

“Voter Sans Voter?”:
*A Study of Voter Participation in
Bamako*

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Introduction

Democracy, as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary is: “a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.”¹ Democracy, as defined by Abraham Lincoln is: “of the people, for the people and by the people.” Democracy, as defined by one Malian citizen is: “une systeme qui permit un citoyen de dire ceux qu’il pense.”² For some, the word evokes images of liberty and freedom, for others, images of deep rooted corruption and failure to serve a people. However, no matter how it is defined, one cannot argue with the fact that a certain beauty lies at the root of democracy, a beauty that, as Lincoln said, is “by the people.” This is, of course, the power of a vote. Free elections are the metaphorical steering wheel of democracies everywhere, and behind that steering wheel are the thousands and thousands of citizens and their individual votes. This right to a vote is something empowering for a citizen, and also, important for the advancement of a successful democracy.

Significance of Study in Malian Culture

Now, what happens when less than 30% of the population votes in a presidential election?³ Or, better yet, when less than 7% of a community bothers to vote for their Mayor for the next five years?⁴ The answer: a democracy exists; however, it exists only for those involved, wanting to benefit themselves. A democracy exists, however, it exists only in a way that a battered up, old car exists –

¹ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. (2009). *Democracy*. May 5, 2009. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

² Translated to English as: “a system that permits a citizen to say as he thinks”. May 4, 2009. Interview 11. (Interview C).

³ African Elections Database. (2007). *Elections in Mali*. April 26, 2009 from <http://africanelections.tripod.com>.

⁴ April 29, 2009. Interview 7. (Interview C). Statistic taken from Party Head who was heavily involved with Election Day in Commune V. Statistic refers to Commune V’s voter turnout on April 26, 2009.

with an engine that blows black exhaust endlessly and with wheels that fail to move. This damaged sort of democracy exists in Mali.

Citizens' involvement in their political system, as previously mentioned, is necessary for a healthy democracy. The lack of voter participation in elections is not only a problem during the election seasons, but all year round, for it translates into the greater problem of general dissatisfaction with the government. Mali is a fairly new democracy and is stable, comparatively speaking, however, if citizens' discontent for the government continues, and if the one of the defining factors of democracy, elections, are reduced to a fraction of the population, then the future of Mali's political, social and economic development will be negatively affected.

Statement of Intent

So why do Malian citizens choose to vote or not vote? I set out to answer this question with the 2009 Malian Communal Elections, being held on April 26th, 2009 as my backdrop.

Objectives

In order to completely answer my research question, it was necessary to approach the question from many different aspects. This paper will examine, firstly, a brief history of democracy in Mali and the laws that govern elections, and their counterparts, political parties. Additionally, it will focus on the opinions of Malian citizens, as well as of the efforts of political parties, the officials and a non-governmental organization.

A collection of questions will be answered: why do citizens vote or not vote? What type of people vote or not vote? What is being done to increase the number of people voting? And finally, what needs to be done in the future to combat the low rate of voter participation?

Background Information

To understand the current state of democracy in Mali, it is important to look at the history of the political system, as well as an essential law that governs the driving force of elections, and therefore democracy: political parties. While no participant in my study cited any laws in their interviews, I believe that it is still imperative to mention them in my study, since they constitute the basis of the system.

Democracy in Mali

On September 22nd, 1960, Mali gained independence; however, it was not until January 12th, 1992 that a democratic state was created in the form of the Third Republic. With the installation of Alpha Oumar Konaré, the first democratically elected president of Mali, the two previously military ruled republics were made history.

The fight for democracy began in March of 1991, when the economic crisis combined with the growing movement against the dictatorship of General Moussa Traoré planned and threw a coup d'état. Immediately following, a transitional government was formed, during which a newly created National Conference, consisting of a variety of political, military and social groups, created a Constitution, an Electoral Law and a Law for Political Parties. In addition, the conference created the basic framework of Mali's Third Republic today, creating commissions, as well as a judiciary power.

In the first four months of 1992, the Malian people, for the first time, exercised their right to vote in four different elections: the constitutional referendum election, communal elections, legislative elections and finally, the presidential election finishing on the 26th of April 1992. There was a collective effort to use radio

and television to inform citizens of their right to vote, their right to be informed and to explain how the political forum works.

After the election of Alpha Oumar Konaré, the Third Republic was tested by negative tension stemming from leaders of the previous republic.⁵ However, democracy has prevailed in Mali for more than 15 years. It is not to say that the political system has not been victim to economic or social problems, but nonetheless, Mali remains one of Africa's most stable democracies.

Political Party Law: LOI N° 05-047

The current political party law was ratified by the President of the Republic and by the Assemblée Nationale in August of 2005. This law is still in effect and governs the now 114 official political parties in Mali. While the law is long and detailed, explaining everything from financing to forming a political party, Article 2 is the most interesting to this study. It states:

“ARTICLE 2 : Les partis politiques sont des organisations de citoyens unis par un idéal, prenant la forme d'un projet de société, pour la réalisation duquel ils participent à la vie politique par des voies démocratiques. Ils ont vocation à mobiliser et éduquer leurs adhérents, à participer à la formation de l'opinion, à concourir à l'expression du suffrage, à l'exercice du pouvoir et à encadrer des élus.”^{6 7}

The government essentially calls on political parties to educate citizens of suffrage and their right to vote.

