The effects of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts: Evidence gap map and protocol for a rapid evidence assessment

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About this report

This report provides a summary of the evidence available on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts. It presents new insights into the findings of a series of six Evidence Gap Maps (EGMs) on governance, democracy and human rights (DRG) interventions that were originally commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) DRG Center, through a partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago. It also presents a protocol for a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) and evidence toolkit that aim to synthesise and appraise the evidence available on democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts.

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Suggested citation

Abstract

Despite widespread advocacy for democracy and democratic freedoms the last thirty years there has been a decline in democratic characteristics of countries across the globe (they have been experiencing democratic backsliding). This research aims to support FCDO's Development and Open Societies Directorate's work in this area by presenting an Evidence Gap Map (EGM) examining the availability and characteristics of the evidence on the effects of freedom and democracy interventions in democratic backsliding contexts. We identified 197 impact evaluations of interventions in backsliding contexts, with the majority of the evaluated interventions in South Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa. The studies focused on accountable governance and the rule of law, as well as civic space and freedoms, with few studies on media and corruption. As we did not identify any systematic reviews dedicated to this topic this report also provides a protocol for a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) and Evidence Toolkit synthesising evidence of the effects of interventions specifically implemented in a sample of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia), Europe and Central Asia (Türkiye), and the South Asia (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan) and East Asia and the Pacific (Indonesia, and the Philippines). Overall, the findings from this research provide a basis for decision-makers, funders and practitioners to consult rigorous evidence in the formulation of programming.

Summary

Background

During the last thirty years, while advocacy for democracy and democratic freedoms has become internationally widespread, the democratic characteristics of countries across the globe have been declining (they have been experiencing democratic backsliding). *Democratic backsliding* (or autocratisation) refers to the weakening of democratic principles within any political regime or deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance (Waldner and Lust, 2018).

Objectives

This research aims to support the work of the Development and Open Societies Directorate at FCDO by presenting an Evidence Gap Map (EGM) examining availability and characteristics of the evidence on the effects of freedom and democracy interventions in democratic backsliding contexts. It also provides a protocol for a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of the effects of interventions specifically implemented in a sample of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Niger, Tanzania and Zambia), Europe and Central Asia (Türkiye), South Asia (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan), and East Asia and the Pacific (Indonesia and Philippines).

Method

The body of evidence has been drawn from the six recently produced evidence gap maps of interventions on democracy, human rights and governance (DRG EGMs; Sonnenfeld et al., 2020; Kozakiewicz et al., 2022; Berretta et al., 2021; Berretta et al., 2022; Gonzalez Parrao et al., 2022a; Gonzalez Parrao et al., 2022b). We filtered the 1,867 studies based on whether the intervention was implemented during an episode of democratic backsliding according to either of two indices: the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) provided by International IDEA and the index on Episodes of Regime Transitions (ERT) provided by the V-Dem institute. We provide novel insights on the results of these six EGMs, presenting a descriptive analysis of the volume of evidence identified from backsliding contexts and the characteristics this evidence, including information about the types of interventions and outcomes featured in the identified studies, the geographic location of interventions, study designs, and funders of the research.

Findings

We identified 197 studies (including 188 quantitative impact evaluations and 9 qualitative evaluations), but we did not find a single systematic review specifically dedicated to the effects of interventions in backsliding contexts. In the studies identified, the evaluated interventions were implemented in 35 countries, with more than two-thirds in South Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa. We identified clusters of evidence related to interventions on accountable governance and rule of law and the civic space and freedoms. However, given the high concentration of ODA related to accountable governance and the rule of law, the number of impact evaluations on these types of interventions is disproportionally small and efforts should be expanded to understand the effects of the relatively large amount of expenditure in this area. We also find limited evidence for interventions related to media and

digital freedom, corruption and other aspects of economic democratic governance, and inclusive politics (which are areas where ODA funding is more limited).

Implications

Overall, the findings from this research provide a basis for decision-makers, donors and practitioners to consult rigorous evidence in the formulation of programming. The EGM highlights that there is a growing body of evidence that can be consulted when considering not only what works for programmatic purposes, but also ways to design and implement interventions so that future evaluations are possible and are able to continue to contribute to this evidence base.

Researchers are also able to use the more nuanced findings and details of the data presented to identify where gaps in the evidence currently exist, with the opportunity to ensure future work contributes to filling those gaps. The lack of systematic reviews dedicated to democratic backsliding contexts, combined with the clusters of evidence identified, highlights a synthesis gap.

To contribute to filling this gap, we will conduct a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) and evidence toolkit covering interventions related to each of FCDOs six interest areas on this topic. When completed this will provide a key resource to help promote the understanding, use and uptake of the existing evidence. However, limits to its overall scope means that future research would benefit from continued efforts to expand and update the available evidence, particularly as the evidence base is growing.

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List of Abbreviations

BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CRS	Credit Reporting System
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
EDI	Electoral Democracy Index
EGM	Evidence and Gap Map
ERT	Episode of Regime Transition
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict Affected Situation
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GOTV	Get Out The Vote
HIC	High Income Country
HR	Human Rights
IAA	International Aid Agency
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IPA	Innovations for Poverty Action
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Country
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PICOS	Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Study Design
REA	Rapid Evidence Assessment
SGBV	Sexual and Gender based Violence
UN	United Nations
US	United Sates
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene

1. Introduction

During the last 30 years, advocacy for democracy and democratic freedoms has become internationally widespread, featuring in many countries' domestic and foreign policy agendas and increasingly among the mandates of international organisations (Huber, 2015; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019; Meyerrose, 2019). For example, the United Kingdom's Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO; 2021) promotes strong democratic institutions and accountable governments as key building blocks for secure and prosperous states. However, despite the increased emphasis on democratic values among the international community, episodes of democratisation across the globe have decreased and many of the democratic advances made following the end of the Cold War have been eroded during this period (Mechkova et al., 2017; Boese et al., 2022, Papada et al. 2023).

Democratic backsliding (or autocratisation) is a common term used to describe instances where a state's democratic characteristics have declined. It refers to the attrition of democratic principles within any political regime or deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance (Waldner and Lust, 2018). Some examples of the causes of democratic backsliding include factors that make elections less competitive, restrict political participation, and constrain public accountability by eroding norms of answerability and punishment. In this report, we define democratic backsliding as the deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance within any regime through a decline in the quality of democracy, when it occurs within democratic regimes, or in democratic qualities of governance in autocracies.

