

Invitation:

The acceptance and non-acceptance of electoral results: a historical view

Free admission, no registration needed.

A joint BGSB / swisspeace research discussion

Abstract:

All too frequently, states grapple with situations in which electoral contestants or their supporters reject the outcome of a national election, including by making sweeping, unsupported allegations of fraud. Over time, such behaviour erodes trust and deepens polarization, tearing into the fabric of democracies.

And yet: to the historian and the political scientist alike, disputes over electoral processes – ranging from fierce but peaceful debate over the design of a process, to conflict and violence arising from its outcomes – are a boon.

Firstly, they provide insight into prevalent notions of what constitutes a “proper” or “correct” electoral process. In other words, they reveal the criteria by which a polity considers whether a process bestows legitimacy on the chosen representatives or office holders. Secondly, disputes and conflict can be a creative force, an impetus for change and reform, typically as a way to overcome a crisis and prevent future conflict.

By taking the long view of electoral disputes, we can see that notions of legitimacy, and the normative framework for election/selection processes, are not fixed, but rather vary from context to context. Moreover, even within the same society, standards evolve, often in response to disputed outcomes. Electoral disputes are thus a lens to analyze political institutions, as well as a door to policy and reform options.

Drawing on a range of historical examples – including the selection of office holders in Athens, the “birthplace” of democracy; of Popes in the Middle Ages; and of the heads of state in contemporary Gambia – but also on his experience as United Nations electoral expert in post-conflict settings (Afghanistan, Libya, Nepal, and others), Maarten Halfff will argue – speaking in a personal capacity – that election disputes are a fruitful subject of study and research. He will suggest elements of a comparative approach, to stimulate an interdisciplinary discussion among participants.

The event aims to be of interest to students of history, social anthropology, political science, and peace and conflict studies alike, as well as to the broader interested public.

Speaker:

Maarten Halfff

Visiting Fellow, Basel Graduate School of History.
Senior Political Affairs Officer, Electoral Assistance
Division, United Nations (on special leave)

Date:

4 May, 4–6 pm CET

Location:

**Kasernenhof 8, CH-4058 Basel
kHaus Nord, Wohnzimmer
(2nd floor)**