

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 19 – Politics and International Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Highlighting and removing obstacles to women's electoral participation and representation in Albania		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010 – December 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Professor Stephen Whitefield	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of Politics, Rhodes Pelczynski Tutorial Fellow in Politics	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 1 March 1998 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> June 2017 – October 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Whitefield's research into political representation led to him creating a National Index of Perception on Women's Participation in Elections (PoPE) for the United Nations (UN) to measure female involvement in the Albanian electoral process. Whitefield's PoPE index findings were used by Albanian civil society activists and politicians to support and justify a legal initiative that resulted in the amendment of the Constitution in July 2020. This means that all the constitutional obstacles to women's electoral participation and representation in Albania, that Whitefield had helped identify, are now lifted. The PoPE Index findings have been used by various stakeholders to promote women participating in decision-making and demand higher representation of women in city councils. There is evidence that this is already having an impact on female participation and representation</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Professor Whitefield's research focuses on political representation in Western and in post-Communist states like Albania. His work examines how successfully political parties represent diverse sets of voters, how social inequality affects perceptions and realities of representation in post-Communist countries, and how the nature of political institutions affects the 'representation gap'. Whitefield has published on these research topics widely, including <b>R1 and R2</b>, with co-author Robert Rohrschneider (University of Kansas), which demonstrate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political parties across Europe have at least until recently successfully represented diverse voters, but achieve representational congruence with their supporters by different methods in post-Communist and Western European countries.</li> <li>• In trying to represent diverse voters more recently, however, parties across Europe are trying to represent an increasingly-individualistic, diverse electorate – creating tensions between partisan and independent voters.</li> <li>• Parties are increasingly also challenged to represent citizens who are critical of democratic institutions in practice and sometimes opposed to democracy as a system, especially in post-Communist states.</li> </ul> <p>Whitefield's research has a methodological focus that was the primary basis for his involvement in creating the Index of Women's Representation in Albania. Since 2002 he has conducted expert surveys to ascertain the positions taken by all significant political parties in 27 European countries on issues regarding the economy, political and social rights (including rights of women), and European integration. He has also conducted numerous nationally representative samples of citizens about politics, economics, inequality and representation across 13 post-Communist states since 1993. He has also integrated these party- and citizen-level surveys into</p>		

a single data base to obtain estimates of the extent of congruence in the positions of parties and citizens on a given issue. Among the many academic publications, resulting from these studies, a number of key findings emerge:

- Citizens' sense of representation is strongly affected by the political institutions of the country, including the electoral process [R1].
- Perceptions of social inequality and corruption, are undermining of trust in the political order [R3, R4, with co-authors Chiara Binelli and Matthew Loveless, University of Bologna].
- Expert survey data can produce valid estimates of party positions [R5].

In 2017, United Nations (UN) Women – a UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women – approached Whitefield for a broad study on female involvement in the Albanian electoral process. Whitefield was contacted specifically because of the unique combination of both research subject expertise in the representation of diverse citizens and methodological expertise in measuring whether representation is happening effectively [R5]. The aim was to create an Index of Obstacles to Women's Representation and Participation. It was based on a combination of expert evaluations of obstacles to women's representation and a survey of citizens' experiences, including their views of women's role in electoral politics. The resultant National Index of Perception on Women's Participation in Elections (PoPE) [R6 – with co-author Endrit Shabani, University of Oxford PhD student] was successfully constructed to measure obstacles across 26 sub-dimensions of the electoral process in Albania. It also provided information on the nature of obstacles at the sub-national level, so allowing comparison across Albania's 12 regions. The results for each region and each sub-dimension were then coded into four categories: no significant obstacles to women's representation, some significant obstacles, considerable obstacles, and severe obstacles. While the findings in some sub-dimensions and regions were broadly positive, the Index noted many considerable and severe obstacles in certain aspects of the Albanian electoral process and in some regions of the country. Key findings included:

- Coercion of women's freedom to vote for a candidate of their choice, family voting, vote buying
- Female candidates' struggle to source the same amount of campaign funding as their male counterparts;
- Women standing for election being faced with significant amounts of hate speech, threats, and violent attacks.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] (Book) Rohrschneider, Robert, and Stephen Whitefield, *The strain of representation: How parties represent diverse voters in Western and Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), ISBN: 9780199652785 (Available upon request)

