

PRE-ANALYSIS PLAN

A Survey Experiment on Voter Preferences and Receptiveness to Information in Rural Burkina Faso

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Abstract

This research design document describes a survey experiment designed to shed light on effects of different forms of candidate differentiation on voter preferences and voter decidedness in the run-up to the transitional municipal elections in Burkina Faso. The survey experiment is carried out with randomly sampled voting-age citizens in all rural municipalities located within six of Burkina Faso's thirteen administrative regions.

Research Questions

The upcoming municipal-level elections in Burkina Faso will confront voters and candidates with a highly unusual situation. In the wake of a national-level political transition, the incumbent local governments were removed from office until new municipal elections are held in 2016. While the previous municipal elections were single-party dominated, previous national ruling party has now become one political force among many in a much more fragmented political landscape. As a consequence, local-level politicians are forced to (re-)position themselves in a changed environment. This raises a number of important questions: Can local politicians who were affiliated with the former

party in power gain from switching parties? What candidate attributes can countervail the effects of being associated with the previous regime? Are there dimensions of candidate differentiation that are such strong determinants of voters' preferences that any other attributes are irrelevant?

To shed light on these problems, we carry out a survey experiment with voting-age citizens in 118 rural municipalities in Burkina Faso. Respondents are asked about their preference between two imaginary mayoral candidates, who are characterized by eight randomly varied attributes, along which the two candidates may or may not differ. Furthermore, respondents are asked about the extent to which their preference might be altered by additional information about the candidates, and about the types of information that would have the greatest influence over their preference.

The survey experiment was designed to address two distinct sets of research questions. The first set of questions concerns the relationship between candidate differentiation and voters' receptiveness to information, at a more general, theoretical level.

- Are there dimensions of candidate differentiation which will cause voters to ignore further information?
- What type of information will sway indifferent voters?
- What is the (observational) relationship between voter indifference and intent to vote?

The second set of questions focuses on the mechanisms by which local political support is sustained, specifically in the Burkinabé context. We conjecture that the impact of the national-level political developments on local political competition will depend on the extent to which the local-level mobilization capacity of political parties is derived from their role in national-level politics, or from their access to independent local power structures. In a single-party dominated regime, these two alternative mechanisms are observationally equivalent, because dominant parties have both the greatest national-level support and a competitive advantage over other parties in recruiting the most powerful local mobilizers. However, once a political system shifts from single-party dominance to pluralistic, multi-party competition, the mechanism by which local political support is sustained becomes highly relevant and consequential for the further trajectory of political development.

If a party's local-level mobilization capacity is derived from its influence in national-level politics, rather than from control over independent local mobilization capacity, then we would expect that a shock to political power relations at the national level (by the revolution in the capital city and the subsequent takeover of power by the military) would cause a comparable shock to local-level power structures. Alternatively, if local-level politicians wield mobilization capacity that is independent of their affiliation with a powerful national party, then we would expect that local-level politicians might not be hurt too much by changes at the national level. Local power structures would remain intact, even if established local politicians might opportunistically change their party affiliation.

Which of these scenarios is more likely to occur will depend on whether voting in local-level elections is personalistic or partisan, and how voters respond to opportunistic party switching. If voter preferences in local elections are *partisan-oriented*, i.e. if voters make their choices based on the ideologies, social identities or segments of society parties stand for, then we would expect that local politicians who are affiliated with the former ruling party will lose power in places where their party has lost popular support. If voter preferences in local elections are *personalistic*, i.e. if voters are willing to overlook former or current party affiliation, because other dimensions of candidate differentiation (such as gender, co-ethnicity, co-religiousness, kinship ties to a village, or the proffering of campaign gifts) are more salient, then local power structures might remain intact and opposition parties might seize the day and compete for established local-level politicians.

Hence, in order to explain the local-level impact of the national-level political transition in Burkina Faso, a crucial prerequisite is to understand whether voting in local-level elections is partisan or personalistic. We will therefore focus on the following questions:

1. In the municipal elections, will voters turn away from local-level supporters of former president Blaise Compaoré, even though many established local politicians were and continue to be affiliated with the CDP?
2. Can local-level supporters of former president Blaise Compaoré gain from switching parties?
3. What dimensions of candidate differentiation can countervail an association with the previous regime?

