

## Society-level

# Rule of Law interventions

Effective rule of law (ROL) ensures that laws—and **the justice institutions, actors, and processes** that support them – **protect individual rights** and are responsive to and inclusive of the needs of all people in society. ROL is often framed as a **means of ensuring or pursuing justice**. The conflation of ROL with justice institutions often leads to substantial overlap between interventions that aim to strengthen ROL and those aiming to strengthen justice systems.

This brief highlights research findings and observations from 10 studies from the 'Society' domain of the **Rule of Law Evidence Gap Map**. The topic was selected based on the availability of evidence and the priorities of USAID Democracy, Rights and Governance (DRG) technical experts. The intended audience is DRG practitioners, with a focus on practical information and considerations to inform the planning and implementation of DRG programming and research. The brief thus does not synthesize or quantify intervention effect sizes (as in a systematic review), nor does it replace the need for rigorous evaluation of DRG programming.

### Did you know ?

- An estimated **5.1 billion people** have no access to effective justice.
- Nearly **60 per cent** of justice problems remain unresolved.
- Over **253 million people** live in situations of extreme injustice, including conditions of slavery, statelessness, and high levels of insecurity.<sup>1</sup>

### Key messages



#### For practitioners



- Mass media can influence social norms to help address violence against women and longer programs tend to be more effective.
- Providing plaintiffs with personalized case outcome predictions showed early promise in increasing settlement rates. However, having access to this information only affected the settlement when the plaintiff themselves were present to receive the information directly.
- Working with local partners, such as civil society or local police stations, can help facilitate the implementation of community monitoring interventions. It should be clear to community members how they will benefit from participating.

#### For learning specialists and researchers



- The evidence on what works for improving the rule of law is limited. Additional research on interventions that focus on "society" is needed to strengthen the evidence base.
- Study instruments and tools must be adapted to local contexts and protect participants' privacy.
- When analyzing the impact of ROL interventions on crime, consider limitations in self-reported and/or police-registered crime data.

