

Institution: University of East Anglia		
Unit of Assessment: 19 – Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Protecting Electoral Integrity		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Toby James	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Politics and Public Policy	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2012 - Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Since, as the US elections in 2016 and 2020 illustrated so vividly, voting is at the very heart of democracy, national governments and international bodies need to maintain integrity and inclusivity in their electoral practices. Research addressing these key aspects of electoral management undertaken by Toby James has had impact of major reach and significance in the UK and beyond. It has led to reforms in the UK aimed at protecting and enhancing the participation of young people. It has shaped international definitions of best electoral practice and improved electoral integrity during times of crisis.</p> <p>In his research, James has identified a series of problems in the implementation and management of UK electoral policy, and outlined how they might be addressed. As a result of the implementation of his recommendations, an estimated 3.5 million young people have been prompted to register to vote each year, and a further 500,000 were automatically registered in Wales. In addition, over GBP20,000,000 per year has been saved through the adoption of new voter registration systems. James has also established the importance of electoral management bodies for protecting electoral integrity at the international level. His work has directly informed resolutions made by international institutions, including the United Nations and electoral officials. Furthermore, the contributions his research has made to training programmes and advice for electoral management professionals on how to protect electoral integrity during the Covid-19 pandemic have helped to define best practice for election officials. James' accomplishments were recognised in 2018 when he was runner-up for the ESRC Outstanding Contribution to Public Policy.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>In an under-studied field, James has combined historical study of policy development and change with empirical and theoretical investigation of policy implementation and effectiveness. In two monographs, three journal special issues and 16 ISI cited research articles, he has advanced the investigation of the organisations, networks, resources, instruments and working practices involved in the conduct of elections. Specifically, James has addressed three main areas:</p> <p>Elections in the UK: In a series of studies, James identified problems and proposed remedies to the UK electoral system. These investigations, which involved colleagues from Newcastle University and UEA, were funded by the British Academy, the Electoral Commission, and the Joseph Roundtree Trust. They examined the effects of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act (2013), the challenges faced by electoral officials and evaluations of the management of electoral events 2014-19. Three findings were noteworthy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual electoral registration reduced levels of voter registration among young people and students, increased costs for electoral officials and lowered staff morale (R1). • although voter fraud, notably compared to registration errors, is rare in the UK, problems with voters missing from the electoral registers were such that at the 2015 General Election two-thirds of polling stations turned away at least one would-be voter (R2). • the complexity and fragmentation of electoral law are a challenge for electoral administrators (R2, R3) and shortfalls in funding (and the need to cut costs) have reduced vital voter outreach work (R4). Automated voter registration was recommended (R1, R2, R3, R4). 		

International and Comparative Elections Research: In the international arena, James has demonstrated the effects of investment in electoral machinery and building stronger workforces, and developed criteria for assessing the quality of election management. In a 2020 monograph (R1), the first systematic comparative assessment of electoral management and a journal special issue on the topic (R5 and R6), James detailed the structure, workforce and capacity of electoral management bodies (EMBs) worldwide. His work drew on the first-ever global survey of electoral management bodies in collaboration with the Venice Commission and with EMBs in 72 countries. The study revealed high levels of variation in the capacity, independence, staffing and technology of EMBs, and showed how they struggle to access the resources needed to maintain election integrity. Demonstrating the centrality of electoral management to electoral integrity, the research proposed metrics for assessing the quality of electoral management, and proposed measures for assessing its effectiveness. Elsewhere, James elaborated the principle of 'inclusive voting practices', which he had developed in partnership with Holly Ann Garnett, and showed in a special issue of *Policy Studies* how the principle can be used to inform policies to reduce inequalities in voter turnout. This work built on his 2012 monograph *Elite Statecraft and Election Administration*.

Elections and the Pandemic: While a visiting scholar at International IDEA, James's rapid response research explored the challenges, including an uneven playing field for candidates, reduced opportunities for political participation, compromised election management quality and political uncertainty to electoral integrity, posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. His findings formed the basis of remedies he proposed in articles in *Election Law Journal* and *Public Money and Management*.

