The political economy of voter engagement in Niger

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Key messages

- Political meetings are the main mode of engagement between candidates and voters. Candidates draw on party mandates, the capacity to broker access to development projects and services or ethnic connections to build their legitimacy but rely on the distribution of electoral rent to incentivize voters to attend political meetings.

- Candidates also use campaigners at the local level to mobilise voters to attend political meetings during election campaigns. The distribution of electoral rent to campaigners was found to be widespread and many campaigners were open about their decision to campaign for a party based on how much a political party or candidate could offer.

- Chiefs and religious leaders remain influential opinion formers in Nigerien society. Candidates work to gain the support of chiefs and religious leaders through the distribution of gifts and opportunities for both groups to demonstrate their respective power.

- In theory, electoral rents do not pose problems for democracy, as voters remain free to vote for their party of choice. However, political parties in Niger have been able to reward voters who were able to prove that they had voted for a particular party.

- Political and economic factors underpin the continuation of Niger's clientalistic electoral system, but there are aspects of the current system which present opportunities for reform. They include implementing legislation which prevents voters from being able to prove which party they voted for, and educating those who are less deeply embedded in the clientalist system to use different voting strategies.

1. Introduction

This briefing forms part of a three-piece political economy analysis that was carried out by Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local (LASDEL) researchers. The aim was to inform the design of the Participatory and Responsive Governance (PRG) programme to be implemented by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) from 2015 to 2020.

Box 1: Methodology

Research was carried out in three regions: Niamey, Maradi and Tahoua. In each, researchers carried out interviews in at least two communes where LASDEL had already worked, to allow the team to build on their insights. Based on a literature review and a political economy workshop with students of sociology and politics, eight categories of key actors in voter engagement were identified:
- Political party representatives (deputies, mayors, councillors and candidates);
- Male activists;
- Female activists;
- Young men who did not engage in politics;
- Women who did not engage in politics;
- Islamic association representatives;
- Businessmen/women; and
- Chiefs.

Data collection took place through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). In each commune, the team interviewed as many representatives from each category as possible within two to three days. Political party and Islamic association representatives, business men/women and chiefs were interviewed individually. Others took part in FGDs. Women were interviewed separately from men, by female interviewers where possible.

To inform the PRG, this research sought to understand how political parties engage voters in Niger, whether their engagement involves responding to citizen priorities and if not, why not. In October and November 2015, three months before the presidential and legislative elections were scheduled in Niger, research was carried out in three regions: Niamey, Maradi and Tahoua (for more details on the methodology used, see Box 1).

2. How political parties engage voters in Niger

2.1 Political party engagement structures

Most of the larger political parties in Niger have formal hierarchical structures that link the party at the national level with citizens at the local level. Parties have regional bureaus that then connect with coordination offices at the administrative levels of the department and commune. These coordination offices reach out to between 15 and 18 villages in rural areas or *quartiers* in urban areas. Depending on the size of the party, and the strategic importance of the *quartier,* a party may have a *cellule de base*, which usually consists of a president, a treasury and an administrator. The cellules de base usually become active only in the year leading up to presidential and municipal elections. Each *cellule de base* has connections with 'militants', or political activists who mobilise support for a party.

Some activists expressed a loyalty for their party but more activists interviewed were loyal to a particular candidate and not a party'. As candidates changed party, they followed their chosen candidate without questioning why the candidate was changing party or whether the new party represented their interests.[1] Loyalty to a candidate was usually based on family and ethnic connections, or the idea that the candidate was from their locality so would look after them.[2] The types of loyalty identified during this research (i.e. based on family, ethnic and locality connections) were always cemented through the distribution of rent or access to resources by the candidates. There were incentives to encourage activists to remain with a particular party; those higher up in the political party hierarchy gain more monetary benefits[3] and long-term activists can benefit from access to jobs or promotions,[4] which are a great deal more valuable than small payments made during election season.

Vote-buying is widely recognised as a feature of elections in democracies across the world, particularly in poor areas/countries. In Niger, it was clear candidates were also engaged in the purchase of activists' support. Many activists were open about their decision to campaign for a party based on how much the party could offer.[5]

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1   FGD with male activists, Akoubounou, Abalak; interview with councillor, Tibiri.