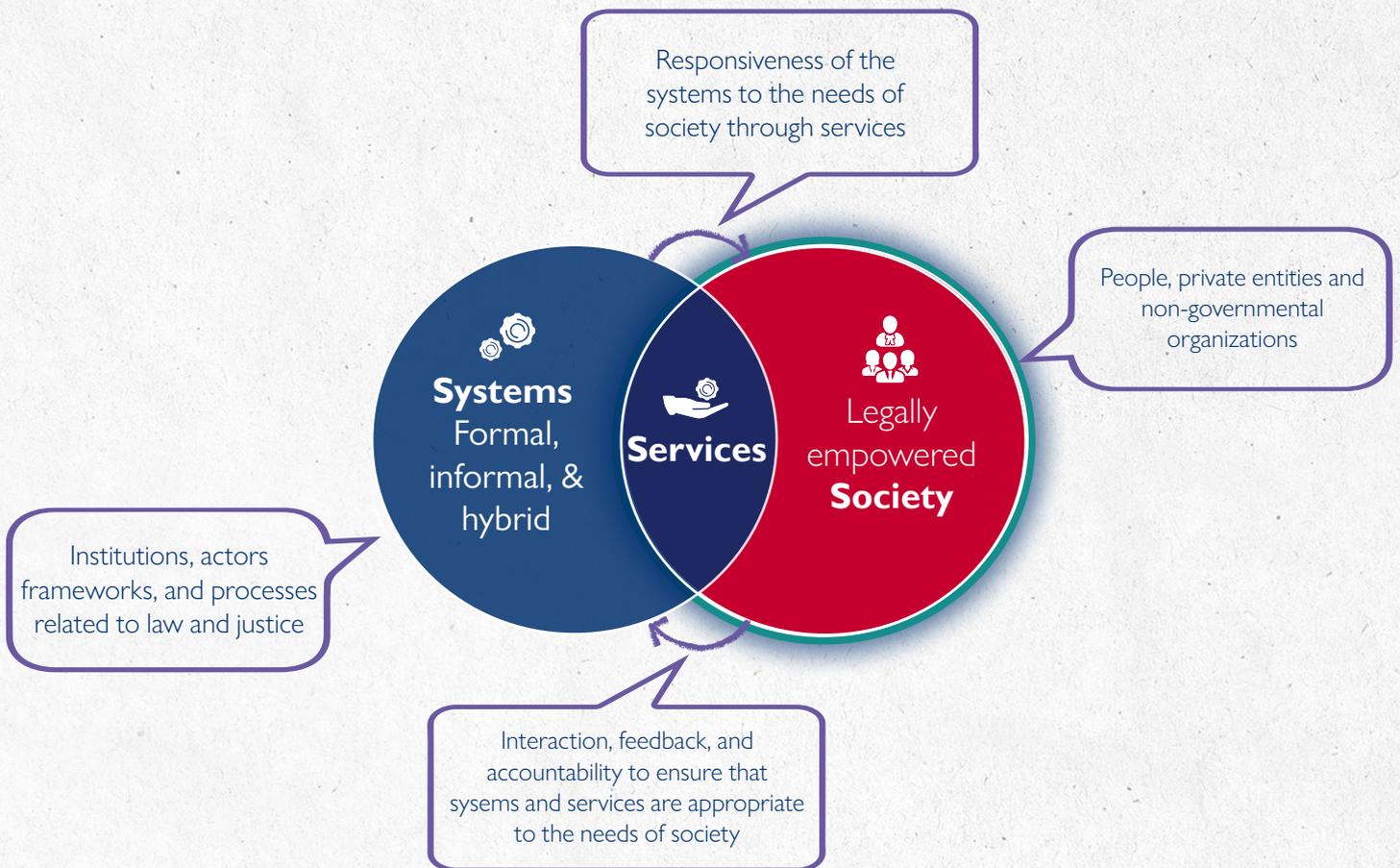
## How we conceptualize rule of law



Our understanding of ROL and how to strengthen it is constantly evolving. For this brief, **effective ROL** is conceptualized as relying on the functioning of **three different domains – systems, services, and society** – and the existence of supportive interactions and well-functioning feedback loops between them (Figure 1).

**Systems** in this conceptualization are the basis for providing effective ROL for a given context and are the foundation for providing legal and justice services to society. **Services** are points of interaction wherein formal and informal legal and justice institutions and actors come into contact with members of society to deliver legal support or protection, or to uphold the law. **Society** is a diverse sphere encompassing all the people, private entities and non-governmental organizations within a particular context.

**Figure 1:** Conceptualization of effective ROL



Source: Modified version of the diagram included in the report *Rule of Law and Justice: an Evidence Gap Map*, 31e

Our conceptualization of ROL is also underpinned by a **"people-centered justice"** approach to ROL assistance. In contrast to approaches that emphasize justice system institutions and actors (formal and informal) and how successfully they enforce the law, a people-centered justice approach puts people at its core. It transforms justice institutions and services into more data-driven, user-friendly, solution-focused, and prevention-oriented entities, while also empowering people to know, use, and shape the law, and to seek multiple pathways to justice.

## Availability of evidence about the effects of these interventions



There is a **large gap in understanding about interventions that** improve ROL.

To fill this gap, USAID commissioned 3ie to develop an **Evidence Gap Map** of ROL interventions and outcomes.

An EGM is a **visual representation** of completed and ongoing studies that quantify **changes attributable to a**

**program** – that is, after accounting for other factors--structured around a **framework of interventions and outcomes**. The EGM thus represents an important slice of the available body of evidence that can inform USAID decision-making about where and how to invest resources for development.

**Figure 2:** Key aims and illustrative examples of society-level ROL interventions

Aim	Example of intervention
Increase people's legal literacy	 <p>Public legal education and awareness campaigns Translation of legal information and materials for marginalized groups</p>
Support people to hold justice services to account	 <p>Monitoring committees for justice institutions Community observers assessing justice institutions and services</p>
Strengthen society-led protection and reporting mechanisms	 <p>Neighborhood watch schemes School or community anti-crime or violence campaigns Strengthening civil society to support justice for all</p>
Support people to use legal techniques to solve their problems	 <p>Strengthening public interest litigation Establishing approaches using freedom of information requests</p>

