

Mapping UNSW Impact Global Development

Primary SDG	16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
Broad theme	Election fraud
Research	Determining the key factors that contribute to electoral fraud
Impact region	Global
Faculty	Arts and Social Sciences
School/Institute	School of Social Sciences
Academic	Dr Carolien van Ham
Project partners	ARC DECRA, \$325,000 ending 2017; University of East Anglia; McGill University; Electoral Integrity Project (University of Sydney); Varieties of Democracy Project (Gothenburg University)
Related SDGs	10: Reduced Inequalities

Elevator pitch

Carolien van Ham is researching the integrity of elections and independent electoral management bodies around the world to determine key factors that contribute to electoral fraud, instructing academic and NGOs on how best to mitigate fraud in developing democracies.

The Challenge: Election fraud is rife in developing countries

After the Cold War, a shift in power dynamics saw Western aid for developing countries become increasingly contingent on their progress towards democracy. A wave of democratisation around the world followed. In five years, the proportion of African countries holding multiparty elections jumped from 25 per cent in 1988 to 84 per cent in 1994. In 2012, virtually all African countries (92 per cent) held multiparty elections for national office.

There are many ways to rig an election. They range from manipulating the legal framework, gerrymandering and hacking voter registration to either delete or add voters, to using state resources and public media in election campaigns, ballot box stuffing, vote buying and election violence. Campaign finance, social media and digital technology pose challenges to election integrity even in established democracies (as illustrated in the US election of Trump). More countries have created a formal independent electoral management body to oversee elections to create an impression of integrity, but the independence and effectiveness of these bodies varies. What are the right solutions to prevent fraud?

UNSW's solution: Research the integrity of elections and independent electoral bodies globally

Carolien is researching electoral integrity and electoral reform in 100 countries in the former USSR, Eastern and Southern Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America and Central America. Using data from election observer missions and expert surveys, she is examining the success of electoral reforms, how election integrity can be strengthened, and the impact elections have on democracy. She is currently writing a book that compares countries and seeks to explain where elections have improved or deteriorated over time, highlighting the key factors driving these different outcomes.

In partnership with the University of East Anglia and McGill University, Carolien is also assessing the independence and effectiveness of electoral management bodies (EMBs) created to oversee elections. They have surveyed over 70 EMBs in developing and developed countries on their budgets, staffing, structures, and power, to analyse which institutional design features affect election integrity. They are currently investigating the key factors that make these bodies independent and effective, and are set to publish a number of journal articles on this soon. Carolien and her team will present their research findings to the Annual Conference of Electoral Management Bodies, organised in collaboration with the Venice Commission and the Council of Europe.

Carolien is also researching the legitimacy of and satisfaction with democracy, and she has created a Social Science Data Guide online which is hosted by UNSW that enables users to find a database easily and share data. The website maps quantitative datasets on elections, democracy and autocracy, as well as data on peace, human rights and development.

The Impact: Determine key factors contributing to electoral fraud

Carolien's work provides ground-breaking insight into electoral integrity around the world and the independent bodies that oversee elections. Her research will promote discussions in academic and NGO circles about the key factors required to mitigate the chances of election fraud, and what risk factors contribute to fraudulent behaviour. Carolien and her team are seeking to partner with a key NGO to build a global database around EMBs, and to translate research findings into practical assistance on the ground to ensure electoral bodies are independent and effective.

Researcher

Carolien van Ham is a Lecturer in Comparative Politics at UNSW and an ARC Discovery Early Career Research Award recipient. She is also a research associate at the Varieties of Democracy Institute, a senior research fellow at the Electoral Integrity Project, and co-editor of the Routledge book series *Elections, Democracy and Autocracy*. Prior to coming to UNSW, Carolien worked as a researcher at the University of Twente, the University of Sydney, and the University of Gothenburg. Growing up in Yemen and Sudan, Carolien is passionate about democracy, autocracy and corruption.

Ben Falkenmire 20.03.18