



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH
GROUP ON AUTHORITARIANISM
AND COUNTER-STRATEGIES**



Authoritarian Neoliberalism & Reactionary Populism: The Authoritarian Appeal

Call for Applications by the [International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies](#) of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung and the University of Potsdam for

6 postdoctoral fellowships

at the [Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at the University of Potsdam](#)

Application deadline is February 15, 2025.

Short Description

The [International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies](#) (IRGAC) is an initiative of the [Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung](#) and the [University of Potsdam](#) aimed at supporting critical research from and on the Global South, and strengthening dialogue on authoritarian transformations and counter-strategies, both internally—among countries in the South—and between the Global South and the Global North. To achieve this, the IRGAC will fund 6 postdoctoral fellowships from April 2025 to December 2027 (33 months) for activist researchers from [ODA recipient countries](#).¹

The postdoctoral researchers will be based at the [Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at the University of Potsdam](#).² Fellowship holders will have the opportunity to collaborate closely with international colleagues within the framework of the IRGAC, which currently brings together around 20 scholar-activists from across the Global South. This includes participating in regular workshops and colloquia, as well as active participation in collective projects and publications.

With this call for applications, the IRGAC is seeking research proposals on authoritarianism's appeal, especially to subaltern classes and social groups. We are particularly interested in studies that propose a perspective for and from the Global South (which is to say studies that critically relate regional problems to global economic and power relations and transnational actor networks) and propose creative inter- and transdisciplinary research strategies. We favour scholar-activist methodologies—i.e., rigorous academic work that is embedded in progressive political projects, movements or initiatives—and are looking for research output that reflects this scholar-activist character.

The programme's explicit goal is to contribute to a global dialogue between radical progressive scholars and activists who seek to better understand the rising tide of global authoritarianism, develop counter-strategies, and advance along a new path towards a just, democratic society based on international solidarity, and on the principles of anti-fascism and anti-racism.

¹ We welcome applications from researchers residing outside their home countries.

² Funding starts in April 2025, but the research fellows aren't expected to arrive to Potsdam before October 2025.

Considerations

“Why do people fight for their servitude as if it were their salvation?” In the face of a worldwide trend towards an increasingly brutal and militarized regime of capitalist accumulation and domination, a deepening of the antidemocratic features of neoliberal states and societies, and the rapid expansion of reactionary discourses and ideologies of inequality, Spinoza’s question seems more pressing than ever. Why do people support authoritarian politics? How does authoritarianism appeal to people, especially to those who are less powerful? What exactly do authoritarian options have to offer – both politically, and on a socio-psychological level?

Although the Frankfurt School discussed authoritarian ideology and subjectivity in the 1920s and Stuart Hall addressed the cultural dimensions of what he termed authoritarian populism forty years ago, we consider that there are many open and new questions regarding the dynamics of and popular support for authoritarianism, its historic specificity and its relation to neoliberalism, neoliberal democracy and their crises.

Perspectives from the South

We invite researchers to examine the complex relations between neoliberalism and its long-term economic, political and subjective effects; the specific expressions and effects of what is often termed multiple, or polycrisis; the increasingly authoritarian nature of neoliberalism; and questions regarding authoritarianism’s appeal to and support by broad segments of society.

We seek in-depth studies of the relations between economic, political and social mutations on the one hand, and the ideological, affective and micro-practical dimension of authoritarianism on the other hand. We are particularly interested in contributions from a postcolonial, Southern perspective, i.e., one that critically relates specific problems to global constellations of power. This implies questioning the role the “South” plays within the context of the global authoritarian shift.

Critical perspectives on these issues are particularly important because much of mainstream political science still taxonomically differentiates between liberal democracy and authoritarian regimes as opposing poles, thus rendering the antidemocratic dynamics inscribed within the former invisible. Analysis of authoritarianism in society is further complicated by the fact that, while processes of institutional de-democratization might seem relatively comparable between states, the political-ideological amalgam of authoritarianism is diverse and specific. Thus, authoritarianism’s appeal as well as its ideological core are often wrapped up under a vague notion of “populism”, closely identified with populist leader figures, to the effect that questions about its structural embeddedness in neoliberal social, political and economic relations and imaginaries remain largely understudied and undertheorized.

The same can be said about the role that class, race, gender and other social power relations play in this context. Many perspectives ignore them altogether, others frame authoritarian neoliberalism either exclusively as a transformation from *above*—i.e., as state-centered, imposed by dominant classes or “manipulative” far-right actors—, or as one from *below*—for example, as a “reaction” of popular and/or middle classes to the effects of the multiple crises of capitalism and neoliberal democracy. We consider that there are important shortcomings and open questions in this context, and thus welcome relational, dialectical approaches that critically ask how authoritarianism addresses, appeals to and/or reconfigures relations of class, race and gender, among others, without obscuring the sometimes uncomfortable questions regarding the political subjectivities of the dominated. This implies adopting a materialist perspective that combines analysis of, for example, structures and mechanisms of inequality, coloniality, infrastructures of communication, or social organization, with sound analysis of political discourse, ideology and affect.

