Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa

MICHAEL BRATTON
Michigan State University

ROBERT MATTES
University of Cape Town

E. GYIMAH-BOADI
University of Ghana

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

First published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

Typeface Sabon 10/12 pt. *System* LaTeX 2ε [TB]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Bratton, Michael.
Public opinion, democracy, and market reform in Africa / Michael Bratton, Robert
Mattes, E. Gyimah-Boadi.
p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in comparative politics)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-521-84191-7 – ISBN 0-521-60291-2 (pb.)
1. Africa, Sub-Saharan – Politics and government – 1960– – Public opinion. 2. Democracy –
Africa, Sub-Saharan – Public opinion. 3. Legitimacy of governments – Africa,
Sub-Saharan – Public opinion. 4. Africa, Sub-Saharan – Economic conditions – 1960– –
Public opinion. 5. Africa, Sub-Saharan – Economic policy – Public opinion.
6. Capitalism – Africa, Sub-Saharan – Public opinion. 7. Free enterprise – Africa,
Sub-Saharan – Public opinion. 8. Public opinion – Africa, Sub-Saharan.
I. Mattes, Robert B. II. Gyimah-Boadi, Emmanuel. III. Title. IV. Series.
JQ1879.A15B74 2004
320.967–dc22 2004043555

ISBN 0 521 84191 7 hardback
ISBN 0 521 60291 2 paperback

Contents

List of Tables and Figures

TABLES

FIGURES

Introduction

This book explores public opinion in the parts of Africa that have recently experienced political and economic reforms. What views do Africans hold about democracy and a market economy? How do they behave in response to liberalization? Why do citizens think, feel, and react as they do? And what are the implications of mass opinion for the consolidation of fragile new regimes? In short, we explore the nature of public opinion – its content, origins, and outcomes – in all its glorious diversity in the leading reformist countries of the sub-Saharan subcontinent.

Needless to say, very little is presently known about these subjects. Thus, our first task is descriptive: to fill a gaping empirical hole and to help give voice to otherwise silent majorities of ordinary men and women. But we also harbor theoretical ambitions and an abiding interest in public policy. Why does public opinion vary cross-nationally and among different social and opinion groups within countries? What sort of theory – of interests, identities, or institutions – best explains African patterns of mass attitudes and action?[1] By accounting for popular demands and satisfactions – or, more likely, dissatisfactions – this book enters evidence into long-standing, often heated, debates on the suitability of political democracy and market-friendly policies to African needs and conditions.

To introduce our topic, we present two vignettes – one apiece about democratic and market reforms – that illustrate the above preoccupations. These short stories point to a variety of regime paths being taken by African countries and to distinctive patterns of popular response. In the process, we begin to situate public opinion as both a cause and a consequence of change.

A TALE OF TWO PRESIDENTS

In Africa today, civilian leaders who ignore the constitution pose a more insidious threat to democracy than coup plotters in the military. As elected rulers have come to enjoy the benefits of public office, they often have been tempted to cling to power by bending the law. It is not uncommon for leaders to try to amend the national constitution, either to sideline opponents for the presidency, or to extend the number of terms that a president can serve. Among others, Sam Nujoma of Namibia and Frederick Chiluba of Zambia have used these tactics. Both tried to persuade their compatriots that they deserved a third term in office, even in the face of explicit constitutional prohibitions. In wanting to overturn presidential term limits, they sought to circumvent democratic reforms made a decade earlier.

Nujoma, Namibia's founding father, was first elected in 1989 with 57 percent of the vote, a solid mandate that was increased in presidential elections in 1994. As his second term unfolded, Nujoma gave conflicting signals about his intentions: at first he declared he would step down to make way for a younger candidate; but he later allowed that his future would be left up to the ruling South West Africa Peoples' Organization (SWAPO). Feigning response to a popular groundswell and arguing that the country could ill afford a damaging succession struggle, Nujoma accepted the unanimous acclamation of an extraordinary party congress in 1998 that he should stay on. An amendment to the constitution was rammed through the National Assembly, where SWAPO enjoyed a comfortable super-majority, which allowed Nujoma to run again in the 1999 presidential elections. He won a third term, now with 77 percent of the vote.