[R2] (Journal article) Rohrschneider, Robert, and Stephen Whitefield, 'Critical parties: How parties evaluate the performance of democracies', *British Journal of Political Science*, 49:1 (2019), 355–79, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123416000545>

[R3] (Journal article) Binelli, Chiara, Matthew Loveless, and Stephen Whitefield, 'Rethinking social inequality and why it matters', *World Development*, 70 (2015), 239–48, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.02.007>

[R4] (Journal article) Loveless, Matthew, and Stephen Whitefield, 'Being unequal and seeing inequality: Explaining the political significance of social inequality in new market democracies', *European Journal of Political Research*, 50:2 (2011), 239–66, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2010.01929.x>

[R5] (Journal article) Whitefield, Stephen, Milada Anna Vachudova, Marco R. Steenbergen, Robert Rohrschneider, Gary Marks, Matthew P. Loveless, and Liesbet Hooghe, 'Do expert surveys produce consistent estimates of party stances on European integration? Comparing

expert surveys in the difficult case of central and eastern Europe', *Electoral Studies*, 26:1 (2007), 50–61, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2006.04.006>

**[R6]** (Research report, external body) Whitefield, Stephen, Shabani, Endrit. National Index of Perception on Women Participation in Elections (PoPE) 2017  
<https://albania.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/06/obstacles-to-womens-participation-in-elections-in-albania>

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Albania was known to have lower female engagement in politics, both as voters and as candidates, compared to neighbouring countries. In response to concern about this situation, and an increase in activism to try and address the problem, Whitefield was commissioned by UN Women in 2017 to investigate the obstacles to women's participation in the electoral process in Albania. The resultant analysis, the National Index of Perception on Women's Participation in Elections (PoPE) **[R6]** measured obstacles to engagement across 26 sub-dimensions of the electoral process in Albania. It also provided information on the nature of obstacles at the sub-national level, so allowing comparison across Albania's 12 regions. As highlighted in section 2, the work highlighted a number of the key obstacles to women's representation, and it also drew attention to specific areas in the Albanian electoral cycle and law where legislative change to the electoral laws would be appropriate, where political parties needed to change, and where interventions by both state bodies and NGOs would be best directed. Subsequent to the publication of the report in 2017, the findings have been used by civil society activists and politicians to support and justify changes to electoral process and amendments of the Constitution and the Electoral Code.

One of the findings of the report **[R6]** was that women voters are less likely to participate in elections for a myriad of reasons, including external obstacles and internal motivations. In response the Central Election Commission (Komisioni Qendror i Zgjedhjeve) – a permanent, statutory agency responsible for conducting parliamentary and local elections in the Republic of Albania – started reporting the turnout statistics based on gender from the general election of 2017 onwards, which has exposed, and drawn attention to, the low turnout rates of women **[C1]**. *“Collecting and reporting gendered voter turnout has helped us and other actors, understand this issue better and raise public awareness about it. Consequently, these data have encouraged us as Central Electoral Commission, as well as other actors, to work in removing obstacles that women face to participate in the next election, and insodoing increase their turnout in the next elections.”* Former Chairperson of the Central Electoral Commission **[C2]**.

The PoPE Index **[R6]** was critical in providing the evidence required to substantiate the need for changes to legislation in order to address the barriers to participation in standing for election. According to Rudina Hajdari, MP, Co-Chair of the Parliamentarian Committee for the Electoral Reform, *“These research findings have confirmed through scientific evidence, what we as women in politics have long felt in our day-to-day political activity... As the co-chair of the ad-hoc committee on the Electoral Reform, as a politician, and as a woman; I have supported this initiative, and I have fought hard to achieve a better representation of women in politics. These research findigns (sic) have been crucial in providing supporting arguments in favour of our efforts to introduce a comprehensive electoral reform in Albania”* **[C3]**.

A bill demanding a number of amendments to the electoral law was submitted to the Albanian Parliament on 17 January 2020 **[C4]**. Notably, the bill proposed an electoral formula that would increase the number of women in Parliament by including the application of a 50% gender quota.

