

<b>Institution:</b> University College London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 26 - Modern Languages and Linguistics		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Securing Elections, Defending Democracy, and Protecting Human Rights in Europe, Africa and North America		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> September 2018 – April 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Brian Klaas	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Associate Professor in Global Politics	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> September 2018 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> September 2018 to July 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>Dr. Brian Klaas's research, consultancy, and briefings for global policymakers have led to improved election quality and security in the UK and in Ukraine, substantial public discourse around threats to democracy (particularly in the United States), NATO's establishment of a semi-permanent tracking capability that prepares for and seeks to mitigate the risks of conflict related to water scarcity in the Middle East and North Africa, and more pressure on Madagascar's government to improve human rights. Klaas's research has shaped political dialogue about democracy with global reach through over 500 media interviews since joining UCL in 2018, including appearances on major international news outlets in the UK and USA, and as a result of his weekly column in <i>The Washington Post</i>, which has over 2,000,000 digital subscribers.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Dr Brian Klaas's research focuses on issues related to authoritarianism and the ways in which it either prevents democracy from taking root or uproots existing democracies. His research combines quantitative analysis with elite interviews conducted during field work in a variety of countries, such as Madagascar, Zambia, Thailand, Côte d'Ivoire, Tunisia, Belarus, and the United States. "Five New Ways to Rig an Election and Ten Ways to Stop It" (<b>R1</b>) examines new and innovative ways (particularly in the digital age) that authoritarian regimes rig elections—in order to win and to create a false veneer of international legitimacy. The research for this new chapter for the paperback edition of <i>How to Rig an Election</i>, co-authored with Nic Cheeseman, was carried out after Klaas joined UCL as lecturer in global politics within the School of European Language, Culture, and Society (<b>SELCS</b>) in September 2018, an appointment made as part of the School's expansion of research into languages and cultures beyond Europe, and to address issues of global reach and importance through interdisciplinary approaches. It (<b>R1</b>) provides a substantial contribution to the political science literature by demonstrating how despots across the globe harness new technologies (including social media ventures like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter) to consolidate their power. This is an important correction to the earlier scholarly and public consensus that social media would primarily be used to empower citizens against authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, the chapter explores the ways in which authoritarian leaders will benefit from emerging technologies, like machine learning-assisted "deep fakes," which allow unscrupulous actors to create fake videos of world leaders appearing to make statements that they never actually said. The new chapter draws on several case studies, including elections in India, Brazil, Ukraine, and the United States, to demonstrate precisely how these innovative tactics operate in practice. It represents an important addition to scholarship by Klaas related to the rise of authoritarianism, the dangers of political violence around elections, the authoritarian-style impulses of new populists like President Donald Trump, and the ways in which blurring the line between fact and fiction can pose a severe threat to fragile democracies.</p> <p>Klaas's research has also examined political exclusion in Africa, based on field research undertaken in Côte d'Ivoire. He argues in (<b>R2</b>) that the political history of Africa is defined by political exclusion. Klaas shows that political exclusion in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes substantially increases the likelihood of future coups d'état, civil wars, and other forms of destabilizing conflict and violence.</p>		

In 2020 Klaas co-authored a private brief for the Transatlantic Commission on Election Integrity (TCEI) highlighting key security threats in Ukraine's elections (R3). The report identified a series of cyber vulnerabilities that could be exploited by foreign actors along with a series of recommendations for shoring up election security in Ukraine.

The fourth piece of underpinning research is an unpublished report that Klaas co-authored for Amnesty International about the ways in which Chinese investment in Madagascar was contributing serious human rights abuses (R4). The work was commissioned so that Amnesty could focus its lobbying efforts and international pressure campaign in the areas of greatest need. The report proposed strategies that could help reform its extractive industries sector to reduce child labour, to reduce illegal trafficking, and to lower corruption tied to mining.