Experimental Design

Survey experiments involving the evaluation of imaginary political candidates are often rightfully questioned for their lack of realism and their construct validity. However, this study is perhaps unique in that it examines a situation in which the identity and positioning of candidates is actually highly speculative in reality. In the run-up to Burkina Faso’s municipal elections, the public’s attention is primarily focused on the highly contested national-level transitional elections. Candidate lists for the municipal-level elections have yet to be announced, and the lines of political competition at the local level will likely be contingent on the outcomes of the national-level elections. Furthermore, mayoral candidates are nominated by the different political parties, and mayors are elected indirectly by the municipal councils, while voters decide over the allocation of council seats by party. For survey respondents, this means that comparisons between imaginary mayoral candidates are not confounded by inevitable associations with real-world candidates (or worse: with current incumbents), simply because the real-world candidates have not emerged yet and there are no incumbents. This situation creates a unique opportunity for a glimpse into the effects of different forms of candidate differentiation on voters’ preferences and on their decidedness (or conversely: their receptiveness towards additional information).

Survey setup and outcomes of interest

The survey setup is as follows. First, interviewers read the following prompt to the respondents:

“There are no official candidate lists yet for the next municipal elections. But imagine that you had the choice between two candidates for mayor in your commune.”

Next, the interviewers orally present respondents with two candidate profiles. In the candidate profiles, eight specific attributes are used to describe the candidates. These attributes are described below. The candidate profiles are read to the respondents as follows:

“The first candidate is [...LIST OF ATTRIBUTES FOLLOWS ...]. The second candidate is [...LIST OF ATTRIBUTES FOLLOWS ...].”

The presentation of candidate profiles is followed by the following questions:

If these two candidates were your only options to choose from, do you think you would vote in the next municipal elections?

- *Yes, definitely*
- *Yes, probably*
- *Probably not*
- *Definitely not*

If you had to vote between these two candidates, which candidate would you prefer?

- *I would DEFINITELY prefer Candidate 1*
- *I would PROBABLY prefer Candidate 1, but I might change my mind if I had more information about the candidates*
- *I would DEFINITELY prefer Candidate 2*
- *I would PROBABLY prefer Candidate 2, but I might change my mind if I had more information about the candidates*
- *I would need more information to decide which of these two candidates I would prefer*

Respondents who stated that their preference would depend on further information, or that they might change their preference in response to further information are asked:

“What other information would be most important for you to decide which candidate you would prefer? ”

and subsequently:

“What additional information would also help you decide which candidate you would prefer? ”

These questions are open-ended and interviewers are instructed not to suggest response options to the respondent. Upon receiving a response, interviewers code the response using a list of pre-specified categories, as well as a write-in “other” category.

Random variation in candidate attributes

The two candidate profiles vary along eight dimensions, and information on each of these eight dimensions is included in every candidate profile:

1. The candidate's gender
2. Whether the candidate was an active supporter of the ousted president Compaoré
3. Whether the candidate has switched parties after the revolution
4. Whether the candidate is supported by the military
5. Whether the candidate is of the same ethnicity as the respondent
6. Whether the candidate is of the same religion as the respondent
7. Whether the candidate has close relatives in the respondent's village
8. Whether the candidate has given the respondent a campaign gift

Each of these eight attributes is randomized independently for each of the two candidate profiles. For every attribute in each of the candidate profiles, one of the two potential realizations is selected independently of the candidate's other attributes and independently of the other candidate's profile, with a constant assignment probability of 0.5. This randomization is carried out within the mobile survey software, which automatically displays the two candidate profiles and allows the interviewer to record the responses, while also recording the treatment information (see Appendix for the XLSForm code).

What Determines Voters' Receptiveness to Information?

Effects of candidate differentiation on voters' preference and decidedness

To investigate how voters' demand for information is affected by different forms of candidate differentiation, we first analyze how different dimensions of candidate differentiation influence not only

voters' preferences, but also their decidedness in favor or against particular candidates (Table 1).

