



Centre de Recherche sur le Savoir Local

Programme Point Sud 2010-2011

**“Bringing History Back In.
Institutional Legacies, Critical Junctures and Political Regime Development
in Africa”**

24th - 26th February 2011

Report

1 Organisers

Dr. Gero Erdmann, GIGA Institute of African Affairs

Sebastian Elischer, GIGA Institute of African Affairs

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2 Themes and Objectives

Roughly twenty years after the democratization wave of the early 1990s political scientists note significant differences in political regimes (democratic/ hybrid/ authoritarian) across the African continent. So far research on the causes of regime development has neglected the historical impact of institutions. Hybrid regimes, i.e. regimes that can neither be classified as democracies nor as autocracies, are particularly frequent on the African continent. The workshop provided a forum for both theoretically and empirically grounded papers, which look at the causes of the proliferation of diverse regime types. The workshop provided the opportunity to apply and contribute to the key concepts of Historical Institutionalism, which in recent years has experienced a renaissance in the political science literature. Historical Institutionalism has frequently been applied to questions of regime development in Europe and Latin America, yet it has not yet been applied to explain the diversity of political regimes in Africa. Although the workshop was particularly interested in papers pursuing comparative approaches, the organisers also welcomed single case studies, where scholars could focus on one particular regime type or on changes of the regime type in one particular country. To arrive at generalizations or to reject generalizations was a declared goal of the workshop. All papers focused on the role of institutions and their long-term impact on the emergence of regime types in one of the following fields of research:

- (a) the history of electoral systems and electoral management,
- (b) the struggle for political participation rights and the scrutiny of government by political parties, civil society or the media,
- (c) the history of checks and balances in the political system (the relationship between parliament and government or between judiciary and government),
- (d) the development of civil-military relations.

Overall the workshop tried to find tentative answers to the following research questions: Are there specific development paths for the various regime types? What are the critical junctures for the later regime proliferation? Are there different pathways and critical junctures for different regimes?

3 Methodology and Results

A premium emphasis was put on a representative selection of participants from francophone and anglophone countries. For methodological reasons the organisers selected a broad variety of countries, that participants wishing to pursue individual countries could focus on. A

further priority in the selection of the participants was to cover all of the above fields of research. The workshop tried to foster interdisciplinary research and called for contributions from political scientists, scholars with a background in any of the social sciences, historians, anthropologists, and jurists. In order to ensure both a representative sample of African participants and analytical coherence, the organisers issued a call for papers several months in anticipation of the conference to academic institutions in Europe, North America and Africa. In this manner participants were familiarised with the main goals of the conference and could structure their papers accordingly.

The working languages of the conference were English and French. Participants could present their papers and contribute to the question and answer session in both languages. The event was accompanied by several students from the University of Bamako, who assisted in overcoming the language barrier between francophone and anglophone participants. The conference organisers provided further assistance, which was at times necessary as the quality of the translators varied. At the inception of the conference, the conference organisers provided an overview over regime proliferation in Africa since the early 1990s and the key concepts of Historical Institutionalism including “critical junctures” and “path dependence”. The theoretical overview familiarized all participants with the major theoretical strand guiding the conference. On various occasions during the conference participants outlined how their respective papers fit into the general outline of the workshop. An overview over all panel and the respective participants is provided on the following page. All panels were chaired either by one of the organisers or by a participant, who was able to communicate in both English and French. Each panel was followed by a question and answer session. In addition the final afternoon session was used in order to link the debate back to the overall question of which institution matter most for regime proliferation. This again ensured mutual understanding, comparative perspectives and analytical coherence.

The four research fields outlined above were covered in five panels:

Panel 1: Electoral management bodies and democratization in Africa. The panel examined the role of electoral bodies in facilitating democratic elections since independence. This was the panel with most contributions. A whole day of the conference was dedicated to this topic. The cross-country comparison of electoral management bodies found significant differences in the degree of their respective independence. The independence of the electoral management body could be identified as crucial for the success of democratization efforts. This confirmed a basic assumption of political science research: Democratization is meaningless without free and fair elections.

Panel 2: The history of checks and balances in the political system. In many African countries the democratization process has been hampered by the dominant role of the executive. The panel critically examined whether the legislative and the judiciary have been successful in limiting the powers of the executive. Only in a few African countries does the judiciary have the power to effectively limit the power of the executive. The main problem is not the formal right of the judiciary to do so but the executive’s lack of will to allow the judiciary to make use of its powers. Yet in all countries

democratization efforts were accompanied by greater independence of the judiciary. Many presenters and participants stressed that an independent judiciary is as important as free and fair elections in order to make democracy sustainable.

