



SPIRe Newsletter

Spring / Summer 2022



Since our first issue in November, a lot has happened at SPIRe. We are all getting reacquainted with being back on campus, sometimes meeting colleagues for the first time again in two years. We went through an extensive external quality review process that will inspire our strategic planning in the coming year. Various ongoing recruitment processes will lead to a lot of new faces after the summer. And we have one new academic centre, the UCD Centre for Asia-Pacific Research, and one freshly rebranded, from the Institute for British-Irish Studies to the UCD Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies.

[news]

Top 100 in Politics

In the QS World University Rankings by Subject of 2022, the school retained its position in the world's Top

100 departments in politics and international studies. We are now ranked Number 1 in Ireland, in a shared first place with the Department of Political Science at Trinity College Dublin.

The QS rankings are based on reputational surveys among employers and other academic institutions, as well as citation and publication rates.

[news]

New hires

In recent months, the school has been particularly busy recruiting new academic colleagues. From teaching fellows to fill gaps in our portfolio for a year, to permanent and fixed term assistant professors, to the new SALI professor in Sustainable Development, the school has been a hive of job talks and interview activity. While the next issue will introduce most of these

individuals, once all contracts are signed, in this issue we will introduce two new colleagues starting in September, Lucia Tiscornia and Joshua Alley.

[new colleague]

Lucia Tiscornia

Lucia Tiscornia will be starting as assistant professor in SPIRe this coming September. She is a research affiliate with the Violence and Transitional Justice Lab at the University of Notre Dame and previously worked at the Division of Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) in Mexico City. She graduated from the University of Notre Dame, where she was a PhD fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies.

TOP 100

2022

Politics International Studies



**WORLD
UNIVERSITY
RANKINGS**

BY SUBJECT

Her research applies mixed methods to the study of transitional justice, police and criminal violence. She thus strengthens the school's competence in the area of our recently rebranded UCD Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. Her recent work explores the conditions under which police reform contributes to (or hinders) the respect of human rights and organised criminal violence in post-conflict and



democratic societies.

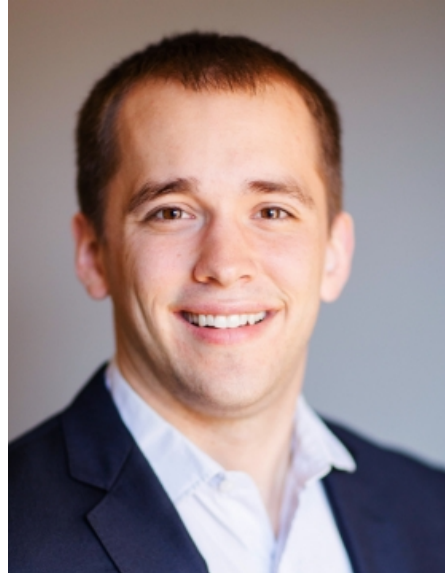
In a separate collaborative project she seeks to understand how transitional justice mechanisms can break cycles of impunity during democratic transitions and reduce criminal violence post-transition. Relatedly, she conducts research on the determinants of organised criminal behaviour.

[new colleague]

Joshua Alley

To strengthen the school's capacity in international relations and

international conflict, Joshua Alley will be starting as assistant professor in SPIRe this coming September. He is currently a postdoctoral research associate with the Democratic Statecraft Lab at the University of Virginia. He graduated with a PhD in political science at Texas A&M University in 2020.



Joshua's research focuses on alliance politics and the political economy of security. His work explores when alliance participation increases or decreases military spending, alliance politics in democracies, and the economic aspects of civil conflict. His paper in *International Studies Quarterly* argues that deep formal defence cooperation modifies the impact of alliance participation on military expenditures and can explain increases and decreases in spending by small alliance members. Security-seeking junior members of deep alliances usually decrease military spending because these treaties are more credible. Participating in shallow alliances often

increases junior alliance member military spending, however. He then tests this argument by creating a latent measure of alliance treaty depth and using it to predict differences in how alliance participation affects military spending.

In another paper he examines the public goods theory of alliances and finds few alliances where states with a small share of total GDP in an alliance decrease military spending while states with a large share of allied GDP increase military spending. This implies that free-riding based on economic weight is unusual in alliance politics, which may be due to limits on alliance security as a public good or bargaining between alliance members.