## What do we know? Where are the gaps?



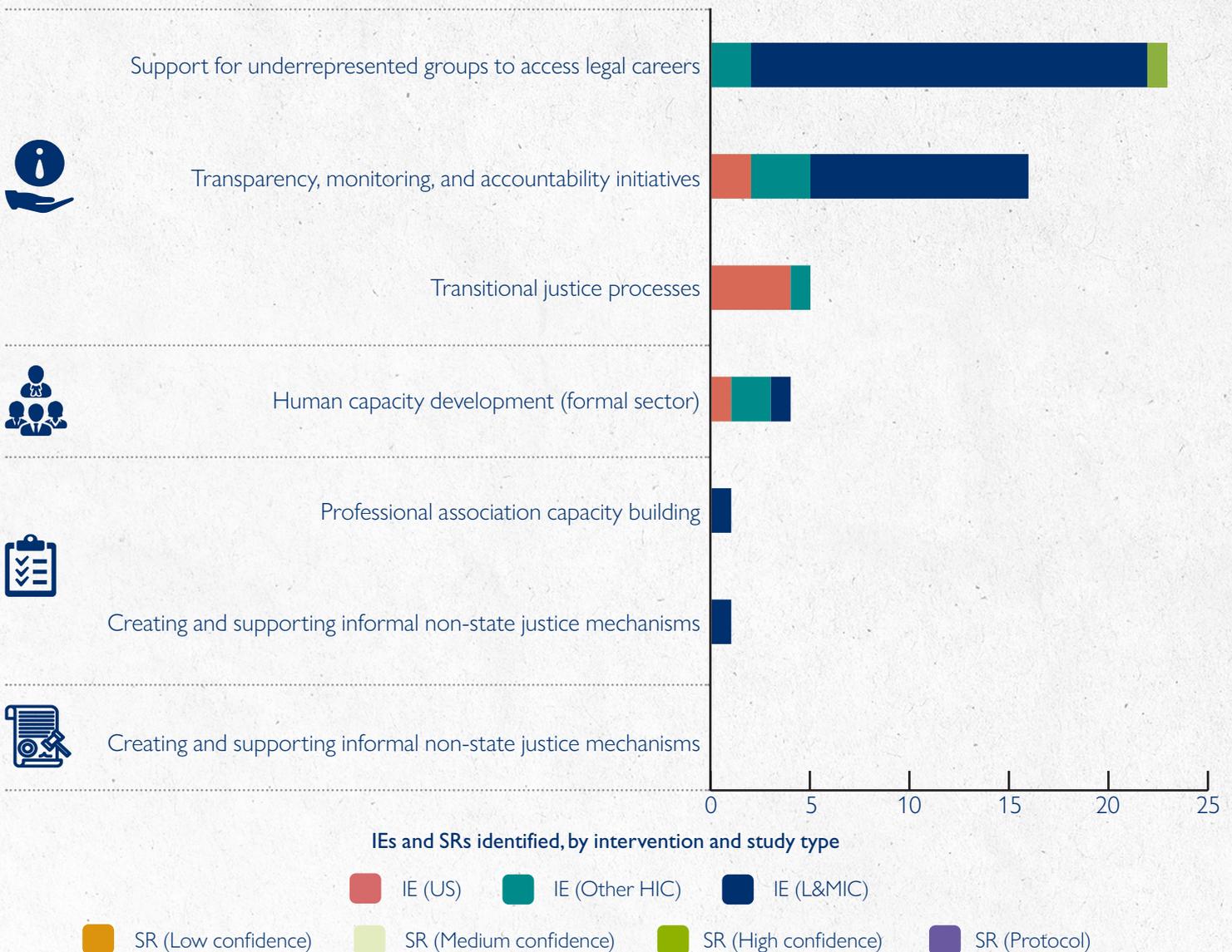
The ROL EGM included 643 completed impact evaluations (IEs), 13 ongoing IEs, 107 completed systematic reviews (SRs) and 11 ongoing SRs. The search identified studies dating back to 1990, but most were published after 2000, with an **increase in the publication of studies evaluating interventions in low- and middle-income countries (L&MICs) starting in 2009.**

**The distribution of the evidence base is very uneven across geographies.** Most included studies evaluated programs implemented in high-income countries, particularly the United States, where seven out of ten

included IEs were undertaken. By contrast, **less than one fifth of the 656 included quantitative and qualitative IEs took place in L&MICs.** These findings raise questions regarding the generalizability of included studies across geographic and socio-economic contexts.