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

- R1.** Nic Cheeseman and Brian Klaas, "Five New Ways to Rig an Election and Ten Ways to Stop It" in *How to Rig an Election*, paperback edition (2019). New Haven: Yale University Press. ISBN: 9780300246650. Jeffrey Smith, Executive Director, Vanguard Africa Foundation: "Nic Cheeseman and Brian Klaas offer an incisively sweeping view of this pressing global challenge, and importantly, how to counteract anti-democratic headwinds. This remarkably timely book is an indispensable addition to the desks and bookshelves of activists, academics and courageous pro-democracy crusaders worldwide." [submitted to REF2021]
- R2.** Brian Klaas, (2019). Political exclusion in Africa. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press. DOI: [10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1326](https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1326). Peer reviewed.
- R3.** Nic Cheeseman and Brian Klaas, "Defending Ukraine's Elections Against Foreign Interference" (2020). Private report submitted to the Transatlantic Commission on Election Integrity.
- R4.** Brian Klaas and David Landry (2020). "China and Human Rights Abuses in Madagascar." Private report submitted to Amnesty International.

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

Authoritarian leaders who agree to hold elections are generally able to remain in power longer than autocrats who refuse to allow the populace to vote. Such authoritarian regimes undermine the electoral process through pseudo-democratic strategies to guarantee victory for themselves. Klaas's research has led to changes in international policy to improve election quality and security, a renewed push for human rights lobbying in one of the world's poorest countries, and increased public understanding while generating significant debate about the ongoing decline of global democracy.

#### Influencing global policymakers in senior government positions and improving election quality and security

Klaas has directly advised a series of high-profile international organizations about authoritarianism and elections, including NATO, the UK Foreign Office, and the UK Cabinet Office. His research into rigged elections (R1), political exclusion in Africa (R2), election security in vulnerable democracies (R3), and authoritarian human rights abuses (R4) underpins his policy engagement with these groups. His research has led to policy changes in several instances.

In May 2019, Klaas organized and gave the keynote address at a NATO conference in Naples, Italy about the potential consequences of climate change on the Middle East and North Africa. Drawing on (R1) and (R2), he spoke about challenges posed by authoritarian governments related to water scarcity along with exclusionary politics and the scramble for resources. As a result, NATO established a semi-permanent tracking capability that prepares for and seeks to mitigate the risks of conflict related to water scarcity in the region. NATO's Allied Command Transformation attests that Klaas's research led to NATO Joint Force Command-Naples and NATO Strategic Direction South establishing the Open Perspectives Exchange Network (OPEN)

Seminar, a working group that “brings together a diverse group of Tunisian experts to share their expertise and share perspectives. Dr. Klaas was directly responsible for the success of this Seminar [...] and] his work with OPEN was a catalyst that helped propel OPEN from experiment to capability” (A). They state that Klaas’s “work on Tunisia enabled NATO Strategic Direction South to overcome their immediate challenge of connecting and sharing with non-military actors, thereby providing a powerful win to the fledgling organization” and “facilitated the first information exchange from the Hub” (A).

Klaas conducted two private and confidential briefings in February and July 2020 with senior leadership of the UK Foreign Office about American political polarization and the Trump administration, drawing on his research for (R1) and (R3) on authoritarian populism and Trump’s repeated claims that the 2020 American elections would be “rigged.” FCO officials circulated these briefings to shape the UK Foreign Office’s 2020 long-term vision, which guides staff thinking about the major sources of geopolitical risk over the longer term. FCO policy precludes providing any attribution for shifts in British foreign policy to outside advising, but the FCO attests that Klaas’s “contributions have provoked thought and discussion among colleagues here” and noted the unusually high number of top-level directors who attended the two briefings (B).

