I

Running against All Odds

Kukimbia si kufika
To run is not to reach your destination.
Swahili Proverb

January Makamba and Ismail Ladhu Jussa first formally met in 2010 in the Bunge building on Dar es Salaam Avenue in Dodoma. A small, dusty city at the geographic center of Tanzania, Dodoma is where the Bunge (Parliament) has met since the country’s capital was relocated from Dar es Salaam in the 1970s at the height of Tanzania’s political and economic development vision known as Ujamaa. About two kilometers east of the legislature lies the green and yellow painted headquarters of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), situated between Madaraka (“power/mandate”) and Mwangaza (“light”) Avenues. Most would say that, having governed for more than half a century, the halls of the CCM building are where the madaraka of Tanzania’s government really lies.

That January Makamba and Ismail Jussa would come to meet in Dodoma seems inevitable. They were rising stars in their parties – the CCM and the opposition party Civic United Front (CUF), respectively – and, to many, central figures of Tanzania’s political future. They were informally introduced in Dar es Salaam years earlier in a sit-down arranged by a wealthy businessman and CCM financier. Both were also in Dodoma at the behest of the same person: then Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete. The reason that each was in Dodoma differed: Ismail Jussa to advance the core ideological issue that defined his politics and January Makamba to solve the political headache that was costing CCM internal party cohesion and votes on election
day – Zanzibar’s autonomy within Tanzania. Their pathways to Dodoma were also different.

January Makamba knew Dodoma well. After leading Kikwete’s successful 2005 presidential campaign, he became the president’s personal assistant at age thirty-one. As a child, he spent time in Dodoma as his father Yusuf Makamba – a leader in Tanzania’s war with Uganda – climbed the political ranks. By January’s fifth birthday, his father had secured a position in CCM’s secretariat. Yusuf would eventually serve as the party’s secretary-general (2007–2011). January first joined CCM as a “Young Pioneer” in primary school and described his ascendency to political prominence within the party as a matter of course.

Jussa – the name Ismail Ladhu Jussa prefers to use – was in Dodoma because he was plucked out of Zanzibar by President Kikwete to represent Zanzibari opposition’s interests in negotiating efforts to enhance peace and stability in the archipelago. The issue of Zanzibar’s autonomy within the Tanzanian union defines the politics of CUF and is one that activists have fought and died for since Tanzania was created in the 1960s. Jussa’s brief stint in Dodoma was not an effort to co-opt a staunch regime challenger. The government gave up on silencing him long before, when he turned down its first attempt to buy him out in his twenties in spectacular fashion. Approached by an elder, respected CCM leader who offered roughly US$ 25,000 to join CCM or quit politics – about 150 times the country’s per capita GDP at the time – he responded with a lament that the elder had decided “to be used as a pimp.”

When Jussa was born – in August 1971 – there was no political opposition in Tanzania. By the time multipartyism had been reintroduced, he had already been arrested for his civic activism as a student in pursuit of the dream of a prosperous, empowered Zanzibar. When the 2020 elections concluded – a contest marred by significant election fraud and intimidation – he reaffirmed his lifelong commitment to the betterment of Zanzibar from a hospital bed, saying he was “ready to make any sacrifice needed to make sure Zanzibar regains its freedom and our people live in a free and a just system.” Police had kidnapped him on election day and broke his leg and shoulder during a multiday interrogation.

Like Jussa, James Mbatia’s path into the opposition stood at the intersection of student activism, personal costs of political participation, and political reform. A founding member of Tanzania’s National Convention for Construction and Reform – Mageuzi (NCCR-Mageuzi; NCCR, for short), politics found their way to James Mbatia, rather than the other way around. As an engineering student nearing graduation from
the University of Dar es Salaam, he was expelled as a student activist not for political activism but for pushing the university to provide better conditions for students. The expulsion changed him – his career path to engineering derailed and he was displaced from his civic and social networks on campus. More fundamentally, his willingness to fight the system reemerged in the only alternative venue available at the time: opposition parties.