While the evidence base is the smallest for “society” interventions relative to the “systems” and “services” domains, the majority of “society” studies evaluate interventions in L&MICs. The most frequently evaluated intervention among IEs is legal registration, followed by society-led crime prevention and reporting initiatives.

**Figure 3:** Studies from the ROL “society” domain, by intervention type



Note: HIC = high-income countries.

### Considerations for programming and implementation

This section draws on ten quantitative and qualitative studies to briefly summarize research findings, identify illustrative drivers and barriers, and offer implications for further research. These studies evaluated interventions within society-led crime

prevention and reporting initiatives, legal empowerment, and community monitoring intervention categories; they were implemented in Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Table A1 in Online appendix).

### Society-led crime prevention and reporting initiatives

#### Key messages

- Mass media campaigns should be tailored to the cultural context of their intended audience.
- Practitioners should consider using communal settings for broadcasting messaging on reporting violence against women (VAW).
- Community mobilization interventions to address VAW may take time to show results.
- Community-based, crime- and violence-prevention programs have shown some promise in improving perceptions of security and reducing crime victimization.



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**“The video is so real.”<sup>2</sup> Mass media campaigns should be tailored to the cultural context of their intended audience.** Participants of a mass media study in Uganda reported that campaign materials set in nearby villages that used the local language were more salient and believable to viewers. Researchers attributed shifts in social norms, such as reduced fear of social retaliation and greater trust in community members, to more relevant campaign materials that ultimately reduced incidents of VAW in treatment villages (Table A2 in Online appendix).<sup>3</sup>

**Practitioners should consider using communal settings to broadcast messaging about VAW reporting.** A study in Uganda found that communal broadcasting of anti-VAW messaging generated collective responsibility to report and helped to solidify reporting norms. However, the authors noted that access to some communal spaces was restricted for women. Implementers should make sure they are using settings and communication channels that are accessible to women.<sup>4</sup>

**Community mobilization interventions to address VAW may take time to show results.** Three studies report that the length and intensity of the intervention exposure matters and that three to five years of exposure might be needed for a significant impact on VAW outcomes.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Community mobilization and community-based prevention were highlighted as important considerations for implementing prevention programming in both quantitative and non-causal qualitative research.<sup>8,9</sup>

**Community-based crime and violence prevention interventions have shown some promise in improving perceptions of security and reducing crime victimization.** An evaluation of USAID’s community-based crime prevention approach in four Central American countries found reductions in reported murders, reported extortion, and improvements in several other outcomes of interest that were attributable to the intervention. The multi-pronged approach included planning by municipal-level committees, crime observatories, environmental design such as improved street lighting, activities for youth at risk, and community policing. (Table A2 in Online appendix).<sup>10</sup>

Legal empowerment 

Key messages 

■ Providing personalized case outcome predictions to plaintiffs shows early promise in increasing settlement rates.

