

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Exeter		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 19 Politics and International Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Shaping the global response to the transnational repression of political exiles		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013 - 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
John Heathershaw	Professor of International Relations	2007-Present
David Lewis	Associate Professor of International Relations	2013-Present
Catherine Owen	British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow	2017-Present
Saipira Furstenburg	Research fellow (short-term contracts)	2017-2020
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 - Present		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Heathershaw et al.'s research has informed and shaped the global response to transnational repression, especially but not exclusively, with regard to Central Asian political exiles. The team's research provided the first analysis of the scale, types and stages of extra-territorial security by Central Asian states and is used by legislatures and courts in Europe and North America and by major human rights organizations. These organisations have noted that the team's database 'saves lives', informs programming and advocacy, as well as supporting the prevention of the misuse of cross-border criminal justice mechanisms. Freedom House are now using Exeter's methodology as a model for a new global database.</p> <p>In addition, international policy development and discourse has been influenced by the team's research. The US Congress developed the Transnational Repression Accountability and Prevention Act with a 'significant contribution' from Heathershaw et al.'s research. Invited evidence to the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and engagement with the Parliamentary Human Rights Group led to a new model Code of Conduct to, among other things, protect academic exiles from transnational repression. Finally, the work of Heathershaw et al has informed policy discourse in fora attended by Central Asian, EU member state and US delegates.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Heathershaw et al.'s research provides the first-ever systematic analysis of Central Asian political exiles and the first cross-national accessible public database of transnational repression from any region of the world. Existing research on the extra-territorial dimension of 'regime security' and the phenomenon of political exiles had mainly focussed on the Middle East and North Africa and on how this coercion impacts on the ability of opposition movements to organise politically. However, Central Asia – defined as the five post-Soviet Central Asian republics – remains a poorly understood region. Before our research, there was no systematic evidence, qualitative or quantitative, of extra-territorial measures by Central Asian regimes against their exiles.</p>		

Typically denoted as ‘transnational repression’, the team define these acts as the extra-territorial authoritarian practices to control political space beyond the borders of the state (3.3, 3.4). Heathershaw et al have identified their causal processes across three stages and types of practice from online harassment to assassination of exiles, from high-profile opposition leaders to low-profile academics (3.2). In particular, the team have shown that transnational networks of state agencies and their formal and informal partners work together to move across these three distinct stages of inclining severity (3.2). Furthermore, the team have published cases demonstrating the conditions under which escalation to ‘stage 3’ occurs and provided evidence of these practices leading to the closure of spaces of refuge. Heathershaw et al have also shown that in many cases international criminal justice mechanisms, including regional agreements between former Soviet states and the abuse of the international policing service INTERPOL (R2, R3), were instrumental in the escalation of extra-territorial security measures against an exile (3.1).

Heathershaw et al.’s research has systematically collated and analysed the publicly documented cases of over 250 political exiles from 40 different Central Asian opposition groups from five states. The CAPE database is published biennially first in November 2016, with the most-recent third edition in 2020 [3.5]. Analytics have been improved each time with new fields related to gender-based violence, the misuse of INTERPOL (R2, R3), and assassination. Geo-spatial mapping of cases has been added. This has enabled the team to chart patterns of escalation with respect to certain countries and opposition groups, particularly from Uzbekistan (3.1, 3.2) and Tajikistan (3.2).

The research was undertaken by members of the Exeter Central Asian Studies research group, a research network begun by Heathershaw in 2010 which has grown to be one of the leading groups for the study of Central Asia in Europe. The team began conducting research in this area in 2013 as part of an ESRC-funded project on conflict management (ES/J013056/1), which included the NGO Saferworld as a non-academic co-investigator, and Lemon’s doctoral studentship (see below, 2013-16, 1216025) under the supervision of Heathershaw. The team subsequently received specific funding to work on political exiles from the Open Society Foundation (OR2017-34773) and an ESRC IAA NGO Data award. Following this funded research, in 2019 the team began to work on a pro bono basis on Freedom House’s funded ‘global database’ project, which is inspired by CAPE.

The CAPE project is collaborative with colleagues at Columbia University of New York and a total of 11 temporary research assistants. The core team comprises three senior scholars (Heathershaw and Lewis at Exeter and Cooley at Columbia) and three early-career scholars (Owen, Lemon and Furstenberg) all of whom were PhD students and/or postdoctoral fellows with Heathershaw. In particular, Lemon took on a postdoctoral fellowships at Columbia University (2016-18) and the Daniel Morgan Graduate School (2018-20) in the United States while continuing to work on the project.

