

# **Call for Application**

## **Summer School: New Forms of Political Participation**

### **in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Bamako, 13th-18th December 2017

Political participation has been on the research agenda about politics in Africa ever since the beginning of the democratization process in the 1990ies. Political participation can be understood (without limiting oneself to it) as “activities by social actors, which exert an influence on the mode of collective governance”.

In contemporary democratic systems, elections are of central importance. They constitute an obligatory passage to gain and to exercise political power. In this perspective, political power is legitimized and accepted when exercised by political representatives who were elected by the people through free and transparent elections.

The majority of postcolonial African states started to adopt elections after the World War II only. After having reached independence, nearly all of these states quickly abandoned competitive elections as the primary mode to select their political leaders. It was only in the course of the crisis of authoritarian regimes at the end of the 1980ies and the consequent initiation of the process of political liberalization, that competitive elections became the common mode for selecting political leaders. Consequently since more than two decades, African states experienced democracy with the vote as the principal way of political participation.

Elections fulfill multiple functions in a democracy. Most importantly, they play a key role to internalize and institutionalize democratic rules. But despite the central importance of elections for the institutionalization of democracy, not all political actors in African countries trust the process and the outcome. Common contestations of electoral results, persisting electoral abstentions as well as unconventional modes of political participation, especially among youth, testify for this lack of trust.

At the same time as elections are institutionalized everywhere in Africa, one can observe that public protests gained after the *Arab Spring* again legitimacy and importance. A crucial difference, compared to the democracy movements at the beginning of the 1990s, is the use of new media of communication, such as social media and mobile phones. Together with these new technologies appears a new type of actors of a heterogeneous civil society who combines in their agency the use of these media with more “traditional” forms of political protest like street mobilization.

Social media and the internet in general provide more possibilities as a means of communication and mobilization. They constitute a new public arena for discourse, especially used by younger actors. This public arena reaches easily beyond state borders and is hard to control neither by the state nor by parties than press or television. The new means of access to information, communication and public discourse contribute to a significant extension of the reparatory of political strategies as well as to a diversification of actor’s profiles (civil society, unions, universities, political parties etc.).

The new forms of political participation are facilitated through a change in the structure of political opportunities (existence of democratic rules and institutions based on human rights). They are characterized by putting social demands on the political agenda (land rights, employment, health, education, etc.) as well as through the demand for good governance in the management of public affairs.

The use of these opportunities and of new media is not linked to a certain political or ideological position. We find in the public arena the complete spectrum of political and cultural actors from democratic movements up to fundamentalist religious movements or neo-traditional actors. Due to the global access to these means of communication the actors may be part of global networks and part of members may be living in the diaspora.

These changes are very significant for the political trajectories of African states and call for a “fresh” analysis to account for the dynamics they are generating. The current political contexts in Africa offer an interesting terrain for analyzing the transformation of political participation.

### **Themes and Objectives of the Summer School**

This summer school aims to bring together a group of young researchers (PhD-students and post-docs) and senior scholars of various disciplines who are working on new forms of political participation and their significance in Africa. The objective is to confront different disciplinary approaches in order to stimulate a fruitful dialogue about methods, theories and fields of investigation related to the subject. Following a comparative perspective, this interdisciplinary dialogue permits to discern communalities and specificities with regard to different African terrains. In this perspective, the summer school will address questions related to four principal axis of investigation:

- *New Forms of Political Participation and their Specificities*
  - What are their determinants?
  - What are their manifestations?
  - Who are the mobilizing actors?
  - Which are the strategies applied by the actors?
  - Which types of discourses are diffused?
- *Intra- and Supranational Forms of Articulation*
  - Which are the links between new forms of participation and communication at the one hand and political institutions, civil society, political parties at the other hand?
  - With which supranational networks do these forms of mobilization interact?
  - Which images and representations are associated to these forms of participation?
- *Reconfiguration of Political Order*
  - Do the political changes have an impact on the perception of the state, democracy and the ways of doing politics?
  - What are the challenges for the rule of law?
  - Which new forms of authority are emerging?
  - How do these processes differ from previous forms of authority?
  - Which challenges are related to processes of constitutional and political reforms?

- *Role of International Actors*
  - Who are the international actors concerned by these new forms of political participation?
  - What are their strategies?
  - To which extent do these actors influence the dynamics of internal change?

## **Methodology**

The summer school comprises theoretical discussions and practical exercises. In the beginning of the summer school, the participants will gain a theoretical input by specialized senior scholars. These theoretical inputs can comprise:

- What is actually meant by politics?
- Limited Social Orders
- African Constitutionalism
- Theories on Social Movements
- Dynamics of Protest
- Medias and Mobilization
- Rural/Urban Problematic and Mobilization
- Mobilization and Diversity of Actors: The Participation of Women

The theoretical input will be followed by a two day writing school in which participants are asked to present their current writing projects (dissertation and/or scientific article), based on their research, while referring to one of the theoretical inputs. This writing school will be led by the senior scholars who will guide you in your writing. The aims of this exercise are to relate theory to empirical findings, to help young researchers to advance the skills of their scientific writing and to plan the next steps in their research projects.

## **Conditions to Apply**

- The summer school will bring together young scholars of the social sciences and humanities coming from universities and research institutes in Africa.
- Post-doctoral candidates should have defended their thesis no longer ago than five years.
- Doctoral students should be in an advanced state of their project and should be able to present first results of their research.
- PhD-students and post-docs should come with a writing project (thesis and/or scientific article).
- Candidates should relate their work to one of the axis mentioned above.
- Candidates must have good language skills in English and/or French.
- Candidates are asked to send an abstract of their research (1000 words maximum), a CV, current academic affiliation and a letter of motivation via mail to the following address: [scholze@em.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:scholze@em.uni-frankfurt.de).
- Deadline for application is the **16<sup>th</sup> of October 2017**

## **Practical Aspects**

- The Summer School is financed by the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) in the framework of the Program Point Sud, which is organized by the Goethe University Frankfurt/Main in Germany in collaboration with STIAS and research institutes and universities in six other African countries. For more information please see [www.pointsud.org](http://www.pointsud.org).
- The entire costs for each participant (travel, accommodation, meals etc.) will be taken on charge by STIAS and the Program Point Sud.
- The working languages will be English and French.
- The summer school will take place from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> December 2017 at the research centre Point Sud in Bamako/Mali.
- For additional information, please contact:  
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