2   FGD with male activists, Akoubounou, Abalak.

3   FGD with male activists, Garkouwa, Tahoua.

4   Ibid.

5   Interviews with male and female activists, Tahoua, Maradi and Niamey.

Others admitted they campaigned for several parties to maximise their earnings.[6]

"If they fill our stomachs, we will follow them."(Female activist, Garjoua, Tahoua).

One of the factors contributing to this 'activist market' is the system of assessing candidates by the number of activists they can mobilise. In Western democracies, candidates usually have to demonstrate their adherence to party values before they will be put forward as a candidate. Of course, an assessment of the potential for a candidate to win votes will be factored into the decision. In Niger, the main criteria by which parties assess a candidates' potential is by the number of activists they have demonstrated they can mobilise.

In many instances, it was difficult to distinguish an activist from a regular voter. When researchers asked to speak with people who were not activists, they inevitably were introduced to people who had campaigned for one party or another at some stage. It pays to 'do politics' in Niger. A small amount of mobilising during the election season earns much needed benefits, while aligning oneself with a political party can ensure one is connected to the right people to get a job.

"The problem is that, when you don't 'do' politics, nobody will give you a job."(Male youth, Koira Tegui, Niamey).

"We don't do politics, but we are obliged to receive politicians and the money they propose because we are impoverished."(Male youth, Koira Tegui, Niamey).

"Everyone does politics."(Male youth, Roudouna Market, Chadakori).

Thus many activists could be described more accurately as 'pop-up activists' – that is, activists who are willing to mobilise people to attend political meetings in return for small envelopes of cash and goodies during the election season. It could be argued that many activists for political parties in democracies across the world become active only in election periods. The difference is that, in Niger, many activists will engage only if a party is willing to pay them. This increases the pressure on political parties to allocate their resources to paying activists rather than spending time engaging them on party mandates or programmes.

"The parties don't do political education, there's only the language of money! Today, the activists don't understand how the parties function. For them, what is important is us finding them work and money."(Deputy elected in a pastoral zone).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, PNDS required activists to pay a monthly fee to the party of CFA 1,000, similar to the way political parties in the UK charge a yearly membership fee that contributes to party expenses. In the mid-2000s, the party realised this model prevented them from convincing activists to join them. PNDS now requires candidates to pay a monthly fee only. The main socialist party in Niger has thus been incentivised to embrace the activist market.

2.2 Engagement through social structures

Despite the existence of *cellules de base*, activists at the quartier or village level are not fully integrated into the party structure. In fact, most activists are accessed through *fadas*, women's *groupements* and associations, social structures which resemble the political mobilisation groups which Kountché formed during his one-party regime in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the mid-1990s, groups of young males have increasingly socialised together in groups called *fadas* (an old word for 'court' in Hausa). These groups provide a space to debate and play games, and a network with which to access resources (Alzouma, 2015; Bazoum, 2011). Some *fadas* have more formal structures, with agreements signed by their local mayor. There are 55 such *fadas* in Niamey, coordinated by the National Federation of *Fadas* and Clubs. In his study of *fadas* in Niger, Bazoum distinguishes between '*fada de thé*' and '*fada association*', the former representing more informal structures which tend to be dominated by youth, the latter representing formal structures, with monthly membership fees and members aged between 30 and 80 (2011). The number of both formal and informal *fadas* has increased significantly since the mid-1990s and early 2000s, a period that was marked by a recruitment freeze in the public service and an increase in unemployment for graduates.

According to the National Federation of *Fadas* and Clubs, *fadas* are apolitical but members can campaign for whichever political party they want.[7] However, it is clear political parties use *fadas* to access males, particularly young males, across all three regions. In many ways, *fadas* represent a structure through which Nigeriens (mostly male) can access electoral rent in a mode considered legitimate. The leader of a *fada* can receive anything

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6 Interview with activists, Soumarana, Maradi; interview with National Bureau of the Federation of Fadas and Clubs; see also Olivier de Sardan (2015).

