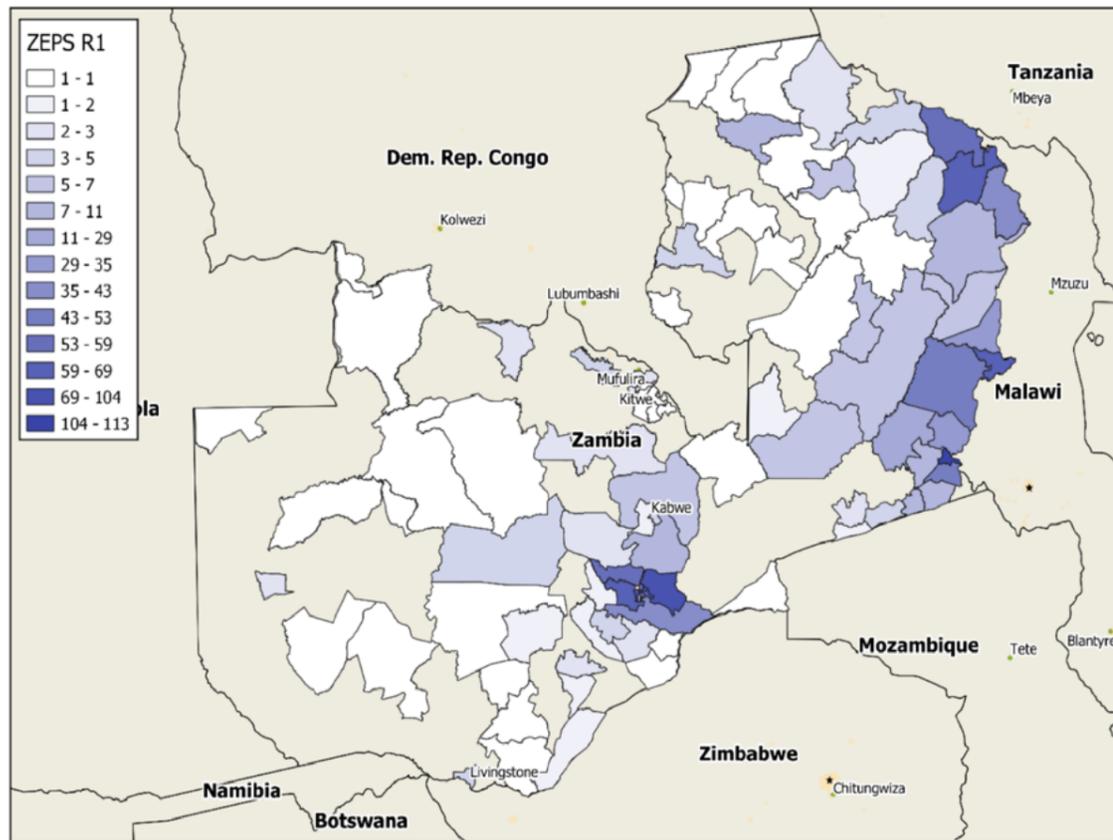


Figure 2: Respondents of ZEPS Survey | By location | Round 1

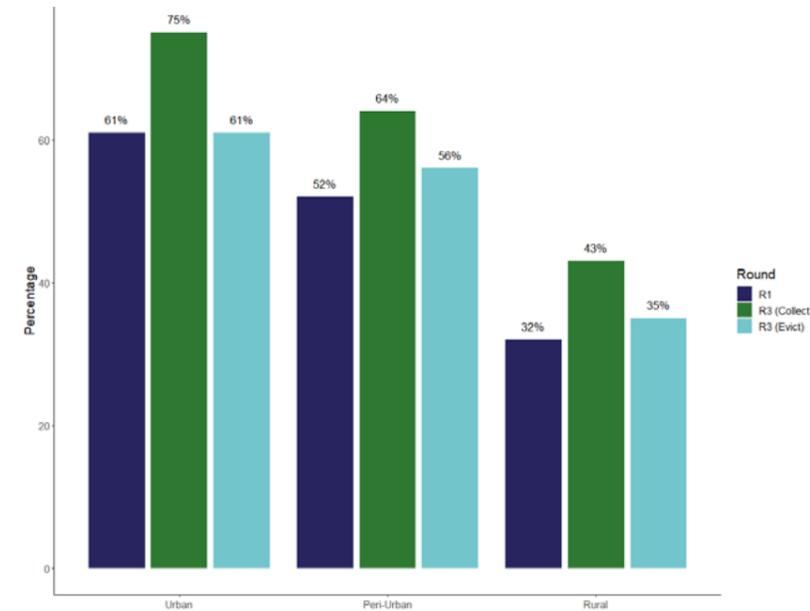


Impact on Zambians' Everyday Lives

Then-opposition candidate and current President Hakainde Hichilema took a strong stance against the growing impunity of the governing Patriotic Front's (PF) party cadres during his campaign and has since tried to rein in their influence. But there are suggestions that the PF could continue to play a destabilizing role.^{vi} In order to better understand the potential threat PF cadres could play in the future, we start by tracing their impact on the everyday lives of Zambians when these cadres were most active – the run-up to the 2021 election.

Before the election (R1), the survey found that urban and peri-urban respondents were significantly more likely to encounter cadres than those in rural areas. For example, 61% of urban respondents and 52% of peri-urban ones said cadres collected money or evicted tenants from markets and bus stations. Only 32% in rural areas said the same. This urban bias continued through the campaign period (R3).