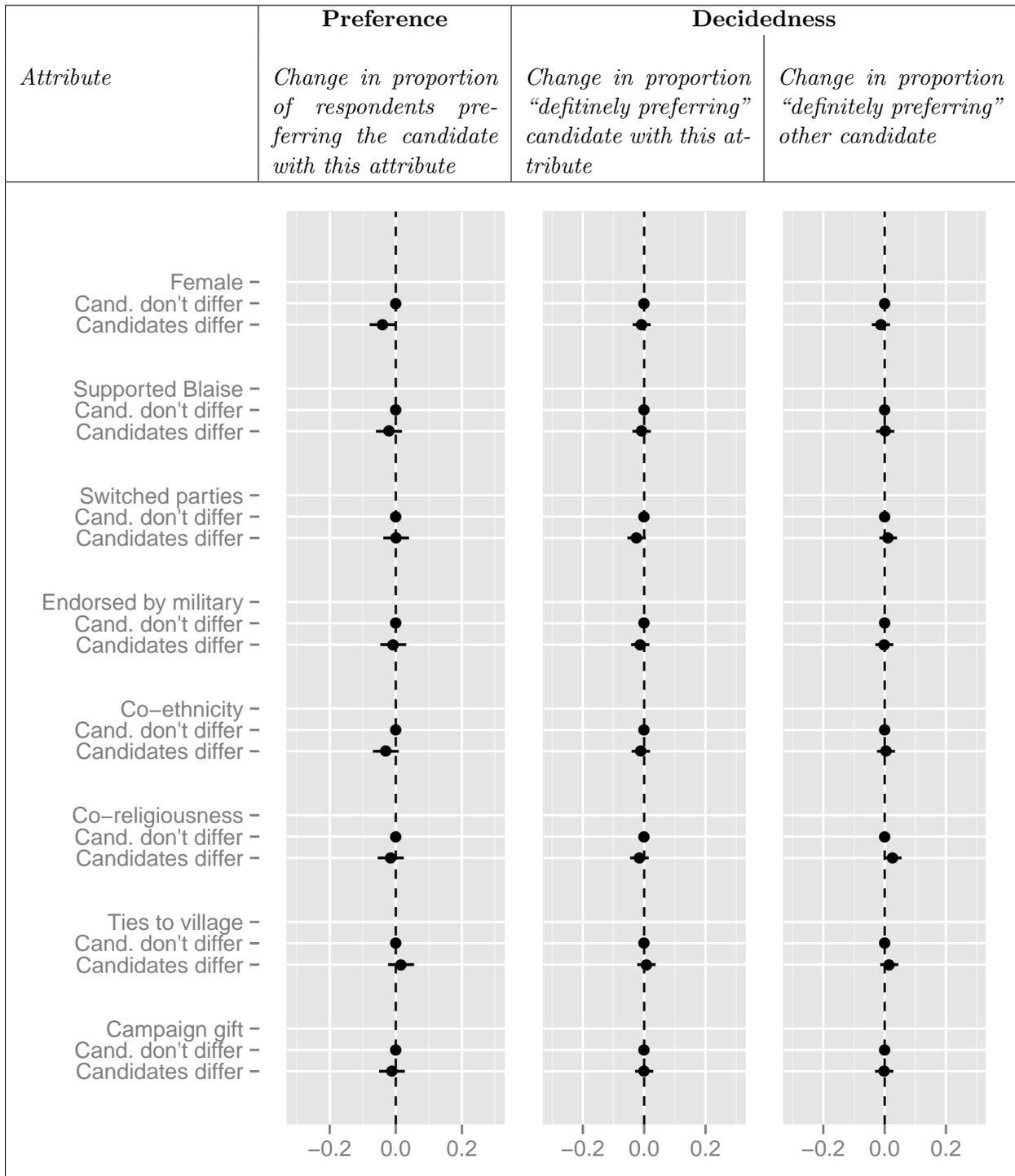


Table 1: Effect of candidate differentiation along different attributes on voters' preferences and voters' decidedness. [NOTE: SIMULATED DATA, NOT REAL RESULTS]

Voter indifference and intent to vote

The comparisons proposed in the preceding section examine whether candidate differentiation along the attributes of interest is consequential for voters' preferences and their receptiveness towards further information about the candidates. This part focuses conversely on (1) whether a lack of differentiation with regard to specific attributes increases the proportion of respondents who are completely indifferent between the candidate profiles, (2) the observational relationship between decidedness/indifference and intent to vote, and, lastly, (3) how a lack of differentiation with regard to specific attributes affects respondents' intent to vote.

To visualize the observational relationship between decidedness and intent to vote, a mosaic plot will be presented, with three levels of decidedness (1. Needs more information to decide, 2. Probably prefers a candidate, but might be swayed by further information, 3. Definitely prefers a candidate) on the X-axis and four levels of intent to vote (Definitely; Probably; Probably Not; Definitely Not) on the Y-axis.

To analyze how a lack of candidate differentiation along specific features affects the proportion of voters who are indifferent between candidates, as well as voters' overall motivation to turn out to vote, we compare cases in which candidates differ along a specific attribute to cases in which candidates either both share or both lack the attribute (Table 2).