7 Interview with President, Principal Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator of National Federation of Fadas and Clubs.

from CFA 25,000 to CFA 100,000 from political parties to mobilise *fada* members to attend a political meeting but also to invest in the group. The Sniper Boys, a *fada* of young males in Kerkizoi quartier in Niamey received money from Lumana that they used to buy benches and a sound system for their meeting place on the street. Through establishing their *fada*, these young men were able to benefit financially from the election campaign. However, just as activists change their political affiliation according to the best offer, *fadas* also change their political affiliations according to what political parties are willing to give.

Female *fadas* are often groups of financial support and meet mostly on weekends. Male *fadas* tend to be quite visible on the streets of Niamey and other major towns in Niger through their signs and gatherings in the evening; female *fadas* tend to be less visible as their meetings take place in private yards or houses. Instead of accessing female voters through *fadas*, political parties are more likely to use women's associations or *groupements*. International NGOs often work with women's associations to promote income generation activities and skills training. As a result, women's participation in associations is widespread, with some associations having up to 800 members. Their links to international NGOs means many women's associations do not rely on political parties solely for patronage. There are indications that women activists from women's associations receive less patronage from political parties than male activists who access patronage through fadas. In Kirkissoye quartier in Niamey, women in three different women's associations reported receiving on average CFA 1,000 per person for attending a political meeting, whereas the males in a fada in Kerkizoi reported receiving up to CFA 2,500 per person per meeting. Women's associations reported receiving between CFA 5,000 and CFA 100,000 to distribute to those women who attend a meeting but, with some associations having up to 800 women, each woman could receive as little as CFA 100 each.

More recently, female activists have started forming women's *groupements* to sing and dance at meetings and political events. This has become popular in Niamey and other large towns, with certain *groupements* gaining fame through their songs and dances, such as Naney, Belles Chiques, Wangareyes, Kama Jiki, Ambiance Claires and Les Intimes. In theory, these *groupements* sing and dance at meetings because they are supporters of that party. A candidate shows appreciation of their support through the distribution of presents, however, as with other groups of activists, the loyalty of the women in a groupement tends to be with the female activist and not with the party. In November 2015, Fati Tsalha, a activist in Niamey left Modem Fa Lumana to join the Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme (PNDS). Her *groupement* followed her to support PNDS.

2.3 Engagement through opinion leaders

As in democracies around the world, opinion leaders influence Nigerien's decision about who to vote for. The three main types of opinion leaders who influence Nigerien voters are chiefs, religious leaders and businessmen ('big men'). In this research, we examined how political parties engage with chiefs and religious leaders to influence voters.

La Chefferie

Officially, the customary institution of La Chefferie should be politically neutral as chiefs are part of the administration and paid by the Ministry of the Interior. For this reason, chiefs often do not directly try and influence voters. Instead, they use the influential members of their family to work as activists for their chosen party. In addition to mobilising a team of local opinion leaders, the chief influences the vote in other indirect ways. Although the Electoral Code specifies that local distribution committees established by the Administrative Committees are responsible for distributing electoral cards, in practice the chief retains a great deal of control over the distribution process. Through facilitating access to electoral cards for some groups by organising distribution, or making it more difficult for other groups of voters by requiring that they come and collect their cards themselves, chiefs can subtly influence the vote (Younoussi, 2015). Chiefs also host voters on election day who listen to their advice before going to the voting booth, which is often installed in their compound (Issaley and Olivier de Sardan, 2015).

In some areas, La Chefferie plays a much more active role during the municipal elections than during the presidential elections. In these areas, chiefs ensure they retain influence over local politics through the installation of members of their family in key positions in the local administration:

It should be emphasised, however that the chief's influence is contested. Many argue for reducing the power of the chief, for separating the chief and the local administration. They work to convince younger voters and those outside the ruling family to vote against the party of the chief.[11]

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8   FGD, Niamey, Tahoua and Abalak.

9   Conversations with team members. Eric Kohlavi Hahonou noted that in Baleyara, a town on the outskirts of Niamey, certain members of fadas 'surf' between fadas during election periods to gain maximum electoral rent (Hahonou, 2004).

