

Coalition Politics and the Evolution of Electoral Systems in Francophone Africa

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During summer 2013, I was able to travel to Senegal, Mali and Niger for my pre-dissertation research. The initial purpose of this research was to collect empirical data on elections and electoral systems in order to write a well-informed dissertation proposal.

My focus on the origin and change of electoral systems is informed by the empirical puzzle that a number of French African countries which were under the same electoral system during the colonial period chose different electoral systems during the “authoritarian rule” (after the 1960s) and throughout the democratic period (after the 1990s). For instance, Mali has continued to use the two-round majority-runoff formula inherited from the colonial administration while Senegal has shifted from a pure proportional representation system in 1978 to a mixed electoral system since 1983. Niger has been using a proportional representation system since 1991. Whether the initial electoral system is maintained or change largely depended how actors and groups mobilize in the process of institutional design. The purpose of my research is to examine how coalition politics account for the divergence in patterns of electoral systems in three countries (Senegal, Mali and Niger) that share many background conditions.

I largely spent summer 2013 doing archival work and collecting both published and unpublished documents on elections and electoral systems. I was able to conduct semi-structural interviews with key actors working on electoral issues in order to gauge the trajectory of electoral systems in Mali, Niger, and Senegal since the colonial period. These actors include civil servants, leaders of political parties, journalists, civil society activists, and academics. I was also fortunate to be in Mali a few weeks before the July 2013 presidential campaign. I was able to follow the debates on the new arrangements of electoral system during the transition. The data I collected were primarily



meant to help to build an inductive theory of the origin and change of electoral systems in Francophone Africa and better prepare my dissertation fieldwork. As I move forward with my dissertation proposal, I am paying a close attention to the patterns of coalition-making and the process through which they affect the evolution and change of electoral systems.

In addition my pre-dissertation fieldwork, I have also followed the consequence of the Malian crisis of 2012 in Senegal. In fact, not only has this crisis threatened the sovereignty of the Malian state from an assault led by a Tuareg rebellion connected to Islamists affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, it also has far-reaching effects in West Africa and the Sahel. In Senegal, it has fueled two domestic concerns. The first effect is economic and is related to the disruption of the terms of trade between Senegal and Mali that began during the first five months of the crisis. The second is relative to the national security of Senegal. Perhaps, the main worry is associated with Islamist

threats. These domestic impacts of the Malian crisis in Senegal were developed more broadly in a paper I presented in a panel at the African Studies Association (ASA) annual meeting in November 2013 in Baltimore, Maryland.

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