



**Dr Adrian Kavanagh
The Eurovision Song
Contest has taken place
each year since 1956 and
this year 42 different
countries are competing.**

1956

**Below: Swiss singer Lys Assia,
shortly after winning the very first
Eurovision Song Contest with her
song 'Refrain' on May 25, 1956.**

GETTY



While the focus will be on the songs and performances, the contest acts as a mirror to

European geopolitics and underlines various political tensions, alliances and enmities while also posing questions as to what Europe is and what countries may be viewed as European.

Political rivalries are often acted out on the Eurovision stage, as was evident in recent years in the tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which has lead Armenia to boycott this year's contest in the Azerbaijani capital Baku.

Since the introduction of televoting in 1998 (coinciding with the start of Ireland's fall from Eurovision grace), voting patterns have tended to reflect the shape of European politics and the continent's changing political identities and ethnic geographies.

Indeed, Eurovision

voting patterns offer a much better approximation of the level of cultural closeness between different European states than can be found in studies of other more serious and formal events and processes.

The use of statistical analysis and geographical information systems to study Eurovision voting patterns over the past 15 years points to the existence of a number of voting blocs. These include the former Soviet, former Yugoslav, Nordic, Iberian and western European blocs; countries from the same bloc tend to vote for each

other, or else are hosting large diasporas from other European countries who will tend to vote for the home country in Eurovision.

Certain countries have especially benefited from big votes from western European countries containing large diaspora populations, including Armenia, Turkey, Greece and Romania, or indeed Latvia and Lithuania in the case of the Irish televote.

The existence of geographic, or friends and neighbours, voting patterns with televoting is not due to political collusion. Rather, many of these neighbouring countries

share similar musical tastes and similar musical markets, in which countries' artistes tend to be well known in neighbouring countries, especially if they were part of the same state little more than two decades earlier, as would be the case with the former Soviet and former Yugoslav states.

While song and performance quality ultimately determines who wins the contest, countries that are able to rely on strong neighbourly and diaspora votes, such as Greece, Turkey and the Ukraine, will generally start at an advantage and tend to do well

