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Independence**

Henry, Mark

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Understanding A Century of Exceptional Progress: Ireland Since Independence

Commentary accompanying the book 'In Fact: An Optimist's Guide to Ireland at 100'

By
Mark Henry

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Abstract

Ireland has achieved remarkable economic growth and social progress since its foundation as an independent state in December 1922. In just one hundred years it has risen from being poverty-stricken to having the second highest quality of life in the world.

The Irish live longer than ever before, have never been healthier, and have never been better educated. There have never been more at work, yesterday's luxuries are now commonplace, and its society is safer and more tolerant than ever before. The lives of women and children have improved vastly, and the Irish are amongst the happiest people on the planet.

Ireland is an excellent case study in progress – the relative absence of it for the first fifty years post-independence, followed by a dramatic period of transformative change in the following fifty. My work *In Fact: An Optimist's Guide to Ireland at 100* is the first data-driven history of Ireland's first century and seeks to explain the reasons behind Ireland's extraordinary rise.¹

Introduction

It is a common perception that human progress in recent decades has been limited or non-existent despite the evidence to the contrary. A survey of the populations of seventeen of the world's most developed countries found that more than six in ten people thought the world was getting worse. Three in ten said it was staying the same or they didn't know; leaving a mere one in ten who said it was getting better.²

A spate of recent literature has challenged this perception. Historian and economist Deirdre Nansen McCloskey, psychologist Steven Pinker, health professor Hans Rosling, journalist Matt Ridley, and historians Johan Norberg and Rutger Bregman are amongst those who have challenged the notion through the provision of quantitative and qualitative data to the contrary.³ Some of these authors have been collectively christened “the new optimists”.⁴

In practically all instances their analyses are of global or American data. Yet one of the countries that has excelled in its economic and social progress over the past century has been Ireland. In the past two decades alone, Ireland's development has seen it jump more than twenty places in the United Nation's Development Programme's Human Development index to attain the second highest quality of life ranking in the world (second only to Norway).⁵ It has risen more places than any other developed nation since the UNDP rankings were first published in 1990. Ireland's extraordinary success is worthy of exploration in its own right and in the context of the analytic frameworks of these progressive authors.

My book is written for a non-academic audience, and published by Ireland's largest publisher, with the objective of ensuring its analysis achieves as wide a circulation as

¹ M. Henry, *In Fact: An Optimist's Guide to Ireland at 100* (Gill Books, 2021).

² W. Dahlgreen, 'Chinese people are most likely to feel the world is getting better', *YouGov.co.uk*, 5 January 2016, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2016/01/05/chinese-people-are-most-optimistic-world>, accessed October 2022.

³ D.N. McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity* (University of Chicago Press, 2011). D.N. McCloskey & A. Carden, *Leave Me Alone and I'll Make You Rich: How the Bourgeois Deal Enriched the World* (University of Chicago Press, 2020). S. Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (Penguin, 2012). S. Pinker, *Enlightenment Now* (Penguin Books, 2019). H. Rosling, O. Rosling & A. Rosling Rönnlund, *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong about the World - and Why Things Are Better than You Think* (Sceptre, 2019). M. Ridley, *The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves* (Harper, 2010). J. Norberg, *Open: The Story of Human Progress* (Atlantic Books, 2020). R. Bregman, *Humankind: A hopeful history* (Hachette, 2020).

⁴ O. Burkeman, 'Is the world really better than ever?', *The Guardian*, 28 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/jul/28/is-the-world-really-better-than-ever-the-new-optimists>

⁵ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene*, (UNDP, 2020).

possible. This commentary adds a rigorous academic context for the work, positioning it amongst other analyses of Ireland's historical progress, considering the comparative nature of the country's success and the identified success factors, explaining the innovative contribution of my model, considering counterfactual narratives and alternative analyses, and expanding on the political science and psychology research findings highlighted in the work.

Objective

The aim of my book *In Fact* is to:

1. Quantify the positive progress attained during the country's first century since gaining independence from the United Kingdom in 1922
2. Evidence the assertion that Ireland's improvement has been extraordinary across multiple domains, on occasion using comparative data to do so
3. Identify the causal factors that account for this progress, and the policy implications arising
4. Explain why the extent of progress is not widely recognised amongst the general public

The focus of the work was on the Republic of Ireland; it did not seek to include the development of Northern Ireland which remained part of the UK and, hence, subject to different policy direction and outcomes.

Scope & Methodology

To make a comprehensive case for national progress I sought to identify indicators across a broad range of dimensions – e.g. economic, health, education, social, cultural, environmental, and psychological. I identified the major quantitative variables indicative of progress on these dimensions from a review of comparative works at a global, continental, or national level. This review encompassed the works on progress referenced in the introduction, as well the publications and available databanks of multinational institutions such as the EU, UN, OECD, and World Bank. I also identified variables for which Ireland's performance was known to be exceptional, frequently sourcing these from Irish media reports.

I then sought data sources for these indicators for Ireland, preferring those whose time series extended as far as possible – ideally back as far as 1922. Official national statistical sources and comparative sources produced by multinational organisations were preferred. Irish data for some variables could not be identified and the measure was, therefore, excluded from the analysis.⁶ Where data was available across various datasets covering different time periods, I constructed a single comparable time series.

The data was imported into Excel and charted. Charts highlighting the data that best represented an improving trend or demonstrated the current high quality of life pertaining in Ireland were then incorporated into the published work. Where comparative data was available, and where it was relevant to consider in the context of the topic under discussion, I also downloaded and imported this to identify if Ireland's performance was distinctly different from comparable countries – a topic that I would then seek to explore in subsequent interviews.

⁶ Examples include changes in the population IQ level over time, use of pesticides in food production over time, changes in the time parents spend with their children, international music sales by Irish artists, international book sales by Irish authors, and national crime statistics which the Central Statistics Office has placed "under reservation" given data quality concerns.

One hundred data points reflecting positive progress were selected for publication, alongside ten reflecting negative trends. Data from sixty different sources feature in the book. (The list of all published data points and their sources are contained in Appendix A.)

I justify the exclusion from the publication of data that showed no notable trend, or that which demonstrated a deterioration, on the basis that the objective of the work is to quantify positive progress and, furthermore, that the absence of a trend is of limited interest to general readers. While it can be argued that any exclusion means that the work embodies a selection bias and fails to provide a balanced picture of the nation's development, I sought to address this by including a chapter dedicated to exploring a series of negative trends. Such data exclusions were, however, relatively few in practice and would have not countered the overall evidence for national progress in any meaningful way.⁷

The next step was to then understand the historical occurrences, policy decisions, and underlying factors that accounted for the demonstrated change. Subject matter experts were selected to provide insight into the progress in each area based on their authorship of pertinent academic publications and/or their job role in the area. The published literature was primarily sourced from searches of Research Gate, Google Scholar, and Google Search. Authors whose works reviewed historical and policy developments in Ireland over a timespan that included the twentieth century were favoured. Interviews with these experts supplemented my primary and secondary sources, enabling a wide range of historical events to be distilled and the pertinent factors prioritised by those with a deep understanding of their domain.

Practically all my first-choice interviewees were willing to participate. In the few cases where someone was unable to do so, I used these same criteria to identify suitable alternative experts to cover the same domain. The interviews were semi-structured, with questions designed to explore the patterns evident in the data, the changes that had occurred in the domain area over the century, the leading policy initiatives or events that had contributed to this change, and why Ireland was comparatively better or worse than similar nations where this was evidently the case. A sample of the questions that were developed in advance of one expert interview are included in Appendix B. Insight and quotations from forty-seven such expert interviews appear in the book. The list of interviewees is contained in Appendix C.

This data-first approach of identifying the historical data and then subsequently eliciting the narrative and explanation for the evident pattern differs in approach from that of most of the Irish historiography. (This contribution will be placed in context within the literature review below.)

The quantitative data combined with the expert narratives together tell a potent story of exceptional national progress. Content analysis of the expert commentary, combined with the author's literature review, identified four macro factors which, I argue, account for the country's comparatively strong progress: stability, community, education, and openness.

Finally, in order to explain why the public, media and commentators are slow to recognise this progress, I reviewed the cognitive biases identified by psychology researchers – sourcing comprehensive lists of these from online journals and psychology websites.⁸ I selected five that I judged to be most pertinent in terms of their likelihood of having the greatest impact in reducing people's perception of positive progress, verifying their veracity by sourcing literature reviews in the psychological literature. These are: the negativity bias, the illusory truth effect, the reminiscence bump, prevalence-induced concept change, and

⁷ Examples include measures of national innovation such as the number of patents filed from Ireland or the country's ranking in measures such as the Global Innovation Index, the number of Olympic medals per capita, government social spending as a share of GDP, CO₂ emissions per Euro of GDP, and the number of refugees hosted relative to GDP.

⁸ The review was conducted online through library search engines, the American Psychological Society's PsycNet, Research Gate, Google Scholar, and Google.com.

shifting baselines. I identified that the shifting baselines bias was framed as an explanation of why people fail to understand slowly-occurring environmental deterioration – rather than slowly-occurring environmental improvement – and I renamed this as ‘Progress Attention Deficit’, acknowledging that the same cognitive limitations are at work.

The strengths of the selected methodology were several. Leading with a quantitative data-centric analysis offered the prospect of a potentially less subjective evaluation of progress over the century. It also represented the application of a cliometric approach to historical analysis which is an original contribution to the Irish historiography.⁹ New datasets that were brought into the historiography as a result include, for example, the number of road deaths 1922-2020, the number of overseas holidays taken as a proportion of the population 1992–2019, the number of Irish pubs per continent, countries ranked by their population’s acts of generosity 2009–18, the number of states that started prohibiting corporal punishment of children in various decades 1970s–2010s, tonnes of fine particulate matter emitted in Ireland 1990–2018, and average annual private donations for overseas aid per citizen 2017–19. The breadth of data coverage enabled the work to examine very many facets of Irish life including economic, political, medical, educational, social, cultural, and environmental.

Incorporation of expert opinion further enabled the work’s comprehensive coverage and presented an opportunity to build on the analyses of other historians by incorporating their insight. It ensured coverage of very recent events where there was little or none in the published literature. The input provided me with expert analysis of the critical success factors for Ireland’s progress, rather than relying on my non-expert view even where this might have been informed by a wide-ranging literature review. This approach, furthermore, facilitated content analysis of the factors that the experts identified as positively contributing to progress, thereby assisting the development of a model of nation development. Quoting the experts in the text also helped to make the work more engaging for readers, and the credibility of those contributors helped to increase its impact. The incorporation of literature and models from other disciplines, most notably psychology, also enabled fresh perspectives to be brought to bear to the existing historiography.

However, no work is without its limitations. As acknowledged above, my book had the objective of telling a positive story of progress so negative or neutral trend data were not prioritised (albeit not entirely excluded), thereby potentially providing a less balanced picture of the century.

The wide breadth of the work also entailed a reliance on a limited number of experts to explore the factors that delivered progress within each domain, thereby increasing the risk of subjectivity and selectivity that is inherent in oral history.¹⁰ This may have resulted in some initiatives or events being missed or deprioritised that would have been captured through a greater number of expert interviews in each area. The mix of academic and practitioner interviewees will also have provided different perspectives with different time horizons (e.g. the time horizon of their academic studies versus the time horizon of their professional careers). It was in an effort to counter this that experts were selected for their breadth of knowledge of their area and (where relevant) a publication record which demonstrated their grasp of relevant historical developments.

The data analysis undertaken in the study was also relatively rudimentary. I did not deploy some of the more advanced analytical tools evident in cliometric research, partly because the raw datasets were rarely available to me. Similarly, in the development of my model of the factors accounting for Ireland’s development, the content analysis I undertook was qualitative in nature rather than carried out with quantitative tools for textual analysis of interview transcripts.

⁹ Cliometrics refers to the application of statistics and data processing to the study of history and will be explored in more depth later in the commentary.

¹⁰ P. Leavy, *Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

Nevertheless, in the round, I believe that the deployed methodology proved fit for purpose in allowing me to deliver on the publication's objectives, viz. to quantify positive progress since 1922, to evidence the assertion that Ireland's improvement has been extraordinary across multiple domains, to identify the causal factors that account for this progress, and to explain why the extent of progress is not widely recognised amongst the general public.

The Submitted Work

The completed work is 127,000 words in length, published across 481 pages, with 395 endnotes referencing other published work and data sources. The work makes an original contribution to knowledge in several respects, namely:

1. Such a unique, wide-ranging, data-driven analysis of Ireland's performance as an independent nation has never before been published, utilising more than 110 data sets from 60 different sources and 47 expert interviews. The comparative scope of the book also exceeds that of similar work.
2. An original four-factor model accounting for Ireland's success is outlined consisting of the development of social capital, institutional capital, and human capital, nurtured by openness.
3. An original model for the development of national wellbeing is outlined, based on applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the population level.
4. The identification of the leading perceptual biases in human psychology that account for bias in understanding and recalling history.
5. This is an interdisciplinary work combining modern history, data analytics, political and economic theory and psychology.

I will now expand on each of these points.

As I show in the literature review below, other major reviews of modern Irish history contain relatively sparse coverage of the most recent decades – my book is the first major work to cover the full century of Ireland's independence – and none of them has been as extensively data driven. My work can, therefore, be framed within the school of cliometrics. 'Cliometrics' refers to "the application of methods developed in other fields (such as economics, statistics, and data processing) to the study of history".¹¹ My use of an extensive collection of datasets spanning a wide variety of domains – including economic, social, cultural, and political – represents an original application of a cliometric approach to the study of Ireland's progress.