Chiluba had similar ambitions, but was less effective in realizing them. He took office after resoundingly defeating Zambia's founding father, Kenneth Kaunda, in a landmark transition in 1991. Chiluba was reelected five years later with an almost undiminished majority. In this election, however, he eliminated competition from Kaunda (whose parents were born in Malawi) by trumping up a charge that the latter was not a Zambian citizen. Belatedly, in May 2001, just six months before he was due to step down, Chiluba publicly floated the possibility of a third term. He managed to persuade the ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), to renominate him as its presidential candidate, but in the process precipitated a split in the party. Lacking enough votes in parliament to change the constitution, Chiluba expelled all his leading opponents from the MMD, including the national vice-president and several cabinet ministers. A few days later – in the face of popular protests by student, labor, and church groups and moves by parliamentarians to begin impeachment – the president dramatically reversed himself: he went on national television to announce that he would *not* seek a third term.

Many factors explain why Nujoma's power play succeeded and Chiluba's failed. The former president could capitalize on his reputation as the liberator of his country from colonial rule, whereas the latter came to power as a second-generation, compromise candidate. Nujoma was apparently more skillful than Chiluba in managing splits within his own party and turning them to his own advantage. And perhaps Zambians, unlike Namibians, had already learned from bitter experience that a single leader should not be permitted to stay in office too long.

To fully appreciate whether leaders can get away with manipulating the core rules of the democratic game, we contend that attention should be paid to public opinion. As third-term debates came to a head in both countries, we conducted national probability sample surveys in Namibia and Zambia that, among other questions, asked people about their attitudes to government by a strong leader. Specifically, did they approve or disapprove of a form of government in which "we abolish parliament and political parties so that the president can decide everything?" The results were strikingly different across the two countries: in Namibia, only a bare majority (of 57 percent) rejected one-man rule; yet in Zambia, an overwhelming majority (91 percent) did so.

Thus the profile of public opinion in Namibia, where almost half of the population indicated they would not resist a strong leader, was acquiescent to Nujoma's bid to change the constitution to suit his own ambitions. In Zambia, however, Chiluba confronted a much more politicized populace that clearly rejected any seizure of power by another would-be strongman. While these popular preferences may or may not have been communicated directly by the people to the president, they certainly found expression via civic organizations, political parties, and the parliament. As a reflection of popular disaffection with a leader's machinations, public opinion apparently played a role in determining whether a nondemocratic gambit would succeed.

TAKING ACCOUNT OF ADJUSTMENT

As well as influencing the course of events, public opinion is shaped by policy performance. In recent years, African countries have undertaken economic reform programs that aim to encourage economic growth by adjusting the structure of the national economy. The scope of such reforms, including actual implementation, has varied greatly from country to country, as illustrated by the divergent paths recently taken by Mali and Nigeria.

Originally an agricultural economy, Nigeria was self-sufficient in food at the time of independence and an exporter of cocoa, palm oil, groundnuts, and cotton. The development of oil resources in the 1970s, however, led to an economic boom that financed the rapid expansion of the state sector. Numerous public enterprises were established in industry and manufacturing that, together with the civil service, came to account for more than 60 percent of formal employment. Imports of capital goods and raw materials to support these enterprises, along with the consumer luxuries that Nigerians increasingly demanded, produced a ballooning trade deficit. By the 1980s, the government could no longer finance its own expenditures and was forced into debt.

When General Ibrahim Babangida grabbed power in 1985, he moved quickly to restructure the Nigerian economy. Following a referendum on international borrowing that revealed a strong streak of popular economic nationalism, Nigerian policy experts undertook to design their own structural adjustment program (SAP) in 1986. It aimed to restore fiscal discipline, diversify the economy away from dependence on oil, and address the growing debt burden. This homegrown product won the approval of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which made the country eligible for the disbursement of loans and the rescheduling of arrears.