In 2021, a record number of states – 30 countries, home to 2.8 billion people according to the V-Dem institute indicator – were experiencing substantial democratic backsliding (Boese et al., 2022). And the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2021 decreased to levels last registered in 1989 (Boese et al., 2022). In 2022 those levels were down to those registered in 1986 (Papada et al. 2023). Advances in global levels of democracy made over the last 35 years have been wiped out and for the first time in more than two decades, there are more closed autocracies than liberal democracies (Papada et al. 2023).

In this context of increased policy interest in democratisation and a trend of democratic backsliding, the demand for evidence on the effects of interventions that address democratic backsliding has been increasing.

In this report we map and analyse the existing evidence on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions, as defined by the topics related to the work of FCDO's Development and Open Societies Directorate, implemented in democratic backsliding contexts. Through our research we aim to address the following research questions:

- What are the extent and characteristics of evidence on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions implemented in democratic backsliding contexts?
- What are the major primary and synthesis evidence gaps in the literature and how does this reflect patterns of donor ODA funding?
- What areas could be prioritised for primary research and/or evidence synthesis?
- What are the effects of democracy and freedom interventions implemented in democratic backsliding contexts?
- How do the effects of interventions vary according to contextual factors, such as regime type, country income status, implementer type? Do they vary according to whether backsliding is specifically acknowledged in the research, or whether the intervention has a specific objective to address an element of backsliding? Do they vary according to different sub-groups of a population?
- What is the risk of bias of studies on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions implemented in democratic backsliding contexts?
- Are there any reported unintended consequences associated with democracy and freedom interventions?
- Which factors are reported as barriers to and facilitators of the effectiveness of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts?
- What evidence exists on the costs of the included democracy and freedom interventions?

To achieve this objective, we draw on the results of a series of six Evidence Gap Maps (EGMs) on governance, democracy, and human rights (DRG) interventions originally commissioned by the USAID DRG Centre[1] (Sonnenfeld et al., 2020; Kozakiewicz et al., 2022; Berretta et al., 2021; Berretta et al., 2022; Gonzalez Parrao et al., 2022a; Gonzalez Parrao et al., 2022b). EGMs aim to establish what we know, and do not know, about the evidence evaluating the effects of interventions in a thematic area. They present existing evidence within specific thematic areas or sectors in a structured framework of interventions and outcomes (Snilstveit et al., 2016b). We provide novel insights on the evidence identified by these six EGMs, collating their findings and presenting new information about studies of interventions introduced in democratic backsliding contexts. Following this, we outline a protocol for a rapid evidence assessment (REA) and evidence toolkit that will further synthesise the evidence identified on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts.

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[1] More information is available on the [3ie webpage of the DRG EGMs.](#)

Overall, the findings from this research provide a basis for decision-makers, funders and practitioners to consult rigorous evidence in the formulation of programming. Researchers and commissioners will also be able to use the findings to identify where gaps in the evidence currently exist and target new research to fill those gaps.

The next section of this report provides further context about the incidence of democratic backsliding during the past three decades. Section 3 then presents the findings of our synopsis and description of the evidence identified across the six DRG EGMs on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions introduced in democratic backsliding contexts. Finally, Section 4 outlines details of our protocol for compiling a more detailed rapid evidence assessment and toolkit summarising our appraisal of the sample of evidence from prioritised contexts.

2. Background

The concept of democracy bears its definition in its Greek etymology (demos, the people, and kratos, the power) and historically referred to political systems that empowered a state's citizens with opportunities to determine its rules, laws and public conduct. While in practice there are many forms of democracy, more recent definitions of democracy have evolved to focus on five key principles: elections, liberalism, participation, deliberation, and equality (Lindberg et al., 2014).

For example, according to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), *"democracy is an ideal that seeks to guarantee equality and basic freedoms, empower ordinary people, resolve disagreement through peaceful dialogue, respect differences, and bring about political and social renewal without economic and social disruption. […] and it has multiple dimensions, including civil and political rights, social and economic rights, democratic governance and the rule of law."* (International IDEA, 2021, p2).

Democratic backsliding refers to the dismantling of the principles of democracy and the institutions that can support them, in any type of society (Bermeo, 2016). Today there exist several measures of the state of democracy, which make use of various proxies and methodological criteria. Here we summarise the prevalence of democratic backsliding over the past 30 years, comparing data from two well-known indices: the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) provided by International IDEA and the index on Episodes of Regime Transitions (ERT) provided by the V-Dem institute.

The GSoD index by International IDEA measures democratic performance in 173 countries

using 116 indicators and 14 data sources.[2] The ERT by the V-Dem institute measures regime changes across 183 countries and draws from the V-Dem electoral democracy index (EDI), which is based on 40 separate indicators (Maerz et al., 2021).[3] The indices are inherently related as the V-Dem EDI is the largest source of data of the GSoD. However, the GSoD includes a time component in its measure of backsliding (a 0.1-point decline in the indices average score over a period of five years), reflecting its aim to measure sustained periods of democratic decline.

Examining the indicators' data on the state democratic backsliding over the last 30 years, Figure 1 shows that the number of countries currently experiencing democratic backsliding is high compared to historic levels. According to the International IDEA index, the number of countries observing backsliding episodes each year has increased from 3 in 1990 to 11 in 2021. The figure also shows an upward trend in the number of countries experiencing backsliding, particularly during the last 10 to 15 years. Similarly, data from the V-Dem indicator shows that the number of backsliding countries has increased compared to historic figures, increasing from 3 in 1990 to 30 in 2021, and there appears to have been a noticeable upward trend in the number of countries experiencing backsliding during the last 10 to 15 years, with a longer-term trend possibly extending to the early 1990s.[4]

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[2] The data is organised into five areas: (i) Participatory engagement (including indicators such as direct democracy, electoral participation); (ii) Representative government (including clean elections, free political parties); (iii) Fundamental rights (including access to justice and civil liberties); (iv) Checks on governments (including media integrity and effective parliament) and (v) Impartial administration (including predictable enforcement and absence of corruption) (International IDEA, 2022). International IDEA defines democratic backsliding as "a net decline of at least 0.1 points on the average score of Checks on Government and Civil Liberties over a period of five years" (International IDEA, 2022, p9).