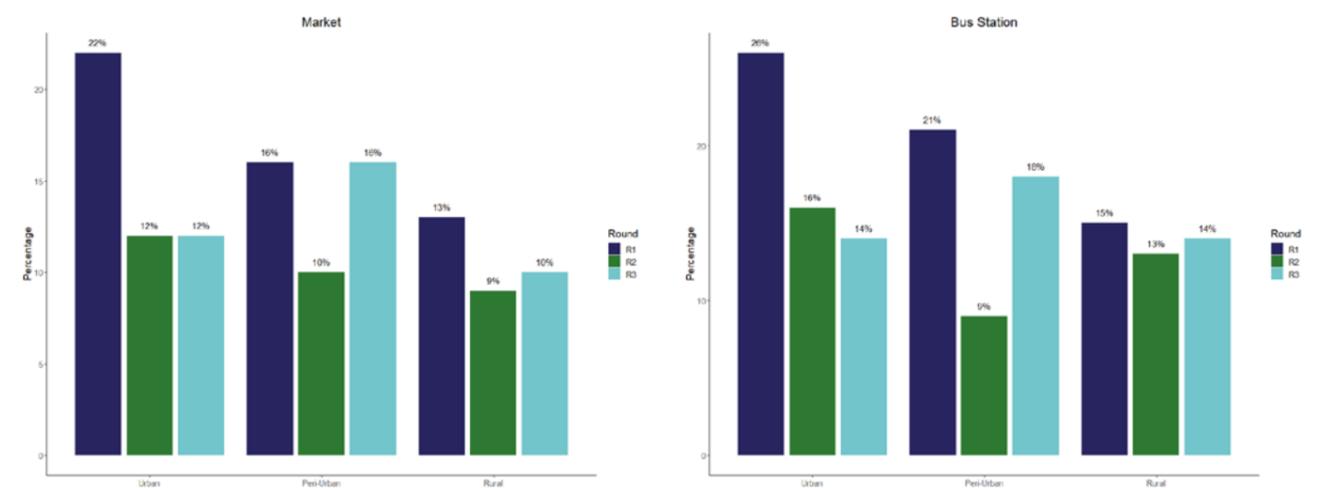
Figure 3: Share of Citizens Who Say Cadres Collect Money / Evict People at Markets and Bus Stations | By location | Rounds 1 & 3



Urban Zambians report fearing violence and intimidation by party cadres when going about their everyday activities – such as buying food at a market or taking local transport (Figure 4). For example, prior to the campaign period, 22% of urbanites and 16% of peri-urbanites feared experiencing intimidation at the market, versus only 13% of rural residents.

We see a similar response to facing possible intimidation at bus stations. Interestingly, this difference disappeared during the campaign period, and immediately after the election. This may have been a result of Zambia's electoral commission's temporary bans on campaigning in some urban areas due to scattered incidents of inter-party violence.

