



**Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme**  
**Research Proposal**

**Emerging Autocracies: Understanding Regime Development after  
Genocide and Civil War**

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## Abstract

This research project investigates the factors that influence regime development in the aftermath of civil conflict and genocide, with a particular focus on why transitional societies veer toward autocracy in the aftermath of genocide. This question is especially urgent given the ongoing global trend of autocratization and persistent civil conflicts in regions like Darfur and Myanmar.

By examining both historical and contemporary cases, this research aims to identify patterns and determinants of post-conflict regime trajectories. Rwanda, Cambodia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are the historical case studies; they have all experienced genocide and civil conflict and subsequently failed to develop robust democratic regimes. These cases will be analyzed in relation to contemporary conflicts, particularly those in Sudan (Darfur) and Myanmar, which are currently experiencing civil conflict and ethnically motivated violence.

Methodologically, the project will begin with a literature review to establish theoretical foundations and define key terms. It will proceed with a qualitative, comparative case study analysis using academic databases, archives, and secondary literature. Historical and contemporary cases will be evaluated on variables such as the role of international intervention, pre-war political structures, and the legacy of violence.

The ultimate aim of this project is to contribute to academic understanding in political science and global governance while developing a practical policy toolkit to guide international actors in supporting democratic outcomes in post-conflict states.

## Introduction

I chose my research project because of two papers that I wrote last year, and the connection that I noticed between them. During the spring semester, I wrote a final paper for each of my Trinity One International Relations courses. In Global Governance, I discussed the potential for leveraging European Union accession policy to promote reform, democratization, and anti-corruption in the Balkans. I examined the development and nature of forms of governance in the region. During my research, I was surprised by the prevalence of recently developed competitive authoritarian regimes in the region. For a long time, I bought into the misconception that, slowly but surely, democracy was on the rise across the globe. The reality could not be more different; the world is experiencing an overall trend of democratic backsliding, with more autocratic regimes establishing themselves each year. I was struck by the fact that, in 2023, the global average level of democracy regressed to the 1985 level.<sup>1</sup> My other paper, written for my class on Justice and Global Conflict, centered on the genocide and international response to the still-unresolved War in Darfur. The Sudanese government is highly unstable, and the question of what the post-war regime will look like remains unanswered.

It was these two papers, in which I researched the burgeoning trend of competitive authoritarianism and the enduring question of the post-war nature of Sudanese governance, that led me to my research question; what determines the nature of the regime established after civil conflict and genocide? What do historical cases indicate about the trajectories of ongoing conflicts interlinked with ethnic cleansing, like those in Darfur and Myanmar?

Through my research, I hope to identify common characteristics and factors that connect the processes of regime development across historical case studies of civil war and genocide, and then apply

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<sup>1</sup> Angiolillo, Fabio, Martin Lundstedt, Marina Nord, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2024. "State of the World 2023: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot." *Democratization* 31 (8): 1597–1621. doi:10.1080/13510347.2024.2341435.

my learnings to contemporary conflicts. Ideally, my work will inform international efforts to establish stable, secure, and democratic regimes in ongoing and future civil conflicts. I believe that this research fills an underserved niche in the international relations and global governance fields, and will be increasingly important if the world continues to autocratize.

## **Research Objectives & Questions**

### Key Questions:

- What factors determine the nature of a regime established after civil conflict and genocide?
- Is there a correlation between genocide and the subsequent establishment of autocratic regimes?
- What do the historical cases of regime establishment in the aftermath of civil conflict and genocide in Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Cambodia indicate about the trajectories of ongoing conflicts like those in Darfur and Myanmar?

### Primary Objective:

- Understanding how civil war and genocide shape the nature of post-civil war regime establishment and the trajectories of transitional societies by researching historical case studies.

### Secondary Objectives:

- Observing relevant conclusions from the historical data that can inform efforts to establish democratic regimes in contemporary civil conflicts including Sudan (Darfur) and Myanmar.
- Developing a toolkit of policy recommendations for governments seeking to establish stable and secure democracies.
- Examining the role of the international community and local knowledge in shaping the post-war nature of regimes.
- Studying the recurrence of civil conflict, ethnic and religious division, and unrest in post-civil war societies.

## **Background**

As I mentioned in my introduction, I chose my topic after writing two papers that allowed me to explore the global trend of autocratization and the civil conflict on Darfur. The process of writing these papers, “Leveraging EU Accession Policy for Governance Reform, Democratization, and Anti-Corruption in the Western Balkans” and “Twenty Years of Apathy: Genocide, Intervention, and Lessons from the War in Darfur” stimulated my interest in the intersection of regime formation, civil conflict, and genocide.