⁵ Diarra, Chieck Oumar. (1996). Le Defi Democratique. Paris: L'Harmattan. P. 13-243.

⁶ L'Assemblée National du Mali. (2005). *LOI N° 05-047 : Portant Charte des Partis Politiques*. April 26, 2009, from <http://dgemali.net>

⁷ Translated roughly into English as: “The political parties are organizations of citizens united by an ideal, taking the form of a project or corporation, for the realization of which they participate in political life by democratic ways. They have the possibility to mobilize and educate, to participate in forums, to compete in political expression, to exercise strength and to carry elected officials.”

In a pluralist system with 114 parties, it is impossible to each party to have a major campaign during the elections. This is also due to the fact that not every single political party can receive financing from the government. The Délégation Générale des Elections and the Ministre d'Administration Territoriale are responsible for delegating money. This is done through a system of check list regulations that the political party must submit and follow. In the previous elections only five parties were applied for financial assistance. This year, after a series of workshops teaching the importance of maintaining a detailed bank account for the application, more than 60 parties applied and 30 were granted aid.⁸ However, even with the increase in political parties receiving campaign financing, it is evident that there are major parties that have control over the elections.

Election Day in Mali

For my research, I decided to concentrate on the 2009 Communal Elections. I did not ask specific questions about candidates; however, I used the hype and preparation for the elections as a diving board into the issue of voter participation. Throughout my research, the word corruption came up quite frequently, not only in regards to elected officials, but also in regards to the actual Election Day. Therefore, I decided to research how an election day works in Mali and to observe a polling place in Bamako.

Communal elections in Mali happen every five years. Each commune in Bamako has different candidates that are running; however, the same parties participate in most of the communes. It is interesting to note that in the days preceding the election, the campaigning was primarily for the party, not the individual candidate. Only in two cases did I see a candidate's name on a campaign poster. In

⁸ April 17, 2009. Mamadou Haidara, *Delegation Generale des Elections*. Interview 1.

addition to campaign posters, there were a multitude of campaign neighborhood block parties and events in the weeks leading up to the election. During this time, t-shirts, pagnes⁹ and hats declaring that a specific party was the “party for your commune” could be seen donned around Bamako. The campaign strategy, if one can call it that, of distributing much needed material goods to people is a technique that is highly successful in Mali, as I would find out more so in my interviews. The sounds of car horns and motorcycles also signaled last minute campaign efforts by party activists. However, due to the election regulations, all campaigning stopped 48 hours before the election on Friday night.

In order to vote in Mali, one must have a Voter Registration Card. Unlike in the United States of America, Malian citizens are registered automatically to vote when they turn 18. Their names are input into the system and cards are made for them. On the Wednesday before the election, April 22, 2009, the government declared a holiday. All banks, schools and most businesses were closed. The purpose of this holiday was to give people time to go pick up their registration cards at their Mayor’s office.

On Election Day, voters had to visit their assigned polling location. There are approximately 350 polling locations in Commune V alone.¹⁰ I visited the polling place with two Malian citizens. On the registration card your assigned polling location is written. The polling place that I visited was located at the local public school. When I arrived there seemed to be a great amount of people present. There were even sotramas¹¹ that seemed to be bringing people to the polling location. However, I soon

⁹ The word “pagne” refers to the fabric in Mali used to make skirts, shirts, etc.

¹⁰ Delegation Generale des Elections. (2008). *Bureaux de Vote*. April 26, 2009, from <http://dgemali.net>.

¹¹ Public transportation vans in Bamako.

realized, after one of the Malian voters that I was with mentioned that there were not a lot of people, that the majority of the people present were vendors of food and water. While it is not certain that these vendors did not vote, there seemed to be very little people actually voting. In fact, there were no lines to vote. In the actual polling room, there were four people, one person handing out ballots, one person explaining how to use the stamp to vote, one person checking your name on a list and one person stamping your election card after you voted. There were also around eight observers and one observer from CENI, the independent commission in responsible for observing elections. The four poll workers are organized and determined by the Ministry of the Interior. The observers consisted of a variety of non-governmental organizations, in addition to a single representative from each political party. I attempted to go into the polling box with the Malian voter, however, I was quickly told that I was not allowed. After the fact, I was told that apparently the observers thought that I might be someone working for a political party and that I would influence the voter. I was glad to see that regulations were followed in my case.

Other than witnessing the polling place, there was no evidence that it was Election Day in my neighborhood, probably due to the strict ban on no campaigning. However, there was no talk among neighbors on if they voted, or if they were going to go vote. It was interesting to observe the polls and the ambiance of the day.