Yet the economic reform program became severely distorted by corruption. From the outset, the oil boom allowed the personal enrichment of top public officials who entered into lucrative deals with foreign oil companies. An economic downturn in the 1980s due to falling world oil prices created even greater incentives for graft, which infamously led successive military administrations in Nigeria into spectacular avarice. By the mid-1990s, General Sani Abacha allowed Nigeria's oil refineries to collapse and maneuvered himself, his cronies, and members of his family into controlling positions in the oil import business. By the time Abacha died in mid-1998, the government had dropped all pretense of systematic economic management. Public enterprises were looted and capital took flight. Life worsened for ordinary people as education and health services collapsed, average life expectancy stalled at about fifty years, and Nigeria slipped from being a middle-income country to being a low-income one.

Under these circumstances, public confidence in the government's economic strategy was bound to be extremely low. In the first place, only 40 percent of the respondents in a national probability sample survey in January 2000 had even heard of the SAP, in part because many respondents were too young to remember the public debates about a program introduced in 1986. Among those who had heard of the SAP, a mere 14 percent were prepared to express satisfaction with the way it had been implemented. This judgment accords with a World Bank assessment that, by 1997, Nigeria had demonstrated poor compliance with an orthodox package of recommended reforms.

The case of Mali presents a different picture. Much less well endowed with natural resources than Nigeria – it has no oil and two thirds of its land area is desert – Mali embarked on a promising path of policy reform that attracted a measure of support from both international donors and the general public.

Malian governments were initially opposed to a market-based economy. From 1960 to 1968, the independence government of Modibo Keita attempted to install a regime of rural socialism whose political bankruptcy was signaled when party militants resorted to confiscating food grains from farmers. The succeeding military government of Moussa Traoré opened the door to World Bank and IMF support by, among other reforms, allowing staple foodstuffs to be traded privately. Unwilling to surrender control, however, Traoré permitted only token privatization of the rural economy and violently repressed demands for political freedoms raised in the streets by urban demonstrators. He was finally ousted in a coup in 1991, which was followed by a democratic election in 1992 that installed Alpha Omar Konaré, a reformer with a more wholehearted commitment to restructuring the economy.

Like other West African governments, the Konaré administration had no choice but to accept a 50 percent devaluation of the national currency (the CFA franc) in January 1994. But, of its own accord, it also adopted measures to resume the liberalization of agricultural marketing, introduce a value added tax, and initiate the sale of publicly owned utility companies. Gradually, Mali began to harvest the fruits of these reforms. Growth in real domestic product averaged 5 percent between 1994 and 1998, though it later slowed again. The export of rice increased substantially and the country approached self-sufficiency in this staple food. Although cotton prices dropped, livestock exports boomed. And, for the first time in years, improvements in the management of the government's finances allowed public employees to be paid on time.

Accordingly, survey research shows that Malians are much more satisfied than Nigerians with their country's economic reform program. Interestingly, exactly the same proportion of adults in both countries (40 percent) is aware of the existence of an official SAP, though in Mali, where reforms are more recent, lack of policy knowledge is due less to age than to lack of education. The big difference between the two countries, however, is that many more Malians (39 percent) say they are satisfied with the reform package as implemented, a figure nearly three times higher than in Nigeria. To be sure, SAPs attract only minority satisfaction in both countries, but Nigerians express an almost total lack of confidence in the economic policies implemented by corrupt military dictators. These findings suggest that significant proportions of Africans attend to national policy developments and form their opinions accordingly. In the contrasting cases of Nigeria and Mali, the policy performance of governments apparently affected the size of any popular constituency for economic reform.

SETTING AN AGENDA

On the basis of these case comparisons, we find it worthwhile to explore more systematically the role of public opinion in the evolution of democratic and market regimes in Africa. Several avenues for elaboration immediately come to mind.

