

Section A		
The fields in this section are mandatory.		
Institution: Durham University		
Unit of Assessment: 28 – History		
Title of case study: The impact of elections in sub-Saharan Africa		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Between 2009 and 2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Justin Willis	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor in History	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2010-2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Between 2014 and 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y		
Section B		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Impact from Willis' research expertise and insights, concerns elections in Kenya, Ghana and Uganda, and in the following particular areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The electoral support work and contingency planning of the UK government around Kenya's 2017 elections. This was informed both by the previous work of Willis and colleagues and by a close and continuing discussion over options, with impact as an integral element. This research has consistently emphasised the importance of local political contests as key to understanding national dynamics, and encouraged policy-makers to understand the role of popular ideas of virtue and morality in driving behaviour that violates international electoral norms. • The decisions of the wider Donor Group on Elections in Kenya, which brings together multiple bilateral and international actors. • Policy discussions around elections in Ghana and Uganda. This work was central to a submission to the ESRC Celebrating Impact awards, and received the 2019 award for Outstanding International Impact, as well as the 2019 President's Medal from the Market Research Society. 		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The research and impact described here are related to an impact case study submitted in 2014, which described Willis' work in informing policy in a range of areas, particularly through the medium of the Rift Valley Institute (RVI), a research and advocacy non-governmental organisation (NGO) with which he has worked closely. Both research and impact since 2014 have focussed on the particular question of elections in sub-Saharan Africa, and the effectiveness of international interventions intended to improve governance through enhanced electoral integrity. The research that underpins this impact has been undertaken through a series of externally funded studies. The most significant was the ESRC award 'The impact of elections' (ES/L002345/1), which funded a three-year comparative project combining archival work, interviews, opinion surveys and observation in Kenya, Ghana and Uganda. This was led by Willis as PI, with Co-Is from Oxford and Warwick, and ran from 2014 to 2017. That research was supplemented by two Kenya-specific consultancies relating to the 2013 and 2017 elections, undertaken for the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) / Department for International Development (DfID), with the same two partners (Oxford and Warwick).</p> <p>Donors have supported elections in Africa since the early 1990s in the hope of improving accountability and governance, but the consequences of multiparty elections have been varied</p>		

and uncertain. Of our case study countries, Ghana has established a pattern of peaceful elections and the alternation of power, Kenya's elections have often been violent and their results contested, while in Uganda the incumbent president has repeatedly won elections that are widely seen as unfair. Behind that disappointment lies an apparent conundrum. Levels of participation are high in all three countries: elections are lively, vigorous events, many voters cast their ballots, and candidates at all levels evidently commit much energy – and money – to the contest, even where national outcomes are not in doubt and/or there is widespread suspicion of malpractice. How can we understand this? While the FCO/DfID consultancies were aimed specifically at providing information to the UK government and partners in order to inform electoral support and planning in Kenya, the main ESRC project set out to provide context by testing what has been an enduring hypothesis about elections: that adult suffrage and the secret ballot will over time induct voters into a sense of citizenship, leading to changes in political behaviour.

The research confirmed the importance of the linkage between elections by adult suffrage and the legitimacy of the state itself – not simply the government (R2, R3). Incumbent regimes have wanted to hold elections to demonstrate the competence of the state, to domestic and international audiences - though their desire to do so has been in constant tension with concern that they might lose them (R2, R6). Previous research has argued that this tension has driven top-down electoral manipulation. That approach suggests that malpractice, driven by elites, has meant that elections have failed to improve governance.

