

# AFRO BAROMETER

Working Paper No. 55

**FREE AND FAIR OR FRADULENT  
AND FORGED: ELECTIONS AND  
LEGITIMACY IN AFRICA**

by Devra C. Moehler

**A comparative series of national public  
attitude surveys on democracy, markets  
and civil society in Africa.**



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## **FREE AND FAIR OR FRAUDULENT AND FORGED: ELECTIONS AND LEGITIMACY IN AFRICA**

### **Abstract**

Elections are thought to bolster legitimacy by providing fair mechanisms for selecting leaders. In Africa, where competitive elections are often unfamiliar and imperfect, losers express much less support for their political institutions than do winners. Analysis of Round 1 Afrobarometer survey data from more than 20,000 respondents in 12 countries demonstrates that losers are less inclined than winners to trust their political institutions, consent to government authority, and feel that voting matters. Contrary to initial expectations, however, losers are more eager than winners to defend their institutions against manipulation by elected officials. Furthermore, divergent evaluations of electoral fairness are responsible for only a small portion of the winner-loser gap in legitimacy. Many more losers than winners said their elections were unfair, but losers must have additional reasons for doubting the legitimacy of their political institutions.

## **FREE AND FAIR OR FRAUDULENT AND FORGED: ELECTIONS AND LEGITIMACY IN AFRICA**

Elections have the potential to confer legitimacy, moderate dissent, engender compliance, and heighten citizen efficacy. Elections are especially crucial for eliciting consent from those citizens who would prefer alternative rulers and policies. But do elections fulfill these functions in Africa, where competitive elections are often unfamiliar and imperfect? Specifically, do citizens who feel close to ruling parties (winners) believe that their government institutions are more legitimate than do citizens aligned with opposition parties (losers)? If losers are more disgruntled than winners, is it because they doubt the procedural fairness of the recent elections?

Analyses of Round 1 Afrobarometer survey data from more than 20,000 respondents in 12 African countries<sup>1</sup> demonstrate that winners are more inclined than losers to trust their political institutions, consent to government authority, and feel efficacious. Contrary to initial expectations, however, winners are less eager than losers to defend their institutions against manipulation by elected officials.<sup>2</sup> While losers doubt the trustworthiness, rightful authority, and responsiveness of their political institutions, winners are willing to support their current government even as it dismantles the pillars of liberal democracy. It may be that elections in Africa generate too little support for the current government among losers and too much support among winners.

This paper also investigates the hypothesis that winners and losers express different levels of political support because they view elections differently. The analysis indicates that partisan affiliation is strongly associated with perceptions of electoral integrity. That is, winners tend to perceive recent elections as free and fair, whereas losers are more inclined to think that the elections were fraudulent and forged. That relationship is stronger in Africa than in other regions. Importantly, however, divergent attitudes about the fairness of elections are only responsible for a small portion of the gap in political support between winners and losers. It seems that the legitimacy gap results more from loser dissatisfaction with what happens after the election than with what happens during it. All else being equal, losers have a hard time accepting their government as legitimate even if they think the election was free and fair, and winners are supportive even if they think the election was fraudulent. These findings suggest that efforts to ensure free and fair elections—and to help citizens perceive them as such—will have only a limited effect on building political legitimacy in new democracies.

### **BACKGROUND**

Recent flawed elections in Ethiopia and the Ukraine became key rallying points for revolutionary action. These elections resulted in clashes between incumbent supporters and opponents that seriously undermined or overturned regimes. In contrast to these dramatic showdowns, most citizens who supported losing candidates in Nigeria's 1999 election, Zimbabwe's 2002 election, and Iran's 2005 election quickly yielded to official dictates and allowed hybrid regimes to continue. According to outside observers, all five elections were plagued by irregularities. It is not clear whether opposition acquiescence in the face of flawed elections is better or worse for democratic development in the long run. However, it is obvious that the reactions of citizens who lost at the ballot box are critical to the stability of hybrid systems, transitional polities, and new democracies alike. Unfortunately, little is known about how elections affect the attitudes of winners and losers outside of advanced industrial democracies.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Afrobarometer project, see the project's web site: [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)

<sup>2</sup> The institutions in question are judicial courts, independent media, and elected legislatures.

In theory, elections are legitimating institutions because they provide citizens with fair procedures for selecting leaders. Research shows that when individuals believe decision-making procedures are fair, they tend to be more satisfied with the leaders overseeing the process and more accepting of the outcomes of the process—even when the outcomes are deemed undesirable (Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan, and Listhaug 2005; Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler, Casper, and Fisher 1989; Tyler 1989).

In practice, however, elections typically have uneven legitimizing effects. Previous research shows that elections often generate greater political satisfaction and support among winners than among losers. Scholars have discovered “winner–loser gaps”<sup>3</sup> in citizen evaluations of institutional performance; approval of political leaders; support for government policies; satisfaction with and support for democracy; confidence or trust in political institutions; and evaluations of regime responsiveness; as well as in perceptions of citizen efficacy; protest potential; and fairness of elections.<sup>4</sup> In short, elections inevitably produce winners and losers, and winners tend to be happier with political outcomes than are the losers—although the existence and size of the gap varies across attitude dimensions and countries (Anderson et al. 2005).

While there are numerous empirical studies documenting winner–loser gaps, most are based on data from advanced industrial democracies (primarily North America and Western Europe), with only recent forays into the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup> Studies of Africa, Latin America, and Asia are rare,<sup>6</sup> despite the fact that electoral outcomes can dramatically affect regime survival and democratic development in these regions. On the one hand, unstable democracies are vulnerable to backsliding or breakdown if disgruntled losers disengage from public life or act against the system. On the other hand, authoritarian leaders who stage “managed” elections may garner enough support to forestall the need to make further reforms. Understanding the views of citizens on the losing side of elections seems critically important for anticipating the trajectories of hybrid and nascent democratic regimes.

I contend that it is especially important for us to understand winner–loser gaps in institutional legitimacy, or diffuse support, in unconsolidated regimes.<sup>7</sup> We should expect losers in Africa, Latin America, and Asia to be unsatisfied with the leaders and policies that they voted against—as is the case in advanced industrial democracies.<sup>8</sup> The crucial question for transitional states is whether losers also reject the basic institutions of the state, or whether they continue to support the political system with the hope of doing better in the next election. If a sizable portion of the population desires, or is agnostic about, institutional

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<sup>3</sup> The winner–loser gap is also referred to as the winner effect, the majority–minority difference, or the home-team hypothesis (Anderson et al. 2005).

<sup>4</sup> For some recent examples, see: Anderson and Lotempio (2002); Anderson and Tverdova (2003); Anderson et al. (2005); Banducci and Karp (2003); Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005); Cho and Bratton (2005); Clarke and Acock (1989); Craig, Gainous, Martinez, and Kane (2004); Fuchs, Guidorossi, and Svensson (1995); Listhaug and Wiberg (1995); Nadeau and Blais (1993); Nadeau, Blais, Nevitte, and Gidengil (2000); and Norris (1999).

<sup>5</sup> The authors of *Losers' Consent* use data from Eastern Europe in their analyses of the differences between old and new democracies (Anderson et al. 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Japan, Australia, and New Zealand are included in many of the analyses of advanced industrial countries. Bratton and his colleagues have done some important work on this topic in Africa (Bratton et al. 2005; Cho and Bratton 2005). The analysis in *Critical Citizens* includes Mexico, India, and Chile (Norris 1999: 230–32). Anderson et al. (2005) also include Mexico in some of their analysis.

<sup>7</sup> I use the terms institutional legitimacy and diffuse support (often shortened to legitimacy and support) interchangeably as I have not encountered a convincing theoretical or empirical distinction between the two within the existing literature.

<sup>8</sup> Bratton et al. (2005) found that winner–loser status was positively associated with performance evaluations of elected representatives and the president (260). Those authors remark in a footnote that the relationship between winner–loser status and evaluation of presidential performance is “one of the strongest so far found among micro-level variables in this study” (444).

change then there is little to protect the system from elite tampering or more severe challenges.<sup>9</sup> Institutional legitimacy is crucial for regime stability and longevity because it represents “a reservoir of favorable attitudes or goodwill that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effects of which they see as damaging to their interests” (Easton 1965 124-5). In long-standing democracies, childhood socialization helps ensure that populations view their institutions as legitimate and worthy of adherence and protection. Transitional polities rarely have such reservoirs of diffuse support and thus require alternative mechanisms for establishing institutional legitimacy.

Do elections help build legitimacy among losers as well as winners in hybrid systems and nascent democracies? This paper seeks to answer that question by evaluating whether there is a consistent winner–loser legitimacy gap in Africa. My research looks at a range of indicators of electoral legitimacy in each of the 12 African countries for which there is data, and compares the African responses to those from other regions whenever possible.