Figure 4: Citizens Fear Violence and Intimidation at Markets and Bus Stations | By location | Rounds 1-3

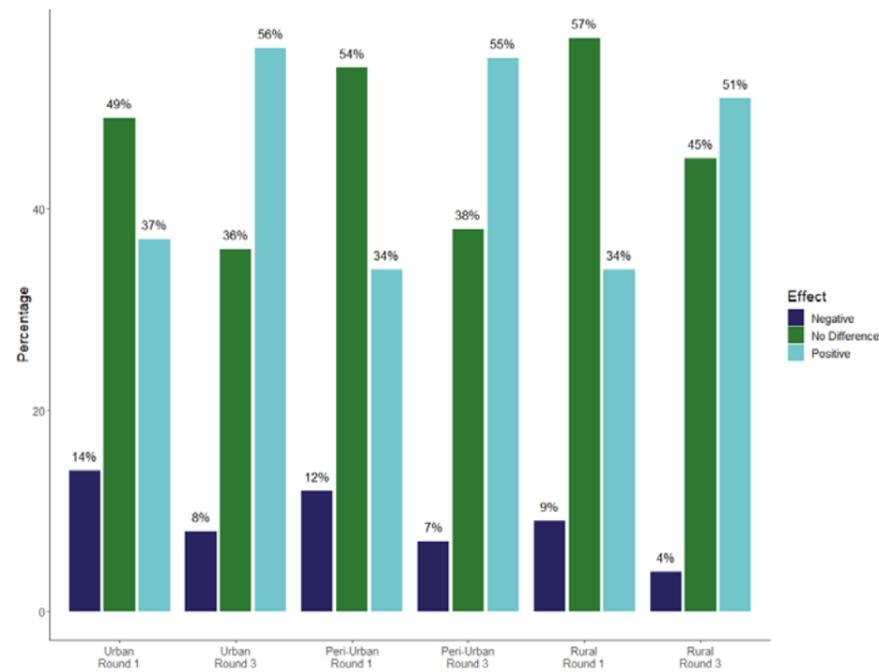


Impact on Voter Turnout

Across all three Rounds, we asked respondents whether the actions of cadres make them more or less likely to vote, or if their actions do not make a difference. The data show that, on balance, party cadres seem to have increased voter turnout. Yet, this effect is somewhat uneven. Following the same urban-rural distinction as above, two trends emerge (Figure 5).

First, the positive impact of party cadres in general (incl. opposition party cadres) on the likelihood of voters turning out to vote increases between the early campaign period (R1) and election day across all three types of locations. Second, the negative impact of cadres is higher in urban than in rural areas.^{vii}

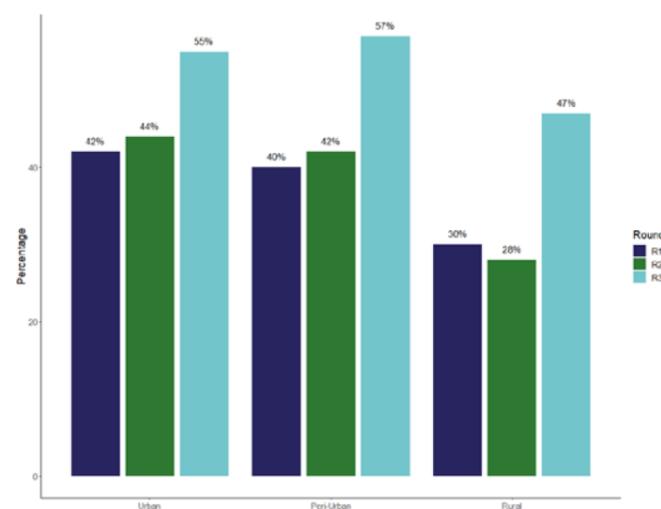
Figure 5: Impact of Party Cadres on Likelihood of Voting | By location | Rounds 1-3



Why the PF Lost

The PF identified party cadres as one of the key reasons they lost the 2021 election.^{viii} Our survey supports this claim. We find that more than 40% of respondents stated that the actions of PF party cadres damaged their view of the then-ruling party. This increased in Round 3, conducted just after the election, when more respondents said the actions of PF party cadres negatively impacted their view of the party. While the scope of this analysis does not allow us to determine whether the increase in Round 3 is due to respondents feeling more secure stating a negative opinion now that the PF is out of power, or because respondents changed their opinion based on recent PF party cadre behavior, the broader point remains; PF party cadres have had a substantial negative effect on the party brand.

Figure 6: Negative impact of PF party cadres' actions on view of party | By location | Rounds 1-3



Lessons

The ZEPS data has shown that party cadres contributed to a climate of fear in peoples' everyday lives in the run-up to the 2021 election. The intimidation was most widespread in urban areas before the election campaign period. As a result, party cadres are deeply unpopular, have a bifurcated effect on voter turnout, and likely contributed to the PF's election loss. This is a potentially important lesson for Zambia's new government.

