

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 teknolojizm [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 masası [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 Osmanlıci 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

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| – 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

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| – 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 hayatımıza nasıl etkileyebilecek? [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 Sauvé 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