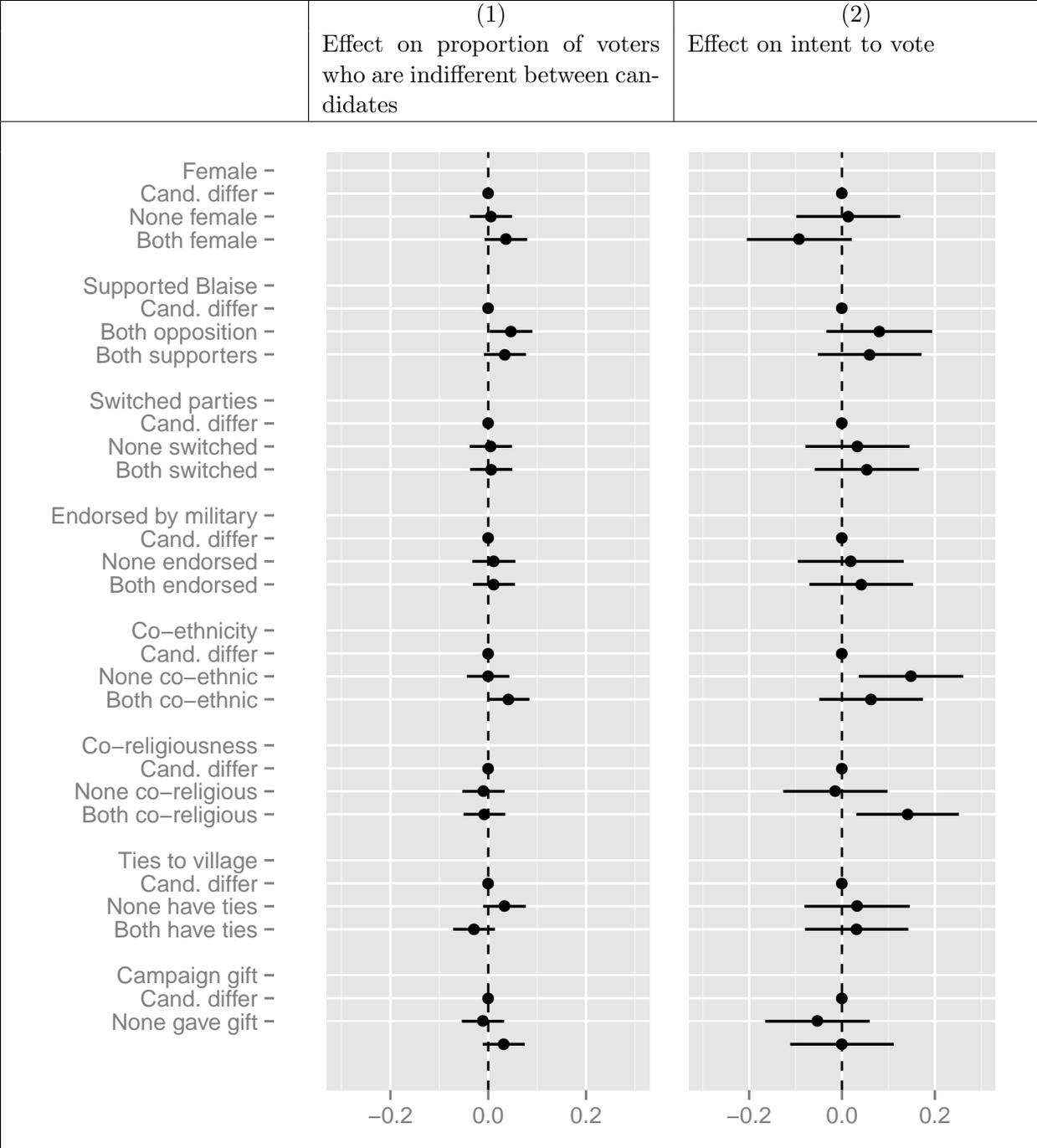


Table 2: Effect of candidate indistinguishability (with respect to a specific attribute) relative to a situation where the candidates differ with respect to that attribute. The outcomes of interest are the proportion of respondents who are undecided/indifferent between candidates (Column 1) and on respondents' intent to vote (Column 2). [NOTE: SIMULATED DATA, NOT REAL RESULTS]

What information will sway indifferent voters?

