

POPULAR REACTIONS TO STATE REPRESSION: OPERATION MURAMBATSVINA IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

In May 2005, the government of Zimbabwe launched Operation Murambatsvina (OM), a state-sponsored campaign to stifle independent economic and political activity in the country's urban areas. This article employs a national probability sample survey to analyse the popular reactions of ordinary Zimbabweans to this landmark event. It shows that the application of state repression succeeds at some goals, fails at others, and has powerful unintended effects. We report that the scope of OM was wide and that the main victims of OM were younger, unemployed families whom state security agents saw as potential recruits for social unrest. Whereas OM undoubtedly disrupted the informal economy, we show that it did not succeed in banishing urban dwellers to rural areas or permanently shutting down illicit trade. Moreover, the crackdown thoroughly discredited the police and other state institutions. We also demonstrate that state repression emboldened its victims, deepening polarisation between political parties and fortifying the ranks of Zimbabwe's opposition movement.

RULERS WHO GAIN OFFICE THROUGH VIOLENCE are prone to resort to repression; they are especially likely to do so when they run out of options for governing. If they risk losing elections or confront an empty treasury, then the urge to cling to power may easily tempt such rulers to call out armed forces against their own citizens. Yet the application of state violence is an extreme policy choice whose consequences are particularly unpredictable under conditions of political or economic crisis.

Born as a liberation movement, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government of Robert Mugabe has never shied away from violence. The harsh repression of political dissent in Matabeleland

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in the early 1980s is only the most blatant example.¹ A quarter century later, ZANU-PF has exhausted its capacity for good governance.² It is now able to extend its tenure only through a series of increasingly disputed elections marred by intimidation, vote buying, and ballot fraud. For abusing its political opponents, the Mugabe government has been driven into international isolation, mainly by the Western powers but also from selected members of the African Union. And, by embarking on an ill-considered and chaotically implemented programme of land seizures, it has turned the country from an agricultural exporter to a needy recipient of foreign food aid. By 2005, as a result of gross economic mismanagement, the government was essentially bankrupt and desperate to gain access to dwindling supplies of foreign exchange.

In May of that year, in the aftermath of parliamentary elections that confirmed that ZANU-PF had lost political control of Zimbabwe's urban areas, the government cracked down. Its security apparatus launched a massive 'urban clean up' campaign called Operation Murambatsvina (OM) that was justified as a strategy to eradicate illegal dwellings and eliminate informal trade. As with earlier attacks on journalists and opposition parties, colonial-style legislation was invoked, in this case to regulate how people could house themselves or make a living. Analysts and observers inside and outside the country commented that the crackdown was performed in an indiscriminate manner and with excessive force. Because it breached national and international laws guiding evictions and undermined the livelihoods of large numbers of people, the operation was broadly condemned as a gross violation of human rights.

This article measures the popular reactions of ordinary Zimbabweans to OM by means of a national probability sample survey. Administered in October 2005 as part of Afrobarometer Round 3 in Zimbabwe, the survey instrument contained a battery of questions about the impact of the OM campaign on the residential and economic circumstances of respondents. These data cast light on important questions: Who were the victims of OM? What hardships did they experience? How did they react to repression? By comparing the economic conditions and political affiliations of

1. Disturbing accounts of the human toll are given by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980 to 1988* (Legal Resources Foundation, Harare, 1997) and Richard Werbner, *Tears of the Dead* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991). On systematic electoral violence, see Norma Kriger, 'ZANU-PF strategies in general elections, 1980–2000: discourse and coercion', *African Affairs* 104 (2005), pp. 1–34. On the violence associated with land invasions and crackdowns on journalists, see Stephen Chan, *Robert Mugabe: A life of power and violence* (I.B. Taurus, London, 2003) and Andrew Meldrum, *Where We Have Hope: A memoir of Zimbabwe* (Atlantic Monthly Press, New York, 2004).

2. For an insightful collection of current analyses by a variety of Zimbabwean commentators, see David Harold-Berry (ed.), *Zimbabwe: The past is the future* (Weaver Press, Harare, 2004).

Zimbabwean citizens in late 2005 with the results of previous surveys, it is also possible to arrive at conclusions about whether the ZANU-PF government helped or hurt itself by cracking down.

As an instrument of governance, state repression is crude and costly. If the balance of power favours the government, then deployment of the police and army against citizens may achieve certain short-term objectives. For example, the crackdown in Zimbabwe may have temporarily met the primary policy goal of preempting political protest. It may even have had a wider scope of indirect effects — for example, in deepening the psychological trauma of Zimbabwean citizens — than initially intended. But it clearly failed to meet key official objectives. According to our survey data, OM did not lead to a massive relocation of populations from urban to rural areas or to the permanent demise of the informal economy. Most importantly, the use of repression prompted a backlash of unintended consequences. In Zimbabwe, a strategy of coercion ultimately undermined the legitimacy of key state institutions, notably the police force, and boosted overt political support for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the main opposition party. It may even have emboldened the populace, particularly the very victims of state repression.

Anatomy of a crackdown

On 17 May 2005, contingents of Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) swooped down on street vendors who were plying their trade on the streets, squares, and corners of Harare's central business district. They confiscated or destroyed the goods on sale — including food, flowers, clothes, shoes, and curios — arrested the traders, and assaulted anyone who resisted. The campaign against informal trade soon spread to suburban flea markets in Harare's elite northern suburbs and into the sprawling, southern 'high density areas', where the taxi operators who sustain the commuter transport system were prevented from purchasing scarce fuel on the black market. 'Police will leave no stone unturned in their endeavour to flush out economic saboteurs', police spokesman Chief Superintendent Oliver Mandipaka told the state media.³

Within days, public anger at the raids boiled over. Faced with an economy that had shrunk by 40 percent over five years, an unemployment rate of at least 70 percent, and triple-digit inflation, many Zimbabweans had turned to the informal sector as a source of livelihood and survival. Government policies that misguidedly tried to control consumer prices had driven basic commodities from the shelves of the country's supermarkets and into the hands of private entrepreneurs who sold them more or less covertly at

3. 'Zimbabwe police target minibuses', *BBC News*, 24 May 2005.

higher market prices. Indeed, many Zimbabweans benefited from informal trade, whether via proceeds from sales, by gaining access to otherwise unavailable goods, or by evading taxes. When the authorities sought to seize these sources of lost revenue, some people took to the streets in protest, for example barricading township roadways and engaging in running, stone-throwing battles. The government retaliated by putting security forces on high alert: convoys of armed soldiers were sent into the townships, and police roadblocks were set up at entrances to the city.

At the same time, the scope of the onslaught widened, now targeting, without warning, the homeless and the poorly housed. On 24 May, the City of Harare Commission announced that residents must demolish all structures deemed illegal, including roadside kiosks, backyard workshops, rental rooms, and shack dwellings. Across Harare, police bulldozed unapproved structures and set fire to furniture and other household goods. Hapless family members — old and young, male and female alike — were loaded onto lorries and trucked to hastily established and unprepared transit camps where they were left in the open with minimal shelter — often no more than plastic sheeting — in the winter cold. And, beyond the capital city, the crackdown extended to urban areas countrywide; it was especially harsh in Bulawayo and Mutare, but it also reached other provincial centres such as Gweru, Kadoma, Kwekwe, Chinhoyi, Marondera, and Victoria Falls. Those who were evicted were instructed to return to their ‘homes’ in Zimbabwe’s rural areas regardless of whether they were born and bred urbanites or second- or third-generation descendants of immigrants from Malawi and Mozambique.