Possible Research Questions

Building on these considerations, possible research questions from all branches of the social sciences and humanities may therefore include:

- What connections can be drawn between the materiality of neoliberal statehood and economy, imaginaries and experiences in late neoliberalism, and authoritarian discourses and ideologies?
- What function does the authoritarian (and sometimes openly fascist) ideological mobilization have for today's neoliberalism, i.e., how and why does neoliberalism produce a reactionary ideological core?
- How do different authoritarian politics and discourses actually appeal to concrete social groups, and how do these groups insert themselves in these authoritarian political projects?
- What position do authoritarianism and reactionary populism accord to various subjects—including, indeed especially, subaltern ones? Does the authoritarian populist turn mean more rule by coercion and less by hegemonic persuasion, or does it also represent a (reactionary) self-empowerment of the subaltern? And what role is played by the “intermediate classes”?
- How can we conceptualize and study authoritarian ideologies and their successful appeal beyond liberal moralising, in order to understand the underlying social experiences and malaise, as well as the far-reaching cultural and political changes they bring?
- How do authoritarian elements manifest in “radical conservative” or authoritarian populist discourses and politics, versus authoritarian (neo)liberal discourses and politics?
- To what degree does the worldwide turn to authoritarian capitalism represent a renegotiation of class and other power relations at the local, national or global scale, and what role do post- or neocolonial relations play in this context?
- Does the expansion of neocolonial practices such as settler colonialism and ideological discourses of a global “culture war” represent a reconfiguration of imperialist strategies of rule and an attempt to cordon the Global North off from the South, or do they instead represent a worldwide intensification of “class war from above”, or something else entirely?
- Especially when seen from a Southern perspective, what role do coloniality and global (post)colonial relations play in social authoritarianism worldwide?

This list is not exhaustive. Transversal to this research agenda is the question of how to effectively counter authoritarian transformations, which implies analyzing the conditions and struggles that make authoritarianism fail.

Structure and Goals

The fellowships are funded by the [International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies](#), an initiative of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS) and the University of Potsdam aimed at supporting critical research in and from countries of the Global South and strengthening dialogue between scholars, activists and research-oriented artists from the Global South and Global North.

The postdoctoral researchers will be based at the [Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at the University of Potsdam](#), which hosts the International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies (IRGAC). They will gain the opportunity to advance their own individual research and collaborate closely with colleagues at the University of Potsdam and the IRGAC. This includes participating in regular meetings (on a weekly basis), as well as other regular online and offline workshops, and active participation in collective projects, such as the online and other non-academic publications.

The fellowships explicitly aim to contribute to a more global conversation between scholars and activists for a better understanding of the rising spread of authoritarianism and to advance the idea

and praxis of just and democratic societies. We are particularly interested in approaches that propose comparative and international perspectives for and from the Global South on the aforementioned issues.

Funding starts April 1, 2025 and ends December 31, 2027. Researchers are expected in Potsdam from October 2025 onward. We encourage and support research stays abroad.

Requirements

Due to funding stipulations, only citizens of [ODA-recipient countries](#) are eligible to apply.

Applicants should have completed their PhD within the last **eight years** and should be able to provide relevant research and publications on the topics described in this call for applications.

Please note that in order to facilitate an ongoing and productive dialogue between scholars, the working language will be English. Therefore, applicants are required to have a very good command of the English language.

Financial Support

The financial support provided to postdoctoral researchers is a tax-free scholarship of 2650€, a monthly travel allowance of 100€, plus a monthly allowance for health insurance in Germany. We may grant additional funding in case you travel with children and/or your spouse.

Submission

To submit your application, please send us an email to contact@irgac.org with the following documents in **one single PDF file** no bigger than 6 MB.

Please make sure that the filename is **LastName_FirstName.pdf**, and that the documents are in correct order. We only accept complete applications in one single file.

Please visit irgac.org/calls/ to find a comprehensive FAQs and further information on conditions, selection procedures, etc. Please direct any further queries to contact@irgac.org.

Your application should include:

- A first page with your full name, nationality, address / place of residency, the title of your research project, and your field of study.
- A letter of motivation (max. one page)
- An outline of the project you would like to carry out, consisting of:
 - an abstract (max. 200 words)
 - a research proposal (max. 2,000 words)
 - a project timeline
 - proposed outcomes
- Your curriculum vitae, including a publication list

The publication list should be divided into publications in peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, and conference papers. Please highlight the two most relevant publications.

- Two names and contact details of referees.

- Your PhD certificate

Unless the document is issued in English, an English translation is required. A certified translation, together with a certified copy of the PhD certificate, will only be required after the scholarship is awarded.

- A copy of your passport
- A certificate of English language skills

You must be able to prove that you have at least a [CEFR C1 level](#) of English, unless it is your native language or you wrote your doctoral dissertation in English. If you do not have a certificate, please provide written information regarding your language skills.

We will inform all applicants of the results of the selection process by early March, 2025.

Funding starts April 1, 2025.

www.irgac.org