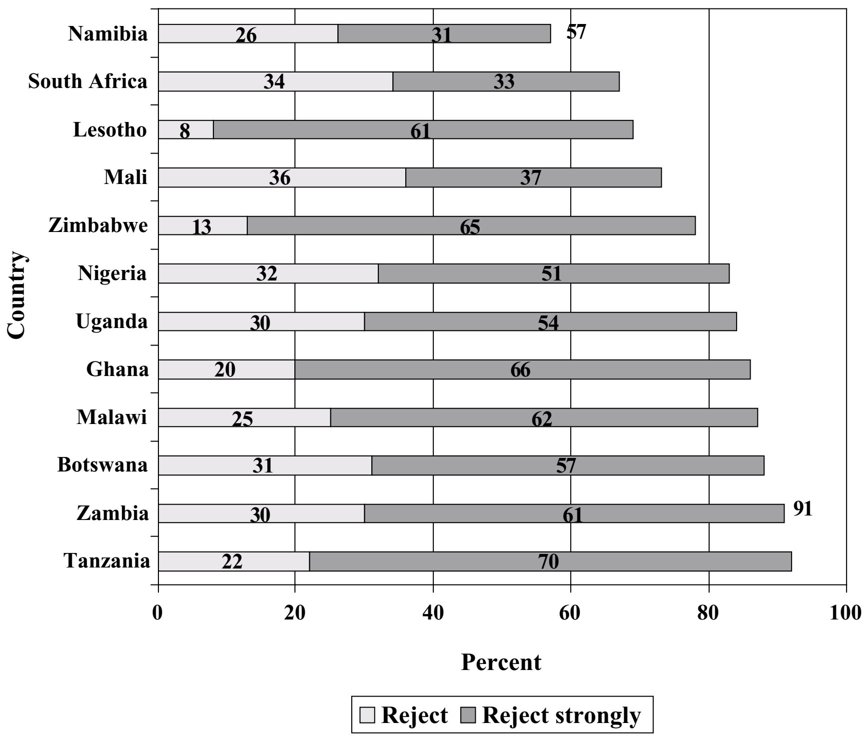
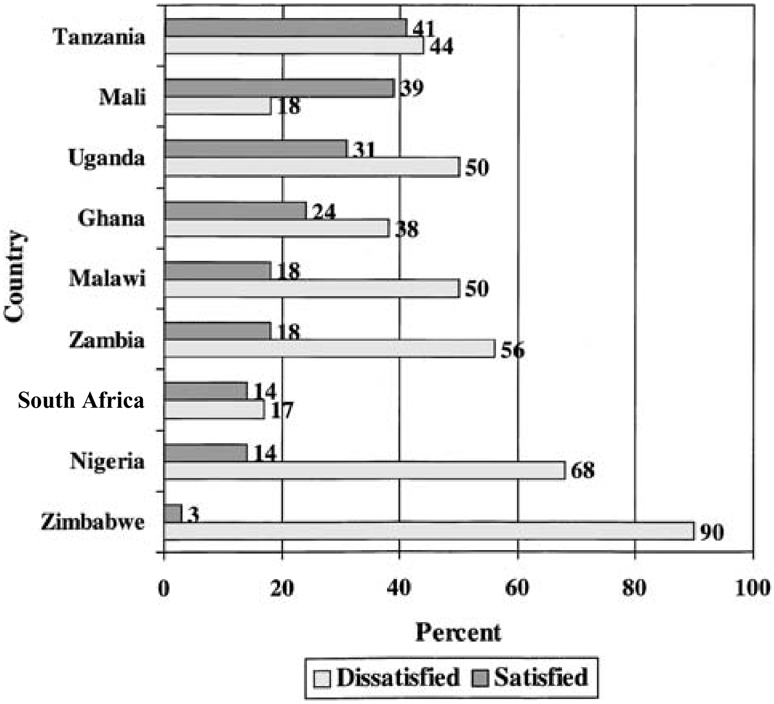


FIGURE 1.1. Rejection of One-Man Rule

Do these findings apply elsewhere? The countries mentioned so far – Namibia, Zambia, Mali, and Nigeria – were chosen because their national populations display extreme values on relevant public attitudes. Figure 1.1 shows that, across twelve African countries for which we have data, Namibians express the very lowest rates of rejection of one-man rule, whereas Zambians are second highest. Figure 1.2 shows that, across nine African countries that had implemented a SAP, Nigerians were among the most dissatisfied and that Malians were among the most satisfied.