Religious associations

Religious leaders in Niger are usually aligned with an association with different associations varying in the degree to which they engage with politics. Gaining political support from a religious leader, particularly those active within religious associations is hugely valuable for candidates. Islamic associations have extensive influence at national and local levels. They organise religious broadcasts on radio and television, huge rallies that hundreds attend, cutting across all social categories in Nigerien society. Wahhabist associations organise sermons at the village level, with themes including good governance. If a candidate can convince an imam to support his campaign, it can mean the difference between winning and losing:

> *"When people learn a big marabout in a village is with a certain party, this can bring them over to the party's side… It's a world of interest, you have to outdo what the other can do."(Councillor, Tibiri).*

Support from marabouts, and particularly imams, is usually discrete. Some marabouts perform fatihas to open or close a political meeting for a candidate or allow a candidate to hold a meeting at their mosque, and in this way show their approval for a candidate. Others perform readings from the Qur'an near to a particular candidate's house or under their election hangar (e.g. Younoussi, 2015), again subtly providing approval for a candidate. Candidates may encourage such support from marabouts through presents and donations. Other marabouts say prayers for all parties, in this way earning some money but also avoiding aligning themselves with any one party.

Other maraboust prefer to remain neutral. While they may include political themes in their sermons, they mostly described their advice as being neutral and focusing more on the characteristics of a good leader (e.g. honest, accountable).[14] Candidates or political activists sometimes attend sermons and, if the marabout talks about what leaders need to be doing in the area, this is an opportunity for the party representatives to make promises about what their party will do if they get elected.

2.4 Election campaign discourses

Party mandates

Election campaigns in Africa are often criticised for being overly personality-based while neglecting party mandates. In Niger, there are indications that this is sometimes the case. During the local elections in Filingue commune in 2009, for example, the MNSD delegation did not once use the party programme for developing the commune to convince voters (Tidjani Alou, 2015). However, in the 2009 legislative elections in Goure, a candidate for Rassemblement Social Démocratique (RSD), allied to MNSD, told voters he would not make false promises about problems that are difficult to solve, such as the lack of water; rather, if he was elected, he would work with experts and with the participation of the community to find the right solutions to their problems (Makama Bawa, 2015). Several candidates interviewed for this research reported drawing on party programmes to convince voters. In Tahoua and Tibiri, for example, deputies described how they used comparisons of how the situation is now with before to convince voters to give their support to PNDS in the next elections.[15]

The question is whether party mandates convince voters. It is interesting to note that, in Filingue, MNSD won the majority of votes while the candidate in Goure came third. Political 'meetings' represent the main opportunity for rural and poorer urban voters to hear a candidate's case for support. Meetings ranged from large delegations with a visiting minister to smaller events involving only a candidate and his key activists. Candidates make promises to build wells and schools and create employment,[16] which may convince some voters but it was clear from the interviews carried out for this research that few could remember the content of a candidate's speech during a meeting. Voters mainly understood meetings as opportunities for candidates to distribute rent to potential supporters rather than as opportunities to understand the party's programme or mandate. One mayor admitted that the party programme was only theory that voters don't take seriously.

> *"What interests [the voters] is what you will give to them."(Mayor of a commune, Maradi).*

Brokering development projects and access to public services

The use of development projects by candidates as evidence of their ability to bring development to an area has been noted in the literature on elections in Niger (e.g. Tidjani Alou, 2015). This was confirmed during interviews carried out for this research. For example, in Abalak, a candidate from a newly formed party, Jamhuria, used the understanding that he had brought a lot of NGOs to the area to build legitimacy for his position.[17] A councillor in Tibiri used her connections with the Sultan

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10 Interview with councillor, Abalak, interview with male activists, Abalak and Akoubounou.

11 In this briefing, we limit our analysis to Islamic associations – associations that are established to promote Islam and the precepts of the faith. We do not include Islamic international and national NGOs in our analysis.