[news]

Text analysis conference

In May UCD hosted the international COMPTExT conference at the UCD University Club, with 134 attendees presenting over 100 academic papers. The conference focuses on the use of computational methods in analysing primarily textual data, with a primary focus on applications in political science and international relations. It emphasises the complexity of research problems at the intersection of social sciences and information technology and takes a comparative approach to solving these problems, such as multi-lingual comparative analysis. The conference is closely associated with the Connected_Politics Lab in SPIRe, the members of which took part in the conference organising



committee. Quantitative text analysis - and the more recent extensions to analysing audio and visual data - is increasingly prominent in the school, with undergraduate and graduate students, as well as academic colleagues, increasingly applying these methods in their research.

[news]

After Brexit

As part of IBIS' ongoing *Constitutional Futures after Brexit* project, a one-day 'hybrid' workshop defining and debating constitutional futures in Great Britain and Ireland was held on the 18th of February. The workshop, entitled *After Brexit: Debating constitutional futures across 'these islands,'* brought together academics and practitioners to explore the concepts and issues at stake in discussing the constitutional futures of 'these islands,' and explored different ways of thinking and talking about these futures. It looked at key constitutional principles, and at Unionism and Nationalism as ways of both thinking about and doing politics.

In the photo below, from left to right: Dr Jonathan Eversed (Newman Fellow in Constitutional Futures after Brexit, IBIS); John Osmond (author and political advisor, Plaid Cymru); Dr Judith Sijstermans (Universities of Edinburgh and Dundee); Michelle Gildernew MP (Sinn Féin MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone).

[news]

Outstanding reviewer

Reviewing academic papers for journals is a labour-intensive task that is rarely acknowledged and unpaid, but an important part of the academic publishing process. The editor of the Political Research Quarterly, a reputed journal in our discipline, informed us that Thomas Däubler has been named one of Political Research Quarterly's Outstanding Reviewers for this past year. The Top 20 Outstanding Reviewers are recognized in PRQ's 2021 Annual Report and also in a separate space on the journal's website. The editor states: "Academic service is never valued as much as it should be, ... but disproportionately responsible for the well-being of our discipline."

[thesis highlight]

Internally displaced women reclaiming agency

It is with great shock that we heard of the passing of our PhD graduate Dr Sinéad McGrath, who shortly after a cancer diagnosis passed away on 20 January 2022. Sinéad studied with us from September 2015, working particularly closely with Melanie Hoewer and Alexander Dukalskis. She defended her thesis in April 2021.



For her thesis, Sinéad conducted research on the role of the UN Refugee Agency and International Organisation for Migration in transitional settings, with a case study in Colombia to see whether international organisations are influential factors in internally displaced women reclaiming agency. The thesis makes a two-part argument. On the one hand, the historical legacies of international organisations shape their approaches and effectiveness in addressing the needs of internally displaced women and this is evident in the context of transitions to peace. An analysis using historical institutionalism explains how these organisations approach contemporary issues of forced displacement by assuming the same positions assigned to these after World War II yet attempting to juxtapose new identities with a continuation of old policy stances. Secondly, by approaching female agency intersectionally, the research unpacks the effectiveness of these programmes and the involvement of internally displaced women in processes of transitions to peace. By conducting research with internally displaced women in Colombia, Sinéad uncovered gaps between organisational policy and practice, the results of which will have an impact on our understanding of how



international organisations influence gender dynamics in conflict and post-conflict contexts.

[research highlight]

Political agreements

Dawn Walsh, with co-authors from the University of Birmingham, introduced a new database of political agreements in internal conflicts. In 2020 there were over 80,000 conflict related deaths globally. Political agreements are key to building peace



and preventing conflict recurrence. However, what exactly should be included in these agreements to help them to successfully fulfil this role is unclear.

Agreements frequently include information on how new political institutions will function. This often involves outlining how representatives of the conflict groups can participate in these new political institutions. Exclusion of certain groups from political decision-making can be at the root of conflict and agreements that include requirements for all relevant groups to share power seek to address



this cause of conflict. Such moves aim to transform violent conflict into ordinary political conflict that can be managed or resolved through agreed procedures.

Previous research into these arrangements has focused on the impact of groups sharing power in cabinets, parliaments, and the military. It was thought that the more institutions in which groups shared power the less likely it was that conflict would re-occur. However, Dawn and her co-authors found that power-sharing on independent bodies, such as election or human rights commissions, is the only type of power-sharing that contributes to the non-recurrence of violence. These results highlight the importance of commission type institutions in ending conflict and Dawn is carrying out further research into their role in peace processes with the support of the Irish Research Council.