Building on that foundation, my current research focuses on three major post-conflict contexts: Rwanda, Cambodia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These cases each represent a society that experienced genocide within the context of civil conflict and offer diverse examples of regime development across Africa, Asia, and Europe. Although geographically and culturally distinct, none of these cases resulted in the establishment of a fully free or democratic regime. Instead, they illustrate different patterns of authoritarian consolidation or externally imposed facades of democracy. Current civil conflicts, such as those ongoing in Myanmar and Darfur, reflect similar dynamics of ethnic violence and contested governance, and, like my selected historical case studies, face the question of post-conflict regime development. The connection between autocracy and conflict that I identified in my previous research provided the basis for my project, which becomes increasingly relevant considering the ongoing rise of autocratization.

## **Methodology**

My research methods will be qualitative, and consist of a literature review, planning, and then the research itself.

My first step will involve finalizing the case study selection. Currently, my project is planned to focus on three historical cases and two contemporary cases. The historical cases are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, and Cambodia, and the contemporary ones are Sudan (Darfur) and Myanmar. These cases were chosen for their shared experiences of civil conflict and genocide, and their post-conflict regime trajectories; the historical cases have concluded, while, in the contemporary cases, the conflict and genocide are ongoing. During this stage, I will consider additional cases and potentially expand my set of case studies if I find more examples that align with the project's scope.

I will then proceed to a literature review that will establish a strong theoretical foundation, examine existing scholarship on my selected cases, and clarify the definitions of key terms like “autocracy,” “democracy,” and “genocide” by synthesizing relevant academic definitions. This initial phase will help determine my analytical approach and provide me with a basis from which to conduct my research.

I will then move to the main part of my research, in which I will analyze each case study through a qualitative, comparative approach. Using academic databases, online archives, and library resources, I will examine a) the nature of conflict and genocide, b) the role of international actors, and c) the processes of regime formation, in each historical case. I will then take my findings from the historical cases and apply them to the contemporary ones, in an effort to assess patterns and identify factors promoting autocratization. Using the insights I've developed, I will also create a toolkit of policy recommendations for international actors seeking to prevent the establishment of autocratic regimes in post-conflict, post-genocide states.

### **Training/ Certifications Needed**

No training or certifications will be required.

### **Research Location**

I will be located in Canada during the research period, with my time split between Toronto and Oakville.

### **Research Ethics Board**

My research does not require REB approval.

## **Timeline**

May, June 1-16: Pre-research period

- Finalize case study selection for both historical and contemporary cases
- Discuss case studies and research trajectory with advisor
- Research and read preliminary sources for all case studies
- Conduct and write literature review

June 16 – July 7: Historical case study research

- Conduct research on historical case studies: Rwanda, Cambodia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina
- For each, research topics including a) conflict origins, b) genocide events, c) international interventions, and d) post-conflict regime development
- Write individual case study analyses, focusing on regime type, legitimacy, international involvement, and institutional development

July 7 – 21: Contemporary case study research

- Conduct research on contemporary case studies: Sudan (Darfur) and Myanmar
- For each, research topics including a) current conflict dynamics, b) current genocide dynamics, c) ongoing transitional governance efforts, and d) international engagement
- Write contemporary case study sections focus on outlooks for future governance

July 21 – 28: Conclusion, policy toolkit development, project finalization

- Perform comparative analysis of historical and contemporary case studies
- Using learnings, develop a policy toolkit for international actors seeking to prevent the establishment of autocratic regimes
- Write conclusion
- Proofread and perform a final edit of report

## **Resources & Support Needed**

I do not anticipate needing additional resources or support at this time.

## **Potential Impact**

The ongoing global autocratic regression is not just a political concern; it is a humanitarian, institutional, and international one. Ongoing civil conflicts, particularly those that are interlinked with ethnic cleansing and genocide, such as those in Darfur and Myanmar, further highlight the urgency of understanding how post-conflict societies rebuild and whether they transition toward democracy or authoritarianism. These developments not only threaten the safety, rights, and futures of individuals within conflict zones but also pose broader risks, such as regional destabilization, the erosion of international norms, and the decay of multilateral systems built to promote peace and human rights. As democracy faces mounting pressure globally and transitional justice becomes increasingly important, the need to understand how post-conflict, post-genocide societies rebuild, and whether they transition toward democracy or autocracy, has never been more pressing.

This research aims to address these urgent issues and will hopefully yield impactful practical and academic applications. Academically, I believe it that my work will contribute meaningfully to the fields of global governance and political science, and will advance the understanding of the impacts of civil conflict and genocide on states, and the factors (such as international intervention) that shape regime development in transitional societies. I hope to bridge the theoretical and practical gap between my research and actual policy by developing a toolkit for policymakers and international actors to guide post-conflict reconstruction strategies away from autocratization. I hope to understand the nature of post-conflict, post-genocide regime

formation, and to take my learnings further to tangibly contribute to efforts that shape a more democratic future.

## **Budget**

Budget submitted as a separate Excel file.

## **References**

Angiolillo, Fabio, Martin Lundstedt, Marina Nord, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2024. "State of the World 2023: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot." *Democratization* 31 (8): 1597–1621. doi:10.1080/13510347.2024.2341435.