My analysis of the data and the expert insight identified four contributing factors to Ireland's progress: stability, community, education, and openness. This original model seeks to explain the country's comparatively strong performance:

1. Ireland has been a *stable* democratic state with governments that have pursued consistent centrist policies over a prolonged period. The resultant continuity of policy and investment programmes over a sufficiently long time helped to ensure their success. This was bolstered by a social partnership approach with participation by employers, unions and civic society that resulted in shared investment priorities and the building of 'institutional capital'. I adopt Platje's definition of institutional capital as "institutions, institutional governance and governance structures that reduce uncertainty, stimulate adaptive efficiency (i.e. the ability of a system to adapt to changing conditions) and stimulates the functioning of the allocation system and sustainable production and consumption patterns".¹²

¹¹ 'Cliometrics', *Merriam-Webster.com*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cliometrics>, accessed 10 September 2022.

¹² J. Platje, 'Institutional capital as a factor of sustainable development, The importance of institutional equilibrium', *Baltic Journal on Sustainability*, 14:2 (2008), pp.144-150.

2. Civic partnership and a lack of extreme politics engendered trust throughout society. As a small nation, with a strong sense of *community*, trust in each other tends to be higher than in other places. That was essential for the building of the 'social capital' that encouraged people to live and work together for their mutual benefit and to underpin sustained progress. I align with Putnam's definition of social capital as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit".¹³
3. Successive government investment in *education* developed 'human capital'. High education levels have both attracted foreign investors and stimulated local business development, providing the professions and private and public sectors with outstanding capability. My definition of human capital aligns with that of the OECD, namely "the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social, and economic well-being".¹⁴
4. Ireland has been rated as the most *open*, globalised country in the world. The Irish have shown themselves to be open to new ideas, to new technology, to social diversity, and to immigration. The accrual of institutional, social, and human capital allowed Ireland to compete strongly on the global stage for the financial capital necessary to help its people flourish.

While some authors have argued for the primacy of one or the other of these factors, my analysis of the Irish experience suggests a mutually symbiotic combination contributes to greater progress.¹⁵

My model seeks to be explanatory rather than merely descriptive and, in that respect, gives rise to a theory of national development that can be subsequently tested in quantitative analysis of other countries and their development.

I review the emerging literature on national well-being, highlighting the factors that contribute to happiness at a national level (Table 1).¹⁶ I demonstrate throughout the work how Ireland has made substantial progress in the factors that have been linked to high performance. These include, for example, economic development, the level of democracy, political stability, adequate income security, a high level of trust, and personal and political freedom. I also present confirmatory data showing the resultant high levels of life satisfaction and happiness amongst the Irish population.¹⁷

¹³ R.D. Putnam, 'Bowling alone: America's declining social capital', *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (1995), pp.65-78.

¹⁴ OECD, *The Well-being of Nations: The Role of Human and Social Capital* (OECD Publishing, 2001).

¹⁵ For example, D. Acemoglu & J. A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (Crown, 2012), argue for the primacy of institutional capital.

¹⁶ M. Henry, pp.374-377.

¹⁷ M. Henry, pp.372-374.

Table 1: Factors that contribute to happiness at a national and a personal level¹⁸

| What makes a population happy | What makes a person happy |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Economic development | Higher income |
| Globalisation | Greater education |
| Level of democracy | Being married /cohabiting |
| Rule of law & absence of corruption | Social support |
| Good governance | In employment |
| Political stability | Occupational prestige |
| A progressive tax regime | Work-life balance |
| Adequate income security | Good health |
| A good healthcare system | Physical activity |
| Healthy natural environment | Leisure pursuits |
| Urbanisation | Holidays |
| High level of trust & community | Generosity |
| Personal & political freedom | Sense of meaningfulness |
| A flourishing society | |

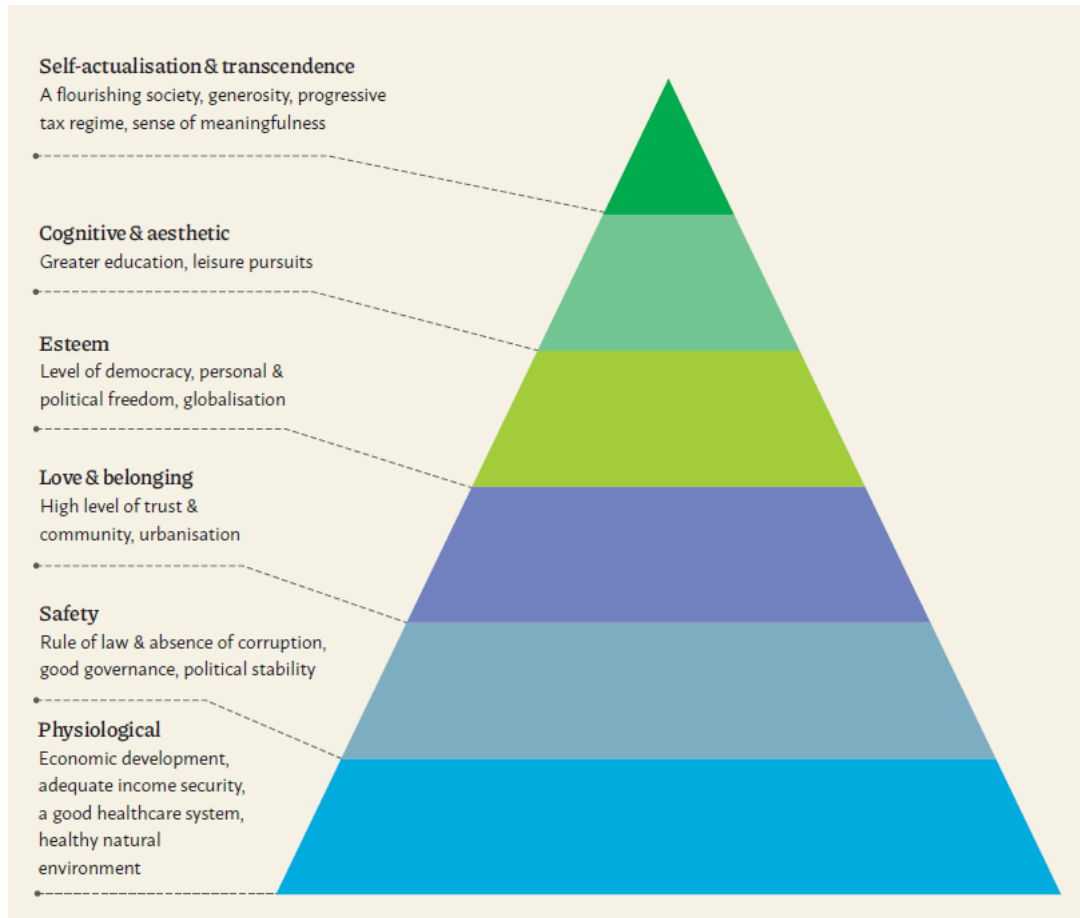
I, furthermore, derive an original model for the development of national wellbeing, based on applying Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the population level.¹⁹ Maslow is best known for his work in identifying the hierarchy of human needs.²⁰ I took the factors that have been identified as contributing to the well-being of a country's population and mapped them onto his model to produce a hierarchy of national needs. The resultant blueprint for national well-being supports the contention that the progress Ireland has made over the past fifty years has contributed directly to its citizens' welfare.

¹⁸ This table can be found on page 374 of the book, with the source references listed on page 466 in footnote number 10.

¹⁹ M. Henry, pp.381-384.

²⁰ A.H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (second edition, Harper & Row, 1970).

Figure 1: The blueprint for national well-being: a hierarchy of public needs



Given the misperception of limited human progress in the modern era, I also explore five leading psychological biases that account for a poor understanding of recent history, thereby blinding populations to positive progress. These are:

- *Negativity bias*: we pay more attention to bad news than to good news.
- The *illusory truth effect*: if a false statement is repeated often enough, we will start to believe it.
- The *remembrance bump*: a sense that things were better when we were younger.
- *Prevalence-induced concept change*: when problems become rarer, we count more things as problems.
- What I have labelled *progress attention deficit*: our inability to recognise slowly occurring positive change in our natural, socio-cultural, political and economic environment.

My literature review located no publication that identified as comprehensive a set of biases as these, and none that refer to the relevant academic literature. My work, therefore, appears to provide the most academically rigorous analysis yet of cognitive bias in the public's perception of historical progress.

Historiography & Literature Review

I discuss here the major works overviewing modern Irish history, the writing of the new optimists, other work on capital models, modern cliometric writing, and works that discuss the impact of cognitive biases on perceptions of history and progress. I highlight the distinctive contribution of my work to these areas within each section.

Writings on Modern Irish History

I have considered the leading overviews of modern Irish history for this commentary, focusing on those that have been published within the past twenty years and which have covered the history of the nation since independence. This includes works by Foster, Ferriter, Bielenberg and Ryan, Bourke and McBride, Bartlett, O'Dowd, and O'Gráda and O'Rourke.²¹ However, these analyses contain little to no coverage of the most recent period of modern Irish history, i.e. the decade following the collapse of the Celtic Tiger and the Great Recession. My book is the first major work to cover the full century of Ireland's independence.

While my methodology and data-centric approach differ from the more traditional approaches taken by these authors, a content review of their works demonstrates much alignment on the factors identified for Ireland's development. As most of their explanations map onto one or more of my model's four factors, such an analysis offers supportive validity for the model.

Evidence of Ireland's strength of community, and high levels of social capital, are advanced by Ferriter who references a high degree of social consensus and the power of community organisations, and Foster who points to an absence of class politics (also suggested by McGarry) and the relative absence of divisive media commentary.²² Both authors, along with Bielenberg & Ryan, specifically call out the role of 'social partnership' between the government, trade unions and civic society in the 1980s, 90s and 00s as an important contributor to national progress.²³ O'Tuathaigh, further, acknowledges such social capital and posits that it is due to high levels of conformity with the values and teaching of the Catholic Church.²⁴

Evidence of Ireland's 'stability' and high levels of institutional capital are advanced by practically every historian. The lack of ideological differences evident amongst the major political parties, and their respective support for each other's policies at times of crisis, is widely cited.²⁵ The lack of civic and political radicalism is cited, with McGarry and O'Tuathaigh arguing that mass emigration and relatively high levels of land ownership were contributory factors to this.²⁶

A degree of institutional capital was acquired through the continuation of the British model of government upon the formation of the State and a high degree of centralisation.²⁷ Foster cites an alignment of Northern Ireland policy with the British government due to better Irish-UK relations in the 1980s and 1990s (also identified by O'Hagan and O'Tuathaigh) and the NI peace process as aiding stability.²⁸

²¹ R.F. Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000* (Penguin Books, 2007). D. Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (Profile Books, 2012). A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland Since Independence* (Routledge, 2013). R. Bourke & I. McBride (eds.), *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (Princeton University Press, 2016). T. Bartlett (ed.) *Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume IV: 1880 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). N. O'Dowd, *A New Ireland: How Europe's Most Conservative Country Became Its Most Liberal* (Skyhorse, 2020). C. O'Gráda & K.H. O'Rourke, 'The Irish economy during the century after partition', *Economic History Review*, 75 (2022), pp.336-70.

²² R.F. Foster, *ibid.* D. Ferriter (2012), *ibid.* D. Ferriter, 'Twenty-First Century Ireland', in R. Bourke & I. McBride (eds.), *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (Princeton University Press, 2016), pp.168-189. F. McGarry, 'Independent Ireland', in R. Bourke & I. McBride (eds.), *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (Princeton University Press, 2016), pp.109-140.

²³ A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *ibid.*

²⁴ G. O'Tuathaigh, 'Ireland 1880-2016: Negotiating Sovereignty and Freedom', in T. Bartlett (ed.) *Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume IV: 1880 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.1-29.

²⁵ A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *ibid.* D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.* R.F. Foster, *ibid.* B. Girvin, 'Ireland Transformed? Modernisation, Secularisation and Conservatism since 1973', in T. Bartlett (ed.) *Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume IV: 1880 to the Present*, (Cambridge University Press, 2018) pp.407-440. F. McGarry, *ibid.*

²⁶ D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.* R.F. Foster, *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.* G. O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.*

²⁷ R.F. Foster, *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.* G. O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.* E. O'Halpin, 'Endword: Ireland Looking Outwards, 1880-2016', in T. Bartlett (ed.) *Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume IV: 1880 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.809-837.

²⁸ R.F. Foster, *ibid.* O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.* J. O'Hagan, 'The Irish Economy 1973 to 2016', in T. Bartlett (ed.) *Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume IV: 1880 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.500-526.

