Final Report
Leibniz-Wettbewerb

International Diffusion and Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes

Berichtszeitraum: 01.07.2014 - 30.06.2019

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Executive Summary

The international research network "International Diffusion and Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes" (IDCAR) brought together some of the most renowned Political Science experts on authoritarian rule and its cross-border dimensions around the globe. The IDCAR network was coordinated by the GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, and its members included scholars from 14 partner institutions in Europe and North America. Under the network's umbrella, IDCAR scholars contributed to the systematic study of the international diffusion and cooperation of authoritarian regimes, connecting this research agenda to the overarching theoretical debates of the discipline. The network had much success in putting the central themes of authoritarian diffusion and cooperation on the agenda of mainstream Comparative Politics and International Relations research, as well as in making inroads into neighbouring disciplines in the Social Sciences and Area Studies.

IDCAR's activities were made up of five components: 1. thematic network conferences, joint panels at international conferences, and a final dissemination symposium; 2. high-quality publications (such as special issues, single articles in top academic journals, monographs, and edited volumes); 3. an academic exchange programme between the GIGA and its partner institutions; 4. the compilation of a data set on bilateral government visits; and, 5. the generation of future joint research projects. Across all components, IDCAR was successful in its activities; in some, its excellent results even surpassed the envisaged outcomes.

Beyond cutting-edge scholarship, the research avenues pursued by individual IDCAR members as well as the collaborative initiatives within the network became even more important over time. This was because they also strongly reflected the real-world political transformations that have occurred across the globe over the course of the last decade: the gradual democratic regression, the rise of national populisms, and the – at least partial – retrenchment of authoritarian regimes have all rendered the central issues investigated in the IDCAR network even more pressing from a political point of view. We therefore expect the vital groundwork that was laid in the IDCAR network to remain of key importance in the years to come.

Inhalt

1. Zielerreichung und Umsetzung der Meilensteine

The international research network "International Diffusion and Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes" (IDCAR), coordinated at the GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies together with partners from 14 research institutions in Europe and North America, ran from July 2014 through June 2019. It brought together some of the most renowned experts on authoritarian diffusion and cooperation in a network that set the agenda and moved the field forwards. The project's goals, namely to systematically study the under-researched international dimensions of authoritarian rule and to contribute to larger theoretical debates, were fully realised. Rather than developing a single analytical research angle on authoritarian diffusion and cooperation, the network served as an umbrella under which researchers employed multiple methods and theories depending on their specific research questions and foci.

IDCAR's activities were structured along five core components: 1. thematic network conferences, joint panels at international conferences, and a final dissemination symposium; 2. high-quality publications; 3. an academic exchange programme; 4. the compilation of data sets on select issues; and, 5. the generation of future joint research projects. Across all five components, IDCAR was successful in its activities; in some, its excellent results surpassed the envisaged outcomes.

1. **Network conferences** all took place as envisaged; thanks to the cost-neutral prolongation, even one more concluding network conference for all partners could be held in Hamburg in 2018. The productive nature of the network conferences is evidenced by two special issues of international, peer-reviewed journals that IDCAR partners co-edited as results of the second and third conferences in Austin and Oxford, respectively. Network members also organised more **joint panels** at international conferences than originally planned. All IDCAR panels at (inter)national conferences were well attended by the network partners. At the General Conference of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) in Prague in 2016, Thomas Richter and Oisín Tansey organised a full section of eight panels with different foci relating to IDCAR's topics, entrenching research on authoritarian regimes in mainstream European Political Science. In both network conferences and joint conference panels, participating scholars extended beyond IDCAR to include co-authors and colleagues from outside the network – the IDCAR group was, as such, not a closed, isolated circle but well integrated in and cooperative with the wider academic community. The final **dissemination** took place in Berlin in different formats, with a well-attended and high-profile closed policy workshop at the Federal Foreign Office, a public panel discussion with civil society practitioners at the Leibniz Association's headquarters, and a public academic lecture co-organised by our Leibniz partner institution, the WZB Berlin Social Science Centre. Further dissemination activities such as lectures for practitioners and at universities, as well as media contributions, helped spread the research results to wider audiences.

2. The **publication** of articles in high-quality journals was another project component that would see extraordinary success. Two full special issues appeared in *Democratization* and the *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, alongside a forum section in the *European Journal of Political Research*, the most highly ranked European Political Science journal. Project partners also edited a special section in *Global Policy* and a special issue of *Globalizations*. All network partners published numerous journal articles, some also books with prestigious presses.