Where the attitudes of winners and losers diverge, the paper goes on to consider what might cause the legitimacy gap, an aspect that has received scant attention, even with respect to advanced industrial democracies.<sup>10</sup> Anderson and Tverdova (2001) remark on this oversight: “Despite the apparent robustness of the winner–loser effect when it comes to people’s attitudes toward governmental institutions and regime performance, it is yet to be determined with some precision what precisely it is about being in the majority or being a winner that drives attitudes toward government” (334). This paper questions not only whether a legitimacy gap exists in Africa but also, if such a gap does exist, why does it exist?<sup>11</sup>

## **DEVELOPING HYPOTHESES FOR AFRICA**

The scholarly literature suggests several reasons to think that the winner–loser legitimacy gap will be large in Africa.<sup>12</sup> First, distributive or utilitarian concerns loom large in African elections because rulers often distribute state goods, services, and jobs to their supporters in return for loyalty. Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) remark: “Especially in systems based on patronage, and in countries where political office is one of the only reliable routes to personal wealth, partisan identification with a governing party is critical to one’s life chances” (39). I would expect losers to be especially unhappy with outcomes that they believe will cost them dearly, and possibly even threaten their livelihoods. In the face of severe economic disadvantages losers may feel compelled to reject not only the current leaders and policies but the institutions of the state as well.

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<sup>9</sup> Citizens who deem the system illegitimate typically will not take up arms against the state. However, they will also not act as a buffer to those who do seek to alter the political system from within or from without.

<sup>10</sup> The major exception is Craig et al. (2004), who found that losers’ negative assessments of the campaigns, candidates, and elections were sometimes responsible for their lower system support as compared to winners. Additionally, Anderson et al. (2005) outline three theories to explain why individuals affiliated with the party in power would exhibit greater political support than do individuals aligned with the opposition, but they stop short of testing those theories. The theories proposed are based on different assumptions about: 1) utility maximization, 2) affective responses, and 3) cognitive consistency (24-29).

<sup>11</sup> Craig et al. (2004) provide a unique and valuable investigation of the thesis that the causal pathway connecting partisan attachments and political support runs through electoral evaluations. In their study of Florida’s 1998 gubernatorial and senatorial elections and the 2000 presidential elections, these authors found that losers’ negative assessments of the campaigns, candidates, and elections were sometimes responsible for their lower system support as compared to winners (see earlier footnote in this paper).

<sup>12</sup> This section integrates and builds on theoretical work by Anderson et al. (2005: 24-29, 90-97) and literature on public opinion in Africa by Bratton et al. (Bratton et al. 2005).

Not only do election results strongly influence access to jobs and resources in Africa, current elections can also affect access to political power in the future. Anderson et al. (2005) observe that in transitional polities and new democracies—where democratic institutions are still under construction—the party in power can often mold the political game to increase their fortunes in future electoral contests. Moreover, the continuation of democratic elections is less certain in new democracies than it may be in mature ones. “Simply put, in a nascent democracy, being in the minority and majority can be expected to weigh more heavily because citizens are less sure when and whether there will be another opportunity to determine who has the power to rule and who does not” (Anderson et al. 2005: 92). In Africa, today’s losers are not necessarily tomorrow’s winners. Thus, the losers may feel that they have less of a stake in the existing political system than do the winners.

Additionally, Anderson et al. (2005) hypothesize that losing gracefully comes with practice and experience, which citizens in new democracies lack. In most old democracies, today’s losers were already yesterday’s winners and visa versa. Citizens learn through these alternating experiences (or from parents, teachers, and history books) that current advantages and disadvantages are temporary and limited in scope. “Only after some time has passed and citizens have gone through an accumulation of experiences of transition should we expect losers to be somewhat sanguine about their loss” (Anderson et al. 2005: 93). Most Africans have been practicing democracy for just over a decade, with only short-lived experiences before that.<sup>13</sup> They have yet to learn that winning isn’t everything.

The last hypothesized cause of a winner–loser gap in Africa may be the most important. It is possible that losers in Africa are unwilling to consent to official election results because they may not think that the electoral contests are free and fair.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned earlier, the primary mechanism by which elections are thought to legitimize governments is by providing fair and acceptable procedures for making difficult decisions. However, most campaigns and elections in Africa are plagued by irregularities, either by design or due to lack of resources, infrastructure, and experience. Furthermore, it is difficult for citizens to assess the causes and consequences of the irregularities—election observers and investigative journalists have limited reach, while public-opinion surveys and exit polls are usually unavailable. In the face of uncertainty and poor information, one would expect winners to give their leaders the benefit of the doubt. Citizens who emerged from an election victorious will tend to believe that any irregularities were unintentional and minor, that the proper candidate won, and that the system is legitimate. In contrast, one would expect losers to assume the worst and conclude that electoral fraud was deliberate and consequential. Additionally, losers might actually witness or be subject to more abuse during campaigns

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<sup>13</sup> Citizens in Botswana have had more experience with democracy than have other Africans interviewed for the Afrobarometer survey project, but they have not had experience with both winning and losing. Botswana has not had an alternation of power since democracy was established there with independence in 1966. Anderson et al. (2005) found that winner–loser gaps are relatively large in countries with predominant party systems (such as Japan and Mexico) and that citizens who lose repeatedly were more dissatisfied than were citizens who lost only once.

<sup>14</sup> A number of interesting studies have been done on electoral integrity and legitimacy in Mexico (Hiskey and Bowler 2005; McCann and Dominguez 1998; Schedler 1999) and Africa (Elklit and Reynolds 2002). These studies test a different set of hypotheses, but they are nonetheless related.

and elections than are winners, especially if the winning party was an incumbent party. As a result, losers may withhold their support not only from elected leaders but also from government institutions.<sup>15</sup>

Although there are many reasons to think that the winner–loser gap in legitimacy will be wide and persistent across African countries, it is also possible that the gap is attenuated in some cases. It could be that after years of authoritarian rule, citizens in new democracies are especially pleased with elections that offer greater choice than in the past. It is possible that the losers will be so euphoric about their newfound freedoms and rights that they will be less affected by unfavorable outcomes—especially if they were shut out of politics under previous regimes as well. It is possible—though perhaps unlikely—that the initial post-transition elections will be equally legitimizing for winners and losers.

Previous multi-country studies using Afrobarometer data suggest that winners are different from losers along a number of attitude dimensions that are related to, but distinct from, institutional legitimacy. Bratton et al. (2005) found that winner–loser status was negatively associated with perceived corruption among civil servants and elected officials, and positively associated with evaluations of leader performance, political participation, and perceived supply of democracy.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, they note that winning is positively associated with an expressed preference for democracy but negatively associated with rejection of authoritarian alternatives—indicating that winning produces only a shallow commitment to democracy.<sup>17</sup> In a separate study of Lesotho, Cho and Bratton (2005) found that winners exhibit greater trust in political institutions<sup>18</sup> and greater satisfaction with democracy than do losers. They also document how changes in the electoral system alter the winner–loser gap. Although certainly relevant, the existing cross-national empirical research on Africa does not address the winner–loser gap in perceived institutional legitimacy, the key concept under investigation here.

In this paper I evaluate two hypotheses that emerge from the discussion above. First, I hypothesize that Africans who feel close to parties in power tend to award their government institutions greater legitimacy than do those who identify with losing parties.

Second, to the extent that there is a legitimacy gap in political support between winners and losers in Africa, I hypothesize that the relationship between identification with the winning party and perceived legitimacy is mediated by evaluations of electoral fairness. This second hypothesis generates the following predictions: 1) winners, more than losers, perceive their government institutions to be legitimate; 2) winners have higher opinions of the freeness and fairness of their elections than do losers;

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<sup>15</sup> Note that the thesis that losers' negative assessments of the campaigns, candidates, and elections are responsible for their lower system support as compared to winners is not necessarily unique to Africa. Using public-opinion data collected in Florida following the 1998 gubernatorial and senatorial elections and the 2000 presidential elections, Craig et al. (2004) found that “winners and losers frequently do have contrasting views about the elections in which they have just competed, and that these views play a significant role in shaping citizens' attitudes toward broader political institutions and processes” (Craig et al. 2004: 2). However, the thesis received empirical support only with respect to some attitudes (political trust and presidential legitimacy, but not external efficacy, government responsiveness, or satisfaction with democracy) and only for some candidates (gubernatorial and presidential, but not senatorial). These findings are intriguing and additional research is needed to determine if the thesis is valid across time and space.

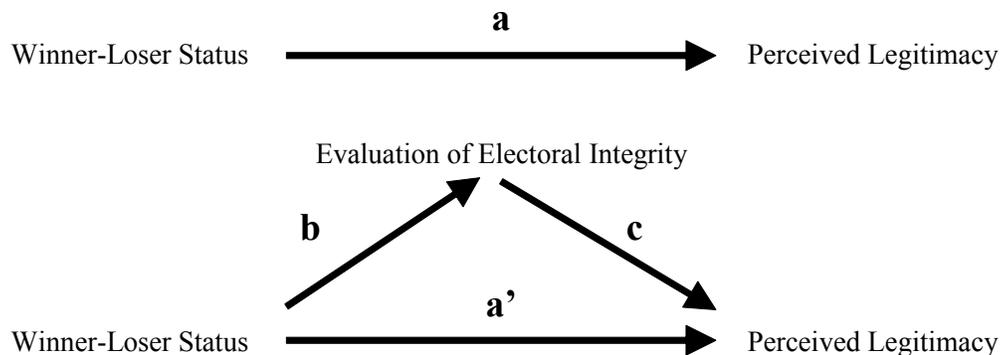
<sup>16</sup> In Bratton et al. (2005), see page 260 for performance evaluations and perceived corruption; page 267 for perceived extent of democracy, page 297 for political participation, and pages 78 and 81–82 for supply of democracy. Supply of democracy is an index that combines satisfaction with how democracy works and the perceived extent of democracy (Bratton et al. 2005: 277).