[centre highlight]

New UCD Centre for Asia-Pacific Research

In June the school received notification from the Acting Registrar that the establishment of the UCD



Centre for Asia-Pacific Research has been fully approved by the university. The centre, under the directorship of Alex Dukalskis, will build from, replace, and formalise the existing UCD Asia Pacific Research Network, which was an initiative between

colleagues in the colleges of Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences and Law to share research about Asia across disciplinary boundaries. The centre will facilitate the visibility and dissemination within UCD and Ireland of knowledge and critical debate about this vast region - which is defined broadly as spanning East, South, and Southeast. It will host public events, help postgraduate students network with one another, and highlight research being done in these two colleges to the general public.



The centre will further UCD's connections with Asia and Asia-Pacific research platforms in other universities in Ireland, Europe, Asia, and beyond, and it will contribute to the development of UCD's research and educational capacity in the languages, cultures, philosophies, history, society, economics, arts, and politics of Asia and Asia-Pacific. You can follow the activities of the centre on Twitter at @AsiaUCD.

[thesis highlight]

Income and participation

For undergraduate students who obtain a certain minimum grade point average in their first years, we offer an *Advanced Seminar in Politics*, where different colleagues in the school present the cutting edge of their respective fields and where students write a thesis under individual supervision. In each Spring issue of this newsletter, we will highlight one undergraduate thesis from the latest cohort of students.

Does income mediate the likelihood of engaging in alternative forms of participation? Molly Considine's advanced seminar thesis bridges prior work on voting, income inequality, and alternative forms of participation. Focusing on the case of Germany, Molly uses individual-level survey data and develops an index of political participation. Based on multivariate regression analysis, Molly finds that higher income predicts the likelihood of voting in general elections. In addition, income increases the probability of donating. However, higher-income voters are less likely to sign petitions, boycott products, or



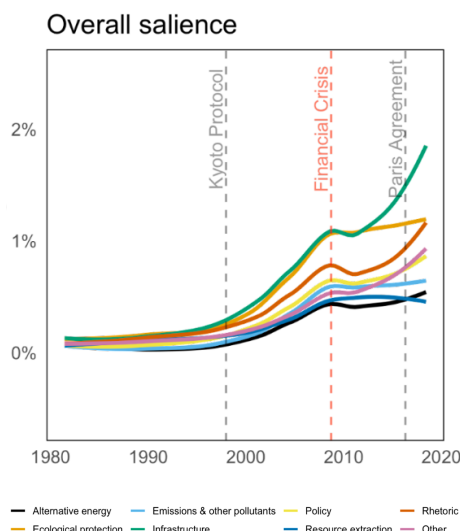
protest. Molly runs various robustness tests, which support the validity of these results. These findings from Germany improve our understanding of the interactions between financial well-being, voting, and protesting.

[programme highlight]

MSc in Politics and Data Science

The explosion of online and social media, the proliferation of digitised information, and improved electronic access to political decision-making processes provide new opportunities to study existing and emerging political processes in various democratic and non-democratic political regimes. The simultaneous development of cutting-edge data science methods to study digital text, audio, and video provide the tools we need to take advantage of these opportunities.

The new MSc Politics and Data Science is designed to equip students with the theoretical knowledge and methodological skills necessary to examine and understand politics in the digital age. Through a dedicated module, students get experience with group work in data science projects. For example, a group in the last semester investigated: "What do political parties talk about when it comes to climate change?"



The programme is organised around two streams of study. The first stream grounds students with backgrounds in political science and related social sciences in data science methods. The second stream is geared towards students with computer science or



related technical backgrounds, teaching them about research design and theories in political science. Apart from two required core modules in each stream, all students can select optional modules that best fit their interests. These modules can either revolve around data science methods, such as Python programming and machine learning, quantitative text analysis, statistics, and experimental

methods. Or they can be modules relating to comparative politics, international relations, political violence, political economy, and related fields that SPIRe has strengths in.

[news]

Quality review

Every seven years, the school goes through an extensive process of a quality review, where the school writes a self-assessment report and a committee of UCD colleagues from other schools as well as external members from outside UCD visit us for several days, talking to academic and professional staff, students, alumni, different units in the university, and other stakeholders, to get a sense of how the school works and where there might be scope for improvements. Our (virtual) assessment took place in April and while the formal report is still pending, the visiting panel was very impressed with the overall performance and functioning of the school.



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