

African Courts: Actors, Institutional Developments and Governance

Workshop at the LASDEL Niamey, Niger

Funded by the DFG and Point Sud

December 4–10, 2014 (including arrival and departure days)

Topic

Across Africa, courts share characteristics beyond their specific colonial history, legal system and national development: they face similar challenges of legitimacy and efficiency, within plural normative orders. Material and structural constraints shape the everyday work of the judicial administration. But how exactly do African courts work? How are they regulated? Who are their actors? And what are their practices, values and norms? Do some court characteristics contribute more to democratization and good governance than others? If so, why and in what conditions?

This workshop brings together young African and non-African scholars who share a common interest in African courts, to engage in new avenues of cooperation on any of the following sub-themes:

- the organization and administration of justice (including research on the day-to-day functioning of courts, court management, judging and sentencing);
- the sociology and behaviour of court actors (including research on judges, clerks, bailiffs, and court registrars, their career trajectories, values and boundary work as well as on appointment politics);
- the reform and harmonization of institutional settings (including court reforms in the 2000s, the relations between customary courts and state courts, and the relation of courts with other arms of government).

In this workshop we particularly welcome comparative approaches and collaborative work. Anthropological micro-level analysis, sociological research on actors' behaviour, and political science approaches on comparative structure-agency-linkages have great potential to speak to each other once the common interest has been specified. Given the importance of personalized power relations in Africa, for instance, joint research on judicial appointments is one particularly obvious field for fruitful interdisciplinary work: sociological and ethnographic work on the judges' socio-cultural background, education and careers could easily merge with political science research on the causal

Workshop

Niamey, 4-10 December 14
(including dates of travel)

Deadline for Applications

31 May 2014

Contact

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Convenors

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effects of appointment policies on democracy and good governance. More fields of cooperation could be how political institutions shape the day-to-day behaviour of court actors or why some political court reforms are more efficient than others. In brief, the interdisciplinary exchange could do both, enhancing the work on general causal effects with deeper empirical insights and factual precision, as well as taking dense descriptions towards more rigorous comparative frameworks and theoretical insights of more general interest.

Aims

This workshop aims at stimulating collaborative, comparative work in groups of two or more researchers, each working group based on a common topic or approach. The workshop will provide a unique opportunity to find such common interests and to develop contributions for scholarly journals with the option of a follow-up workshop for personal discussions after one year (funding bodies will only decide on this option once the first workshop has taken place and in the light of competing applications). The workshop organization therefore targets at providing the best environment for the preparation of co-authored or jointly inspired articles.

Costs

This is a sponsored workshop. Thus, funding for travel, meals and accommodation over the course of the workshop will be provided. Funding was generously granted by the German Research Foundation in the framework of the Point Sud Programme.

Eligibility

We will invite some 20 early career researchers of various disciplines, including political science, history, sociology and anthropology, who are either close to the finalization of their PhD, or have completed their PhD for less than 5 years (convenors might slightly deviate from these strict lines in exceptional cases). We seek a roughly balanced ratio of African and non-African participants in order to support the networking aspect of the workshop. We invite submissions in English and French; bilingual applicants will have an advantage in the selection process.

Deadline

Paper abstracts of not more than 500 words must be sent to the contact e-mail address below by 31 May 2014; please attach a CV and information on where you will be located in December 2014. A decision on the accepted proposals will be made by the end of June 2014. Full papers are due by 1 November 2014 and will be only accessible to all workshop participants.

Contact

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Legon, Mainz, Niamey & Hamburg, 15 April 2014

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