<sup>17</sup> In Bratton et al. (2005), see page 260. Interestingly, individuals who say their recent elections were free and fair also tend to have higher assessments of the supply of democracy and are more committed to democracy than are citizens who think their elections were plagued by major problems (Bratton et al. 2005: 247, 78-79).

<sup>18</sup> Institutional trust is one of the measures of legitimacy that I consider for all of Africa.

3) evaluations of electoral honesty are positively related to perceived political legitimacy; and 4) the initial relationship between winning-losing and perceived legitimacy is attenuated or eliminated in the presence of electoral evaluations. Figure 1 depicts these four parts as **a**, **b**, **c**, and **a** minus **a'** respectively.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 1: The effect of winner–loser status on political legitimacy with evaluation of electoral integrity as a mediating variable.**



Before proceeding I want to address one unavoidable weakness in the proposed analysis. I use cross-sectional data to test for associations that are consistent with the hypothesized causal links shown in Figure 1. Given the available data, however, we can not establish the direction of causation between the associated variables. It is possible that alternative causal explanations are consistent with the same evidence. For example, it is possible that individuals who feel the government is illegitimate would be subsequently motivated to support opposition parties and also believe the election was forged.<sup>20</sup> Or, citizens who witnessed election fraud and corruption may think the resulting government is illegitimate and switch their allegiance to the opposition.<sup>21</sup> More conclusive tests of the causal influences will have to await panel data, field experiments, or qualitative interviews. Nonetheless, the analysis in this paper allows us to reject hypotheses that are not consistent with the existing data, including the ones represented in Figure 1. Furthermore, given what we know about the continuity of party identification and the influences of procedural justice, the proposed causal theory is the most plausible one.

## DATA AND MEASUREMENT

This study employs data from Round 1 of the Afrobarometer surveys, which were administered between 1999 and 2001 in 12 sub-Saharan African countries undergoing political and economic reform.<sup>22</sup> Nationally representative samples were drawn through a multi-stage, stratified, clustered-sampling

<sup>19</sup> See Baron and Kenny (1986) for a detailed description of a test of mediation.

<sup>20</sup> There is a related debate about whether evaluations of procedural justice are the causes or consequences of perceived institutional legitimacy of the U.S. Supreme Court (for a review of the debate between Tyler and Gibson, see: Mondak 1993).

<sup>21</sup> McCann and Dominguez (1998) test the effect of expectations of electoral fraud and perceptions of political corruption on opposition support in Mexico. They find that the effects are not significant in a multivariate analysis.

<sup>22</sup> For more information about the Afrobarometer project, see the project's web site: [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org). Round 2 did not include the question about electoral fairness. Round 3, which was not available at the time of writing, includes the question again.

procedure. The use of a standardized questionnaire facilitates cross-national comparisons. Where possible, I also draw on survey data from other sources to evaluate how the African respondents compare to individuals from other regions of the world.

The dozen countries surveyed in Round 1 were not necessarily representative of the continent as a whole. They tended to be more economically developed and more democratic than the African average. However, they did represent a range of regime types in 2001, including: two “liberal democracies” (South Africa and Botswana); four “electoral democracies” (Ghana, Mali, Namibia, and Malawi); three “ambiguous regimes” (Tanzania, Nigeria, and Zambia); and three “liberalized autocracies” (Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and Uganda).<sup>23</sup> Botswana, which has been democratic since independence in 1966, is the oldest democracy and, along with South Africa, the freest of those surveyed (Freedom House 2002). At the other end of the spectrum are Uganda (with ongoing civil war and restrictions on party activity) and Zimbabwe (where citizens are afforded only minimal political and civil rights). Given the broad spectrum of regime types, it is possible to evaluate how citizens perceive elections and institutional legitimacy in a variety of hybrid and democratic polities.

Institutional legitimacy, or diffuse support, is a multidimensional concept that is defined and measured in slightly different ways by different authors. Vanessa Baird (2001) discusses the concept of legitimacy as follows: “Diffuse support is the belief that although at times specific policies can be disagreeable, the institution itself ought to be maintained—it ought to be trusted and granted its full set of powers” (334). Gibson (2004) writes: “Legitimate institutions are those one recognizes as appropriate decision making bodies *even when* one disagrees with the outputs of the institution” (294). Gibson and Caldeira (1995) add: “We define diffuse support as institutional commitment—that is, willingness to defend the institution against structural and functional alterations that would fundamentally alter the role of the institution in society. At the extreme, this means willingness to defend the institution against attempts to abolish it” (471). Weatherhead (1992) highlights the various aspects of legitimacy: “Political legitimacy is too unwieldy and complex a concept to be grappled in a frontal assault, and virtually all the empirical literature follows the tactic of breaking it into component parts. Thus various lines of research (on alienation, political trust, modes of participation, political efficacy) all partake of a common interest in how citizens evaluate governmental authority” (149). Rather than selecting a single dimension of this complex concept, I examine a range of indicators that reflect the descriptions quoted above.

Fortunately, the Afrobarometer surveys included four questions that record different attitude dimensions that are commonly associated with institutional legitimacy: institutional trust, consent to authority, external efficacy, and defending democracy. For purposes of comparison, the four dependent variables were recoded so that they range from -1 (no legitimacy) to 1 (full legitimacy), with intermediate responses arrayed evenly between the two poles.<sup>24</sup> Negative numbers indicate that citizens think their political institutions are illegitimate, and positive numbers indicate that individuals think their institutions are legitimate. Neutral answers were coded zero.

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<sup>23</sup> This categorization comes from Bratton et al. (2005: 17). Their adaptation, like the original formulation by Larry Diamond (2002), is based on Freedom House ratings. The Afrobarometer project did not carry out interviews in any polities within the category “unreformed autocracy.”

<sup>24</sup> “Don’t know” responses were coded to a defensible value where possible and coded as missing where not. Observations with missing data for the variables included in the analysis were dropped. The regression analyses are based on an unweighted pooled sample of 21,531 respondents. Descriptive statistics, including means and frequency distributions, are calculated using a weighted sample to correct for disproportionate subsamples within countries and to standardize country samples at  $n = 1,200$ . Frequency distributions record proportions of valid responses. See appendix for details about question wording and coding rules.

The first measure of legitimacy, *Institutional Trust*, is an index that sums trust in four government institutions: the electoral commission, courts of law, the army, and the police.<sup>25</sup> The second, *Consent to Authority*, is derived from a question that asks respondents how much they agree or disagree with the statement: “Our government has the right to make decisions that all people have to abide by whether or not they agree with them.”

The third variable, *External Efficacy*, gauges whether citizens feel the system is responsive. At the high end of the spectrum are respondents who strongly agreed with the statement: “We can use our power as voters to choose leaders who will help us improve our lives.” At the low end of the spectrum are citizens who strongly agreed with the statement: “No matter who we vote for, things will not get any better in future.” Measured responses fall in between.

Finally, citizens should be more willing to act in defense of regimes they deem legitimate, than ones they think are illegitimate. The fourth variable, *Defending Democracy*, is an index constructed from questions that asked what citizens would do if the government: “shut down newspapers that criticized the government”; “dismissed judges who ruled against the government”; and “suspended the parliament and cancelled the next elections.” Respondents who said they would oppose all three actions against the democratic system receive the highest value of 1, citizens who said they would do nothing in each hypothetical situation are coded as 0, and citizens who said they would support the government in all three actions are coded as -1. Mixed responses fall in between.<sup>26</sup>

The intervening variable, *Election Free and Fair*, records citizens’ evaluations of electoral integrity. It is based on a question that asks respondents to rate the freeness and fairness (or honesty) of the most recent presidential or national elections. The variable has five possible values and is also recoded to range from -1 to 1 for ease of comparison. Negative scores indicate that the respondent said the election was not free and fair (dishonest) and positive scores denote that the respondent said the election was free and fair (honest). Respondents who said they didn’t know were coded as 0—neither verifying, nor rejecting, electoral integrity.

*Winner–loser Status* is the key independent variable of interest in this paper.<sup>27</sup> Citizens who said they feel close to the parties that make up the government (winners) are coded as 2. Citizens who report feeling close to opposition parties in the legislature or parties that didn’t win seats at all (losers) are coded as 0. Citizens who claim they are not close to any party (non-partisans) are coded as 1.<sup>28</sup> Roughly 17 percent of

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<sup>25</sup> I also considered an index that excluded trust in the electoral commission to ensure that this institution alone was not responsible for the findings. The results were the same for the key variables although the size of the coefficients and the statistical significance were somewhat smaller.