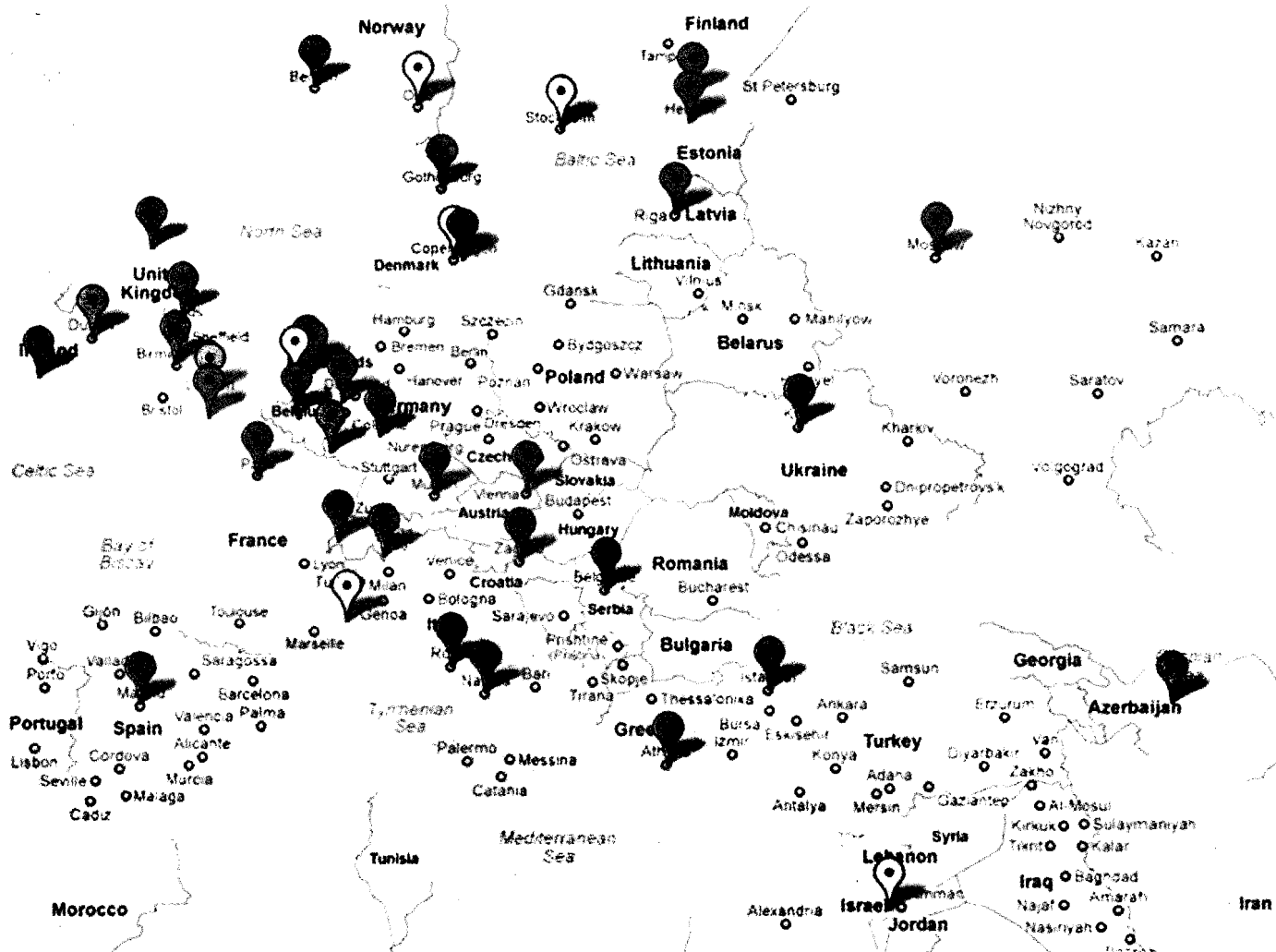
Something else that has to be factored into the analysis of how well an entry is likely to fare is the position in which a song is drawn, with those performing later in a Eurovision semi-final, or final, generally tending to do better than entries performed earlier in the night.

Dr Adrian Kavanagh is a lecturer in the geography department and research associate of the National Institute for Regionals and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) at NUI Maynooth. He will be watching Eurovision this year, even though the final is scheduled for the same time as the annual conference of Irish geographers' dinner.



BEHIND THE SCIENCE OF ...

Map showing the Eurovision host locations
(courtesy Google Maps)



Voting patterns of the 20 countries (17 other semi finalists, as well as Italy, Spain, Azerbaijan) that will be voting in Ireland's Eurovision semi-final on May 22. Dr Adrian Kavanagh

1 Montenegro

Europe's newest state has only had two occasions to vote for Ireland and awarded us only one point. This year their song is 'Euro Neuro' more like Euro No No!

2 Iceland

Part of the Nordic voting bloc that offers the bulk of Ireland's Eurovision points, but has tended to be by far the least generous to Ireland out of this bloc.

3 Greece

Since 1998 Greece has had 12 opportunities to award votes to Ireland but has failed to do so. Twelve points from Athens this year? Not unless we rename Ireland as Cyprus.

4 Latvia

One of our more friendly Eurovision counterparts, awarding Ireland a respectable 35 points on 10 occasions and awarding Jedward 10 points in both the 2011 semi-final and final.

5 Albania

Famously, the only country to award Dervish points in the 2007 Eurovision final. However, Jedward won no points from Albania in last

year's final.

6 Romania

One of the more friendly states in the eastern part of the continent in terms of awarding Ireland Eurovision points, however, Romania awarded Jedward no points in 2011 semi-final or final.

7 Switzerland

Only the UK, Denmark and Malta have awarded us more Eurovision points in the televoting era. However, Switzerland tends to prefer ballads - awarding big points to Niamh Kavanagh, Brian Kennedy and Eamonn Toal but none to Jedward.