The authorities explained the cleanup campaign — codenamed ‘Operation Murambatsvina’ — as an effort at urban renewal aimed at ending the filth and crime associated with the more unsavory parts of the informal economy. The official translation was ‘Operation Restore Order’, although this appellation emphasised a rehabilitative goal and arose only after pockets of popular resistance emerged. A more accurate translation from the Chishona would be ‘one who refuses dirt’ or, more colloquially, ‘Operation Drive Out Rubbish’, which conveys the cavalier disregard with which the government treated its own citizens. As always, Zimbabweans invented their own nicknames: elite commentators dubbed the scorched-earth strategy ‘Operation Murambavanhu’ meaning ‘Operation Anti-People’, and ordinary folk called it a ‘tsunami’, which was an apt description of the flattened landscape left behind in Mbare *musika* (the central market) in downtown Harare.

Why did the government resort to such severe internal repression? The most plausible interpretation is that OM was an effort by ZANU-PF to reassert economic and political control in the aftermath of the 31 March 2005 parliamentary elections.

In the run up to the election, the government had tried to stock the shops with consumer goods and keep prices down. In a brazen attempt to

buy votes, the government announced a ten-fold increase in the minimum wage for domestic workers on the day before voting. Traditional political leaders who were loyal to ZANU-PF were rewarded with increased salaries, four-wheel drive vehicles, electrification of homesteads, and, for some, promises of promotion to the Senate. And the rank and file of the army and police were kept well fed even as the country slipped into its most serious food shortage since independence with an estimated one-third of the population in need of relief. The ruling party even used food as a weapon among the electorate: it directed the distribution of relief supplies to its own supporters, denied it to known opponents, and threatened to withhold food in the future from anyone who voted for the opposition.

Yet the costs of a profligate election campaign financed by printing currency and deficit spending could not be avoided indefinitely. In the aftermath of the election, the government was forced to increase the price of maize meal and bread, the staples of the Zimbabwean diet, by 50 and 30 percent, respectively. Petrol was suddenly unavailable. Warned by the Central Intelligence Organisation that price increases and commodity shortages could spark food riots, the Joint Operations Command seems to have recommended a preemptive strike to nip protest in the bud and disperse prospective demonstrators to the rural hinterland.⁴ At the same time, the government sought to regain control over the vital resource of foreign currency. Not content to extract such reserves from commercial farms, industrial firms, and international hotel chains, the government sought also to seize the US dollars and South African rands that were freely circulating in the informal sector. While blaming black marketeers for hoarding goods, creating artificial shortages, and driving up prices,⁵ the authorities' real motivation seems to have been to recapture official control over sales taxes and hard currencies.

Politically, the parliamentary election of March 2005 had failed to boost the government's legitimacy. In the closing days of the election campaign, the opposition MDC had routinely attracted larger and more enthusiastic crowds than had dutifully appeared at ZANU-PF rallies.⁶ Yet, when the results were announced, ZANU-PF had increased its share of parliamentary

4. The Joint Operations Command - comprised of army, police, prisons, and intelligence heads - coordinates military and security affairs and, on these matters, now carries greater policy weight than the civilian cabinet. A senior state intelligence officer was quoted as saying that 'the operation is meant to reduce the number of people in the central business district so that, if violence erupts, it would be easy to contain.' *Zim Online* (South Africa) www.zimonline.co.za, 24 May 2005. Journalist Baffour Ankomah, usually sympathetic to Mugabe, also reported that 'the operation was the brainchild of Zimbabwe's intelligence community' designed to forestall 'a Ukrainian-style revolution' *New African* (London), October 2005, reprinted in *The Herald* (Harare), 4-5 October 2005.

5. Government of Zimbabwe, 'Response of the Government of Zimbabwe to the Report by the UN Special Envoy on Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order' (Harare, 2005).

6. 'Rallying cry belies Mugabe's fear of voter revolt', *The Times* (UK), 31 March 2005.

seats compared to the previous election.⁷ This sleight of hand was only possible because of a string of irregularities. In the pre-election period, the electoral roll was allegedly inflated with ghost voters, rights of free association and expression were compromised by restrictive legislation, the state-controlled media systematically favoured the incumbents, and impartial international election observers were denied entry into the country. On the day of the election itself, polling stations were disproportionately concentrated in rural areas and at least one in ten voters was turned away from the polls for want of correct documentation. Most importantly, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) announced official results that, for many constituencies, bore little resemblance to the totals and distributions of votes recorded by observers and party agents on the spot.⁸ Even ZEC's own preliminary and final figures varied, sometimes widely, raising serious credibility problems.

Despite its success at manipulating the 2005 election, ZANU-PF could not conceal the fact that it had lost control of Zimbabwe's major urban centres. In a pattern reminiscent of the previous parliamentary election in 2000, the opposition MDC won all seven parliamentary seats in Bulawayo and all but one of Harare's 18 seats. In this light, OM appeared as an act of retribution by a vituperative ruling party against a non-compliant electorate. An urban office worker complained that, 'first Mugabe took the land, then our jobs, now our food. He wants to kill us. People say Mugabe is punishing us because we voted for the MDC'.⁹ Elaborating on this sentiment, MDC spokesmen accused the government of trying to provoke violent reactions from city residents in order to justify rule by decree under a state of emergency.¹⁰

Whatever the motivation behind the crackdown, it had profound social impact. In a toughly worded report in July 2005, the United Nations described OM as a 'disastrous venture' that provoked a 'humanitarian crisis of immense proportions'.¹¹ The United Nations' special envoy, Anna Tibaijuka, went on to say that:

Hundreds of thousands of women, men and children were made homeless, without access to food, water and sanitation, or health care. Education for thousands of school age children has been disrupted. Many of the sick, including those with HIV and

7. Compared to the 2000 parliamentary election, ZANU-PF's share of elected seats rose from 62 to 78, and the MDC's share fell from 57 to 41. With the support of an additional 30 appointed MPs in the 150-seat House, ZANU-PF therefore enjoyed a two-thirds majority, enough to change the constitution.

8. Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 'Statement on the 2005 parliamentary elections', Harare, 3 April 2005. See also Carole Andrews and Bryn Morgan, 'Zimbabwe after the 2005 parliamentary elections', *Research Paper No. 05/58* (UK House of Commons Library, London, August 2005).

9. 'Police in Zimbabwe arrest 9000 traders', *Guardian* (UK), 24 May 2005.

10. 'Zimbabwe government continues blitz', *Associated Press*, 5 June 2005.

11. 'U.N. condemns Zimbabwe for bulldozing urban slums', *New York Times*, 23 July 2005.