3. References to the research

- R1 Comparative Electoral Management: Performance, Networks and Instruments
James, T.S. *Routledge*, 2020. ISBN: 9781138682412.
- R2 'Poll Workers' in P. Norris and A. Nai (eds.) *Election Watchdogs*
Clark, A. & James, T.S. *Oxford University Press*, 2017. ISBN: 9780190677817.
- R3 'Electoral Management in Britain' in P. Norris, R. Frank and F. Matinez I Coma (eds)
Advancing Electoral Integrity
James, T.S., *Oxford University Press*, Chap 8. 2014. ISBN: 9780199368716
- R4 The cost of elections: The effects of public sector austerity on electoral integrity and voter engagement
James, T.S. and Jervier, T. *Public Money and Management*. 37 (7), pp. 461-468, 2017.
DOI: 10.1080/09540962.2017.1351834
- R5 Electoral management and the organisational determinants of electoral integrity:
Introduction
James, T.S., Garnet, H.A., **Loeber, L.** & Van Ham, C. *International Political Science Review*, 2019, 40 (3) pp. 295-312. DOI: 10.1177/0192512119828206
- R6 Better workers, better elections? Electoral management body workforces and electoral integrity worldwide
James, T.S. *International Political Science Review*, 40 (3) 370-390 2019.
DOI: 10.1177/0192512119829516

Grants

Project: **Election Integrity on the Frontline: Poll Workers and the Electoral Process in Britain.** (PI) **James, T.S.**

Funder: The British Academy. Project dates: 2015 – 2016. Grant value: GBP9,297 (UEA)

Project: **Electoral Commission Consultancy.** (PI) **James, T.S.**

Funder: The Electoral Commission. Project dates: May 2016 – August 2016.

Grant value: GBP10,000.

Project: **Comparative Electoral Management.** (PI) **James, T.S.**

Funder: Electoral Integrity Project (Harvard/Sydney Universities 2016 – 2018)

Grant value: AUD8,000.

4. Details of the impact

James' research has achieved impact through the dissemination of his work through the national and international policy community of election specialists in which he has become a pivotal figure. As well as coproducing research with through partnerships with civil society organisations, he has communicated his findings to key user communities through briefings, advising and providing oral and written evidence to parliamentary committees and the Law Commission. His research on voter registration and voter ID has also regularly featured on TV and in the press, including the *Guardian*, *Independent*, and *Daily Mail*.

His organisation and anchoring of networks of experts and practitioners provided a further channel. In 2015 James co-founded the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Democratic Participation with *Bite the Ballot* a charitable advocacy group promoting young people's engagement with democracy. Their work contributed significantly to the improvement of UK policies on voter registration and thus also to improved participation. In 2017 in partnership with Holly Ann Garnett, James established the international Electoral Management Network of academic and professional specialists in elections policy and management, which has 70 members from 30 different countries and a mailing list of 15000. The Network has organised annual conferences in Oslo (2017), Boston (2018), Washington DC (2019) with partners including the International Federation for Electoral Systems, Carter Center and International IDEA. The Network has enabled scholars and practitioners to share best practice, develop common frameworks of understanding, and respond collaboratively – and rapidly – to emerging challenges.

Through these routes and relationships James' research has had impact in four main areas.

1. Improving voter registration and engagement in elections: Westminster and the Welsh Assembly

James' research has inspired policy makers and led to important changes in legislation and regulation to voter registration in the UK, Wales and Scotland. His research on the effect of replacing household with individual registration [S1 page 25] and the use of performance standards was the only academic work to be referenced in the 2014 report, *Voter Engagement*, produced by the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee of the House of Commons. The report also endorsed his recommendations on automatic voter registration [S1, pages 60-61].