<sup>26</sup> I also considered three additional indicators that seem to be related to legitimacy: 1) *Uncorrupt Officials* asks about the prevalence of corruption or bribery among government officials; 2) *Extent of Democracy* records citizen evaluations of the level of democracy actually achieved in their country; and 3) *Satisfaction with Democracy* gauges how satisfied citizens are with how democracy works in practice. The results for all three additional measures are similar to those for institutional trust, consent to authority, and external efficacy. There is a significant positive winner–loser gap for most countries and the gap is partially mediated by the inclusion of the free and fair election measure. I decided to present these findings in a footnote, rather than in the main text, because I am uncertain about their validity as indicators of legitimacy. They record legitimacy only to the extent that citizens view corruption as illegitimate and democracy as legitimate.

<sup>27</sup> Bratton et al. (2005) name this variable *Identifies with Winning Party*.

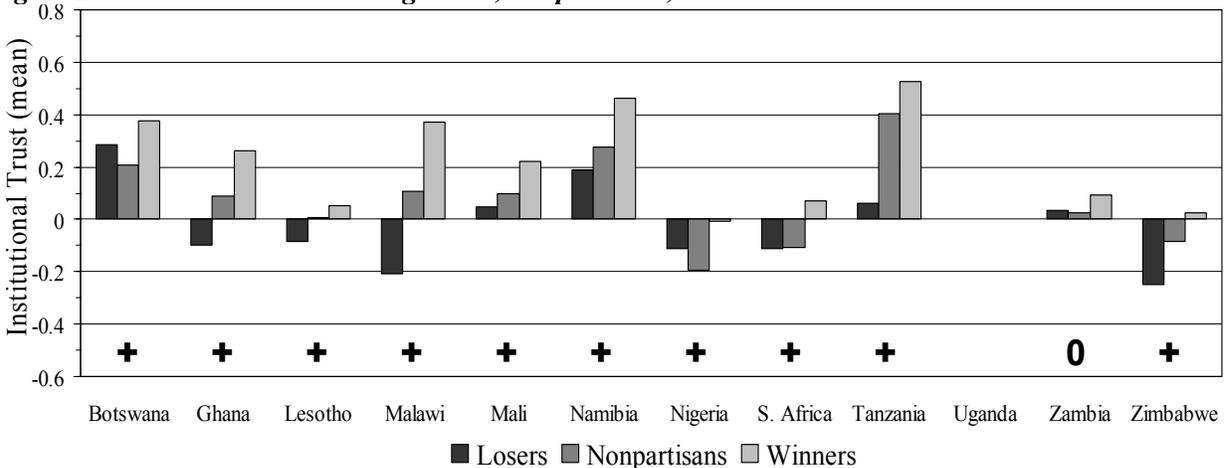
<sup>28</sup> Bratton et al. (2005) acknowledge that perhaps not all citizens truthfully or accurately report their partisan attachments but argue that the measure is still valid: “Of course, some respondents may rewrite their personal histories by reporting voting records deemed politically correct. Despite the possibility that we were sometimes intentionally misled, we still expect that being a self-proclaimed ‘winner’ increases one’s loyalty to incumbent leaders and reduces one’s willingness to criticize their performance” (259). I agree with their assessment.

respondents would be considered losers, 45 percent were non-partisans, and 38 percent are coded as winners, although there is considerable variation in the distributions across countries (Bratton et al. 2005: 256-61).

### PARTISAN ATTACHMENTS AND PERCEIVED LEGITIMACY

Is there a winner–loser legitimacy gap, and how deep and widespread are doubts about political legitimacy among losers in Africa? Figures 2 through 5 allow us to compare the mean perceived legitimacy scores for losers, nonpartisans, and winners in the 12 countries surveyed.<sup>29</sup> The signs indicate differences between winners and losers at the 0.05 level of significance. A positive sign (+) indicates that, on average, winners are significantly more supportive than losers, a negative sign (-) indicates that, on average, winners are significantly less supportive than losers, and a zero (0) indicates that, on average, winners are not significantly different from losers in their attitudes. The bars for the figures depict whether 1) losers and winners, on average, see their government institutions as legitimate (above zero) or illegitimate (below zero); 2) there are cross-national differences in the level of legitimacy; and 3) there are cross-national differences in the legitimacy gap—the difference between the first bar and the last for each country.

**Figure 2: Institutional trust among losers, nonpartisans, and winners**



Note: Sign indicates winner–loser gap at 0.05 level of significance.

Figure 2 reveals a positive gap in institutional trust between winners and losers in each of the 11 countries<sup>30</sup> where the relevant questions were included in the survey. With the exception of Zambia, the winner loser gaps are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.<sup>31</sup> Winners expressed greater trust in the electoral commission, courts of law, the army, and the police than did losers in nearly every country. On average, winners said that they can trust their government institutions in ten of the 11 countries (Nigeria being the exception), although the means are significantly above zero in only seven of those countries. In

<sup>29</sup> The questions that make up the measures of legitimacy were not uniformly asked in every country. Where a question was not asked, the country is eliminated from the analysis for that measure only. Figures 2 through 5 show which countries are represented (bars exist above the country name) and which countries are not represented (no bars above the country name).

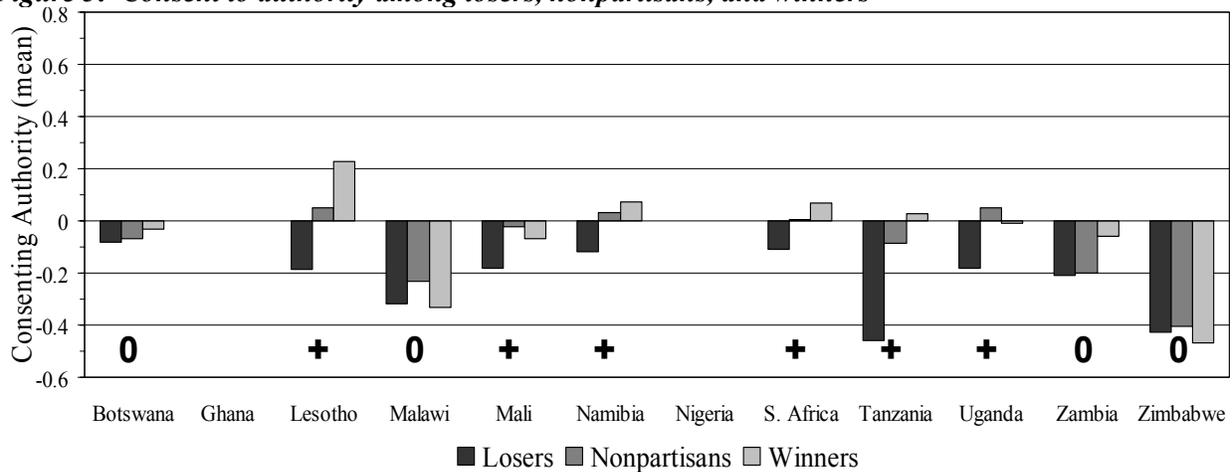
<sup>30</sup> All three trust questions were not asked in Uganda, so the paper discusses the 11 countries for which there is data.

<sup>31</sup> If we exclude trust in the electoral commission and consider an index measuring only trust in the police, the army, and the courts, the differences in means are no longer significant for Botswana and Lesotho. Otherwise the relationships hold.

contrast, losers are trusting in only five countries, with only two being significantly positive.<sup>32</sup> Taking all the countries together, winners expressed significant trust in their political institutions (winner mean = 0.270), while losers were significantly distrustful (loser mean = -0.023).

The picture is bleaker when we turn to the variable consent to authority in Figure 3. Regardless of their political affiliations, most citizens are unwilling to grant their governments authority to make binding decisions. However, once again, we see a legitimacy gap whereby winners are significantly more willing than losers to consent to government decisions (winner mean = -0.049, loser mean = -0.231). The gap is significant in six of the ten countries (Lesotho, Mali, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda). The difference of means between winners and losers is not statistically significant in the other four. On average, in all ten countries with data, losers do not think that government has the legitimacy to make binding decisions.<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 3: Consent to authority among losers, nonpartisans, and winners**



Note: Sign indicates winner–loser gap at 0.05 level of significance.

