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Basel

Research Project

African Political Cultures: A Comparative Study in Guinea Bissau, Libya, South Africa, and Zambia

Third-party funded project

Project title African Political Cultures: A Comparative Study in Guinea Bissau, Libya, South Africa, and Zambia

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Organisation / Research unit

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Africa is a continent where creative experimenting with political orders is omnipresent. Currently, we observe the rise of new actors and the emergence of new institutions and ways of conflict resolution. Political culture is a key to understand and to explain this process of creativity and adaptation. It includes political actions, normative rules, institutional arrangements, discourses, rituals and symbols. Political culture is a dynamic phenomenon. Power, legitimacy, and violence are at its core. Adopting a comparative, transdisciplinary and actor-centred perspective, the research project studies the political cultures of four different African countries, south as well as north of the Sahara: Guinea- Bissau, South-Africa, Zambia, and Libya. The countries differ along the lines of the power of the state, the presence of 'heterarchical figurations', the role and meaning of violence, magic, witchcraft, codes and institutions of conflict resolution, and the kind of leaders and power groups which shape political cultures.

Applying a host of qualitative methods of anthropology and sociology and following a bottom-up research design, the study is particularly interested in the political cultures of those local and regional leaders and power groups who are at the intersection of local, regional, national and transnational politics, determine political culture, and bind people to the political order. The study aims at a better understanding of African politics and of its remarkable adaptability and flexibility and to contribute to general political anthropology and sociology.

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