3. The **academic exchange** programme was also a success, although its practical implementation was more challenging. Contrary to what was originally envisaged, the exchanges did not take place in fixed rounds – individual stays were organised instead in a flexible manner throughout the project's duration. Due to work-related and personal issues, especially for family reasons, some exchange stays lasted shorter than three months. This was especially true for GIGA scholars, whose participation was less than that from the side of network partners. GIGA researchers went to Cornell and twice to WZB and Oxford, while the GIGA received incoming scholars from Heidelberg, Hildesheim, Erlangen, Oxford, Denver, Amsterdam, Durham, and WZB between 2015 and 2018.

4. The process of collecting information on relevant **data sets** was successful and identified potential useful additions to existing data sources on authoritarian diffusion and cooperation. Researchers at the GIGA developed a pilot data set on the frequency and density of bilateral government visits between key authoritarian regimes.

5. With regard to the generation of **future research projects**, the Steering Committee initiated competitive application procedures for seed funding among network partners in the first three years. In total, seven proposals by network members were funded to the tune of EUR 8,000 – given to finance mainly IDCAR-related field research and offer assistance in connection with individual research projects, many of which resulted in publications. Likewise, in a competitive manner the Steering Committee selected two proposals for research workshops that would take place at the GIGA and in Heidelberg. Three applications to the DFG and the EC for follow-up projects were successful, and a further project proposal to the Leibniz Competition is now under preparation.

2. Aktivitäten und Hindernisse

Due to the severe illness of the principal investigator (PI) Gero Erdmann, the project only started in July 2014. Sadly, Erdmann passed away only a few weeks after the project had begun. In spite of this tragic event, the other PIs André Bank, Bert Hoffmann, and Thomas Richter together shouldered the responsibility for IDCAR so that there were no delays in pursuing its activities. In close cooperation with the network coordinator Maria Josua, they ensured the smooth operation of the project. Bank assumed the role of speaker and became a member of the Steering Committee, together with the other GIGA principal investigators and three senior network partners Valerie Bunce, Kurt Weyland, and Laurence Whitehead. Thanks to the economical spending of funds, IDCAR could be prolonged into 2018 – and was eventually further extended until June 2019 due to the network coordinator's parental leave.

The **network conferences** took place on an annual basis, bringing together the network partners under specific themes; the final outlines differed from the initial ideas in the project proposal meanwhile. All were well attended and attracted participants from beyond the circles of IDCAR. The first and last conferences were held in Hamburg, at the GIGA; the second network conference was co-organised with Weyland at the University of Texas at Austin. For logistical reasons, the third network conference took place in Oxford instead of London and was organised jointly with Whitehead at Nuffield College.

At the **final dissemination events** in Berlin, the main target audience was German foreign policy practitioners. The proposal had originally envisaged the participation of policymakers from the authoritarian countries studied in the IDCAR project. However, the GIGA team opted for a different target group for ethical reasons, namely to avoid giving policy recommendations to autocrats and to focus on policy recommendations that further free and democratic societies instead.

For **publications**, principal investigators at the GIGA teamed up with members of the Steering Committee to organise and co-edit special issues in top journals. The contributions by IDCAR members succeeded in pushing the field forwards. Especially the synergy effects with further projects by network partners were instrumental in facilitating publications. Projects closely linked to IDCAR's topics include Marlies Glasius' ERC project "Authoritarianism in a Global Age," Tansey's ERC project on "The International Dimensions of Authoritarian Rule," and Marianne Kneuer and Thomas Demmelhuber's DFG project "Authoritarian Gravity Centres." IDCAR served as a hub to link the various projects' activities and bring researchers together for joint presentations and publications.

Guest researchers coming to the GIGA as part of the **academic exchange** were well integrated into research structures, gave lectures open to the GIGA public, and discussed their IDCAR-related research with network members. They conducted their individual research; some also published results in the GIGA Working Papers series. Outgoing researchers used their stays at host institutions to organise a network conference, to work on publications, and to prepare grant proposals, while also deepening ties with IDCAR partners.

In order to gauge the usage of and need for further **data sets** on IDCAR's topics**,** Richter and Georg Strüver conducted a survey among network partners (rather than convening a data set workshop). As no common thematic or methodological focus could be identified via the survey, after consultation with the Steering Committee Richter and Strüver developed a pilot data set on bilateral government visits to be used as a proxy for diffusion and cooperation. Given the limited time and resources available, more extensive data generation could not be accomplished.

Seed funding projects resulted in numerous conference presentations, a workshop in Amsterdam leading to a special issue of *Globalizations*, working papers, and a book manuscript. While the seed funding projects and research workshops were very well received, they did not succeed in generating *joint* research projects – meaning in terms of securing funding for a larger group beyond IDCAR's duration. While some initiatives for new projects by network partners did not materialise, the successful grant proposals building on IDCAR were an EC-funded network in which Hoffmann and Whitehead participate and two DFG research projects by Julia Grauvogel and Josua at the GIGA. The latter's proposal was discussed among other places at the research workshop held in Heidelberg.