AIDS, no longer have access to care. The vast majority of those directly and indirectly affected are the poor and disadvantaged segments of the population. They are, today, deeper in poverty, deprivation and destitution, and have been rendered more vulnerable.¹²

The secretary-general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, added that 'a catastrophic injustice' had been perpetrated with 'indifference to human suffering': 'I call on the government to stop these forced evictions and demolitions immediately, and to ensure that those who orchestrated this ill-advised policy are held fully accountable for their actions'.¹³

Yet, only days later, the resident UNDP representative in Harare noted that, in the face of international condemnation and despite government assurances to the contrary, a new round of demolitions and evictions was underway at Porta Farm, Harare's main informal settlement.¹⁴ Indeed, the government continued sporadically to persecute squatters, street children, and roadside vendors throughout the following year.¹⁵

The survey

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys on democracy, markets, and civil society, now conducted in 18 African countries.¹⁶ Following previous surveys in Zimbabwe in September 1999 and April 2004, a Round 3 study was undertaken from 9 to 26 October 2005, that is, after OM in May but before the Senate elections in November. Trained fieldworkers, who travelled together in small teams and were closely supervised on a daily basis, conducted 45-minute interviews in the language of the respondents' choice (Chishona, Sindebele, or English). The Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), a Zimbabwean non-governmental research organisation, performed all fieldwork.

The intended sample of 1200 respondents was designed to represent the voting-aged population, 18 years or older. The sample covered both urban (32 percent) and rural (68 percent) populations across all ten administrative provinces with probability proportional to population size. It was divided into two parts: a *main sample* of 1096 persons randomly selected via a multi-stage, clustered formula and an *independent sample* of 104 persons known to have been displaced by OM and randomly selected within selected transit

12. United Nations, Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe, Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka (United Nations, New York, 18 July 2005), p. 7.

13. 'UN chief Annan's statement on Zimbabwe demolitions', *Reuters*, 22 July 2005.

14. 'Zimbabwe steams ahead with demolitions', *Mail and Guardian* (SA), 26 July 2005.

15. See 'UN envoy says Zimbabwe's crisis is deepening', *Business Day* (SA), 7 December 2005 and 'New threat of urban demolition', *IRIN - Integrated Regional Information Networks* (UN), 7 April 2006.

16. For information on country coverage and research methods, see www.afrobarometer.org.

camps. The logic of the split sample was as follows: because OM involved the destruction of dwellings and rendered some people homeless, any such victims would not be captured in a representative sample in which one of the stages was the household. In the presentation that follows, any generalisations about adult Zimbabweans are based on the main random sample. To capture the effects of population displacement, this main sample is compared with the independent sample of persons in transit camps. But, to describe the characteristics and effects of OM victimisation, we compare victims with non-victims using data combined from both random samples.¹⁷

In practice, the survey team was able to complete 1048 returns from the main sample and 64 returns from the independent sample, totaling 1112 interviews overall. The number of returns fell slightly short because, in one transit camp, fieldwork was disrupted by unruly political elements affiliated with the ruling party, causing MPOI to abort the survey towards the very end. This unfortunate experience demonstrates that, as the political environment in Zimbabwe becomes ever more closed, occasions for impartial scientific research are rapidly diminishing.

The scope of the crackdown

How widespread were the effects of OM? The full scope of the crackdown was hard to judge because foreign journalists were banned from the country, and local reporters were constrained by tight media controls. Moreover, a nationwide fuel shortage made it difficult for anyone to observe far-flung events in multiple locations at first hand. Within the first two weeks, estimates began to circulate that 30,000 traders had been arrested or detained and that hundreds of thousands of shanty dwellers had been evicted.¹⁸ A useful survey in July 2005 of over 14,000 households in 26 high-density wards in Greater Harare concluded that over 70 percent had 'lost shelter' or 'lost their sources of income'.¹⁹ But all such estimates were based on partial documentation or unrepresentative samples. A more systematic, nationwide approach was required.

The first comprehensive effort to estimate the scope of OM was the United Nations' *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe* that we quoted above.

17. The sampling frame was the Government of Zimbabwe, Central Statistical Office, *Census 2000 Zimbabwe: Preliminary results summary* (Government Printer, Harare, 2003). In drawing the national probability sample, we followed the standard Afrobarometer sampling protocol, which can be found at <http://www.afrobarometer.org/sampling.html>. For ease of access to the present article, we did not burden the text with extensive methodological apparatus. If readers have queries about data collection or analysis, they are invited to visit the website or contact the authors directly.

18. 'Zimbabwe takes harsh steps in major cities to counter unrest', *New York Times*, 2 June 2005.

19. Action Aid International/Combined Harare Residents Association, *A Study on the Impact of 'Operation/Murambatsvina/Restore Order' in 26 Wards of Harare High Density Housing Areas* (AA/CHRA, Harare, July 2005).

The report, which was based on field visits to urban centres countrywide, divided OM victims into two groups: those *directly* affected and those *indirectly* affected. The United Nations special envoy Anna Tibaijuka defined and calculated the number of directly affected persons as the '700,000 people in cities across the country (who) have either lost their homes or livelihoods or both'.²⁰ She then applied 'a reasonable multiplier effect (to) bring the number of indirectly affected people to over 2.1 million'. Together, and allowing for overlap between categories, 'the (UN) mission estimates that the total population directly and indirectly affected . . . is about 2.4 million'.²¹

The government of Zimbabwe rejected this estimate. Minister of defence Sydney Sekeramayi accused Ms. Tibaijuka of 'whipping up the international community's emotions and sending a wrong message about Zimbabwe'.²² Minister of foreign affairs Simbarashe Mumbengegwi stated that the United Nations report was biased and, moreover, exaggerated the number of victims: 'throughout the report, submissions by the government are consistently referred to as "allegations" while those of the opposition . . . are taken as statements of fact'.²³

So who is right? As its own contribution to the debate about the scope of the crackdown, the Afrobarometer survey asked: 'Were you, or a member of your immediate family, affected by Operation Murambatsvina in any of the following ways?' The relevant effects included destruction of a home or dwelling, eviction from place of residence, destruction or closure of a business, arrest for engaging in illegal trade, or loss of a job. The responses ('yes', 'no', or 'don't know') generated two indicators. The first was a simple binary measure of whether families were *OM victims* ('yes' to *any* effect). The other was an additive index that probed the *extent of OM victimization* (the number of 'yes' responses given by each respondent on a scale from 0 to 5).

By either measure, OM had a wide impact on people's lives. Table 1 summarises that more than half (54 percent) of the main sample of adult Zimbabweans reported that their families were affected in one way or another.²⁴ In urban areas, more than three-quarters reported being

20. Report of the Fact-Finding Mission (2005), p. 8.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

22. 'Annan may take up Mugabe invite', *The Scotsman* (UK), 26 July 2005.

23. 'Mugabe hoping to sidestep Mbeki and Annan', *Sunday Independent* (SA), 24 July 2005. Zimbabwe's Ambassador to the UN also branded the report 'exaggerated', *BBC News*, 27 July 2005.

24. The margin of sampling error for a survey with 1048 respondents is plus or minus 3 percentage points at a 95 percent level of confidence. The confidence interval around the point estimate of 54 percent for OM victimization is therefore between 51 and 57 percent. This result almost exactly replicates the finding of an earlier survey conducted by the Mass Public Opinion Institute. Based on a national probability sample of similar size ($n = 1041$) and using the same question, MPOI found in July-August 2005 that 55 percent of respondents reported that they or their immediate families were affected. See Eldred Masunungure and Anyway Ndapadzwa, *Zimbabwe Elections, 2005: Post-Parliamentary survey report* (MPOI, Harare, August 2005).

