



ADAPTING INSTITUTIONS

A COMPARATIVE AREA STUDIES PERSPECTIVE

International Conference

At the occasion of the 50years anniversary of GIGA

Date 10 - 11 April 2014



Rationale

Institutions are created to regulate social life and prepare society for upcoming challenges. Arguably most of the existing formal institutions are meant to regulate conflicts of different type and scope (such as police, justice, electoral authorities etc.). However, at times, such conflict management institutions (or the quest to reform or improve them) remain promises rather than reality. The functioning of institutions depends on various aspects, such as contextual conditions, the changing dynamics of conflicts and the behaviour of actors. One logical assumption is that institutions need to be adapted to those factors and actors in order to fulfil their intended functions. This view of flexible and adaptable institutions may also imply certain risks: “over-adaptation” could simply serve to replicate a non-desirable status quo.

Mainstream political science approaches are strongly shaped by experiences and debates in a limited number of Western/Northern societies. Thus, political science tended to overlook the global variations of institutions for a long time, as well as their functions and patterns of adaptation. However, actors from the Global South tend to resist the homogenising attempts by the North and the UN system to turn them into globally isomorph institutions – specifically, by creating new forms of institutions and practices. This has resulted in the emergence of “hybrid” institutions or situations in which different institutions meant to deal with the same or similar societal problems (e.g. transitional justice versus the formal justice system; legal pluralism) co-exist and overlap.

Hence, the “Adapting Institutions” conference aims at examining these variations through the use of cross-regional comparisons. Some papers presented will be cross-regional in nature; others will help provide a cross-regional perspective only when contrasted with other papers during the discussion. This perspective will help us to determine the degree of “area boundedness” of different institutions and whether other categories (e.g. autocracies versus democracies, or poor against well-endowed polities) are better at explaining institutional choices.



Conference Programme

First day: 10 April 2014

- 14:00-14:15 Official Welcoming by Detlef Nolte (acting President of GIGA) and Andreas Mehler (GIGA CAS representative)
- 14:15-15:00 Opening Lecture by Laurence Whitehead (Oxford, Nuffield College): “Hybridity” of contemporary democratic regimes in a cross-regional perspective
- 15:00-17:30 **Block I: Adaptive institutional change from a Comparative Area Studies perspective**
Chair: Dirk Berg-Schlosser
- Ben Reilly (Murdoch, Australia) | Electoral system choice in new democracies: is the world really becoming more proportional?
- Susanna Campbell (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva) | Destructive adaptation: The perverse effects of international peace-building reforms
- Mariana Llanos (GIGA) | Informal interference with the judiciary in new democracies: A comparison of six African and Latin American cases
- 18:00-18:30 CAS Award Ceremony
- 19:30 Official Dinner

Second day: 11 April 2014

- 09:30-12:30 **Block II: Reform from above, adaptation from below: What hides behind “hybridity”**
Chair: Andreas Mehler
- Chandra Lekha Sriram (University of East London) | Grassroots versus treetops: What justice and whose justice? Lessons from Africa



Anika Oettler (University of Marburg) | Transitional justice. Global norms, local encounters: A cross-regional focus on sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America

Roger Mac Ginty (University of Manchester) | Everyday peace: The extraordinary peace-making and tolerance of so-called 'ordinary people'

Thania Paffenholz (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva) | Negotiated institutions in Kenya: Successes and limits of hybrid arrangements

14:00-16:45

Block III: When states subvert their own institutions

Chair: Patrick Köllner

Ariel Ahram (Virginia Tech) | Understanding State and Regime Breakdown: Comparative Areas Studies and the Arab Spring

Nicolas van de Walle (Cornell University) | Electoral fraud in Africa: Why governments sabotage state institutions

Henner Fürtig (GIGA) | Islamisation of laic institutions in the name of the government

Nadine Ansorg (GIGA) | Institutional change in post-conflict societies: Road to peace or risk of renewed violence?

17:00-18:00

Block IV: Panel discussion

What can Comparative Area Studies do for the study of institutional change?

Ariel Ahram, Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Andreas Mehler, Representative of the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (pending), Laurence Whitehead

18:00-18:15

End and Farewell



CAS as defined by the GIGA

Comparative area studies (CAS) is a scholarly field of study that combines the regional focus and expertise of area studies with the explicit use of comparative methods as the appropriate means to both:

- a) generate insights into the cases under study and
- b) connect to overarching disciplinary and theoretical debates.

Thus, CAS's cognitive interests consist of both individualisation and generalisation.

Focus and added value

The comparative approach can be based on any number of cases (paired or small-, medium- or large-n) and may equally include various units of analysis (national, subnational or supranational entities). CAS may use comparative methods within a specific world region (intra-area comparison), but is particularly suited to overcoming the limitations of traditional single-area studies through inter-area and cross-area comparisons.

CAS is situated between single-case studies and global cross-country analysis – both of which have great value, but neither is designed to combine the advantages of generalisation and individualisation (at least not in the context of affordable research projects). CAS differs from crucial case studies due to its explicit use of a comparative methodology. CAS also diverges from large-n cross-country research due to its deliberate selection of a number of cases, which allows it to substantially benefit from area expertise. However, the adequate calibration of the number of cases to in-depth area expertise depends on the research question. Thus, CAS does not intend to build new artificial walls, but seeks fruitful interaction with theoretically reflective single-case studies as much as it does with large-n studies of global reach. CAS can be seen as the missing link between globally generalised cross-country studies and individualised empirically thick case studies.

Comparative subdisciplines

The concept of CAS connects to similar research frameworks (at times fully fledged subdisciplines) present in most disciplines concerned with area studies. Aside from the well-established field of comparative politics, growing fields of study include comparative history, comparative linguistics, comparative ethnology and comparative sociology. These approaches not only vary in standing in their respective disciplines, they also differ in the degree of methodological reflection and the standards used to compare. They all, however, share the belief that by comparing we can better understand the commonalities and specificities of the empirical cases we study.