

# Africa Project Workshop Leader Reports

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The APSA Africa Initiative brought diverse group of about 25 scholars to Dakar to discuss research on political participation. Our working language was French. All participants were interested in some aspect of party politics or political participation. The conference-length research papers or research proposals that participants worked on over the course of our three-week workshop centered on questions about the weakness of opposition parties in some countries, the improbable strength of the opposition in others, regional patterns of party mobilization and voting, the role of traditional authorities in voter mobilization, the role of teacher and student unions in politics, political mobilization outside the party system (as in *motions de soutien* for ruling parties), the role of the press in shaping political preferences, women's movements and party politics, civil society and election monitoring, historical legacies that shape political culture, and the possible impact of ethnic identity on regional patterns of political behavior. There was plenty to talk about. The participants appreciated the four-tome reading packet of articles and book chapters that we prepared for the workshop and used as the launching point of our seminar and break-out group discussions.

Four substantive themes surfaced and resurfaced in many of our discussions. First, the concept of "clientelism" took a beating from skeptics who debated the scope and limits of this term, wondered about when to apply or not apply the negative moral valence that was attached to this concept in some of our readings, and asked how to distinguish clientelism from the normal politics of constituency building through the provision of schools, clinics, etc. Second, participants chewed on the proposition that voters are "rational" in the narrow sense and wondered how far to push the more instrumental understandings of the rationality hypothesis. Third, we identified a kind of ecological fallacy in much

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The Dakar Workshop was a very challenging but rewarding academic experience.

The first real challenge, which turned out to be a great opportunity, was the workshop's diversity. Some participants were faculty in history departments, with vast experience in election monitoring. Others were doctoral students with backgrounds in mathematics or economics but an interest in political science research. While some were trained in the rational choice tradition, others hailed from the French post-modernist tradition. But they were all open-minded, eager to share their knowledge and methodological approach to politics with others. By the end of the workshop, I really sensed a determination from all the participants to do better research by engaging with the literature, and by collaborating across countries, disciplines, and research traditions.

Because participants had in-depth knowledge of the political process in their countries, and tended to refer to them quite systematically, our discussions during the workshop both highlighted and benefited from the value of a truly comparative approach to politics. We also learned a great deal about the nuanced differences between regime types and between governments of the same regime type. For example, there is a great deal of democratic pluralism in both Benin and Senegal, but there is less government control of public media in Benin than Senegal. The Biya regime in Cameroon and Compaore's in Burkina Faso are both categorized as autocratic by Freedom House, but there is much more

of the work on African politics that supposes that local political arenas (for example, in rural settings) are microcosms, or simply pale reflections, of politics on the national stage. There is often substantial political autonomy of the local—that said, two good questions are how to study it, and what to make of it. And fourth, the entire supposition of the "individualization of the vote," so foundational to the behavioral studies of voter preferences and participation that we do in the U.S., was repeatedly called into question. Pursuing these lines of questioning systematically, and in African contexts, could eventually have a real impact on the ways in which political scientists think about and study political participation.

Our two Africa-based workshop co-leaders, Prof. Augustin Loada and Prof. Alioune Badara Diop, from Burkina Faso and Senegal, respectively, consistently raised the level of our theoretical discourse and broadened the general discussion. They also helped make sure that our proceedings were grounded in African political realities. The four U.S.-based political science graduate students who participated in the workshop were also great colleagues. I would especially like to thank my two fellow travelers from UT, Eduardo Dargent and Gustavo Rivera, for their substantive and personal contributions to the success of the Dakar workshop.

Thanks also go to Ms. Helena Saele of APSA, who was with us in Dakar for the entire month and who kept us alive and working, and to Dr. Ousmane Sene and Mr. Abdoulaye Niang of the West African Research Center, who made sure our conference facilities were in perfect order and perfectly conducive to doing political science. And none of us would have made it to Dakar without the sustained commitment to this project of Dr. Bahram Rajaei, director of international and external relations at APSA.

autonomy of the civil society in Burkina. We also learned about the enduring legacies of the repression of political participation. For example, while colonial repression has had a long-term adverse effect on electoral participation in Madagascar, the legacies of FRELIMO atrocities led to a permanent protest vote against this party in recent elections in Mozambique.

There was a great deal of diversity of activities during the workshop, including lectures, seminar-style presentations of articles, brainstorming of research topics, and finally a mini conference. There were four evening lectures by political activists, journalists, legal scholars, and politicians. There were also a few fun trips to Goree Island and to the zoo, and less "fun" visits to the clinics. It was a three-week workshop of nine-hour days in 80-plus degree temperature. The seminar rooms were air conditioned, but the taxis were not.

As a result of the workshop, a network of African political scientists is taking shape. A number of new projects were being organized in Dakar, involving scholars with various backgrounds and interests and at various levels of their careers. It is movement that ought to be supported individually and collectively by political scientists and Africanists in the U.S.

I personally enjoyed the experience and thank all the workshop leaders, the U.S.-based graduate students and our hosts the West African Research Center for a successful event.