

## **President's Research Award 2011/12**

**Dr Francesco Cavatorta**  
School of Law and Government

Francesco Cavatorta is a leading authority on the politics of the Middle East and North Africa. His research emphasises the interaction of international and domestic factors on the interests and preferences of contending groups in the largely authoritarian regimes of that region. In doing so, he has managed an impressive synthesis that has had a major impact on the academic literature. He has managed to systematically combine a number of hitherto largely separate literatures such as those on Western foreign policy towards the Middle East and North Africa, comparative democratisation, and the area and country-focused studies, which emphasise the uniqueness of local contexts. Few scholars other than Dr Cavatorta could have even attempted such a feat, requiring as it does language abilities; the skill and commitment to carry out field work in a diverse and, sometimes hostile, set of contexts; mastery of the huge and complex literatures on foreign policy and democratisation; and, finally and most importantly, the ability to convey a striking and coherent theoretical message that does not caricature the subtlety and variety of politics in the real world. This general approach has enabled Dr Cavatorta to publish at the highest levels in a number of streams of research on the contemporary Middle East and North Africa. These include, but are not limited to, political Islam, civil society, EU foreign policy, the Arab-Israeli conflict, understanding Arab authoritarianism, democratisation in the region and the international relations of the Middle East and North Africa.

Dr Cavatorta has been very active in translational research. His work on the role of civil society in authoritarian Arab states (funded by Irish Aid) has also been of significant interest to policy-makers and in addition to its impact in Ireland it has been presented (on special request) to policy community seminars in Denmark and the Netherlands. More recently his work on political

Islam has attracted a large grant from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, a private foundation based in Germany. Dr Cavatorta has been prominent in the media as protests have swept across the Middle East in 2011. A highlight was an extended interview on the RTÉ news.

Dr Cavatorta's commitment to applying the highest academic standards to questions of global importance make him a worthy recipient of this year's President's Award for Research in Humanities, Social Sciences and related areas.