3. Ergebnisse und Erfolge

Publications: The most outstanding results of the network would be special issues of academic journals. Bank and Weyland co-edited a special issue of *Democratization* (2017) entitled "Clusters of Authoritarian Diffusion and Cooperation: The Role of Interests vs. Ideology?" with articles by Bank, Weyland, May Darwich, Jason Brownlee, and others. Another special issue of the *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* (2018) was co-edited by Hoffmann and Whitehead with contributions by Hoffmann, Whitehead, Adele Del Sordi, and Emanuela Dalmasso among others. Finally, a Forum Section in the *European Journal of Political Research* (2015), co-edited by Christian von Soest and Whitehead, assembled articles by von Soest, Lucan Way, and Julia Bader, among others, under the title of "Authoritarian Collaboration."

Individual network members have published numerous journal articles, many of which have been cited in the latest state-of-the-art article on the issue of authoritarian diffusion (Ambrosio and Tolstrup 2019). Some of the influential newer works in excellent journals include Strüver (2016) in *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Tansey/Koehler/Schmotz (2017) in *Comparative Political Studies*, and Edel/Josua (2018) in *Democratization.* Books by network partners have appeared with prestigious presses, such as Cambridge University Press (Darwich; Weyland), Oxford University Press (Tansey), and Routledge (Bank/Weyland).

Both project members at the GIGA and guest researchers have published in the open access GIGA Working Paper and Focus series. The results of one research workshop are available online as POMEPS Studies 21 "Transnational Diffusion and Cooperation in the Middle East."

Completed dissertations:

May Darwich 2015: *Ideational and Material Forces in Threat Perception: Saudi and Syrian Choices in Middle East Wars*, PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh; book has been published in 2019 with Cambridge University Press under the title *Threats and Alliances in the Middle East. Saudi and Syrian Policies in a Turbulent Region.*

Georg Strüver 2017: *Explaining Alignment in International Politics: The Case of Foreign Policy Convergence and Partnerships with China*, PhD thesis, University of Hamburg.

Jessica Johansson 2018*: The "Shrinking Space" of Civil Society and Restrictions of Foreign Funding of NGOs,* MA thesis, University of Hamburg.

Panels were organised jointly by network partners at the conferences WISC 2014, APSA 2014, ISA 2015 and 2016, IPSA 2016, ECPR General Conferences 2014, 2016, and 2017, CES 2015, DVPW Conferences 2015, 2017, and 2018, and DAVO 2015 and 2016. Apart from these pre-organised panels, IDCAR members also presented their work individually at conferences.

Research workshops were co-organised by Bank and Richter with POMEPS at GIGA 2016 under the title "Transnational Diffusion, Cooperation and Learning in the Middle East and North Africa: A Post-Arab Uprisings Perspective." Aurel Croissant and David Kuehn organised another workshop at Heidelberg University in 2017 on "The International Dimension of Vertical Threats and Regime Security in Authoritarian Regimes."

Third-party funding: At the GIGA, two researchers have since successfully acquired funding from the DFG for three-year projects that follow up on IDCAR-related themes. Grauvogel's project on the termination of international sanctions has been ongoing since July 2018 while Josua's project analysing justifications of repression in authoritarian regimes started in July 2019. Hoffmann and Whitehead are involved in the EC-funded Europe–Cuba Forum Network that commenced in 2018.

Dissemination: Apart from the final dissemination events in Berlin described above, Bank presented IDCAR's research at the Ambassadors Conference at the Federal Foreign Office in 2016 while Josua gave a lecture at the Heinrich Böll Foundation's regional office heads' conference in 2015. Knowledge transfer to a broader public took place through university lectures in Berlin and Mannheim in 2019, a GIGA Forum discussion in Hamburg in 2014, GIGA Focus publications in 2017, 2018, and 2019, the POMEPS Studies in 2016, and two Monkey Cage blog contributions. IDCAR's research has also elicited some media interest, evident for example in interviews with Swiss Radio and a reference made in a Zeit Online article.

4. Chancengleichheit

The IDCAR network was very sensitive to issues of equal opportunity and diversity. When **recruiting new members** to the GIGA team, the PIs primarily focused on the respective candidate's research excellence. They thus always hired the best and brightest person for the respective position and, at the same time, made sure that the team is gender-balanced and sufficiently diverse in terms of origins, life experience, and educational background. In addition to the three male PIs, the IDCAR team was composed of one female network coordinator (Josua), four researchers – three female (Darwich, Grauvogel, Kressen Thyen) and one male (Strüver) –, as well as of a very diverse group of research assistants.