[3] The indicators informing the EDI provide measures of sustained changes in suffrage (including the per cent of population with suffrage), elected officials (including the bicameral legislature and the percentage of indirectly elected legislators), clean elections (including the election managing body autonomy and free and fair elections), freedom of association (including party ban and CSO representation), freedom of expression and alternative sources of information (including government censorship effort and media bias), as well as insights from experts and other informants (Maerz et al., 2021). Despite the use of different terminology (autocratisation), the V-Dem measure defines democratic backsliding as episodes that result in a sustainable and substantial decline of democratic attributes. The V-Dem measure requires that such episodes begin with an initial -0.01 point decrease on their electoral democracy index score and a total decrease of at least -0.10 points throughout the episode (Edgell et al., 2020).

[4] Similar patterns are observed from looking at the number of backsliding countries as a proportion of the total number of countries with data reported for each year (which accounts for changes in the indices data coverage over time). Based on the International IDEA dataset, 2 per cent of the countries were experiencing backsliding in 1990 compared to 6 per cent in 2021. Similarly, for the V-Dem dataset, the percentage of countries experiencing backsliding increased from 2 per cent in 1990 to 17 per cent in 2021.

Figure 1. Episodes of democratic backsliding (left) and democratisation (right)
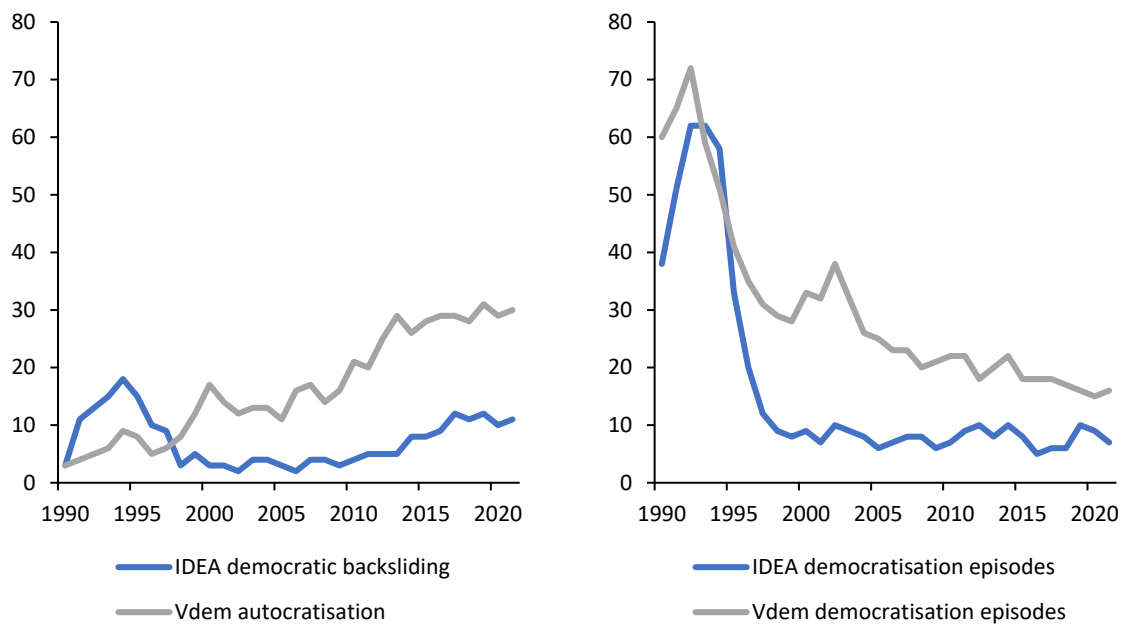
Examples of some of the largest recorded backsliding episodes in this period include those experienced by Poland, which witnessed a decrease from 0.81 in 2015 to 0.59 in 2021 on the 5-year average score of the International IDEA indicator following the Law and Justice party (PiS) accession to power (Freedom House, 2022c). Hungary observed a decrease in the same index from 0.81 in 2009 to 0.58 in 2021 due to the increasing controls imposed by its Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, over institutions (Freedom House, 2022b). El Salvador's score also decreased from 0.67 in 2010 to 0.47 in 2021 following the increasing prevalence of corruption, military violence and limits placed on the freedom of press during this period (Freedom House, 2022a).

During this period of increasing democratic backsliding, a large number of countries have also experienced a democratic breakdown. A democratic breakdown is a shift from democracy to hybrid and/or authoritarian regimes (Brusis, 2019). For example, based on the International IDEA data, the total number of countries that have experienced a democratic breakdown during this period is 88, while the V-Dem data place this number at 75. Some examples of countries that experienced a democratic breakdown during this period include Türkiye (since 2016 for International IDEA, since 2013 for V-Dem), Benin (since 2019 for both indices), Mali (since 2020 for International IDEA, since 2019 for V-Dem) and Venezuela (since 2000 for International IDEA, since 2001 for V-Dem).

This same period has also coincided with a decrease in the number countries observing episodes of democratisation. This is shown in the right panel of Figure 1, which reports the number of countries observing an increase (rather than decrease) in scores of a similar

magnitude to that used to measure backsliding for each of the respective democracy indicators. The International IDEA Index shows a decrease in democratisation episodes from 38 in 1990 to 7 in 2021 and the V-Dem index follows a similar trend from 60 in 1990 to 16 in 2021. Summarising the state of democracy and the overall context these changes have created today, the V-Dem 2022 Democracy Report highlights that liberal democracy is at its lowest level in over 25 years, with 70 per cent of the world's population now living in a closed or electoral autocracy compared to 13 per cent living in a liberal democracy.

A wide range of theories exist that seek to explain how and why democratic backsliding may occur, covering political leadership, political culture, institutions, the economy, social structures, and international factors (Lust and Waldner, 2015). Similarly, events such as open-ended coups d'état, executive coups, and blatant election-day vote fraud are all well-known causes of historic cases of democratic backsliding. However, Bermeo (2016) highlights that the following subtle and complex examples of causes of democratic backsliding have also become more prevalent:

- Promissory coups framing the ouster of an elected government through the claim of democratic legality and the promise of a restoration of democracy. For example, on August 18, 2012, Mali President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's resignation followed a coup that started at the Kati military base. The coup's leaders justified their actions as a response to the government's ineffectiveness and corruption in the management of conflicts in the country (Fornof and Cole, 2020).

