



Centre for Democracy Research Launch

Friday, 19th January 2024

University College Dublin (precise location TBD)

9.30 am – Arrival

9.45 am – President’s address – Orla Feely

09.55 am – Director’ introduction to CDR – Joseph Lacey, SPIRe

10.00 am – Project presentations

- ELECT – Joseph Lacey, SPIRe
- Democracy Challenged – Aidan Regan, SPIRe
- WorkPoliticsBIP – Rosana Pinheiro-Machado, School of Geography
- The Irish Polling Indicator – Stefan Müller, SPIRe

11.00 am – **Guest speaker:** Sanne Kruikemeier, Strategic Communication Group, Wageningen University & Research

‘Hunting for Voters: Implications of Political Targeted Advertising for Democracy ‘

12.00 pm – Lunch

1.00 pm – Maeve Cooke, School of Philosophy

‘Repoliticizing Democratic Theory’

1.40 pm – Lucia Tiscornia, SPIRe

‘TBD’

2.20 pm – Coffee

2.40 pm – Marco Bastos, Information and Communication Studies

‘The Insurrectionist Playbook: Jair Bolsonaro and the National Congress of Brazil’

This event is generously sponsored by the Political Studies Association of Ireland.

3.20 pm – Benedetta Lobina (Presenter) and Laurent Pech, Law

‘Illiberal democracy and EU law: Is there such a thing as “illiberal democracy” and is it compatible with EU membership?’

4.15 pm – **Public lecture: Michael Ignatieff**, Central European University

What if Democracy’s Greatest Enemy is Democracy Itself?

Project and paper abstracts (in order of presentation)

Joseph Lacey – Moral Agency in Election Campaigns (ELECT)

ELECT 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 stakeholders involved in contemporary election campaigns: candidates, campaign professionals, political journalists and citizens. The moral agency of electoral stakeholders becomes a subject of concern when they are confronted with normatively charged situations involving motivations to behave in ways that undermine democratic norms or political trust. The context in which electoral stakeholders exercise their moral agency has been changing, presenting them with new normative challenges relating to their respective electoral conduct. Recent changes include the strategic and communicative possibilities provided by big data and new media and the evolving competitive landscape relating to the emergence of new electoral challengers. Existing research on the tensions between contemporary election campaigns and democracy and political trust has primarily taken campaign outputs as its objects of study. Far less studied are the moral dimensions of the inputs concerning the role that the attitudes, beliefs and motivations of stakeholders play in influencing their conduct and how their moral decision-making is affected by institutions and regulations. Neglect of this input perspective leaves major knowledge gaps that limits 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 stakeholders in four countries that have been subject to recent disruptions in the campaign context, namely Germany, Italy, the UK and the US. Empirical data will be gathered using surveys, elite interviews and citizen focus groups. Diagnostic and prescriptive analyses based on this data will employ state of the art methods in normative democratic theory.

Aidan Reagan – Democracy Challenged: How Global Corporate Tax Avoidance Fuels the Wealth Inequalities that Undermine Democracy

This project develops a new theoretical framework and causal mechanism to explain how corporate tax avoidance fuels the wealth inequalities that undermine democracy. It implements new methodological innovations that explain how global capital evades the fiscal constraints of democracy, using a combination of forensic accounting, in-person interviews, computational text analysis and original survey experiments.



The objectives of the project are guided by two overarching research questions: Why is concentrated capital and wealth inequality a problem for democracy? What is the role of corporate tax avoidance and law in enabling this process? The empirical and comparative case study analysis are designed to answer these questions. First, we explain the global wealth chains and tax avoidance structures of big tech and big pharma multinational groups. Second, we explain how legal-technical actors create these structures and strategies. Third, we explain how their wealth protection strategies destabilise the functioning of democracy. Fourth, we explain the role of the media in politicising corporate tax avoidance as a problem for democracy.

The project has four work packages. First, we construct a new theoretical framework, typology and causal mechanism to explain how corporate tax avoidance leads to the wealth inequalities that undermine democracy. Second, we explain the tax avoiding wealth chains of big tech and big pharma using a combination of forensic accounting and statistical mapping techniques. Third, we explain how legal-technical actors create these structures using a combination of in-person interviews, list survey experiments and computational text analysis. Fourth, we implement a cross-national survey experiment to explain the role of the media in disrupting the political consensus of legal-technical experts. Finally, we develop a set of new normative principles to guide how governments can respond in a democracy-enhancing way.

