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ZAMBIAN CITIZENS, DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Towards the end of the 1980s, Zambians' desire to participate in governing their country was demonstrated by criticism of the one-party state and calls for a return to a multiparty political system. The holding of multiparty elections in 1991 and the proliferation of political parties underscored the Zambians' preference for democratic government. The return to multiparty politics meant that Zambians, through their elected representatives (local government Councillors and Members of Parliament), would have the opportunity to provide oversight on governance issues with a view to helping to shape their own destiny. Over the years, many Zambians have continuously submitted to various commissions appointed by government to develop a Constitution that would adequately uphold democratic ideals, and ensure the protection of human rights. In order to achieve such desires, the need for sustained demand and support for democratic government and effective political representation cannot be overemphasised. This Briefing Paper summarises the Zambian citizens' perception with regard to political participation in general and support for democracy in particular, as captured by an Afrobarometer survey conducted in June 2009.

Although support for democratic government has been rekindled, following a declining trend between 1999 and 2005, the Zambian political environment still remains characterised by very low levels of interaction between constituents and political representatives. Most Zambians also prefer a revised Constitution to be ratified or approved by a public referendum rather than Parliament or "some other method". These are some of the many important findings revealed by the recent Afrobarometer survey conducted in Zambia in June 2009.

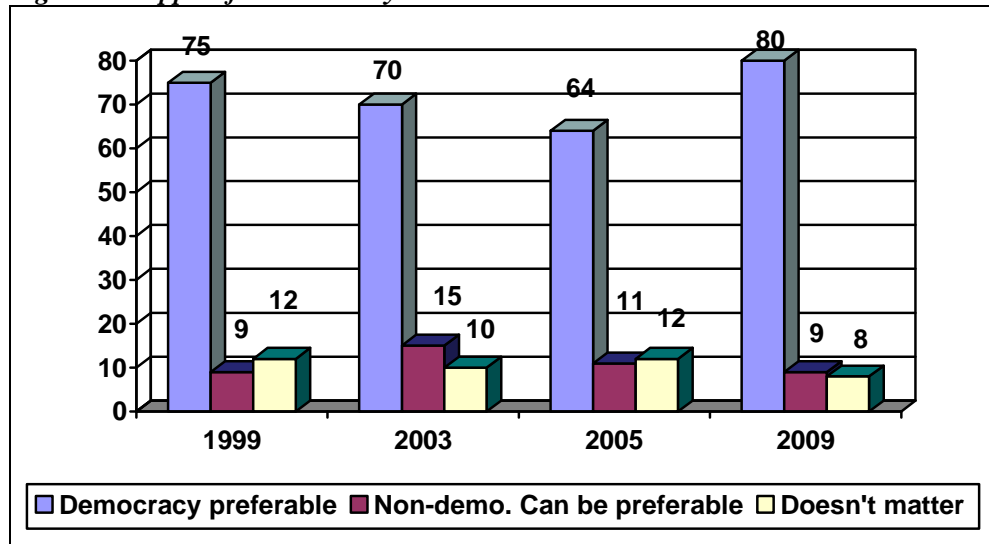
About the survey

The Afrobarometer is a systematic survey of ordinary Africans' attitudes towards democracy, markets and civil society. The surveys are conducted in countries that have introduced some degree of democratic and economic reform. The survey on which this report is based was carried out in June 2009 in all the nine Provinces of Zambia. Based on official population projections for 2008, a multi-stage, stratified area cluster sample was used. A sample of 1,200 adult Zambians (18 years or older) was randomly selected within a framework stratified by province and urbanization. The respondents were equally balanced in terms of gender and had a median age of 32 years. Most of the respondents (63 percent) were rural residents whilst the remainder (37 percent) were urban-based. According to respondents' preferences, the interviews were conducted in English (the official language) or in a local language (Chinyanja, Chibemba, Chitonga, Silozi or Kikaonde).

Popular support for democracy

Support for democracy has been rejuvenated with more Zambians (80 percent), in the 2009 survey, holding the view that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government compared to 75 percent in 1999, 70 percent in 2003, and 64 percent in 2005 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Support for democracy



What might account for the apparent increase in support? Between the 1999 and 2005 surveys there has been a noticeable specificity with regard to the perception of Zambians about what democracy means. Whereas in 1999 most Zambians associated democracy with general concepts such as the “freedom of speech” (12 percent); “freedom in general (14 percent); and “freedom of expression” (16 percent), in the 2005 survey Zambians were more specific and instead associated democracy with “A country being ruled by the people” (18 percent – 1st verbatim); “a government by the people” (68 percent – 2nd verbatim); and being “able to contest in an election” (91 percent – 3rd verbatim).