- Executive aggrandisement through the weakening of checks and balances by executive power. For instance, in 2013, Ecuador's President Rafael Correa published the Organic Law of Communication creating the Superintendency of Information and Communication. This provided the government the power to fine and sanction journalists and media, potentially limiting public forms of accountability and contestation (Higuera, 2021).

- Strategic election manipulation discreetly supporting the incumbent without making the election appear fraudulent. On April 3, 2022, Viktor Orban was elected President of Hungary for the 4th time. His critics highlight that his success was based on the manipulation of voters, by promising large public benefits to potential influential supporters, and using a monopoly over media during the campaign (Scheppele, 2022).

In response to the alarming state of democratic backsliding and the topic's increasing complexity, the issue has become a focal point in the agendas of many in the international community. Data shows that an increasing percentage of international organisations reference

support for democratic values in their founding charters or other official documents (this percentage has more than doubled since the end of Cold War; Meyerrose, 2020). Meanwhile, several other examples of international initiatives promoting democratic values also exist. These include those by the World Bank's Governance Global Practice (which supports client countries to build capable, efficient, open, inclusive, and accountable institutions) and the Sustainable Development Goals on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.[5] The increase in OECD countries' ODA for democratic governance and civil society also illustrates the increasing international commitment to this issue, with financial commitments rising in real terms from US$2 billion in 1995 (3% of total commitments) to US$23 billion in 2021 (9% of total commitments) (OECD, 2021).

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[5] Similarly, Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an example of a long-standing international agreement to defend democratic participation as "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government" (United Nations, 1948). International agencies have recommitted themselves to the protection and promotion of human rights, rule of law, democracy, electoral transparency, and equality: "The UN does not advocate for a specific model of government but promotes democratic governance as a set of values and principles that should be followed." (United Nations, 2022a).

3. Evidence gap map on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts

In this section, we present a description of the evidence available on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts. First, we outline the research questions, the inclusion criteria, and methods used for our analysis. Then, we examine the volume and characteristics of the studies we have identified.

3.1. Research Questions

In this EGM, we aim to identify and describe the evidence available on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts. The purpose of this research is to help promote the wider use of rigorous evidence on the effects of freedom and democracy interventions, while also providing a tool that can be consulted to help identify relevant evidence on interventions' effects and understand where gaps in the evidence currently exist. To support these aims, we seek to address the following research questions:

1. What is the extent and characteristics of evidence on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions implemented in democratic backsliding contexts?

2. What are the major primary and synthesis evidence gaps in the literature and how does this reflect patterns of donor ODA funding?

3. What areas could be prioritised for primary research and/or evidence synthesis?

3.2. Inclusion criteria and methods

To address these research questions, we draw on the findings of a series of six recent EGMs capturing evidence in this area and provide novel insights on the availability of evidence on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions introduced in democratic backsliding contexts. Given the close affinities between the USAID's DRG and FCDO's democracy and freedom topics, the DRG EGMs overlap well with the interests of topic experts working in this area and the categories of interventions typically implemented. We did not conduct an additional search for evidence, but exclusively used the data and evidence from the six DRG EGMs. As stated below, the scoping work conducted in consultation with FCDO's topic experts indicated that the interventions covered by the DRG EGMs were comprehensive and could be directly used without further search for our EGM on freedom and democracy. In the following section we first present the approach used by the DRG EGMs to identify the source body of evidence and our work on the scope of the new EGM on interventions democratic backsliding context.

3.2.1. About the DRG Evidence Gap Maps

In 2020, the USAID DRG Center commissioned six EGMs to support the prioritisation of its research within the DRG sectors and facilitate access to research among decision-makers and researchers working in this area. The six EGMs are categorised by theme and altogether they searched for evidence on the effects of 192 intervention categories on 152 categories of outcomes. The six themes of the evidence maps include: Rule of Law (Sonnenfeld et al., 2020), Human Rights (Kozakiewicz et al., 2022), Civil Society (Berretta et al., 2021), Independent Media (Berretta et al., 2022), Political Competition (Gonzalez Parrao et al., 2022a), and Governance Effectiveness (Gonzalez Parrao et al., 2022b). Overall, the six EGMs identified 1,623 experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluations[6], 63 qualitative evaluations and 181 systematic reviews on the effects of DRG interventions. A chapeau summary is in process of publication on the body of evidence across the six EGMs (Anda et al., forthcoming).

The development of the six EGMs followed a similar process to ensure the research across the maps is consistent and comprehensive. Consulting relevant literature and stakeholders from USAID and other sector experts, each research team created an intervention-outcome framework describing the different categories of interventions implemented in the DRG sector and relevant outcomes that also later determined the inclusion of studies. Literature search strategies were then developed for each topic in collaboration with information specialists and conducted in four academic bibliographic databases and a total of 85 sector-specific databases and websites between July 2020 and January 2022. All studies identified by the literature search were independently screened by two team members based on the study's title and abstract. The studies identified as potentially includable based on the information provided in their title and abstract were subsequently screened by two independent reviewers using the study's full text.

, data about their characteristics, such as their bibliographic information, the geographic location of the intervention and study design, were extracted by independent trained reviewers and recorded on 3ie's specialised platform for EGMs (the Development Evidence Portal). When extracting and recording data, the reviewers created a single entry combining the information of the main study and any linked publications.[7] Drawing on all linked publications

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[6] We define impact evaluations as a study of the attribution of changes in the outcome to the intervention. Impact evaluations have either an experimental or quasi-experimental design. Other types of evaluations might include qualitative method. See Annexes for more information about included study designs.

[7] Linked records are study versions by the same authors and research team, studying the same intervention and sample, using the same method and research question(s). For instance, a working

ensured that the information available was as comprehensive as possible for each study. A summary of the extracted data is presented in each of the EGM reports cited above and online interactive maps visually present the evidence base. All maps and related content can be accessed through the DRG EGMs project webpage.[8]

3.2.2. Scope and categories of democracy and freedom interventions and outcomes included in our map

The interventions included in this map were selected in consultation with FCDO's topic experts on democracy and freedom interventions and cover 81 intervention categories. Each of the interventions included in our analysis has been categorised according to the following FCDO interest areas (see Table 1 and Appendix 1 for the full details of included interventions):

- Accountable governance, including horizontal and vertical accountability, checks and balances, and rule of law (hereafter accountable governance and rule of law)
- Civic space, including freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression (hereafter Civic space and freedom)
- Inclusive politics, including the inclusion of women, youth and minority groups, opposition parties, and full geographic representation (hereafter Inclusive politics)
- Electoral integrity, including the capacity and autonomy of election management bodies, voter registration, vote buying and other irregularities, and government intimidation and other forms of electoral violence (hereafter Electoral integrity)
- Media and digital tech freedom (hereafter Media)
- Corruption and other aspects of economic democratic governance (hereafter Corruption and economic democracy)
- Multicomponent interventions, where an intervention includes a mixture or at least one component related to the above categories.