There is a widespread acknowledgement of the success in the construction of a coherent and democratic state that proved stable and relatively corruption-free while good political management is highlighted by some (Foster, McGarry) and improved fiscal and monetary management by others (Bielenberg, Bielenberg & Ryan).²⁹

The importance of extending accessibility to second and third levels of education, leading to an increase in human capital and availability of skilled labour – particularly through growing female labour force participation – is identified by practically all historians as a critical success factor for Ireland's growth.³⁰ This was aided by favourable demographic conditions given a relatively young population.³¹

Finally, Ireland's pivot to an open economy from the late 1950s, and its consequent adoption of an export-led growth strategy, the foundation of the Industrial Development Authority to attract inward investment, and the provision of low taxation and subsidies for foreign investment are identified by practically all the authors as contributing to national development.³² The extension of this open strategy to include joining the European Economic Community in 1973, thereby benefiting from European structural and agricultural funding, the introduction of the Single Market in 1992, the decision to join the euro single currency in 1999, and a healthy external economic environment, are considered formative.³³

An open mindset and openness to behavioural change is referenced by many. An openness to embracing rapid, fundamental change is cited by Foster as a comparative differentiating factor for the Irish. The embrace of feminism and secularism, with a corresponding loss of power for patriarchy and the Catholic Church, is considered pivotal by many.³⁴ O'Hagan (citing Haughton) considers an increasing embrace of entrepreneurship as important.³⁵ O'Tuathaigh also references an openness to changes in issues of national sovereignty and boundaries.³⁶

The influence of the media in opening up Irish minds to new ideas and to world developments is cited by a few.³⁷ O'Halpin also cites mass emigration and the work of Church missionaries in forging links between the Irish people and places overseas.³⁸ While openness to immigration, and a consequent elastic labour supply, are cited as conferring a comparative advantage by Foster and Bielenberg & Ryan.³⁹

The fact that the Irish are native English language speakers is one of the only factors cited by several historians that is not explicitly covered in my four-factor model, along with Ireland's strong cultural and diaspora links with the USA and UK.⁴⁰

Although other historians have, therefore, identified a range of factors that have contributed to Ireland's remarkable progress, none have attempted to synthesise them into a collection of overarching factors, as I have. My model unites practically all of the individual factors identified by others in a capital centric model (human, social, and institutional), super-powered by openness.

²⁹ R.F. Foster, *ibid.* D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.* E. O'Halpin, *ibid.* G. O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.* A. Bielenberg, 'Economy in Independent Ireland', in R. Bourke & I. McBride (eds.), *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (Princeton University Press, 2016), p.425-446. A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *ibid.*

³⁰ A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *ibid.* D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.* R.F. Foster, *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.* N. O'Dowd, *ibid.* C. O'Gráda & K.H. O'Rourke, *ibid.* J. O'Hagan, *ibid.* G. O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.*

³¹ A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *ibid.* D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.* R.F. Foster, *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.*

³² A. Bielenberg, *ibid.* D. Ferriter (2016), *ibid.* R.F. Foster, *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.* N. O'Dowd, *ibid.* C. O'Gráda & K.H. O'Rourke, *ibid.* E. O'Halpin, *ibid.* G. O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.*

³³ A. Bielenberg, *ibid.* A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *ibid.* D. Ferriter (2016), *ibid.* R.F. Foster, *ibid.* B. Girvin, *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.* N. O'Dowd, *ibid.* C. O'Gráda & K.H. O'Rourke, *ibid.* J. O'Hagan, *ibid.* E. O'Halpin, *ibid.* G. O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.*

³⁴ D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.* R.F. Foster, *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.* N. O'Dowd, *ibid.* G. O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.*

³⁵ J. O'Hagan, *ibid.*

³⁶ G. O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.*

³⁷ D. Ferriter (2012), *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.* E. O'Halpin, *ibid.* G. O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.*

³⁸ E. O'Halpin, *ibid.*

³⁹ R.F. Foster, *ibid.* A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ D. Ferriter (2012), *ibid.* R.F. Foster, *ibid.* J. O'Hagan, *ibid.* G. O'Tuathaigh, *ibid.*

The advantage of my approach is its applicability by policy makers and civil society leaders in other jurisdictions, even where the specifics of Ireland's situation may not have parallels. It is, furthermore, a model that can be empirically tested through studies of nation development elsewhere.

The historiography is not without criticism of Ireland's approach to progress or its relative absence in the first half century after independence. In the area of governance (i.e. stability and institutional capital), the strongly centralised nature of government is called out for criticism by some, and there is a view that the culture of political clientelism leads to the absence of a long-term, national perspective amongst elected representatives and gives vested interests undue influence.⁴¹ I, however, counter that the country's Proportional Representation System (Single Transferable Vote) keeps politicians close to the concerns of the electorate in a way that has benefited the democratic system to a greater extent than it has hindered it.⁴² The Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) approach ensures that if 20 per cent of people vote for a certain party then that party is very likely to end up with 20 per cent of the parliamentary seats. It cannot be said that the voice of the voter is not heard. Although it leads to a more fragmented political landscape, I argue that there is strength in diversity. It forces different parties with distinctive policy platforms to come together and agree on common programme for government that can reflect the best of both – enhancing national stability and building institutional capital. Relative to other countries, more of the Irish population are satisfied with how the state does its business than the citizens of nearly anywhere else.⁴³

Ferriter is persistently critical of the lack of long-term policy planning, the lack of regional and physical planning, and the failure to develop democratic institutions such as a welfare state.⁴⁴ While these criticisms are valid, they are common to all democratic systems to some extent as a change of government alters policy direction. Nevertheless, it is fair to acknowledge that the stability in political party representation in government (all governments having been led by either Fianna Fail and/or Fine Gael throughout the century) has not translated into long-term visions for national development. The country's long-term development has, therefore, occurred despite political short-termism, although the desire for continuous improvements in living standards is ever-present in policy formation.

Perhaps the most damning critique of Ireland's institutional capital reserves is the view that the country was badly managed for a long time and, specifically, that major policy errors and poor regulation and oversight led to over-borrowing and bad lending during the Celtic Tiger era and this contributed to a deeper economic crash that necessitated a bailout by the IMF/EU/World Bank and the cost of economic sovereignty in 2010-13.⁴⁵

Such failures are indefensible. However, I am not claiming that Ireland is a bastion of perfect governance, rather that its institutions of state have generally functioned well and with a high degree of consistency over time, and therefore have garnered high levels of public support. The evidence for this is that the institutions of state survived the austerity years unscathed (albeit that some were reformed) and that the electorate's satisfaction with the operation of democracy reached new heights within a decade of the onset of the crash.⁴⁶

In the area of social cohesion (i.e. community), authors highlight the high levels of relative poverty and inequality that existed right up to and through the Celtic Tiger years.⁴⁷

⁴¹ A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *ibid.* D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.*

⁴² M. Henry, pp.252-253.

⁴³ R.S. Foa et al., *The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020* (Centre for the Future of Democracy, 2020).

⁴⁴ D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.*

⁴⁵ A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *ibid.* D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.* B. Girvin, *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.* N. O'Dowd, *ibid.* C. O'Gráda & K.H. O'Rourke, *ibid.* J. O'Hagan, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ M. Henry, pp.250-256.

⁴⁷ D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.* R.F. Foster, *ibid.* F. McGarry, *ibid.*

Discrimination is cited against lower social classes, women (especially unmarried mothers), those identified as “sexually deviant” and outsiders.⁴⁸ And there was a silence and repression of social issues such as child abuse, marriage breakdown, and poverty, as well as widespread tax avoidance and silence on malpractice.⁴⁹

I argue, again, that Ireland’s experience in these areas was common to that of most other countries, but that in all of these domains Ireland has been transformed for the better in the most recent decades and I present the evidence that this is the case.⁵⁰ In some instances, it is the later time coverage of my work that enables further progress to be identified.

O’Gráda & O’Rourke argue that Irish economic performance over the century was in fact typical of its European peers in the long run, with the country underperforming prior to the mid-1980s and then over-performing for the rest of the twentieth century, with slow real growth after 2000.⁵¹ However, their work takes the period 2000 to 2018 as a single unit of analysis in which strong recent growth is masked by the impact of the economic crash of 2008-2010, and subsequent data for 2019 and 2020 (which I cite) is excluded. Furthermore, my analysis includes a wider set of variables that have been linked to high levels of national well-being than just our economic progress.⁵²

The environmental damage caused by progress – particularly as a result of agricultural intensification – is cited only by Foster.⁵³ Nevertheless, I entirely agree that this is the case and I refer to the need to address the loss of natural capital in the next decade as a prerequisite for sustaining further progress.⁵⁴

While acknowledging the periods of advance and setbacks in the nation’s development, my approach differs from some other historians in its assertion of an underlying trend line towards positive improvement across very many domains of Irish life (albeit that, in common with others, I recognise that improvement has occurred primarily over the past fifty years rather than evenly across the full century as the Irish government pivoted to embrace a policy of openness).

For each chapter in the book, I summarise below the main topics that it covers, the scholarly debate in the domain, and I highlight my contribution.

Chapter 1: Living Longer

The chapter highlights the population increase since the 1970s, the reductions in the death rate (e.g. amongst infants, in the workplace, on the roads, and by suicide), and the resultant increase in life expectancy. I note the different decades in which such improvements happened and identify the underlying causes of improvement. I highlight the contribution of public health initiatives such as immunisation, infection control and antenatal screening, publicly funded hard-hitting car safety advertising, and the appointment of trained suicide-prevention experts throughout the country’s health boards. The introduction of new regulations such as Safe Pass health and safety training in the construction sector, and the National Car Test for roadworthy vehicles and mandatory alcohol testing, are also outlined.

⁴⁸ T. Bartlett, ‘Preface’, in T. Bartlett (ed.) *Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume IV: 1880 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), p.xxxi-xxxvi. D. Ferriter (2016), *ibid.* G. O’Tuathaigh, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ A. Bielenberg & R. Ryan, *ibid.* D. Ferriter (2016), *ibid.*

⁵⁰ I discuss declining poverty and inequality in more recent years in M. Henry, pp.163-172; I dedicate a whole chapter to the improvements in the position of women pp.275-294; I explore the radically changed attitudes towards homosexuality, abortion and divorce, pp.267-271; and discuss reduction in corruption, aided by the exposure of malpractice, in pp.257-259.

⁵¹ C. O’Gráda & K.H. O’Rourke, *ibid.*

⁵² M. Henry, pp.374-375.

⁵³ R.F. Foster, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ The World Forum on Natural Capital defines natural capital as “the world’s stocks of natural assets which include geology, soil, air, water and all living things”, cited in: United Nations Statistics Division, *Towards a Definition of Natural Capital*, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/londongroup/meeting21/towards%20a%20definition%20of%20natural%20capital%20-%202nd%20draft.pdf>, accessed 30 April 2023.

My findings align with those of others who have examined the topic of demographic change, such as Fitzgerald and Walsh, although I extend the period under analysis to identify progress in more recent years.⁵⁵ In addition, I highlight Ireland's exceptional comparative performance – for example, showing how life expectancy now exceeds the European average and is higher than that in the UK. I agree with Daly's analysis of the contribution of emigration to a lack of population growth before the 1970s, although Daly also argues that the promotion of large families contributed to late marriages thereby slowing population growth further.⁵⁶

Chapter 2: Living Healthier

The chapter explores health improvements such as reductions in death due to various diseases, improvements in health behaviour such as reduced cigarette consumption, increases in public health spending and public hospital admissions, and high levels of good health in the population. I identify various reasons for this such as the creation of regional health boards in the 1970s, the introduction of national vaccination programmes, public health initiatives targeting smokers, centralisation of cancer treatment, and the introduction of national cancer screening programmes.

I highlight Irish innovations such as the world's first national ban on smoking in the workplaces, including in restaurants and bars, the first EU country to remove all tobacco advertising from retail outlets, and clinician-driven healthcare design. Such policy innovations are discussed in the health and public policy literature, but less frequently in the historiography.⁵⁷

Although the literature is often critical of the organisation and practices in Ireland's health service, I argue that its performance must be considered positively when its outputs and outcomes are considered.⁵⁸ To illustrate this, I cite comparative data showing that Irish people are the most likely in Europe to describe their health as good or very good.

Chapter 3: Eating Better

The chapter contends that the Irish are eating better, more nutritious food and yet spending less on it than ever before whilst also reducing alcohol consumption. The consumption data I present updates that from previous work.⁵⁹ I demonstrate how these changes have led to notable increases in average height over the past century.

While there has been criticism of the lack of top-down strategies to prevent the rise of alcohol consumption in the Celtic Tiger era and subsequently, I argue the opposite by showing the evidence that consumption peaked in 2001 and that policy initiatives and changing attitudes have contributed to a continual decline thereafter.⁶⁰

I also explore how the country produces far more foodstuffs nowadays, yet utilises less land and less manpower to do so. In telling a story of agricultural improvement it builds on previous works.⁶¹ I, furthermore, highlight that Ireland's quantity of food production has

⁵⁵ J. Fitzgerald, 'A Hundred and Fifty Years of Vital Statistics: Documenting Demographic Change in Ireland', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. XLV (2016), pp.177–201. B. Walsh, 'Recent Trends in Mortality and Morbidity in Ireland', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, Vol. XXXVII (2008), pp.95-112. B. Walsh, 'Life Expectancy in Ireland since the 1870s', *The Economic and Social Review*, 48:2 (2017), pp.127–43.

⁵⁶ M.E. Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland 1920–1973* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

⁵⁷ P. Malone and P. O'Connell, 'Trends in Smoking Prevalence and Tobacco Consumption', *PublicPolicy.ie*, https://publicpolicy.ie/downloads/papers/2020/Trends_in_Smoking_Prevalence_and_Tobacco_Consumption.pdf, accessed 3 May 2023. D.T. Studlar, 'Punching Above Their Weight through Policy Learning: Tobacco Control Policies in Ireland', *Irish Political Studies*, 30:1 (2014), pp.41-78.

⁵⁸ M.A. Wren, *Unhealthy State: Anatomy of a Sick Society* (New Island Books, 2003).

⁵⁹ National Nutrition Surveillance Centre, *Changes in the Food Chain since the time of the Great Irish Famine* (Centre for Health Promotion Studies at University College Galway, 1995).

⁶⁰ A. Hope & S. Butler, 'Changes in consumption and harms, yet little policy progress. Trends in alcohol consumption, harms and policy: Ireland 1990-2010', *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, Vol. 27:5 (2010), pp.479-495. D. Ferriter, 'Drink and society in twentieth-century Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol. 115C (2015), pp.1-21.