Field Site

During the early stages of my research preparation, I originally wanted to do a comparative study of Bamako, an urbanized, developed part of Mali and of a smaller, more remote village. However, during my initial research I discovered that Bamako's voter participation rate is extremely low, in fact it is lower than those rates in the

regions of Gao and Timbuktu In the 2004 Communal Elections, the national voter turnout rate was 43.1%. Bamako's participation rate was 23.3% compared to the region of Gao with a 49.3% voter turnout.¹² Now the purpose of this research paper is not to do a comparative study, however, I personally found this fact astonishing, especially, if you think of it as if New York City or Washington D.C. had the lowest voter participation in the country of the United States of America. In a city that is home to the government, universities and many community associations, it seems unnatural that the rate of participation would be so low. That being said, I decided to focus my study only in Bamako.

Bamako is the capital of Mali, both politically and economically. Home to 1.7 million people, along with all the government ministries, courts and countless non-governmental organizations, Bamako is the metropolis of Mali. Geographically, Bamako is approximately 40 kilometers squared and is bisected by the Niger River. For the sake of political purposes, Bamako is split into six communes. Due to the immensity of Bamako, each commune has a communal office and an elected mayor. In fact, some communes have a primary communal office and a secondary office. During my research I lived in the quarter of Kalaban-Coura, which is located in Commune V, therefore, a majority of my research was done in this area.

Research Methodology

My research was conducted over a four week research period, during which I attempted to study a diverse population through three primary types of data collection.

¹² African Elections Database. (2007). *Elections in Mali*. April 26, 2009 from` <http://africanelections.tripod.com>.

Fortunately, the 2009 Communal Elections in Mali fell during the third week of my four week research period.

Population

My research population was only limited to Malian citizens over the age of 18, which is the legal voting age in Mali. I also limited my field site to Bamako. Besides those criteria, I wanted to interview a variety of people, of every demographic. Voting is not limited to young or elderly people, to rich or poor people, to educated or non educated people, and I wanted to make sure that I conveyed this in my research.

Data Collection

I decided on three primary methods of data collection. The first, to aid me in understanding the state of Mali's democracy and the current political situation, was data collection through written sources. I used books and websites to construct a platform for my research. While it was impossible to research all 114 political parties, I made an effort to research the main political parties and their beliefs, knowing that this would help me begin conversations with people, or carry conversations further. Towards the later stage of my research, right after the 2009 Communal Elections on April 26th, 2009, I used a variety of Malian published newspapers. My research question is largely focused on people's opinions, therefore reading editorials and articles in the newspapers helped me understand the widespread opinion on my issue.

While written sources did help me build a strong basis for my research, the majority of my Independent Study Project was done through primary sources. The majority of my information was collected through a combination of informal and formal interviews. These interviews were conducted throughout the four week research period. I had four written interviews that I began my research with, one for a non-governmental organization, one for government officials, one for political parties

and one for Malian citizens.¹³ In addition, when I met with various government officials, individuals or my Advisor, I completed interviews as well – formal in the sense that I had an appointment to meet with them, but informal in the sense that I did not have a set of questions prepared beforehand. The purpose of these interviews was to collect both statistics, but also opinions on voting.

Additionally, I used questionnaires to collect statistics from the population.¹⁴ These questionnaires were short and were mainly administered by the participant, however, in some cases I administered the questionnaire orally due to illiteracy. The questionnaires were distributed throughout Bamako during the four week research period. My initial reasoning for creating the questionnaire, in addition to the interviews, was to collect data on voting statistics, as previously mentioned. However, I soon realized that the statistics I wanted to collect came from my Western background. For example, I wanted to see if there was a correlation between religion, age, upbringing, income, profession and ethnicity to voting. After reading through just a few questionnaires, I knew that they would not be as helpful as I wanted since political participation in Mali cannot fully be compared to political participation in the United States of America.

Using these three strategies, I believe, were a good combination for my research. Not only did I collect facts and statistics, but I was able to delve deeper into the issue by soliciting opinions from citizens.

Obstacles and Biases

¹³ Reference Appendix C for a complete explanation and examples of interviews.

¹⁴ Reference Appendix B for a complete explanation and example of questionnaire.

Even with a four week research period, it was difficult to truly survey a sample of the Malian demographic. I found that my research biases lie in four different areas: language, education, age and sex.

First of all, when I was planning my research, I did not take into consideration using Bambara. Since I wanted to focus my study in the capital of Bamako, I assumed that the majority of the people I would encounter would, at least, have an oral knowledge of the French language. However, I realized that by not utilizing a Bambara translator or the Bambara language, I ignored a vital part of my population – a population that might not be politically active, but who quite possibly would have had strong opinions on the effectiveness of government and on their abstinence of voting.

In addition, my contacts and access to people for interviews was extremely narrow, mostly including males in their early to late twenties who were currently students, or who have completed their higher education. Ideally, I would have liked to interview more people over the age of 40 and have a larger population of both females and non-educated citizens.

In regards to the questionnaire section of my field research, I was forced to depend on neighbors and friends to help me distribute the questionnaires, and once again, I was left with a narrow population. I did attempt to hand out questionnaires and do oral surveys with people in downtown Bamako, however, people were hesitant to stop and take time to fill out the questionnaire.

