



# SPIRe Newsletter

Autumn / Winter 2022



The new academic year started with a great buzz, now that we are all fully back on campus and with so many new colleagues in the school. In the previous issue we already introduced Lucia Tiscornia and Joshua Alley, who both started working with us in September. A few new colleagues, Pinar Dokumaci, Samuel Johnston, and Harald Edinger, were confirmed later and will be introduced in this issue. Three more appointments are forthcoming later this academic year. For the alumni among you: note the very last item in this newsletter, introducing our new LinkedIn alumni group!

## SPIRe wins over two million in research grants

Between the recent European Research Grants and the Irish Research Council Laureate programme, the school recently won over €2 million in grants, between two projects.

## Moral agency in election campaigns

Joseph Lacey received a 1.5 million euro grant from the European Research Council on "Moral Agency in Election Campaigns". In his own words: "The modern campaign environment has changed radically over the last decade. Big data, new

media and the emergence of new electoral forces have altered how campaigns are run and won. Over the next five years, a team of UCD political scientists will investigate what motivates the behaviour of candidates, campaign professionals, journalists and citizens in their varied campaign roles. In particular, we're interested in understanding the opportunities and risks posed to democracy by changes in the campaign environment."



ELECT, as the project is called, falls within the methodological framework of 'grounded normative theory'. It combines normative democratic theory with a mixed-methods and comparative research design to investigate the moral agency of key actors involved in contemporary election campaigns.

The moral agency of electoral actors becomes concerning when they are confronted with motivations to behave in ways that undermine democratic norms or political trust. Neglect of the

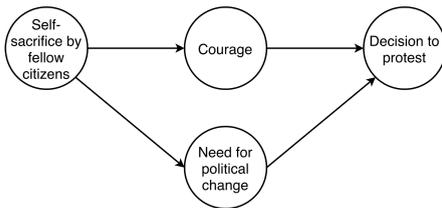
study of the moral dimensions of campaign inputs as related to attitudes, beliefs and motivations of campaign actors leaves major knowledge gaps that limit our ability to accurately diagnose normative problems with campaigning and prescribe effective solutions. ELECT will attempt to fill these gaps by exploring the moral agency of electoral actors in four major democracies that have been subject to recent disruptions in the campaign context: Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States.

## Women and religion in resistance

Stephanie Dornschneider-Elkink received a grant of over half a million euro from the Irish Research Council for a project on women in religious resistance, contributing to the literature on conflict resolution.



Conflict studies show that women are important contributors to conflict resolution and that their empowerment is crucial to conflict resolution efforts. Are these findings applicable to Islamic groups? The literature typically considers women in these groups as passive victims, subordinated to their husbands and male leaders in the name of a radical religious ideology. However, gender studies show that women often advance their independent, and potentially peacebuilding agendas by applying, rather than opposing Islamic principles.



The project constructs an original dataset of ethnographic interviews with women in both Islamic and non-Islamic groups. The interview analysis applies Axelrod's cognitive mapping approach. Cognitive maps consist of beliefs, connections between beliefs, and decisions that visualise the reasoning processes underlying political behaviour. Novel computational methods and new tools from quantitative text analysis are utilised to systematically trace common reasoning processes among men and women, and identify a repertoire of cognitive processes underlying conflict- and empowerment-related behaviour.



## Showcasing research on SDGs

The International Association of Universities held its annual conference at UCD on 25 October 2022 at the O'Reilly Hall. The school was asked to host a showcase event on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a focus on research, collaboration, and capacity building. SPIRE colleagues Paul Walsh and Krishna Vadlamannati made a presentation on the PhD in Global Human Development at this event. The PhD training programme was developed for government personnel and public servants (such as Higher Education academics and research institutes) in Africa. The PhD scholars undertake a joint structured PhD programme with the partner University. Currently 60 students have graduated over a wide range of disciplines across UCD. Paul and

Krishna shared a few interesting examples on how the PhD programme in Global Human Development has contributed to collaboration and capacity building in the global south. IAU member universities from across the world have attended this event.

