STATEMENT OF RESEARCH INTERESTS

Current Research
My dissertation, External Actors, Local Participation, and Political Reform in Africa: Ghana and Senegal Compared, draws on over fifteen months of field research among civil society members, government officials, technocrats, members of the international community, and ordinary citizens in these two countries. I consider the involvement of new actors in novel political and economic reform initiatives in West Africa. These initiatives emanate from policies mandated by international actors – election monitoring and poverty reduction strategies – and were affected by and impacted the ongoing development of civil societies in each country.

I conclude that a different form of resurgent civil society developed in Ghana relative to Senegal given each country's electoral and political history. My analysis utilizes theories on “split societies,” and contends that the particular interplay between colonial, political, and economic logics leads to different types, though in quite varied ways, of civil societies. Consequently the policy outcomes encouraged by external actors are dissimilar in each case. I argue that in Ghana, “partisans of democracy” emerged, who focused on obtaining more accountability, transparency, inclusive participation, integrity, and rule of law and, together with more developed organizational capacity, were better placed to bring about actual change.

This project has sought to make more concrete discussions in the literatures on civil society and democratization in Africa that have been too abstract, mechanistic, and generalized. As such, it informs important and ongoing scholarly and policy debates about these issues that are also critical to the people whose fate rests on the success of political and economic reform programs. This research has utilized the concept of resurgent civil society as an analytic construct to assess whether the politics of neopatrimonialism – a system of political exchange that has largely governed much of the continent since the dawn of independence – are changing and becoming more inclusive and less predatory.

I plan to transform my dissertation into a larger book on the role of civil societies in fostering change in political and economic policy outcomes in Africa.

Future Research Goals
I want to return to West Africa as soon as possible to implement an expanded research project that will further test my argument on the development of civil societies in West Africa. I am interested in developing new indicators that measure this development. I plan to pursue funding from the Council of American Research Centers and the West African Research Association to carry out new research: on the development of political and social capital in West Africa, on opinions of key stakeholders in civil society, and on other new quantitative and qualitative measures of civil societies. To my knowledge, none of this work has been done or proposed on Africa. I am interested in extending my research to other places in the developing world, such as Latin America and Southeast Asia, where democracy is developing and economic change is also occurring.

To begin this work, I would like to create and publish data on links between civil societies, political and social capital, and democracy such as has been done on Latin America. I am also interested in expanding and publishing research that I have begun on another project that surveys elite opinion in civil society in Ghana and Senegal. I am interested in testing findings from this data against wider opinion poll data currently being produced through the Afrobarometer project. Finally, I believe that the data now exists to develop better, more tangible measures of civil society in Africa. I would like to collect and aggregate this data such that it can be employed to better assess growth and development across both new quantitative and qualitative dimensions on the structure, values, space, and impact of civil societies.
On the external side, my interest has been, and continues to be, on the synergies and disconnects between policies designed at the international level by governments, development and financial international institutions, think tanks, and NGOs and what happens on the ground in Africa and elsewhere. I want to know more about how varied elite and civil society responses impact the ongoing evolution of policies proposed, and sometimes mandated, by a variety of external actors. Such processes merit more empirical work and theoretical investigation in a wider number of countries and policy types. International-national linkages have always been of prime importance to Africa, but the rise of more vibrant civil societies in Africa has altered this crucial but under-explored dynamic. This will be the subject of another, probably cross-regional, book project.