

## Introducing

# Rachael McLellan

Assistant Professor in Politics in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Glasgow.

**Rachael McLellan is an Assistant Professor in Politics in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Glasgow. Her work focuses on the politics of local government and opposition in electoral autocracies. She has done significant fieldwork in Tanzania and is currently writing up a book manuscript based on this research. She received her PhD in Politics from Princeton University in 2020. In this interview, Rachael tells us about her work in Tanzania on local control, decentralization, and authoritarian regimes.**



**In your GLD Working Paper “Local Control: How Opposition Support Constrains Electoral Autocrats,” you demonstrate how opposition parties in local governments in Tanzania have benefitted from decentralization in gaining territorial control and limiting the reach of the state. Could you elaborate a bit on what advantages decentralization can bring to opposition-led local governments?**

In the GLD Working Paper, conditionally accepted now at *Journal of Politics*, I show that Tanzanian opposition parties benefitted from decentralization because local control (elected control of local governments) gave them the powers and autonomy they needed to shield their own voters from punishment for partisanship. In many authoritarian countries, regimes use their control of the state and the public purse to encourage loyalty and punish disloyalty. In the paper, I show that the extent to which local control affords opposition parties this ability increases as the level of decentralization increases. The more opposition parties can do at the local level with needing to coordinate with the center, the more they can even out access to resources and even favor their own voters.

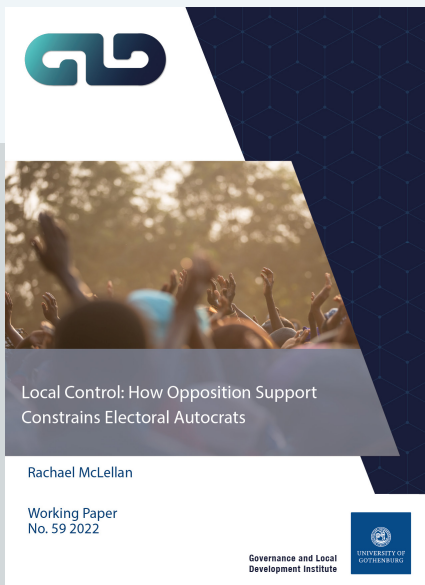
**You also have a book project on local control, decentralization, and authoritarian regimes. Could you tell us more about that book? Does it build on the previously mentioned Working Paper?**

What I cover in the GLD Working Paper is a chapter of the broader book project. The book asks how opposition parties use local control to contest for votes and their own survival. I show that decentralization was a bit of a double-edged sword for the regime in Tanzania. While decentralization initially strengthened the Tanzanian regime by making it easier to target communities for punishment and reward, over time, opposition parties used their control over the local state to build credibility, increase the local state’s capacity, and win over voters. As followers of Tanzanian politics will know, opposition parties became something of a victim of their own success, and the government of John Magufuli engaged in brutal repression of opposition politicians and activists, including at the local level. In the final chapters of the book, I look at how local control gave opposition parties tools to resist and ask what implications opposition local control had for ordinary citizens, even after these local governments were wrested back under regime control.

**Since you study Tanzania, I would guess you have been there once or twice. What are some of your best memories from your time spent there?**

I've been to Tanzania quite a few times and have probably, cumulatively, spent almost two years there. I have many good memories of the place and miss going regularly. I made a lot of, hopefully, lifelong friends there and enjoyed many an evening laughing, eating, and drinking with them over a plate of chicken sekela or mishkaki. I was lucky that many of my field sites were in some of the most beautiful places I've ever been. Coming home from work, watching the sunset behind Mount Kilimanjaro was really something.

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The mentioned GLD Working Paper "Local Control: How Opposition Support Constrains Electoral Autocrats," can be found on [gld.gu.se/en](https://gld.gu.se/en) here:

<https://gld.gu.se/en/publications/gld-working-papers/wp-59-local-control-how-opposition-support-constrains-electoral-autocrats/>

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