## Visit by Secretary General Joe Hackett

On 23 November, the Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs since September 2021, Joe Hackett, visited our school to meet with faculty and students. We discussed the various ways in which our research can inform the work of the DFA and how we can establish closer relations with the department. He then gave a talk to final year undergraduate and Masters students on "Current challenges for Irish



foreign policy", talking about security and defence, Brexit, and Ireland's term on the UN Security Council.

Joe Hackett joined the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs in 1995 and has since served in a variety of positions in Ireland and abroad. Prior to his appointment as Secretary General, he served as Director General of the EU Division and in Brussels as Deputy Permanent Representative of Ireland to the EU and as Permanent Representative to the EU's Political & Security Committee.

## Samuel Johnston

A recent graduate from Trinity College Dublin, Samuel Johnston joined us in September as a Teaching Fellow in European Comparative Politics.



His research focuses on how the EU influences the different forms of nationalism utilised by political parties. Contrary to the common understanding of the EU's role, his research suggests that, rather than a backlash to EU integration resulting in forms of nationalism related to the central state (e.g., anti-immigration or anti-ethnic minority rhetoric, or external exclusiveness appeals focused on ethnic kin or territory in neighbouring countries) becoming more salient in party discourse, the EU instead discourages these forms of nationalism and incentivises parties to focus on other forms of identity, especially at the sub-national level.

Another ongoing study focuses on candidate decision-making in the 2022 University of Dublin bye-election to the Seanad. In most elections, candidates have a high level of knowledge about both the party they are running for and the voters: who will vote for them, who could be persuaded to vote for them, and even where these voters are situated. However, candidates will always need to make campaign decisions in a context of (relative) uncertainty. Not only are these bye-elections rare and poorly covered by the media and polling companies, but the long history of independent candidates and Senators in the constituency means that there are very few partisan cues, there are few obvious issues to campaign on, and the constituents are a diffuse group spread across the country.

## Pinar Dokumaci

Pinar Dokumaci joined us in September as Assistant Professor in Development Studies. She completed her PhD at the Department of Political Science, University of Toronto, where she specialised in Political Theory and Comparative Politics, and worked as Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of York and Queen's University, Canada.



Pinar's research lies at the intersection of empirical ethnographic research and applied theory. Her main interest targets the dynamics of feminist solidarity and disagreement between women's rights groups in deep-rooted politico-religious conflict and how these groups interact with each other

in the civil society. In doing so, Pinar examines the identity-building aspect of feminist activism in civil society as well as gradual and iterative transformations of political prejudice and distrust during such encounters. In her dissertation, Pinar focused on the alternative vocabularies of the disagreement between secular/Kemalist feminists and Islamic/pious women's civil society groups in the women's rights movement in Turkey. In her theoretical research, Pinar aims to bring together postcolonial, post-Orientalist theories of feminist subjectivity and deliberative democracy from an alternative relational psychoanalytic approach.

## Harald Edinger

A recent graduate from the University of Oxford, Harald Edinger joined us as a Teaching Fellow in Peace and Conflict Studies in September, after working as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg. Prior to academia, he worked in management consulting and European financial regulation.



His research interests broadly lie at the intersection of international security, international relations theory, political psychology, and Russian foreign policy. In his dissertation, he drew on classical realist theory and the life sciences to gain insights into the role of affect in foreign policy decision-making. He developed an analytical framework,