While I completely understand that the biases and obstacles that I encountered contribute to a large margin of fault in my research, I do not believe that it infringed completely on me examining my research questions and coming to a worthy conclusion.

Research Findings: To Vote or Not to Vote

After reviewing the interviews and questionnaires that I distributed, I came to the conclusion that I could not make any concrete correlations between voting and lifestyle. Ethnicity, religion, age and profession did not make a difference in whether the person voted or not. In fact, the only area in which I saw a slight slant in favor of voting was with education. The higher the citizen's education level, the more likely he or she was to vote. I did find these results interesting though because I was expecting to see correlations, especially between age and voting and profession/income and voting. Most of my findings for why people decide to vote or not vote came from the interviews that I administered.

To Vote

After reading statistics and speaking to people initially, I felt as though the non-voting trend was wide spread. However, I encountered many people who felt quite strongly about the opposite view point. One of the most interesting advocates for voting was a 55 year old woman who did not attend school past the age of 10. During her interview she was very adamant about voting, stating that one cannot complain about their government if they did not vote to change it. Many of the responses as to why they vote focused around voting being the responsibility of a citizen of a democracy. Many of these voters also were involved with political parties. Interestingly enough, when asked about why they supported their specific party, the responses were very similar, usually involving a family connection. Only two people that I interviewed said that they supported the party for a specific idealistic reason. In an interview with an employee of a non-governmental organization, she mentioned that Malians tend not to vote on conviction, instead they vote based on material goods

received by a party or because their family knows a candidate in a specific party.¹⁵

Not all of the voters had complete faith in their government though. Some were optimistic and stated that corruption was minimal, however, others acknowledged that politics in Mali have a long way to go until honesty is reached. One thing that was undeniable while talking to all these voters was their passion on the subject of voting. Whether they were involved with a party or not, they felt strongly that voting was a duty that all citizens must fulfill. With enthusiasm like that, I question how it does not spread to other citizens.

Not to Vote

While all the voters that I interviewed shared the same belief about voting being a duty, the non-voters were divided as to their decision not to vote into two main categories.

The first category, which was the more common, is the sense of not caring, therefore not voting. While this sounds simplified, I can assure you that it is not. When I asked interviewees why they do not vote, the non-voters in this category did not have real responses. Instead, I received shrugs and “I don’t know” answers. Many of these non-voters’ parents do not vote as well. It is apparent that voting and the political system have never played a large role in their lives, therefore they do not think about its importance. In addition, I found out that many people do not vote, as well, because they do not know who the candidates are. An evident disconnect exists between everyday life and the government. However, when taking into consideration Mali’s economy, and the fact that poverty is a reality for many, it is somewhat understandable that voting is not a priority.

¹⁵ April 27, 2009. Traore, *National Democratic Institute for International Affairs*. (Interview A).

The second category of non-voters fell into the realm of abstaining from voting to take a stand. Many of these non-voters talked much about corruption and how politics never changes anything. The majority of these voters were highly educated. There was much disdain in the voices of these non-voters and when I asked them what needed to be done to encourage them to participate, the responses centered around finding a candidate or party that will actually work for the people and make positive change. Something interesting to note was that a couple times during this sort of interview the topic of the current President of the United States came up, in regards to a candidate of real change. When I explain that many voters had to work very hard to get a man like that elected and that it was necessary to participate in the political process for that to happen, I received responses that hinted towards “nothing like that could happen in Mali.” Nonetheless, I could not help but feel some sort of respect towards this category of non-voters for they are not voting on a conviction. However, it is unfortunate that such passionate people are lost in a democratic political system.

The Media and Voting

I would like to take this opportunity to mention the media. While I did not study the media before the election, I could not help but notice the newspapers on April 27th, 2009, the day after Election Day. Headlines like: “Les Bamakois n’ont pas voté” and “Une mobilisation timide” graced many newspapers.¹⁶ I was especially taken by an editorial entitled, “Voter sans voter”.¹⁷ The author argued that he did not vote because he is taking a stand against a government that does not work for the people. When I read the article I immediately thought of those that I interviewed who fell into the second category of non-voters. These articles are evidence that the rate of

¹⁶ Translated to English as: “Citizens of Bamako did not vote” and “A shy showing”

¹⁷ Translated to English as: “Voting without voting”.

voter participation is a major problem and that many people, including the media have realized it and are now bringing it to the forefront.

Research Findings: Efforts to Increase Voter Participation

At the basis of any problem lies the question of education. In regards to low voter turnout in Mali, the lack of education, not necessarily formal education, but education on the political forum is a major contributing factor. During my research, I researched four main sources of potential education and evaluated their actions.