⁶¹ J. Bell & M. Watson, *A history of Irish farming 1750–1950*. (Four Courts Press, 2008). R. Sexton, *A Little History of Irish Food* (Gill & Macmillan, 1998).

grown to such an extent that it is now rated as the second most food-secure nation on the planet.

Chapter 4: Living Easier

The chapter demonstrates how Ireland shifted from a rural to an urban country, explores the improvements in housing and the availability of utilities and appliances within them, and discusses increases in car use and leisure activities.

I discuss the increased urbanisation, accommodated particularly through the growth of suburban housing, and the provision of public housing in the first half of the century, followed by the reliance on private sector provision in the second half. There is little controversy over the facts of housing provision, although debate exists about whether incentivisation of owner-occupation was the optimal policy and whether the declining extent of public provision represented an abdication of responsibility with negative consequences evident in the current housing shortage.⁶² Irrespective, I demonstrate that the quality of housing has never been better and my focus on the material improvements for each generation fills a gap in the literature identified in Rowley's review.⁶³

Chapter 5: Learning More

The chapter explores increased educational participation at second level, improved pupil-to-teacher ratios, and increased primary school education through Irish. It also explores the remarkable growth in third level education which has resulted in the Irish becoming amongst the most highly educated people on the planet and contributed to economic growth and wider societal benefits.

The Catholic Church's control of the education system, and its orientation towards producing God fearing children rather than productive members of the community, is evaluated critically in line with other works.⁶⁴ I recognise, however, that the parish-centric educational approach that evolved under the Catholic system is now deemed best practice in education.

There is some debate about whether pupil:teacher ratios remain too high in Ireland, despite the sizeable reductions that I identify, given that comparative analysis shows Irish classes to be amongst the largest in the EU.⁶⁵ I contend, nevertheless, that educational outcomes are comparatively strong and cite Hyland concluding that there is no evidence that further reduction would deliver better pupil achievement.

My work also helps to address the absence of more recent cliometric descriptions of Irish education identified by O'Neill.⁶⁶

Chapter 6: Earning More

The chapter starts with an overview of the major economic events during the century. It then presents data illustrating changes in GDP and employment, the strength of indigenous companies, the reduction in industrial disputes, increases in earnings and wealth, declining

⁶² R. McManus, 'Suburban and urban housing in the twentieth century', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, Vol. 111C (2011), pp.253–286. E. Rowley, 'Housing in Ireland, 1740-2016', in Eugenio F. Biagini and Mary E. Daly (Eds.) *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.230. M.Norris, *Varieties of home ownership: Ireland's transition from a socialised to a marketised policy regime*, Geary Institute Discussion Paper WP2013/06 (University College Dublin, 2013).

⁶³ E. Rowley, *ibid*.

⁶⁴ T. Garvin, *Preventing the Future. Why was Ireland so poor for so long?* (Gill and Macmillan, 2004). J. Walsh, 'Creating a modern educational system? International influence, domestic elites and the transformation of the Irish educational sector, 1950–75', in Brendan Walsh (Ed.), *Essays in the History of Irish Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 235–66. T. O'Donoghue and J. Harford, 'A Comparative History of Church-State Relations in Irish Education', *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 55:3 (2011), pp.315–41.

⁶⁵ C. Kelleher and S. Weir (2016), 'Class size and student-teacher ratio at primary level in Ireland and other OECD countries', *The Irish Journal of Education*, Vol. xli (2016), pp.39-60. Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 'Yet again, OECD report shines spotlight on supersized primary classes', *INTO.ie*, 16 September 2021, <https://www.into.ie/2021/09/16/yet-again-oecd-report-shines-spotlight-on-supersized-primary-classes/>, accessed 23 April 2023

⁶⁶ C. O'Neill, 'Literacy and Education', in Eugenio F. Biagini and Mary E. Daly (Eds.) *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.259.

income inequality, and changes in contributions from the European Union. I argue that Ireland was in the best economic shape ever before Covid-19 hit, and that the country was well placed to recover strongly for the pandemic's negative impact.

There is a debate about whether Ireland's economic performance is truly remarkable or not. O'Gráda and O'Rourke argue that it has merely caught-up to the European average, and Honohan argues that actual individual consumption levels only match the EU average at best.⁶⁷ However, both papers do not include data for the past four or five years during which Ireland's performance has continued to exceed other nations, and the authors nevertheless accept that Ireland is now amongst the wealthiest nations in the world, having come from a very different place fifty years ago. My model aims to explain the factors that brought about this improvement. Arguments about which rank Ireland precisely holds amongst the world's twenty wealthiest nations do not undermine this.

Aspects of my model mirror the analysis of other historians on Ireland's growth, as I have outlined above. I could reach back to earlier works by Garvin and O'Grada who identify the factors accounting for Celtic Tiger growth, including educational investment (human capital), social partnership and institutional development (institutional capital), social capital, and trade liberalisation and export growth (openness).⁶⁸ Similar to O'Grada, I acknowledge the contribution of EU investment (which I attribute to *openness* to EU membership) and the rising labour force participation by women (although I would differ from O'Grada in arguing that it was increase in jobs that resulted from Ireland's economic capital generation that enticed women into the workforce – not the other way around). I also agree with Garvin that external forces such as The Great Moderation played an important role – albeit that I argue that this was something that Ireland was able to take advantage of to a greater extent than many other nations for the reasons I identify in my model.

Whether Ireland's increased wealth has resulted in greater or lesser inequality in society is a subject of popular debate. My analysis aligns with those who take a data-centric approach in showing the strong fall in income inequality and poverty to a level that is below that of most other EU members states, while accepting that market incomes (before taxes, social welfare payments and pensions) have moved in both directions in recent decades.⁶⁹ Some others seek to minimise or deny the extent of this progress, highlighting the importance of a data-driven analysis covering changes in the most recent period.⁷⁰ Furthermore, I argue that centrist politics have contributed to this (helping to generate institutional capital), as well as rising education levels (human capital), supported by high social capital and a memory of national poverty that encourages a policy focus on fairness.

Chapter 7: Opening to the World

The chapter outlines Ireland's extraordinary growth in exports and the changing nature of those over time; it discusses Ireland's success in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and the impact of this in job creation, thereby eliminating net emigration; and it expounds on changes in inbound and outbound tourism.

There is periodic criticism that Ireland has become overly reliant on exports to sustain its economy, or overly reliant on too few multinational companies.⁷¹ I, however, argue that a wide diversity of export markets has provided Ireland with increased resilience against economic downturns – and more so than economies that rely to a greater extent on their

⁶⁷ O'Gráda and O'Rourke, *ibid.* P. Honohan, 'Is Ireland really the most prosperous country in Europe?' *Economic Letter*, Vol. 2021:1 (Central Bank of Ireland, 2021).

⁶⁸ T. Garvin, *ibid.* C. O'Gráda, *Rocky Road: The Irish Economy Since the 1920s* (Manchester University Press, 1997).

⁶⁹ B. Roantree et al, *Poverty, Income Inequality and Living Standards in Ireland* (Economic and Social Research Institute & The Community Foundation for Ireland, 2021).

⁷⁰ R. Sweeney, *The State We Are In: Inequality in Ireland 2020* (Foundation for European Progressive Studies & TASC Think Tank for Action on Social Change, 2020).

⁷¹ A. Storey, Ireland Needs to Reduce Its Dependence on a Handful of Multinationals, *Dublin Inquirer*, 8 August 2018, <https://dublininquirer.com/2018/08/08/andy-ireland-needs-to-reduce-its-dependence-on-a-handful-of-multinationals/>, accessed 24 April 2023.

domestic economy. Instead, I align with those authors who point to Ireland's openness as the very reason that the country recovered so comprehensively and rapidly from The Great Recession and the austerity that resulted from this.⁷² As my expert interviewee Frank Barry further asserts, commentators have been raising the prospect for many years that the leading multinationals will leave Ireland but it has yet to happen and Barry sees little prospect of it happening any time soon.

Others have claimed that Ireland's reliance on foreign direct investment has effectively turned Ireland into a vassal state for neoliberalism and neutered the power of policymakers to make independent decisions.⁷³ I provide counterfactual evidence of high-quality job creation through FDI that has contributed to large volumes of inward migration, and I highlight examples of policy making that have not served profit-maximisation motives (e.g. OECD-leading redistributive income policies, and Origin Green as an environmental initiative for the food and drink sector).

Chapter 8: Cultivating Culture and Sports

The chapter explores the success of Gaelic sports and horse-racing, as well as success in English literature, acting and music, and the growth of Irish pubs abroad. I align with other authors in identifying the negative impact that Catholic Church-inspired censorship of literature had on the development of a new literature – and, indeed, new cinema – for a newly independent Ireland.⁷⁴ I point out that it was the subsequent embrace of openness that led to the demise of censorship, and that increased education levels helped establish a modern literature.

The commercial development of Irish pubs overseas has been criticised as an inauthentic pursuit that created a “figment of 'Irishness' attractive to non-Irish consumers, but increasingly difficult to reconcile with contemporary, multicultural Irish life”.⁷⁵ I challenge that with the evidence from surveys of departing tourists that our conviviality is genuinely stronger than that experienced in other countries they visit, and the power of the global pub network is that it, in part, conveys that authentic attribute. There is, furthermore, nothing exclusionary about the Irish pub experience in Ireland or overseas as the staffing is predominantly multicultural in both.

Chapter 9: Strengthening Society

The chapter demonstrates high levels of satisfaction with democracy and public institutions, low levels of corruption and crime, strong press freedom, and public support for social freedoms.

While postcolonial theory suggests (I argue correctly) that Ireland's national identity would develop as a direct contrast to that of its former coloniser, I further suggest that Ireland's approach to governance also developed in contrast in so far as all ruling political parties pursued republican ideals with the aim of the Irish governing themselves for the good of their people (even if the coloniser's structures of governance were themselves inherited and embraced).⁷⁶ I argue that the adoption of the proportional representation (PR-STV) voting

⁷² K. McQuinn and P. Varthalitis, 'How openness to trade rescued the Irish economy', Conference presentation at 'Second Workshop on Structural Reforms in the EU' in London School of Economics, December 2018, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329450167_How_openness_to_trade_rescued_the_Irish_economy, accessed 24 April 2023.

⁷³ E. McDonald, J. Hogan & B. O'Rourke, 'Austerity and Its Effects on Neoliberal Industrial Policy: The Case of Enterprise Policy in Ireland', *International Political Science Association*, Poznan, Poland, 26 July 2016. R. Hearne, 'Neoliberalism exposed', TASC.ie, 15 June 2016, <https://www.tasc.ie/blog/2016/06/15/neoliberalism-exposed/>, accessed 24 April 2023. Rob Kitchin et al., 'Placing neoliberalism: the rise and fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger', *Environment and Planning A*, Vol.44 (2012), pp.1302-1326.

⁷⁴ A. Keating, 'Censorship: The Cornerstone of Catholic Ireland', *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 57:2 (2015), pp.289-309. P. Martin, *Censorship in the Two Irelands, 1922-1939* (Irish Academic Press, 2003). K. Rockett, *Irish Film Censorship: A cultural journey from silent cinema to internet pornography* (Four Courts Press, 2004).

⁷⁵ B. Grantham, 'Craic in a box: Commodifying and exporting the Irish pub', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol. 23:2 (2009), p.257.

⁷⁶ M.S. Kumar & L.A. Scanlon, 'Ireland and Irishness: The Contextuality of Postcolonial Identity', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 109:1 (2019), pp.202-222. T.J. White, 'The Impact of British Colonialism on Irish Catholicism and National Identity: Repression, Reemergence, and Divergence', *Études Irlandaises*, Vol 35:1 (2010), pp.21-37.

system has had the effect of keeping politicians close to their electorate and to their concerns, with the result that the State has adopted a softer, kinder approach to dealing with its citizens than elsewhere (even if that has led some historians to conclude that there has been an unwillingness to take hard decisions and a consequent lack of long-term planning).⁷⁷

Some authors have argued that Ireland's increasing economic wealth – most particularly the rapid gains experienced during the Celtic Tiger era – was associated with a growth in materialism in Irish society.⁷⁸ However, I present evidence here that the Irish are assessed as amongst the most generous peoples on the planet and, later, that increasing wealth is associated with greater trust levels and willingness to help others – not increased selfishness as greater materialism might suggest.

Finally, I align with many other authors in attributing the liberalisation of social attitudes in recent decades to second wave feminism, the impact of television on youth attitudes, the support of European institutions, the decisions in key legal cases, the declining influence of the Catholic Church (driven particularly by scandals concerning its treatment of women and children), and the use of participative democracy.⁷⁹

Chapter 10: Better Lives for Women

The chapter discusses how the position of women in Irish society has been dramatically transformed in recent decades. It illustrates this with discussion of falling fertility, changing family structures, rising education rates and labour force participation, and our 21 years with a female head of state. I highlight the fact that women surpassed men in higher educational attainment in 2000, just over 90 years after women secured access to undergraduate places in the National University of Ireland and Trinity College Dublin.⁸⁰

It could be argued that the increasing variety in family structures in recent decades is, in some respects, a return to a more common pre-1922 pattern when low life expectancies often resulted in the death of a parent leaving large numbers of single-parent families or remarriages that brought together children from different relationships.⁸¹

My work acknowledges that further progress needs to be to achieve equality in many domains. Although I was unable to locate any time series data on gender inequalities in time spent on home duties, the cited figures arguably demonstrate little improvement today over the earliest decades of the State's existence.⁸² While the Irish government has expressed the intention to hold a referendum to remove reference to a women's place being in the home from the Irish Constitution (adopted in 1937), some have argued that the original intent behind the statement's inclusion was to acknowledge the importance of women's lives and their work within the home, thereby giving status to members of Irish society who were otherwise ignored.⁸³

I highlight the gap that remains in labour force participation and the gender wage gap, aligning with other works in relating this to a gap in seniority in organisations and in higher

⁷⁷ D. Ferriter (2012 and 2016), *ibid.*

⁷⁸ T.J. White, 'Materialism and the Loss of Sovereignty: Ireland in the Celtic Tiger and After', *Studi irlandesi: A Journal of Irish Studies*, no. 3 (2013), pp.89-113.