Rosana Pinheiro-Machado – Flexible Work, Rigid Politics in Brazil, India, and the Philippines (WorkPoliticsBIP)

The WorkPoliticsBIP project investigates the nexus between labour precariousness and authoritarian politics in Brazil, India, and the Philippines (BIP). In the early 2000s, emergent economies were promising global democratic powers. Yet, democratic consolidation faces significant challenges in the face of BIP nations electing populist authoritarian politicians. The understanding of such a process remains fragmented or limited to a global North repertoire. This project proposes a framework that examines emerging economies' development contradictions, namely economic growth that fostered new aspirational and entrepreneurial classes amidst labour precariousness. Strong evidence shows that sectors removed from poverty supported authoritarian politicians in the BIP countries. We interrogate why and how this occurs. The research team explores two intertwined phenomena: (a) the sociological roots related to platform labour precariousness that makes this convergence possible (sense of authenticity, isolation, individualism, competitiveness, entrepreneurial spirit), and (b) the technological infrastructure that promotes and reconfigures interactions between the two axes.

Stefan Müller – The Irish Polling Indicator

The Irish Polling Indicator, established in 2014, combines all Irish opinion polls for the Dáil Éireann into a single estimate of public support for the parties from 1987 to 2023. These estimates are continuously updated following the release of new polls. An additional component, the Irish Demographic Polling Datasets, offers insights into Irish citizens' voting intentions, satisfaction with the government, and approval ratings of party leaders. The data encompass the full set of respondents as well as various sub-samples, including age groups, gender, region, and social class. Websites for both projects feature a range of interactive graphs and detailed explanations of the methodologies used. The projects were financially supported by the 2021 Strategic Funding Scheme of the UCD College of Social Sciences and



Law. In this presentation, I explore the impact of these projects on the general public, academics, politicians, and political advisors. I conclude by offering recommendations for researchers and practitioners interested in developing similar publicly accessible datasets and websites.

Irish Polling Indicator: <https://pollingindicator.com>

Irish Demographic Polling Datasets: <https://irishdempolling.shinyapps.io/dashboard/>

Sanne Kruikemeier – Hunting for Voters: Implications of Political Targeted Advertising for Democracy

Persuading voters is at the heart of any political campaign. Advances in technology are offering new opportunities for candidates to reach out to voters. Political campaigns today combine data-driven voter research with personalized political advertising and use online microtargeting techniques. In this context, in the talk, Kruikemeier will explore whether these techniques are a threat to democracy. It will study the effects of data-driven microtargeting and digital persuasion to identify under which conditions and to what extent they affect citizens' attitudes, opinions, and vote decisions. Using a mix of research methods and taking a comparative perspective, the project will assess the benefits and risks.

Maeve Cooke - Repoliticizing Democratic Theory

My paper seeks to contribute toward repoliticizing democratic theory by highlighting the political importance of subjective ethical convictions and commitments. The importance of recognizing value pluralism has led some of the most prominent contemporary political theories to favour normative models of democratic will-formation and decision-making that are ethically abstinent. On the assumption that ethical disagreements are intractable and ethical conflicts divisive, they define democratic legitimacy in purely formal terms, requiring citizens to set aside their particular ethical convictions and commitments when deliberating or making decisions on matters of general political concern. I contend that this kind of formalist approach leads to a privatization of ethical concerns with unwelcome consequences. One of these is depoliticization. Formalist approaches are depoliticizing, first, in the sense of demotivating: They foster a disengaged mode of democratic politics that abstracts from the ethical quality of laws, political decisions, and policies, making the subjective importance of ethical-existential questions a matter of political indifference. They are depoliticizing, second, in the sense that they are conducive toward unquestioning acceptance of the ethical-existential values undergirding the established political procedures, facilitating the reproduction of the political status quo and discouraging radically transformative political action. Against this, I take the view that contemporary democratic theory should acknowledge the political importance of ethical-existential questions, not least if it is to meet the challenges posed by our disastrous ecological situation. This requires it, in turn, to engage with the question of ethical-existential validity.

Marco Bastos – The Insurrectionist Playbook: Jair Bolsonaro and the National Congress of Brazil

This study unpacks the 2022 Brazilian Presidential campaign marked by multiple claims of electoral fraud and calls for a coup d'état by supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro. We



identify the narrative frames underpinning this insurrectionist playbook by analyzing Bolsonaro's statements during the presidential campaign. We subsequently test the penetration of this playbook on members of the Brazilian National Congress during the campaign trail and the transition of power to the opposition candidate, when pro-Bolsonaro protesters attempted to overthrow the Federal Government. Our analyses lend support to the thesis that the coup d'état was not successful due to the dwindling support beyond the hard-core Bolsonaro base. Our results also describe an insurrectionist playbook largely centered on the blueprint of false claims of electoral fraud, a playbook that can be monitored through the public statements of elected officials. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and recommendations for future research.