



AUTUMN 2025

SPIRe Newsletter

What's new in this issue?

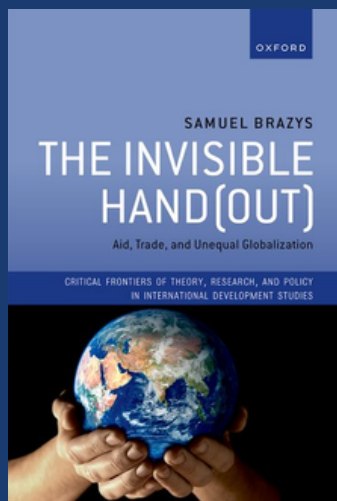
Dear all,
the autumn term always seems particularly busy but taking over as editor of the SPIRe newsletter from Elifchan has given me a whole new appreciation just how busy people at SPIRe actually are. So this newsletter will be on the longer side... On the plus side, I really enjoy being able to share so many good news. So, without any further ado, please find below information on new honours and prizes, new research, new publications, new opportunities, reports of and invitations to many great events and a few words on our new Athena Swan Silver Award.
All the best, Alexa Zellentin

Lucía Tiscornia receives ERC starting grant on Criminal Governance in Unexpected Contexts

This project is set to investigate a puzzling question: why do criminal organizations thrive in countries with strong welfare schemes? The project will focus on three Latin American countries—Argentina, Chile, and Costa Rica—to understand the relationships between these groups and the local communities. This study challenges the conventional view that criminal organizations only emerge in places with weak or failing governments. Instead, it suggests a surprising link between robust social safety nets and the behaviour of criminal groups. By using a combination of surveys, interviews, and administrative data,

the project aims to show how these groups adapt and operate in unexpected environments. Criminal violence is a major global issue, often exceeding the death toll of civil wars. Understanding how to prevent this violence without causing more harm is critical. While the study is focused on Latin America, its findings will offer valuable lessons for any country dealing with organized crime despite strong social welfare provision. This work will bring new insights to the field of politics. Political scientists have traditionally focused on the coercive role of the state in fighting crime. This project offers a completely new perspective that could change how we think about the behaviour of criminal groups and the best ways to manage them. Governments have agency to make choices other than using violence to curtail the growth of criminal organisations.





New Book:

The Invisible Hand(out): Aid, Trade, and Unequal Globalization, by Samuel Brazys

The book examines the relationship between foreign aid, market access, and economic growth in developing countries during the era of globalization. Despite the rapid integration of global markets lifting millions of people out of poverty, disparities remain, with some nations thriving while others falter. The book argues that explanations focusing solely on domestic governance and institutions, or geography, fall short in explaining these divergences. Instead, it highlights the critical role of external factors—specifically, the availability of trade-effective aid and the presence of meaningful market access opportunities. Drawing on extensive fieldwork and novel datasets, the book offers both quantitative and qualitative evidence in support of its arguments. Brazys considers a number of in-depth cases, including success stories Indonesia and Vietnam, where strategic aid and market access drove transformative growth, alongside cases including Madagascar and the Federated States of Micronesia, who have stagnated despite high overall levels of aid and de jure market access. With a focus on both economic data and the lived realities of development practitioners and exporters, *The Invisible Hand(out)* bridges theoretical insights and practical implications, offering policymakers, academics, and development professionals a fresh lens on addressing global inequality and fostering sustainable growth.

National University of Ireland Awards an Honorary Doctorate to Maurice Manning



On November 6, the NUI awarded Maurice Manning an Honorary Doctorate (LLD) in Higher education, public service, politics and public discourse. SPIRe Professor, David Farrell was invited to 'introduce' Maurice at his conferral.

Appointed to UCD in 1966, Maurice was one of the founding members of the then Department of Ethics and Politics, where he taught until his election to the Dáil in 1981. At UCD he played a key role in the establishment of the Department, putting a stamp on the teaching programme of this new UCD venture, and in so doing making an important contribution to the growth of political science as a discipline in Ireland. His academic output was notable, including: the definitive text on *The Blueshirts*, the first scholarly study of Irish Political Parties, an exhaustive study of Electricity Supply in Ireland, and his magisterial biography of James Dillon. But it was as a teacher that he will be most fondly remembered. In his comments at the ceremony, David noted that 'he was a highly popular lecturer and tutor. Everyone loved Maurice. He was the most humane of lecturers: always approachable, and with a sympathetic ear'.