Although there is no concrete evidence to support the assertion, it may be plausible to argue that the activities of 20 civil society organisations, funded through the Zambia Elections Fund (ZEF-2006) prior to the 2006 elections, may have had a positive influence on people’s support for democracy. The overall objective of the civic and voter education activities was to provide non-partisan, accurate and timely information to the electorate and political actors on the 2006 tripartite elections with a view of building public confidence in the outcome of the elections. The assessment of these activities that followed after the elections, among other things, noted that more people (75 percent of the respondents) indicated having voted in the 2006 tripartite elections compared to only 62 percent of them that indicated having voted in previous elections.

It is important to note, however, that there are no significant differences in the level of support for democracy based on location or gender. Urban residents (82 percent) are slightly more emphatic in their support for democracy compared to their rural counterparts at 79 percent, which falls within the margin of sampling error for Afrobarometer surveys. Slightly more male residents (82 percent) support democracy compared to the female residents at 78 percent.

In their support for democratic government, Zambians have persistently preferred to choose their leaders through regular, open and honest elections. Although somewhat more emphatic in 2005

when almost nine in ten (87 percent) Zambians held this view the recent survey results have revealed that many (76 percent), still prefer this method of choosing their leaders.

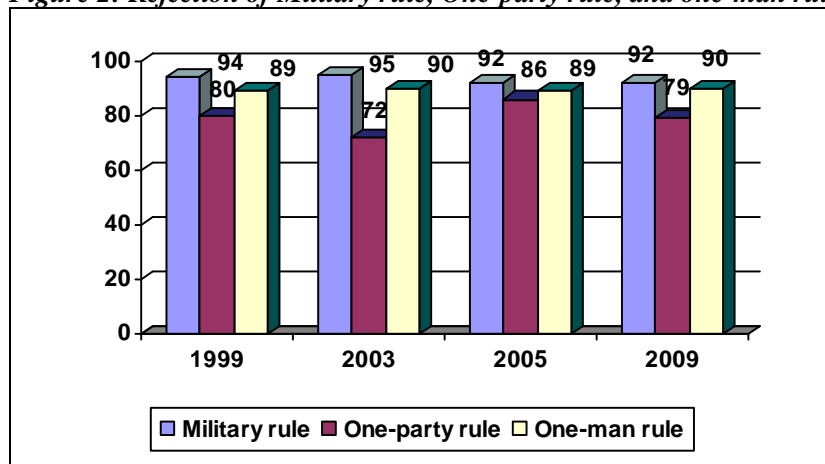
The survey results show that, Zambians (80 percent) are among the strongest supporters for democracy in the Southern African region. They are surpassed only by the citizens of Botswana (at 86 percent) and are far more supportive than citizens of Lesotho (at 45 percent).

Rejection of authoritarian rule

Similarly, Zambians have continued to reject authoritarian regimes in their quest for democratic government. More than seven in ten Zambians have persistently rejected military rule, one-party rule or one-man rule since the first survey conducted in 1999 (Figure 2). Military rule has been rejected by 94 percent (1999), 95 percent (2003), 92 percent (2005), and 92 percent in 2009. One-party rule has been rejected by 80 percent (1999), 72 percent (2003), 86 percent (2005), and 79 percent in 2009. One-man rule, on the other hand, has been rejected by 89 percent (1999), 90 percent (2003), 89 percent (2005), and 90 percent in 2009. On average, military rule is the most disliked form of government (93 percent) followed by one-man rule (90 percent) and then one-party rule (82 percent).

The dictatorial tendencies exhibited by former President Kaunda’s one-party regime (1973-1990) disenchanted many Zambians leading to the widespread calls for and subsequent return to multiparty elections in 1991. The failed bid, by the second republican President, Chiluba, to serve an unconstitutional third term resulted in the formation of a political party, the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD), by several former Ministers who opposed the bid and broke away from Chiluba’s ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD). This breakaway was hailed by many Zambians who perceived the development as a *signature* for the growing acceptance of democratic government in the country. These two ‘national’ events, among other considerations, seem to have sharpened the desire for and appreciation of democracy as the most preferred form of government.