⁷⁹ J.A. Elkins et al., 'The death of conservative Ireland? The 2018 abortion referendum', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 65 (2020), 102142. L. Smyth, 'Abortion in Ireland: liberalisation, social freedom, anger and shame' in R. Baikady et al. (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of global social change* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022). S. Calkin & M.E. Kaminska, 'Persistence and change in morality policy: The role of the Catholic Church in the politics of abortion in Ireland and Poland', *Feminist Review*, 124:1 (2020), pp.86-102.

⁸⁰ J. Walsh, 'Women's educational activism and higher education in Ireland 1850-1912', in J. Atwal et al. (Ed.) *Gender and History: Ireland, 1852-1922* (Routledge, 2022), pp.193-206.

⁸¹ R. Murphy, 'Gender and the Irish Family 1852-1922', in Jyoti Atwal et al. (Ed.) *Gender and History: Ireland, 1852-1922* (Routledge, 2022), pp.11-22.

⁸² C. Clear, *Women of the House: Women's Household Work in Ireland 1922-1961* (Irish Academic Press, 2000). F. McGinnity & H. Russell, *Gender Inequalities in Time: Use The Distribution of Caring, Housework and Employment Among Women and Men in Ireland* (The Equality Authority and The Economic and Social Research Institute, 2008).

⁸³ M.E. Daly, 'Women in the Irish Free State, 1922-39: The interaction between economics and ideology', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 7:1 (1995), pp.99-116.

educational subject choice.⁸⁴ I also, later in the work, link this to the comparatively high cost of childcare.

Chapter 11: Better Lives for Children

The chapter discusses the improvements in children's lives as evidenced by the recognition of children's rights and the prohibition of corporal punishment, the rise of special needs education, children's reduced consumption of harmful substances, falls in teenage births, and reductions in youth crime.

Historians have often focused in on the negative experiences of childhood in Ireland in the twentieth century, including the experiences of those in the care of state or religious organisations or those in intense poverty.⁸⁵ In that respect, my work aims to introduce a more upbeat assessment and is partly aligned with some more recent works.⁸⁶ Given the immigration influx that I discuss elsewhere, I have not specifically considered the experience of migrant children and the degree to which they share these improvements.⁸⁷

Chapter 12: Increasingly Environmentally Conscious

The chapter demonstrates the progress made in redressing the environmental damage caused by progress as evidenced by increased forestation, reductions in air pollution and untreated waste water, increased recycling, growth in renewable energy, and better energy efficiency in housing.

I contend that histories of the Irish environment are few and far between and are a more recent phenomenon, in part given that there was limited awareness of the environmental damage that our economic progress was inflicting until recent decades.⁸⁸ This view aligns with authors in the field who describe environmental history in Ireland as “embryonic” and “virtually ignored”.⁸⁹ I, therefore, consider my work to be a useful contribution to the field.

Chapter 13: Helping the World

The chapter explores Ireland's contribution beyond its own borders citing the history of expenditure on official development assistance by the State and private citizens, citizens' support for fair trade and tradition of volunteering overseas, and the ranking of Ireland as one of the leading nations contributing to the global good.

My work brings up to writing on Ireland's overseas development programme as historians have published little on the theme in the past decade.⁹⁰ It presents the evidence that Irish aid is assessed as the least 'tied' and self-interested of any nation, which – alongside the UN peacekeeping contribution – contrasts with the assessment of some that Irish foreign policy primarily constituted pragmatic selfishness.⁹¹ Indeed, as I outline in the chapter, the Good Country Index developed by Anholt aims explicitly to assess the positive contribution of

⁸⁴ H. Russell et al., 'Gender Equality in the Irish Labour Market 1966-2016: Unfinished Business?', *The Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 48:4 (2017), pp.393-418. B. Stanley et al., *An Analysis of Labour Market Earnings for Higher Education Graduates in their Early Careers: Graduation Cohorts: 2010 – 2017* (Higher Education Authority, 2019). A. Doris, 'Ireland's Gender Wage Gap, Past and Present', *The Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 50:4 (2019), pp.667-681.

⁸⁵ M. Raftery and E. O'Sullivan, *Suffer the Little Children* (New Island, 1999). M.J. Maguire, *Precarious Childhood in Post-Independence Ireland* (Manchester University Press, 2009). S.-A. Buckley, *The Cruelty Man: Child Welfare, the NSPCC and the State in Ireland, 1889-1956* (Manchester University Press, 2013). M. Maguire & S. O'Cinnéide, 'A Good Beating Never Hurt Anyone: The Punishment and Abuse of Children in Twentieth-Century Ireland', *Journal of Social History*, Vol.38 (2005), pp.635–52.

⁸⁶ M. Luddy and J.M. Smith (Eds.), *Children, Childhood and Irish Society: 1500 to the Present* (Four Courts Press, 2014).

⁸⁷ C. Ni Laoire et al., *Childhood and migration in Europe portraits of mobility, identity and belonging in contemporary Ireland* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2011).

⁸⁸ One recent example is that by my expert interviewee: P. Fogarty, *Whittled Away: Ireland's Vanishing Nature* (Collins Press, 2017).

⁸⁹ J. Adelman & F. Ludlow, 'The past, present and future of environmental history in Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, Vol. 114C (2014), pp.359–391.

⁹⁰ The last notable overview work being H. O'Neill, 'The Evolution of Ireland's Foreign Aid over the past 20 years: A Review of ISIA reviews since 1994', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 24 (2013), pp.179-236. See also R. Murphy, *Inside Irish Aid: The Impulse to Help* (Liffey Press, 2012).

⁹¹ M. Kennedy, 'Irish Foreign Policy: 1919 to 1973' in T. Bartlett (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Ireland, Vol. IV: 1880 to the present* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.604-638.

countries to the world at large and it is noteworthy than since publication of my book Ireland has rising seven places in the latest Index to rank eighth amongst all nations.⁹²

Chapter 14: A Happier People

The chapter demonstrates improvement in the well-being of Irish citizens citing its rising rank in the UN Human Development Index, positive views about fairness and equal opportunity in society, and high levels of life satisfaction. I also discuss the factors that researchers have identified as contributing to happiness at a national and personal level and reflect how the data cited throughout the book demonstrate that Ireland's progress over the century has contributed directly to its population's well-being.

Some authors have argued that the Human Development Index rankings for Ireland are not a true assessment of our actual standing as the Index gives significant weight to GNI per capita which includes some residual multinational corporate activity. By substituting GNI* instead, Honohan calculates a fall from second to ninth place in their 2020 rankings.⁹³ However, Honohan fails to recognise that multinational activity is also a significant element of the GNI of some of the other leading countries, for example Switzerland (ranked joined second) and the Netherlands (ranked eighth). Such a drop, nevertheless, does not undermine my argument that Ireland is ranked amongst the very top tier of nations with the highest quality of life.

The most recent Human Development Index report, published last September, awarded Ireland the rank of eighth in the world.⁹⁴ Somewhat confusingly, the UNDP did not consider this a decline as the change was due to a revision of its dataset going back to 1990. Instead, it reported that Ireland was one of only 10% of countries that had succeeded in continuing to increase its citizens development during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. The revised dataset reconfirms that Ireland is the only developed nation to have experienced such a high degree of improvement since the UNDP initiated their Index, in line with the central argument of my work.

The Human Development Index has been critiqued as one that is narrowly defined and, therefore, offers an incomplete assessment of human development and quality of life.⁹⁵ I acknowledge that it excludes measures of poverty, human rights, governance, security and social cohesion, for example. Nevertheless, my work demonstrates that the trends in Ireland in these areas are also consistently in the right direction. Furthermore, the UNDP's Index is the most widely cited one in its area and is the one that offers the greatest time series – hence is of greatest utility in an historical review of Ireland's progress.

Chapter 15: How We Achieved This

The chapter outlines the four-factor model that I contend accounts for Ireland's remarkable progress in recent decades: stability, community, education and openness. The support for the model amongst the existing historiography is discussed in the literature review in the main body of the commentary.

Chapter 16: Why It's Hard to Believe

This chapter discusses five cognitive biases that, I contend, negatively impact on the general public's ability to appreciate positive progress. Again, I review the literature concerning this area in the body of the commentary.

⁹² The Good Country Index version 1.5 (2022), available at <https://index.goodcountry.org/>, accessed 29 April 2023.

⁹³ Honohan *ibid*.

⁹⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2021-22: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World* (UNDP, 2022).

⁹⁵ A.D Sagar and A.Najam, 'The human development index: a critical review', *Ecological Economics*, Vol.25:3 (1998), pp.249-264. I. Bagolin & F. Comim, 'Human Development Index (HDI) and its family of indexes: an evolving critical review', *revista de Economia*, 34:2 (2008), pp.7-28. G. Ranis, F. Stewart & E. Samman, 'Human development: beyond the human development index', *Journal of Human Development*, Vol.7 (2006), pp.323-358.

Chapter 17: Room to Improve

This chapter acknowledges that, despite the positive progress cited previously, there remain areas of significant challenge for the Irish State as it enters its second century. A wide range of topics are discussed from damage to the natural environment, to the cost of living and childcare, to the housing shortage, growing obesity levels, reduced public funding for higher education, high levels of public debt, and reducing electoral participation.

Most of these topics have been discussed earlier in the work in respect of the positive progress made in these domains. Many of them are directly related to my four-factor model: e.g. failure to address the housing shortage will undermine social capital, failure to restore investment in education will threaten the future strength of this factor, and declining election turnouts will drain institutional capital. In addition, this chapter recognises the importance of minimising damage to natural capital that was not a consideration in attaining economic progress until recently.

Chapter 18: Continuing Our Progress

The concluding chapter presents the argument that, based on the data presented and the model accounting for our success, we need to acknowledge our success and nurture the factors that have helped to deliver this to ensure continued positive growth into the future. To help achieve this, I argue that Irish policymakers and the public should reconceptualise Ireland as being amongst Nordic peers (not alongside the historically connected United Kingdom or United States of America) as we can learn more and benefit more from cooperation with those who share a high quality of life and have sustained their leadership positions over many decades.

Writings of the New Optimists

A spate of authors has made the case for positive human progress in recent times. These “new optimists” originate from a wide range of disciplines such as history (Bregman, Norberg), economics (McCloskey), psychology (Pinker), health (Rosling), and science journalism (Ridley).⁹⁶ All the authors make their case based on quantitative and qualitative data; none of their works are grounded in a particular theory or model of progress. In practically all instances their analyses are of global or American data.

I view my work as a contribution to the new optimism literature. It follows a similar data-driven methodology but differs in so far as it presents a case study of progress in a single nation (other than the USA) and presents a model to account for this. My work, furthermore, combines contributions from an historical and psychological perspective utilising my knowledge in both domains.

Writing on Capital Models

My analysis of Ireland's development suggests that institutional, social, and human capitals – supported by an openness that encourages competition and cross-jurisdictional learning – are preeminent in contributing to greater progress at a national level. ‘Capital’ has been defined by Bourdieu as accumulated labour in its materialised form or its embodied form.⁹⁷ There are several different forms that capital can take, and various authors have proposed different models – the table below summarises the capital types identified in a selection of works. The goods and services needed to improve quality of life are derived from these types of capital.

⁹⁶ D.N. McCloskey, *ibid.* D.N. McCloskey & A. Carden, *ibid.* S. Pinker (2012 and 2019), *ibid.* H. Rosling, O. Rosling & A. Rosling Rönnlund, *ibid.* M. Ridley, *ibid.* J. Norberg, *ibid.* R. Bregman, *ibid.*

⁹⁷ P. Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’, in M. Granovetter & R. Swedberg, *The Sociology of Economic Life* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 78-92.

Forms of Capital Identified in Various Author's Models⁹⁸

| | <i>Economic / Financial</i> | <i>Produced / Manufactured</i> | <i>Institutional</i> | <i>Physical / Public</i> | <i>Social</i> | <i>Human / Cultural</i> | <i>Natural</i> |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Bourdieu | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Forum for the Future | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Goodwin | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Rainey et al. | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Zenghelis | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Some authors argue for the primacy of one or the other of these factors – e.g. Acemoglu and Robinson argue for the primacy of institutional capital for the success of nations.⁹⁹ Others argue for the need for a balanced combination of several capital forms to achieve sustainable development.¹⁰⁰

My model contends that it is the mutually symbiotic combination of institutional, social, and human capital that contributes to greater progress at a national level. Their combined impact provided the conditions that enabled financial and physical capital development in Ireland. (I also recognise the need to address natural capital depletion in order to achieve future sustainable growth.) This analysis, and the hypothesised causative theory that can be derived from it, is not presented elsewhere in the literature.

Modern Cliometric Writing

No study of Irish history to date has been as extensively data-driven as mine. My work can, therefore, be framed within the school of cliometrics – i.e. the application of quantitative and theoretical techniques to the study of historical phenomena.