This research, however, showed that this is not simply a story of top-down malpractice. Manipulation has often required real mobilisation of voters, not simple ballot stuffing. That mobilisation has often taken its energy from sub-national concerns, encouraging a localised politics of claims-making in which voters have been as active as politicians (R4, R5, R6). In this, politics, demands and obligations are routinely seen in moral terms. Elections have therefore involved a contest between different ideas of virtue (R6). On the one hand is an ideal of the informed voter-citizen who supports the candidate who will be best in national terms; on the other is a member of a local community, who supports the candidate who follows local moral norms of reciprocity. Politicians sometimes have to be local patrons; voters sometimes organise themselves as communities of clients – defined by ethnicity or locality. This may be at odds with donor interventions, including voter education, that emphasise international electoral norms and seek to turn people into informed voter-citizens. Elections have been most successful in producing political turnover and systemic stability where the moral logic of clientship has managed to co-exist – in tension – with the moral ideal of national citizenship (R6).

The ESRC project has offered multiple insights that underpin the impact:

1. Electoral support work focussed solely on procedural regularity and the use of technology to ensure 'electoral integrity' is insufficient; politicians, officials and voters may all feel a moral imperative to act in ways that undermine rules and process (R4, R6).
2. Elections usually involve multiple local-level contests, not simply a presidential race between an incumbent and 'the opposition'; donor support and political planning around elections must recognise this (R1, R5, R6).
3. Election observation, while symbolically important, has limited effect on malpractice and offers donors very little political leverage (R1, R2).

4. In some circumstances – as in Ghana – practices that are condemned by international electoral norms can be compatible with the turnover of power and a degree of accountability, as well as political stability (R6).

3. References to the research

R1 Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch, and Justin Willis 'Democracy and its discontents: understanding Kenya's 2013 elections', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8.1 (2014): 2-24 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2013.874105>

R2 Justin Willis, Gabrielle Lynch, and Nic Cheeseman, "A valid electoral exercise"? Uganda's 1980 elections and the observers' dilemma', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59.1 (2017): 211-238. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s001041751600058x>

R3 Justin Willis, Gabrielle Lynch and Nic Cheeseman, 'Voting, nationhood and citizenship in late colonial Africa', *Historical Journal* 61, 4 (2018), pp. 1113-1135 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X18000158>

R4 Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch, and Justin Willis. 'Digital dilemmas: The unintended consequences of election technology.' *Democratization* 25.8 (2018), pp. 1397-1418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1470165>

R5 Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch, Karuti Kanyinga, Mutuma Ruteere and Justin Willis, 'Kenya's 2017 elections: winner-takes-all politics as usual?', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 13 (2019), pp. 215-234 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2019.1594072>

R6 Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch and Justin Willis, *The Moral Economy of Elections: Voting, Virtue and Democracy in Africa* (Cambridge University press, 2021 (online publication Dec 2020) <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108265126>

Evidence of 2* Quality

The articles are all published in peer-reviewed international journals of high standing; the monograph is peer reviewed and under the imprint of an international publisher of repute. The core of the work was funded through an ESRC award 'The impact of elections' (ES/L002345/1), grant of GBP658,000, awarded through the standard programme.

4. Details of the impact

From January 2016, Willis and colleagues were involved with staff from FCO and DfID in discussions concerning preparations for Kenya's 2017 elections. Since those elections, discussions have continued, now looking ahead to the planned 2022 elections. This involvement had the following effects:

- Directing donor attention to the significance of local level electoral contests
- Making donors aware that electoral support based on technical process could not ensure widely accepted electoral outcomes
- Informing donor political planning for various electoral outcomes

The first meeting was held with the British High Commissioner and staff in Nairobi in January 2016, and was based on the 'lessons learned' report produced by Willis and colleagues in the wake of the 2013 elections. That report also provided the basis for a briefing for staff from FCO and other government agencies in London on 20 June 2016. In September 2016, FCO/DfID issued a call for consultancy work to advise on policy around the 2017 elections; the call was based closely on the research originally designed by Willis and colleagues, and funded by FCO, for the 2013 elections (using, for example, exactly the same title as their proposal). Willis, together with his colleagues from the ESRC project and two Kenyan colleagues, bid for this consultancy through the RVI. Their bid, which stressed the need for multiple simultaneous studies of politics at a local level, was successful. The research led to the production of a