To understand what information undecided voters may be seeking, we are asking those respondents who do not exhibit a definite preference for one or the other candidate in the survey experiment what other information would help them decide between the two candidates. We will present a summary table indicating what fraction of respondents mentioned each type of information (without having been prompted about the response options).

| Type of information | Percent of respondents identifying this type of information as most important |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Popularity of the candidates in the respondent's village | |
| Which candidate is supported by the village chief or the village elders | |
| Which candidate is supported by the national government | |
| Age of the candidates | |
| Level of education of the candidates | |
| Occupation of the candidates | |
| Wealth of the candidates | |
| Prior experience of the candidates in municipal governance | |
| Ability of the candidates to mobilize people | |
| Candidate's ability to bring money to the municipality | |
| Honesty of the candidates | |
| Personality of the candidate | |
| Physical appearance of the candidates | |
| How likely each candidate is to win the election | |
| What the candidates have previously done for the respondent's village | |
| What the candidates have previously done for the municipality | |
| What the candidates have previously done for the country | |
| The political party of the candidates | |
| Other | |

Table 3: Voters' demand for information (among respondents who are undecided between the two hypothetical candidates or indicated that they might be swayed by further information). The table reports the percentage of respondents mentioning, in an open-ended question, the respective piece of information as "most important" for their choice between candidates.

Understanding the Impacts of the National-Level Regime Transition on Local-level Politics in Burkina Faso

In the municipal elections, will voters turn away from local-level supporters of former president Blaise Compaoré?

To what extent voters have a preference against candidates who were active supporters of Blaise Compaoré will become apparent from the analysis reported in Table 1.

While we expect that – everything else equal – many voters will be biased against active supporters of Blaise Compaoré, it remains to be examined to what extent this actually weakens the electoral chances of Compaoré’s (former) supporters, or whether other dimensions of candidate differentiation might compensate for it, such as endorsement by the military, identity-based voting, kinship ties to a village, or campaign gifts. Especially since many former CDP politicians are switching to the newly founded MPP or to other parties in the run-up to the elections, it is also important to investigate how voters respond to strategic party switching.

Additionally, we will investigate whether effect of having been an active supporter of Blaise Compaoré on a candidate’s attractiveness differs by whether a commune was CDP- or opposition-controlled after the last municipal elections. We will also visualize the effect size by CDP vote share in a commune in the last municipal elections.

Lastly, the data can provide insights into the observational relationship between voter preferences and strength of the ruling party in the previous elections. To investigate this, we will report coefficients from an OLS regression of CDP vote share in a commune in 2012 on the estimated effects of each dimension of candidate differentiation (as reported in Table 1, column 1).¹

¹Given that we have only 20 respondents per commune, in each of 118 communes, we expect the commune-level treatment effect estimates to be very noisy. Yet, the commune-level comparisons provide an opportunity to validate potential findings about treatment effect heterogeneity between CDP-controlled and non-CDP-controlled communes, by examining whether similar patterns can be observed at lower levels of aggregation and with more fine-grained data on prior CDP influence.

Can local-level supporters of former president Blaise Compaoré gain from switching parties?

To test whether local politicians can dissociate themselves from the CDP by running for a different party, we will report the effect of party switching on voters' preference for candidates who were active supporters of Compaoré's, separately by whether they are being compared with (1) a candidate who was not a supporter of Compaoré's, or (2) a candidate who was an active supporter of Compaoré's and has not switched parties.

What dimensions of candidate differentiation can countervail an association with the previous regime?

If we find that having been an active supporter of Blaise Compaoré is a liability for mayoral candidates, we will test whether other dimensions of candidate differentiation, besides party switching, can diminish or eliminate the negative effect of being associated with the former regime. To test this, we will first examine which candidate features (gender, endorsement by the military, co-ethnicity, co-religiousness, kinship ties to the village, or the proffering of campaign gifts) increase voters' preference for a candidate (see Table 1). Focusing on comparisons between supporters and non-supporters of Blaise Compaoré, we will then examine whether the effect of having been a supporter of Blaise Compaoré is lower for those candidates who also distinguish themselves from the alternative candidate by one of the aforementioned features.