Political Parties

According to LOI N° 06-044, the Electoral Law passed in 2006 by the National Assembly and the President, political parties are responsible for voter education. The law, however, does not state specifically about what parties must do to educate. It only states, in Chapter 6 that parties are responsible for releasing a list of candidates.¹⁸

During the weeks leading up to the election, many political parties hosted events in various neighborhoods. These events were obviously campaigning events attempting to target voters and raise awareness for their party's candidate. There was little effort to encourage people to vote in general, rather only an effort to have voters vote for a specific party. These efforts are overlooked by many citizens due to the fact that they are partisan. In addition, citizens that have never voted before and who were not planning on voting do not pay attention to these events.

Individual Citizens

In an interview conducted with a politically active youth, he told me about his disgust over the lack of voter turnout in Commune V. He told me that less than 7% of

¹⁸ L'Assemblée National du Mali. (2005). *LOI Electorale*. April 26, 2009, from <http://dgemali.net>.

Commune V voted in the recent election. After inquiring what he thought should be done about this statistic he introduced me to two of his friends and told me that they were the executive board of a new association created just for “get out the vote” purposes. While they do not have an official name yet, they have already started planning campaigns and events to hold in order to educate people on their right and duty to vote. While I understand that this is only one story among many citizens in Bamako, this young man’s ambition, coupled by his support system leads me to believe that there will be a valiant effort during the next elections to raise the rate of participation, from a non-partisan stance. It is important not to underestimate the significance of individuals in encouraging people to vote.

Non-Governmental Organizations

There are a multitude of non-governmental organizations that help observe and monitor elections in Mali to ensure that they are democratic, however, there are only a handful of organizations that are directly involved with the political process. The National Democratic Institute is a Washington D.C. based non-governmental organization whose mission is to work “to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and government accountability.” The National Democratic Institute has an office in Bamako and had two primary projects directed at the 2009 Communal Elections. The first project was a joint project with another non-governmental organization, Groupe Pivot and the Embassy of Denmark. This project focused on women’s participation in the electoral process. As part of this project, NDI staffers were sent out to speak on the radio, on television and to associations in different parts of Mali. In addition, a booklet was created for communal election candidates explaining the importance of a woman’s vote and how they could encourage women to vote. This booklet was the first piece of

literature that I have seen relating to the importance of voting. Their second project was a partnership between them and US-AID and it focused solely on spreading the word about the importance of voting. This was done through the same methods as the first project: radio, television and talking with groups.

NDI is staffed mainly by Malian citizens in Bamako and therefore projects can be culturally focused. While the staff believed that their two projects did increase participation, even in the slightest, there was a common consensus that in the future the effort needs to be more grassroots and community based. Non-governmental organizations like the National Democratic Institute are providing the much needed voter education.

The Malian Government

After speaking with government officials at the Délégation Générale des Elections and at the Ministry of the Interior, it is clear that the Malian government sees no need to get involved with voter education. When asked if he thought voter education efforts would be better received by non-partisan groups, or the government, rather than political parties, an official at the Délégation Générale des Elections responded that it would not matter because the Electoral Law states that political parties are responsible for education and that the law would have to be changed to include the government.¹⁹ In addition, after speaking to an official at the Ministry of the Interior²⁰ about the low rate of participation, he stated that it was no concern to him if people vote or do not vote, as long as the elections are democratic.²¹ In fact, the government, in the past, and for the 2009 Communal Elections has only encouraged

¹⁹ April 30, 2009. Mamadou Haidara, *Delegation Generale des Elections*. Interview 8 (Interview B).

²⁰ The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for organizing elections and ensuring legitimacy.

²¹ April 22, 2009. Boubacar Sow, *Ministre d'Intérieur*. Interview 3.

citizens to pick up their voter registration card, but no further encouragement to vote on election day. It is important to note though that civic education is taught in the Fondamental Level of the public school system in Mali, which is under the umbrella of the Malian government.

Conclusion: Building Towards the Future

Now Mali is in the month of May; newly elected mayors are taking their seats and only the months ahead will tell whether the promise they strung along the campaign trail will come to fruition. In less than three years, Mali will face yet another election, however, this time for the highest seat in the land. Will citizens exercise their right and their duty to vote? An official at the Délégation Générale des Elections in Bamako said, “They are always ready to criticize and never to build.”²² While some participants in my study share the same bleak opinion on the future participation of Malian citizens in the political process, others have more optimistic hopes. No matter the opinion, it is evident that the state of voter participation in Mali is weak.

In summary, I would like to contribute the poor state of voter participation to three primary problems: education, culture and corruption. Corruption plagues many democracies and many politicians. Malians recognize this and therefore will not vote for candidates, or political parties because they are believed to all be dishonest. In addition, due to the lack of follow through on campaign promises, some Malian citizens do not believe that voting will change anything in the future, rightfully so. This topic of political party and government transparency would be interesting to look

²² April 30, 2009. Mamadou Haidara, *Delegation Generale des Elections*. Interview 8 (Interview B).

into in the future to enhance this study. While the problem of corruption cannot be fixed with a vote, the more people that vote and the more people that pay attention to the political process, the more accountability an official will have. It is up to the people to elect their representatives and it is up to the people, and in some cases the judicial branch, to hold the representatives accountable. However, this problem cannot begin to be conquered without tackling the first two issues.

