

# Research impact: making a difference

## **Fostering better governance in states moving towards democracy**

Professors James Hughes and John Sidel helped to identify and address key challenges in the democratic reform of governance systems and cultures

### **What was the problem?**

States seeking to negotiate the transition from autocratic rule to constitutional government and liberal democracy must confront significant and often long-standing challenges.

These may include reforming governance arrangements and political or civic cultures to meet the expectations of international funding bodies and other external agencies, eliminating the influence of 'local bosses' at regional or local levels, and protecting ethnic or religious minorities. States may also need to identify and combat political violence and terrorism within and beyond their borders.

### **What did we do?**

In LSE's Department of Government the problems of transitional political systems have been an enduring focus and an important avenue for aligning research and teaching with the exigencies of the real world. Regions of particular interest in recent years have included Eastern Europe, the former republics of the Soviet Union and new democracies in Southeast Asia.

Professor of Comparative Politics James Hughes, known for his work on Russian politics and Chechnya, combined his study of local elites in post-communist Russia with a thorough probing of the assumptions behind Western theories of democratization and federal bargaining.

In an influential book and papers co-authored with Professor Gwendolyn Sasse (now Oxford) and Dr Claire Gordon (LSE European Institute), Hughes argued that the conditions imposed by the European Union (EU) on countries seeking membership had less influence than expected on the critical levels of regional and local government, where the foundations for democracy must be engineered. He stressed instead the importance of working closely with local elites to ensure economic and political development.

Hughes also researched and analysed the conflict in Chechnya in a major book. Chechnya was among a group of nationalist struggles globally in the 1990s to be transformed and become a part of Al Qaeda's global jihad. His research located the reasons for this transformation in three main areas: first, the dynamics of the violence, with indiscriminate and disproportional Russian force radicalising Chechen society; second, the blocking of the Chechen elite's national self-determination aspirations by the international community; and third, the rise of Al Qaeda and the attractive power of its ideas about jihad.

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Since the late 1990s Professor John Sidel, Sir Patrick Gillam Chair in International and Comparative Politics, has conducted research into how local bosses emerge in localities across the developing world, especially in states undergoing transitions to democracy at an early stage of economic development. His published work has shown that local economic conditions and opportunities tend to produce different forms of local monopolistic control, which in turn tend to complicate and compromise both economic development and good governance.

Sidel has also conducted extensive research and published widely on religious violence in Indonesia, paying close attention to the different locations, protagonists, and forms of such violence since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. His research revealed that violence perpetrated in Indonesia in the name of Islam has been essentially defensive, reflecting anxiety and insecurity rather than self-confidence and aggression.

'Hughes was...actively involved in advocating the protection of minorities in the former Yugoslavia and of the Russophone minority in Latvia... Sidel's work has helped to inform policy-makers interested in conflict, violence, and displacement in Southeast Asia.'

The research of Hughes and Sidel reveals that each incidence of religious violence is highly specific in its causes and character, calling for a precisely modulated counter-terrorism response from governments and international bodies.

## What happened?

Hughes' work on local elites in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics, and on post-communist conflicts in Eastern Europe, was instrumental in securing an LSE Enterprise contract to establish and produce a Development and Transition newsletter for the region, funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). From 2008 to early 2011 Hughes co-edited the newsletter with Ben Slay, the Programme's Director and Senior Economist at its Bratislava office.

By late 2009 the newsletter's readership had grown to 3,600 subscribers evenly split between: officials in eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics; officials in the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme and other international organizations; and subscribers from think tanks and universities. A majority of the newsletter's issues focused on themes linked to Hughes's research on national and ethnic conflicts and minorities, regional development, and EU enlargement. Each issue was launched with a lunch conference, giving Hughes the opportunity to negotiate with civil servants and delegations on the governance aspects of fostering development.

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Hughes was also actively involved in advocating the protection of minorities in the former Yugoslavia and of the Russophone minority in Latvia. In 2012 he was appointed head of the international advisory board of the European Centre for Minority Issues, a think tank funded by the German and Danish governments. His work and expertise on Russia and post-communist conflicts has been drawn on by governments, international think tanks, media and policy bodies, including the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the Open Society Foundations, the Financial Times, and most recently as a member of a panel of experts on Russia, Ukraine and the EU as part of the Dahrendorf Symposium "Changing the European Debate".

Sidel's work has helped to inform policy-makers interested in conflict, violence, and displacement in Southeast Asia. For the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sidel reported on how Indonesia's new citizenship law was affecting the country's vulnerable minorities. Sidel's report became a reference point in asylum cases in the USA, the UK and Australia. Through public and private lectures before academic audiences and in venues such as the international think tank Chatham House, and through a policy-focused monograph published in the United States, he brought international attention to Islamist persecution of the Muslim Ahmadiyya minority in Indonesia.

Another theme of Sidel's work was the need to understand and reassess the trajectories of violence in the name of Islam across Southeast Asia in response to the 'Global War On Terrorism', an argument Sidel articulated in exchanges with intelligence agencies, military staff colleges, terrorism experts, and other interested audiences.

Finally, Sidel's work has also extended to efforts to promote conflict resolution and good governance in the island of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago in the southern Philippines, where armed Muslim separatist mobilization and Islamist terrorism have stimulated various forms of international involvement. Since mid-2012, Sidel has been providing strategic advice – in regular written reports, briefings, and other presentations – to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Asia Foundation in support of a multi-million dollar programme promoting conflict resolution and sub-national governance reform in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, as well as related reforms across the Philippines. This work has drawn on Sidel's many years of research in the Philippines and Indonesia and has drawn him into a senior advisory role for the Asia Foundation and the Australian Embassy in Manila, as well as a participant in a broader 'community of practice' across a range of international development agencies, including DFID and the Asian Development Bank. Having unearthed such a rich seam of material, the researchers then sought to bring their methodologies and people's individual stories to a wider audience. They were particularly keen to reach young people who had not experienced migration themselves but whose lives, families and communities had been shaped by it.

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**James Hughes** is Professor of Comparative Politics, Convenor of the MSc Conflict Studies, and Director of the Conflict Research Group. His research and publications span the study of political violence and terrorism, democratisation, secession, national and ethnic conflict in the Former Soviet Union and the Balkans, and the role of the EU in democratisation and conflict resolution.

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**John Sidel** is the Sir Patrick Gillam Professor of International and Comparative Politics. He specializes in the study of Southeast Asia and has four main areas of thematic expertise and interest in the study of politics, as reflected in his research, writing, and teaching: local politics, religion and politics, nationalism and transnational forces, and advocacy campaigns.

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