

PON Next Generation Grant Report
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PON Next Generation Grant Recipient, Spring 2012

Dissertation Working Title: *Securing the Space for Political Transition: The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in Burundi*

In the spring 2012, I received a PON Next Generation Grant, which contributed to funding my summer doctoral research trip to Bujumbura, Burundi.

The Burundian Army serves as the central case study for my doctoral dissertation, which will explore how civilian supremacy in civil-military relations is negotiated and what might motivate a military to remain in their barracks, despite a forty-year history of intervention in politics. This research is of particular importance given the investment that the international community makes in security sector reform in post-conflict countries. As in the case of the Burundian Army, many militaries in post-conflict states have dominated politics in the years leading to conflict. If a key goal of international efforts is to contribute to establishing democratic governance in nations such as Burundi, then understanding the process by which the path towards democratic civil-military relations is initiated is critical to achieving that goal.

My understanding of the on-going negotiations between civilian and military leaders and of the past decision-making processes that have resulted in the current non-intervention of the military in Burundian politics has been informed by the experience of Burundian politicians and military officers involved in the reform process. Working through my network of professional contacts, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with key Burundian decision-makers, facilitated one focus group and conducted three additional, informal interviews during my first month of field research in August 2012. My interviews targeted both military and civilian officials: high-level army officers (Lieutenant Colonels, Colonels and Generals), a former President and Senator, a former Prime Minister, officials from the Ministry of Defense, donor partners, and relevant civil society actors working in the domain of security sector reform and good governance. I also started archival research at “Le Renouveau” newspaper and collected and reviewed books on the conflict in Burundi from a private library – many of which I’ve been unsuccessful finding either in the US or France. This visit also set the stage for my subsequent research trip to Burundi, conducted in January 2013.

Using process tracing as my principal research methodology, I am uncovering the history of civil-military relations in Burundi and in particular, the role that one or two key actors have played in inculcating a norm of civilian supremacy within the institution of the army. Interestingly, this process seems to have begun before security sector reform programs were introduced and possibly long before the war ended. If my research continues to support this finding, this could have important implications for how security sector reform projects are conceived of and implemented in the future, and in particular, who the targets of security sector reform should be and how best to reach them.