While culture should not be defined as an issue, it is an issue in regards to the Western style democracy that Mali adopted. The concept of a vote exists in Bambara, however, only as a communal vote. The individual vote, that democracies use, does not exist. In fact, some people cannot accept the fact that a leader can be elected with only a majority of the votes, rather than unanimously. I found this problem while interviewing the non-voters that experienced a disconnect with politics. More and more, as Mali progresses into a modern age, citizens are understanding the importance of an individual vote. However, a question must be posed: Should Malian tradition and culture just conform to a Western style government or should Mali's democracy mold to fit tradition and culture? The culture dilemma might never be resolved, especially in a quickly globalizing world.

Lastly, and definitely most importantly, the issue of voter education must be addressed. Citizens must be informed on their right and duty to vote. Casting a vote and disposing of it into a plastic box might seem meaningless to many, but if people gain a better understanding of the political forum, they will realize that their vote is their say in their government. Although various types of civic education exist, there is still a strong need of a non-partisan, non-governmental, citizen based effort to "get out the vote". Malian culture is rooted in family ties, therefore a campaign mobilized by a few leaders talking one on one with citizens would allow for the word to spread

quickly. A Malian employee of the National Democratic Institute argued that education must begin at a grassroots level. She mentioned that most of the education that political parties do is through television advertisements, and while some families watch television, more Malians like to converse with each other. Therefore, people should be going door to door, from one group of men drinking tea to a group of women washing clothes to just talk to them about voting. She argues that from there, discussions will get started and hype will automatically come as a result.²³ After much observation, I do agree with her statements. In addition, youth associations and schools should be targeted, for the youth will be the leaders of tomorrow. Education is, unarguably, the basis of the voter turnout solution.

One interviewee stated that he votes because he is a citizen, because it is his duty and because it is necessary for the development of Mali. While all Malians might not agree with this statement in full, the development of Mali is an issue felt by many citizens. That being said, Malians cannot afford to throw away their vote, they must vote with conviction. This must be encouraged by fellow citizens, political parties and the government alike – for does a true democracy exist in the absence of its people? With hope, the future story of Mali will not be forced to answer that question; with hope the future story of Mali will be written by the people, vote by vote.

²³ April 27, 2009. Traore, *National Democratic Institute for International Affairs*. Interview 5 (Interview A).

Appendix A: Consent Forms

Before interviewing individual participants, I read aloud the Consent to Participate in Research information in the appropriate language: French or English. An individual participant is defined by those who I interview that were not connected with an organization, a political party or with the government. For these agents I made it clear that I would be using the information they gave me in a paper and that their organization name would be cited, but not confidential.

After reading through the information, individual participants wanting to be part of the study signed a written consent form found at the bottom of the information page. The participant will get a copy of the contact information at the bottom of the sheet.

You will find two copies of the Consent to Participate in Research information sheet and written consent form, one in English and one in French.

Elections and Voter Participation in Mali: Consent to Participate in Research

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Samantha McLean. The research study will be used to complete an Independent Study Project for the School for International Training/World Learning Study Abroad Program (Mali: Gender, Health and Development Spring 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore elections in Mali and voter participation, specifically why people choose to vote or not vote and how they choose to cast their vote.

Procedures of the Study

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to you to complete an oral interview and a survey on the subjects of political thought and elections in Mali.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.

Information received during the interview process will be reviewed by the research (Samantha McLean) and a School for International Training/World Learning staff member, in order to aid with translation. Participant confidentiality will be ensured indefinitely.

Interviews will be audio recorded to aid in effective translating and transcribing of interviews. As a participant, you will have the right to review and edit the tapes or transcripts, if you wish. All audio recorded interviews will be erased after the completion of the research period on May 8th, 2009.

Participation and Withdraw

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Rights of Research Participants

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics

clearance through the School for International Training/World Learning Study Abroad.

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (print your name here), understand all of the above mentioned information on this research study and volunteer to be a participant.

Signature

Date

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher: Samantha McLean (#79 26 95 46) or School for International Training/World Learning Academic Director: Modibo Coulibaly (#76 46 59 86).

Les Elections et la Participation des Electeurs au Mali : *Le Consentement*

Vous êtes demandé de participer dans une étude de recherche dirigée par Samantha McLean. L'étude de recherche sera utilisée pour compléter un Projet d'Etude Indépendant pour School for International Training/ World Learning l'Etude à l'étranger Programme (Mali : Le sexe, la Santé et le Développement Printemps 2009).

Le but de l'Etude

Le but de cette étude est d'explorer des élections au Mali et la participation d'électeur, en particulier pourquoi les gens choisissent de voter ou ne pas voter et comment ils choisissent de voter.

Les procédures de l'Etude

Si vous offrez volontairement pour participer dans cette étude, vous serez demandé vous compléter une interview orale et une enquête par questionnaire sur les sujets de pensée politique et les élections au Mali.

La Confidentialité

Chaque effort sera fait garantir la confidentialité d'informations distinctives qui est obtenue pendant cette étude.