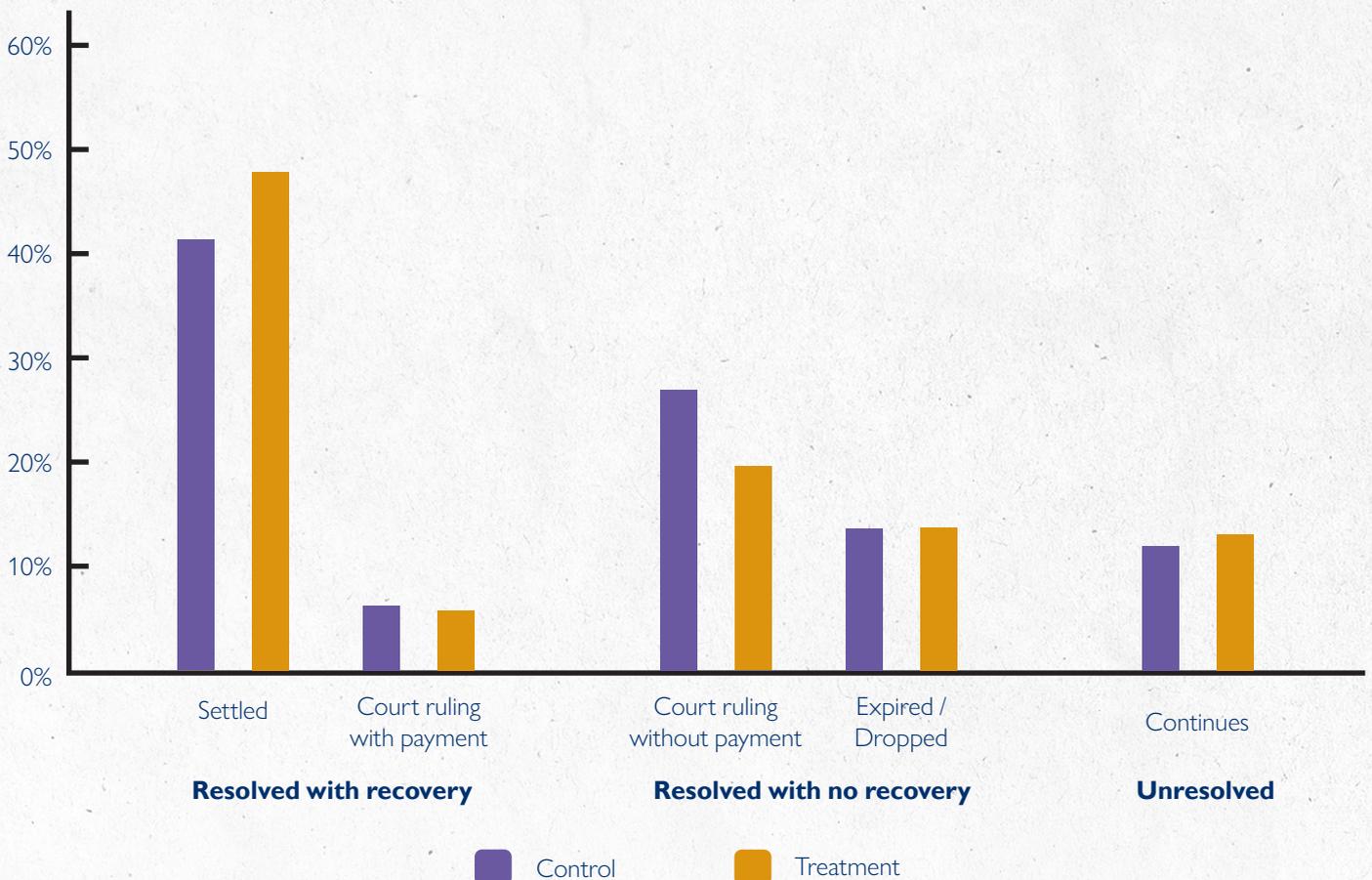
■ Access to information was only received when the plaintiff themselves were present to receive the information directly.

**Providing personalized case outcome predictions to plaintiffs shows early promise in increasing settlement rates.** One study found that an intervention in Mexico that provided parties with case-specific predictive outcomes (generated from machine-learning models using data from 5,000 concluded cases) modestly increased the settlement rates, relative to plaintiffs who did not receive extra information. (Table A1 in Online appendix and Figure 4).<sup>11</sup>

However, **access to information only affected settlement when the plaintiff was present to receive the information directly**, suggesting that lawyers may not always or adequately convey the

information provided about predicted outcomes to their clients. The authors observed that disruption in information transmission from lawyers to plaintiffs could be due to the challenge of explaining the information (in this case, prediction probabilities) to plaintiffs, or mistrust between plaintiffs and lawyers. The impact of the intervention on settlements was largest for recently filed cases, and researchers suggested that the intervention would be more effective if provided during the initial hearing. The study also reports that plaintiffs were generally misinformed and overly optimistic about the outcome of their cases, which explained the low settlement rates at baseline.

