

Call for Abstracts for Special Issue Proposal

We invite colleagues to submit an abstract (minimum 500 words) and a short biographical note for consideration for inclusion in our Special Issue “Rethinking authoritarianism: Transnational praxis between South-West Asia, North Africa, and the world”. Please send your abstract and bio to fabrizioleonardo.cuccu@dcu.ie by **10 January 2026**. If you have any questions or would like to discuss the fit of your contribution, please contact us at the same address. We welcome submissions that engage critically and empirically with the themes outlined below:

Rethinking authoritarianism: Transnational praxis between South-West Asia, North Africa, and the world

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Recent work on authoritarianism has moved beyond regime-type classifications to examine how coercive practices (Glasius 2023; Dukalskis et al. 2024), narratives and propaganda (Rasheed 2022; Gurol 2023; Rivetti 2023), repertoires of legitimation (Yabanci, Akkoyunlu & Öktem 2025), and digital tools (Jones 2022; Bashirov et al. 2025; Garbe et al. 2025) circulate globally and across different regimes. Studies of authoritarian diffusion and cooperation highlight how autocratic elites learn from one another, emulate each other’s technologies of control and actively promote “authoritarian gravity centres” (Kneuer & Demmelhuber 2020) through networks of material and ideational linkages (Lemon & Antonov 2020; Hall & Debre 2025). This scholarship demonstrates that authoritarian consolidation is rarely a purely domestic process; rather, it is embedded in wider transnational infrastructures: security partnerships, migration management regimes, digital surveillance markets, and counterterrorism cooperation. All these connections allow ideas, practices, and policy templates to travel and be repurposed.

Within this scholarship, the SWANA region has been theorized as a key space of experimentation in which regime responses to the 2011 uprisings (Heydemann & Lendeers 2011) and transnational agendas focusing on migration (Natter 2021) and security (Cuccu 2025) have generated dense circuits of learning in policing, repression and counter-revolution, both within the region and outward to other world regions. As a result, SWANA regimes operate not only within regional webs of mutual reinforcement but also within transnational configurations in which external actors shape the scope, direction, and durability of authoritarian practices (Michaelson 2017; Tsourapas 2021). This environment makes the region a crucial lens for examining how authoritarian ideas and technologies travel, adapt, and co-constitute contemporary global authoritarianism.

This special issue discusses authoritarian politics as an epistemology for the present. As we witness the spreading and emboldening of authoritarian ideologues and political movements across the world, this panel calls on scholars to re-examine how we conceptualize and know authoritarianism as a theoretical concept as well as political praxis. In this inquiry, the SWANA

have a special place as a geography where political strategies for exercising power in an authoritarian manner are refined and tested. This is done through the maintenance of political and human precariousness, due to widespread armed conflicts and neo-colonial interventions, with the complicity of the so-called advanced democracies of the world that support autocratic and war-mongering rulers financially and politically in the name of market stability and halting immigration.

The special issue seeks submissions that move away from understanding authoritarianism as a domestic issue, and instead interrogate it as a manifestation of transnational politics and as a concept that we can use to learn how transnational politics works. This panel invites papers that examine the issues discussed above, including but not limited to:

- the online and offline circulation of authoritarian, conservative and illiberal ideas and theories, from anti-“gender ideology” and carceral ideas, to conspiracy, racist (“Great Replacement”) and “strong men” theories;
- the sharing and transfer of security technologies, from surveillance to detention, and the authoritarian political visions they come with;
- the commercialization of war technologies, the formation of transnational neoliberal military-industrial complexes, and the authoritarian political imaginary they engender and foster;
- the authoritarian strategies to deplete the right to dissent through explicit means (legislation, policing and criminalization of activism and movements) as well as means that implicitly discourage mobilizations and/or critical thinking (for example, through the privatization of public and urban spaces, the reform of employment legislation and workers’ rights, the privatization and reform of the education system, reform of the communication system and the use of social media).