The bill was supported by 50,000 voters **[C4]**. The Index and Whitefield's research are explicitly referenced in the official documents justifying the bill: *“The National Index of Election Women's Participation **[R6]**, published by the University of Oxford and UN Women, shows that women in Albania still face great obstacles to get elected. These obstacles are socio-cultural, but they are*

*also legal and institutional. Experts argue that it is precisely the fact that the career of female politicians depends on the party leader that limits the scope to be represented and to follow an emancipatory agenda for Albanian women” [C4].*

The bill was discussed in the Parliamentary Commission for the Electoral Reform, as well as in an ad-hoc committee for electoral reform established in Albania, where the influence of Whitefield’s research was acknowledged by Ralf Gjoni MP: *“This bill has been influenced by the work of experts from the University of Oxford” [C5].*

On 30 July 2020, the Albanian Parliament voted in favour of the constitutional amendments to allow open lists and the women quota. The proposed electoral system guaranteed higher representation of women in Parliament by requiring that at least two thirds of the candidates in party lists are chosen directly from the voters and at least one third of elected MPs are women [C6]. Furthermore, one in three candidates on a party list has to be a woman, and if this quota is not met by any party then the list of that party will not be accepted to run in general elections by the Central Election Committee (CEC). The amendments were passed in to law on 5 October 2020.

*Given that in previous general elections women MPs have taken less than 30% of the seats in Parliament, these legal amendments are expected to bring a significant increase of women representation in Parliament, marking a huge leap forward in the history of our society. Rudina Hajdari, MP, Co-Chair of the Parliamentarian Committee for the Electoral Reform [C3].*

Beyond the national legislative changes, the PoPE Index findings [R6] have also been used to promote women’s participation in decision-making and to demand higher representation of women in city councils. There is evidence that this is already having an impact on female participation and representation. For example, the Index findings were presented at the Joint National Conference of the National Alliance of Women Councillors and the Alliance of Women MPs in December 2018 [C7]. The Index findings were supported by the leaders of both alliances, and the chair of sub-commission on gender equality. The chair of the National Alliance of Women Councillors publicly endorsed the Index and used it as a lobbying tool to persuade the party to increase the number of women councillors in the local elections of 2019. *“As leaders of the National Alliance of Women Councillors, I have endorsed PoPE Index, because it demonstrates in a very convincing way that women in politics face additional barriers to succeed. Therefore, we have used this report in conferences and workshops, including the National Alliance of Women Councillors’ joint national conference and the Alliance of Women MPs held in Tirana 14-15 December 2018” [C8].* In 2019, the resultant impact was significant: the number of women councillors elected had increased from 37% in the 2015 local election to 44% in the 2019 local election [C9].

##### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[C1]: Central Election Commission Albania (Komisioni Qendror i Zgjedhjeve) voter turnout data. <http://kqz.gov.al/zgjedhje-per-kuvendin/?lang=en>

[C2]: Testimony letter, Former Chairperson of the Central Electoral Commission of Albania

[C3]: Testimony letter from Rudina Hajdari, MP and Co-Chair of the Parliamentarian Committee for the Electoral Reform

[C4]: The text of the bill that proposed amendments of the electoral law (PoPE Index and University of Oxford is mentioned in the text)  
[http://www.parlament.al/Files/ProjektLigje/20200928090545priligji%20kodi%20zgjedhor%20%20all\\_compressed%20\(2\)\\_compressed%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.parlament.al/Files/ProjektLigje/20200928090545priligji%20kodi%20zgjedhor%20%20all_compressed%20(2)_compressed%20(1).pdf)

[C5]: Recording of ad-hoc committee for the electoral reform established in Albania, 28 September 2020. The influence of Whitefield’s research was acknowledged by Ralf Gjoni MP at

timestamp: 0.24

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEucmF8y2Og&feature=youtu.be&ab\\_channel=ReportTV](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEucmF8y2Og&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=ReportTV)

**[C6]:** Amendment to the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, the Assembly of the Republic of Albania.

<http://parlament.al/Files/Akte/20200730153004ligj%20nr.%20115,%20dt.%2030.7.2020.pdf>

**[C7]:** Agenda: Joint National Conference of the National Alliance of Women Councillors and the Alliance of Women MPs, 14–15 December 2018.

**[C8]:** Testimony letter, Chairwomen, National Alliance of Women Councillors

**[C9]:** Bashki te Forta report: 'Increase of Women Councilors to 44% after 2019 elections', 31 January 2020: <http://bashkiteforta.al/rritje-e-grave-keshilltare-ne-44-pas-zgjedhjeve-2019/>