The term 'cliometrics' was coined in the 1950s to refer to a movement to study economic history by incorporating quantitative methods in the study of past economic phenomena.¹⁰¹ As noted earlier, the term is defined broadly nowadays as "the application of methods developed in other fields (such as economics, statistics, and data processing) to the study of history".¹⁰²

Recent studies of American history utilising large datasets have been undertaken by Putnam & Garrett and by Turchin.¹⁰³ Both works identify broadly similar shifts in American society with improving quality of life indicators from the 1920s through to the 1970s, followed by fifty years of decline.

Putnam & Garrett point to growth in educational participation – initially due to expansion of public high schools and universities – before this stalled in the mid-1970s and, almost immediately, a reversal in the upward trend of greater equality. They similarly conclude that economic inequality and political polarisation have moved in lockstep – as polarisation

⁹⁸ P. Bourdieu, *ibid.* 'The Five Capitals - a framework for sustainability', *Forum for the Future*, December 2020, <https://www.forumforthefuture.org/the-five-capitals>, accessed October 2022. N.R. Goodwin, *Five Kinds of Capital: Useful Concepts for Sustainable Development*, Global Development and Environment Institute Working Paper No. 03-07 (2003), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/7051857.pdf>, accessed October 2022. D.V. Rainey, K.L. Robinson, I. Allen & R.D. Christy, 'Essential forms of capital for sustainable community development', *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 85(3) (2003), pp.708-715. D. Zenghelis (2019), *Social and natural capital is the wealth all around us and we should invest in it*, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 27 March 2019, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/news/social-and-natural-capital-is-the-wealth-all-around-us-and-we-should-invest-in-it/>, accessed October 2022.

⁹⁹ D. Acemoglu & J. A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (Crown, 2012).

¹⁰⁰ N.R. Goodwin, *ibid.* D. Zenghelis, *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ G. Wright, 'Economic History, Quantitative: United States', in N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes (Eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Pergamon, 2001), pp.4108-4114.

¹⁰² 'Cliometrics', *Merriam-Webster.com*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cliometrics>, accessed 10 September 2022

¹⁰³ R.D. Putnam & S.R. Garrett, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again* (Simon & Schuster, 2020). P. Turchin, *Ages of Discord: A Structural-demographic Analysis of American History*, (Beresta Books, 2016).

decreased in the first half of the twentieth century so did inequality; and as it increased from the 1970s on, so has inequality. Their evidence is that it is polarisation that drives inequality. They identify the cause of the inflexions in progress as a shifting focus from individualism to inclusivity and back again.

Turchin's structural-demographic model seeks to explain the broad underlying forces that cause societies to become unstable. It has four components: the state, elites, the general population, and a measure of political instability. An increase in elite numbers ahead of suitable opportunities, increases in the general population ahead of labour force opportunities leading to falling living standards, and deteriorating state finances or decreasing public legitimacy, are identified as examples of destabilising factors.

Turchin identifies the cause of the current extended decline in population wellbeing as (i) increases in immigration, greater female participation in the workforce, a growing trade deficit due to globalisation, and gains in productivity, which increased supply and reduced the demand for labour, thereby leading to reductions in real wages, (ii) a shift in corporate culture from morality and cooperation to self-interest and individualism, (iii) growth in the number of elite ahead of the opportunities for them in business and government, leading to greater competition and intraelite fragmentation and political polarisation, as well as greater economic inequality, and (iv) growing distrust of state institutions.

Ireland's experience aligns with the predictions of the structural-demographic model in so far as real wages are increasing, a culture of cooperation (which I label 'community') has been retained, increases in high-skilled job opportunities have not resulted in a shortage of elite opportunities, economic inequality is in decline, and political polarisation is low with high levels of support for state institutions (which I consider constituents of 'stability').

My analysis of Ireland's progress, however, is not in line with these American studies as Ireland experienced a flatline on many metrics (rather than a continual decrease) from the 1920s through to the 1960s/70s. In that respect, it offers a challenge to the models of Putnam and Turchin. Ireland's subsequent period of improvement has yet to peak, in direct contrast to the pattern of decline in the United States over the same time frame.

Writing on the Impact of Cognitive Biases on Perceptions of History and Progress

The concept of bias in historical analysis is well discussed and understood in the literature, most particularly as a cautionary tale for the teacher or researcher.¹⁰⁴ However, as the discipline of modern cognitive psychology has identified a wide range of inherent biases in recent decades, there has been little meaningful analysis of their impact on the field of historical understanding. My literature review reveals a dearth of discussion of cognitive biases in the popular understanding or academic analysis of history. There are no mentions of the biases that I discuss in my work (the negativity bias, prevalence-induced concept change, shifting baselines, the reminiscence bump, or the illusory truth effect) in the historiography – although some discussion of these concepts is evident in the field of political science.¹⁰⁵ Yet I argue that these biases, in particular, play an important role in shaping the popular perception of modern history and progress – a further unique contribution of the work.

¹⁰⁴ G.M. Trevelyan, 'Bias in History', *History*, New Series, 32(115) March 1947, p.1.

¹⁰⁵ B. George et al., 'Institutional Isomorphism, Negativity Bias and Performance Information Use by Politicians: A Survey Experiment', *Public Administration (London)*, 98:1 (2018), pp.14–28. J.R. Hibbing et al., 'Differences in Negativity Bias Underlie Variations in Political Ideology', *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 37:3 (2014), pp.297–307. Y. Wu, 'Distinguishing the binary of news – fake and real: The illusory truth effect', *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*, 11.3 (October 2022), pp.287-308.

In popular writing, there is occasional recognition that perceptions of current and past reality can be shaped by such biases.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the work of the new optimists can be counted amongst these. Pinker, as a cognitive psychologist, is to the forefront: his work discusses the availability bias and the negativity bias and how their impact is exacerbated by modern media.¹⁰⁷ Norberg cites a range of psychological effects from nostalgia (in effect, the reminiscence bump), confirmation bias, zero-sum thinking, “groupishness” (ingroup loyalty and outgroup discrimination), and anxiety about change and the unknown.¹⁰⁸

Rosling identifies ten “instincts” that lead to popular misunderstanding, with a focus on our ability to understand data and trends and some of these are psychological biases (e.g. the negativity bias, our tendency to generalise, or to blame a single factor/individual rather than a range of factors).¹⁰⁹ However, neither he nor Norberg make reference to the academic literature, nor do they discuss the impact of ‘prevalence-induced concept change’ as it has only recently been identified.

My discussion of these cognitive biases can assist historians in better contextualising their work for the general public who may not easily relate to evidence of positive progress, thereby enhancing the communication of their work and its resonance. The communication of the existence of these biases to the general public also serves a positive social purpose in so far as it increases the public’s awareness of their own negative tendencies, with potential positive mental health implications and increases in objectivity.

Writing on Models of State-Building and National Development

State-building, in political science terms, refers to the political and historical processes of creation, institutional consolidation, stabilisation and sustainable development of states.¹¹⁰ An extensive number of studies over the past twenty to thirty years have sought to identify factors that contribute to successful state-building and national development. Some of the factors that have been consistently recognised in studies include:

- *Human capital*: investment in education, improving the skills of the labour force.¹¹¹
- *Institutional capital*: a stable political establishment enforcing property rights and the rule of law and an absence of corruption.¹¹²
- *Population homogeneity*: national cohesion through a common national identity which may be achieved through linguistic homogeneity and limited ethnic diversity.¹¹³
- *Technology adoption*: investment in technology and its adoption increases labour productivity.¹¹⁴
- *Delivery of public goods*: job creation, poverty reduction, population health improvements, and infrastructural investment (physical capital).¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶ J. Desjardins, ‘24 cognitive biases that are warping your perception of reality’, *World Economic Forum*, 30 November 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/11/humans-cognitive-bias-mistake/>, accessed October 2022. C.J. Ferguson, ‘Why Cognitive Biases Make It Hard to Get History Straight’, *Psychology Today*, 21 January 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ie/blog/checkpoints/202001/why-cognitive-biases-make-it-hard-get-history-straight>, accessed October 2022.

¹⁰⁷ S. Pinker (2019), *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ J. Norberg, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ H. Rosling et al, *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Wikipedia, ‘State-building’, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State-building>, accessed January 2023.

¹¹¹ H. Doucouliagos & M.A. Ulubaşoğlu, ‘Democracy and Economic Growth: A Meta-Analysis’, *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 52(1) (2008), pp. 61–83. J. Woodruff, ‘Factors Affecting Economic Development and Growth’, *Chron.com*, 12 February 2019, <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/factors-affecting-economic-development-growth-1517.html>, accessed October 2022. C. Stephenson, ‘Nation Building’, *Beyond Intractability*, Conflict Information Consortium at University of Colorado, January 2005, <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/nation-building>, accessed October 2022.

¹¹² C. Stephenson, *ibid.* R. Sharma, *The Rise and Fall of Nations: Forces of Change in the Post-Crisis World*, (Norton, 2016). D. Acemoglu & J.A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, (Crown, 2012).

¹¹³ A. Alesina & B. Reich, *Nation-building*, Working paper, Department of Economics, Harvard University (2015). A. Wimmer, *Nation Building: Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart* (Princeton University Press, 2018). C. Stephenson, *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ J. Woodruff, *ibid.* S. Ruchir, *ibid.* M. Purcell, ‘6 Factors for Successful Development’, *borgenproject.org*, 5 April 2013, <https://borgenproject.org/6-factors-for-successful-development/>, accessed 23 October 2022.

¹¹⁵ A. Wimmer, *ibid.* C. Stephenson, *ibid.* S. Ruchir, *ibid.*

- *Economic development*: economic opportunity for individuals (enabling entrepreneurship) and good macro-economic management that helps to generate financial capital.¹¹⁶
- *Market connectivity*: trade connections to global and regional markets.¹¹⁷

Some studies have also identified the incentive that an external threat of territorial conquest or an enduring international rivalry can provide a state to develop a strong polity.¹¹⁸ Arguably such a relationship existed for Ireland during much of its first century as it sought to establish itself as a successful state independent of the United Kingdom. In my work, I regularly return to the theme that Ireland only truly attained its independence in more recent decades as evidenced by its dependency on the UK for exports, tourism, and as a destination for emigrants, for example.

The four-factor model that I have identified as accounting for Ireland's comparative success maps well onto this list. Human capital is the same as my *education* factor, and institutional capital mirrors my *stability* factor. My *openness* factor subsumes market connectivity and the adoption of new technology as well as other factors (such as low taxation and a willingness to embrace rapid change) that contribute to Ireland's openness to inward investment and willingness to attract external talent into the labour force.

My fourth factor, *community*, refers to social capital, high levels of interpersonal trust and a corresponding sense of fairness that informs government policy priorities. This is not directly represented in the research summary list above, although it is evidence of strong national cohesion and a homogeneity of social attitudes in the population. However, some studies have also identified a positive contribution for social capital to economic growth and state-building.¹¹⁹

My model, therefore, partially maps onto existing work but suggests a wider definition of the concept of openness and supports other studies that argue for the inclusion of social capital. It is my contention that economic development, which in turn provides the means for the delivery of public goods, is generated to a greater extent when the four factors I have identified are present. This success in turn grows citizens' support for the state, thereby aiding state-building.

My model has the advantage of being able to be empirically validated through further study. It is possible to quantify measures of education levels, institutional capital, social capital, and openness for other countries and to calculate the extent to which changes in these factors contribute to changes in quality of life for the population and/or national economic development. This analysis can be longitudinal and predictive and not merely correlational.

Impact, peer review & dissemination

An important objective in authoring the work was to influence public perception of Ireland's positive progress (in light of the prevailing psychological biases mitigating against this). The work succeeded in doing so and in influencing national civic discourse in the aftermath of its publication.

¹¹⁶ S. Ruchir, *ibid.* M. Purcell, *ibid.* H. Doucouliagos & M.A. Ulubaşoğlu, 'Democracy and Economic Growth: A Meta-Analysis', *American Journal of Political Science*, 52 (2008), pp.61-83.

¹¹⁷ S. Ruchir, *ibid.* J. Woodruff, *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ H. Mylonas, 'The Determinants of Successful Nation-Building: Macro-Sociological Political Modernization and Political Alliance Structures', *Nationalities Papers*, 50:1 (2022), pp.185–189. J.K. Hanson, 'Laying the Foundations of the State: Identifying the Constituent Factors of State Building', Delivered at *State Capacity. Concepts – Causes – Consequences*, Duke Workshops in the Frontiers of Political Science. Duke University, 12-13 April 2019, <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jkhanson/resources/hanson16.pdf>, accessed 23 October 2022.

¹¹⁹ Y. Algan & P. Cahuc, 'Inherited Trust and Growth', *American Economic Review*, 100:5 (2010), pp.2060-92. G. Tabellini, 'Culture and Institutions: Economic Development in the Regions of Europe', *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 8:4 (June 2010), pp.677–716. C.L. Bankston III, *Rethinking Social Capital* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022).

I was interviewed about the book's analysis on every major national radio network in Ireland and on TV. I authored multiple articles to highlight the findings in the leading national newspapers, in online news websites, and in key journals.¹²⁰ The book was independently praised by writers in leading media, e.g. *Irish Times*' columnist Stephen Collins described the book as "a timely effort to detail the reality of the way we live now" and the paper selected it as one of just four history titles to make their 'Books of the Year' list.¹²¹ International interest was evident from articles in Irish diaspora publications and those focusing on human progress, as well as a citation in *The Financial Times*.¹²²

Paschal Donohoe, the Minister for Finance, selected the book as one of his non-fiction books of the year on a national radio programme.¹²³ Both Taoiseach Micheál Martin and Tánaiste Leo Varadkar made contact directly with me to congratulate me on the work, with the Taoiseach highlighting its positive impact on civic discourse and the Tánaiste describing its publication as "doing the nation a real service". Notably, my work was the only one cited by Taoiseach Micheál Martin in his address to mark the centenary of the foundation of the Irish state.¹²⁴

Professor John O'Brennan, the Jean Monnet Professor of European Integration at Maynooth University, described the work as "a superb production and a really interesting counter to the 'doomscrolling' approach to recent history" and "a valuable addition to the canon on Ireland".¹²⁵

On the back of the book's success, I have been an invited speaker at a wide range of fora such as book festivals, addresses to public bodies, to Irish diaspora fora, and to international organisations focused on well-being. These have provided further opportunities to enhance the book's impact at home and abroad.