12 This was the Kountché regime's device to control the public sphere. It resulted in a monotone public sphere and a monologic public discourse built around constructs such as the nation, unity and national security (Sounaye, 2007).

to ensure development actors were introduced to her and the women's association she coordinated. Development funding allowed her to distribute goods to a large number of women and expand the size of her association. During the last election campaign, the councillor used the network she had developed through the distribution of development goods to drum up support for her campaign.[18]

As services can be time-consuming to access in Niger, some candidates position themselves as brokers of public services. Provision of copies of birth certificates (extraits de naissance) was a service facilitated by a candidate in two different localities.[19] Other candidates mentioned pressurising their councillors to ensure potential supporters had their voter cards or organising the distribution of the cards[20] on the day before the election.[21]

Emphasising ethnic or regional links

Olivier de Sardan (2015) emphasises that ethnicity in Niger is something leaders draw on when appropriate – for example to mobilise a vote block based on their collective identity – but that it is not a factor that structures political life in Niger. There are some indications that the ethnic connection may be more important for pastoralist Tuareg and Peul groups. In Abalak, participants in FGDs mentioned the importance of voting for one of their own. In his analysis of local powers in Abalak, Abdoulaye Mohamadou (2004) describes how surprised members of the Tuareg ruling family were that an Arab who was 'a foreigner' in their area succeeded in being elected deputy for MNSD. A deputy for a pastoral area emphasised how her lineage with the ruling Tuareg family helped legitimise her bid to be a leader.[22]

> *"It's regionalism, its ethnocentralism, we say, its the son of so and so. We support them based on the symbolic power of their parents who were from the ruling family, these are the realities we have not yet escaped."* (Husband of deputy in a pastoral zone).

In Tibiri, a hopeful candidate described his father, who was based in Maradi, as the chief of the Fulani, a claim that was not recognised by the chief of the Peul *groupement* in that area. Peul chiefs and youth interviewed for this research at a market in Tiadi had not heard of a chief of the Fulani based in Maradi.[23]

As Tuareg and Peul groups tend to see themselves as minorities in the Nigerien electoral system, the emphasis on ethnicity as an important factor is understandable. With too few registered voters to easily influence the overall vote, they see voting as an ethnic block as the best way to ensure their needs are represented at the national level. This political strategy has probably benefited higher-status Tuareg and Peul voters more as it is the ruling families that negotiate with political parties and that control and distribute the electoral rent (Issaley and Olivier de Sardan, 2015; Mohamadou, 2004, 2015). There are some indications that younger and lower-class Tuareg and Peul are willing to vote against the choice of La Chefferie and potentially for someone of a different ethnicity.[24]

3. The limits of current strategies of engagement

The findings from this research indicate that party mandate is not strongly influencing many voters in Niger. Family, ethnic or locality connections are more likely to foster party or candidate loyalty. Their loyalty is rewarded by parties with electoral rent in the form of cash or access to resources. Many voters interviewed for this research report accepting electoral rent from any party which visits their area and basing their vote on which party is willing to offer them the most. In theory, the distribution of electoral rent is not a problem for democracy per se as voters remain free to vote for the party of their choice in the isolation of their voting booth. However, it is not clear the extent to which this is happening in Niger. Candidates have been careful about rewarding voters when they can demonstrate that they have voted for their party, through collecting voting ballots when voters exit the voting booth for example.

There is also a widespread sense that activists support candidates but then experience few benefits when that candidate gets into power. Young males in Bagalam *quartier* in Maradi commented that their parents had campaigned for political parties but their lives had not changed. A common metaphor used to describe candidates

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13 Interview with Islamic association, Tibiri.

14 Interview with activist, Tahoua, interview with councillor, Tibiri.

15 FGD with male youth, Kijgari, Abalak; Akoubounou, Abalak and Tahoua.

16 FGD with male youth, Abalak.

17 Interview with councillor, Tibiri.

18 FGD with male youth, Soumarana, Maradi; interview with secretary-general of political party, Chadakori.

19 Interview with deputy for département, Tahoua.

20 Interview with councillor, Abalak, interview with deputy, Niamey.

was that of a broken-down car, which gets a push from activists and then disappears again.

> *You push a vehicle and it leaves you behind* (Young males who have left politics, Bouzou Dan Zambadi, Maradi).

Popular Nigerien band MDM Crew has written a song about the hypocrisy of politicians asking for support during campaigns but once in power never interacting with their supporters until the next campaign.