Table 1. Incidence and extent of Operation Murambatsvina (OM) victimisation (percentage of respondents)

	<i>Adult Zimbabweans</i>	<i>Displaced persons</i>
OM victim		
Yes, affected in some way	54	100
No, not affected	46	0
Do not know	<1	0
Extent of OM victimisation		
One effect	13	23
Two effects	12	20
Three effects	9	9
Four effects	7	16
Five effects	14	31

affected (76 percent), whereas fewer than half (44 percent) made the same claim in rural areas. As expected, every respondent (100 percent) in the independent sample of displaced persons also said that they, or a family member, had been victimised. Moreover, displaced persons were more than twice as likely as average Zimbabweans to have suffered a complete array of five negative effects ranging from the destruction of a dwelling to the loss of a job. Indeed, by this measure, almost one-third (31 percent) of displaced persons were rendered destitute.

It is important to note that Afrobarometer figures are rough estimates. For one reason, the survey measured the impact of OM on family units, not just individuals. By asking about 'you or a member of your immediate family', we lost the ability to distinguish between adult and child victims. But we captured the reality that individual welfare in Zimbabwe is a function of collective circumstances; if one member of a family unit — defined flexibly in terms of the respondent's own subjective definition — loses a home or job, then other members of the unit will be negatively (and indirectly) affected. So our data refer to both *direct and indirect* effects of OM. With this proviso, and because the Afrobarometer defines OM victimisation in a fashion equivalent to the United Nations ('loss of home or livelihood or both'), we think that our study results can be compared with those of the Tibaijuka report.

As stated, the survey estimates that about 54 percent of the adult population of Zimbabwe was affected by OM. The official census reports a total population of Zimbabwe at 11.635 million in 2002.²⁵ An annual population growth rate of 1.1 percent produces a 2005 population of 12.023 million. Let us conservatively estimate that 2.023 million Zimbabweans

25. *Census 2002*, p.1.

have emigrated in search of political freedoms and economic opportunities.²⁶ Of the roughly 10 million people who remain behind, approximately 50 percent are under the age of 18.²⁷ Subtracting people under the voting age, we are left with an eligible population of about 5 million adults. If some 54 percent of these were affected, then the estimate of total OM victims (direct and indirect) must be raised to roughly 2.7 million.²⁸

This informed conjecture is slightly higher than that offered by the United Nations. There are two possibilities: either the Afrobarometer has overestimated the scope of OM effects²⁹ or the United Nations has underestimated the effects. Whatever the case, and unless all careful studies are wrong (which seems unlikely), the government of Zimbabwe appears to be incorrect in claiming that Anna Tibaijuka exaggerated the impact of OM.

What kinds of impact?

Beyond confirming the wide aggregate scope of the crackdown, survey data allow us to explore exactly who was affected and how.

Figure 1 addresses the latter question. It shows that OM victims were most likely to experience the destruction of a dwelling. A catastrophe of this sort reportedly struck all displaced persons and exactly half of all adult Zimbabweans or their families. In some cases, especially in squatter settlements, a primary residence was demolished and the family found themselves homeless.³⁰ More often, demolition was targeted at outbuildings (like workers' quarters, most of which were legal structures) or extensions (that sometimes failed to meet city building codes) that were leased out to renters as a means of supplementing household income.

As a result, not all demolitions resulted in eviction. Whereas about two-thirds of displaced persons reported being forcibly ejected from their homes, about one-third of other Zimbabweans said that this had happened to them or their family members. The police and local government authorities executed evictions in summary fashion, either without notice or with

26. This guesstimate is conservative compared to the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe's claim of 3.4 million Zimbabweans living abroad in 2004 (www.homelinkzimbabwe.com) and various journalistic accounts of 3 million or more, for example by Geoff Hill, *What Happens After Mugabe?* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2005), p. 2.

27. The World Bank's African Development Indicators says 43 percent are under age 14 (World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2004), p. 309.

28. Or, taking sampling error into account, between 2.55 and 2.85 million.

29. Survey respondents may have used an especially broad subjective definition when defining an OM victim as a member of their 'immediate family'. There is also a small risk that some victims were double-counted as members of more than one respondent's extended family. Either way, we doubt that we have undercounted.

30. Squatter settlements were unapproved, but many of them had existing court judgments that prevented the government from removing them without providing alternative accommodation. Some shacks in urban areas even had planning permission.

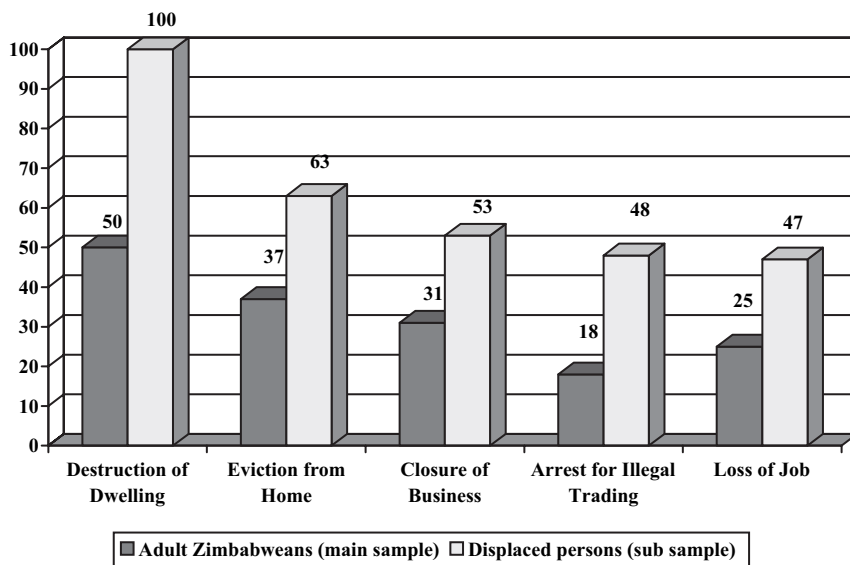


Figure 1. Reported effects of the Operation Murambatsvina (OM) campaign (percentage of respondents)

only the briefest of forewarnings, and always in violation of the law. The government never paid compensation for abandoned or destroyed property and only rarely provided evictees — usually its own supporters — with decent alternative housing. Instead, the cash-strapped government undertook to launch a crash programme to build new homes, a promise that it manifestly lacked the capacity to fulfil.³¹

Other Zimbabweans had their business premises destroyed, including roadside kiosks, home tuck shops, or stands at informal flea markets. The closure or razing of informal enterprises affected nearly a third of all families and more than half of all displaced persons. These numbers swell when those arrested for engaging in ‘illegal’ trade are also counted. Almost two in every ten among average Zimbabweans said that they (or someone from their immediate circle of relatives) were apprehended and required to pay ‘admission of guilt’ fines to regain their freedom. Moreover, one-quarter of the general public reported that they (or some close family member) lost a job consequent upon OM, a figure that doubled for displaced persons. In

31. ‘Msika officially launches operation Garikai’, *The Herald* (Harare), 30 June 2005. Also ‘Zimbabwe: operation live well struggles to take off’, IRIN - *Integrated Regional Information Networks* (UN), 19 August 2005.

other words, as well as losing their homes, half of the most severely affected Zimbabweans also lost livelihoods.