One example of that impact is the lead editorial in *The Sunday Times (Ireland)* new year's edition which cited the book and concluded: "The real puzzle is why, as a nation, we do not enjoy our success and happiness a little more. Henry argues that the media are partly to blame, since they rarely report what progress has been made, but obsess about the stumbling blocks. We're not fans of new year's resolutions, but we will attempt to accentuate the positive in 2022. There's a lot to celebrate and be thankful for."¹²⁶

¹²⁰ M. Henry, 'The Irish State has had unimaginable success in its first century', *The Irish Times*, 3 January 2022. M. Henry, 'Ireland at 100: 12 reasons to feel great about being Irish', *The Irish Independent*, 6 November 2021. M. Henry, 'Joining the EU was the inflexion point in our modern progress', *Irish Examiner*, 2 January 2023. M. Henry, 'St Patrick's Day turns whole world green — with envy', *The Sunday Times (Ireland)*, 13 March 2022. M. Henry, 'Opinion: You might think Ireland's fast going to hell in a handbasket. But that's not true', *TheJournal.ie*, 18 December 2021, <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/mark-henry-optimists-guide-to-ireland-5632771-Dec2021/>, accessed October 2022. M. Henry, 'Let's hear it for Ireland's success on our 100th birthday - we've come a long way', *TheJournal.ie*, 6 December 2022, <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/ireland-centenary-celebrations-5938115-Dec2022/>, accessed January 2023. M. Henry, 'Changed Utterly', *Ireland of the Welcomes*, 71(3) (May 2022). M. Henry, 'A People's Progress - How Independent Ireland Delivered on the Promise of Her People's Well-Being', *History Ireland*, 30(3) (June 2022), pp.16-17.

¹²¹ S. Collins, 'Narrative of failure has become so all pervasive that it is a threat to our future', *The Irish Times*, 3 December 2021. N. Donnelly, 'Best books for Christmas 2021: Fiction, biography, sport and children's books', *The Irish Times*, 27 November 2021.

¹²² C. Devane, 'An Optimist's Guide to Ireland at 100: Why there's hope for the future', *IrishCentral.com*, 4 February 2022, <https://www.irishcentral.com/culture/optimists-guide-to-ireland-mark-henry>, accessed October 2022. M. Henry, 'The Human Progress Podcast Ep. 21 Transcript', *HumanProgress.org*, 4 February 2022, <https://www.humanprogress.org/mark-henry-the-human-progress-podcast-ep-21-transcript/>, accessed October 2022. J. Webber, 'Ireland's census time capsule will reveal the people behind the data', *Financial Times*, 5 April 2022.

¹²³ P. Donohoe, 'Non-Fiction Books Of The Year 2021', *Today FM*, 14 December 2021, <https://www.todayfm.com/podcasts/the-last-word-with-matt-cooper/non-fiction-books-of-the-year-2021>, accessed October 2022.

¹²⁴ M. Martin, *The Taoiseach's address at the Academic Conference on the Centenary of the Establishment of the Irish Free State*, 2 December 2022, <https://www.gov.ie/en/speech/7f202-the-taoiseachs-address-at-the-academic-conference-on-the-centenary-of-the-establishment-of-the-irish-free-state/>, accessed January 2023.

¹²⁵ Personal correspondence.

¹²⁶ 'Ireland's healthy and wealthy, so get wise to our good fortune for 2022', *The Sunday Times (Ireland)*, 2 January 2022.

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Appendix A

List of published data, and their sources, in the order in which they appear in the text

| Data | Source |
|---|--|
| <i>Chapter: Living Longer</i> | |
| The population of Ireland, 1926–2020 | Central Statistics Office |
| Population by province, 1926–2016 | Central Statistics Office |
| The number of people who died in selected years per 1,000 of population | Central Statistics Office |
| Deaths of infants under one year of age per 1,000 births, 1922–2019 | Central Statistics Office |
| Maternal deaths per 100,000 live and stillbirths, 1922–2019 | Central Statistics Office |
| Work-related fatalities rate per 100,000 workers, 1996–2019 | Health and Safety Authority |
| Number of road deaths, 1922–2020 | Road Safety Authority, Wikipedia |
| Suicides per 100,000 of population, 1980–2019 | Central Statistics Office |
| Average life expectancy, 1926–2016 | Central Statistics Office |
| <i>Chapter: Living Healthier</i> | |
| The leading diseases causing death in 1913–22 and their prevalence today | Central Statistics Office |
| Age-standardised cancer mortality per 100,000 of population, 1950–2015 | International Agency for Research on Cancer, World Health Organisation |
| Cigarettes smoked daily per capita in various years | Department of Health, Revenue Commissioners |
| Deaths from diseases of the circulatory system per 100,000 of population, 1980–2018 | Central Statistics Office |
| Government health spending in real terms, 1970–2018 | OECD |
| Day cases and in-patient numbers at publicly funded acute hospitals, 2000–18 | Department of Health |
| Percentage of the population reporting good or very good health in 2019 | Eurostat |
| <i>Chapter: Eating Better</i> | |
| Index of area harvested for crops and the tonnes produced, 1961–2019 | Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations |
| Tonnes of beef, pig and poultry meat produced, 1961–2019 | Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations |
| Kilograms of meat, seafood and fruit & vegetables available for consumption per person per year in 1961, 1986, 2018 | Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations |
| Percentage of the average household budget spent on food, 1922–2016 | Central Statistics Office |
| Cost of selected food items in euro / cents, 1922–2019 | Central Statistics Office |
| Litres of pure alcohol consumed per adult in selected years | Revenue Commissioners |
| Average heights of Irish men and women aged 18 in centimetres, 1914–2014 | NCD Risk Factor Collaboration |
| <i>Chapter: Living Easier</i> | |
| The percentage of the population living in Dublin, another urban centre or a rural location in 1926, 1966, 2016 | Central Statistics Office |
| The top 25 urban centres and their population growth, 1926–2016 | Central Statistics Office |
| Number of rooms and the average number of people per household, 1926–2016 | Central Statistics Office |
| The percentage of households with various utilities in each decade, 1940s–2000s | Central Statistics Office |
| Percentages of households without various appliances over time | Central Statistics Office |
| Number of vehicles licensed for the first time, 1954–2020 | Central Statistics Office |
| Number of visitors to Dublin Zoo to the nearest 100,000 people, 1922–2019 | Catherine de Courcy |

| Data | Source |
|---|--|
| <i>Chapter: Learning More</i> | |
| Full-time student enrolments in primary and second level, 1925–2015 | Central Statistics Office, Department of Education |
| National school pupils taught in Irish, 1976–2016 | Central Statistics Office |
| Pupil-to-teacher ratios in primary and secondary level, 1970–2020 | Department of Education |
| Percentage of students entering secondary school who completed their Leaving Certificate, 1960–2010 | Department of Education |
| Percentage of adult population that has completed higher education, 1960–2020 | BBVA, Central Statistics Office |
| <i>Chapter: Earning More</i> | |
| GDP per capita in constant \$, 1920–2018 | Maddison Project Database |
| GDP per capita in current US\$ in 2020 | International Monetary Fund |
| Number of people in employment to the nearest 100,000, 1977–2019 | OECD |
| Percentage of labour force unemployed, 1923–2019 | Rebecca Stuart, Central Statistics Office |
| Proportion of all those employed in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors, 1926–2016 | Central Statistics Office |
| Percentage employed in high-, medium- and low-skilled jobs, 1986 and 2016 | Central Statistics Office |
| Average hours worked per person employed, 1972–2010 | OECD |
| GDP per hour worked in US dollars, 2019 | OECD |
| Gross Value Added per person employed in the EU, 2017 | Central Statistics Office |
| Percentage of enterprises in EU countries selling online, 2019 | Eurostat |
| Number of strikes, 1984–2020 | Central Statistics Office |
| Average weekly industrial wage in real terms, 1940–2020 | Central Statistics Office |
| Average annual changes in consumer prices, 1923–2020 | Central Statistics Office |
| Nominal changes in consumer prices over the past 25 years in various categories | Central Statistics Office |
| Percentage of the population in the upper-, middle- and lower-income brackets, 1987 and 2018 | Central Statistics Office |
| Household wealth and liabilities, 2002–20 | Central Bank of Ireland |
| Percentage of population experiencing consistent poverty, 2003–19 | Central Statistics Office |
| Income inequality (Gini coefficient percentage), 2004–19 | Central Statistics Office |
| Income inequality in selected countries | Central Statistics Office (Ireland), Eurostat (EU Countries), World Bank (USA) |
| Ireland's receipts from the EU minus payments made, 1976–2019 | European Commission |
| <i>Chapter: Opening to the World</i> | |
| Value of goods exports, 1965–2020 | Central Statistics Office |
| Notable facts about Ireland's exports | Sustainable Food Systems Ireland, Bord Bia |
| Destination of goods exported, 1940–2020 | Central Statistics Office |
| Value of goods and services exports, 2003–19 | Central Statistics Office |
| Average number of jobs created through foreign investment for every million residents per year, 2009–18 | IBM Institute of Business Value |
| Average number of jobs created through international investment for every million residents per year, 2009–18 | IBM Institute of Business Value |
| Net number of people emigrating from, or immigrating to, Ireland, 1951–2020 | Central Statistics Office |
| Percentage of the population born outside of Ireland, 1950s–2010s | Central Statistics Office |
| Top ten countries of birth of non-Irish-born residents | Central Statistics Office |
| Countries to which Irish residents send the greatest remittances | World Bank, Pew Research Center |
| Number of overseas tourists to the nearest million, 1960–2019 | Central Statistics Office |
| Where our overseas tourists hail from, 1960–2019 | Central Statistics Office |

| Data | Source |
|--|---|
| Price of a Dublin–London return flight in real terms in 1980, 2000 and 2019 | Barrett, Roseingrave and Farecompare |
| Number of overseas holidays taken as a proportion of the population, 1992–2019 | Central Statistics Office |
| Number of destinations passport holders can access without a prior visa | Henley & Partner |
| <i>Chapter: Cultivating Culture and Sports</i> | |
| Support for Gaelic games | Teneo, Sport Ireland |
| Facts about Ireland’s horse-racing industry | Horse Racing Ireland |
| Ireland has the most winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature and the Booker Prize per capita | Author’s calculations |
| Leading Eurovision Song Contest winning countries | European Broadcasting Union |
| Roll-call of Ireland’s Oscar-winning actors | Wanderu |
| Number of Irish pubs per continent | Irish Hospitality Global |
| <i>Chapter: Strengthening Society</i> | |
| Satisfaction with democracy, 1973–2019 | European Commission |
| Public trust in various institutions | European Commission |
| Ireland Is One of the Least Corrupt Countries in the World | Transparency International |
| Terrorism fatalities in the Republic of Ireland, 1970s–2010s | Global Terrorism Database |
| World Press Freedom Index 2021 | Reporters Without Borders |
| Support for liberalisation of divorce, abortion and same-sex marriage laws, 1980s–2010s | Wikipedia, European Values Survey, Millward Brown |
| Countries ranked by their population’s acts of generosity, 2009–18 | Charities Aid Foundation |
| <i>Chapter: Better Lives for Women</i> | |
| Average number of children born to women during their reproductive years, 1960–2019 | The World Bank |
| Figures for marriages, births and families, 1970–2019 | Central Statistics Office |
| Percentage of women and men aged 25–64 with a third-level education, 1989–2019 | OECD |
| Percentage of women aged 20+ looking after home/family or in the labour force, 1971–2016 | Central Statistics Office |
| Female presidents / prime ministers in power over the last fifty years | World Economic Forum |
| <i>Chapter: Better Lives for Children</i> | |
| Number of states that started prohibiting corporal punishment of children in each decade and select countries that implemented this, 1970s–2010s | Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children |
| Government investment in special needs education | Department of Education, National Council for Special Education |
| Percentage of 15–16-year-olds who have drunk alcohol, smoked cigarettes or used cannabis in 1995 and 2019 | European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs |
| Number of teenage births in each year, 1999–2019 | Central Statistics Office |
| Number of children referred to Garda Diversion Programme and number of offences before the Children’s Court, 2007–2017 | Irish Youth Justice Service, The Courts Service |
| <i>Chapter: Increasingly Environmentally Conscious</i> | |
| Percentage of total land area under forests, 1928–2017 | Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine |
| Tonnes of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) emitted, 1990–2018 | Environmental Protection Agency |
| Urban waste water treatment, 1997–2019 | Central Statistics Office / Environmental Protection Agency |
| Kilograms of municipal and household waste generated per person, 1995–2018 | Environmental Protection Agency |
| Recycling rate of various materials | Environmental Protection Agency |

| Data | Source |
|--|--|
| Share of electricity consumption from renewable sources, 2001–19 | Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland |
| Energy ratings of domestic buildings by their year of construction, 1700–2020 | Central Statistics Office |
| <i>Chapter: Helping the World</i> | |
| Government expenditure on official development assistance, 1974–2019 | Irish Aid |
| Average annual private donation for overseas aid per citizen, 2017–19 | OECD |
| Average sales of Fairtrade-labelled products per person in 2017 | Fairtrade |
| Average number of volunteers for UN programmes per million citizens, 2017–19 | United Nations Volunteers |
| Leading countries in Good Country Index | The Good Country |
| <i>Chapter: A Happier People</i> | |
| Ireland's rank in the UN Human Development Index, 1990–2019 | United Nations Development Programme |
| Attitudes to fairness and equal opportunities | European Commission |
| Percentage of people satisfied with their life, 1973–2019 | European Commission |
| Factors that contribute to happiness at a national and a personal level | Multiple Sources |
| <i>Chapter: Room to Improve</i> | |
| Tonnes of CO ₂ equivalent emitted per person, 2018 | Eurostat / Central Statistics Office |
| Condition of protected habitats and their trends | National Parks and Wildlife Service |
| Price levels in Europe's most expensive countries relative to the EU average in 2019 | Eurostat |
| Percentage of net household income required for childcare | OECD |
| Number of house completions in select years, 1993–2020 | The Housing Agency |
| Number of homeless adults and children, 2014–21 | Focus Ireland / Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage |
| Percentage of those aged 15+ living with normal weight, overweight or obesity | Department of Health |
| Reduction in funding per student | Parliamentary Budget Office |
| Gross public debt per person, 1995–2022 | European Commission |
| Turnout in general elections, 1973–2020 | |