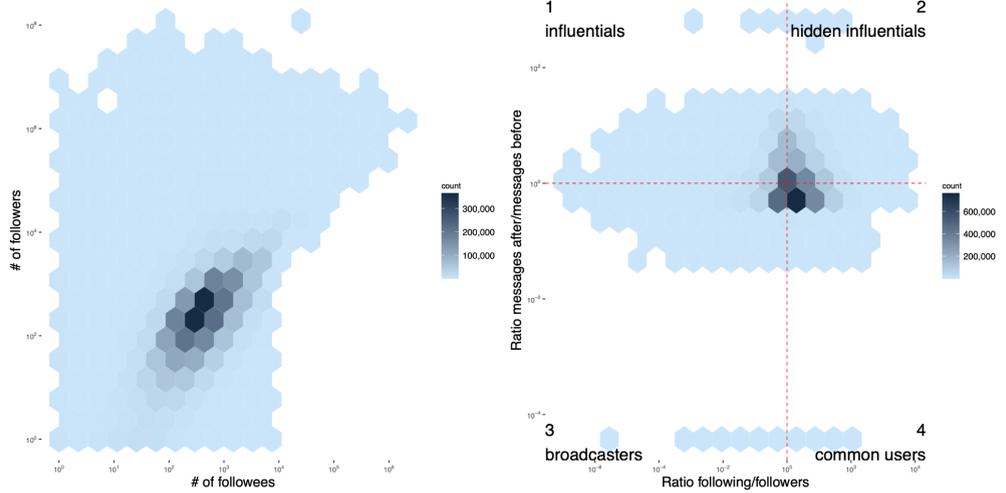
termed ‘affective realism’ that was probed via several case studies in Russian-European relations between 1999 and 2014.

A recent study published in *International Affairs* focuses on the controversy that has surrounded realist explanations of the causes of Russia's war against Ukraine, particularly John Mearsheimer's charge of western responsibility. In an effort to explicate some of the assumptions about the behavioural micro-foundations of states and their leaders, the article investigates main components of structural theory—including power differentials, ‘rational’ interests and states as unitary actors—and connects these concepts to base emotions like fear and anger. It argues that realists do well to differentiate between the aspirations of states and individual leaders' quest for power and status. In the same vein, reference to Russian security concerns may be emblematic of elites' perceived challenges of cultural subordination, and Putin's personal fears for the stability of his regime.

## Jennifer McGowan



Jennifer McGowan joined the school in September as administrator for all our graduate taught programmes. She previously worked for the Conferring Unit in UCD, administering all graduation ceremonies in the university. She also worked as undergraduate administrator in the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice and the School of Mechanical and Materials Engineering.



In addition to joining our administrative team, she has passionately taken on voluntary duties as caretaker of all our office plants.

## Who Tweets Security?

The concept of securitization focuses on political communication to explain how security threats come into existence. Rather than treating security as a given object, securitization understands security as a linguistic practice and builds on the constructivist idea that by ‘speaking security’ a given issue becomes a security problem.



As with other forms of political communication, the advent of social media has brought about important implications for securitization, accommodating a wider range of actors and providing more accessible means to make effective claims about threats. Yet, the securitization scholarship has been slow to adapt to

the new context of online political communication, leaving many open questions about the ways in which online networks contribute to the emergence of security problems. Natalia Umansky's PhD thesis explores this puzzle by integrating tools from the field of computational social science to study the working mechanisms that bolster securitization on online networks. This work contributes to our understating of securitization by three means: 1) it offers a systematic empirical framework to study securitization as discourse networks; 2) it delves into the question of who are the actors that define security problems online; and 3) it analyses the ways in which securitization spreads on online networks.

The findings suggest that minority voices can be amplified to securitise new threats, such as gender violence and inequality, climate change, and racial injustice. However, on the flip side, the knowledge that our online behaviour can have system-wide implications invites readers to think more critically about the content that they share on social media and consider: Who or what is being secured and for and by whom?

## Teaching Award

The Political Studies Association of Ireland named Stefan Müller the 2022 recipient of its Teaching and Learning Prize. Recognising political scientists whose teaching has incited intellectual curiosity and raised awareness of the significant relationship between the theory and practice of politics, the award was presented at the annual



conference in Waterford. The prize committee noted the "depth and range of reflective practice, professional growth, and innovative pedagogical approaches."

## Remembering Peter Mair

On October 24 2022, the school hosted a workshop in memory of the internationally-renowned political scientist, Peter Mair, who passed away suddenly in 2011. Peter studied for his Masters at the school in the 1970s, and after he died his family donated his book-collection to us, which is housed in our Boardroom and Peter Mair Library, where this event was held. Most of all, Peter was known for his work on the study of political parties and party systems - which was the focus of this Workshop.