series of four reports, written by Willis and his collaborators. These comprised a baseline report; two separate reports at different stages of the campaign; and one set of post-election reports. These are not public but they combined analysis with policy recommendations. In each case, submission was followed by a briefing and discussion session with the High Commissioner and his staff in Nairobi. As the testimonial from the High Commissioner (E1) indicates, these interactions informed UK policy throughout the period. Willis also, separately, provided briefings to London-based staff from FCO, DfID and the Cabinet Office in August and November 2017 (E2, E3); took part in a closed discussion with FCO staff in London on the aftermath of the elections at the FCO in February 2018 and had a private discussion with the High Commissioner in Nairobi in September 2018. A final briefing to reflect on lessons learned was held in Nairobi with FCO and DfID staff, including the High Commissioner, in May 2019. In March 2019 Willis and his two colleagues from the ESRC project also met in London with the High Commissioner designate and the designated new Head of Chancery, who took up their roles in Nairobi in September 2019. In February 2020, Willis and colleagues were approached by DfID/FCO with a view to undertaking similar research and policy-advice work around Kenya's next elections, scheduled for 2022; the business plan produced by FCO/DfID for their overall electoral support programme makes a number of references to the 2017 research.

Findings from the ESRC project provided the basis for engagement with other policy-makers in Kenya: a briefing to EU Heads of Mission in Nairobi in January 2016 (E4); subsequent private meetings with the EU ambassador to Kenya (January 2016 and February 2017) and briefings to the Donor Group on Elections (a group bringing together various diplomatic, bilateral and multilateral actors involved in providing electoral support, from the Danish Embassy to USAID to the UN) in January 2016, May 2017 and May 2019 (E5, E6, E7). These meetings were supported with funds from the Durham ESRC Impact Acceleration Fund. Working in cooperation with the RVI, Willis and his ESRC colleagues also organised a two-day course on elections in Kenya in February 2017 (E8) – covering history, political culture, and institutional dynamics – which was attended by 40 fee-paying individuals from a range of institutions involved in election work (from EU and 'five eyes' diplomats to international and Kenya NGOs).

Willis and his colleagues on the ESRC project also provided briefings to the Deepening Democracy Group (a consortium of donors working on election support) in advance of Uganda's 2016 elections and to the British High Commissioner and his staff in Ghana. Willis also organised a 'study day' for UK based FCO staff on 1 March 2018; one of the three panels on this was devoted to the 'Moral economy of elections' project (E9). Willis was invited to give a key lecture on 'Do we need elections at all' to a conference on 'Rethinking democracy'. Organised by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Nairobi in September 2019, the conference brought together politicians and civil society activists from across Kenya's political spectrum and spoke to a wide policy audience.

Additionally, the research reached a public audience through a series of op-ed pieces:

Newsweek: 23 January 2016; 22 February 2016; 10 December 2016

Washington Post Monkey Cage: 3 November 2016; 21 December 2016

Foreign Policy: 16 February 2016; 29 April 2016

Foreign Affairs: 15 August 2017; 25 October 2017

The Huffington Post: 11 August 2017

The Conversation: 3 August 2017; 6 September 2017; 22 November 2017; 23 March 2018 (with a readership of 136,729 people) (E10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- E1. Letter from British High Commissioner, Nairobi, September 2018
- E2. Letter from FCO London, 2 September 2016
- E3. Letter from Nikolai Hutchinson, FCDO Nairobi, 18 November 2020
- E4. List of attenders, HoMs meeting 12 January 2016
- E5. Letter from Danish and Norwegian Ambassadors, January 2016
- E6. List of attenders, DGE meeting, 24 January 2017
- E7. Letter from Norwegian Ambassador, 9 September 2016
- E8. Kenya elections course programme, February 2017 and participants
- E9. Letter from Neil Wigan, FCO, March 2018
- E10. Readership metrics from *The Conversation*, April 2018