Table 1. Domains of democracy and freedom interventions included

FCDO's interest areas	Examples of interventions included in the source DRG maps
Accountable governance and rule of law	*Includes 22 intervention categories across the following topics:* Management innovations and civil service reforms; Design and targeting of public services; Decentralisation; Human capacity development of justice and non-justice actors, law enforcement agencies; E-government and digital transformation of

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paper would serve as the linked record of a journal article. We identified the latest version of a study as the main record, and all older versions as linked records.

[8] The DRG EGMs webpage can be accessed using the following address:
https://www.3ieimpact.org/our-work/evidence-mapping-democracy-human-rights-and-governance.

FCDO's interest areas	Examples of interventions included in the source DRG maps
	administrative processes; Open data and freedom of information interventions
Civic space and freedom	*Includes 18 intervention categories across the followings:* Behaviour change communication for the public; Civic and Legal Education; Capacity building of Civil Societies Organisations (CSO) on coordinating activities, public campaigns, monitoring and documentation and on advocacy
Corruption and economic democracy	*Includes 4 intervention categories across the following topics*: Compliance management and reform; Performance standards and monitoring; Financial, compliance and performance audits, and internal controls and inspections; Citizen observers, monitoring of front-line service providers, and reporting mechanisms
Electoral integrity	*Includes 10 intervention across the following topics*: Voter information, voter education, and Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV); Electoral rules reform; Nonpartisan citizen (domestic) election observation; Monitoring and mitigating electoral violence; Election security planning and implementation; Countering election-related disinformation; Electoral system reform; International election observation
Inclusive politics	*Includes 3 intervention categories across the following topics*: Participatory consultations and deliberative democracy; Community-driven development (CDD) and community-driven reconstruction (CDR); Co-production of public services
Media	*Includes 4 intervention the categories across following topics:* Dissemination of media content on accountability, and democracy promotion; Media infrastructure: Establishment of media outlets (public or private); Training on journalistic skills; Media infrastructure: Establishment of community media/broadcasting;
Multicomponent	*Includes any mix of intervention domains implemented together and for which there are no individual effect sizes per component:* Some common examples are Voter information, voter education, and GOTV + Integration of technology during elections; Civic and legal education + Transparency mechanisms and feedback loops; E-government and digital transformation of administrative processes + Tax policy and administrative reforms, and management of non-tax revenues

Notes: This table provides illustrative examples of the different categories of interventions included in each area. Appendix 1 provides the complete list of interventions included and the way they have been categorised.

The democracy and freedom interventions cover 92 categories of outcome indicators.

Similarly, we have structured the list of outcomes against cross-cutting domains (see

Table 2):

Table 2. Domains of outcomes included

Outcome domains	Examples of outcome indicators
Institutional capacities and service quality	Any measure related to the efficiency, quality and operations of legislators, public decision-makers, or public servants efficiency and the justice sector; Agency coordination between (intra) and within (inter) state and non-state agencies; Performance of electoral management bodies, elected legislature; Public service efficiency, effectiveness, and quality; Tax compliance and contribution, public spending and performance of the legislator; Infrastructure & institutional capacity of the media and CSOs.
Knowledge, belief, attitudes and norms	Any measure related to public satisfaction, democratic belief, consent to being governed, or awareness of rights and responsibilities; Voter knowledge; How knowledgeable and informed public decision-makers are; Motivation, honesty or work-ethic of public officials, public servants and decision-makers; Media literacy and skills.
Participation and civic/political engagement by the general public	Any measure related to the participation of individuals in activities, groups or processes involving civic life, political processes, public affairs, media/investigative journalism and justice institutions and services; Voters' turnout; Inclusive and equitable interest articulation and representation.
Transparency and accountability	Any measures related to the consequences of accountability measures (including those involving duty-bearers) such as changes in the number of issues reported, investigations made or the results of the accountability processes; Civil society oversight; Corruption, governments' transparency, accountability and oversight measures; Election management body transparency and provision of open election data; Political party transparency; Electoral observation; Independence from political pressure; Access to information.
Trust/social cohesion	Any measure of citizens' trust in justice institutions, government officials and service providers, electoral processes and outcomes, CSOs and the media.

Notes: This table provides illustrative examples of outcome indicators included. Appendix 2 provides the complete list of outcomes included and the way they have been categorised. The source DRG EGMs also included outcomes related to human and economic development that are not reported in this EGM.

3.2.3. Criteria for including and excluding studies in our map

In our new EGM, we examine impact evaluations and systematic reviews initially included in

the DRG maps and that present evidence of the effects of democracy and freedom interventions introduced in backsliding contexts. Studies are included in our map if the intervention started during a period of democratic backsliding. We also include studies of interventions that coincide with a democratic breakdown.

We determined democratic backsliding or breakdown contexts using both the ERT by the V-Dem institute and the GSoD index by International IDEA. If either indicator implied that the start of an intervention coincided with a backsliding or a democratic breakdown during the last 30 years, the study is included. One caveat concerning this approach is that it may omit studies of the effects and experiences of interventions started before backsliding episodes. However, here we focus on new initiatives introduced in backsliding contexts to limit the overall scope of this project.

Table 3 presents details of the participants, interventions, comparators, outcomes, and study designs (PICOS) determining the studies' inclusion in our analysis, as well as other characteristics such as the language, publication date and study status.

Table 3. Summary of criteria determining whether studies are included (PICOS)

Criteria	Description
Participants	Any population from low- and middle-income countries (L&MICs) and a selection of high-income countries (HICs) (HIC data extracted for Rule of Law and Human Rights EGMs only). See Appendix 3 for additional information.
Interventions	Interventions are included if they are introduced (started) during an episode of democratic backsliding in the last 30 years and relate to the following areas aligned with FCDO interests (see Table 1): Accountable governance and rule of law; Civic space and freedom; Electoral integrity; Inclusive politics; Corruption and economic democracy; Media.
Comparison	A study must have included a comparison group, though there is no exclusion criteria based on the type of comparison (status quo, waiting list, other intervention).
Outcome	The following categories of outcomes are included (see **Table 2**): Institutional capacities and service quality; Knowledge, belief, attitudes and norms; Participation and civic/political engagement by the general public; Transparency and accountability; trust/social cohesion.
Study designs	We include quantitative impact evaluations, qualitative evaluations and systematic reviews. For quantitative impact evaluations, we include studies using an experimental or quasi-experimental design. For qualitative evaluations we include studies using a subset of designs listed in Appendix 4. We include systematic reviews that synthesise the effects of an intervention on outcomes (descriptions of included study designs are available in Appendix 4).