This book asks the following question: Why do people run for the legislature for opposition parties in electoral authoritarian regimes? On one hand, there appears to be little to be gained from running on opposition tickets in those settings: ruling parties will do nearly anything to hold onto power, and it is opposition candidates who pay the costs of campaigns thwarted by the government and the political, economic, and even physical repression that comes with fighting an authoritarian regime. When opposition candidates do win seats in the Parliament, they face ruling party majorities and supermajorities that undermine them. On the other hand, any chance of forcing those regimes out of office or into accepting reforms that curb corruption, deepen human rights, promote development, and protect civil liberties requires that formidable challengers bear the risks that come with candidacy and skillfully navigate their environment to enact change.

What we know about candidacy to date mostly comes from democracies and concludes that candidates weigh cost-benefit expectations regarding what they get out of being a legislator. This framework in its current form cannot explain candidacy in electoral authoritarian regimes. This is significant because regimes like that in Tanzania – where ruling party politics reign supreme – are not exceptions: they are the norm. Electoral authoritarianism is the most prevalent form of governance found in the developing world. The majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa are electoral authoritarian regimes, and it is in the subcontinent where the greatest number of the world's electoral authoritarian regimes are found. Every single year, candidates around the globe stand for opposition parties in authoritarian elections to fight for a better future that is more fair, just, and democratic, and yet, we as scholars cannot explain why. Approaches to political ambition that cannot account for the authoritarian character of contemporary elections ignore the most important normative questions about the fate of democracy in the twenty-first century.

My book offers an explanation of opposition candidacy in electoral authoritarian settings that emphasizes the role of early life experiences with civic activism and vocational careers in the civil society sector.
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in shaping later decisions to run for the opposition years or decades down the road. It follows Jussa, January, and James through experiences long before they considered running for office. It shows that Ismail Jussa and James Mbatia followed a path of civic activism and that this engagement translated later into opposition candidacy. January Makamba’s early life experiences in party politics positioned him to run for CCM, a phenomenon I call “career partisanship.” Their accounts combine with surveys of hundreds of legislative aspirants, the biographies of more than 700 Tanzanian legislators, qualitative interviews, and archival data to provide a rich, in-depth narrative of the politics of Tanzania, where the second longest-standing ruling party in the world currently governs.¹

The book illustrates how political paths not only shape the candidacy options available to prospective office seekers but also the goals they hope to achieve in doing so. I reveal that the prevailing framework that casts candidates as strategic decision makers can be adapted to electoral authoritarian settings, but what shapes the cost-benefit calculations in that approach all ties back to early life experiences with civic versus political party activism. Experiences in civic activism early in life underlie a desire to seek policy-oriented benefits that running for opposition parties can deliver, even in electoral defeat.

Who runs for office and why they run are the two most essential questions for elections, representation, and political accountability in democracies. They are even more important in electoral authoritarian regimes because the answers determine whether those regimes stand any chance of growing into democracies in the future.

I.1 THE PUZZLE OF OPPOSITION CANDIDACY

Even Democratic Elections Favor Incumbents and Ruling Parties

Theories of why political actors participate as voters and candidates commonly focus on some combination of calculated costs and benefits of action. It is generally assumed that the benefits motivating any given candidate hinge on their chance of winning. Theorizing that candidacy motivations rest on the chances of defeating incumbent officeholders and governing parties, however, is problematic. In the history of democracy, governing party defeat via the ballot box is uncommon. In electoral

¹ CCM’s reign is second only to the People’s Action Party, which has ruled Singapore since 1959.
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Authoritarian regimes, such outcomes are even rarer. In consideration of these dynamics alone, why political actors would fight important but, ultimately, losing battles at the ballot box is not at all obvious.