Les informations reçues pendant le processus d'interview seront réexaminées par la chercheuse (Samantha McLean) et un membre de personnel de School for International Training/World Learning, pour aider avec la traduction. La confidentialité de participant sera indéfiniment garantie.

Les interviews seront enregistré pour aider dans la traduction et transcrire efficaces d'interviews. Vous aurez la droite pour réexaminer et éditer les bandes ou les transcriptions, si vous souhaitez. Toutes les bandes seront effacées après la fin de la période de recherche (8 Mai 2009).

La participation et Retire

Vous pouvez choisir si être dans cette étude ou pas. Si vous offrez volontairement pour être dans cette étude, vous pouvez retirer à tout moment sans les conséquences. Vous pouvez exercer l'option d'enlever vos opinions dans l'étude. Vous pouvez refuser aussi de répondre aux questions que vous ne voulez pas répondre et restez toujours dans l'étude.

Les droits des Participants

Vous pouvez retirer votre consentement et interrompez à tout moment la participation sans la peine. Vous n'abandonnez pas de réclamations légales, les droits ou les remèdes à cause de votre participation dans cette étude de recherche. Cette étude a été

réexaminée et a été reçue le dégageant d'éthique par School for International Training/World Learning.

LA FORME ECRITE DE CONSENTEMENT

Je, _____ (imprime votre nom ici),
comprends tout l'au-dessus des informations mentionnées sur cette étude de recherche
et veux être un participant.

Signature

Date

Si vous avez n'importe quelles questions ou n'importe quelles inquiétudes de la
recherche, s'il vous plaît ne se gêner pas contacter le chercheuse : Samantha McLean
(# 79 26 95 46) ou School for International Training/World Learning Directeur
Académique : Modibo Couilbaly (# 76 46 59 86).

Appendix B: Questionnaire

The next page is an example of a questionnaire that I handed out to people around Bamako. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions, mainly regarding demographic information. On the top of the questionnaire, I included a shortened consent statement for the participant to sign and date.

Questionnaire

CONSENTEMENT

Vous êtes demandé de participer dans une étude de recherche. Chaque effort sera fait garantir la confidentialité d'informations distinctives qui est obtenue pendant cette étude. Vous n'abandonnez pas de réclamations légales, les droits ou les remèdes à cause de votre participation dans cette étude de recherche.

Je, _____ (imprime votre nom ici),
comprends tout l'au-dessus des informations mentionnées sur cette étude de recherche
et veux être un participant.

Signature

Date

***S.V.P. Répondez aux questions par encercler la réponse ou par écrire sur la ligne.
Si vous ne voulez pas répondre à une question, laissez la question blanche.***

1. Age : _____
2. Sexe : **homme** **femme**
3. Ethnicité : _____ (**bambara, peuhl, etc.**)
4. Religion : **musulman** **chrétien** **rien** **autre** (_____)
5. Quel niveau d'école est-ce que vous avez arrêté ?
Fondamentale **Secondaire** **Supérieur** **autre** (_____)
6. Profession : _____ Revenu Annuel : _____ **CFA**
7. Est-ce que vous enregistrez de voter ? **OUI** **NON**
8. Est-ce que vous supportez un parti politique ? **OUI** **NON**
Si oui, quel parti ? _____
9. Est-ce que vos parents enregistrent de voter ? **OUI** **NON**
10. Est-ce que vos parents supportent un parti politique ? **OUI** **NON**
Si oui, quel parti ? _____

Appendix C: Interviews

In this appendix, there are a total of four interviews. They are labeled A through D and correspond to different types of participants.

Interview A was used while interviewing the Assistant Director of the National Democracy Institute.

Interview B was used while interviewing my Project Advisor.

Interview C was used while interviewing all other citizens.

Interview D was used while interviewing people who work for the political parties.

Interview A

1. Please explain to be NDI's mission and its major projects in Mali.
 - a. Were there any specific projects for the 2009 communal elections?
2. How did you get involved with NDI in Mali?
3. Could you give me examples of some of your:
 - a. Biggest success stories
 - b. Biggest challenges
4. NDI is an American NGO, so how does NDI work to promote democracy without imposing a strictly Western perspective?
5. In your opinion, what needs to be done to increase voter participation in Mali?

(Many Malians have told me that they do not vote because they do not have faith in politics or in the government. However, you work for a politically oriented organization, so do you believe the same thing and if not what are your beliefs on voting?)

1. Expliquez-moi la mission de NDI et ses projets majeurs à Mali.
 - a. Il y avait des projets spécifiques pour les 2009 élections communales ?
2. Comment avez-vous été commencer de travailler avec NDI à Mali ?
3. Donnez-moi les exemples de:
 - a. Les plus grands réussites
 - b. Plus grands défis
4. NDI est un NGO américain, donc comment NDI travaille-t-il à promouvoir la démocratie sans imposant une perspective strictement de l'ouest ?
5. A votre avis, quels besoins être-t-ils faits pour augmenter la participation d'électeur à Mali ?

