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**Abstract**

How do political forces come together to influence merger forms and outcomes? This question is posed in a context of an analysis of the forms and outcomes of three ?case studies? of mergers that took place in South Africa in the past decade. The theoretical stance, borne out by the data under review, places political actors at the centre of the explanation for change and continuity in the merger of institutions. While there are clearly broad lessons that could apply in other national contexts, the paper recognises that the fact that most published studies on mergers originate in established economies like those of Norway, Australia, England, the USA. The paper poses the question, therefore: do mergers follow different processes and deliver different outcomes in the social, economic and political contexts of third world institutions? (HRK / Abstract übernommen)