Criteria	Description
Language	Studies in any language are eligible, although search terms used to identify the literature were in English.
Publication date	All studies published from 1990 onwards.
Status of studies	We included ongoing[9] and completed quantitative impact evaluations, qualitative evaluations and systematic reviews. This includes prospective study records, protocols and trial registries.

Notes: The source DRG EGMs also included outcomes related to human and economic development that are not reported in this review.

3.2.4. Our analytical approach

We present a descriptive analysis of the volume and growth of the studies on democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts. We examine the trends and patterns in studies' key characteristics, such as the interventions and outcomes studied, the geographic location of interventions, the study designs, and the funders of the research. Our analysis highlights areas where clusters of studies and gaps exist in this body of evidence. Since data extraction was already undertaken through the DRG EGM, the research team did not undertake additional data extraction and directly drew from available data to build our freedom and democracy intervention database.

3.3. Evidence on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts

Overall, we identified 188 quantitative impact evaluations and 9 qualitative evaluations, but no systematic reviews on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in these contexts. This represents 12 per cent of the quantitative impact evaluations and 14 per cent of the qualitative evaluations identified across the source body of evidence. Next, we examine trends in the growth of this evidence base over time, as well as the distribution of evaluations based on the interventions, outcomes, geography, methods, and funders reported.

3.3.1. Growth of the evidence base

We found a significant increase in the number of quantitative impact evaluations on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions introduced in backsliding contexts in recent years. We found that 90 per cent of the quantitative impact evaluations (n = 170) identified were published during the last decade alone. This accounted for nearly seven-fold increase in the total number of quantitative impact evaluations on this topic during that period, increasing from

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[9] Ongoing studies, such as protocols, were included when they provided sufficient information to meet all criteria. This includes an explanation of primary and secondary outcomes, as well as the intervention to be evaluated.

28 quantitative impact evaluations in 2012 to 188 in 2022. Similarly, the total number of qualitative evaluations also increased in this area, increasing from 1 in 2012 to 9 in 2022.

The number of quantitative impact evaluations published increased in each year since 2010, with a peak of 37 quantitative impact evaluations identified from 2020 (Figure 2). Qualitative evaluations were published in small numbers since 2012, with one or two studies published most years.

Figure 2. Number of quantitative impact evaluations and qualitative evaluations identified by year of publication
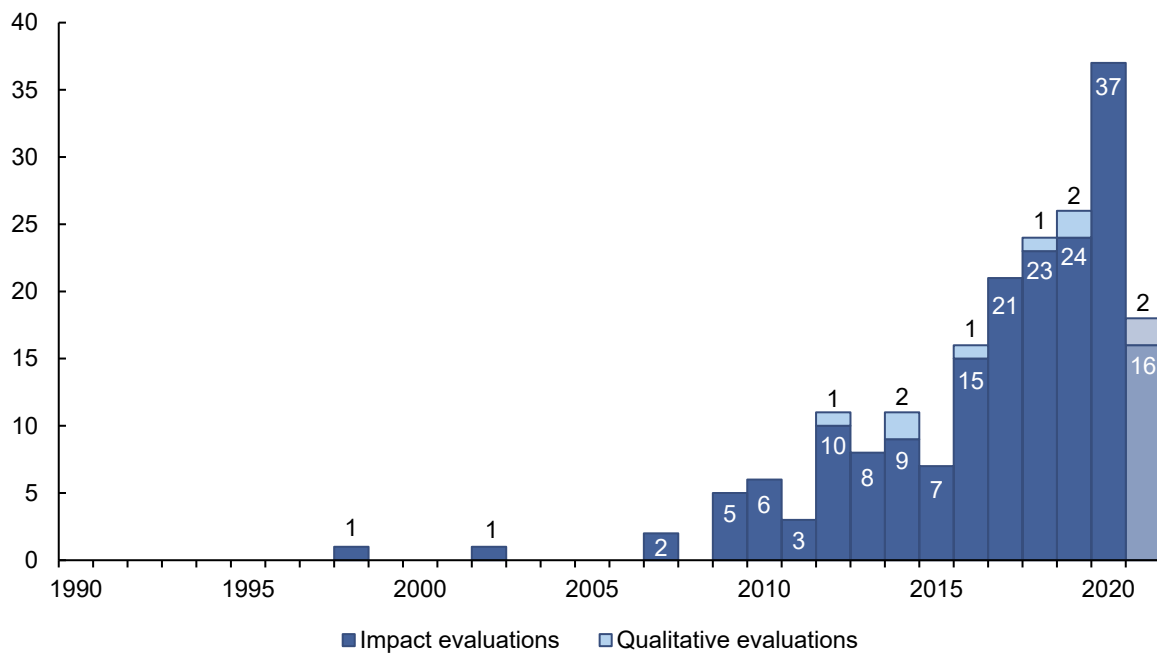
Notes: The values for 2021 represent a mid-year figure reflecting that the literature search for the six source DRG evidence gap maps were completed between July 2020 and January 2022.

3.3.2. Intervention and outcome coverage

Evidence on freedom and democracy interventions in context of democratic backsliding is not evenly distributed between our included intervention and outcomes (Table 4). We observe larger clusters of evidence on the effects of:

- Accountable governance and rule of law interventions on outcomes such as institutional capacity and service quality (n = 25); knowledge, belief, attitudes and norms (n = 43); participation and political engagement (n = 14).

- Civic space and freedom interventions on outcomes such as participation and political engagement (n = 24), and knowledge, belief, attitudes and norms (n = 26).

- Electoral integrity interventions on institutional capacity and service quality (n = 22).

