

ABSTRACTS

Democratisation and rotation of local elites in Cameroon

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Through two case studies, the present study explores the renewal of local political elites in Cameroon provoked by the new context of multipartyism and democratization. It is based on the idea expressed by Robert Dahl that, in certain societies, leadership exercised by multiple and competing elites is the “best approximation of democracy”. It may indeed be observed that, in post-industrial societies, liberal and democratic regimes are based on negotiation between elites from various sectors – in particular the economic sector. In those societies, the professionalization of politics, although manifest, does not exclude diversity in the trajectories of politicians. On the contrary, under the one-party system, a recurrent characteristic of the African political game was the “narrowess of the political class”. Cameroon was no exception to the rule. Thus, only certain categories of the population were used to take actively part in political life. Therefore, in the West province, municipal executive and local councils remained stepping stones for traditional chiefs who were in that region, allies of the state. Here, those chiefs, considered as “social eldest people”, were secured a nomination in local elections. As elections were non-competitive, they were granted an appointment as local counsellors or mayors in their respective towns. The 1996 local elections set a breach in the system: the base of the population expressed its will to mark a distinction between traditional authorities, relaying the state, and the former single party, the CPDM. Even within the CPDM, the local political class opened to economic contractors, instead of chiefs.

Transferring competencies by contract? – Legal foundations and practical problems of the ‚convenios de transferencia’ within the Ecuadorian decentralization process

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A core element of decentralization processes is the transfer of competencies and resources to sub-national levels of government. In most cases, new laws are passed that restructure the division of competencies. These legal norms usually assign the same attributions to all

local government institutions of the same tier of government, such as all municipalities. However, due to vast differences in capacities, resources, and extension of local governments this equal treatment often overtaxes smaller municipalities. Against this background, Ecuador has chosen a different decentralization model. Here, local governments voluntarily conclude so-called 'transfer agreements' with central government agencies, thereby assuming only those attributions they can fulfil according to their own capacities. However, as this article shows, the contractual solution stands in tension with the delineation of clear roles and functions of the different levels of government. In addition, the transfer agreements confront a series of implementation problems, such as inequalities in the bargaining power, which cast doubt on the feasibility of this decentralization model.

When disaster strikes small islands. The right of Overseas Territories and Micro-States to claim international attention

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Small island overseas territories and states are highly vulnerable to natural disasters. While independent small island nations have rather easy access to the international community to voice their need for disaster relief, dependent overseas territories must rely primarily on their relationship with the motherland. They are usually not covered by media reports and, therefore, often not in the international public eye. Being small both in size and population in most cases, overseas territories are seldom the subject of research. Some of these overseas territories are non-self-governing.

Both small island states and small island territories often lack quality disaster management. Small island nations can improve their disaster preparedness by means of regional cooperation. When a disaster occurs in overseas territories, these do not always have a legal claim to assistance from their motherlands. Depending on their status under their motherland's national constitutional law, they would do well to engage in regional cooperation, as well. It is necessary to improve the disaster preparedness of both small island developing states (SIDS) and of overseas territories. The improvement of disaster preparedness in overseas territories should be accompanied by a discussion of disaster management in small island states, in order to benefit from resulting synergies.