Appendix B
Sample of semi-structured interview approach

Questions on Education Prepared for Professor Áine Hyland

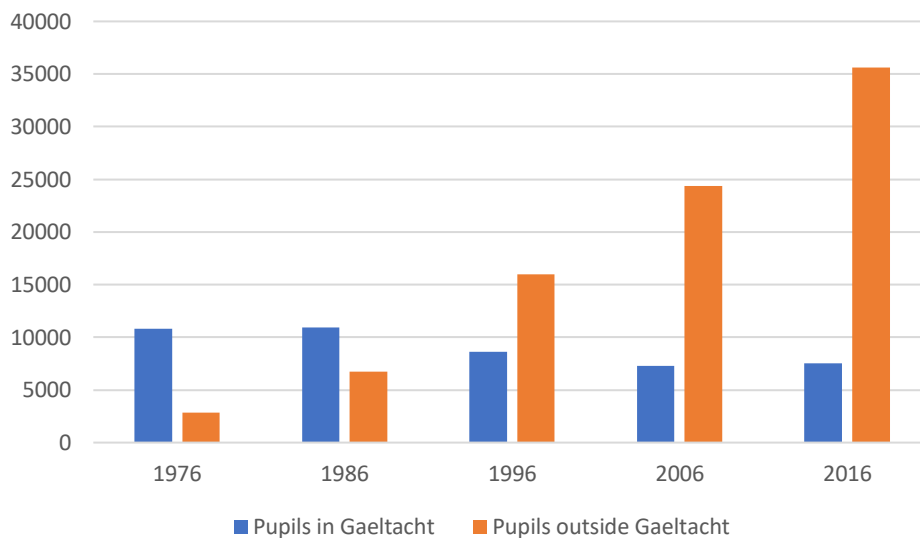
Describe the state of education in Ireland at the time of Independence in 1922.

- Who typically attended school? What gender differences were there?
- For how long did pupils typically attend? Why did they leave education?
- Who provided the schooling? What role did the State play? What was the role of the Churches?
- How did the number and size of schools differ from today?
- How different was the curriculum?

According to the 'Towards a Better Future' report that you contributed to, there were three eras of policy change following independence that have shaped the school system of today: 1922-1934, the 1960s, and the 1990s. Can you briefly outline what the main changes were in each era?

The Irish language was made a compulsory subject at primary level in 1922 to build the identity of the new Irish state – did it help achieve this? How has the role of Irish on the curriculum changed over time?

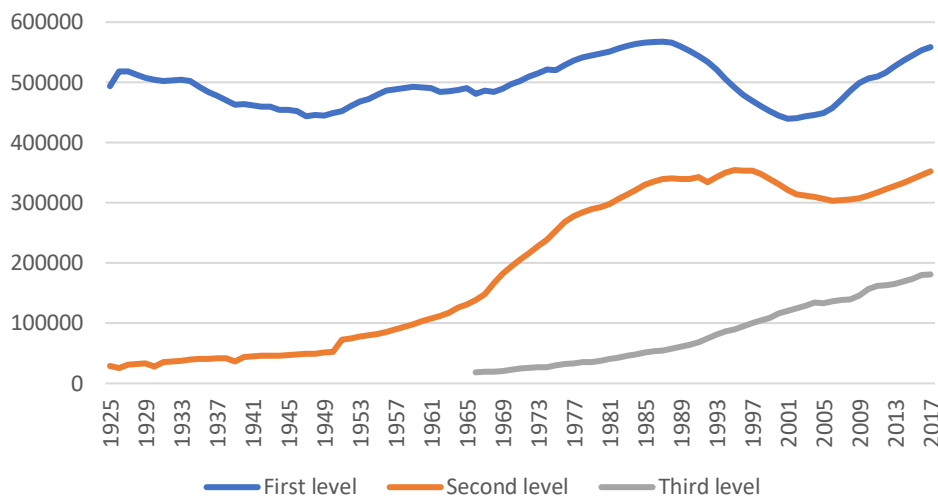
Number of National School Pupils Taught Through Irish



Source: Central Statistics Office.

Why have we seen such an increase in pupils taught through Irish in schools outside the Gaeltacht in recent decades?

Number of Full-Time Student Enrolments by Education Level



Source: CSO, Department of Education.

The figures are for institutions aided by the Department of Education and Skills.

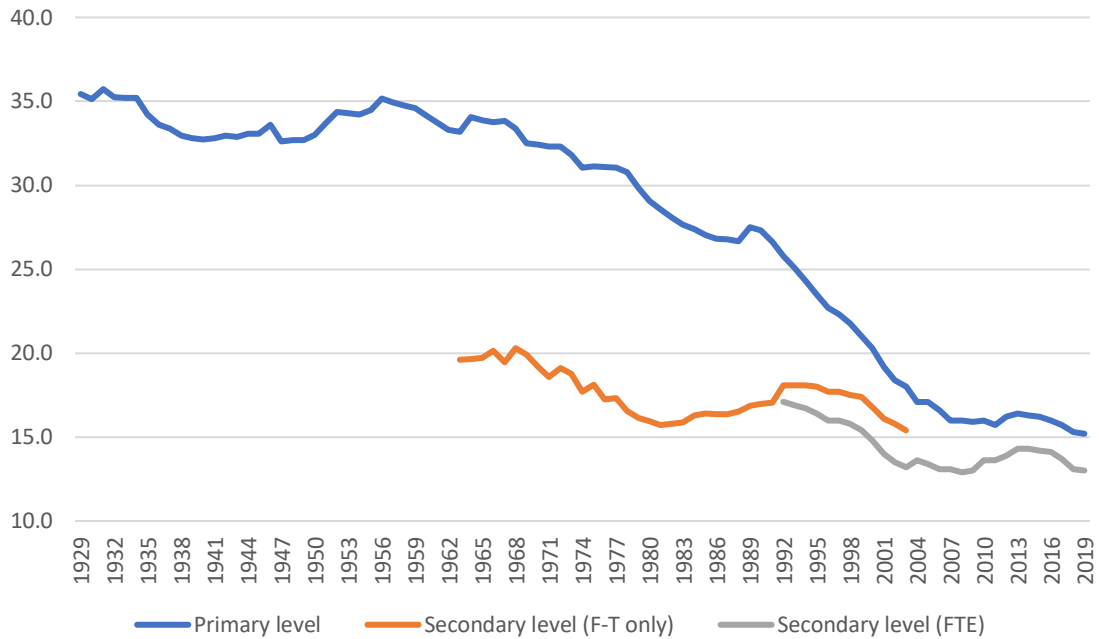
Before the 1950/1960s, why did so few primary school pupils progress to secondary? Why did more girls than boys do so? [Any anecdotes from your own school days that illustrate what it was like in the 50s/60s?]

The big increase in the numbers at second level took place between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s. What factors account for this change? [Why is there a gap between the numbers in primary and the numbers in secondary in the graph, if everyone in primary ends up going to secondary these days?]

If it is fair to say that Ireland was a laggard in introducing free second level education amongst its European peers, was there anything revolutionary at all about its introduction here? How would you characterise Donogh O'Malley's contribution as Minister for Education?

Before the 1970s, why did so few pupils who started secondary education finish it to Leaving Cert? When was the mandatory school leaving age introduced and increased? Ireland now has one of the highest rates of second level completion in Europe – why are we above average?

Pupil:Teacher Ratios in Primary and Secondary Level



Source: Department of Education, Annual Statistical Reports.

Pupil teacher ratios improved consistently from the early 1970s – what underpinned these changes? However, the average figures for primary schools conceal significant variation between smaller and larger schools until recent decades – can you explain why this was?

How has the role of the Catholic church changed over the decades? In what ways was its influence a force for good and in what ways did it hinder reform?

Our children generally perform above average in international tests of educational competence at primary and secondary levels today (such as PISA) – why is that? What policy interventions or initiatives have been most successful in achieving that outcome, in your opinion?

(Time permitting: In 1950, the number of fulltime students at the universities was only 7,900, of which only a quarter were female. What factors accounted for the huge growth in third level participation in subsequent decades? And for the changes in gender participation that saw women become the majority?)

What uniquely Irish factors were at play in any of the trends and improvements that we have discussed (e.g. legislative changes, policy initiatives)? Are there any initiatives in which we have been world/European leaders?

If you were to highlight the contribution of one single individual in Ireland to delivering any of this progress, who would you pick and why?

Appendix C

List of interviewees in the order in which they appear in the text

| Title | Name | Job Title | Institution |
|--------------|---------------------|---|--|
| Professor | Denis Gill | Professor of Paediatrics | National Children's Hospital |
| Dr | Sharon McGuinness | CEO | Health & Safety Authority |
| | Brian Farrell | Communications Manager | Road Safety Authority |
| Dr | Paul Corcoran | Head of Research | National Suicide Research Foundation |
| Professor | Kerri Clough-Gorr | Director | National Cancer Registry |
| Dr | Paul Kavanagh | Director of Public Health Medicine NE | Health Service Executive |
| Professor | Emer Shelley | Dean of the Faculty of Public Health Medicine | Royal College of Physicians of Ireland |
| Dr | Alan Smith | Deputy Chief Medical Officer | Department of Health |
| Professor | Frank O'Mara | Director of Research | Teagasc |
| | Regina Sexton | Programme Manager of Diploma in Irish Food Culture | University College Cork |
| Dr | Ellen Rowley | Research Fellow, Architecture Department | University College Dublin |
| | Leanne Blaney | Author | |
| | Catherine de Courcy | Author | |
| Professor | Áine Hyland | Emeritus Professor of Education | University College Cork |
| Dr | John Walsh | Lecturer, Department of Education | Trinity College Dublin |
| Dr | Ronan Lyons | Assistant Professor of Economics | Trinity College Dublin |
| Professor | Christopher Whelan | Head of School of Sociology | University College Dublin |
| | Francis Devine | Historian | SIPTU |
| | Gerard Kiely | Head Representative in Ireland | European Commission |
| Dr | Ella Kavanagh | Senior Lecturer | UCC |
| Dr | Jacob Dencik | Economic Research Lead | IBM Institute for Business Value |
| Professor | Frank Barry | Professor of International Business & Economic Development | Trinity College Dublin |
| | Helen King | Director, Strategic Insight & Planning | Bord Bia |
| | Eoghan Corry | Travel Writer | |
| Professor | Enda Delaney | Professor of Modern History | University of Edinburgh |
| Dr | Ruth Barton | Associate Professor, Film Studies & Head of School, School Office - Creative Arts | Trinity College Dublin |
| | Philip King | Musician & Broadcaster | |
| Professor | Paul Rouse | Professor, School of History | University College Dublin |
| Professor | Fran Brearton | Professor of Modern Poetry | Queen's University Belfast |
| | Mel McNally | Founder | Irish Pub Company |
| Dr | Ailbhe Smyth | Founding Director of the Women's Education, Resource and Research Centre | University College Dublin |
| Professor | Ian O'Donnell | Professor of Criminology | University College Dublin |
| | Shane Coleman | Author & Journalist | |
| | Margret Fine-Davis | Senior Research Fellow (Emerita) | Trinity College Dublin |
| Professor | Yvonne Galligan | Director, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion | Technological University Dublin |

| Title | Name | Job Title | Institution |
|---------------------|----------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Professor | Saoirse Nic Gabhainn | Health Promotion | National University of Ireland Galway |
| Assoc. Prof | Joseph Travers | Head of School of Inclusive and Special Education | Dublin City University |
| Professor | Ursula Kilkenny | Head of the College of Business and Law | University College Cork |
| | Padraic Fogerty | Campaigns Officer | Irish Wildlife Trust |
| | Laura Burke | CEO | Environmental Protection Agency |
| Assistant Professor | Lisa Ryan | School of Economics | University College Dublin |
| Professor | Ray Murphy | Irish Centre for Human Rights | National University of Ireland Galway |
| | Peter Gaynor | CEO | Fairtrade Ireland |
| | Simon Anholt | Founder | Good Country Index |
| | Caoimhe de Barra | CEO | Trócaire |
| | Mike Allen | Director of Advocacy | Focus Ireland |
| Dr | Jean O'Connell | Consultant Doctor | |