[TEXT REMOVED FOR PUBLICATION]

An invitation to advise government officials and other policymakers at Wilton Park, an executive agency of the UK’s Foreign Office, arose from Klaas’s *Washington Post* article on the threat of “deep fake” videos to democracy (14 May 2019, 130,121 unique page views by June 2019) based on (R1) (D). Klaas conducted a briefing at Wilton Park on 8 April 2019 and this expert testimonial formed part of a formal report compiled by Wilton Park staff. The report included specific recommendations for the UK government that draw on his research (R1), such as “Governments should consider how to confront the problem of ‘deep fake’ videos (convincing false videos of world leaders) and explore in depth whether influence operations are likely to become bolder, and escalate in the lead up to polling day” (E). In addition, Klaas has similarly advised the European Union, the Italian Foreign Ministry and the UK Department of International Trade.

In July 2019, Klaas co-authored a private report (R3) for the Transatlantic Commission on Election Integrity about potential forms of manipulation of Ukraine’s elections. The TCEI is a hugely influential international body made up of fourteen members, including two former presidents, a former US secretary of state, a former US secretary of homeland security, and a former Secretary General of NATO. The report was used as the basis for a three-day conference in Kyiv, Ukraine, in September 2019. The conference aimed to put pressure on both Ukraine’s government and Western governments to help protect Ukraine’s fledgling democracy (F). The Chancellor’s Professor, Carleton University, who oversaw the report with TCEI, confirms that it is “a very useful and informative report [...] that has gained widespread attention and been read by policymakers here in Canada”. They noted that it has “broad relevance to the integrity of elections in other countries and not just Europe” and “It is my understanding from those members of the Commission that I know that the paper was important to their work and deliberations” (F).

In April 2020, Klaas co-authored a private report (R4) about human rights abuses in Madagascar linked to Chinese investment on the island for Amnesty International, one of the premier human rights lobbying organizations in the world. The Strategy Manager at Amnesty wrote that “Brian and David’s scoping study on the human rights impact of Chinese investment and activities in Madagascar helped Amnesty to identify the issues on which, and ways in which, we could contribute to positive change.” They attested that the report provided a useful framework for focusing their strategy to pressure Madagascar into cracking down on human rights abusers (G).

Klaas also gave a high-profile keynote lecture about *How to Rig an Election* (R1) at the India Today Conclave in Mumbai (21 September 2019). The Head of the Election Commission of India attended the event and it created a significant public debate in India, because President Modi

had claimed that Indian election machines cannot be hacked. Klaas refuted that false claim, creating significant media coverage in major Indian newspapers, including features in *India Today's* digital publication, its print magazine, and a story in *Business News*, a top Indian economics press outlet (H). Klaas's lecture has been viewed 11,966 times on YouTube and received 131 comments (H).

### **Shaping public political dialogue about democracy through media engagement**

As an expert political commentator, Klaas has conducted over 500 media interviews since joining UCL in 2018. Regular appearances on high-profile television and radio programmes in the UK and USA to talk about global politics have enabled informed public participation in specialised political debate across traditional and social media, a key part of effective democratic process.

Klaas has appeared 9 times on *The Today Programme* on BBC Radio 4, which has roughly 1,000,000 listeners per day, as well as providing expert analysis for other programmes. As a featured guest on *More or Less: Behind the Stats* on 15 August 2020, Klaas drew on (R1) to discuss election rigging in Belarus. *More or Less* is broadcast to hundreds of thousands of listeners on Radio 4 and is consistently in the top 25 most downloaded podcasts in Britain. He also was a guest speaking about digital election campaigns on the BBC Radio 2 Jeremy Vine programme on 13 August 2019 which has approximately 7,420,000 listeners per week. He has appeared four times on BBC Newsnight, for example drawing on his research on the politics of exclusion (R2) to discuss how America's exclusionary immigration policy could create civil strife (5 June 2019, [TEXT REMOVED FOR PUBLICATION]) (I).