### 3. References to the research

**3.1 Lewis, David.** “Illiberal Spaces:” Uzbekistan’s extraterritorial security practices and the spatial politics of contemporary authoritarianism. *Nationalities Papers*, 43(1), 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.980796>

**3.2 Cooley Alexander, and John Heathershaw,** *Dictators Without Borders: power and money in Central Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017 – Book submitted to REF2021 and available on request

**3.3 Lewis, David, John Heathershaw, and Nick Megoran.** “Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management.” *Cooperation and Conflict* 53, no. 4 (December 2018): 486–506. doi:[10.1177/0010836718765902](https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718765902).

**3.4 John Heathershaw and Owen, Catherine.** 'Authoritarian conflict management in post-colonial Eurasia', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 19(3), 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2019.1608022>

**3.5 Heathershaw et al.** CAPE Database of known Central Asian Political Exiles (2016, published biennially with the third edition in 2020)

#### 4. Details of the impact

Since 2016 when the team made the CAPE database open, searchable and user-friendly, its impact on the global response to Central Asian political exiles has emerged rapidly. The publication [3.5] prompted significant media coverage and led to invitations to brief policy makers and collaborate with human rights organizations. As a result of key relationships with these organizations, beneficiaries now routinely use the team's work to develop policy and as evidence for their own projects and analysis. It is widely used by human rights and legal practitioners with 5,345 unique users and 76,819 unique hits over the period from May-November 2018 when the high-profile second edition was released. This impact has had special significance for four specific areas and audiences. The project's impact on human rights organisations, asylum seekers, as well as legislative bodies and policy makers in the US and UK has extended beyond Central Asia to shape the global response.

##### 4.1. Evidence in the courts to grant asylum and save lives

Evidence from the database has been used to support the awarding of asylum, to prevent extradition, and to provide authoritative evidence about exiles which are subject to intimidation, harassment and violence. In particular, 18 Central Asian exiles residing in Russia, Greece, Lithuania, Cyprus, Poland, Sweden, Germany (x3), Turkey, Canada, and the United States (x4) have called upon Heathershaw et al to **provide expert witness testimony** or official letters of support to demonstrate a pattern of state repression and how this has continued outside of the country. For example, a testimonial letter from the Georgetown Law Clinic (USA) notes that '*the wealth of knowledge and cases maintained by the [CAPE] project*' which is '*not available from general country conditions reports*' was instrumental in the successful award of asylum [5.1]. The team have often collaborated with global human rights NGOs. Letters from Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) provide testimony of this influence. AI noted '*several cases where individuals in fear of deportation have used reports produced by the CAPE project to defend themselves*' [5.2] and HRW claims that **the database has 'saved lives'** [5.3].

##### 4.2. Co-produced research and joint advocacy activities with leading NGOs

In 2016, Heathershaw et al formed a group of non-academic advisors, including AI, Fair Trials International, Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) and a host of human rights groups in Russia and Central Asia. The team's research provided, for the first time, the **systematic evidence they needed to demonstrate the targeting of exiles** in their human rights reporting. AI remarks that the CAPE database provides them with '*a unique analytical tool to study patterns of extraterritorial repression*' which they use '*for advocacy with governments and international governmental organizations*' [5.2]. Fair Trials notes that it aids their work '*to prevent the misuse of cross-border criminal justice mechanisms*' and '*plays a very helpful role in supporting our work on the reform of INTERPOL*' [5.4] (see below). FPC adds that the database enables '*evidence-based policy development*' and '*is critical to our advocacy work in the region [of Central Asia]*' [5.5]. In 2019, the team began to work as a formal advisor to Freedom House on their transnational repression '**global database**' project, which is inspired by and modelled on CAPE [5.16]. The team provided conceptual and methodological expertise, co-authored their codebook and co-edited a special report published by Freedom House in July 2020 [5.6]. They note that their work on transnational repression "*would not have been possible with their [Heathershaw et al] foundational work, support and collaboration*".

#### 4.3. Advice to parliaments, shaping a draft law in the US and code of conduct in the UK

In the US, Heathershaw et al's research has been used to shape and support legislation that was introduced to the **US Senate and House of Representatives** in September 2019. The Transnational Repression Accountability and Prevention Act (TRAP) seeks to prevent authoritarian regimes from using Interpol notices to have citizens detained by immigration authorities within the United States and requires the US Government to press for reforms within Interpol. First, CAPE research was used in the oral testimony of two panellists, from the Director for Special Research at Freedom House and Heathershaw's co-author from Columbia University in an oral hearing on the TRAP Act in the US Senate on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 [5.7]. The committee's co-chairman, Senator Wicker, in his introduction to the session, noted that Heathershaw and Cooley "wrote the book on extraterritorial authoritarian practices" [5.7]. The Senior Policy Advisor to Senator Wicker, added that the research "*contributed to the language in the TRAP Act that would require the U.S. State Department to document salient instances of transnational repression in the human rights report*" and continued to say that "*Prof. Heathershaw's scholarship significantly enriched the understanding of transnational repression among members of Congress and their staff and contributed to concrete policy changes, most notably the documentation of transnational repression in the U.S. State Department's Annual Human Rights Country reports*" since 2019 [5.8].

