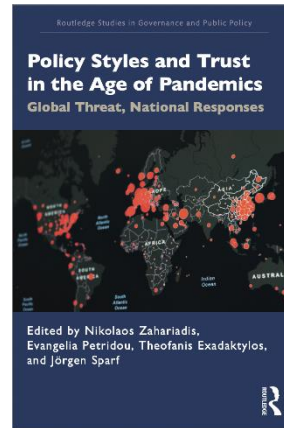
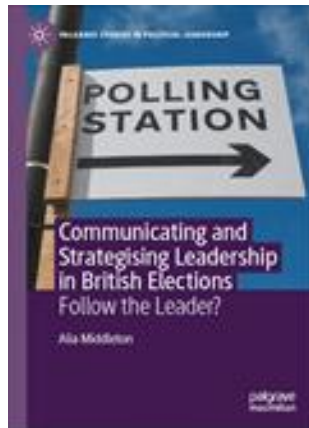


## Double book launch and roundtable event

On 03 May 2022, the Centre for Britain and Europe (CBE) held a double book launch to showcase two exciting new books written by Dr Alia Middleton, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Surrey, and Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos, Reader in Politics at the University of Surrey.



The CBE was privileged to welcome Dr Peter Kerr, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Birmingham and Professor Sofia Vasilopoulou, Professor of Politics at the University of York, for a roundtable discussion which covered the issues raised by the two volumes. Professor Daniele Albertazzi, Professor of Politics at the University of Surrey, chaired the discussion which illuminated some interesting overlap between the two books.

Dr Alia Middleton commenced the launch by giving an overview of her new book entitled 'Communicating and Strategising Leadership in British Elections: Follow the Leader?'. This book is one of the first of its kind to focus not only on the impact of contemporary British election campaigns, but to analyse the 2019 general election. By gathering evidence from twelve different campaigns across four general elections, the book provides a sophisticated analysis on where predominantly Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders visit and why. Due to the originality of this work, Dr Alia Middleton explained that she was able to create a typology of visits made by party leaders during an election campaign.

The book also gives an insight into how leaders are presented in the press. In Dr Alia Middleton's analysis of over 10,000 newspaper articles across nine different publications, she explained that

the media tends to emphasise when things go wrong during a campaign trail which significantly shapes the electorate's perception of a leader. However, Dr Alia Middleton highlighted that being a woman adds another dimension of scrutiny, whereby the press tends to place an increased focus on a female leader's appearance as opposed to her male counterpart.

Following Dr Alia Middleton's insight into her new book, Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos gave a summary of his recent publication entitled 'Policy Styles and Trust in the Age of Pandemics: Global Threat, National Responses', which he wrote alongside Nikolaos Zahariadis, Evangelia Petridou, and Jörgen Sparf. The book explores the reasoning behind why national responses to the Covid-19 pandemic varied despite being faced with the same threat. Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos explained that the crux of the matter comes down to political trust. The book highlights that different levels of political trust interact with policy styles that lead to a variety of national responses.

By focusing on a mixture of cases, which include an array of different regimes and geographical locations during the first year of the pandemic, Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos and his fellow authors were able to create categories for which responses to the pandemic could be classified. This exploratory research found that the effectiveness of a decentralised response is contingent on a high level of trust between society and the state. The book concludes that although the primary objective of national responses to crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, is to save lives, they also act as political tools to project power and reinforce the status quo.

On the surface, the two books appear rather distinct from one another, however Dr Peter Kerr commenced the roundtable discussion by spotlighting their similarities. He explained that both books talk to the statecraft model. Whilst Dr Alia Middleton's book has filled a gap in the literature by providing a 'bottom up' perspective about winning an electoral strategy, Dr Peter Kerr explained how Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos' book gave insight into how to manage the management of a crisis, tapping into statecraft and the image of government competence.

Dr Peter Kerr further highlighted that both books touch upon the theme of 'post truth politics'. With Dr Alia Middleton's work centring around electoral campaigns, Dr Peter Kerr explained that the 2019 campaign spoke of a readymade Brexit deal, 40 new hospitals and an increase in the number of police however this proved untrue. Turning towards Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos' book, Dr Peter Kerr reiterated the fiction surrounding the pandemic, such as the idea of putting a protective ring around care homes. He went on to question whether this worsened political trust as a result of the government listening to internal pressures, as opposed to the experts.

Lastly, Professor Sofia Vasilopoulou shared her thoughts on Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos' book, which she described as 'comparative politics in action'. She went on to explain that she was impressed with the theoretical framework deployed and expressed her praise for the book by stating that 'it should be a textbook for research design in comparative politics'. Professor Sofia Vasilopoulou outlined several key issues raised by Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos' book such as the role of agency, differences between right-wing and left-wing leaders in their handling of the pandemic, and finally how the framework can be used in application to other crises.

Professor Daniele Albertazzi then opened the floor to questions from the audience, which generated further interesting discussions off the back of the themes touched upon in the roundtable discussion. The CBE is proud to be made up of leading researchers and looks forward to future publications by not only Dr Alia Middleton and Dr Theofanis Exadaktylos, but the rest of its experts.

*Written by Evie Horner.*