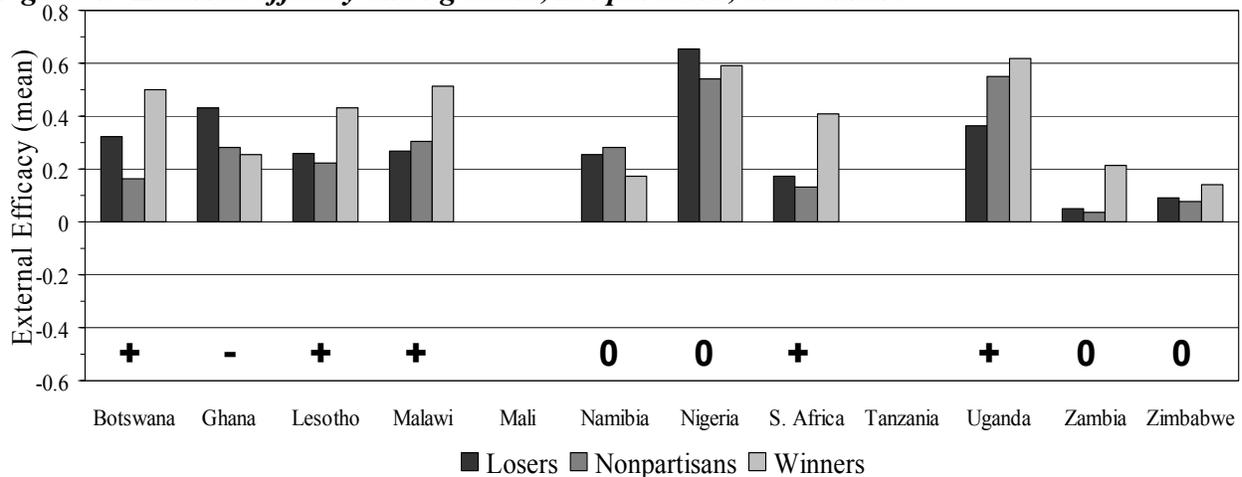
Figure 4 reveals that external efficacy ratings are generally quite high. In the ten countries where the question was asked, Africans agreed that they could improve their circumstances by electing responsive leaders.<sup>34</sup> The winner–loser gap in external efficacy is smaller than it was for the other perceived legitimacy measures considered so far (winner mean = 0.370, loser mean = 0.313). There is a statistically significant positive gap in half the countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, and Uganda). The winner–loser gap is not significant in Namibia, Nigeria, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In Ghana there is even a reverse gap—losers felt they have more power through the ballot box than do the winners. Indeed, following the survey the opposition managed to win the 2000 election and change their leaders, and possibly their circumstances.

<sup>32</sup> Average winner trust is not significantly different from zero in Lesotho, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. Average loser trust is not significantly different from zero in Mali and Zambia.

<sup>33</sup> For losers, the mean value of granting authority is significantly negative in every country. For winners, the mean is not significantly different from zero in Botswana, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. The winner mean is significantly positive in Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa, and significantly negative in Malawi, Mali, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>34</sup> The average winner is significantly positive in all countries. The average loser is positive in all countries but not significantly so in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

**Figure 4: External efficacy among losers, nonpartisans, and winners**



Note: Sign indicates winner–loser gap at 0.05 level of significance.

Interestingly, the results for Africa differ considerably from answers to a similar question asked in 19 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and Slovenia.<sup>35</sup> One can draw only tentative conclusions because the questions were not the same in the two surveys, but the stark contrasts are illustrative nonetheless. Anderson et al. (2005) report that, on average, both winners and losers in all 20 countries do not think that their vote can make a difference. Furthermore, the winner–loser gap is most often reversed: “In six of the twenty cases, there is no real difference between winners and losers, in only three cases are winners more likely to say that voting makes a difference, and in the majority of cases (eleven) losers actually are more likely to say that voting makes a difference” (Anderson et al. 2005: 40-41). While losers in Africa are somewhat more optimistic about the power of their vote when compared to losers in the OECD countries, the winners in Africa are extremely positive compared to winners elsewhere.<sup>36</sup>

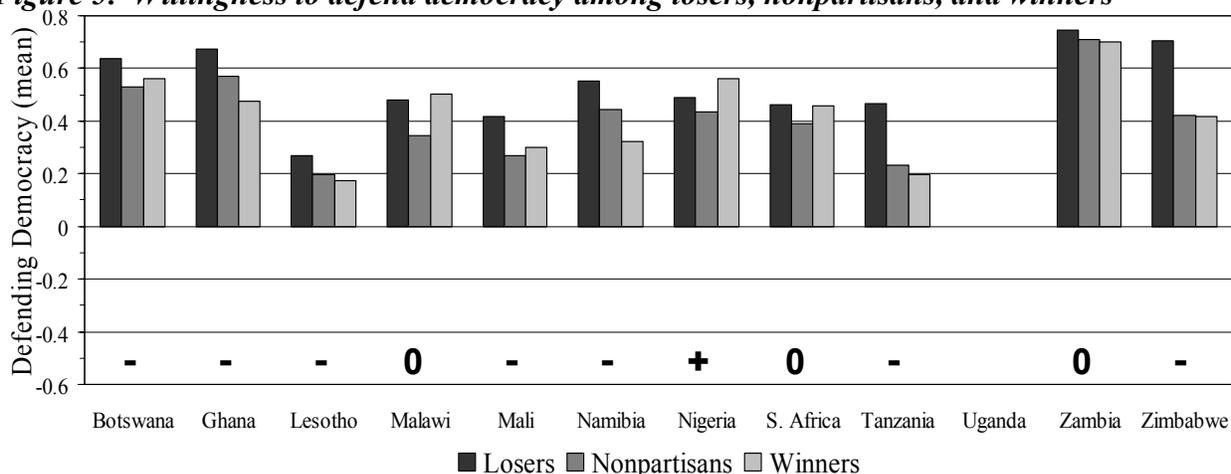
Finally, Figure 5 presents the mean values for whether citizens say they will act to defend their democratic institutions from threatening government actions. Most Africans surveyed report that they would act against hypothetical government attacks on media freedom, judicial independence, and democratic elections. This is important because if legitimacy is to be meaningful for political outcomes it must induce supportive behavior as well as attitudes. In all 11 countries with data, both winners and losers, on average, say that they would defend their democratic institutions—although many restrict their actions to just talking with others. Surprisingly, however, the winner–loser gap in defending democracy is the opposite of what was hypothesized. Winners are *less*, not more, inclined to act in defense of their system than are losers (winner mean = 0.404; loser mean = 0.535). Winners are significantly less inclined to act in defense of their system in seven countries (Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Mali, Namibia, Tanzania,

<sup>35</sup> The gaps are calculated from the mean values for winners minus the mean values for losers (all variables range from -1 to +1). These findings are based on the results from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems Surveys as reported in Anderson et al. (2005: 40). They include data from 16 advanced industrial democracies in Europe as well as Australia, Czech Republic, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, and Slovenia.

<sup>36</sup> The mean gap for the 20 countries combined (-0.04) is also of smaller magnitude than the combined mean gap for Africa (0.10). The African gap values with respect to efficacy are as follows: Botswana (0.18), Ghana (-0.18), Lesotho (0.17), Malawi (0.24), Namibia (-0.08), Nigeria (-0.06), South Africa (0.23), Uganda (0.25), Zambia (0.17), and Zimbabwe (0.05). Gaps in 19 OECD countries and Slovenia range from -0.26 in the Czech Republic to 0.08 in Norway.

and Zimbabwe). Only in Nigeria is the mean value for winners significantly higher than it is for losers. There is no significant winner–loser gap in the remaining three countries.

**Figure 5: Willingness to defend democracy among losers, nonpartisans, and winners**



Note: Sign indicates winner–loser gap at 0.05 level of significance.

Why is it that the losers seem to place a higher value on protecting core democratic institutions than do the winners? Why is the legitimacy gap the reverse of what it is for all other measures? Originally I assumed that a willingness to defend democratic institutions was a good measure of citizens’ perceptions of institutional legitimacy. However, a careful review of the question’s wording indicates that the instrument pits support of the current government against the legitimacy of democratic institutions. In other words, it asks: “If the government took an action against democracy, what would you do?” Both winners and losers, on average, would act to support democracy. However, when forced to choose between the in-power government and their nascent democratic institutions, winners are more willing to support a government that violates democracy than are the losers. In this sense, there is such a thing as too much government legitimacy and citizen compliance. Some Africans are willing to support the government even as it violates fundamental democratic precepts—and winners are more susceptible to “over-compliance” with their governments than are the losers. This result also suggests that although government legitimacy and citizen compliance may be good for government effectiveness, such attitudes are not necessarily beneficial for democratic survival, especially in unconsolidated democracies.

In sum, Figures 2 through 5 depict a fairly consistent legitimacy gap between citizens who feel close to winning parties and those who are aligned with losing parties. Winners exhibit greater support for their institutions than do losers. Although the gap is not ubiquitous, it is fairly consistent across the different attitude dimensions and countries. Even so, the figures do *not* depict a severe legitimacy crisis for losers in most states. Losers are less sanguine about their political institutions, but they do not indicate that they are inclined to withdraw from the political sphere or reject democratic governance as a result. Instead losers say their vote matters nearly as much as winners and, additionally, losers express a greater willingness to act to defend democratic institutions than do those citizens whose favored party is in power.

The evidence presented here should act as a warning to the Malawian and Zimbabwean governments; losers in these countries expressed deeper and more consistent dissatisfaction with political realities than

did citizens in other countries.<sup>37</sup> Losers in these two countries seem to have withdrawn their consent and they may act against a government that they deem illegitimate if given an opportunity. Losers in Lesotho were similarly disillusioned when the first round of Afrobarometer surveys was conducted (as shown here), but subsequent electoral reforms boosted losers' assessments of government legitimacy (Cho and Bratton 2005).