(Beaucoup de Maliens m'ont dit qu'ils ne votent pas parce qu'ils n'ont pas la foi dans la politique ou dans le gouvernement. Cependant, vous travaillez pour une organisation politiquement orientée, donc croyez-vous que la même chose et si non qu'est-ce que c'est vos convictions sur le sujet) ?

Interview B

1. Many Malians have told me that they do not vote because they do not have faith in politics or in the government. However, you work for the government and more specifically for an office that deals with elections. So, do you believe the same thing as these people and if not what are your beliefs on this issue?
2. Political parties are responsible for voter education. However, some citizens do not listen because they do not like the political parties. Do you think that if the government launched a campaign that taught the importance of voting that citizens would listen?
3. Do you think political parties need to be strengthened or weakened? Why?
4. What type of election reform is need in your opinion?
5. Do you believe that voting is a right or a duty?

(Do schools or universities teach civics?)

1. Beaucoup de Maliens m'ont dit qu'ils ne votent pas parce qu'ils n'ont pas de confiance dans la politique ou dans le gouvernement. Mais, vous travaillez pour le gouvernement et spécifiquement pour un bureau des élections. Alors, est-ce que vous croyez la même chose comme ces gens et si non qu'est-ce que vous pensez sur ce problème ?
2. Les partis politiques sont responsables de l'éducation d'électeur. Mais, quelques citoyens n'écoutent pas parce qu'ils n'aiment pas les partis politiques. Pensez-vous que si le gouvernement fait une campagne qui a enseigné l'importance de voter que les citoyens écouterait ?
3. Pensez-vous que les partis politiques ont besoin d'être fortifié ou être affaibli ? Pourquoi ?
4. Quel type de réforme d'élection est le besoin à votre avis ?
5. Croyez-vous que voter est une droite ou un devoir ?

(Les écoles ou les universités enseignent-ils l'instruction civique) ?

Interview C

1. Age :
2. Sexe : **homme** **femme**
3. Ethnicité :
4. Religion : **musulman** **chrétien** **rien** **autre**
(_____)
5. Quel niveau d'école est-ce que vous avez arrêté ?
Fondamentale **Secondaire** **Supérieur** **autre**
(_____)
6. Profession : _____ Revenu Annuel :
_____ **CFA**
7. Est-ce que vos parents enregistrent de voter ? **OUI** **NON**
8. Est-ce que vos parents supportent un parti politique ? **OUI** **NON**
Si oui, quel parti ? _____
9. Est-ce que vous enregistrez de voter ? **OUI** **NON**
OUI : pourquoi ?
NON : pourquoi pas ?
10. Est-ce que vous supportez un parti politique ? **OUI** **NON**
9/10. OUI : quel parti ? _____ et pourquoi ?
9/10. OUI : est-ce que vous travaillez pour le parti (par exemple. Aidez le parti par mettre les signes dans ville, assistez les événements, etc.) ?
Si oui, quel type de travail ?
Si non, pourquoi pas ?
9. OUI/10. NON : pourquoi est-ce que vous enregistrez de voter mais vous ne supportez pas un parti ?
9. NON/10. OUI : quel parti ? _____ et pourquoi ?
9. NON/10. OUI : pourquoi est-ce que vous n'enregistrez pas de voter mais vous supportez un parti ?
9. NON/10. NON & 9. NON/10. OUI : qu'est-ce que les partis ou le gouvernement doivent faire pour vous commencez de voter ?
11. Définiez le mot « démocratie »
12. Est-ce que vous pensez que voter est un droit et/ou une responsabilité pour un citoyen d'un état démocratique ?

13. Qu'est-ce que vous pensez de politiques communales au Mali ?
14. Si vous expliquiez la démocratie au Mali en trois mots, lesquels est-ce que vous choisissiez ?

Interview D

1. Please give me a brief description of your party and its beliefs.
 2. Why did you personally choose this party?
 3. What type of work are you responsible for?
 - a. During the election?
 - b. During the rest of the year?
 4. Many Malians have told me that they do not vote because they do not have faith in politics or in the government. However, you work for a political party, so do you believe the same thing and if not what are your beliefs on voting?
 5. When you talk to citizens who do not support your party what do you tell them to convince them to vote?
 6. How does your party educate citizens on why it is important to vote?
-

1. Donne-moi une description brève de votre parti et ses convictions.
2. Pourquoi avez-vous choisi ce parti ?
3. Pour quel type de travail vous êtes responsable ?
 - A. Pendant l'élection ?
 - B. Pendant le reste de l'an ?
4. Beaucoup de Maliens m'ont dit qu'ils ne votent pas parce qu'ils n'ont pas la confiance dans la politique ou dans le gouvernement. Mais, vous travaillez pour un parti politique, donc croyez-vous que la même chose et si non qu'est-ce que vous pensez sur le sujet ?
5. Quand vous parlez aux citoyens qui ne supporte pas votre parti qu'est-ce que vous les dites pour convainquent de voter ?
6. Comment votre parti instruit-il des citoyens sur pourquoi c'est important de voter ?

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