Panel 3: The development of civil-military relations. African armies have intervened in civilian politics on numerous occasions. The panel analyzed the impact of military involvement in politics on democratic pathways and illustrated civil-military relations today. Despite the enormous challenges that regular military intervention poses, African governments have very rarely if ever found political solutions, which lead to institutional oversight over the military. In all countries under scrutiny the military has remained a potential veto actor.

Panel 4: Civil society and political parties in the struggle for political participation rights. Civil society organisations can fulfil various roles in the democratic process. The panel discussed to what extent civil society and political parties managed to live up to its potential. The effect of civil society on democratization is mixed. In some countries civil society organisations could increase the democratic quality. In others pro-regime groups either help stabilize autocratic rule or opposition groups were co-opted into the ruling elite. Methodological questions remain whether civil society fosters democratization or whether democratization leads to a more vibrant civil society, which in turn leads to an increase in the quality of democratization (problem of endogeneity).

Panel 5: Democratic pathways in Africa. Democratic pathways have taken diverse directions in Africa since the early 1990s. The final panel reviewed the experiences of individual countries. The panel demonstrated that democratization is never a linear process. The end of autocratic rule is not immediately succeeded by democratic governance. Instead democratic transitions in Africa are marked by setbacks or periods of long-term stagnation. Long-term stagnation can lead to the permanent “hybridization” of a regime.

The presentations and the discussions were received very positively by the participants. It was particularly encouraging to see was the exchange between anglophone and francophone scholars on all topics covered. All workshop participants were keen on exchanging their findings and insights. The debates were lively and constructive.

4 Sustainability of the Event

The final discussion revealed a general desire to continue to work beyond the French/ English language divide. All participants agreed that further research on the role of institutional factors in regime proliferation is urgently required. The conference organisers are considering the option of a special issue of *Africa Spectrum*, a peer-reviewed international journal edited by the German Institute for Global and Area Studies Hamburg. A special issue might include three to four revised papers that were presented at the conference. This however will require further discussions with the editor of the journal about the quality of the initial papers

submitted. If a special issue appears feasible, a call for revised papers will be issued to the participants in the near future. In addition a variety of participants indicated that they are in the process of submitting papers to peer-reviewed journals drawing on the major themes of the conference. All participants agreed to stay in contact via email in order to provide regular updates about conferences and publications covering the major theme of the workshop.

5 Participants

1. Prof. Maurice Amutabi Political Science, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya
2. Prof. Amukowa Anangwe Political Science, University of Dodoma, Tanzania
3. Prof. Sylvain Anignikin History, University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin
4. Audrey Cash M.A. Development Studies, University of Reading, England
5. Dr. George Chawanda Education, Catholic University of Malawi
6. Sandra Casals M.A. African Studies, Colegio of México, Mexico
7. Dr. Birama Diakon Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
8. Dr. Djibril Cissé Literature, École Normale Supérieure, Mali
9. Dr. William Ehwareme Political Science, Delta-State University, Nigeria
10. Prof. Ould Ahmed Hassen Literature, University of Nouakchott, Mauritania
11. Sebastian Elischer M.A. International Relations, GIGA Hamburg, Germany
12. Dr. Gero Erdmann Political Science, GIGA Hamburg, Germany
13. Prof. Michel Goeh-Akué History, University of Lomé, Togo
14. Oumarou Hamani DEA Political Science, LASDEL, Niamey, Niger
15. Dr. Mathias Hounkpê IFES, N'Djamena, Chad
16. Boureima Kansaye M.A. Anthropology, Université de Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
17. Dr. Brehima Kassibo Sociology, CNRST Bamako, Point Sud, Mali
18. Oumarou Kologo DEA Political Science, Université Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
19. Bathé M'Baye M.A. Law, Point Sud, Mali
20. Enoh Meyomesse Writer and Analyst, Cameroon
21. Jacinta Musundi M.A. Anthropology, University of Fort Hare, South Africa
22. Prof. Jean Njoya Political Science, University de Yaoundé, Cameroon
23. Prof. Bizeck Jube Phiri History, University of Zambia
24. Oumarou Samaké DEA Anthropology, CNRST, Bamako, Mali
25. Dr. Kalibou Sidibé History, Université de Bamako, Mali
26. Dr. Nouhoun Sidibe Education, ISFRA, Bamako, Mali
27. Dr. Abdoulaye Somparé University of Conakry, Guinea
28. Alexander Stroh M.A. Political Science, GIGA Hamburg, Germany
29. Fred Tetteh Electoral Commission of Ghana
30. Kamanan Traore M.A. Political Science, Université de Bamako, Mali