

REGIME STABILITY, POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION, AND SOCIAL MOBILIZATION IN THE SAHEL

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Today, virtually all African regimes participate in the core rituals of democracy through the political institutions of multi-party elections. However, the degree of substantive political competition varies noticeably from country to country. How do different types of institutional configurations affect the overall level of political competition in the different regimes of Africa? How, in turn, does social mobilization shape political reform in the name of democracy? How do the iterative effects of institutional reform and social pressure combine to influence the prospects of regime resilience or breakdown?

As was the case in much of sub-Saharan Africa, the countries of the Francophone Sahel embarked on democratizing political transitions during the 1990s. Recently, significant pressures on regime stability have emerged as a result of the fall of the Qaddafi regime, the rise of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and the state collapse of Mali. Further, together the countries of the Sahel are considered amongst the least developed on earth; their regimes struggle to control demographic change, drug and arms trafficking, and various social cleavages. Given these challenges, how have certain regimes not only remained stable, but in some cases engaged in the processes of democratization?

My dissertation examines how regimes respond to social pressures resulting in augmented political liberalization in certain cases, but the persistence of authoritarian practices in others. Through a comparative framework and extensive fieldwork in Chad, Burkina Faso, and Senegal, this project will systematically analyze the interactive and reciprocal effects of institutional reform and social pressures on each country's political development and how these effects have shaped the prospects for political stability in each case. This research will be carried out over a period



of eighteen months divided between each of the three countries and builds off of previous pre-dissertation research conducted during the summer of 2013.

This past year, I began conducting my research in N'Djamena where I worked alongside a team of university student researchers based at a local civil society organization, *Le Comité de Suivi de l'Appel à la Paix et à la Réconciliation* (CSAPR). I have conducted interviews with political party leaders, state officials, academics, other civil society organizations, and journalists. I have been able to collect numerous documents from the archives of institutions and libraries which illuminate the various political reforms which have taken place under the current regime of the president Idriss Déby Itno and his party *le Mouvement Patriotique de Salut* (MPS). Déby led a political transition from the single party rule of former dictator Hissène Habré to a multi-party political system which marked the end of decades of political violence and civil war. However since this transition, Déby and

the MPS have dominated the political arena of the country, winning overwhelming majorities in all of the legislative and presidential elections and leaving little room for genuine political competition.

Conducting research on processes of democratization in this context has proven to be challenging. Nevertheless, my research has advanced considerably while in Chad and I continue to gain crucial insights into the political mechanisms of the regime. This is largely thanks to the invaluable advice and support of faculty at the Center for African Studies, CSAPR's local network, and the engaging community of scholars who compose the Sahel Research Group at the University of Florida.

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