Who are the OM victims?

OM struck men and women with equal impact. There was a slight tendency for men to be victimised more often than women, but this difference was not statistically significant. But being a head of household, whether male or female, offered some measure of protection.

Instead, the crackdown was concentrated among younger, less-established people and their families. Overall, some 58 percent of youngsters (aged between 18 and 29 years) were victimised compared to 54 percent of middle-aged folks (30–49 years). Somewhat fewer (50 percent) older people (50 years or over) were affected, in part because many lived in rural areas far from the epicentre. As Figure 2 shows, the age effect was consistent for all kinds of OM consequences. Young people were more likely than old people to suffer a loss of property (dwelling or home) and especially likely to lose livelihood (by being arrested for trading or losing a business or job).

OM also targeted entrepreneurial elements. There was no difference in OM impact between those who were employed, either part time or full time, and those who were unemployed. But persons actively looking for a

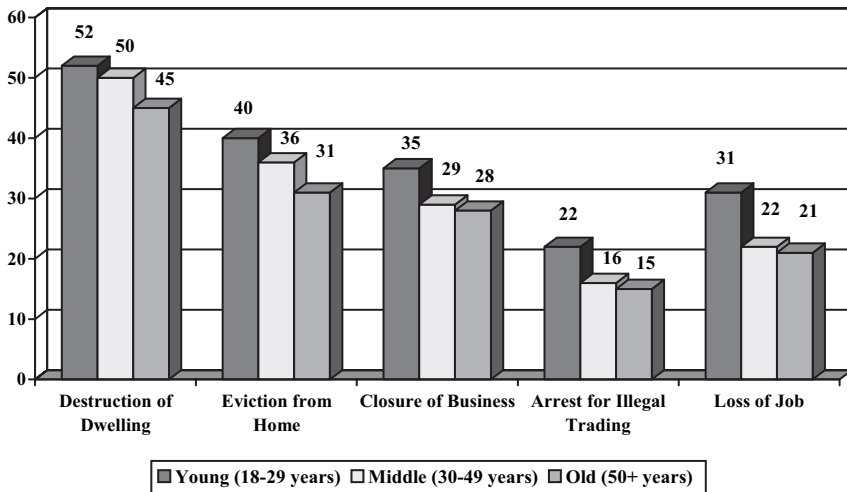


Figure 2. Operation Murambatsvina (OM) effects, by age (percentage of respondents)

job (or a better job than one presently held) were inordinately likely to get caught in the OM web (63 versus 48 percent). In other words, the principal victims of OM were younger people who were yet to become head of their own households but who were active jobseekers. Included in these numbers were ‘lumpen’ elements of no fixed abode or employment, who were available for easy mobilisation in any anti-state uprising.

What was the geographic impact of the crackdown? Figure 3 shows the provincial breakdown of those who had their homes or dwellings destroyed. It confirms that OM was a largely urban phenomenon with housing demolition occurring most frequently in Harare (72 percent) and Bulawayo (66 percent). Harare also experienced the largest proportions that had a business closed (63 percent) or suffered eviction from their homes (56 percent) (not shown). Bulawayo (38 percent) and Matabeleland South (33 percent) led the way in arrests for engaging in illegal trade. Mashonaland West, the rural homeland of President Robert Mugabe and a ruling party stronghold — but also a province with few major urban centres — escaped with the least reported impact.

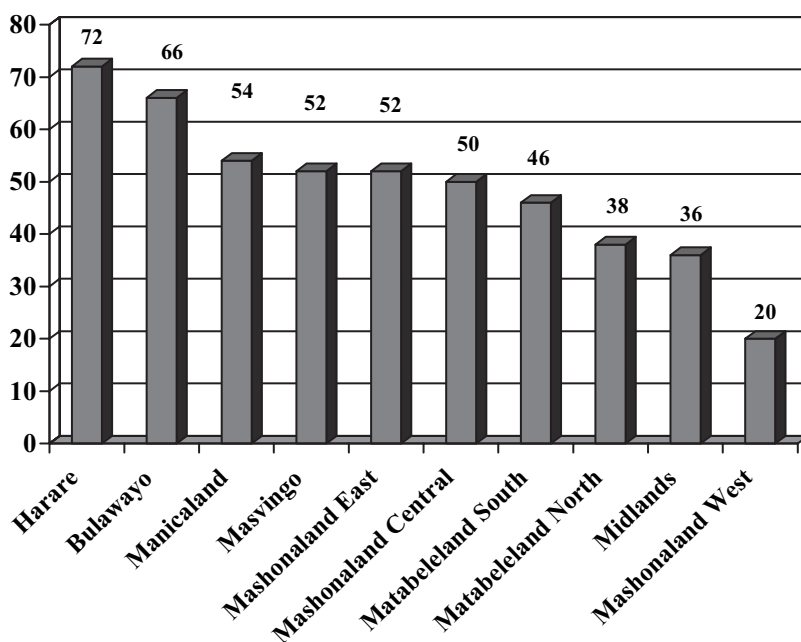


Figure 3. Reported destruction of dwelling, by province (percentage of respondents)

Were opposition supporters targeted?

OM followed close on the heels of Zimbabwe's parliamentary election of March 2005. Because this election confirmed that political opposition was centred in urban areas, there is reason to suppose that the crackdown constituted a form of collective punishment. As documented earlier, many Zimbabweans think that the government intended to reprimand opposition supporters for voting the 'wrong' way, that is, for casting their ballots for MDC parliamentary candidates.

But the survey data indicate that people who voted in the 2005 parliamentary election were *not* the primary targets of the state's repression. Overall, there was a slight tendency for abstainers, rather than voters, to later become OM victims (78 versus 72 percent).³² But the pattern varies across urban and rural areas. Abstainers were more likely to be targeted for *not* voting in the countryside, where party officials and youth militias had applied strong-arm pressures for villagers to vote for ZANU-PF. By contrast, voters were more likely to be victimised in towns, here presumably for voting *against* the government (67 versus 62 percent). As such, there is trace — although hardly overwhelming — evidence that OM was partly a device to rebuke urban voters for preferring opposition candidates. In both areas, the crackdown also affected people who had not registered to vote and who chose not to vote, perhaps because they thought that the electoral playing field was uneven.

Voting records also identify opposition sympathisers. Although the Afrobarometer did not ask respondents how they voted in the March parliamentary election, MPOI had done so in a previous survey in July–August 2005. Just under one-third (31 percent) had reported voting for ZANU-PF candidates, whereas 23 percent said that they had voted for MDC.³³ Most of the remainder declined to answer. Among self-ascribed partisans, more than two-thirds (71 percent) of MDC supporters subsequently became OM victims, whereas less than half (45 percent) of ZANU-PF supporters suffered the same fate. With this evidence of the partisan affiliations of respondents *before* the advent of OM, we can infer that MDC supporters were indeed somewhat likely to be affected by OM. But we cannot conclusively prove that they were targeted *because* of their affiliations with the opposition.

All told, the OM dragnet was cast so wide that it caught supporters of the ruling party as well as its opponents. While opposition individuals or blocs may have been singled out, an equally plausible story allows that the security apparatus cracked down on *any* young unemployed — or

32. In Zimbabwe, as in other African countries, young and unemployed people are least likely to vote.

33. Mass Public Opinion Institute, Zimbabwe Elections, 2005 (MPOI, Harare, 2005) p. iii.

underemployed, or informally employed — person who was a potential recruit for anti-state protest.