Table 4. Distribution of quantitative impact evaluations by intervention -outcome pairing

Outcomes / Interventions	Institutional capacity & service quality	Knowledge, beliefs, attitudes & norms	Participation & civic/ political engagement by the general public	Transparency & accountability	Trust/ social cohesion	Grand Total
Accountable gov & rule of law	25	43	14	6	1	67
Civic space & freedom	26	8	24	9	2	38
Corruption & economic democracy	6	12	8	4	3	15
Electoral integrity	22	7	15	8	1	27
Inclusive politics	3	14	5	3	4	14
Media	10	3	9	4	1	12
Multicomponent	15	2	22	9	0	29
Grand Total	79	76	63	26	9	**188**

Notes: The total of the values displayed ("grand total") will be larger than the sum of studies per row or column, reflecting that a study may contain multiple interventions and outcomes.

On the other hand, we also observed smaller clusters of evidence ("gaps") in some key intersections of interventions and outcomes:

- Trust and social cohesion outcomes were relatively rarely measured in the body of evidence. In total, nine evaluations were identified across all intervention categories.

- We identified a relatively small body of evidence on the effects of media interventions (n = 12), as well as interventions promoting inclusive politics (n = 14) and addressing corruption and other aspects of economic democratic governance (n = 15). However, clusters of evidence also appear to be growing specifically on the effects of interventions related to inclusive politics (n = 14) and corruption and other aspects of economic democratic governance (n = 15).

Further evidence gaps may be identified by looking at different variations of interventions implemented in each area.

The body of evidence also included nine qualitative evaluations (Table 5). The majority of these studies focused on accountable governance and rule of law (n = 4) and civic space and freedom (n = 2) interventions. Despite the small number of evaluations, this finding was also in line with the trends observed in the rest of the body of evidence, with interventions in these

areas being more commonly evaluated.

Table 5. Characteristics of the qualitative evaluations

Author(s)	Country	Design	FCDO interest area	Intervention domain
Long (2019)	Bangladesh	Process tracing	Civic space and freedom	Citizen observers, monitoring of front-line service providers, and reporting mechanisms
Zhener (2021)	Pakistan	Contribution analysis	Multicomponent	i) Participatory consultations and deliberative democracy; Capacity building and information for public decision-makers
				ii) Tax policy and administrative reforms, and management of non-tax revenues; Capacity building and information for public decision-makers
Hamkens and Traoré (2021)	Mali	Contribution analysis	Accountable governance and rule of law	Tax policy and administrative reforms, and management of non-tax revenues
Bakibinga et al. (2014)	Kenya	Qualitative comparative analysis	Accountable governance and rule of law	Public Private Partnerships
Murray (2012)	Bolivia	Process tracing	Civic space and freedom	Citizen observers, monitoring of front-line service providers, and reporting mechanisms
Smith et al. (2018)	Bangladesh	Outcome harvesting	Accountable governance and rule of law	Improvement of capacity and security protocols for rights defenders
Strupinskiene (2019)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Process tracing	Multicomponent	i) Transitional justice processes
				ii) Management innovations and civil service reforms
Delgado (2014)	Bolivia	Process tracing	Accountable governance and rule of law	Improvement of capacity and security protocols for rights defenders
Hearn et al. (2016)	Indonesia	Outcome harvesting	Multicomponent	i) Sustained financial assistance
				ii) Strengthening of procedural justice approaches

3.3.3. Geographic distribution of studies

Of the 188 quantitative impact evaluations on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in backsliding contexts, we found evaluations of interventions implemented in 35 countries across the world. More than two-thirds of the interventions featured in these studies were implemented in South Asia (n = 94, 50%) or Sub-Saharan Africa (n = 36, 19%), but smaller clusters of quantitative impact evaluations were also available on interventions from Latin America and the Caribbean (n = 16, 8%), East Asia and the Pacific (n = 23, 12%), and Europe and Central Asia (n = 7, 14%). Fewer quantitative impact evaluations existed on interventions in the Middle East and North Africa (n = 5, 3%).

The recent growth in the number of quantitative impact evaluations was largely explained by an increase in the number of studies on interventions in South Asia and, to a lesser degree, Sub-Saharan Africa (see Figure 3). It also showed that the availability of quantitative impact evaluations from other regions was increasing, but at a more moderate rate.

Figure 3. Trends in the cumulative number of quantitative impact evaluations by region
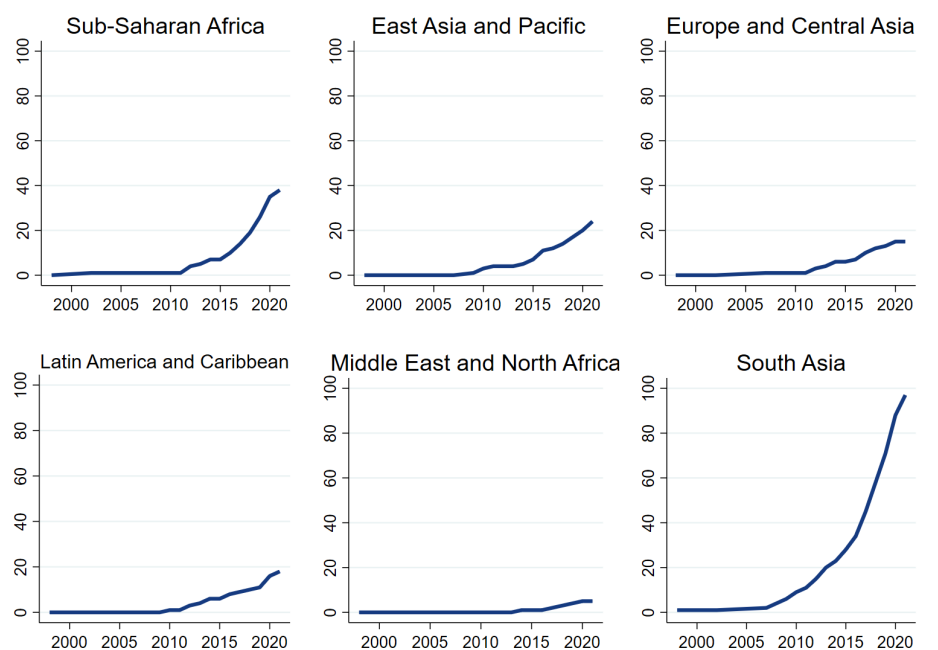
The largest concentration of quantitative impact evaluations examine interventions located in India (n = 64), Pakistan (n = 17), Indonesia (n = 12) and Tanzania (n = 11) as presented in Figure 4 showing the distribution of the location of interventions in quantitative impact evaluations by country. India was the country with the highest number of studies in South Asia, Tanzania in Sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil (n = 6) in Latin America, Indonesia in East Asia and Pacific, Türkiye (n = 8) in Europe and Central Asia and Egypt (n = 2) in Middle East and North Africa. Examples of countries that observed democratic backsliding episodes, but for which

we identified no evidence, included (among others) South Sudan, Sudan and Namibia in sub-Saharan Africa and Myanmar in East Asia and the Pacific. With respect to qualitative evaluations, Bolivia and Bangladesh (respectively n = 2) were the most prevalent countries but the overall volume of qualitative evaluations was too low to determine geographical trends (see Table 5).