James was the lead author of the 2016 report, *Missing Millions*, published by Bite the Ballot. Endorsed by the APPG for Voter Participation, the report informed the understanding of Westminster MPs and their approach to voter engagement. According to Shadow Minister for Voter Engagement and Youth Affairs Cat Smith MP, it "*played a vital role in evidencing the funding pressures facing electoral services and advocating for a more modern electoral registration system*" [S2], and Minister for the Constitution (2015-16) John Penrose MP stated that the report was "*helping inform our plans for a programme of work aimed at realising this vision*" [S2]. Four of the report's recommendations were implemented in full or in part:

- Recommendation #3: The Higher Education Act 2017 was amended such that universities are now required to comply with requests from Electoral Registration Officers for information about students, making the annual registration of 2 million students much more efficient and effective, ensuring that this group of sometimes hard to reach voters have the opportunity to participate [S2, S3].
- Recommendation #10: The Government established a National Democracy Week, overseen by the Cabinet Office, which forms a key part of the promotion of democratic participation, voter engagement and registration [S2, S3].
- Recommendation #18: With the further impact of briefings by James and Wilks-Heeg (Liverpool University), produced in partnership with the Electoral Reform Society, the government committed, when passing the Parliamentary Boundaries and Constituencies Bill (2020), to inviting citizens to register to vote when they are sent a new National Insurance Number. Consequently, each year 700,000 16-year-olds will be prompted to register to vote [S7].
- Recommendation #25: The Representation of the People (Annual Canvass) (Amendment) Regulations 2019 provided for a streamlined system of voter registration in which citizens were

no longer required actively re-register each year. Coming into effect in 2020 the government estimates that this change alone saves GBP20,000,000 annually while increasing registration [S4].

Chris Skidmore MP (Minister for the Constitution 2016-18) commented that "*The Missing Millions report will go down in history as helping to evolve the UK's electoral registration system*" [S2]. On the eve of the voter registration deadline for the EU Referendum, James' warning about individual electoral registration, and his explanation of how viewers could check their status and register, created a spike in registrations, which led the website hosting the electoral register to crash. As parts of his interview were replayed on BBC News 24, there were repeated spikes in online access on the day bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36332411 [S2].

James' evidence to the report *Voter Engagement* also shaped Automatic Voter Registration legislation adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government [S5, p.15]. This was consolidated following his role as expert adviser to the Welsh Assembly Parliamentary Finance Committee on the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill 2019. Estimates suggest that the law will add 500,000 voters to the register for Welsh parliamentary and local elections [S7].

2. Electoral management and voter fraud in Scotland and the UK

James' 2016 proposal to the Scottish Parliament's Select Committee on Local Government and Communities for increased transparency and reform to the payments system for Returning Officers was accepted by the Committee, and included in the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill 2019 and the Referendums (Scotland) Bill 2019.

His research showing that the level of election fraud is overstated and that problems with electoral integrity lie elsewhere was taken up by the inquiry into electoral fraud and laws on voter ID conducted by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles. James' recommendation that electoral officials be exempted from FOI requests has now been publicly accepted as desirable policy by the government minister and opposition in Westminster. Moreover, James' work highlighting why the complexity and fragmentation of electoral law are problematic was taken up by the Law Commission, on which he served as an advisor, and informed the Commission's proposal for legal consolidation [S6]. The reform was endorsed by the Public Administration and Constitutional Reform Committee in 2019, following written and oral evidence from James, and legislation is now pending [S6].

3. Defining international best practice for the design of Electoral Management Bodies

James' research has had international impact by informing the work, policies and recommendations of the Venice Commission. The conclusions of Venice Commission conferences signal best practice in elections across the world. They inform the judgements on electoral procedures made by international organisations such as the OSCE/ODHIR, the European Court of Human Rights and the Venice Commission itself.

Following the suggestion made by James in 2016 at the 13th European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies organised by the Venice Commission and held in Romania, a survey of election workers to examine the capacity of EMBs worldwide was successfully undertaken. Findings from the survey, which was supported by the Venice Commission, were reported to the 14th conference in St Petersburg. Organised around the theme of the project, the conference was attended by 120 senior officials from 40 countries (including Chairs and members of Electoral Commissions) and representatives of international institutions including the United Nations [S8]. The conclusions of the 14th conference drew significantly on James' work: conclusion 5 underlined research findings about the importance of adequate human and financial resources if EMBs are to fulfil their purpose; conclusion 17 urged reforms to the management of election workers; conclusion 18 endorsed actions derived from the research concerning the promotion of gender equality within electoral management bodies [S8].