The (limited) movement of OM victims

How have OM victims fared? Survey respondents were asked about their movements in the wake of the OM onslaught.

For instance, where did the homeless find sanctuary? Only small proportions (16 percent overall and just 14 percent of displaced persons) were ever transported to a transit camp set up by churches or the government. Instead, many more people who lost their homes (42 percent overall and 58 percent of displaced persons) stayed in the open, often by the roadside, at least for the period immediately after they were evicted. Most of these OM victims were left entirely to their own devices and did not receive relief from any governmental or non-governmental agency. In the absence of organised forms of relief, people fell back on the informal ties of kinship. Three of four OM victims (77 percent) and nine of ten displaced persons (89 percent) reported moving in with relatives.

One of the apparent objectives of OM was to disperse selected urban populations to rural areas, where ZANU-PF could more easily oversee their activities. In the short run, the authorities seemed to meet this goal: some 68 percent of OM victims (53 percent of displaced people) reported relocating to a rural area (see Table 2). But we have reason to believe that any such movements were temporary.

Rather, in the medium to long run, the government failed to induce a mass movement of people from urban to rural areas. To track population movements, the survey explicitly asked, 'How recently did you come to stay in this area?' We were especially keen to identify displaced persons who, in October 2005, said 'within the last six months', a period within the time frame of the cleanup campaign. The first thing to notice is that just one in 20 adults (5 percent) acknowledged having arrived in their present

Table 2. Post-Operation Murambatsvina (OM) population movements (percentage of respondents)

	<i>Adult Zimbabweans</i>		<i>Displaced persons</i>
	<i>All</i>	<i>OM victims</i>	
Taken into transit camp	8	16	14
Stayed in the open	20	42	58
Moved in with relatives	40	76	89
Relocated to a rural area	35	68	53

residential location within this interval. On the face of it, this figure does not seem to represent an inordinately large aggregate population shift, especially over and above movements during more normal periods. For example, in the six months *before* OM, almost as many people (4 percent) reported changing their area of residence.

Second, at the time of the survey interview in October 2005, there was significantly more recent residential turnover recorded by those living in urban areas (7 percent) than among those living in rural areas (4 percent). In other words, if population displacement occurred, it did so more *within* urban areas than *from* urban to rural areas. This pattern is confirmed by answers to the question: 'Where were you living before you came to stay here?' Of those who moved in the last six months, more people replied that they moved from one urban area to another (39 percent) than from an urban to a rural area (23 percent).³⁴ In fact, just as many people also moved *within* rural areas (from one communal or resettlement area to another) as moved from urban to rural areas. In short, we find no evidence of a distinctive mass wave of urban–rural out-migration in Zimbabwe during 2005.

We do not mean to imply that OM did not cause population movements. It clearly did. Among those who moved within the six-month period from May to October 2005, for example, two-thirds reported being OM victims. But we want to qualify the nature of the connection between victimisation and displacement. Many fewer people changed residential areas than might have been expected, which suggests that those who were evicted found alternative shelter close to home. Indeed, almost twice as many survey respondents reported moving in with relatives in *urban* areas than in rural areas.³⁵ In other words, evictees and displaced persons in Zimbabwe's cities and towns generally put down new roots elsewhere in towns, leading to even greater overcrowding within the surviving urban housing stock.

Moreover, it is not unreasonable to expect that many of those forcibly removed to so-called 'home' areas in the rural hinterland would sooner or later drift back into towns. In our survey, two-fifths of those who reported being relocated to rural 'homelands' were actually interviewed in an *urban* area, which suggests that they had not stayed long in the countryside. As such, the government apparently did not generally succeed in its goal to rusticate urbanites.

The resilient informal economy

Another stated goal of the cleanup campaign was to put an end to unapproved trading, especially where taxes were evaded and exchanges of

34. Note: the percentage figures should be treated with caution as the number of cases is small (n = 56).

35. Sixty percent of these respondents were urban versus 34 percent rural.

foreign currency were involved. Over the previous decade in Zimbabwe, the informal sector expanded greatly, first as a planned response to structural adjustment reforms and later as a spontaneous substitute for a shrinking formal economy. By the time of the survey, over one-third of all Zimbabwean adults (36 percent) and nearly half of urban dwellers (47 percent) acknowledged having engaged during the previous year in 'buying and selling goods'. These trading activities were a vital means for the unemployed to generate income and a valuable sideline for professionals and employees faced with the declining purchasing power of wages and salaries. Indeed, by 2005, people with jobs were almost equally liable as the jobless to enter into informal trade.³⁶

One would expect unofficial entrepreneurs to be especially vulnerable to expropriation in the government's sweep of the informal sector. This is the outcome that came to pass. Whereas just over one-quarter of non-traders (27 percent) were affected by OM, a proportion approaching half of the informal traders we interviewed (44 percent) were caught up in the sweep. These individuals lost either a dwelling or a business or were arrested for illegal trading, and some individuals (54 percent of those affected) suffered a combination of three such consequences.

Did the government of Zimbabwe succeed in stamping out the informal sector? Our evidence suggests not. The hallmarks of the informal economy in Africa are adaptability and resilience. Despite the attack on their livelihoods, the self-reliant occupants of this sector in Zimbabwe quickly tried to recover. Among OM victims, fully four in ten continued to operate a business from their homes in October 2005,³⁷ a figure that constitutes some 56 percent of those whose businesses were destroyed or closed.

We also asked survey respondents to record changes in their level of involvement in informal trading activities across time, that is, between the period before OM ('six months ago') and the present time ('now'). Among those who experienced direct impact from OM, some two in three (68 percent) said that they nevertheless presently continued to 'buy and sell goods' on informal markets. Remarkably, one in ten OM victims (10 percent) reported *starting* to engage in informal trade in the *aftermath* of OM, even when they had never done so before. The architects of the OM campaign clearly underestimated the difficulties involved in breaking the backbone of the popular economy.

In fact, the overt impact of OM on the informal economy seems to have been restricted to the small minority who ceased trading activities. In October 2005, just 22 percent said that they no longer operated informal enterprises established before May 2005.

36. 35 percent among the former versus 37 percent among the latter.

37. 41 percent among the random sample of adults, 45 percent among displaced persons.

Of course, even if the majority did jump back in to informal trade, they often had to do so in clandestine fashion or by dodging the law. Small business operators also had to contend with damaged assets, reduced stocks, and a more anaemic informal sector than before. But it is important to note that the proportions that continued to trade were almost identical among OM victims and those *unaffected* (68 versus 66 percent). This constitutes striking evidence of the limited impact of OM at curtailing the 'black market' activities that it was specifically designed to stop.

