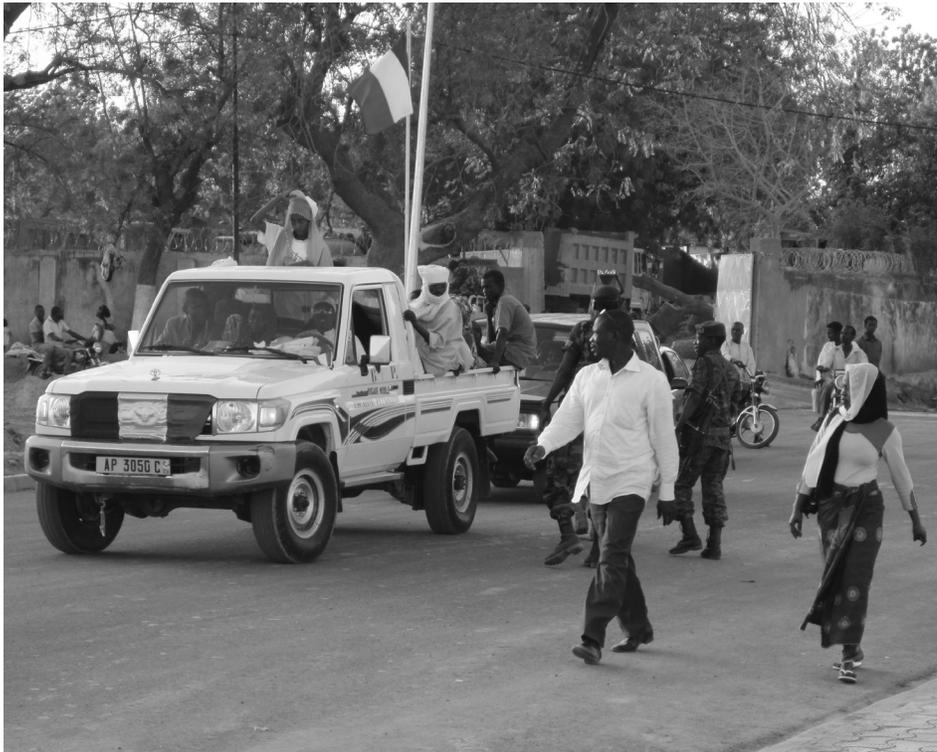


# The Trans-Saharan Elections Project (TSEP)

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In 2012 the Trans-Saharan Elections Project (TSEP) completed a highly successful second round of exchanges with elections specialists from the six Sahelian countries involved in the project: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. TSEP is funded by a grant through the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and has involved a two-year series of exchanges and seminars bringing together elections specialists from the six countries with a wide range of American academics and professionals also involved in elections. The goals of the project, co-directed by Leonardo A. Villalón and Daniel A. Smith, are to comparatively examine the challenges and issues involved in ensuring electoral freedom, fairness, and transparency; to develop a network of scholars and practitioners across the six countries and with the University of Florida; and to develop a research resource on elections in the Sahel.

Key to accomplishing these goals has been our collaborative partnerships in each of those coun-

tries. Our partners have been key in helping us select and invite participants, sharing information on their own work on elections, and hosting and organizing seminars and meetings in our visits to each country.

Our partners include:

- CGD, Centre Pour la Gouvernance Démocratique (Burkina Faso)
- EISA-Chad (Chad)
- APEM, Réseau Appui au Processus Electoral au Mali (Mali)
- Université de Nouakchott, Faculté des Sciences Juridiques et Economiques (Mauritania)
- LASDEL, Laboratoire E'Etudes et Recherches sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local (Niger)
- Mouvement Citoyen (Senegal)
- WARC, West African Research Center, Dakar, Senegal.

Since the early 1990s the ma-

jority of countries in Africa have instituted systems of regular elections. While the results of the past two decades have been highly mixed, in virtually every country elections have been accepted as the "normal" mode of acceding to public office. The reiterated processes of elections has, however, also produced intense debates about their conduct, and over the years there has been an increased awareness that the need is not just to avoid cheating on election day but to consider much broader issues such as the impact of varying electoral systems, the importance of the larger institutional infrastructure and the rules of game, the role of social and political organizations, and the management of the mechanics of electoral processes. Importantly, these very issues also preoccupy many intense American political debates about electoral reform. A key goal of the TSEP project is thus to share experiences, and to stimulate discussions that will have real and substantive impact on our understanding of elections.

Our May 2012 seminar in the US for our African visitors, involving 16 participants representing all six countries. The three week seminar thus took place in an American presidential election year, and in a context in which there was much intense debate in the United States about key aspects of elections—redistricting, voter identification, voting procedures and provisions for early and absentee voting—that some argued would have an impact on voter turnout. In the Sahel, the seminar followed some highly significant events as well: In Senegal, extremely successful and well-executed presidential elections had been held in April, happily proving wrong expectations of problems