8 Belgium

Tends to veer towards less traditional Irish Eurovision fare, with most of the points awarded to Ireland by Belgium since 1998 going to Jedward and Dustin the Turkey (!?!?).

9 Finland

Jedward need a good vote from Finland, another of our Eurovision friends within the Nordic voting bloc - otherwise

Irish hopes could be Fin-ished.

10 Israel

Statistically, the country least likely to award Eurovision points to Ireland prior to 1998, but has improved in the rankings, giving six points to Niamh Kavanagh in 2010 but no points for Jedward last year.

11 San Marino

San Marino has only had two chances to vote for Irish entries (Dustin the Turkey in 2008, Jedward in 2011) and spurned the opportunities.

12 Cyprus

Awarded seven points each to Eamonn Toal in 2000 and Mickey Harte in 2003, but since then has awarded only one point to any Irish entry.

13 Denmark

Obviously still feeling bad about the pillaging back in Viking times, Denmark is one of our best

Eurovision friends, surpassed only by the UK. Awarded Jedward 12 points both in the 2011 semi-final and final. Love you Denmark!

14 Russia

Russia had 13 chances to vote for Irish entries between 1998-2011 but only managed to award one point to any of these (Brian Kennedy in the 2006 semi-final). From Russia with love? Ha ha ha...

15 Hungary

Hungary loved the McCauls in 2005's semi-final (awarding them a whopping 10 points) and Dawn in 1998, but no other Irish entry (including Jedward) has won Hungarian points.

16 Austria

Since 1998 only two Irish entries - 'Millennium of Love' in 2000 and 'Lipstick' in the 2011 final (but not the semi-final) - have attracted the interest of the Austrian voters. Very blue Danube...

17 Moldova

Very much towards the lower end of the scale in terms of awarding Ireland Eurovision points - only three points for Irish entries since their granny-drum-beating debut



in 2005 and no points for Jedward in 2011.

*BIG 5 - Italy

Stormed out of Eurovision in a huff in 1997 and only returned last year when the Italians opted to award nil points to Jedward in both the semi-final and final. Mamma Mia!

*BIG 5 - Spain

Spain awarded relatively few points to Irish entries between 1998 and 2010, but did like Jedward last year, awarding them seven points in the final.

HOSTS - Azerbaijan

The furthest Eurovision-land country from Ireland and our meagre points haul from the Azeris reflects this, only awarding points to Ireland on one occasion (Niamh Kavanagh in the 2009 semi-final).



***The 'Big 5' qualify automatically for the final because of the major financial contribution they make to the European Broadcasting Union**

Can they win?

Dr Adrian Kavanagh

In the final on May 26

Jedward would now be able to win votes from a number of north-western European countries that gave big votes to them in the 2011 final, but not drawn to vote in their semi-final this year, including Sweden, Germany and Ireland's most loyal Eurovision friend, the UK.

Song, performance-level and impact on the Eurovision audience determine how well different acts will do. But neighbourly/diaspora voting can significantly improve a country's chances and countries such as Greece, Serbia and Russia can generally expect to do well in most finals (Greece, for instance, has finished in the Top 10 in all the Eurovision finals held since 2004).

Draw position too has a significant impact. As with the semi-finals, a later draw position will generally be expected to help a country's chances (and it also helps to be drawn before, but not after, the ad break). Performing in last position does not carry the same advantages as in the semi-finals.

Last year, Jedward were drawn in sixth position, statistically one of the least successful positions, and close to a number of similar acts; their strong result was attained despite this.

Statistically, the best positions in terms of average points won over the past decade would be the 22nd and 18th draw positions. The most wins since 1975 have come from the 17th and 20th draw positions, with these positions accounting for four Irish Eurovision victories (1980, 1987, 1992 and 1996). The 17th draw position has been especially kind to Ireland, accounting for three wins, two second places and one fourth place.

So, a late-ish draw position (17th?), close to a number of ballad-style entries would help their chances.

But, they cannot afford to be mainly relying on north-western Europe for support and need to win points from most of the eastern European countries.