The (de)legitimisation of state institutions

The government may have expected that OM would help to consolidate state power. On the one hand, OM marked a shift to a stronger state and a more authoritarian form of domination. On the other hand, the state was also weakened because its popular legitimacy was undermined. From the perspective of public opinion, state institutions appeared less trustworthy after the crackdown than before. To illustrate, the proportion of the adult population who expressed trust in a core array of state institutions — the parliament, the electoral commission, the courts of law, and the army — fell by 6 percentage points between April 2004 and October 2005 (from an average of 48 percent to an average of 42 percent).³⁸

The officers of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) were the campaign's principal agents.³⁹ They took the lead in ordering people to destroy dwellings, close businesses, and board trucks to relocation camps. As such, the police represented the sharp end of the stick of state repression. Once held in fairly high esteem, the ZRP stood to lose popular respect as the state institution most closely associated with the OM crackdown.

Indeed, in recent times, public trust has slumped further for the police than for any other state institution. In April 2004, a majority of adult Zimbabweans (52 percent) actually said that they trusted the police 'somewhat' or 'a lot'; by October 2005, this proportion had dropped by a precipitous 13 points (to 39 percent). But can this decline be attributed to the cleanup operation that began in May 2005? We think so. The latest Afrobarometer survey shows that trust in the ZRP held reasonably steady among those who were *unaffected* by OM, declining just two points (to 50 percent).⁴⁰ By contrast, trust in the police fell by 23 points (to just 29

38. For 2004 estimates of institutional trust, see Michael Bratton, Annie Chikwana, and Tulani Sithole, 'Propaganda and public opinion in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23, 1 (2005), pp. 77–108.

39. According to an official report, 'Police had been approached by local authorities to help in enforcing Council by-laws, which were being ignored . . . (and) to relocate street kids, vagrants, touts and vendors who were causing chaos in town.' Zimbabwe Republic Police, 'Zimbabwe Republic Police response to allegations of deaths suffered during Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order', (Harare, August 2005).

40. This slight adjustment lies within the margin of sampling error for a single survey.

percent) among those who reported victimisation. We take this as a clear indication that the police's sagging reputation was directly attributable to their role as agents of OM.

As further evidence, we note a very strong relationship between OM impact and the proportion of people who think that it is 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to 'get help from the police'.⁴¹ Among those unaffected by OM, only four in ten (40 percent) hold this view, thus reinforcing the impression that many Zimbabweans continue to regard the police as an accessible source of help. By contrast, among OM victims, more than seven in ten (73 percent) regard the police as unhelpful, most probably because they have recent direct experience of rough treatment at the hands of the ZRP.

While the legitimacy of the state is declining in Zimbabwe, and OM accelerated this trend, ordinary people still prefer a rule of law. When asked what they would do if wrongfully arrested — including for 'illegal' trading — three-quarters of adult Zimbabweans (75 percent) said that they would 'lodge a complaint through proper channels'. To be sure, OM victims are significantly less likely to say so,⁴² but seven in ten still claim that they would use an approved, legal form of redress.

Where OM victims depart markedly from other Zimbabweans, however, is with regard to police corruption. Almost three times as many victims as non-victims (14 versus 5 percent) would seek release from wrongful arrest by 'offer(ing) a tip or a bribe', presumably to a police officer. As one 39-year-old mother of three said: 'I try to supplement the family budget by selling foodstuffs on the black market. However, my earnings are not much as we are continuously raided by the police who take our stuff if we don't bribe them.'⁴³

Perhaps it is unsurprising that operators in the informal economy are ready to resort to bribery. Ordinary Zimbabweans know that the police themselves are thoroughly implicated in the 'black' markets that OM was expressly designed to eliminate. Indeed, OM seems to have had the effect of *increasing* graft within the police force. By October 2005, 62 percent of adult Zimbabweans thought that 'some' or 'all' of the ZRP were 'involved in corruption', a figure that was up sharply from 42 percent in 2004. By bringing police officers into close contact with the populace in an intensive campaign to seize or destroy property, the government created new opportunities for extortion and payoffs. This may have been an unintended effect. Alternatively, it could also be a purposive strategy of a bankrupt government that increasingly finds difficulty in covering the salaries of police and army officials.

41. Pearson's $r = 0.271$, $p < 0.001$.

42. By 9 percentage points: 71 percent for OM victims versus 80 percent for non-victims.

43. 'Price of basics soars beyond reach of poor Zimbabweans', *Mail and Guardian* (South Africa), 20 March 2006.

The political fallout

Some politicians may even have been deluded enough to imagine that OM would boost ZANU-PF's political stature. The outcome of the 2005 parliamentary elections sent an unmistakable signal that the party needed to rebuild its political base, especially in urban areas. Certain overzealous leaders — notably Ignatius Chombo, minister of local government and housing — may have exceeded their authority and allowed repression to get out of control. But we must again conclude that OM had negative effects. Among the major political consequences of the onslaught were substantial drop-offs in popular approval for the ruling party. There was also a concomitant increase in the popularity of the opposition MDC between Afrobarometer surveys in April 2004 and October 2005.

Let us start with trust in the ruling party. Whereas fewer than half of adult Zimbabweans trusted ZANU-PF in April 2004, fewer than a third did so just 18 months later (44 versus 31 percent). The key intervening events between these two measurements were, of course, the disputed parliamentary election and OM, which suggests a causal narrative. This inference is strengthened by the observation that, among the minority who still trusted the ruling party in October, OM victims were only half as likely to do so as those who remained unaffected (22 versus 44 percent). In short, the crackdown undercut the ruling party's already dwindling base of support.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from data on the party affiliations and voting intentions of Zimbabwe's electorate. Because these indicators are closely correlated,⁴⁴ we will report only the latter here. Voting intentions are measured by a question that asks: 'If a presidential election were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?' In October 2005, just 21 percent said that they would vote for the ZANU-PF candidate in a context where some 39 percent refused to answer, or otherwise evaded, the question. Consistent with the results just reported on trust, OM victims were only half as likely as other Zimbabweans to say that they would cast their ballot for the ruling party (15 versus 28 percent). Again, OM apparently reduced rather than boosted the size of ZANU-PF's electoral constituency.

The MDC benefited from trends of declining ZANU-PF support. In the first instance, the turn of political events — including the shock tactics of OM — brought many Zimbabweans 'off the fence'. Whereas in April 2004, only 40 percent of adult Zimbabweans were willing to openly identify with *any* political party, some 54 percent were willing to risk doing so by October 2005. Apparently emboldened, the proportion that admitted to

44. Pearson's $r = 0.962$, $p < 0.001$. Indeed, these indicators are so closely correlated that either could act as a proxy for the other.

'feeling close' to MDC rose from 5 percent in 1999 to 10 percent in 2004, and to 34 percent in 2005. Although support for the main opposition party had been cautiously rising, OM apparently contributed to an acceleration of the upward trend (by 24 percentage points in just 18 months). Gains for MDC were especially marked among OM victims, who were three times more likely to identify with the opposition rather than the ruling party (40 versus 14 percent). Accordingly, by October 2005, OM victims were three times more likely to say that they would vote for MDC than ZANU-PF (47 versus 15 percent).

We do not know whether MDC could have won a free and fair election held at that time; there were still too many voters who declined to reveal their voting intentions. And, although the polarisation of political parties deepened,⁴⁵ we do not know whether the apparent realignment of the electorate away from ZANU-PF is provisional or permanent. The swing towards the MDC among Zimbabwe's voters occurred before the opposition split apart over the issue of the party's participation in the November 2005 Senate elections. These events may have been just as profound as OM in shaping subsequent party preferences. As a result, the present (2006) distribution of support for the two main political parties is largely unknown.⁴⁶ All that can be said with any certainty is that ZANU-PF would be unlikely to win without massive intimidation and fraud.