As the continent rapidly urbanizes and countries hold local and national elections, party cadres are likely to play an increasingly prominent role in everyday governance and political campaigns, posing barriers to peaceful and transparent elections in the years ahead. It is urgent and important that political elites manage these actors, preventing the emergence of the kind of unaccountable, exploitative, and intimidatory actions seen in Zambia in 2021.

Question phrasing

Figure 3:

Political parties are often represented by local members who are not MPs or Councilors. How frequently do these members engage in any of the following activities in an ordinary year when there is no election taking place?

- Collect money or evict tenants from markets and bus stations (R 1)
- Collect money from vendors at markets or bus stations (R 3)
- Evict people from markets or bus stations (R3)

Figure 4:

Do you fear being subject to violence or intimidation if you did the following?

- Bought goods at the local market (R1&2)
- Took a local bus (R1&2)

During the election campaign period, did you fear being subject to violence or intimidation if you did the following?

- Bought goods at the local market (R3)
- Took a local bus from a bust stop (R3)

Figure 5:

Have the actions of party cadres made you more or less likely to vote? (R1&2)
Did the actions of party cadres make you more or less likely to vote? (R3)

Figure 6:

Have the actions of PF party cadres changed your view of the ruling PF party? (R1&2)
Did the actions of party cadres changed your view of the PF party? (R3)

Answer Choices:

- Not changed my view
- Negatively influenced my view of ruling party
- Positively influenced my view of ruling party
- Refused to Answer

References

ⁱⁱ Nicole Beardsworth et al., 'Party Cadres, the Politicisation of Local Government and Zambia's 2021 Elections,' Briefing, Zambia Electoral Analysis Project (ZEAP) Briefing Paper Series (Lusaka: Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the Southern African Institute for Policy and Research, August 2021).

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Wahman and Owen Sichone, 'Electoral Violence in Zambia,' Briefing, Zambia Electoral Analysis Project (ZEAP) Briefing Paper Series (Lusaka: Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the Southern African Institute for Policy and Research, August 2021).

^{iv} Karen Hansen, 'Changing Youth Dynamics in Lusaka's Informal Economy in the Context of Economic Liberalization,' African Studies Quarterly 11 (1 March 2010).

^v This brief draws upon data from the Zambia Election Panel Survey - Lust, Ellen; Beardsworth, Nicole; Krönke, Matthias; Seekings, Jeremy; and Wahman, Michael. *Zambian Election Panel Survey*. University of Cape Town; The Program on Governance and Local Development at University of Gothenburg: 2021. www.gld.gu.se. For additional information on the sampling strategy, please contact the authors.

^{vi} 'Zambia: Chushi Condemns Attack on Civil Servant by UPND Cadres as the Party Is Urged to Address the Rebel Movement within Its Ranks,' Lusaka Times, 22 January 2022. [Available here](#).

^{vii} Less than 5% of interviewees refused to answer or said "Don't know/can't remember." Thus, they were excluded from this analysis.

^{viii} Victoria Yambani, 'Arrogance, Hooliganism, Cadrism and Indiscipline Were Causes of Electoral Defeat in August- PF,' The Zambian Observer (blog), 18 November 2021, [link](#).

Acknowledgements

This publication was supported by the Swedish Research Council Recruitment Grant (Swedish Research Council - E0003801); PI: Ellen Lust (University of Gothenburg), Jeremy Seekings (University of Cape Town), Michael Wahman (Michigan State University), Matthias Krönke (University of Cape Town), and Nicole Beardsworth (University of the Witwatersrand). This publication was also supported by the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg and the University of Cape Town. The authors would like to thank Erica Ann Metheny, Jeffrey Paller, Rose Shaber-Twedt, and Sara Bjurenvall for edits, graphics, contributions, suggestions, and design.

About GLD

The Program on Governance and Local Development (GLD) is a research program based at the University of Gothenburg, originally founded in 2013 at Yale University by Program Director, Professor Ellen Lust. GLD focuses on the local factors driving governance and development. The program is dedicated to international collaboration and scientifically rigorous, policy-relevant research in an effort to promote human welfare globally. Program findings are made available to the international and domestic communities through academic publications, policy briefs, public presentations, and social media, as well as on-the-ground workshops in cooperation with local partners.



Subscribe to our newsletter!



[Sign up via this link](#)

Contact

Department of Political Science,
University of Gothenburg
Box 711, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden
Visiting address: Sprängkullsgatan 19,
Gothenburg

contact@gld.gu.se

[Twitter](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[Facebook](#)