

# Dr. Semuhi Sinanoglu

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## Short Bio

I am a researcher at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), and a German Marshall Fund (GMF) Marshall Memorial Fellow. I study how dictators drive support for their regime with propaganda, repression, and polarization during fiscal downturns, and which counter-mobilization and international assistance strategies can help mitigate their effectiveness. Previously, I was a political risk consultant leveraging open data to forecast protests and elections. I also co-founded two social impact initiatives, based in Istanbul and Montreal.

## Education

### Degree programs

- **University of Toronto** | [PhD in Political Science](#) 2018–24
- **Koc University** | [MA in International Relations](#) 2014–17
- **Bogazici University** | Double Major: Political Science and International Relations, and Economics 2009–14

### Non-degree programs

- **ICPSR Summer Program in Quantitative Methods** | [EITM-certified Bayesian Modeling](#) Summer 2019
- **McGill University** | Graduate Research Trainee 2017–18
- **Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education** | [Leadership, Organizing, and Action](#) Spring 2017
- **Columbia University** | Exchange Program Spring 2013

## Work Experience

**German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)** | Researcher 2024–current

I provide policy advice to German and international stakeholders on countering digital authoritarian propaganda, based on insights from my experimental and computational research within a [project team](#) analyzing global autocratization and polarization trends.

I launched a new initiative, called [Corporate Civic Responsibility in Safeguarding Democracy](#), which aims to map global business initiatives for democracy, identify what motivates firms to defend democratic institutions, and build AI-powered simulations to prepare firms against democratic erosion.

**Maidan Analytics** | Co-founder 2019–23

- I enabled businesses to identify political risks by developing proprietary algorithms that forecast protests and elections using open data.

**Development Analytics** | Social Policy Researcher 2014–15

- I contributed to quantitative and geo-spatial analysis, and desk reviews for two policy reports delivered to the World Bank and COMCEC.

## Research and Publications

### Academic

- [Autocrats and their business allies: The informal politics of defection and co-optation](#). *Government and Opposition* 2025-60(4): 1273-91.

- [Can capitalism save democracy?](#) *Journal of Democracy* 2025-36(3): 5-15 (with L. Way and S. Levitsky).

- [Out of sight, out of mind: The impact of lockdown measures on sentiment towards refugees](#). *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 2024-21(2): 166–75 (with A. A. Reda and A. Aboussalah).

- [Mobilizing the masses: Measuring resource mobilization on Twitter](#). *Sociological Methods and Research* 2024-53(1): 153–92 (with A. A. Reda and M. Abdalla) | Presented at APSA (DC, 2019).

- [Containing ethnic conflict: Repression, co-optation, and identity politics](#). *Comparative Politics* 2022-54(5): 765–86 (with C. Belge) | Presented at ISA (Toronto, 2019).

### Under review | Pre-print | Work-in-progress

- [Strategic humanitarian aid, trust in Europe, and support for authoritarianism](#). IDOS Discussion Paper 2025-28: 1-37 | Presented at MPSA (Chicago, 2025), ECPR Joint Workshop (Prag, 2025), SISP Workshop (Milan, 2025), Chicago Center on Democracy (2026).

- [Cross-partisan disaster relief aid as an opposition depolarization tactic under authoritarianism](#) (with M. Donnelly) | Presented at APSA (Montreal, 2022), CEU DRD Annual Workshop (Budapest, 2024); funded by EGAP, IHS, and POMEPS.

- [Why citizens endorse authoritarian financial repression?](#) | Presented at APSA (LA, 2023); funded by the IHS.

- [The cost of co-optation: Tax audit as authoritarian financial repression](#).

- [Sultanist and militarist soft propaganda, and support for security operations](#) (with M. Donnelly) | Presented at VWAR Workshop (2024), PEDD (Muenster, 2025), PSA (Birmingham, 2025).

- [E-government tools, authoritarian propaganda, and regime support: experimental evidence from Turkey](#) IDOS Discussion Paper 2025-35: 1-24 (with A. von Schiller) | Presented at EPSA (Madrid, 2025); WZB-MoPED Workshop (Berlin, 2025), EIPCC Workshop (Bonn, 2025).

- Domestic leader prosecutions in the age of democratic contestation: Introducing the PROSEC Dataset v1.0 (with S. Gunitsky and S. Jafarov).
- Resource concentration and autocratic resilience (with L. Way and S. Levitsky).
- The sources of democratic resilience in an age of backsliding (with L. Way and S. Levitsky).