Thus, the cross-national results point in the same directions as the case comparisons. In countries where, in the past, strong leaders entrenched themselves in power for multiple terms in office (as did Nyerere in Tanzania, Banda in Malawi, and Rawlings in Ghana), public opinion runs strongly against one-man rule. In Malawi, widespread popular opposition (87 percent, almost Zambian levels) contributed to President Muluzi's reluctant decision in March 2003 to forego a third term bid. In countries where the authorities have abandoned SAPs and incited economic nationalism against global financial institutions, satisfaction with SAPs is low. In Zimbabwe, for example, satisfaction is even lower than in Nigeria (just 3 percent). And vice



Percent who say they are "satisfied/very satisfied" or "dissatisfied/very dissatisfied"

FIGURE 1.2. Satisfaction with Economic Reform Programs

versa: in countries that have demonstrated a measure of compliance with the market-based policy recommendations of the World Bank and IMF and people have seen modest improvements in the economy (for example, in Tanzania and Uganda), public opinion shows relative satisfaction with SAPs. Strikingly, in Tanzania, almost as many people say they are satisfied with the country's economic reform program as express dissatisfaction (41 percent versus 44 percent).[2]

But cross-national comparisons also raise new questions. One-man rule is roundly rejected in Botswana in a context where leaders have refrained from ruling in brutal fashion or attempting to outstay their welcome. This case raises other possibilities, including that the rejection of one-man rule is a product of a popular syndrome of democratic preferences based on extended experience with open, multiparty politics. Moreover, satisfaction with structural adjustment is very low in South Africa, plumbing Nigerian depths. In this case, public unease cannot be attributed to a failure of orthodox stabilization measures because, under the guidance of African National Congress's (ANC) economic team, the government has balanced the public budget and controlled inflation. Nor has creeping corruption in South Africa reached anything resembling Nigerian levels. Instead, dissatisfaction with SAPs in South Africa must be due to other factors such as the poor performance of the economic regime at generating jobs and reducing some of the starkest economic inequalities in the world. Thus, to understand the diverse sources of public opinion, we must move beyond monocausal, country-case comparisons in favor of more rigorous multivariate analyses of a large number of observations.

Another item on the agenda for this book is the theoretical status of mass attitudes and behavior. Is public opinion a cause or a consequence of regime change? The vignettes presented in the previous sections indicate that the arrow can point in either direction. With reference to presidential term limits, public opinion appears to have preceded political change by making a formative contribution to both Nujoma's success and Chiluba's failure. In the language of statistical modeling, popular rejection of strongman rule was an independent variable that helped to predict the fate of presidential efforts to reverse recent constitutional reforms. But we have also observed that populations that have experienced government at the hands of "life" presidents are likely to overwhelmingly reject one-man rule. In this regard, public opposition to the reemergence of strongmen is also a reaction to harsh political experience that people remember well and do not wish to repeat. Thus, public opinion is also a product of popular learning.

In the case of structural adjustment programs, we have portrayed public opinion mainly as reactive. In expressing low satisfaction with SAPs, citizens were seen as responding to relatively effective policy implementation in Mali and to the serious corruption of the economic reform effort in Nigeria. Thus public opinion was treated as a dependent variable, a phenomenon to be explained, in this case principally in terms of the government's record at policy performance. At some stage in the process of reform, however, public attitudes take on an independent existence. For example, as satisfied customers of a SAP begin to emerge, as in Tanzania when small-scale vendors welcomed the lifting of trading regulations, constituencies congeal in favor of sustaining and extending market-based reforms. Thus, attitudes and behaviors that start out as reactions to an external policy stimulus can, in turn, become catalysts of reform in their own right.

In this book, we start and end with whole regimes. At this macro level, we are interested in big questions about the status of, and prospects for, democratic and market reforms in Africa. We would like to know whether public opinion helps or inhibits the probability of consolidating new forms of political and economic organization in various countries. At the core of the book, however, is a microlevel investigation. For most of the presentation, we treat public opinion as a set of mass initiatives for reform or public reactions to reforms introduced by national and international elites. The bulk of the chapters that follow are devoted to describing the profile of public opinion and analyzing its origins and outcomes.

OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS

Part I of this book proposes a framework for analyzing popular orientations. Chapter 1 sets the scene by summarizing recent trends in political and economic liberalization, noting variations across African countries. It also dissects the literature's prevailing theory of the consolidation of democracy, finds it wanting, and substitutes a model of supply and demand for a range of regimes. We also derive a series of propositions about the profiles of public opinion that might be expected to prevail in Africa's new, hybrid systems.

Chapter 2 introduces the Afrobarometer and discusses the survey research methodology of this study. It situates Round 1 Afrobarometer surveys in relation to previous similar work in Africa and abroad, and emphasizes the comparative ambition of the present enterprise. A key element of this chapter is a literature-based review of competing explanatory frameworks. In examining what others have written about popular attitudes to emergent democracies and markets, we derive hypotheses for tests with African data. We note in other world regions, for example, that democratization attracts more widespread public support than reforms to introduce a market economy. As it happens, the Africans we interviewed feel the same way.

The book then proceeds by successive steps to document Afrobarometer results, to propose explanations, and then to test these. In the process, we gradually increase the sophistication of statistical techniques, beginning with univariate description, exploring tentative bivariate connections, introducing controls via single-stage multivariate regression models, and concluding with comprehensive path analyses. Readers may wish to pick and choose extracts from the text depending on their interests: those intrigued by empirical African realities will find Parts II and III most engaging; those concerned with the testing of theory may wish to spend more time on Parts I and IV.

Part II describes how people think, as well as what they do, in relation to reform. Chapter 3 records attitudes to democracy in African countries, characterizing popular support for this type of political regime as wide but shallow. Chapter 4 narrates economic attitudes, stressing popular ambivalence to market-based capitalism. Chapter 5 adds new information on the extent of popular engagement among Africans in informal economic activities and formal political processes. While it would be wrong to assume that public opinion is uniform across social groups within a country, we start by emphasizing cross-national variations. For example, we find that about two thirds of Africans interviewed say that they prefer democracy to any other form of government, but that Batswana (the citizens of Botswana) exceed, and Basotho (the citizens of Lesotho) fall short of, this average.

In Part III we ask why liberalization reforms attract differential levels of popular support and mass satisfaction. Applying candidate theories to the Afrobarometer data, we test the impacts of social demography, cultural values, and institutional influences, as well as considerations of cognitive awareness and performance evaluation (see Chapters 6 through 10). Contrary to the historical and anthropological emphases of African studies, we find that explanations of public opinion on the sub-Saharan subcontinent are not well served by frameworks based on social structure or cultural values. Instead, we substitute a popular learning approach that posits that people arrive at opinions about democracy and markets on the basis of knowledge, reasoning, and experience. In our view, the evolution of public opinion depends on two key considerations: first, emerging popular understandings of what a democracy or a market actually *is*; and second, mass perceptions of what, in practice, these regimes actually *do*.

Part IV (Chapters 11 and 12) expands and refines this emerging explanation. The object is to comprehensively model both popular attitudes (demand for, and perceived supply of, democracy and a market economy) and mass behavior (specifically, various forms of participation in the political process). We confirm that demand for reforms hinges critically on the quantity and quality of scarce information available to citizens. And the perceived supply of democratic and market regimes is a function of popular evaluations of the performance of leaders, institutions, and regimes. Weaving these strands of explanation together, we find that demand for democracy is largely intrinsic (as a goal valued in and of itself), but that evaluations of the supply of economic reform are highly instrumental (depending on improvements in the material conditions of life). Moreover, political participation is mostly a product of institutional mobilization. In all cases, Africans develop their orientations to reform less from formal education and more from direct experiences in adulthood.

The book concludes (in Chapter 13) with interpretation of "country" differences. What does it mean that being a Nigerian is a significant predictor of popular satisfaction with democracy or that being a Tanzanian powerfully explains support for market reforms? Precisely which economic or institutional attributes are signified by these geographic attributes? Analysis returns to country characteristics as represented by aggregate data derived from Afrobarometer surveys and other independent sources. By this last step we find that political legacies matter. Among other paths, a history of settler colonialism is not conducive to the consolidation of democracy; but past episodes of multiparty rule – however brief – are extremely helpful. Based on such findings, the book ends with some broad-gauged speculations about the sustainability of recent democratic and market reforms in the parts of Africa we have studied.