Elections in general have always strongly favored the incumbent party. From 1788 through 2011, there were 2,230 contested elections held in the world. Nearly 1,500 of them resulted in victory for the incumbent government. Opposition success rates in the first half of the twentieth century were less than 20 percent and in the nineteenth century rarely more than 10 percent. Examples of long-standing incumbent parties abound in democracies, particularly in Europe. Sweden’s Socialdemokratiska Arbetarpartiet was elected democratically to rule uninterrupted for forty-four years. Only two parties held government in Austria from 1945 to 2000: the Austrian People’s Party for twenty-five years, followed by thirty-five years of the Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs. Liechtenstein has experienced two periods of party government lasting more than twenty years; the same holds true for Luxembourg. Christian Democrats governed Italy for more than three decades after the Second World War, and the list goes on. It is true that opposition-induced turnover has been on the rise in the past half century. Nonetheless, nearly a third of the countries around the world have never experienced a turnover in the party in power through the ballot box (Przeworski 2015, 102).

At the level of the legislative candidate, the rates of incumbent success are similarly high. Reelection rates of standing congressional representatives in the United States rarely fall below 80 percent and House of Representatives reelection rates hover around 90 percent (Jackson 1994a, 40–41). Standing legislators have regularly won 80 to 85 percent of reelection campaigns in Germany (Boll 1994, 165) and Denmark (Pedersen 1994, 221). Perhaps the lowest odds facing challenger candidates are where individual incumbency and party hegemony align: during the forty years of the Liberal Democratic Party’s rule in Japan, the reelection rates of LDP incumbents averaged nearly 80 percent (Reed 1994, 282). The same holds for the Labor/Mapai tenure of thirty years, when 65 percent or more of incumbent legislators were elected in each election for the Israeli Knesset (Arian 1994). In Taiwan, a prototypical dominant party

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2 Calculated by the author based on Version 1 (September 1, 2011) of Przeworski et al.’s (2011) “Political Institutions and Political Events” (PIPE) dataset.
3 These statistics are reported in Templemann (2014b) and drawn from an original dataset created by that author.
system, “permanent representatives” who established the legislature in 1945 remained in office through the 1990s (Templemann 2014a), and the new seats introduced went to members who proved to be resilient in subsequent elections (Jackson 1994b, 270).

In sub-Saharan Africa, ruling parties have remained in control via the ballot box: across all multiparty elections held in Africa, less than twenty percent of them yielded turnover of the party in power. The legislature of Botswana – considered by many observers as one of Africa’s exemplary democracies and rated a 2 or 2.5 (“free”) by Freedom House from 1998 to 2020 – has been ruled for nearly fifty years by a single political party that will continue to govern at least until 2024. At the level of the individual legislator, rates of incumbent return to the legislature are comparably lower. Much is driven by internal party competition and reelection rates increase with the strength of legislative institutions (Opalo 2019).

**Opposition Chances Are Worse under Electoral Authoritarianism**

Electoral authoritarian regimes are settings in which ruling parties are subjected to electoral contests at regular intervals, but such competitions are so heavily stacked in favor of incumbents that the opposition has little chance to win. According to Schedler (2006, 3),

> Under electoral authoritarianism, elections are broadly inclusive (they are held under universal suffrage), as well as minimally pluralistic (opposition parties are allowed to run), minimally competitive (opposition parties, while denied victory, are allowed to win votes and seats), and minimally open (opposition parties are not subject to massive repression, although they may experience repressive treatment in selective and intermittent ways).