Maurice's political career included six years in the Dáil, followed by 15 years in the Seanad where he served both as Leader of the House and also as Leader of the Opposition, and played a key role in the passage of important legislation, perhaps most notably the 1997 Universities Act. His many other recent roles have included, most significantly, as Chancellor of the NUI, from 2009-24.

New Opportunities

SPIRe offers three January-start postgraduate courses, and applications are open until the beginning of January. These are the MSc Sustainable Development (online, 18 months), the Professional Certificate in Quantitative Text Analysis, and the Professional Certificate in Programming for Social Scientists (on-campus, 4 months). Visit our website for further details:

<https://www.ucd.ie/spire/study/prospectivepostgraduatestudents/januarystartcourses/>

Elizabeth Meehan Prize for Dawn Walsh



The Political Studies Association of Ireland 2025 Elizabeth Meehan Prize for the best paper presented at the annual PSAI conference was awarded to Dr Dawn Walsh (UCD), and Prof Stefan Wolff (University of Birmingham) for their paper "International involvement in power-sharing peace processes: Lessons from Northern Ireland and beyond".

Best Paper Award for Linette Lim

UCD SPIRe Phd Student Linette Lim has won the Best PhD Paper Award 2025 from the Political Studies Association Autocracy and Regime Change Specialist Group for her paper "Foreign Bogeymen: The Use of Anti-Foreign Media Propaganda in China" For further information see [here](#).



Inaugural Paper Prize for Lucas de Melo Prado

UCD SPIRe PhD Candidate Lucas De Melo Prado is one of the two holders of the inaugural prize for the ECPR Standing Group on Methods in Normative Political Theory for his paper "Is It Fair? A Theoretical Framework to Analyse and Assess Justifications of Social Inequalities in Liberal Democracies" For more information see [here](#).

New papers

'Estancona, Chelsea, and Tiscornia Lucía. (2025) From Cocaine to Avocados: Criminal Market Expansion and Violence. International Organization. 79(3):417-455. doi:[10.1017/S0020818325100763](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818325100763).

Most of what we know about organized criminal violence comes from research on illicit narcotics markets. Yet criminal groups also fight to capture markets for licit commodities, as evidenced by Sicilian lemons and Mexican avocados. When do organized criminal groups violently expand into markets for licit goods? We argue that rapid increases in the share of a good's export value create opportunities for immediate profit and future market manipulation. These opportunities lead to violence as groups expand their territorial holdings and economic portfolio. We provide subnational evidence of our mechanism using data on avocado exports from Mexico, and address reverse causality with Google Trends data on the popularity of web searches for "avocado toast." We also provide cross-national evidence by combining data from the Atlas of Economic Complexity, V-Dem, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). We find that increases in a country's share of global export value for agricultural goods are associated with more homicides—but only where organized criminal groups are present.

Khokhlov, Nikita, and Alexander Baturo. (2025) Autocratic Audiences and Linguistic Complexity. British Journal of Political Science 55: e137. doi: [10.1017/S0007123425100914](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123425100914).

In this article, we explore how and why authoritarian elites tailor the complexity of their communication to audiences. Using evidence from Russian governors' policy addresses, social media posts, and federal parliamentary speeches, we show that elites simplify their language in protest-prone, more educated, and economically developed regions, where legitimation and co-optation are most vital. In turn, more effective communicators are promoted. These results run counter to democratic dynamics, where simpler speech tends to target less educated and poorer voters. Our findings contribute to an understanding of authoritarian co-optation, elite incentives, responsiveness, and propaganda.

Lim, Linette (2025). Foreign Correspondence in China: Authoritarian Media Control and Journalistic Responses. The International Journal of Press/Politics, doi: [10.1177/19401612251379585](https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612251379585).



Linette Lim, a PhD candidate at SPIRe, has published her first solo-authored article in the International Journal of Press/Politics (IJPP). The article, titled "Foreign Correspondence in China: Authoritarian Media Control and Journalistic Responses", examines how authoritarian regimes shape media coverage by foreign correspondents. Drawing on more than fifty interviews with former and current foreign correspondents, the study reveals subtle yet powerful tools of control that extend beyond propaganda and surveillance. These include legal ambiguity that deters reporting, and the mobilization of citizens to obstruct reporting. The findings carry implications for the integrity of global journalism in restricted information environments. She first presented the project at the IJPP conference at the University of Edinburgh in 2024, and was subsequently invited to submit the full paper for a special issue of IJPP