Figure 2: Rejection of Military rule, One-party rule, and one-man rule



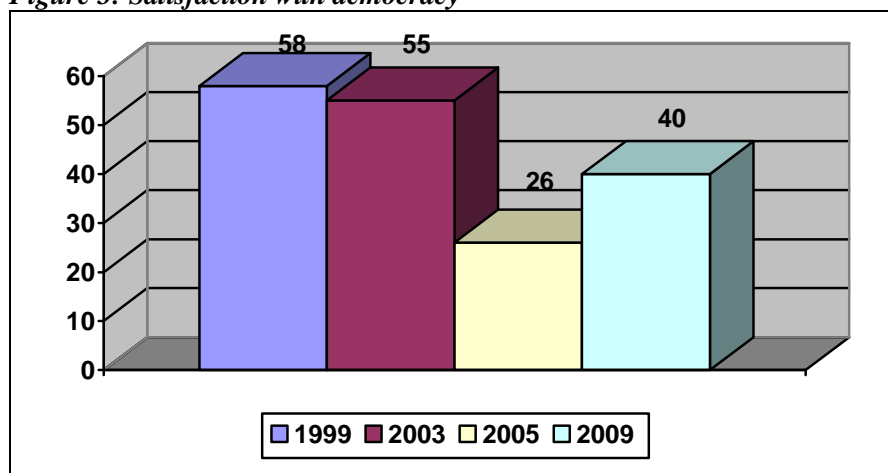
Results of the Afrobarometer surveys, thus far, indicate constant rejection for authoritarian regimes but variable support for democracy. Do these results show that people know more about what they do not want than what they do want?

Satisfaction with democracy

However, less than one quarter (22 percent) of Zambians consider the country as full democracy while the majority (64 percent) describe Zambia as either a democracy with major problems (39

percent) or a democracy with minor problems (25 percent). To this effect, more than half (54 percent) of all Zambians interviewed are either “not at all satisfied” (22 percent) or “not very satisfied” (32 percent) with the way democracy works in Zambia while 40 percent are either “fairly satisfied” (26 percent) or “very satisfied” (14 percent). Although these levels of satisfaction are lower than those recorded in 2003, they nonetheless constitute a big improvement over that recorded in 2005 (Figure 3). This improvement is a clear testimony of the resurgence in the support for democracy recorded during the 2009 survey. In other words the declining satisfaction for democracy between 1999 and 2005 helps to explain the decline in the support for democracy during the same period.

Figure 3: Satisfaction with democracy



Support for and satisfaction with democracy in Zambia should be read against Zambians’ view of what constitutes a democratic country. Most Zambians (59 percent) consider a country democratic if there are many political parties, everyone is free to speak their minds about politics and to vote for the party of their choice, and where sometimes elections lead to a change of the ruling party. On the contrary, a country with one large political party and many small ones but where elections have not led to a change of the ruling party, is considered by most Zambians (67 percent) as either a “democracy with major or minor problems”. In the same vein, many Zambians (79 percent) consider a country with one big political party and many small ones, where people are afraid to express political opinions or to vote for the opposition and where the opposition is so weak that it would never win an election as either “not a democracy” (48 percent) or “a democracy with major problems” (31 percent).

Except for Botswana (83 percent), Namibia (67 percent), and Malawi (59 percent) where more than half of the citizens are satisfied with how democracy works in their countries, less than half of the citizens in the remaining countries in the Southern African region are satisfied with how democracy works in their countries. However, Zambian citizens’ satisfaction at 40 percent compares quite favourably with that of Zimbabwe (25 percent) and Lesotho (30 percent).

Political participation

In spite of the high levels of support for democracy, and with almost six in ten (59 percent) Zambians indicating having voted in the October 2008 Presidential elections, inadequate interaction between the citizens and their elected representatives has continued to characterise democratic government in Zambia.

Survey results have persistently shown that many Zambians rarely interact with their elected representatives — the local Councillors, and Members of Parliament (MPs) — between elections. Many respondents (71 percent) had “never” contacted their local Councillor in the year prior to June 2009, though this was an improvement over the 80 percent reported in 2005. Few respondents (18 percent) reported having contacted their local Councillor in the past year either “a few times” or “often”. The number of residents that had contacted their local Councillor either “a few times” or “often” was even smaller in 2005 (9 percent) and in 2003 (15 percent).