**Figure 4:** Case outcomes: plaintiffs who received legal empowerment interventions are slightly more likely to resolve cases and recover their settlements





### Considerations for future learning and research



#### Key messages



- The evidence on what works for improving rule of law is limited.
- Study instruments and tools must be adapted to local contexts and protect participants' privacy.
- When analyzing the impact of ROL interventions on crime, consider limitations in self-reported and/or police-registered crime data.

**The evidence on what works for improving rule of law is limited.** This search identified just ten studies that met our inclusion criteria for “society” interventions in L&MIC contexts. Interventions in these domains may be more challenging to evaluate and should be accompanied by a robust research agenda. Nearly all of the qualitative studies reviewed for inclusion in this report did not address causal questions or did not use methods that could plausibly establish causal impact. Commonly, studies used key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis to describe the intervention implementation. Consider incorporating qualitative study designs that seek to establish causal attribution in future research such as realist evaluations, process tracing, and contribution analysis.

**Study instruments and tools must be adapted to local contexts and protect the privacy of participants.** Several studies mentioned the importance of strong tools for monitoring interventions within ROL

programs. One common recommendation was that measuring tools should be adapted and pre-tested in the field to ensure relevance and cultural resonance. For example, the evaluation of PARP in Uganda<sup>14</sup> used surveys collected from police officers to measure corruption. However, to avoid provoking resistance to a survey framed as an assessment of police corruption, the authors present it as a review of the challenges faced by police officers, by exploring questions of facts and opinions. The authors also emphasized the importance of protecting anonymity and ensuring privacy and confidentiality when collecting police officers' judgements.

**Researchers should account for challenges in data collection, especially for self-reported and police-registered crime, when designing studies and data extraction tools.** Several studies warn that self-reported data is prone to respondent or recall bias, especially in the case of sensitive issues.<sup>15,16,17</sup> Researchers should account for these challenges when interpreting data.



## About the evidence

**Figure 5:** What types of evidence are included in this brief?

Evidence type	M&E indicators and project reports	Performance and process evaluations	Impact Evaluations (IEs)	Systematic Review (SRs)
Key question	WHAT was done?	HOW was it done?	Did it have an EFFECT?	Were the effects CONTEXT dependent?
Use(s) of findings	Assist in guiding program implementation and course-correction, and demonstrate accountability	Multiple purposes (e.g., program adherence to the plan, implementer performance, achievement of planned outputs and immediate outcomes, stakeholder/partner/client feedback)	Measure intervention effectiveness, after accounting for other factors. Published IEs provide examples of what has or has not impacted a targeted outcome.	Synthesize findings from multiple IEs (often through quantitative meta-analysis) on a particular issue, increasing confidence and generalizability.
Included in EGM	No	No	Yes	Yes

In effectiveness evidence from IEs and SRs, **negative findings are just as important** as positive findings, because they help to refine our understanding about what works (or not, and why or why not). In addition, the **absence of effectiveness evidence does not mean an intervention should be avoided**, but rather

highlights the potential benefit of an impact evaluation, particularly if the intervention:

- is innovative,
- may be scaled up, or
- is being considered as a potential model for replication elsewhere.



## Why evidence matters

### Why is this important for practitioners? !

This brief (along with the associated EGM matrix and report) is designed to inform USAID practitioners' investments in ROL society-level interventions at multiple phases of the program cycle, including: strategic planning; project design and implementation; activity design and implementation; monitoring; and evaluation.