In the aggregate, these conditions mean that there is little or no potential for the opposition to defeat incumbents and ruling parties. From 1980 to 2014, only 13 percent of elections in authoritarian regimes have resulted in a change in the ruling party (Lucardi 2015). This is not surprising, as elections in such settings feature “hyper-incumbency advantages” (Greene 2007, 39) and are manipulated so much they cannot be classified as democratic (Schedler 2006). Prospects for the opposition are marginally better when challenger parties collaborate through pre-electoral coalitions (Wahman 2013); however, when they do not, parties fare even worse: odds of victory drop below one in ten (Lucardi 2015). In notable cases, the opposition manages to wrest power out of the hands
of the authoritarian guard. The most studied example is Mexico’s Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), which governed for seventy-one years uninterrupted. Against a rising tide of discontent and waning access to state resources, it was finally defeated in 2000 (Greene 2007). In Africa, the Parti Socialiste du Sénégal (PS) lost control of the presidency and the legislature in Senegal after 2000. Such outcomes are exceptions, rather than the norm. Even if opposition is strong and appears poised to defeat incumbents, it may not be permitted to do so.

First, incumbents who are facing possible defeat may intervene to ensure victory. Such was the case in the 2015 elections in Zanzibar, a semiautonomous region of Tanzania where Chama Cha Mapinduzi faced strong challenges from CUF. As official results from the Zanzibar Electoral Commission trickled in by constituency, parallel tallies showed opposition victory was imminent. After validating some 60 percent of constituencies, the commission suspended counting and annulled the polls. The opposition ultimately boycotted the new election held months later, marking the second time CUF had been robbed of victory at the vote-counting stage in Zanzibar’s multiparty history (Burgess 2009).

Gabon’s 2016 presidential elections offer another contemporary example where incumbents may appear to lose elections and still manufacture a victory through the tools of authoritarian rule such as fraudulent counting and manipulating election management bodies (Obangome 2016).

Second, incumbents who are voted out of power may simply not concede defeat. Incumbents may lose and admit loss but simply refuse to step down. Of the 660 instances in the global history of elections from 1788 to 2011 where opposition parties defeated incumbent governments, 57 of them never saw the opposition winner take office (Przeworski 2015). The incumbent government instead remained in power. Stated differently, even when the opposition wins an election officially, there is almost a 10 percent chance it will never make it to the state house or government. Gambia’s 2016 presidential elections nearly followed this narrative. After conceding defeat to the opposition, incumbent President Yahya Jammeh backtracked and instead insisted that the victory of his challenger Adama Barrow was fraudulent. He remained in power for nearly two additional months until international actors negotiated his exit (Bleck and van de Walle 2018, 3). Laurent Gbagbo remained in power for a year after his 2010 election defeat in Côte d’Ivoire until he was deposed by the military with the support of the United Nations and France.

Third, incumbents who anticipate defeat in an impending election may delay or indefinitely suspend elections or selectively ban opposition
parties. Elections and competition are only guaranteed to the extent that they serve the goals of ruling regimes. Leaders may shutter electoral institutions altogether after learning that fraud and repression alone will not guarantee victory (Thompson and Kuntz 2006).

Alongside the prospects of electoral defeat, it is also notable that opposition challengers in electoral authoritarian regimes bear the risk of a different kind of loss. Opposition candidates and supporters risk repression and physical harm, especially around election times. Using violence against opposition candidates may be electorally advantageous in that it represses dissent and protest (Brass 2003, Charurvedi 2005), mobilizes supporters (Wilkinson 2004), and/or captures new voters (Collier and Vicente 2014, Wilkinson and Haid 2009). Some candidates who are poised to defeat incumbents may never take office because they lose their homes, businesses, or lives.

In sum, the opposition’s prospects are poor in electoral authoritarian regimes. Incumbency advantages predominate in many types of regimes, and the asymmetries of competition are especially severe in authoritarian settings. Even in the rare event that the opposition is strong enough to rival the ruling party, incumbents can ignore election results or cancel the polls. Little of the promise of competition that electoral authoritarian regimes offer the opposition is guaranteed.