With regard to allowing citizens to participate in Council decisions, almost eight in ten (70 percent) of the respondents noted that their local authority was doing either “very badly” or “fairly badly”. The situation is even worse with regard to Members of Parliament (MP). More than seven in ten residents had “never” contacted their MP in the past year prior to the 2003 (82 percent), 2005 (88 percent), and 2009 (85 percent) surveys. Again fewer residents had contacted their MP either “a few times” or “often” in 2003 (9 percent), 2005 (3 percent), and in 2009 (8 percent), (Figures 4 and 5).

It is surprising, however, that in spite of the limited interaction most Zambians (56 percent) hold the view that it is either “somewhat likely” or “very likely” they can get together with others and make their elected local Councillor listen to their concerns about a matter of importance to the community. On the contrary, less than half of the Zambians (44 percent) hold this view with respect to their Member of Parliament. This is a very unfortunate state of affairs considering that when electing a Member of Parliament most Zambians (60 percent) prefer to vote for a candidate who can listen to the constituents and represent their needs and one that would be willing to spend time in the constituency “at least once a month” (51 percent) or “at least weekly” (16 percent).

Figure 4: Formal contact between elected Councillors and citizens

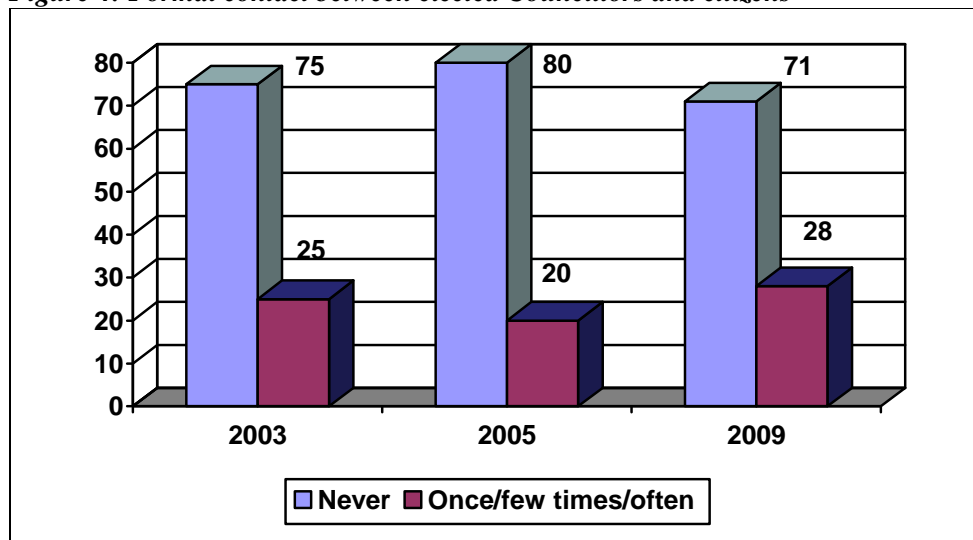
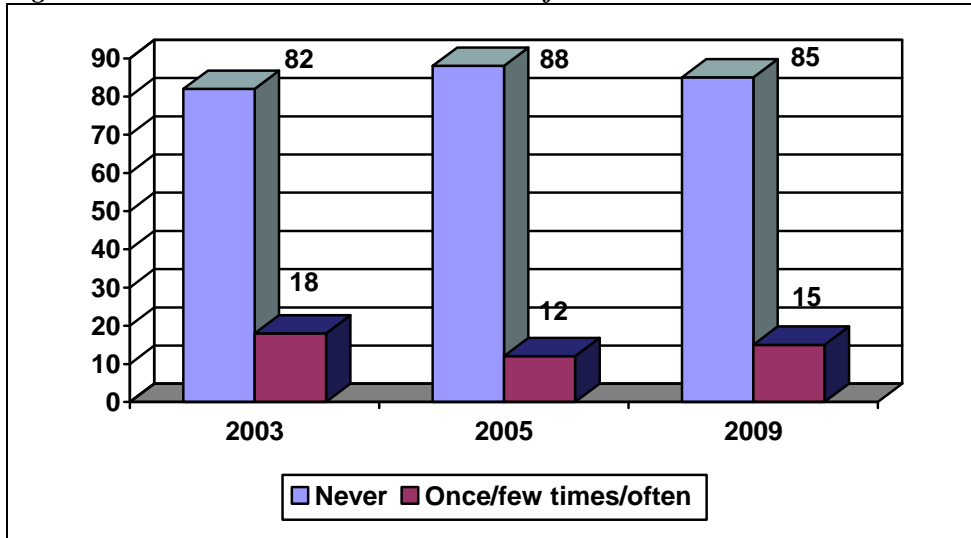


