

ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM IN THE FRANCOPHONE SAHEL

DANIEL EIZENGA

In recent years political scientists have observed that in some sub-Saharan African countries democracy seems to consolidate despite the initial deficiencies that characterized their early multiparty elections while, in other countries, a restoration of authoritarian politics follows such an opening. Based on extensive fieldwork in three Sahelian African countries, my dissertation, “Surviving Democratization: Electoral Authoritarian Regimes in Burkina Faso, Chad and Senegal,” seeks to explain different regime outcomes in each case. In the dissertation, I advance an original theoretical framework based on different configurations of political institutions, civil-military relations and religious and traditional institutions to better understand how these institutions influence the ability of elites to manage pressures for greater liberalization from civil society and the political opposition.

The literature on democratization in political science has produced an abundance of regime types along the spectrum between democratic and authoritarian rule. Yet, this body of work has, so far, failed to understand a variety of fundamental questions about these ‘electoral authoritarian’ regimes, particularly in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. My dissertation addresses this gap by examining several related questions including: Why are seemingly similar regimes trending in different directions of political liberalization? Why, following the implementation of multiparty elections, do some countries exhibit further institutionalization, while in others an erosion of institutions takes place? How are elections organized in these regimes, and how do politics manifest themselves in response? How do other socio-political institutions react and engage with society in electoral authoritarian contexts?

I employ a comparative approach to examine the interaction of political institutions, civil-military relations, traditional and religious institutions, and civil society to scrutinize how each contributes to the different regime trajectories of Burkina Faso, Chad and Senegal, following their respective implementations of multiparty elections. During this research, I conducted fieldwork in these three countries over eighteen consecutive months (June 2014 – December 2015), with the goal of better understanding differences in their political trajectories, despite their relative and shared stability. The evidence I gathered from hundreds of interviews conducted with political elites, civil society leaders, and other state actors, as well as extensive archival research, indicate that civil-military relations alongside traditional and religious institutions interact with each country’s respective political institutions to manage processes of political liberalization in each case. My dissertation and fieldwork remain indebted to the invaluable advice and support of faculty at the Center for African Studies, contacts in Burkina Faso, Chad and Senegal, and the engaging community of scholars who

compose the Sahel Research Group at the University of Florida.

During the last year, I presented my research at the annual Carter Conference hosted by the Center for African Studies at the University of Florida, at the Univeristé de Québec à Montréal and at the 60th African Studies Association meeting in Chicago. In the fall of 2017, the United States Institute of Peace selected me as the principal investigator for a research project on the regulation of religion at institutes of higher education in Chad as part of their larger research project on the Lake Chad Basin. In 2017, I also received a dissertation writing fellowship from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for the spring semester of 2018.

Daniel Eizenga is a PhD candidate in political science and a former FLAS fellow (Arabic). Funding for his dissertation research was provided by the UF Office of Research, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Center for African Studies, the Sahel Research Group, the Department of Political Science and the Minerva Initiative Grant “Political Reform, Social Change, and Stability in the African Sahel.”