In the UK, the team have closely collaborated with the all-party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) especially with regard to the transnational repression of **academic exiles**. Co-Chair of the PHRG notes that, "*Professor Heathershaw's work [...] helped to inform the PHRG and other APPGs' engagement with, and recommendations for, UK foreign policy officials and representatives of these countries.*" [5.9]. In June 2019, Heathershaw was invited to give **oral and written evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry** 'Autocracies and UK foreign policy' which was quoted in the November 2019 report with respect to the targeting of academic exiles in the UK [5.10]. This evidence was used in the report to support a series of recommendations for the Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) to develop a strategy on internationalisation and academic freedom, to which Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab responded affirmatively [5.10]. In parallel, Heathershaw became **principal academic advisor** to the PHRG and a founding member of its new Academic Freedom and Internationalisation Working Group (AFIWG), a group formed to develop a UK-wide 'code of conduct' on internationalisation and academic freedom including measures to protect academic exiles [5.9]. The Code of Conduct was referenced in a subsequent report by Universities UK and headlined on the **front page of The Times** on 12 October, 2020.

#### 4.4. Informed the policy of international agencies and foreign governments

Heathershaw et al have informed the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In January 2018, the IOM's **flagship World Migration Report** included a text box on the team's research and argument that large-scale repression of diasporas may promote radicalization by a small minority of exiles. This citation was included to argue that safe conditions for legal migration and the right to refuge must be protected [5.11]. The team appear to have had particular effect at the OSCE and the policy of the US government in these fora. In December 2017, Heathershaw was invited to speak at a closed-door meeting of the OSCE where he presented data from the CAPE project to around 40 senior officials from the organization. In September 2018, the team's influence was demonstrated when they helped organise and participated in a meeting on Tajikistan's transnational repression at the **OSCE's annual human dimension** meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw. There were more than 50 attendees, many of them official delegates from member states, including the Government of Tajikistan which spoke from the floor in response to the team's evidence and that of their colleagues. However, in the main session during the afternoon, the representative of the US government delegation, which had attended the team's event, noted that 'Tajikistan uses counter-extremism to target its opposition' [5.12]. This position was consistent with the evidence presented by the team to the USG on three occasions in the preceding 9 months. The event demonstrated how the international discourse on transnational repression has changed in recent years, partly due to the team's research on Central Asia.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

**5.1** Letter from Student Law Representatives, Georgetown Law Clinic, 2018

**5.2** Letter from the Director of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia office, Amnesty International, 16 February 2018

**5.3** Letter from a Central Asia researcher, Human Rights Watch, 2020

**5.4** Letter from the Legal and Policy Officer, Fair Trials, 23 February, 2018

**5.5** Letter from the Director of the Foreign Policy Centre, 12 February 2018

**5.6** Letter from the Director for Special Research, Freedom House, 2020

**5.7** United States Senate, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Hearing 'Tools of Transnational Repression', 12 September 2019

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201203150356/https://www.csce.gov/sites/helsinkicommission.house.gov/files/ToolsOfTransnational.pdf> , pps. 5, 7, 25, and 34-35.

**5.8** Letter from the Senior Policy Advisor for Senator Roger. F. Wicker, Co-Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, US Senate, 202

**5.9** Letter from the Co-Chair of the APPG for Parliamentary Human Rights Group, 2020

**5.10** House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, A cautious embrace: defending democracy in an age of autocracies (November 2019),

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201203145828/https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmfa/109/10902.htm> pps.7 and 17; 5.5, para 23d+e.

**5.11** International Organization for Migration, World Migration Report 2018,

[https://web.archive.org/web/20201203150927/https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/china/r5\\_world\\_migration\\_report\\_2018\\_en.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20201203150927/https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/china/r5_world_migration_report_2018_en.pdf) p.219

**5.12** OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2018, Warsaw, Video recording of working session 4, 12/09/18,

[https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=554268724993886&ref=watch\\_permalink12/09/18,1542CEI](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=554268724993886&ref=watch_permalink12/09/18,1542CEI)