
Processes of Democratization in the Sahel

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Over the course of summer 2013, I conducted more than thirty interviews with state, civil society and political party elites in Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Chad to prepare my dissertation proposal. In addition to the interviews I preformed this past summer, I was able to set up a network of contacts in each country. These networks will serve as the foundation of my future dissertation research in 2014. My dissertation project investigates how different regimes in the Francophone Sahel respond to pressures for political liberalization and how these responses affect political stability and state-society relations. I approach this question by analyzing three intersecting domains: civil-military relations, civil-society organizations, and political institutions. This study of democratizing processes—or their absence—utilizes a comparative framework between the contemporary regimes of Senegal, Chad, and Burkina Faso in order to examine their differences and similarities.

In Burkina Faso and Chad, ruling parties led transitions to multi-party electoral systems during the 1990s. Despite these changes, both ruling parties remained in power and both presidents have won all subsequent electoral contests by modifying constitutional term limits. In Burkina Faso, this occurred in conjunction with limited levels of political liberalization which allowed social organizations—such as the press, religious associations, and non-governmental organizations—to expand their activities and influence over society and politics. In Chad, civil society organizations were included in the transition process, but in contrast, the regime was able to negotiate the process of transition without undergoing significant liberalization. Interviews preformed during the summer of 2013 helped to substantiate this similarity in ruling-party entrenchment, but difference in level of political openness by gathering evidence that civil society associations in Chad had been coopted by the state whereas in Burkina Faso many organizations actively protest against policies advanced by the



ruling party without fear of reprisal.

The political trajectory of Senegal diverges from the electoral authoritarian regimes of Chad and Burkina Faso. Steady and incremental processes of political liberalization since independence have contributed to significant democratic gains in Senegal. During the first four decades of independence these processes occurred under the guidance of a dominant political party, but over the last three presidential elections there have been two turnovers of power and many configurations of political parties to form the majority and opposition coalitions in parliament. By analyzing these processes in comparison to those in Burkina Faso and Chad, my dissertation hopes to establish which strategies pursued by elites at the institutional level encourage or inhibit political liberalization and why.

Multiple FLAS awards to study Modern Standard Arabic contributed to my ability to engage with Muslim populations in each country as well as read the Arabic press in Chad. Finally, CAS also continues to offer support through an invaluable community of scholars and several opportunities for my professional development.

These include discussions and presentations at the regular meetings of the Islam in Africa working group, weekly Barazas from outside speakers, and SASA lunches for graduate student research reports.



Dan Eizenga is a PhD candidate in political science and a former FLAS fellow (Arabic, 2010-2012). Funding for his pre-dissertation research was provided by the UF Office of Research, the Center for African Studies, the Department of Political Science, and the Minerva Research Initiative.