Klaas appears regularly on MSNBC, including 11 appearances on morning news programme *Morning Joe* (1,100,000 viewers average) and 12 appearances on political talk 'The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell' (2,570,000 viewers average). These appearances frequently generate significant public debate. For example, Klaas argued in a 12 March 2020 MSNBC appearance that Donald Trump's response to coronavirus replicated the same types of disinformation as the authoritarian Soviet Union's botched response to the Chernobyl catastrophe. #TrumpsChernobyl was one of the top trending Twitter topics that day indicating how Klaas shaped global conversations; the clip was viewed by 145,000 people and the phrase was referenced in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and on Sean Hannity's Fox News primetime show among other media outlets (D, I).

Klaas's weekly column (since 2018) for *The Washington Post* is read by tens of thousands of people per week. In 2020, his column received an average of 80,062 unique page views, while the average for Washington Post columns is 52,527 unique page views (D). Additionally, many of his columns have appeared in print, for which *The Washington Post* has more than 350,000 print subscribers. Many of his columns spark high profile public debate. For example, US presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren shared on Twitter his 12 July 2019 column about how American presidents reward campaign donors with prestigious diplomatic posts. Warren, citing the column, again pledged not to appoint ambassadors who were also donors to her campaign (D, J). A column on April 22, 2020, comparing British media to Fox News in the United States, generated 1,200 unique comments on the Washington Post page, along with 6,400 retweets on Twitter, and 659 comments on the Washington Post Facebook page (D, J). Another column (September 2, 2020) about Trump's campaign strategy to appeal to white suburban voters in the Midwest, was shared on Twitter by Dean Phillips, a member of the US Congress, who said: "An insightful and powerful piece by Brian Klaas...The strategy of hate and division being employed by Trump will only bring our community together." (D, J)

Klaas's podcast series, 'Power Corrupts', has been downloaded 1,670,000 times (in 207 separate countries/territories, with at least 1,000 downloads in 48 separate countries) since being launched in May 2019. Episodes introduce and analyse major topics including election rigging, smuggling, conspiracy theories and assassinations drawing on Klaas's research expertise. The first episode, 'How to rig an election', based on (R1), has been downloaded 90,000 times (I). The podcast led to the team leader for Governance, Conflict, Inclusion, and



Humanitarian research at the UK Department for International Development (DFID), approaching Klaas directly and this has sparked discussions to commission an episode about corruption in public procurement in collaboration with the UK Department for International Development. The podcast was awarded the Bronze Award for “Smartest Podcast of 2020” by the British Podcast Awards, beating finalists from the BBC and *The Times* (I).

Klaas’s large—and influential—Twitter following of 246,500 people (November 2020) includes 7 US Senators (out of 100), dozens of members of the United States House of Representatives, and members of parliament from the United Kingdom, France, New Zealand, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Ireland. His tweets are widely shared and engaged with, leading to between 25,000,000 and 65,000,000 impressions per month (a measure of how many Twitter users had a tweet by Klaas show up in their Twitter feed). In July 2020, a single tweet (about comparative government responses to the coronavirus pandemic) was seen by 22,000,000 people, was retweeted 109,091 times and liked by 278,310 unique accounts. It generated 1,840 comments on Klaas’s tweet itself, and tens of thousands of additional comments when others shared it (J).

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

- A. Testimonial from NATO Allied Command Transformation
- B. Statement from Strategy Director and Strategic Programmes Coordinator, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- C. [TEXT REMOVED FOR PUBLICATION]
- D. Washington Post and print media bundle
- E. Wilton Park Report, Digital interference in democratic processes: use and misuse of personal data (Monday 8 – Wednesday 10 April 2019) WP1682
- F. Testimonial from Chancellor's Professor, Carleton University
- G. Testimonial from Strategy Development Manager, Amnesty International
- H. ‘Dictators who conduct rigged elections last longer than those who don't: Brian Klaas’, *India Today* 21 September 2019; Youtube ‘India Today Conclave 2019: Brian Klaas on elections and democracy’
- I. TV, Radio and Podcasts broadcasts bundle
- J. Social media bundle