New Colleagues



Dr Elisa D'Amico is our new Assistant Professor in Environmental Politics. She holds a Ph.D. in Political Science and specializes in the intersection of climate change, conflict, migration, and political economy. Her research examines both the drivers of and responses to the climate-conflict nexus, investigating how environmental shocks shape conflict dynamics, peace processes, and migration patterns while also analyzing policy and institutional responses to these global issues. Her work employs computational social science methods to advance understanding in this field. Her work has appeared in the Review of International Political Economy, Journal of Peace Research, and Nature Climate Action. Before joining UCD, she held a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of St Andrews and visiting fellow at the University of Basel. For more information see: <https://www.elisadamico.net/>

Dr Farsan Ghassim is a new Assistant Professor at SPIRe and a member of The Queen's College in Oxford. Previously, he worked at the University of Oxford, Maastricht University, and Lund University. His research on global governance and survey methodology has been published in the British Journal of Political Science, Perspectives on Politics, the International Studies Quarterly, The Review of International Organizations, and elsewhere. Farsan holds a doctorate from the University of Oxford, an MA from Yale University, and a BSc from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He has worked at Bain & Company, the German Foreign Office, the European Parliament, and the United Nations, among others. More information is available on his website: www.farsanghassim.com



Professor Karen Anderson's research focuses on the comparative political economy of welfare state development. She is currently completing two collaborative research projects: 1) the political economy of sustainable investment in funded occupational pension schemes and 2) the politics of pension reform in the affluent democracies. Much of her research focuses on the countries she knows best: Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Germany. For more information, see <https://people.ucd.ie/karen.anderson>



Dr Guy Robert Eyre is a new postdoc at SPIRe. Located at the nexus of comparative politics, sociology, and Islamic studies, his research examines the consequences and drivers of Islamic mobilisation in the Middle East and North Africa. He completed his PhD at SOAS, University of London, and has held research fellowships at the universities of Freiburg, Lancaster, and Edinburgh and at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. His most recent publications include journal articles on Islamist politics and authoritarian governance for Democratization, Mediterranean Politics, and The International Spectator.

In August, the Gendered Dimensions of Hunger in Peacebuilding (GDHP) project, co-led by SPIRe faculty Dr Caitriona Dowd, welcomed a new addition to the project team, Dr Maksym Skrypnyk. Maksym holds a PhD in Political Science from Odesa Mechnikov National University, where his thesis examined U.S. nuclear policy in the 21st century. Previously, he worked at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Dublin, where he provided direct case management and integration support to Ukrainians affected by the war in Ukraine. Maksym's research interests include global security, air defense, and nuclear deterrence. His work on the Research Ireland-funded GDHP project examines food weaponisation by Russia in Ukraine, to be presented at DSAI 2026.



Dr Nikita Khokhlov is an Ad Astra Fellow and Assistant Professor, working on comparative authoritarianism, political behaviour, and propaganda, with a regional focus on Russia and former Soviet states. He completed his PhD at Dublin City University and worked as a Teaching Assistant in SPIRe last year. His articles have been published in American Journal of Political Science, British Journal of Political Science, Post-Soviet Affairs, Europe-Asia Studies, and Politics & Policy.

Events

Spotlight on Food Security: UCD and AfDB Co-Host High-Level Conference in Dublin



On September 11–12, 2025, the UCD's Centre for Sustainable Development (CSD) in collaboration with the African Development Bank (AfDB), hosted a landmark conference on Accelerating Food Security and Sovereignty in Sub-Saharan Africa. The event brought together leading academics, policymakers, and practitioners to explore cutting-edge innovations in digital agriculture, climate-smart practices, and inclusive food systems.

Co-funded by Irish Aid and Research Ireland, the two-day event featured keynote addresses, dynamic research sessions, and high-level panels. The programme spanned critical themes—from youth-led tech innovation to gender-transformative approaches—fostering meaningful dialogue on building resilient and inclusive agri-food systems across Africa.

Photo: Researchers, funders, and practitioners gathered at UCD's Merrion Square campus for this vibrant and timely conference.

Ireland's Presidency: More Than a Figurehead?



On Tuesday, 30 September 2025, the School of Politics and International Relations brought the SPIRe alumni community together for a lively and thought-provoking discussion at the Museum of Literature Ireland.

For more information see [here](#).

If you would like to stay up to date about future events, please join the LinkedIn group for SPIRe alumni.

The discussion "Ireland's Presidency: More Than a Figurehead?" examined the evolving nature of the Irish presidency. The panel featured Art O'Leary, Chief Executive of The Electoral Commission and former Secretary General to the President; Kevin Rafter, Professor of Political Communication at DCU and editor of The Irish Presidency; and Sheila Naughton, reporter at RTÉ.

