



SPIRe Newsletter

Autumn 2021



A new newsletter

The UCD School of Politics and International Relations (SPIRe) is very excited to launch this new newsletter! We will publish electronically twice a year, in autumn and spring. The objective is to keep our large network of colleagues, students, alumni and others with a personal connection to the school fully informed of what is going on.

[news]

Bronze Athena SWAN Award

Under the leadership of Niamh Hardiman, the school was recently awarded a Bronze Award (photo

below) from the Athena SWAN organisation to improve the gender balance in our School. A new committee has been established to oversee the implementation of the plan, with the objective of reaching a Silver award. The photos on the wall of former Chairs of Politics in our school clearly suggest a male-dominated, and primarily clerical, history. Even now, long after the separation of church and university, and with several prominent female academics with longstanding careers in the school, there still is a considerable gender imbalance in the school. In light of this, a serious attempt is being made by colleagues to address this deficiency by reviewing all our policies and activities, from hiring and promotion, to engagements

with students and alumni, to training and support.

[alumnus interview]

SPIRe Alumnus

In every issue of this newsletter we will interview a recent alumnus from SPIRe. In this first issue we speak with Janina Kopfmüller, who is a graduate of our MSc in European Governance, a double-degree programme with the University of Utrecht. Janina is currently working as a policy officer in the EU Department of the German Federal Foreign Office. In her position she contributes to the further elaboration of German EU policy and strategy, and the coordination of the German position before European



Council meetings. We had the pleasure of interviewing Janina below. *How did your studies at UCD help you in your work?* On the one hand, studying the multidisciplinary degree - European Governance - helped me in getting deeper insights not only in the functioning of the EU generally, but also in specific topics, such as EU law, EU foreign and security policy, and European Political Economy. On the other hand, being confronted with a high variety of questions on EU policies, I was trained to quickly familiarise myself with unknown topics and apply solution-driven thinking. Both the EU-expertise as well as the working methods are helping me to process a high amount of information and to comply with the demands in my current fast-paced work.

What is your most fun memory of UCD? My year was given the invaluable opportunity to take part in the extracurricular course of “Modern Diplomacy”, taught by the acting Ambassador of the U.S. in Ireland. In this framework, we were invited to the Ambassador’s residence in Phoenix Park on some occasions. One time I found myself talking with the U.S. astronaut, Shane Kimbrough, and having a small personal chat with him about the German astronaut Alexander Gerst and the beauty of our earth – definitely an unexpected, but unique experience I will never forget!



What advice would you give our current master students? Stay curious and be engaged. Obviously it would be ideal, but there is no need to know where exactly you want to end up. Stay interested, also in topics that may not attract your enthusiasm at first glance. If a plan does not work out right away, something else will lead you on an equally exciting path.

[research highlight]

Backsliding states

In every issue of this newsletter, we will highlight a randomly selected recent publication from a SPIRE colleague. In this issue we look at the article by Joseph Lacey, with co-authors from the University of Exeter and the London School of Economics and Political Science: “Why does the European Right accommodate backsliding states? An analysis of 24 European People’s Party votes (2011–2019)”.

Over the last decade, the EU’s fundamental values have been under threat at the national level, in particular among several Central and Eastern European states that joined the EU since 2004. During this time, the European People’s Party (EPP) has been criticized for its unwillingness to vote for measures that would sanction the Hungarian Fidesz government, one of its members, in breach of key democratic principles since 2010.



The situation of the EPP, however, is more complex than it first appears. A closer look at voting cohesion of EPP MEPs across 24 resolutions on the protection of EU fundamental values reveals deep and growing divisions in the party over time on issues concerning fundamental values. Joseph and his co-authors find EPP voting behaviour on such issues is substantially determined by the changing strategic interests of the party over time, but that ideological factors and the strategic interests of national governments at the EU level are also important explanatory variables. These results further our understanding of the obstacles facing the EU in protecting its fundamental values.

[news]

New Chair of ECPR

After leading the school for eight years, from 2010 to 2013, and from 2016 to 2021, David Farrell (photo) has taken on the role of Chair of the Executive European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), the leading political science association in Europe. Within SPIRE, and for the next 3 years, Jos Elkink has taken over the helm as the new Head of School.



[new colleague]

Yoo Sun Jung

Yoo Sun Jung started in September as assistant professor in SPIRE, after having completed her graduate studies at Purdue University and Texas A&M. Prior to coming to UCD she worked as a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Center for Commerce and Diplomacy (CCD) at UC San Diego’s School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS). Her research, based on game theoretic models and empirical analysis, lies at the intersection of international and comparative political economy and explores how global economic integration shapes state behaviour and firm strategies. One stream of her research focuses on the consequences of institutional design on state behaviour. In particular, she examines the effects of legalization of international institutions on power asymmetries between wealthy and poor nations. In her dissertation, she examined whether international trade institutions help put small and weak

states on an equal footing with powerful states, thereby maintaining the liberal international trade order.



The other stream of her research emphasizes the causes and consequences of globalization, where she examines the effect of fragmented global production on strategic behaviour by states and firms using disaggregated trade and FDI data.

[new colleague]

Eleonora La Spada

Eleonora La Spada joined SPIRe as an assistant professor in September. Previously, she obtained her PhD degree from Trinity College Dublin and subsequently gained an ERC postdoctoral fellowship at Bocconi University in Milan.