### Policy | Reviews

- Communicating strategic interests in humanitarian aid may help counter authoritarian propaganda and build trust in Europe. *IDOS Policy Brief* 2025-16: 1-6.
- Countering information pollution to protect democracy. *IDOS Policy Brief* 2024-29: 1-12 (with A. Breuer).
- Post-conflict democratization: A review. National Democratic Institute 2024-04 (with Comparative Autocracy Network).
- A time of crisis and opportunity: Digitizing SMEs in Turkey. *TURKONFED-CIPE* 2021-10: 1-10.
- COVID impact assessment report *TURKONFED-CIPE* 2021: 1-19.
- Socially inclusive 4IR: Fostering youth employment in the MENA. In *Realizing youth potential in the Mediterranean: Unlocking opportunities, overcoming challenges*, edited by L. Kamel & A. S. Okyay 2018: 101-12. Rome: IAI.
- Review of *False dawn: Protest, democracy, and violence in the Middle East*. *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 2017 (Summer): 107-11.
- Tackling the Syrian refugee crisis. *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 2016: 123-30 (with E. Arslan & I. Taner).
- Supply and demand for child care services in Turkey. Washington, DC: World Bank 2015 (with Development Analytics).
- Improving basic services delivery for the poor in the OIC. Ankara: COMCEC 2015 (with Development Analytics).

### Op-ed

- Prosecuting the powerful: Prosecuting political leaders for crimes is healthy for democracies. *Foreign Policy*, October 28, 2025 (with S. Gunitsky & S. Jafarov).
- Strategic humanitarian aid: Could it weaken autocracies and boost confidence in Europe? [Strategische humanitäre Hilfe: Kann sie Autokratien schwächen und Vertrauen in Europa stärken?] *Diplomatisches Magazin* 2025-07: 28-31.
- Die Entwicklungszusammenarbeit braucht dringend ein Technologie-Upgrade [Development cooperation is overdue for a tech upgrade]. *Tagesspiegel*, June 27, 2025.
- Media support needs a tech upgrade before it's too late. *Global Policy*, May 21, 2025.
- Standing up for Istanbul's mayor will strengthen European security. *Global Policy*, March 27, 2025.
- Otoriter rejimlerde bürokrasi: Sadık mı layık mı? [Bureaucracy under autocracy: Loyal or competent?] *Daktilo1984*, February 15, 2021.
- We need a new conservative party in Turkey for regime transition. *Jerusalem Post*, March 31, 2019.
- Building a policy school that has real social impact. *Policy Options*, November 28, 2018.
- Memlekete dönmek [Returning home]. *Birikim*, November 12, 2018.
- Akıllı şehirler ve çağımızın hastalığı teknolojiizm [Smart cities & technologism our age's curse]. *Civil Pages*, April 19, 2018.
- Gençlerin sesini dinlemek [Listening to youth's voices]. *Civil Pages*, January 2, 2018.
- Kanada masalı [The tale of Canada]. *Civil Pages*, November 1, 2017.
- Death & politics: the burial of a Kurdish woman in Turkey. *openDemocracy*, October 4, 2017.
- Derneğe ev yok [No home for associations]. *Civil Pages*, August 1, 2017.
- Parti ebed müddet: Bir siyaset teknolojisi olarak Yeni Osmanlıcı TRT dizileri [The eternal party: New Ottomanist TV series as a political technology]. *Birikim*, March 30, 2017.
- 5 disturbing facts about living under occupation. *Middle East Monitor*, August 22, 2016.
- Youth who make the future. *openDemocracy*, September 23, 2011.

## Research Grants

- **IHS grant** for online survey experiments in Turkey 2023
- **IHS Hayek Fund** for research on business support for autocracy 2022
- **POMEPS Travel, Research, Engagement Grant** for my experimental research on depolarization 2022
- **EGAP Priority Theme Small Grants** for my experimental research on depolarization 2021

## Fellowships and Affiliations

- **German Marshall Fund (GMF)** | Marshall Memorial Fellow 2025
- **Global Relations Forum (GRF)** | Member 2025–current
- **Digital Society Project** | Regional Manager 2022–23
- **POSTCOR Lab** | Associate 2022–23
- **Trudeau Centre for Peace, Conflict and Justice** | Fellow 2022–23
- **Mercatus Center** | Oskar Morgenstern Fellow 2021–22
- **Massey College** | Non-resident Fellow 2019–22
- **Jeanne Sauvé Foundation** | Public Leadership Fellow 2017–18
- **Open Society Foundation** | Human Rights & Governance Intern 2016
- **Ashoka Foundation** | ChangemakerXChange 2016
- **Global Relations Forum (GRF)** | Young Scholar 2012–13