An additional test is warranted to see if the bivariate relationships between winner–loser status and perceived legitimacy remain significant after possibly confounding factors are taken into consideration. Table 1 displays the results of the multivariate analyses.<sup>38</sup> In the four A Models, the measures of perceived legitimacy are regressed on the key independent variable, winner–loser status, and a series of control variables.<sup>39</sup> These controls include indices that gauge citizen satisfaction with the political and economic outcomes (*Government Performance* and *Economic Performance*<sup>40</sup>); measures of civic participation and engagement (*Electoral Participation*, *Political Interest*, and *Exposure to Mass Media*); and key demographic indicators (*Education*, *Gender*, and *Age*). Previous research in old and new democracies found that these traits were sometimes related to partisan affiliation and to perceived legitimacy.<sup>41</sup> The model also incorporates dummy variables for each country in the Afrobarometer.<sup>42</sup> There are likely to be cross-national differences in how citizens feel about former authoritarian regimes, the democratic transitions, and the ethno-political makeup of current governments. Furthermore, there is considerable variation across countries in margins of victory, electoral quality, length of democracy, level of democracy, and economic development. Including country dummy variables ensures that differences in perceived legitimacy among the 12 countries are not confounded with the differences in perceived legitimacy between winners and losers.

Table 1 shows that the coefficients on winner–loser status are substantively and statistically significant for all four dependent variables. For the first three indicators, winners are more supportive than are losers even when controlling for confounding factors. For defending democracy, the relationship is negative such that losers are more willing to defend democracy than are winners, *ceritus paribus*. Importantly, comparing the beta coefficients shows that government performance, economic performance, and education have larger substantive effects than winner–loser status in nearly all of the equations. However, partisan affiliation is typically more influential than are electoral participation, political interest, exposure to mass media, gender, and age. The substantive effect of winner–loser status is largest in the equation predicting institutional trust and lowest for the measure of defending democracy.

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<sup>37</sup> Winners in Zimbabwe were also relatively negative. This was not true for winners in Malawi or Lesotho, who were often more positive than winners in neighboring countries.

<sup>38</sup> To facilitate interpretation, I present the results of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions in this paper. Because the dependent variables are categorical variables, I also conducted ordered logit analyses. The statistical significance of the key independent variable (winner–loser status) and intervening variable (free and fair election) remains the same in every model, with the exception of Model B predicting External Efficacy, where the *p*-value for the coefficient on winner loser status changes from 0.003 in OLS to 0.000 in ordered logit.

<sup>39</sup> See the appendix of this paper for question wording and coding. In addition, the construction and coding of these and other variables mirror those described in Appendix A of *Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa* (Bratton et al. 2005: 355-91), except where I indicate otherwise.

<sup>40</sup> The measure evaluations of economic performance that I employ includes four of the five variables included in the measure that Bratton et al. (2005) used. I exclude the measure of whether the economic conditions of one's own group are worse, the same as, or better than other groups in the country. Dropping this variable from the index does not alter the main results and it allows data from Uganda to be used in several of the equations.

<sup>41</sup> For examples, see: Anderson and Tverdova (2003); Anderson et al. (2005); Bratton et al. (2005); Clarke and Acock (1989); Listhaug and Wiberg (1995); Nadeau and Blais (1993); and Nadeau et al. (2000)

<sup>42</sup> The excluded category is Botswana.

**Table 1:** The Effects of Electoral Influences on Perceived Institutional Legitimacy

	Institutional Trust		Consent to Authority		External Efficacy		Defending Democracy	
	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B
<u>Electoral Influences</u>								
Winner-loser status	.109***	.071***	.039***	.024**	.034***	.026**	-.023**	-.019*
Free and fair election	n/a	.169***	n/a	.060***	n/a	.050***	n/a	-.020*
<u>Performance Evaluations</u>								
Government performance	.199***	.171***	.113***	.102***	.073***	.065***	-.059***	-.056***
Economic performance	.140***	.116***	.068***	.061***	.124***	.116***	.015	.018
<u>Participation and Engagement</u>								
Electoral participation	.038***	.024**	-.004	-.009	.043***	.038***	.051***	.053***
Political interest	.042***	.038***	.004	.002	.039***	.038***	.067***	.067***
Exposure to mass media	-.066***	-.060***	-.016	-.015	.018	.019	.132***	.131***
<u>Social Structure</u>								
Education	-.121***	-.111***	-.062***	-.060***	.069***	.071***	.119***	.118***
Gender (female)	-.023**	-.020**	.019*	.020*	-.010	-.009	-.044***	-.045***
Age	-.026***	-.028***	-.005	-.006	.012	.011	-.017*	-.017*
<u>Countries</u>								
Ghana	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lesotho	-.121***	-.098***	.064***	.072***	.012	.019	-.142***	-.144***
Malawi	-.072***	-.051***	-.078***	-.071***	.027*	.034**	-.049***	-.051***
Mali	-.152***	-.112***	-.026	-.012	n/a	n/a	-.094***	-.099***
Namibia	.005	.015	.021	.025*	-.070***	-.067***	-.097***	-.098***
Nigeria	-.383***	-.353***	n/a	n/a	.064***	.073***	-.107***	-.111***
South Africa	-.113***	-.108***	.103***	.105***	-.047***	-.045***	-.175***	-.175***
Tanzania	.037**	.055***	-.011	-.004	n/a	n/a	-.220***	-.222***
Uganda	n/a	n/a	.015	.020	.042**	.046***	n/a	n/a
Zambia	-.069***	-.062***	-.007	-.005	-.073***	-.071***	.048***	.047***
Zimbabwe	-.070***	-.070***	-.078***	-.066***	-.041***	-.031*	-.079***	-.082***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.231	.253	.065	.067	.084	.086	.118	.118
N	15715	15715	14141	14141	13656	13656	15524	15524

\*  $p \leq .05$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Notes: Entries are standardized regression coefficients (Beta). Botswana is the excluded category.

Source: Afrobarometer Round 1

In sum, winners are significantly and consistently more pleased with political outcomes than losers and, although based on limited data, the winner–loser gaps in African elections appear to be very large in cross-regional comparative terms. However, feeling close to the winning party is not the most important factor affecting legitimacy beliefs. The results in Table 1 indicate that performance evaluations matter more than partisan attachments. Poor performance of the economy or the government can overwhelm the loyalty of winners and good performance can gain the allegiance of even opposition supporters. Ultimately, state institutions have to work well or both winners and losers will withhold their support.

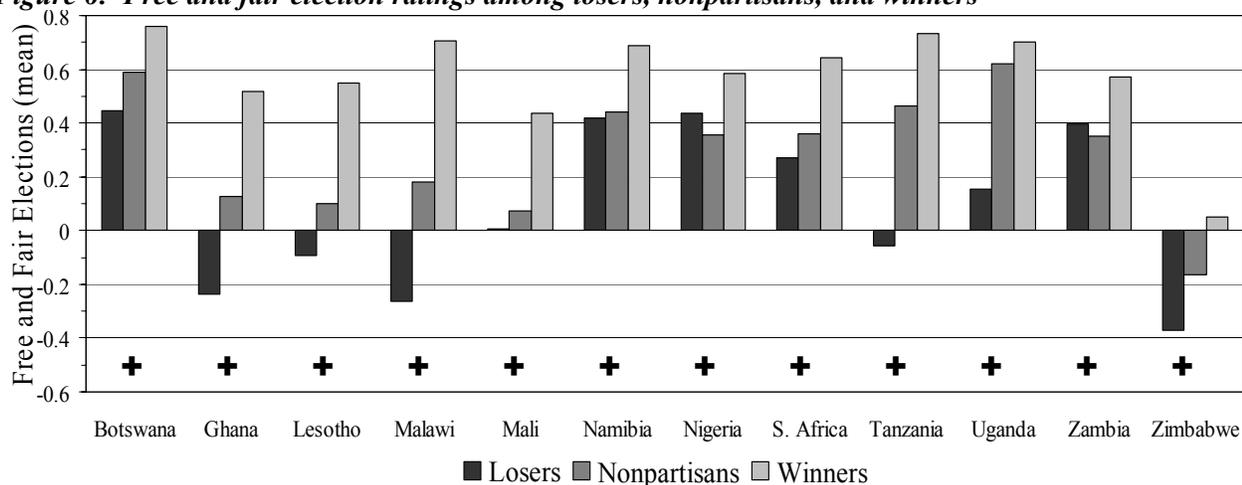
### FREE AND FAIR OR FRAUDULENT AND FORGED

Given the clear evidence of a significant winner–loser gap in legitimacy beliefs, we are left with the question of why the gap exists. Earlier I hypothesized that the causal pathway between partisan affiliations and institutional legitimacy runs through procedural evaluations of elections. In this section I test three observable implications of this theory: winners are more positive than losers when asked to evaluate the freeness and fairness of recent election; electoral evaluations are associated with perceived institutional legitimacy; and the influence of winner–loser status on perceived legitimacy is attenuated or eliminated when electoral evaluations are added to the analysis.

