# Africa's Research Priorities from a Political Science Perspective

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Africa's research priorities, from a political science perspective cannot be isolated from the state of the discipline in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, issues, research orientations, and methodological bases show the need to adopt orientations and methods relevant to particular contexts. This is evident while thinking about the key issues research on Africa should consider in the next few years. The trends observed in the past decade are very instructive. Current local and global challenges cannot be ignored in this thinking.

The objective here is to identify research areas, training patterns, and political dialogue programs that could be explored, invested into and developed in the next phase of CODESRIA journey. It may be necessary to reconsider current patterns in light of new realities and the followed are issues to consider.

First of all, it is important to make an assessment of status of social science research in Africa today, with particular reference to politics and governance. The need to carry out a kind of adjusted stocktaking of the state of social sciences in Africa becomes necessary, to evaluate from accumulations in social-scientific practices throughout the continent. The task itself seems to be a key challenge concerning approaches b social science researchers in multidisciplinary areas.

Even in a multidisciplinary perspective, the African political science approach calls for numerous reformulations, new presentations, and redeployment of methodology. This goes beyond the updating perspective.

## The search for democracy, democratization and democratic transition

Research on African politics is likely to experience some evolution even though the study by political scientists on the continent has focused mainly on democratization. The question of the study of democracy and democratic practice is still essential, from the perspective of achievements and failures of the last decade also. Indeed, this still covers classical dimensions of the relationships between law, politics, and society. Today, there are topical issues such as political pluralism and its content, diversity management, the study of both institutions and practices of transitional justice, gender in democracy and development, local democracy, decentralization, and regionalization.

## Return of the State

The old thematic of the weakness of the state, its role in the identity and role in political violence issues has been seen competing with denationalization, deregulation, privatization, and the planned marginalisation of the state in the previous phase. We know, in this connection, that the African social science research and the public sector have in the past, present and future, to what extent been compromised by official agendas of international organizations, government policies, hegemonic political actors and economic operators. It is therefore necessary today than ever, in view of new realities, to get back to these issues through a more critical approach. Today, it is essential to get back to the new place and the new role of the state in current African realities, a topic of study which has been neglected for far too long for the benefit of different perspectives (market, civil society, social movements that need to be placed at this time, contextualized in the general economy of a new balance particularly marked by a return of the state). This research redirection, restoring the state cannot stop the exploration of topical issues such as political parties, election processes, characteristics of civil associations and missions, relationships between civil societies and politicians, trade-unionism, the fate of community leaders, client-oriented and kinship networks.

## Public policy studies

The agenda should also include public policy studies with a focus on the following:

- Development policies in Africa;
- Social policies (poverty, health, education, employment, housing, gender, migrations...) in a context of social and community capital;
- Management of African natural resources;
- Urban-rural dynamic management policies;
- Water policies;
- Environmental policies, etc.

## Security issues

Among the core topics in the study of African politics today, should include security issues, standard security and security in its new dimensions especially the one currently referred to as 'human security', in various aspects expressed in new types of violence, in the Sahel and elsewhere, inter-ethnic and/or religious conflicts, post-conflict reconstructions; human security dimensions structured around human rights and democratic issues, access to resources, environment, and issues of refugees.

## Africa and the world today

Political research has its place in the current international configuration, particularly in terms of prediction for new power realignments and the impact it is likely to have on Africa. This configuration has been defined and marked by the on-going economic and financial crisis. This also has to be seen in the context of consequences of previous phases, the repositioning of other power contenders, trajectories of unipolar power schemes, impulses of multipolar deployment: in such conditions how does the encounter of Africa with the global system work? How do we decipher Africa's regionalist upsurge? How would interstate and regional reconstructions develop?

## Identity issues

Another important perspective of interest is that of identity, culture, regional distinctiveness, universalism, and art today. It is not without calling for political analysis; there is need to understand the nature of cultural and structural bottlenecks (corruption, patrimonialism, ethnicity, citizen socialization, traditionalism, etc.)