## Awards and Scholarships

- **Outstanding TA Award** | University of Toronto 2023
- **Mary H. Beatty Scholarship** | University of Toronto 2021–23
- **M. W. Donnelly Fellowship in Political Economy** | University of Toronto 2022
- **Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)** | Province of Ontario 2020
- **Morimitsu Inaba Doctoral Scholarship** | University of Toronto 2020
- **Ranjit Kumar Graduate Scholarship** | University of Toronto 2019
- **ICPSR Scholarship** | EITM 2019
- **Graduate Scholarship** | Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey 2014
- **Outstanding Success Scholarship** | Turkish Educational Foundation 2009

## Policy Advice

- **UNDP Sounding Board on Innovation in Public Communication** | Member 2025
- Atlas of Innovation in Public Communication initiative

## Civil Society Experience

- **CityInclusive** | Co-founder 2017–19
- We documented the works of Canadian cities as they went through the process of developing applications for [Canada's Smart Cities Challenge](#).
- **Co-Opinion Network** | Co-founder 2015–17
- I co-founded a network of more than 30 institutions in six countries across the MENA to tackle youth unemployment in the wake of the 4IR. We achieved cross-sectoral collaboration between business associations and youth-led NGOs, and organized summits and trainings in Belgium, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey.

## Teaching Experience

- **University of Toronto, Mississauga** | Course Instructor 2020–24
- I curated and taught three courses in a total of ten semesters: [The political economy of economic crises](#), [Autocrats of the world: International politics of authoritarianisms](#), and [Politics in the Middle East](#).
- **University of Toronto** | Teaching Assistant 2018–24
- I served as a TA for ten different courses, undergrad & grad-level, on comparative politics, political economy, and political methodology, such as *Statistics for Political Scientists*, *Thinking through Research Design*, *Using Data to Understand Politics*, *Politics of Development*, *Democratization in Europe*, and *Global Political Economy*.
- **Trinity College** | Academic Don 2019–22
- **Koc University** | Teaching Assistant 2014–16

## Trainer Experience

- [Understanding the gridlock: Measuring and responding to polarization](#) | UNDP Global Policy Centre for Governance 2024
- [An introduction to R](#) | Munk School of Global Affairs 2024
- [The politics of authoritarianism: A short introduction](#) | University of Toronto 2023
- [An introduction to spatial analysis using R](#) | University of Toronto 2021
- Organizational development & management: Digital security in the age of hyper-surveillance | Co-opinion 2017
- Design lab: Preventing & countering violent extremism | Co-opinion & Hollings Center for International Dialogue 2017

## Public Speaking

- [Capitalism's democracy: Competition and resilience in twenty-first century](#) | Review of Democracy (with L. Way) 2025
- [Rethinking information resilience: Alternative toolkit, new alliances](#) | Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum, Bonn 2025
- [Corporate civic responsibility for safeguarding democracy](#) | IDOS Expert Exchange Meeting, Berlin 2024
- [ChatGPT hayatımızı nasıl etkileyecek? \[How will ChatGPT impact our lives?\]](#) | TUIC 2022
- Podcast: Görsel kültürün politikası [The politics of visual culture] | [Medyapod](#) 2019
- Future of Turkey's youth in a time of turmoil | [Middle East Institute, DC](#) 2018
- Middle powers: Saudi Arabia | Toronto Global Citizens Dialogue 2018
- On spaces and rights: Refugee settlement policies in Lebanon & Turkey | McGill University, Montreal 2018
- Socially inclusive Fourth Industrial Revolution | Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome 2017
- Youth cooperation under an authoritarian regime | Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Istanbul 2017
- Prospects for job generation in the Middle East | [Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center](#), Italy 2016

## Trainings

- Making powerful brand storytelling and persuasive business recommendations, Business model canvas, Theory of change & design thinking, [VOX Method public speaking](#), Social impact assessment | [Jeanne Sauv  Foundation](#) 2018
- Leadership Academy: Strengthening NGOs | [Friedrich Naumann Stiftung](#) 2017

## Service

- **Reviewer** | [APSR](#), [JCR](#), [JITP](#), [CMPS](#)
- **Convener** | IDOS: Quantitative Methods Group (2025–current), Brown Bag Lunch (BBL) (2024–current); University of Toronto: Quantitative Methods Research Cluster (2020–23), Comparative Autocracy Research Cluster (2018–20)

- **Panel organizer** | [APSA](#) (2022–25)
- **Search committee** | University of Toronto: Middle Eastern Politics (2022), Quantitative Methods (2019)

## **Skills**

- **Languages** | Turkish (native), English (fluent), German (Sprachdiplom C1-2009), Arabic (beginner)
- **Software** | R, Qualtrics, JavaScript, STATA, ArcGIS, Python
- **Gallup Strengths** | Developer, Individualization, Input, Learner, Empathy