The conversation explored the president's role in the 21st century, how the office has changed over time, and whether the presidency is primarily ceremonial or exercises broader influence. Panellists also considered the selection procedure and the impact of voter turnout on the institution's legitimacy and public perception.

The event concluded with a drinks reception, providing alumni and faculty with an opportunity to continue the discussion informally.

This was the first in a new series of events for SPIRe alumni.

PSAI Workshop on Methods in Political Theory



The PSAI Political Theory specialist group in cooperation with the PSAI Graduate and Early Career specialist group invited Professor Jonathan Floyd for a methods in political theory workshop on Friday, 3. October 2025. In total nearly 50 people registered for the event. The workshop was split into an introduction to doing political philosophy session in the morning and primarily aimed at those new to the area.

For more information, please see [here](#).

How To Save Democracy Live: What Can Ireland Teach The World About Citizens' Assemblies?



In September the Centre for Democracy Research partnered with the How to Save Democracy podcast for an event titled 'How To Save Democracy Live: What Can Ireland Teach The World About Citizens' Assemblies?'

Jon Alexander of How to Save Democracy Podcast hosted a conversation with SPIRe's own David Farrell, Art O'Leary, Secretary General at An Coimisiún Toghcháin and Louise Caldwell, member of the 2016-2018 Citizen's Assembly, to interrogate what the world can learn from the experience of Ireland's pioneering Citizens' Assemblies over the last 15 years.

Let the People Decide? Hope, Fear, and the Realities of Direct Democracy



In October the Centre for Democracy Research, in partnership with the Swiss Embassy, hosted Professor Daniel Kübler for a public lecture called “Let the People Decide? Hope, Fear, and the Realities of Direct Democracy”.

Daniel Kübler is a Professor at the Department of Political Science and directs the Centre for Democracy Studies at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. His research interests are direct democracy and democratic innovations, local and urban politics and governance, as well as public policy analysis and evaluation.

Constitutional Visions from the Grassroots

The Report of the project 'Constitutional Visions from the Grassroots' was launched on 5 November at the Royal Irish Academy. The study explored how deliberation could depolarise the particularly difficult case of constitutional change on a divided island. The project involved a sequence of deliberative cafés among ordinary women - cross-local, cross-border and cross-community. Each café began by identifying shared problems and concerns. Each led into policy discussion and ended by using the shared problems and aims as criteria to assess different constitutional options.

The participants did not reach consensus - their preferences for union and unity differed - but they gravitated towards unconventional versions of union and unity that could win acceptance even from those with different preferences. UCD PI is Jennifer Todd. This highly participatory research builds on some of Jennifer's recent theoretically informed work on everyday social transformation ([Theory and Society 2024](#); [Sociological Review 2025](#))



Trump 2.0: Economic Security of Korea and Ireland in the Twilight of the Rules-Based International Order?



On 12 November 2025, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea and the UCD Centre for Asia-Pacific Research hosted a seminar titled “Trump 2.0: Economic Security of Korea and Ireland in the Twilight of the Rules-Based International Order?” at the UCD University Club.

Associate Professor Sam Brazys and Assistant Professor Yoo Sun Jung from UCD joined Ah-rum Yoo, Specialist at Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to discuss how both countries are responding to recent pressures on the global economic order. The event offered concise reflections on Ireland's and Korea's strategies, as well as the future outlook for the rules-based system, sparking an engaging discussion among participants.

SPIRe Seminar series

Remember to tune in to our weekly SPIRe seminar series for current research topics of SPIRe researchers. For the full programme, please see [here](#). All seminars are on Wednesdays from 12-1pm in the SPIRe boardroom, F301 Newman as well as accessible via zoom.



Transnational networks and international cooperation

In collaboration with Professor Mai'a Cross, Northeastern University and with the support of the Carnegie Foundation, New York, UCD SPIRe co-hosted an event on Wednesday 26 November on the topic of transnational networks and international cooperation. Across four thematic areas: youth and peace movements; the sustainable use of space including the dark and quiet skies movement; nature restoration, and human rights defenders and the transnational network of prosecutors, this event saw experts and practitioners present their experience of how such transnational networks contribute to positive international collaboration despite global fragmentation and great power conflict. The event is part of a larger project collaboration looking at 'ultra-sociality' as a force for global cooperation as opposed to zero-sum global competition. UCD contributors include Professor Lorraine Hanlon, Dr Laura K. Taylor, and Professor Ben Tonra.

In the News

Can international pressure stop Israel inching closer to a single apartheid-style state?"

