



Call for Abstracts: Workshop

Authoritarian Capture:

(Re)shaping Global Governance from within?

12-13 November 2026 | German Institute for International and
Security Affairs, Berlin, Germany

Organizers

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Focus

Global governance, as it developed since the end of the Cold War, is under visible strain. From perceived paralysis in the United Nations Security Council to increasing contestation in bodies such as the United Nations Human Rights Council or World Trade Organization, many observers diagnose a growing gridlock in international cooperation. This diagnosis often attributes institutional stagnation to obstruction by authoritarian states and rising geopolitical rivalry.

Yet, authoritarian governments do not only seek to obstruct the workings of international organisations. They also engage in various efforts to reshape them from within, potentially leading to a more subtle but consequential transformation of the current international order. Whether, how, and to what extent this process is actually occurring remains an open empirical and theoretical question. To understand these processes, this workshop introduces the concept of *autocratic capture*: the incremental but substantive replacement of the liberal international order with illiberal and autocratic principles and institutions by authoritarian actors.

We understand authoritarian and illiberal actors broadly to include any actor (state, parties, non-state, private) whose strategies are directed at undermining or opposing liberal and democratic institutions and principles, whether at the domestic, regional or international level. Similarly, illiberal and autocratic principles and institutions refer to the wide range of norms, practices, and organisational forms that stand in tension with liberal and democratic governance.

Taken together, the workshop seeks to explore to what extent and under which conditions autocratic capture does occur, and if this signals a shift towards an international order based on illiberal, authoritarian norms? The workshop invites contributions that engage with this prospect of a fundamental transformation. Under what conditions do authoritarian actors block, and when do they successfully reshape global governance? What are the mechanisms, arenas, and consequences of these processes at the global and regional level and across policy fields? What methods can we use to study these processes?

We welcome theoretically and empirically grounded contributions from across disciplines and policy fields that address these questions at different levels of analysis, across regions, and over time. We are particularly interested in work that speaks to contemporary transformations in global governance and engages with the strategies and practices of authoritarian actors broadly defined, including electoral and closed autocracies, as well as authoritarian and illiberal actors operating within democratic systems such as right-wing parties or illiberal NGOs.

Questions that are particularly of interest are:

- What would constitute evidence of autocratic capture, and how would we distinguish it from ordinary contestation or reform?
- Is an autocratic order fundamentally different from the LIO or does it merely openly champion the values that liberal order has always concealed?
- In what ways does autocratic capture reshape power relations and normative orders across the Global North and Global South? How does this affect structural inequalities within the liberal international order?
- Under which conditions does autocratization lead to gridlock versus institutional transformation in global governance?
- What are the mechanisms of autocratic capture across different institutional arenas (e.g. human rights, digital governance, security, trade) and levels (global, regional)?
- How and why do authoritarian actors coordinate in informal coalitions and networks across international institutions?
- How do authoritarian actors reshape agendas, for instance by reframing human rights, development, or sovereignty?
- What role do new and parallel institutions, regimes, and governance models play in transforming global order?
- How does autocratization affect transnational civil society?

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- What are the differences between strategies of authoritarian and democratic actors?
- What methods can we use to study capture?
- What can democratic governments do to strengthen liberal and democratic forms of global governance? What would be an effective strategy to counter the attempt for autocratic capture?

Practicalities

You can submit your abstract (maximum 500 words) [here](#) until **June 10th, 2026**.

The workshop will be organized in the framework of the project 'Bad neighbors, good company?' funded by the Thyssen Foundation. A follow-up workshop will likely be organized in Tokyo in 2027. The output of the workshops will be a Special Issue in a top-level journal, with the second workshop conceptualized as an authors' workshop for SI contributors. We will cover (reasonable) travel and accommodation costs (1 night European participants | 2-3 nights international participants | 1 presenter per paper). The workshop is planned to start after lunch on November 12 and end early afternoon November 13. Please indicate in your application if you need funding to cover accommodation and travel costs.

If you have any questions, please contact Clara Böning (clara.boening@zu.de).