

CALL FOR PAPERS

A Global History of Neutrality during the Second World War

Workshop

University College Dublin

5-6 June 2026

Neutrality did not protect states from the events of the Second World War nor did it preclude their involvement. Some contributed to military developments by supplying belligerents with vital raw materials for arms production. Others went further, abandoning their neutrality for belligerency or at least non-belligerency. Some allowed belligerents the use of their strategic ports and bases whilst others saw their borders violated, witnessing the conflict play out directly on their soil. Away from the battlefields, neutral states became hotbeds of clandestine activity where propaganda and intelligence agents both gathered and disseminated information, however authentic, in order to sway the attitudes of neutral societies in their favour. Some also promoted and engaged in cross-border cultural exchanges with belligerents, thereby providing tacit, if not explicit, support for the latter's wartime policies. As it was, neutrality was neither understood as, nor pursued in, a singular or static fashion. For this reason, neutral states offer a unique context in which to explore various dimensions of the war.

The topic of neutrality has featured widely in the historiography of the Second World War. However, most studies have focused upon national contexts or remain confined to bilateral relations between a single neutral state and a single belligerent power. This workshop will bring together scholars with an interest in expanding horizons on World War II neutrality studies. Participants will have expertise in neutral states across Europe, North and South America, Africa and Asia. Together, they will explore what a comparative, transoceanic and transnational approach can tell us about neutrality; how it was understood, utilised and maintained by contemporary state and non-state actors; and the extent to which it was either respected or violated by belligerents of the Second World War. To examine and compare the experiences of, and the role played by, neutrals during the war, we invite proposals for papers which address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Contemporary perceptions and definitions of neutrality

- The impact of imperial and colonial connections, and their legacies, on the nature and course of neutral policies
- The effect of the war on neutrals' transnational political, economic, religious, social and cultural networks
- Neutral responses to military developments
- Interactions between neutral states
- The role of neutrals in the provision of humanitarian relief
- The legacies of neutrality in the post-war world

Proposals which explore neutral states outside of Europe are especially welcome. The workshop will be structured along the lines of a seminar and will not consist of formal panel presentations. Instead, participants will be asked to pre-circulate a short paper (3,000-5,000 words) which will form the basis of discussion during the workshop. Please send abstracts of no more than 300 words and a short biography to Dr Veronica Barry, veronica.barry@ucd.ie, before 20 February 2026.

This workshop will be held at the School of History and Centre for War Studies at University College Dublin from 5-6 June 2026. It is kindly funded by University College Dublin's College of Arts and Humanities Seed Funding Scheme.