Figure 5: Formal contact between Members of Parliament and citizens



Like their counterparts in Zambia, majorities of citizens in the Southern African region rarely contact their elected officials. Levels of “never” having contacted their Member of Parliament range between 78 percent (Botswana) and 96 percent (Namibia). Similarly, levels of “never” having contacted their local Councillor range between 65 percent (Botswana) and 90 percent (Malawi). All figures refer to the year preceding the survey.

Many Zambians also lack regular contact with officials of government agencies. Most residents (88 percent) in the 2009 survey had never contacted any official of a government agency about some problem or to give them their views compared to 89 percent in 2005, and 85 percent in 2003 (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Formal contact between government officials and citizens

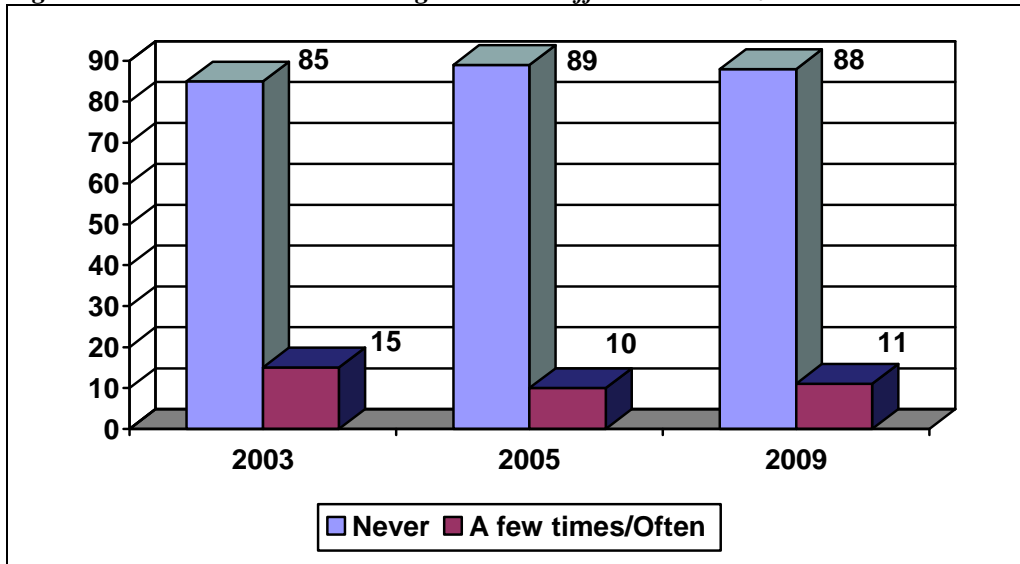
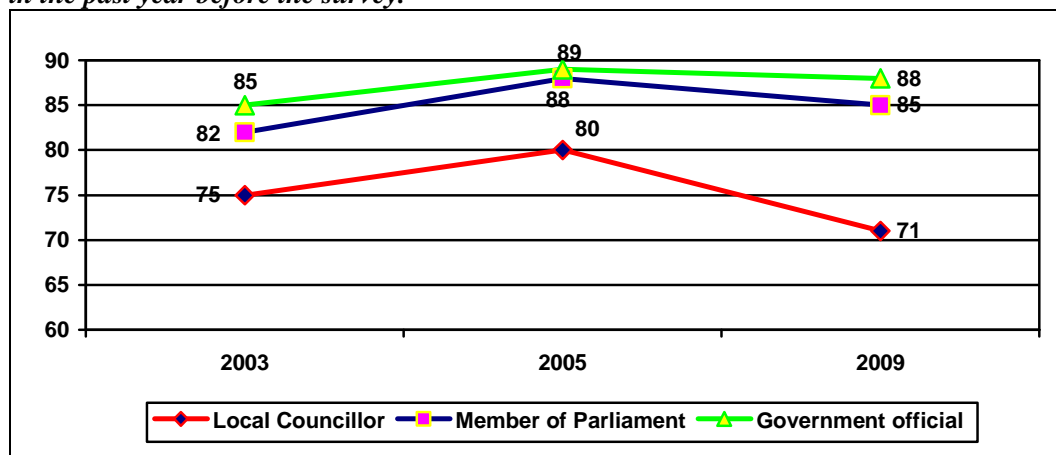


Figure 7: “Never” contacted local Councillor, Members of Parliament or government official in the past year before the survey.