Appendix

XLSForm Code for Candidate Profiles

| name | type | relevance | label:English | label:French |
|----------|-------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| conjoint | begin group | | Candidate Preference | |
| c_intro | note | | There are no official candidate lists yet for the next municipal elections. But imagine that you had the choice between two candidates for mayor in your commune. | Il n'y a pas de liste de candidats encore officielle pour les prochaines élections municipales. Mais imaginez que vous aviez le choix entre deux candidats à la mairie de votre commune. |
| space1 | note | | ***** | ***** |
| c1n0 | note | | THE FIRST CANDIDATE | LE PREMIER CANDIDAT |
| c1n1.0 | note | #{c1.female}=0 | Is a man | Est un homme |
| c1n1.1 | note | #{c1.female}=1 | Is a woman | Est une femme |
| c1n2.0 | note | #{c1.blaise}=0 | Was not a supporter of Blaise Compaoré | N'était pas un partisan de Blaise Compaoré |
| c1n2.1 | note | #{c1.blaise}=1 | Was an active supporter of Blaise Compaoré | Était un partisan actif de Blaise Compaoré |
| c1n3.0 | note | #{c1.partychange}=0 | Has not changed political parties after the revolution | N'a pas changé de parti politique après la révolution |
| c1n3.1 | note | #{c1.partychange}=1 | Has changed political parties after the revolution | A changé de parti politique après la révolution |
| c1n4.0 | note | #{c1.military}=0 | Is not supported by the military | N'est pas soutenu(e) par l'armée |
| c1n4.1 | note | #{c1.military}=1 | Is supported by the military | Est soutenu(e) par l'armée |
| c1n5.0 | note | #{c1.coethnic}=0 | Is of a different ethnicity than you | Est d'une autre origine ethnique que vous |
| c1n5.1 | note | #{c1.coethnic}=1 | Is of the same ethnicity as you | Est de la même origine ethnique que vous |
| c1n6.0 | note | #{c1.coreligious}=0 | Has a different religion than you | A une religion différente de la vtre |
| c1n6.1 | note | #{c1.coreligious}=1 | Has the same religion as you | A la même religion que vous |
| c1n7.0 | note | #{c1.village}=0 | Does not have close relatives in your village | N'a pas de parents proches dans votre village |
| c1n7.1 | note | #{c1.village}=1 | Has close relatives in your village | A des parents proches dans votre village |
| c1n8.0 | note | #{c1.gift}=0 | Has not given you a campaign gift | Ne vous a donné aucun cadeau de campagne |
| c1n8.1 | note | #{c1.gift}=1 | Has given you a T-shirt as a campaign gift | Vous a donné une chemise comme un cadeau de campagne |
| space2 | note | | ***** | ***** |
| c2n0 | note | | THE SECOND CANDIDATE | LE DEUXIEME CANDIDAT |
| c2n1.0 | note | #{c2.female}=0 | Is a man | Est un homme |
| c2n1.1 | note | #{c2.female}=1 | Is a woman | Est une femme |
| c2n2.0 | note | #{c2.blaise}=0 | Was not a supporter of Blaise Compaoré | N'était pas un partisan de Blaise Compaoré |
| c2n2.1 | note | #{c2.blaise}=1 | Was an active supporter of Blaise Compaoré | Était un partisan actif de Blaise Compaoré |
| c2n3.0 | note | #{c2.partychange}=0 | Has not changed political parties after the revolution | N'a pas changé de parti politique après la révolution |
| c2n3.1 | note | #{c2.partychange}=1 | Has changed political parties after the revolution | A changé de parti politique après la révolution |
| c2n4.0 | note | #{c2.military}=0 | Is not supported by the military | N'est pas soutenu(e) par l'armée |
| c2n4.1 | note | #{c2.military}=1 | Is supported by the military | Est soutenu(e) par l'armée |
| c2n5.0 | note | #{c2.coethnic}=0 | Is of a different ethnicity than you | Est d'une autre origine ethnique que vous |
| c2n5.1 | note | #{c2.coethnic}=1 | Is of the same ethnicity as you | Est de la même origine ethnique que vous |
| c2n6.0 | note | #{c2.coreligious}=0 | Has a different religion than you | A une religion différente de la vtre |
| c2n6.1 | note | #{c2.coreligious}=1 | Has the same religion as you | A la même religion que vous |
| c2n7.0 | note | #{c2.village}=0 | Does not have close relatives in your village | N'a pas de parents proches dans votre village |
| c2n7.1 | note | #{c2.village}=1 | Has close relatives in your village | A des parents proches dans votre village |
| c2n8.0 | note | #{c2.gift}=0 | Has not given you a campaign gift | Ne vous a donné aucun cadeau de campagne |
| c2n8.1 | note | #{c2.gift}=1 | Has given you a T-shirt as a campaign gift | Vous a donné une chemise comme un cadeau de campagne |
| | end group | | | |