In terms of **personnel development**, the IDCAR network and its different components allowed the researchers to advance in their careers. These opportunities were flanked by regular career development discussions with individual PIs, as well as by support being given in developing research articles and grant proposals. Overall, the IDCAR network was very successful in serving as a decisive stepping stone for the advancement of young researchers' careers, as all have since transitioned to prestigious and longer-term posts in academia: Josua has successfully initiated her own DFG project based at the GIGA Institute of Middle East Studies (2019–2023); Darwich has become a tenured lecturer at Durham University in the United Kingdom; Strüver has become a postdoctoral research fellow at the GIGA Institute of Asian Studies; Grauvogel has become a tenured Senior Research Fellow at the GIGA Institute of African Affairs, and Thyen has transitioned to a postdoctoral researcher position at the DFG-funded Collaborative Research Cluster on "Global Dynamics of Social Policy" at the University of Bremen. Jessica Johansson started as a student research assistant with IDCAR and was later hired as a doctoral student and admitted to the competitive GIGA Doctoral Programme.

5. Qualitätssicherung

The articles that were published in special issues were mostly presented and discussed twice among network members to ensure the highest possible quality. After the thorough discussions during the network conferences in Austin and Oxford, this included intensive editorial work for the *Democratization* Special Issue and an additional authors' workshop for the *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* Special Issue. At the GIGA, some articles were presented in the research team "Authoritarian Politics" led by Josua, wherein specialised GIGA colleagues commented on them. All project proposals by members of the IDCAR team underwent the GIGA's in-house quality management of two presentations within the research team and the larger research programme, with an external reviewer commenting on applications before submission.

The funds allocated to the publication of research results within the network were largely spent on making findings that were published in top journals available to a wider audience, and especially academics in the Global South. Open access is now available for, among others, the full *Democratization* Special Issue and the *Democratization* article by Edel and Josua (2018), in addition to GIGA's Open Access publication series.

6. Zusätzliche eigene Ressourcen

With regard to personnel resources, all network partners – in written, signed form – committed to devoting a share of their working time to project contributions. Especially the Steering Committee members dedicated some of their time to overseeing the project and selecting proposals in the seed funding and research workshop competitions. Guest editors of special issues, co-organisers of network conferences, and conveners of joint conference panels also contributed a considerable share of their working time. Many partners were involved in scholarly exchanges and mentored incoming partners. At the GIGA, the PIs devoted a substantial share of their working time to managing the project, organising various activities, liaising with partners, and conducting their own research. Apart from academic staff, the project administration in terms of accounting and finances lay in the hands of Sabine Barth.

Regarding material expenses, especially Weyland at UT Austin devoted substantial parts of his research budget to covering expenses accruing from the second network conference. Other than that, workspace equipment and IT services at all host institutions were made available to all partners participating in the scholarly exchanges.

7. Strukturen und Kooperation

The Steering Committee was mainly active in the first years of the project so as to fulfil its functions in the selection of seed grant proposals and research workshops. At the GIGA, the governance structure organising day-to-day business involved the PIs and the network coordinator, the doctoral students only to a lesser degree. Over the course of the project, no new persons were added to the network; however, as members transitioned to new institutions, we concluded agreements with their new universities to allow for the continuity of the established personal networks and joint activities. This was the case with Karrie Koesel (from the University of Oregon to the University of Notre Dame), Demmelhuber (from Hildesheim University to Erlangen University), and Darwich (from GIGA to Durham University in the UK).

8. Ausblick

The IDCAR network was very successful in bringing the international dimension of authoritarian rule to the attention of the Political Science community, as well as to that of policymakers and the wider public – both in Germany and beyond. On the side of research, the cutting-edge scholarship of individual IDCAR members combined with the joint initiatives within the network were decisive for the central themes of authoritarian diffusion and cooperation becoming mainstream in Comparative Politics and IR – as well as for making inroads into neighbouring disciplines in the Social Sciences and Area Studies. Also, while most research within the IDCAR network deliberately focused on the analytical level of authoritarian regimes, some network members considered authoritarian practices below the level of regimes and stretching beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. They also begun to examine how democratic regimes learn from autocracies, and how autocratic practices diffuse to democracies.

These new research avenues also reflect the real-world political transformations that have occurred across the globe over the course of the last decade: the gradual democratic regression, the rise of mostly right-wing, nationalist populisms, and the – at least partial – retrenchment of authoritarian regimes have all rendered the central issues investigated in the IDCAR network even more pressing from a political point of view. We therefore expect that the vital groundwork that was laid in the IDCAR network will remain of key importance in the years now to come.