The survey results show that urban dwellers, compared to their rural counterparts, are the worst with regard to inadequate contact especially with their elected representatives (Table 1).

Table 1: Contacts between residents and public officials, by location – “Ever” contacted (percentage).

	2003		2005		2009	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Local Councillor	16	29	13	23	22	31
Member of Parliament	11	21	10	13	12	17
Government official	14	16	11	9	11	11

Results of the last three surveys have shown appreciable levels of collective action among the Zambian citizens. Each of the three surveys indicated that more than a third of the residents have attended a community meeting either “several times” or “often”. The 2009 survey posited the highest recording (45 percent) compared to the 2003 (43%), 2005 (35 percent), and 1999 (23 percent) surveys. These levels of collective action can be more appreciated when the levels of those that attended a community meeting either “once” or “twice” are taken into consideration. In the 2009 survey, 18 percent of the residents indicated that they had attended a community meeting either “once” or “twice” compared to 30 percent (2005) and 19 percent (2003). According to the 2009 survey results, slightly over one third (33%) of the residents said they would have attended a community meeting compared to 30 percent in 2005 and 24 percent in 2003 if they had had the opportunity to do so. Again we see a slight upswing in the citizens’ interest to act collectively as their satisfaction and support for democracy also increases.

Survey results have also persistently shown that rural dwellers, compared to their urban counterparts, are more inclined to collective action, with male rather than female respondents saying that they are somewhat more active (Table 2). This is a somewhat puzzling result given that in practice women are conspicuously more involved in community activities to church and funeral gatherings.

Table 2: Attendance at community meetings (percentage).

	Urban	Rural	Male	Female
1999	25	40	35	26
2003	44	73	66	57
2005	55	70	67	62
2009	48	65	62	55

Attitudes to the Constitution

If Zambians prefer democracy and seek contact with their leaders, then we would expect them to want a democratic constitution. Indeed, during the past few years there has been an active debate over the country's fundamental legal charter. Do Zambians want to take part in the process of making a new constitution?

In line with their support for democracy and effective political participation, many residents (50 percent) hold the view that the revised Constitution should be ratified or approved by a "public referendum" compared to those who preferred "Parliament" (28 percent) or "some other method" (6 percent). Urban dwellers (55 percent), compared to their rural counterparts (49 percent), and male (53 percent), rather than female (49 percent), are more emphatic on this view. Provincial desegregations show that a sizeable majority of people in Northern (43 percent) and North Western (47 percent) would prefer the Constitution to be ratified by Parliament, while people in Eastern Province are equality split between ratification by Parliament (35 percent) and ratification by a Referendum (35 percent). However, most of the people in Lusaka (43 percent), Central (49 percent), Copperbelt (56 percent), Luapula (68 percent), Southern (67 percent), and Western (64 percent) provinces prefer the Constitution to be ratified by a referendum.

The support for a "public referendum" to ratify the revised constitution, in the majority of the provinces, may be an indication that most citizens do not trust their elected representatives (Members of Parliament) enough to delegate to them this very important task.

Conclusion

Support for democratic government in Zambia has remained high since 1999 when the first Afrobarometer survey was conducted. However, satisfaction with the way democracy works in Zambia has remained below the 50 percent mark between 2005 and 2009. Limited interaction with elected representatives and Zambians' perception of what constitutes a democratic country seems to be critical to their perceptions with regard to satisfaction with democracy. Members of parliament, for example, are not able to meet the expectations of the majority of Zambians who would like these representatives to visit the constituencies at least once a month. Similarly, most Zambians are not satisfied with a political environment that does not lead to a change of the ruling party for prolonged periods of time even if they are free to express their political opinions and to vote as they please. This position poses a serious challenge for the building and consolidation of democracy in the country.

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