From their side, deputies complain the demands from their constituents are too high. The amount of goods distributed during elections, particularly during presidential and legislative elections, creates expectations that politicians have access to endless resources that should be distributed among their supporters. Deputies described visiting their constituents less than they would like to as they are afraid they will only disappoint. Of course, there is a range of reasons why deputies are unable to deliver improvements in their constituencies but the current system effectively reduces many Nigeriens' experience of democracy to a monetary exchange once every four years when candidates tour the country.

> *"Today politics is destroyed, it's all a question of money."*(FGD with young males, Tahoua).

4. The political economy of reforming an electoral system based on clientelism

There are political and economic factors that explain why a clientelistic electoral system is self-reproducing in Niger even though politicians and voters may wish to participate in a democracy where parties campaign on party mandates. At the most generalised level, vote-buying is unsurprising, considering the socioeconomic status of the majority of Nigeriens. Those living in poverty are more easily persuaded by cash handouts than are the middle class or wealthy.[25] In a poor country such as Niger, it may be more strategic for a party to invest in vote-buying rather than in a well-thought-out party programme that is going to convince only a small proportion of voters.

A key political factor sustaining the clientelistic electoral system is the distribution of electoral rent according to the status quo. There are indications that those with more political power and influence benefit most from the current system. Many activists described a hierarchy within the party support structure, with those higher up in the hierarchy gaining more electoral rent than those lower down in the pecking order. Often, those lower down in the hierarchy work harder to mobilise support, but earn less than those higher up. There were also differences between men and women's voting strategies. While men tend to vote for the party that will provide either individual or local rent, women, for the most part, vote for whichever party their husband supports. While it can be argued that by voting for the party her husband votes for women are more likely to benefit either from his personal gain or from the 'club goods' that are distributed to the community, it is also clear that the more educated a woman is, the less likely she is to follow her husband's choice. The majority of women interviewed for this research also reported that men benefited more from party handouts than women. It makes sense for political parties to invest more in securing a man's vote, as once his is secured, his wife will follow suit.

Weaknesses in the design and implementation of elections allows opportunities for clientelism that political parties understandably take advantage of. Once one party takes advantage of these opportunities, it's difficult for other parties to follow the electoral code and not take advantage of votes which may be secured through these means. A key example of this was the design of the ballot papers which feature a separate card with a photo and name of the candidate to make voting easy for less educated voters. Until now, voters were allowed to take their unused ballot papers with them out of the polling booth. Political party representatives have used this feature to reward voters who could give them the ballot papers for all other candidates. New legislation has now been passed which bans voters from taking their unused ballot papers out of the polling booth however it remains to be seen whether it will be possible to implement this ban.

Despite the political, economic and structural factors sustaining the current system, there are areas where reform may be possible to support. The disillusionment with the current system among voters/activists who benefit only from small cash handouts during elections was widespread. A debate about the dysfunctionality of the system and a search for alternatives is already taking place. Unfortunately, that debate is not being conducted by political party representatives challenging the dominant parties. This makes sense; it would be difficult for a new party to win votes based on an alternative mandate as voters know that a new party, running on an alternative mandate alone, is unlikely win a sufficient majority in the National Assembly to implement that alternative mandate.

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21 Interview with deputy, Niamey.

22 FGDs and interviews with Peul youth and campement chiefs at Tchadi Market.

23 FGDs, Abalak; also Mohamadou (2004).

Instead, the debate is happening outside the political arena, at sermons organised by Islamic associations at national, regional and local levels. Through their challenging of secularist and corrupt governance, marabouts and imams work to encourage voters either to vote for leaders that are honest or to boycott the system altogether. As religious leaders have huge influence over voters, their sermons represent a potential mechanism to influence their behaviour.

While there is space to influence voters who are disillusioned with the current electoral system, there is also space to work with voters who are not as deeply embedded in the clientelist structure. The interviews and FGDs carried out for this research indicate that women, particularly less educated women, gain fewer monetary gains during elections than men. As they gain less from the current system, it may be easier to convince them to use alternative strategies for voting. Several female councillors interviewed for this research were already using the narrative that voting for a female candidate will bring more benefits to females as a group than voting for a male candidate who gives them small amounts of cash. It is likely these female candidates are also using electoral rent in the form of envelopes of cash and lengths of material to secure support, but voting for the good of a group of women is one step towards voting for party policy rather than short-term clientelistic gains.