Research conducted by James has had a direct impact on the policies and practices of regional international organisations and national governments. In 2018, James took part in the 5th Annual Conference on Election Management Bodies in Ivory Coast. His findings on electoral management led to the African Union's recommendation that EMBs demonstrate 'independence, impartiality, credibility and professionalism' [S9]. He also delivered training to the Nigerian

Independent Electoral Commission in 2017 and ahead of General Elections in 2019. Following his participation in November 2017 at an IDEA workshop in Sweden where BRIDGE Training courses on Financing Elections were developed, James' research was embedded in the design and set as key reading for practitioners [S10]. James also recorded training videos for the module. The training has been rolled out worldwide by International IDEA who have said that: "*James' research on the cost of elections was used to inform key understandings of a new module on financing elections. The reframing of financing of elections as an investment rather than a cost, and the importance of a compelling risk-focussed storyboard, influenced the way that the deputy chief electoral officer of Australia secured additional funding for training resources*" [S10].

4. Maintaining electoral integrity during the COVID-19 pandemic

James' research on the effects of social distancing and lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic enhanced practitioner understanding of the challenges posed to electoral management during crises. His suggestions of best practice for how they can be addressed led to collaboration with International IDEA, which resulted in the production of resources for professionals in EMBs and the media [S10]. These resources were accessed more than 40,000 times between March and December 2020 [S10].

Further impact was achieved through the publication of a technical paper, which has been used by electoral management bodies worldwide – at local, state and national levels – to guide decisions on special arrangements for Covid-19 elections [S10]. Published on 26 March 2020, the paper had been downloaded 11,568 times by 10 December 2020. As IDEA observes, "*James used his research on comparative electoral management and on inclusive voting practices to contribute text towards the International IDEA Technical Paper on Covid and Elections*" [S10]. James also reached practitioner audiences as an invited expert speaker at webinars organised by the UNDP and the National Election Commission of South Korea, and his co-authored work on election postponement published in the *Election Law Journal* was featured by *CNN*, *Americas Quarterly* and *The Washington Post*.

In summary, James' research on aspects of electoral management has had far-reaching impact on processes that are central to functioning and legitimacy of democratic states. In the UK, his findings have directly informed policy change on voter registration and engagement and elections, and on electoral management and voter fraud. Internationally, his research has shaped the global standards and expectations set by the Venice Commission, influenced the design of the bodies that manage elections across the world and been used to train electoral officials. The findings of James' rapid response research, moreover, have had an impact on how governments and electoral bodies understand the challenges posed by the pandemic and the measures that they can put in place to address them.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. Political and Constitutional Reform Committee *Voter Engagement* report, 10.11.2014 and letter from Committee Chair, 28.11.2014.
- S2. *Missing Millions report*, quotes from MPs 06.2018, quotes from minister 20.06.2018, and Bite the Ballot letter 22.11.2017.
- S3. Testimony from the House of Lords, 22.12.2020.
- S4. Parliamentary debate citing cost savings from automatic re-registration (GBP20,000,000 per annum), 31.10.2019.
- S5. Local Government and Election (Wales) Bill Explanatory Memorandum (p.15), 11.2019
- S6. Law Commission electoral law project exemplar minutes, 19.06.2014, and citations in the PACAC Electoral Law Inquiry, 01.11.2019.
- S7. [Electoral Commission voter registration estimates, accessed on 12.03.2021.](#)
- S8. Venice Commission 14th Conference of EMBs Press Release and Conference Conclusions, 16.05.2017.
- S9. Policy recommendations from the African Union Conference, 2018.
- S10. Letter from International IDEA, 14.12.2020.