The overall impact of repression

Zimbabwe is a country in a multifaceted crisis. The leadership of ZANU-PF has shown a reckless willingness to sacrifice the country's hard-won democracy and development at the altar of personal power. OM in 2005 should be viewed against the backdrop of 'struggles within the struggle' during the liberation period and the Matabeleland pogrom of the early 1980s as the most recent manifestation of the heavy-handed extremes to which incumbent leaders are willing to go to stamp out opposition. Other present abuses include the uncompensated seizure of farmland, the misdirection of food aid for partisan purposes, and the torture of political detainees.⁴⁷ Our public opinion polls confirm that this self-destructive approach to governance has reaped alienation and despair among the population at large.⁴⁸

45. The proportion of MDC supporters who said they did not trust the ruling party 'at all' rose from 49 percent in April 2004 to 62 percent in October 2005.

46. Although the results of the bye-election of May 2006 in Budiriro suggest the mainstream MDC headed by Morgan Tsvangirai has little to fear from the breakaway MDC faction led by Arthur Mutambara.

47. See International Crisis Group, 'Post-election Zimbabwe: What next?' *Africa Report No. 93* <http://www.crisisgroup.org> (7 June, 2005).

48. Eldred, Masunungure, Anyway Ndapwadza, and Noma Sibanda, 'Support for democracy and democratic institutions in Zimbabwe', *Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 27* <http://www.afrobarometer.org> (March 2006).

Because OM is a symptom of a broader pathology of rule, its impact should be weighed against other dimensions of Zimbabwe's present plight. Quite apart from OM, we suspect that support for the ruling party is undermined by public perceptions of economic mismanagement, official corruption, ethnic favouritism, and political intimidation. So, as a final step, we seek to situate OM in relation to other ongoing trends in public opinion. We construct a multivariate regression model that explains the expressed voting intentions of Zimbabweans in October 2005 as a function of a range of relevant considerations. Table 3 confirms that, with just five variables, it is possible to predict about half the variance in an individual's voting intention and to be correct 82 percent of the time.

Let us interpret each influence that shapes vote choice. The most important considerations are popular evaluations of the government's economic policy performance. If people feel positive about such performance — measured here on a four-item index of managing the economy, creating jobs, controlling inflation, and narrowing income gaps — they will probably choose a ZANU-PF candidate. Note, however, that over 90 percent of Zimbabweans thought that the government was doing *badly* on these economic issues in 2005! The second pressing consideration is popular perception of official corruption. If people see corruption as a common affliction — measured here on an index covering ten types of public official — then they will likely vote *against* ZANU-PF candidates (as evidenced by the negative sign on the logit coefficient).

Also important to vote choice are two aspects of social structure: speakers of Chishona, the majority language, tend to choose ZANU-PF, as do

Table 3. Logistic regression model of probability of voting for the ruling party

	<i>Unstandardised regression coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>Significance</i>	<i>Explanatory rank (from OLS)</i>
Constant	4.134	0.832	0.000	
Evaluation of economic policy performance	2.499	0.328	0.000	1
Perception of official corruption	-1.394	0.260	0.000	2
Chishona speaker	1.263	0.330	0.000	3
Rural dweller	0.792	0.298	0.008	4
Victim of Operation Murambatsvina	-0.807	0.259	0.002	5

Correct predictions = 82 percent, Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.483$.

rural dwellers. Like other autocratic African rulers, especially those in political trouble, Mugabe has fallen back on core supporters among co-ethnics (broadly defined in terms of language) in the rural heartland. So far, the ruling party has been able to rely on this secure base of political support even in the face of the public's negative assessments of economic performance and high levels of perceived corruption.

But does state repression remain an important factor determining party preferences even after these standard explanations are taken into account? The answer is affirmative. As indicated in the last line of Table 3, OM victimisation continues to significantly depress support for the ruling party, even when controlled for powerful alternative influences. As such, we are on safe ground in concluding that OM further undermined the ruling party's already declining political base.

Conclusion

Given the wide social and political impact of the recent campaign of state repression in Zimbabwe, the International Crisis Group proposes that OM may be a 'tipping point'.⁴⁹ Building on a long history of state-sponsored violence, the crackdown of May 2005 further laid bare the coercive essence of ZANU-PF rule. Well-informed outside observers therefore seemed to expect that the scope and severity of the humanitarian disaster would mobilise domestic and international forces behind a concerted effort for political change in Zimbabwe.

Yet, in the short run, OM appears to have met the government's primary objective of preempting an anti-state uprising. At the time of writing one year after the event, ZANU-PF was still firmly entrenched in power, and the public mood in urban areas was brooding and sullen, but largely quiet. The unintended and counter-productive effects of state repression, which we have tried to document in this article, will only come home to roost — if at all — over a longer time horizon.

Certainly, the people of Zimbabwe condemn their government's actions. The OM campaign has few domestic defenders. Only two in ten adults interviewed say that they agree with the official view that 'the government's recent cleanup campaign was *a good thing* that helped rid our society of criminals and illegal activities' (21 percent). And this sentiment is common only among those who 'feel close to ZANU-PF' (47 percent). By contrast, almost seven in 10 Zimbabweans consider that 'the government's cleanup campaign was *a bad thing* that caused unnecessary hardship and violated people's human rights' (69 percent). This figure rises to 88 percent for

49. International Crisis Group, 'Zimbabwe's operation Murambatsvina: the tipping point?' *Africa Report* No. 97, p. 4 <http://www.crisisgroup.org> (17 August, 2005).

those who 'feel close to MDC', to 84 percent for those who were internally displaced, and even to a clear majority (63 percent) among rural dwellers.

The purpose of this article has been to reveal and analyse such popular reactions. We have confirmed the wide scope of the OM crackdown and shown that its main victims were younger, unemployed urbanites whom state security agents saw as potential recruits for social unrest. Their families, including vulnerable elders and children, were swept up in the dragnet. While OM undoubtedly disrupted the informal economy, we have presented evidence that it did not succeed in banishing urban dwellers to rural areas or shutting down illicit trade. Moreover, the crackdown had the unintended effect of discrediting the police and other state institutions. Finally, while we cannot verify that MDC supporters were the only targets of OM, we have demonstrated that the crackdown's main political *consequences* were to embolden the victims of repression, to deepen the polarization between political parties, and to fortify the ranks of Zimbabwe's opposition movement.

Despite this accumulated evidence, we are nonetheless hard pressed to see OM as a tipping point. While the opposition received a boost in popularity from the crackdown, the MDC split apart over electoral strategy almost immediately thereafter. Apart from the African Union's Commission of Human and People's Rights,⁵⁰ African leaders in neighbouring countries — notably South Africa — generally turned a blind eye. And, the United Nations' blunt criticisms of the crackdown, and even its generous provision of food relief, have had little discernible impact on weakening the incumbent government. If OM was destined to 'tip' ZANU-PF out of power, then such a change would probably have happened by now. Sadly for the long-suffering people of Zimbabwe, the situation in their country therefore seems destined to get worse before it gets better.

50. 'African leaders break silence over Mugabe's human rights abuses', *The Guardian* (UK), 4 January 2006.