While papers should have a geographical focus on the SWANA region, they should connect policies and strategies implemented by the governments in the region to transnational geographies of authoritarian politics, analysing how ideas, strategies and policies travel across borders. For example, papers could offer micro-, meso- and macro-level examinations of how intergovernmental organizations may be used as fora to exchange authoritarian ideas and practices; how nation states copy and transfer such ideas and practices, and how they localize them; how class politics facilitates such exchanges through elite mingling, from intra-elite marriages to friendship and other mundane activities; how colonial legacies have created visible and less visible transnational chains of transmission of classed, raced and gendered privileges and capital accumulation; how culture and cultural artifacts (whether works of fiction, fine arts artifacts, music and popular culture) have aided the circulation of specific authoritarian ideas and practices – just to name some of the possible approaches. The special issue also invites theoretical papers focusing on the conceptualization of authoritarianism and authoritarian politics, and papers that historicize authoritarian ideas and practices.

The special issue aims to bring together papers that showcase new approaches and under-researched subjects, and that voice new interpretations, positionalities and methodologies.

We are considering the following journals for submission: Democratization, Third World Quarterly, European Political Science, Globalizations.

References

Bashirov, G., Akbarzadeh, S., Yilmaz, I., & Ahmed, Z. S. (2025). Diffusion of digital authoritarian practices in China's neighbourhood: the cases of Iran and Pakistan. *Democratization*, 1–24;

Cuccu, F. L. (2025) *Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in a Postcolonial Context. Security, democracy and religion in Tunisia*. Routledge;

Dukalskis, A., Furstenberg, S., Hellmeier, S., & Scales, R. (2023). The Long Arm and the Iron Fist: Authoritarian Crackdowns and Transnational Repression. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 68(6), 1051-1079;

Garbe, L., Maerz, S. F., & Freyburg, T. (2025). Authoritarian collaboration and repression in the digital age: balancing foreign direct investment and control in internet infrastructure. *Democratization*, 1–24;

Glasius, M. (2023) *Authoritarian practices in a global age*. Oxford University Press;

Guroi, J. (2023) The authoritarian narrator: China's power projection and its reception in the Gulf. *International Affairs* 99(2), 687-705;

Hall, S., & Debre, M. (2025). Developing best practices “against terrorists who protest”: Regional organizations as learning clubs for autocracies. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 46(4), 1225–1254;

Heydemann, S., & Leenders, R. (2011). Authoritarian Learning and Authoritarian Resilience: Regime Responses to the ‘Arab Awakening.’ *Globalizations*, 8(5), 647–65;

Jones, M.O. (2022). *Digital authoritarianism in the Middle East: Deception, disinformation and social media*. Hurst Publishers;

Kneuer, M. and Demmelhuber, T. (eds.) (2020). *Authoritarian Gravity Centers A Cross-Regional Study of Authoritarian Promotion and Diffusion*. Routledge.

Lemon, E., & Antonov, O. (2020). Authoritarian legal harmonization in the post-Soviet space. *Democratization*, 27(7), 1221–1239;

Michaelsen, M. (2017). Far Away, So Close: Transnational Activism, Digital Surveillance and Authoritarian Control in Iran, *Surveillance & Society*, 15(3/4), 465-470;

Natter, K. (2021). Tunisia's migration politics throughout the 2011 revolution: revisiting the democratisation–migrant rights nexus. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(7), 1551–1569;

Rasheed, A. (2022). The narrative of the rise of China and authoritarianism in the global south: the case of Egypt. *The International Spectator* 57, 68–84;

Rivetti, P. (2024). The reception of Iran's state propaganda by the Italian far right: recasting the diffusion of authoritarian discourse and narratives. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, 54(1), 36-53;

Tsourapas, G. (2021). Global Autocracies: Strategies of Transnational Repression, Legitimation, and Co-Optation in World Politics. *International Studies Review*, 23(3), 616–644

Yabancı, B., Akkoyunlu, K., & Öktem, K. (2025). Limits of autocratisation: actors and institutions of democratic resistance and opposition. *Third World Quarterly*, 46(2), 97–116;