#### Partisan Attachments and Electoral Evaluations

Do winning voters in African elections have more positive views of electoral fairness than losers? Figure 6 shows the mean values of the variable free and fair election for losers, non-partisans, and winners in each of the 12 countries surveyed. For each country, the winners’ average ratings of electoral fairness are much higher than the losers’ average ratings, and the differences of means are highly significant.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the winners’ average rating was significantly positive in 11 of the 12 countries surveyed, but the losers’ average rating was significantly positive in only six countries.<sup>44</sup> It seems there is a vast gulf separating winners and losers in how they rate their elections.

**Figure 6: Free and fair election ratings among losers, nonpartisans, and winners**



Note: Sign indicates winner–loser gap at 0.05 level of significance.

Not only are differences in how winners and losers perceive electoral fairness consistent across the 12 African countries, they are also extremely large in comparative terms. Again, these comparisons are only suggestive given that the Afrobarometer surveys and the Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems surveys do not have identical questions (Anderson et al. 2005: 40, 198). Even so, the average winner–loser gap for the 12 African countries taken together (0.49) is nearly ten times the average winner–loser gap for 19 OECD countries and

<sup>43</sup> The difference between winners and losers is significant at the 0.000 level, except for Zambia, which is significant at the 0.050 level.

<sup>44</sup> The winner mean in Zimbabwe is not significantly different from zero. The loser means for Lesotho, Mali, and Tanzania are not significantly different from zero.

Slovenia (0.05).<sup>45</sup> Even with respect to four other new democracies, the gaps are far wider in Africa than in their Eastern European and Latin American counterparts (-0.01 in Slovenia, 0.00 in Mexico, 0.04 in Poland, and 0.31 in the Czech Republic). Remarkably, the difference between the 12 African countries on the one hand and the 19 OECD countries plus Slovenia on the other hand comes entirely from the attitudes of losers. The mean value for winners in Africa (0.58) is only slightly lower than the mean score for winners elsewhere (0.69), despite the serious irregularities in many African elections. In contrast, the mean score for losers in Africa (0.09) is dramatically lower than the mean score elsewhere (0.64). It seems that losers in Africa (and outside observers), but not winners, express reservations about whether recent elections were free and fair or fraudulent and forged.

Table 2 shows that winner–loser status in Africa is positively related to the perception of a free and fair election, even when controlling for other possible influences.<sup>46</sup> Compared with all the other variables in the model, winner–loser status has the largest influence on evaluations of electoral integrity in both substantive and statistical terms. In the face of elections of uncertain quality, winners tend to think they won fair and square, whereas losers are more inclined to cry foul.

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<sup>45</sup> The gap is calculated from the mean values for winners minus the mean values for losers (all variables range from -1 to +1). The African gap values with respect to electoral evaluations are: Botswana (0.32), Ghana (0.76), Lesotho (0.64), Malawi (0.97), Mali (0.43), Namibia (0.27), Nigeria (0.15), South Africa (0.37), Tanzania (0.79), Uganda (0.54), Zambia (0.17), and Zimbabwe (0.43). Gaps in 19 OECD countries and Slovenia range from -0.09 in Spain (1996) to 0.31 in the Czech Republic (Anderson et al. 2005: 40).

<sup>46</sup> Notably, when the same model is run on each country separately, the coefficients on winner–loser status are all significant with 99-percent confidence. The substantive effects are largest in Malawi and Tanzania.



**Table 2:** The Effects of Winner–loser Status on Free and Fair Election Ratings

	<u>B</u>	<u>S.E.</u>	<u>Beta</u>
<u>Electoral Influences</u>			
Winner–loser status	0.204	0.007	0.214 ***
<u>Performance Evaluations</u>			
Government performance	0.024	0.001	0.166 ***
Performance of economy	0.025	0.002	0.142 ***
<u>Participation and Engagement</u>			
Electoral participation	0.080	0.006	0.098 ***
Political interest	0.015	0.004	0.027 ***
Exposure to mass media	-0.004	0.001	-0.031 ***
<u>Social Structure</u>			
Education	-0.043	0.006	-0.062 ***
Gender (female)	-0.015	0.009	-0.011
Age	0.001	0.000	0.012 *
<u>Countries</u>			
Ghana	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lesotho	-0.348	0.026	-0.129 ***
Malawi	-0.320	0.026	-0.119 ***
Mali	-0.476	0.024	-0.227 ***
Namibia	-0.160	0.027	-0.056 ***
Nigeria	-0.278	0.022	-0.171 ***
South Africa	-0.063	0.023	-0.032 **
Tanzania	-0.200	0.023	-0.100 ***
Uganda	-0.155	0.024	-0.074 ***
Zambia	-0.105	0.027	-0.037 ***
Zimbabwe	-0.514	0.027	-0.184 ***
Constant	-0.012	0.030	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.212		

\*  $p \leq 0.05$  \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$

Notes: Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients (B), standard errors (S.E.), and standardized coefficients (Beta). Botswana is the excluded category.

### Fair Elections and Perceived Legitimacy

Are evaluations of electoral fairness related to the perceived legitimacy of government institutions? The four B Models in Table 1 provide evidence of a strong association between opinions of procedural fairness and citizen satisfaction with the outcomes of the process. The coefficients on the intervening variables, free and fair election, are positive and significant in both substantive and statistical terms ( $p < 0.000$ ) for three of the four measures. Citizens who believe that the most recent election was free and fair also exhibit these three traits: trust

their government institutions; grant government the authority to make binding decisions; and believe that their vote matters, *ceteris paribus*. In the model predicting citizens' willingness to defend democracy, the effect is negative and somewhat less significant in both substantive and statistical terms ( $p = 0.018$ ). Citizens who thought that the last election was free and fair are less willing to act to defend democratic institutions against government incursion—perhaps because they are inexorably devoted to their current government.

### **The Mediating Effect of Electoral Evaluations**

The final step is to determine whether the relationship between winning an election and perceived legitimacy is reduced or eliminated when electoral evaluations are taken into account. The amount of mediation can be gauged from Table 1 by comparing the coefficients for winner–loser status in the absence (Models A) and in the presence (Models B) of the free and fair election variable.

For all four dependent variables, there is evidence of partial mediation. The inclusion of the indicator of electoral fairness reduces slightly (but does not eliminate) the estimated effect of winning the election. For each of the four legitimacy measures, the coefficients on winner–loser status in Model B are closer to zero than they are in Model A, but remain substantively and statistically significant.<sup>47</sup> The estimated effect of winning never decreases by more than half of its original value. Winners and losers have different opinions about the fairness of the electoral process and those opinions matter for institutional legitimacy, but there must be alternative aspects of winning that also boost political support. The evidence suggests that perceived electoral integrity is a causal pathway linking partisan attitudes and legitimacy, but it is not the only (or even the most important) causal connection. This analysis suggests that even if losers could be convinced that they lost fair and square, they would still doubt the legitimacy of their government institutions—at least in comparison to winners.

## **CONCLUSION**

In Africa, improving the quality of elections is a primary concern of foreign and domestic policy-makers. Donors, advisors, and activists are directing significant resources and attention towards making electoral procedures free, fair, and transparent. One of the primary goals of electoral reform is to increase the legitimacy of nascent democratic institutions. In contrast to authoritarian governments, which often rely on coercion, democracies require greater legitimacy to ensure citizen compliance (Bratton et al. 2005, 30; Nadeau et al. 2000, 2). For democracies to survive and govern effectively, losers as well as winners must accept electoral outcomes and comply with the laws set by elected leaders. Craig et al. (2004) argue that “a crucial aspect of legitimacy has to do with losers' acceptance of the election outcome as valid and with their willingness to consent to the winners' rightful authority to implement policies advocated during the campaign—policies to which losers may be strongly opposed” (2). Political legitimacy is especially crucial in transitional polities where democracy is not yet the only game in town and the political systems are unstable.

Most studies of elections in transitional or hybrid polities rely on expert assessments of electoral quality. Expert assessments are well suited for determining whether electoral outcomes accurately reflect the wishes of the voters and are also very revealing of elite behavior. However, expert assessments are less well suited for informing us about whether elections have a legitimizing effect on the mass public. Elections may be deemed free and fair by experts, but not by citizens, and visa versa. Furthermore, even if elections are perceived as free and fair, they may not confer legitimacy on government institutions. This paper takes a different approach from most studies of transitional elections. It examines ordinary citizens' assessments of electoral integrity rather than that of experts. It uses national surveys of African citizens to determine whether elections play a legitimating role for losers as well as winners—and if not, why not.

First, I find strong evidence of a gap in perceived legitimacy between winners and losers. This gap is relatively consistent across three different indicators and 12 countries. In general, citizens who feel close to winning parties think that their governments are more trustworthy, authoritative, and responsive than do citizens who are

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<sup>47</sup> For the models that predict defending democracy, the coefficient on winner–loser status increased (or became less negative) in the presence of the intervening variable. In other words, the reverse gap between winners and losers narrowed when electoral evaluations were controlled for. For all the other dependent variables, the coefficient on winner–loser status decreased (or became less positive) when free and fair election was included in the equation.



aligned with the losing side. Although cross-regional data is limited and not perfectly comparable, gaps appear to be larger in Africa than in 20 other old and new European democracies.