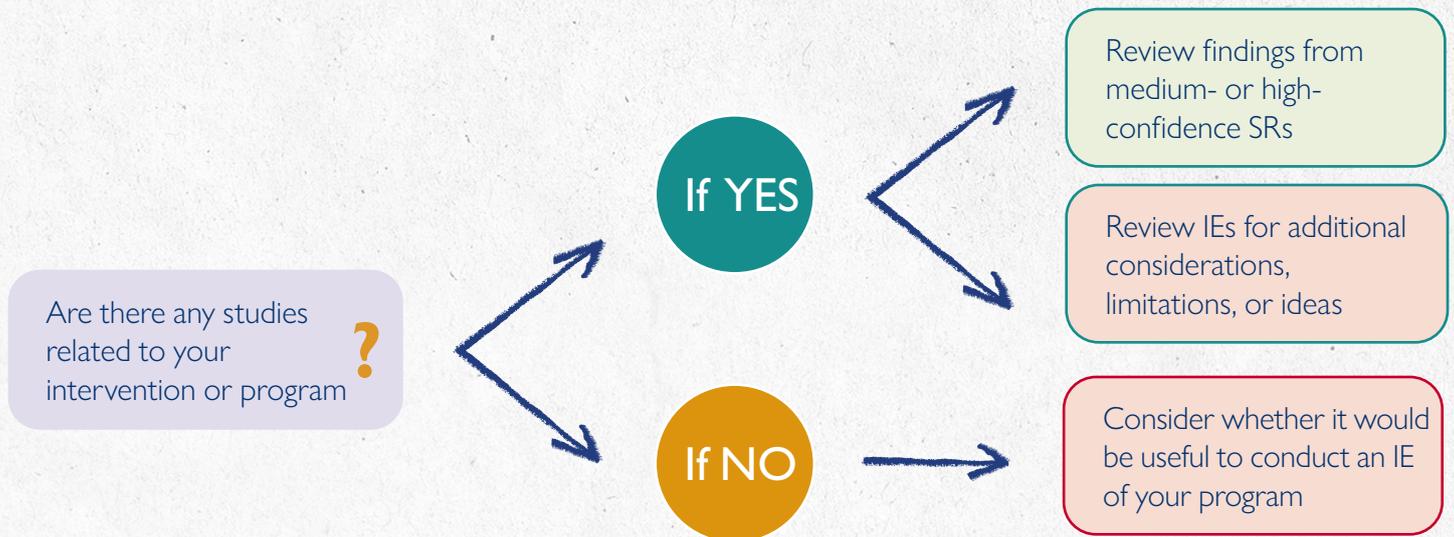
- Results will feed into the **technical evidence** base in the **learning** phase of USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) Framework.
- IE findings provide USAID practitioners with ideas about which interventions they may want to consider when developing a **program design**.
- Like IEs, SRs may include an explanation of relevant theories of change, which can be useful during the **project and activity design** stage.

- In SRs, the more consistent the findings are across contexts, the higher the likelihood that the approach may work in a new context.

While the findings of this research suggest that there are gaps in evidence on ROL interventions in L&MIC settings, we have summarized recommendations from the included evidence for policy makers, funders, practitioners, and researchers.

We encourage practitioners to take a closer look at the online **Evidence Gap Map** to engage with the available evidence. When considering if and how the programs on which you work fit into the framework, we suggest asking the following questions:

**Figure 6:** Using evidence in activity design



You can always reach out ROL experts in USAID/Washington at [ruleoflaw@usaid.gov](mailto:ruleoflaw@usaid.gov) if you have any questions, ideas, or suggestions related to evidence that may help inform the design of your project(s) and/or activity(ies).



## About the brief

This brief highlights research findings and observations from nine IEs and one non-causal, contextually relevant qualitative study for three ROL society interventions identified in the Rule of Law Evidence Gap Map: (1) community monitoring; (2) society-led crime prevention and reporting initiatives; and (3) legal empowerment from Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Reported findings and implementation considerations are illustrative and not based on systematic synthesis.

The studies on which this brief is based were identified through the Rule of Law Evidence Gap Map, by Ada Sonnenfeld and colleagues (forthcoming). The authors systematically searched for published and unpublished IEs and SRs through the third quarter of 2020, and then

identified, mapped, and described the evidence base of interventions that aim to strengthen ROL and access to justice. The map contains 118 SRs and 656 IEs. The characteristics of the evidence are described and mapped according to a framework of 29 interventions and 17 outcomes, with 5 cross-cutting themes. The EGM can be viewed at <https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/egm/rule-of-law-evidence-gap-map>.

This brief was authored by Jane Hammaker, Daniela Anda, Lina Khan, Ada Sonnenfeld, and Douglas Glandon. They are solely responsible for all content, errors, and omissions. It was designed and produced by Akarsh Gupta, Paul Thissen, and Tanvi Lal.



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August 2022