



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



Rethinking Empire.

War, Coloniality, and New Internationalism

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

3 postdoctoral fellowships

with a duration of 20 months (May 2026 – December 2027)
at the [Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at the University of Potsdam](#).

Application deadline is March 10, 2026.

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 up to 3 postdoctoral fellowships from May 2026 to December 2027 (20 months) for activist researchers from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe (non-EU countries).

The postdoctoral researchers will be based at the [Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at the University of Potsdam](#). 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 that critically rethink the topic of empire. We are specifically interested in perspectives that go beyond traditional visions of geopolitics and international relations, looking at how empire, imperialism, and coloniality—and the resistances against them—are produced and contested within social relations, cultural formations, ideological struggles, and political praxis. We especially welcome scholar-activist methodologies. This involves rigorous academic work that is embedded in progressive political projects, movements or initiatives, resulting in 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.

Considerations: Rethinking Empire

Two decades after Hardt and Negri's *Empire* mapped a deterritorialized sovereignty of global capital, the world has entered a new conjuncture—one marked by the crisis of neoliberalism, a renewed centrality of state power, the crumbling of Western hegemony and the rules-based global order, the resurgence of armed rivalry among great powers, and what has been termed a 'war regime' of neoliberal governance itself. The spaces of sovereignty and the territories of capital and of power are being radically redefined. Where—on which layers, in which realms, through which spaces and mechanisms—is *Empire* produced and enforced today? How are logics of imperialism and anti-imperialism, of coloniality and anti-colonial resistances being (re-)produced in this new, evolving constellation? Beyond geopolitics, how does *Empire* (and its crisis) manifest themselves in finance, culture, politics, or subjectivities, among others?

The present conjuncture is increasingly structured by the consolidation of what has been termed a war regime—a condition in which the logics of war operate as an organizing principle of governance and the political order. Processes often described as fascization or authoritarian reconfiguration of state and society can be understood as the internalization and expansion of colonial techniques and war-driven mechanisms of rule. From this perspective, what is commonly framed as the breakdown of the post-1945 international order appears instead as what Aimé Césaire termed the imperial boomerang—the homecoming and normalization of modes of violence, governance, and lawlessness long exercised in colonial contexts. This reconfiguration restructures sovereignty, institutional frameworks, border regimes, and the horizons of politics across scales.

Thus, the authoritarian transformations at the global level cascade directly into regional, national, and local scales, reshaping sovereignty, legal frameworks, border regimes, and the very possibilities for political action and resistance. At the same time, the instability produced by this reorganization of empire opens contingent spaces for state and non-state actors, new South–South alignments, and alternative forms of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist internationalism. Grasping these deeply ambivalent dynamics—the simultaneity of war-centered closure and the emergence of new political horizons—is crucial to any contemporary understanding of empire.

Against this backdrop, this research initiative seeks to develop a renewed theoretical framework for understanding empire in the current conjuncture: not as a simple return to classical imperialism, nor as the smooth deterritorialized apparatus Hardt and Negri described, but as a reconfigured formation where the sovereignty of capital intersects with revitalized state power, where multipolar competition coexists with transnational extraction and inter-state competition, and where the logics of war have become constitutive of political order itself. Moving beyond conventional geopolitical and international-relations frameworks, the initiative is particularly interested in how empire, imperialism, and coloniality—and the resistances they generate—are produced and contested within social relations, cultural formations, ideological struggles, and political praxis and internationalism.

Possible Research Questions and Themes

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

Empire and Political Formation: How can we rethink “Empire“ beyond geopolitical analysis, as a decentered, multilayered system of rule where capital's sovereignty operates through, against, and beyond state logics, all the while the level of politics and state power are clearly assuming a new centrality? How do we theorize the simultaneous deterritorialization of capital and reterritorialization

of state power, monopoly capitalism, and resource wars? How does rethinking empire challenge dominant distinctions between democracy and authoritarianism, peace and conflict, consent and coercion?

War Regime: The logic of war increasingly operates as organizing principle of governance. Emergency becomes permanent, populations are governed as potential enemies rather than rights-bearing citizens, and violence displaces legitimation as the primary mechanism of order. How does this war regime operate across scales—from urban police violence to drone warfare to financial coercion? How does it reshape political temporalities? How does it reorganize accumulation, debt, logistics, and infrastructures of extraction?

Colonialism and Coloniality: In what ways is colonialism reconstituted in this constellation? How do contemporary forms of extraction, debt imperialism, border regimes, and racial capitalism rearticulate colonial relations within and beyond the former colonies? What happens to the distinction between the exterior and interior, between warfare abroad and policing at home?

Nation, State and Sovereignty: What role does the nation-state play between capital's transnational circuits and renewed nationalist mobilizations? How do we understand the marriage of neoliberal globalization with national chauvinism, a rhetoric of clash of civilizations and authoritarian impositions of sovereignty?

Culture and Subjectivity: What are the cultural, affective, and subjective dimensions of this transformation? How do subjects navigate, resist, or reproduce the new imperial order? What happens to solidarity, internationalism, and political imagination under conditions of fragmentation and permanent war? How does Empire mobilize 'retrotopian' imaginaries—mythical pasts used to justify contemporary violence and authoritarian closure. How does the war regime weaponize these nostalgic and nationalist narratives to fragment internationalist solidarity and obstruct the development of a new radical imagination?

Multipolarity and Hegemonic Crisis: What does the decline of U.S. hegemony, the subordination of Europe, and the rise of China and other powers mean for global accumulation regimes, patterns of exploitation, and political subjectivity? How does multipolar competition restructure (rather than dissolve) imperial relations?

Tech Imperialism: How does empire operate through digital infrastructure, platform capitalism, and algorithmic governance? What role do big tech corporations play in contemporary imperial formations? How do data extractivism, AI systems, and surveillance technologies reconfigure colonial relations and patterns of accumulation? What possibilities and constraints does the geopolitics of the digital present for Global South actors? How do questions of technological sovereignty, platform regulation, and AI governance intersect with anti-imperial struggle?

Anti-Imperialism and Internationalism: What forms of internationalist practice and anti-imperial struggle are adequate to this moment? How do we build political alternatives that neither romanticize multipolar competition nor cling to the exhausted frameworks of the post-Cold War Left?

We invite proposals from researchers across disciplines—political theory, geography, sociology, cultural studies, history, anthropology, and beyond—who are committed to critical, materialist, and politically engaged scholarship. Projects may be theoretical, empirical, or combine both approaches. We particularly encourage applications that attend to concrete manifestations of empire beyond geopolitics: labor regimes, urban spaces, cultural production, border zones, ecological extraction, digital infrastructure, or grassroots struggles.

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 bi-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 May 1, 2026 and ends December 31, 2027. Researchers are expected in Potsdam from October 2026 onward. We encourage and support research stays abroad.

Requirements

Due to funding stipulations, only citizens from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe (non-EU 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.

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.

Please direct any further queries to contact@irgac.org.

We will inform all applicants of the results of the selection process by late March, 2026.

Funding starts May 1, 2026.

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