Yet, Opposition Candidacy Is Ubiquitous

Given the barriers to success in electoral authoritarian regimes, opposition candidacy seems like it should be an empirical irregularity. A review of authoritarian elections in the world shows the opposite: opposition candidates proliferate in legislative contests. Figure 1.1 illustrates this pattern, visualizing constituency-level election data from countries around the world. The figure is created with data from the Constituency-Level Election Archive (CLEA), a resource that records constituency-level election data from more than 1,800 elections in 162 countries. Focusing on majoritarian systems, I calculated the average number of candidates per constituency for each legislative election included in the CLEA dataset. Making the conservative assumption that ruling parties run candidates in every constituency, I estimated the average number of opposition candidates. Straus and Taylor (2012), for example, estimate 58 percent of elections in Africa from 1990 to 2007 featured repression and about 20 percent of them resulted in twenty or more deaths (Bekoe 2012).
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Figure 1.1 shows that the average number of opposition candidates in single-member districts is much higher. In competitive democracies the fourth or fifth candidate in a race or, nationally, the fourth or fifth most powerful party, has little chance to win. In electoral authoritarian regimes the prospects of opposition victory are even lower. And yet, the average number of opposition candidates for the legislature in these regimes is between three and four.

We know that electoral authoritarian settings are ones in which parameters of benefits of office, prospects of victory, and costs of running for office differ in ways that should predict low rates of opposition candidacy. And yet, we see that these regimes actually feature more opposition candidates as the total number of candidates minus one. The figure shows the distribution of national averages of opposition candidates per constituency for single-member district systems across electoral authoritarian regimes.\(^5\)

In contrast to foundational work in political science that predicts two-party competition in single-member district settings (Duverger 1954), Figure 1.1 shows that the average number of opposition candidates in single-member districts is much higher. In competitive democracies the fourth or fifth candidate in a race or, nationally, the fourth or fifth most powerful party, has little chance to win. In electoral authoritarian regimes the prospects of opposition victory are even lower. And yet, the average number of opposition candidates for the legislature in these regimes is between three and four.

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\(^5\) This figure uses Wahman and Teorell’s (2013) regime classification scheme because of its superior data coverage in contemporary elections. Elsewhere, I rely on Morse’s (2019) approach, which focuses on sub-Saharan Africa, and Schedler (2013), which runs from 1972 to 2004. The figure does not include mixed-member systems with both majoritarian and proportional constituencies.
challengers than democracies do. These two seemingly incompatible facts shape the puzzle this book engages.

1.2 EXISTING EXPLANATIONS OF LEGISLATIVE CANDIDACY

Election challengers often face little chance of victory but they endure. Even in settings where opposition supporters are not regularly targeted by the government and are allowed to exist without significant interference, they face substantial barriers to victory. So why then would anyone ever run for the opposition in general, much less in electoral authoritarian regimes? The existing literature offers some insight into the motivations of candidates that can be adapted to the puzzle of opposition candidacy in electoral authoritarian regimes.

The Rational Office Seeker

For decades, scholars have looked for the answer to the question of political candidacy in the same place: the rational, utility-maximizing assumptions underlying many theories of political behavior, including participation and candidacy. They rest on the idea that political actors consider the costs and benefits of a given set of choices and act upon whichever choice will deliver the greatest expected benefit. Strategic consideration of political ambition guides the decisions of prospective candidates (Aldrich 2011, Schlesinger 1966). Throughout the book, I generally refer to this approach as the strategic candidacy framework.

This theoretical approach has dominated studies of why people run for office in advanced democracies and this is for good reason: politicians generally act strategically and manifest behavior consistent with their political goals. Black (1972), Rohde (1979), and others offer that actors consider running with a political party and compare the expected utility of a number of alternatives; this provides a framework in which opposition versus ruling party candidacy decisions can be analyzed. The payoff of running is shaped by the benefits of winning and holding office, the costs of campaigning, and the chances of winning.

This approach has some intuitive appeal but it cannot tell us much about opposition candidacy. The disadvantages that opposition parties and their candidates face under electoral authoritarianism are constitutive of those regimes. An “uneven playing field” is the critical feature that distinguishes them from democracies (Levitsky and Way 2010a). Even