The deviations from this general pattern, which I discuss in the text, are as enlightening as the evidence of a general trend. For example, the comparison of means revealed a *reverse* gap with respect to acting in defense of democracy. Compared to losers, winners are more attached to their sitting governments than they are to their democratic institutions. Winners are less, not more, willing to defend press freedoms, judicial independence, and elections if it means going against a government to which they feel attached. Some level of government legitimacy and citizen compliance is necessary for democracy to function effectively, but unconditional allegiance can be dangerous for democratic development, especially in hybrid systems. It seems that winners in Africa give too much support to their current government while losers may give too little.

Second, this paper provides a causal explanation for the winner–loser gap in perceived legitimacy, although only a partial one. In all 12 African countries where the surveys were conducted, winners and losers expressed different opinions about how free and fair their elections are. It seems that many Africans who watch their favored party lose an election thereafter doubt the integrity of the contest (and often they have many tangible reasons to be suspicious). Although cross-regional comparisons are not exact, losers in Africa seem far more pessimistic about their elections than losers in other parts of the world. In contrast, winners in Africa tend to overlook or excuse irregularities at nearly the same rate as elsewhere. In Africa, the divergent views of procedural fairness are also associated with different levels of acceptance of political outcomes. In theory, elections generate legitimacy and ensure the compliance of losers because they provide a fair mechanism for choosing leaders and resolving disputes. However, in practice, Africans who feel attached to losing parties are less inclined to think the process was fair and are also less likely to view the outcomes as legitimate. This evidence is consistent with the second hypothesis; different perceptions of procedural fairness among winners and losers help explain the gap in legitimacy beliefs.<sup>48</sup>

While there is evidence that electoral evaluations play a mediating role between partisan affiliations and perceived legitimacy, my causal explanation does not tell the full story. Even after accounting for respondent attitudes about elections, there remains a significant gap in perceived legitimacy between winners and losers. Africans that emerge from an electoral contest victorious not only have a more favorable view of their elections, they also have other reasons to view political life more auspiciously. A fruitful avenue for future research would be to define these alternative causal pathways. Evaluations of government and economic performance are a plausible link; previous research indicates that winners have higher opinions of government performance than do losers (Bratton et al. 2005: 260) and performance evaluations exert a large influence on perceived legitimacy (see Table 1). Other possible causal links discussed earlier include distributive concerns, lack of experience with elections, and losers' fear of being shut out of the political system in the future.

It is also important to recognize that performance evaluations have a strong estimated affect on institutional legitimacy even after electoral influences are accounted for. Partisan affiliations and the fairness of elections matter for institutional legitimacy, but the actual performance of the government and the economy matters more. This evidence suggests that institutional legitimacy in Africa is based more on citizens' rational calculations than on their affective party loyalties.<sup>49</sup> Regardless of what happens during intermittent election periods, the institutions of the state have to perform in the intervening years if they are to gain the full allegiance, support, and protection of the citizenry.

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<sup>48</sup> While the evidence presented is consistent with the initial hypotheses, the available data does not allow us to establish conclusively the direction of causation between partisanship, fairness evaluations, and perceived legitimacy. Panel, experimental, or qualitative data would help to establish that the causal pathways are as hypothesized.

<sup>49</sup> My assessment is in accordance with Bratton et al.'s (2005) "learning theory of cognitive rationality". They argue that cognitive awareness and performance evaluations are far more critical to understanding public opinion in Africa than cultural, sociological, or institutional ties and attributes. Furthermore, my empirical findings with respect to institutional legitimacy mirror their empirical analyses on attitudes towards political and economic reforms--performance evaluations are more influential than partisan attachments.



Finally, this research offers a mix of positive and negative news for democracy activists and policymakers who have devoted their energies to improving electoral quality in Africa. First, I offer the good news. To the extent that electoral reforms and assistance help African citizens to feel better about the integrity of the electoral process, this research suggests that individuals will become more supportive of their government institutions and more willing to consent to official policies. However, the bad news is that individuals often view similar election processes very differently—improvements in the quality of elections may not always be perceived as such by African citizens, especially by the losers. Furthermore, even if losers can be convinced that the electoral procedures are fair, they will still hold some residual negative attitudes. Cleaning up elections will not be enough to win the full support of Africans aligned with the losing side.

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## Appendix A

### Question Wording and Response Codes<sup>50</sup>

**Institutional Trust:** “How much do you trust the following institutions [to do what is right]: the police, courts of law, the army, the electoral commission?” (“not at all” = -0.250; “distrust somewhat” = -0.125; “don’t know” = 0; “trust somewhat” = 0.125; “trust a lot” = 0.250. The combined “institutional trust” scale for four items ranges from -1 to 1.)

**Consent to Authority:** “Please say whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers. Just tell me what you think: Our government has the right to make decisions that all people have to abide by, whether or not they agree with them.” (“strongly disagree” = -1; “disagree” = -0.5; “don’t know / neither agree nor disagree” = 0; “agree” = 0.5; “strongly agree” = 1.)

**External Efficacy:** “Please tell me which one you agree with most. Choose statement A or statement B. A) No matter who we vote for, things will not get any better in the future. B) We can use our power as voters to choose leaders who will help us improve our lives.” (“agree strongly with A” = -1; “agree somewhat with A” = -0.5; “don’t know / do not agree with either” = 0; “agree somewhat with B” = 0.5; “agree strongly with B” = 1.)

**Defending Democracy:** “What would you do if the government took any of the following actions: Shut down newspapers that criticized the government? Dismissed judges who ruled against the government? Suspended the parliament [national assembly] and canceled the next elections?” (“support the government” = -0.333; “don’t know / do nothing” = 0; “contact an elected representative, support an opposition party, join a protest or boycott, or other” = 0.333. The combined “defending democracy” scale for three items ranges from -1 to 1.)

**Free and Fair Election:** “On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness [honesty] of the last national election, held in [ \_\_\_\_ ]?” (“not free and fair / very dishonest” = -1; “free and fair but with several major problems / somewhat dishonest” = -0.5; “don’t know” = 0; “free and fair with some minor problems / somewhat honest” = 0.5; “completely free and fair / very honest” = 1.)

**Winner–loser Status:** “Do you feel close to any political party? If yes, which one?” (if party choice does not match with the party that won the most recent national election [loser] = 0; if they do not choose a party [non-partisan] = 1; if party choice matches with the party that won the most recent election [winner] = 2.)

**Government Performance:** “How well would you say the government is handling the following matters? Would you say very well, fairly well, not very well, not at all well, or haven’t you heard enough about this to have an opinion: Addressing the educational needs of all [nationality name]? Improving health services? Creating jobs? Ensuring that prices remain stable?” (“not at all well” = 0; “not very well” = 1; “don’t know” = 2; “fairly well” = 3; “very well” = 4. The combined “government performance” scale for four items ranges from 0 to 16.)

**Economic Performance:** “How satisfied are you with the condition of the [ \_\_\_\_ ] economy today?” “How do economic conditions in [ \_\_\_\_ ] now compare to one year ago?” “What about in twelve months time: do you expect economic conditions in [ \_\_\_\_ ] to be worse, the same, or better than they are now?” “Would you say that your own living conditions are worse, the same, or better than other [nationality name]?” (“very dissatisfied / much worse” = 0; “dissatisfied / worse” = 1; “don’t know / neither / same” = 2; “satisfied / better” = 3; “very satisfied / much better” = 4. The combined “economic performance” scale for four items ranges from 0 to 16.)

**Electoral Participation:** “Understanding that some [ \_\_\_\_ ] choose not to vote, let me ask you: did you vote [in the most recent national election]?” (“did not vote / not able to vote / don’t know” = 0; “voted = 1.) “I will read

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<sup>50</sup> There are minor variations in question wording by country. For the exact wording, see the Round 1, 12-country merged codebook (1999–2001) at <http://afrobarometer.org/round1m.html>. All missing data and non-responses were dropped from the analysis using list-wise deletion.

out a list of things that people sometimes do as citizens. Please tell me how often you, personally, have done any of these things [during the last five years]: Attended an election rally? Work for a political candidate or party?" ("never / no chance to / don't know" = 0; "only once / once or twice" = 0.333; "sometimes / a few times" = 0.667; "often" = 1. The combined "electoral participation" scale for three items ranges from 0 to 3.)

**Political Interest:** "Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs: \_\_\_\_\_? [How interested are you in politics and government?]" ("hardly / not interested" = 0; "only now and then" = 1; "some of the time / somewhat interested" = 2; "always / most of the time / very interested" = 3.)

**Exposure to Mass Media:** "How often do you get news from the following sources: Radio? Television? Newspapers?" ("never" = 0; "less than once a month" = 1; "about once a month" = 2; "about once a week / few times a month" = 3; "several times a week / a few times a week" = 4; "every day" = 5. The combined "exposure to mass media" scale for three items ranges from 0 to 15)

**Education:** "How much education have you had?" (no formal schooling = 0; primary only = 1; secondary = 2; post-secondary = 3)

**Gender:** (male = 0; female = 1)

**Age:** (ranges from 15 years old to 100 years old)