Her research focuses on political violence and comparative politics, specifically on conflict studies, self-determination disputes, government response to internal dissent and bargaining processes. Her PhD thesis investigated the relation between the internal structure of self-determination movements and the use of state repression, contending that the internal structure of

challenging movements, and specifically their internal degree of fragmentation, affects the use of repressive actions by the government when facing self-determination disputes. Within-movement fragmentation constrains the ability of governments to use concessions to resolve the dispute and instead increases incentive to repress. In her research, Eleonora employs a mixed-methods approach, complementing quantitative analyses with in-depth case studies and formal modelling. Currently, her research focus also includes democratization processes, leadership structure in rebel groups, and the role of identity in rebel groups survival.

[news]

PSAI Annual Conference

From 8th to 9th October 2021, SPIRe hosted the annual conference of the Political Science Association of Ireland (PSAI). The conference at the O'Reilly Hall and the University Club at UCD was for many attendees the first face-to-face conference since the Covid-19 lockdowns. Organized by SPIRe colleagues: Dawn Walsh, Stefan Müller and James Cross, the conference included the presentation of 100 papers across 29 panels; a keynote speech by Prof. Catherine de Vries; an introduction to the new Electoral Commission by Art O'Leary; a roundtable discussion on academic freedom; a discussion on the UN Climate Summit; and a conference dinner with an awards ceremony.

[news]

Showered with awards

SPIRe was particularly pleased with the number of awards we won at the PSAI this year. PhD graduate Mary Brennan won the Basil Chubb prize for the best thesis in Ireland in 2020. Aidan Regan and Stefan Müller (photo, credit PSAI) won the Elizabeth Meehan prize for the best paper at the

previous conference, based on their paper: "The Compass of Irish Politics is Moving to the Left". Finally, James Cross won the PSAI Teaching and Learning prize.



[intern interview]

Policy assistant in Brussels

In every November issue of this newsletter we will interview a recent alumnus or current student from SPIRe who recently did an internship as part of their studies. In this first issue we speak with Bonaldi Da Costa, who is a graduate of our MEconSc European Public Affairs and Law Programme, and who spent the summer trimester in Brussels as a policy assistant to the former President, Henri Malosse. We interview Bonaldi below.

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

Massively, I have to say. It's a competitive city, Brussels. And, you hear the stories - it can be a difficult process getting your foot in the door. Fortunately, the combination of a good education and the EU institutional experience helped me land a role in a public affairs consultancy soon after my internship and I have not looked back since.

What is your most memorable moment of studying in UCD?

Undoubtedly, the field trip to the institutions in both Brussels and Luxembourg. Brilliant memories from it, with the majority unquotable, but a great few days all round.



What advice would you give our current master students?

Be brave and put yourself out there. It's a competitive labour market but you'll find that professionals, by and large, are willing to give tips and advice on how to navigate it - so reach out to those in your field of interest. Cultivating a strong network is key and it's never too early to start.

[*thesis highlight*]

Best thesis award

The rapid spread of political gender quotas throughout the world has been one of the most significant electoral reforms of recent times. Yet the success of these schemes varies greatly. Mary Brennan's (photo, credit PSAI) prize-winning thesis answers the question: "How does variation in intra-party processes, party culture and party leadership mediate the impact of gender quotas on female candidate selection and election?" Over a series of four studies many explanatory factors are found to be at play.

The thesis begins with a study of unconscious bias by looking at how the electorate responds to variations in marginality of seats in the implementation of a voluntary quota in Irish local elections. This study finds evidence of such bias but for a single party with a particularly centralised organisational structure. Another study indeed finds evidence that parties with highly centralised selection processes select fewer women. Further, that parties in the context of a legislative gender quota select more women, but this does not necessarily lead to more elected women. A next study investigates the

Irish 2016 General Election, the first legislated quota in a Single Transferable Vote electoral system, and the impact of an open ballot structure on candidate selection behaviour.

After these quantitative papers, a final study applies an in-depth, qualitative analysis of four case studies in two countries, comparing parties liberals and social democrats in Ireland and the Netherlands. The analysis finds remarkable similarity in the informal processes of parties of the same political family, despite their operation in very different electoral systems.

This thesis argues that the analysis of intra-party processes through a feminist institutionalist lens can contribute to a greater understanding of the role of bias, both explicit and implicit, in the gendered outcomes of political recruitment. The results highlight the complexity of the selection and election processes within political parties and offer insights for future research.



[*programme highlight*]

MSc in Sustainable Development in partnership with UN SDSN

In September 2015, the United Nations adopted Agenda 2030, an ambitious agenda to promote people, planet, and prosperity. Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted as part of Agenda 2030, setting forth an

ambitious framework of action for countries around the world. UCD has worked with the SDG Academy since its foundation. Patrick Paul Walsh has served on her Academic Oversight Committee since 2012.



The SDG Academy is the online education platform of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), a global initiative for the United Nations. UCD is ranked 14 in the Times Higher World Impact Ranking 2020 for SDG Partnerships (SDG 17) with clear focus on sustainability in the new strategic plan, rising to the future.

The recent Covid-19 crisis has also brought to UCD's attention, the clear need to offer a formal online Masters in Sustainable Development that brings together the best of online resources in the SDG Academy, UN SDSN academic "stars" and experts, with her partner UCD, a leading University in the area of Sustainable Development. This M.Sc. programme is the first online, affordable, global programme of its kind, drawing on the expertise, credibility and network of UCD and UN SDSN to offer cutting edge, global, multi-disciplinary learning for the SDGs.

Brennan, M. (2020). *Progress or tokenism: Assessing the impacts of intra-party processes on gender quota schemes*. PhD thesis 14468, University College Dublin.

Herman, L.E., Hoerner, J., and Lacey, J. (2021). Why does the European Right accommodate backsliding states? An analysis of 24 European People's Party votes (2011–2019). *European Political Science Review* 13, 169–187.

Müller, S. and Regan, A. (2021). Are Irish voters moving to the left?, *Irish Political Studies*.