The participants (see photo above) included a number of Peter's former colleagues, students and friends: Luciano Bardi (Pisa/EUI), Fernando Casal Bertoa (Nottingham), David Farrell (UCD), Zsolt Enyedi (Central European University), Richard Katz (Johns Hopkins), Maria Spirova (Leiden), Thomas Poguntke (Düsseldorf), and Paul Webb (Sussex). Among the attendees was Peter's nephew, Patrick Mair.

## UCD Politics and International Relations Society

The UCD Politics and International Relations Society is a society of, primarily, undergraduate students who have an interest in the subject - and who typically study this subject as

part of their undergraduate degree. Here and in future editions of this newsletter, we report on their latest events.

## Irish-German Relations and Irish Neutrality

On 28 December, the society and the German Society collaborated to bring together a very insightful panel discussion on Irish-German Relations and Irish Neutrality in the UCD Cinema. The discussion was moderated by Gavan Reilly, a UCD alumnus, political correspondent for Virgin Media News and host on Newstalk FM. Both Gavan and members of the audience asked the Minister for European Affairs Thomas Byrne, and the German Ambassador to Ireland, Cord Meier-Klodt, some very interesting questions surrounding the theme of the



discussion. It was an extremely successful event for all involved.

## Trip to Leinster House

On 19 October, some lucky members were generously given a tour of Leinster House by Neale Richmond TD. Places were limited and as such they were given out to the society's members on a first come, first served basis - the society was astounded by the enthusiasm of its members, as spaces were completely full within 7 minutes of the sign-up form going live. It was great to see both Irish and international students taking such a keen interest in the workings of Irish politics. They got to see both the Seanad, and the Dáil in session and bumped into some prominent political figures, such as none other than the Taoiseach himself. (Members were also delighted with the surprise meet and greet from Marty Morrissey!)

## Working at the UN headquarters

In every other issue of this newsletter we interview a recent alumnus who recently did an internship as part of their studies. In this issue we speak with Colin Wyss, who is a graduate of our MA in Peace and Conflict Studies, and who spent the summer trimester in at the UN headquarters in New York working with UNRWA, the UN agency focusing on Palestine and Palestinian refugees.

*How did your internship relate to your programme of study?*

This internship was great, as I had the chance to crystallise my theoretical knowledge and have an overview of what is concretely happening at the political and diplomatic level to curb the effect of conflicts.

*How did your internship/studies help you in your career progression?*

The international sphere is a competitive one, and having experience in a central institution like the UN is an asset that will surely open doors. It already led me to another paid internship with UNHCR in Amman, and got me to interviews for the UN Volunteers. In addition, internships usually include a broader



scope of tasks than a paid position, therefore I got the chance to see a lot about what paid staff do.



*What is your most memorable moment of studying in UCD?*

I think my most memorable memory was a lesson on the continuum of violence during a seminar called Gender, Harm and Justice. I realised that peace was so much more than the absence of war, and I discovered the complexity of structural violence in our society. It created very interesting debates with friends and colleagues and really shaped new thoughts and awareness in my mind.

*What advice would you give our current master students?*

One year is very short, embrace this unique opportunity to study hard, meet a lot of people, start looking for internships early, and have fun in and outside your studies. I had an amazing time running with the UCD Athletics Club, or gathering with the Arab Society. There are so many places you can get inspiration from at UCD, so stay open and have fun!

## New LinkedIn group for alumni

As an important part of our strategy for the coming years, we want to significantly increase engagement with our alumni network. To learn from them in terms of career advice and what skills our graduates need to have, and to inform our alumni of the ongoing developments and research in our school.

As one of the steps to enable this, we have established a LinkedIn group for our alumni. If you are an alumnus of SPIRe, or the older Department of Politics, please consider signing up here:

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12728409/>



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