Crucially, it remains unclear the extent to which voters are willing to ignore the moral obligation to reciprocate electoral rent by voting for that party. Until now, political parties have been able to financially reward voters who are able to demonstrate that they have voted for them. Ballot papers consist of separate cards representing each candidate; if voters are able to produce the cards of other parties, they can demonstrate they have voted for a particular party. For the upcoming elections, voters must leave their ballot papers in the voting booth. This means that, in theory, voters are now free to accept electoral rent but vote for the party or candidate they think best represents their interests, be that the candidate/party who is connected to them via their family, ethnic or locality affiliation or the candidate/party who responds to their priorities.

5. Recommendations

1. *Launch an awareness-raising campaign to educate voters about the change in the law regarding ballot papers*. The awareness campaign should be clear that, even if voters accept electoral rent from a political party, they may use their vote to elect leaders who will respond to their priorities. The campaign should

be especially tailored to uneducated, female and younger voters. Using comics and posters to illustrate the message in simple terms would be effective. The social structures and opinion leaders that political parties use to mobilise support, could be also used to promote this message. If marabouts, and particularly imams, agree to disseminate this message, this could be a powerful medium to influence voter behaviour. Saudi and Qatari governments are currently keen to have their development agencies associated with anti-corruption projects. USAID and other Western donors could consider working with the Saudis and Qataris to access a wider range of religious associations through which the message can be conveyed to Nigerien voters. Accessing a wide range of associations will be key to ensure that the message is not just conveyed by associations with closer relations with the Government of Niger. The upcoming election could be used to gather baseline data on the extent to which voters vote for parties from which they have received electoral rent. The awareness campaign could then be launched prior to the elections in 2020.

2. *Support CENI in the implementation of the new legislation regarding the banning of taking ballot papers out of the polling booth*. The messaging campaign will be undermined if, on Election Day, the law is not adhered to, and voters are allowed to take their ballot papers out of the polling booth, or there are opportunities to work around the ban so that they can demonstrate to parties who they have voted for. CENI have already showed that they are willing to take a stand on some cases of electoral fraud, as was the case in 2009 when the magistrates working for CENI boycotted the election (Oumarou, 2015). There are, however, other cases where CENI has been bought off (see Olivier de Sardan, 2015). To ensure that the messaging campaign is not undermined, USAID and other donors should work with CENI to identify what support it needs to implement the ban. Ways in which political parties and voters may work around the ban should be pre-empted in collaboration with CENI.

3. *Support education on elections and voting strategies for both less educated men and women*. While women are less embedded in the clientelist electoral system, working only with women to educate them on voting strategies is likely to produce a backlash from male activists and male voters more generally. As less educated male voters could also benefit from education in voter strategy, an education programme on voting strategies for both less educated male and female voters but with a strong emphasis on accessing women voters is recommended. The education programme could be organised through fadas, women's associations

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24 See Jensen and Justesten (2013) for an overview of vote-buying and poverty in Africa.

and groupements. The programme would need to be mindful that it could be misinterpreted as a programme supported by 'the West' which aims to influence voters' decisions about which party to vote for. The focus of the programme should be clearly on increasing voters' understanding of the electoral system rather than promoting support for specific policies/parties. An alternative approach would be to work through political parties to provide education to activists who in turn educate voters. The Nigerien Political Parties Charter requires political parties in Niger to provide training in civic and political education to militants which they currently aren't providing. The grant provided by the state to political parties could be made contingent on results based education programmes conducted by the political parties.

4. *Work across the electoral system.* Political parties form only one part of the electoral system. In a review of effective donor support to political parties, it was found that reforming an electoral system was most effective when donors worked with the executive and the judiciary as well as the legislature (Wild et al., 2011). The European Union (EU) is already doing work with the Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI). USAID and other donors could consider coordinating with the EU to ensure work with the judiciary complements USAID's work with political parties.

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