

Through the support of the 2018 SKJ Pre-Dissertation Fellowship, I had the opportunity to conduct preliminary fieldwork research in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) this past summer. Being able to spend ten weeks in Kinshasa, the capital city of the DRC, was an invaluable experience that enabled me to enrich my knowledge which I believe will be crucial as I plan for my next research trip next summer and formulate my dissertation research proposal during my third year. As a native of the DRC, I spent half of my life in Eastern Congo. Having lived through and experienced state failure and fragility for the most part of my life has motivated me to better understand African politics and contribute in my field by not only relying on my own experience but also relying on the analytical skills I will develop as a doctoral student. This past summer, thanks to the funding from the SKJ Fellowship, I had the first opportunity to travel to a country located in the Great Lakes region of Africa for academic research.

The first objective of the research trip was to interact and begin developing collaborative relationships with various ministries, local NGOs, civil society organizations at the national level as well as the relevant international organizations working in the country, to secure a research affiliation for fieldwork next summer. During my stay in Kinshasa, I was able to meet and exchange with various individuals from the non-profit sector, civil society, universities as well as some ministries. Our fruitful exchanges enabled me to have a better grasp of the political landscape. While the upcoming elections dominated most of the conversations, one topic that resonated with me from the interviews related to democracy, governance and how the individual at the local level experienced these daily. Through the local contacts I made during this fieldwork experience, I hope to expand my network which will enable me to conduct more formal interviews and open doors to other resources next summer.

The second objective was to learn more about public goods and services provision in the country by conducting exploratory research as I begin to lay some groundwork for my research. While this proved to be challenging either due to the sensitivity of the topic or the fact that the ordinary citizens that I had the opportunity to interview were not familiar with these terms, it highlighted the importance of state-citizen relations. From the interviews I conducted, I was able to have a better picture of how citizens perceived the state, its functions and what they have come to expect from it. This time spent in the DRC was an affirmation of the importance of citizens' day to day engagement (or a lack thereof) with the state to better understand the implications for democratic participation as well as development in general.

The more I interacted with individuals and witnessed the daily life of Congolese, the I became more intrigued by their process of political socialization. Something that became more evident as I interviewed more and more people was the importance of understanding how individuals understand and internalize certain political realities which in turn affects their political behavior. While education and those who provide it play a crucial role in the political socialization of individuals, it became evident that other aspects such as family, kinship, religious denominations, and mass media heavily influenced this process as well. The more I observed my surrounding and spoke with people, the more I became aware of social factors which may be hard to measure or quantify but heavily influenced one's decision on why and how to participate in politics. Despite this past summer reaffirming that conducting fieldwork in the DRC is challenging, I believe that this was the first of many opportunities that would enable me to build on the regional knowledge and language proficiency needed as I prepare and lay the groundwork for my

dissertation. Having the opportunity to conduct preliminary fieldwork this past summer enabled me to have an insight on how political behavior which is shaped by norms and values embedded in society affect individuals' perception of politics, which in turn affects political participation beyond voting. This is something that I hope to explore further in subsequent years.