Dr Vincent Durac, September 29, 2025, The Irish Times

The piece analyses the possible implications of international recognition of a Palestinian state. It is available [here](#).

Tony Blair's Middle East record makes him an extraordinary choice to govern postwar Gaza

Dr Vincent Durac, October 5, 2025, The Irish Times

Analysis of the Trump 'peace plan' for Gaza unveiled in early October. It is available [here](#).

Will this be the ceasefire deal that finally ends the war?

Dr Vincent Durac, October 13, 2025, The Irish Times

Further analysis of the Trump plan and prospects for success. It is available [here](#).

Upcoming events

'Fostering Safety and Trauma-Sensitivity in Research with Potential Emotional Impacts (ReSTS)

The project 'Fostering Safety and Trauma-Sensitivity in Research with Potential Emotional Impacts (ReSTS)', led by Dr. Christie Nicoson (PI, Law), Dr. Caitriona Dowd (SPIRe), Dr. Melanie Hoewer (SPIRe) and Prof. Aisling Swaine (Law), invites CoSSL researchers engaged in research with potential emotional impacts to take part in two events.

Tuesday, December 9, 10:00am-5:00pm
In-person training at UCD on researcher wellbeing

Wednesday, December 10, 10:00-11:00 am
Seminar 'Institutional Support for Researchers Undertaking Emotionally Challenging Research'

Many researchers at UCD's College of Social Sciences and Law (CoSSL) engage in research that has emotional, safety and wellbeing implications, both for the researcher and research participants. This includes, but is not limited to, research on issues of violence, conflict experience, surviving trauma, genocide, disasters and more. This training helps UCD researchers identify and initiate the first steps to address skills gaps in support of research with emotional, safety and wellbeing impacts. Researchers from across the College and at all stages from PhD to established researcher are welcome.

For more information and to apply please contact: <https://tinyurl.com/2fschd9f>

The training and the seminar are organised with support from the UCD ReCLAIM Fund.

Inclusive AgTech for Malawian Women Farmers Moves to Phase Two

We are delighted to share that the EMPOWER-ME project has successfully completed its Concept Phase and has been approved for the next stage of funding — the Seed Phase — under Irish Aid's prestigious FIP-SDG2 initiative. This milestone recognises the dedication and innovation of our interdisciplinary team working to create more inclusive and effective digital agricultural solutions for women smallholder farmers in Malawi. In the Concept Phase, our team undertook a rewarding mixed-methods study in rural Malawi, engaging with over 100 women farmers through surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews. The project explores how digital agricultural technologies (DATs) can be better tailored to support women's access to agronomic information and informed decision-making. At its heart, EMPOWER-ME aims to strengthen women's agency by providing site-specific agricultural advice while allowing them to choose the platform—SMS, voice, radio or app—that best suits their context. We also explore how enabling conditions like device access and male household support shape uptake and use. With the Seed Phase now underway, the project is moving into a critical phase of experimentation. Three parallel workstreams will test precision agriculture tools, build capacity among DAT providers, and implement an 'informed technology choice' approach across selected VSLA groups. These efforts aim to generate rigorous evidence and practical lessons for scaling inclusive digital agriculture in Malawi and beyond.



SPIRe achieves Athena Swan Silver Award

The considerable efforts in data-gathering, planning, drafting and putting forward an Athena Swan Silver action plan led by the Athena Swan Committee and especially Krishna and Steffi has paid off. SPIRe received Silver Status! Sarah Fink, Head of Athena Swan Ireland, said, "This Silver Athena Swan award highlights the fantastic commitment of University College Dublin, School of Politics and International Relations, in bringing about change through impactful and sustainable gender equality initiatives in higher education across Ireland. Congratulations to all those who work so hard to achieve and sustain this recognition."



Stay engaged!

As an important part of our strategy for the coming years, we want to significantly increase engagement with our alumni network. You can stay in touch with us through our new LinkedIn group:

www.linkedin.com/groups/12728409

The feedback from the evaluation committee particularly highlighted our Family Friendly Policy, which now also extends to our PhD candidates: "the school's policy suite now explicitly addresses family support and flexible working, while transparency around workload allocation has been improved to ensure equitable distribution of teaching and administrative duties." Naturally, they also noted areas for further improvements and this feeds into our new action plan. Hopefully we can develop all those important and wonderful ideas for ensuring equality, diversity, and inclusion in our school set out by ourselves and the reviewers. On a practical level it would also be great to ensure that data gathering will no longer dominate the workload.



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