Figure 4. Map of quantitative impact evaluations by country
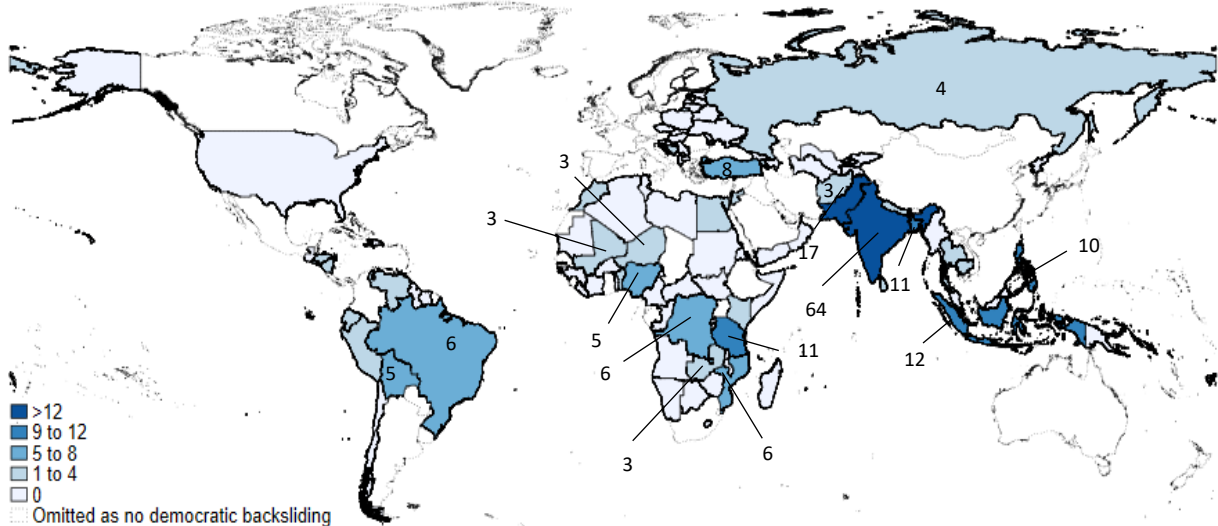
Notes: The map's value labels identify the number of studies from each country where three or more studies have been identified.

3.3.4. Distribution of impact evaluations according to context

Overall, we found that the majority of studies were of interventions in lower-middle income (n = 108) and non FCAS (n = 174) countries. Similarly, the majority of quantitative impact evaluations were of interventions in democratic regimes (n = 101) although we noted a subset of studies focusing on democratic breakdown context (a transition from democratic to autocratic regime) (n = 54). Relatively sizeable clusters of evidence were also available from autocratic regimes (n = 87). Table 6 below presents the distribution of quantitative impact evaluations across intervention categories according to the context characterising the country the intervention was implemented in, such as its FCAS status (fragile and conflict-affected situation), regime type, and income status.

Table 6. Distribution of quantitative impact evaluations by intervention according to context

	FCAS		Regime			Income Status			
	Yes	No	Autocratic & backsliding	Democratic breakdown	Democratic & backsliding	Low Income	Lower middle income	Upper middle income	High income
Accountable gov & rule of law	7	75	32	18	50	25	48	9	0
Civic space & freedom	3	39	20	14	22	15	25	2	0

	FCAS		Regime			Income Status			
	Yes	No	Autocratic & backsliding	Democratic breakdown	Democratic & backsliding	Low Income	Lower middle income	Upper middle income	High income
Corruption & economic democracy	0	17	5	1	12	7	7	3	0
Electoral integrity	2	28	17	11	13	9	17	4	0
Inclusive politics	1	18	10	10	9	9	9	1	0
Media	1	11	6	5	6	5	6	1	0
Multicomponent	4	23	16	12	11	8	18	1	0
Grand Total	**14**	**174**	**87**	**54**	**101**	**62**	**108**	**18**	**0**

Notes: We considered the intervention's first year of implementation to code the country FCAS, Regime, and Income Status. FCAS is based on the annual World Bank country classification (World Bank, 2022a). Regime is based on the V-Dem classification (V-Dem, 2022). Income status is based on the World Bank classification on the first year of intervention (World Bank, 2022b). The total of the values displayed will be larger than the number of studies identified, reflecting a study may contain multiple interventions or multi-country studies.

Both the International IDEA and V-Dem indices discussed above measured a country's democratic context according to five broad sets of indicators, each measuring a different component or democratic principle (e.g., freedom of association, elections, etc.). We mapped the individual components of the V-Dem and International IDEA indices against FCDO interest areas (see Appendix 6 for further details). Overall, for the sample of 99 backsliding episodes[10] where the 188 quantitative impact evaluations were implemented, the most common areas that experienced a democratic decline during a backsliding episode were accountable governance and rule of law (n = 48), civic space and freedom (n = 29) and electoral integrity (n = 18) (Table 7).

Comparing this data to the included interventions' areas, we found that 69 per cent of the quantitative impact evaluations (n = 130) were analysing the effects of an intervention directly relevant to an area of democratic decline during the backsliding episode. However, while it was intuitively interesting to examine interventions in the area directly related to the original decline, the different aspects of democracy were also interrelated and, once backsliding starts to occur, it can create a heightened risk of backsliding spreading to other areas too. For example, removing a piece of legislation that protects Civil Society Organisation (CSO) formation may increase public dissent, leading the political elite in some contexts to increase efforts to degrade (or undermine) political participation and media freedom. Therefore,

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[10] Our study covers 35 countries that experienced difference democratic backsliding episodes. We then cover 99 backsliding episodes in our body of evidence.

strengthening and "protecting" other aspects of democracy can be important in some context, which makes evidence on interventions in other areas relevant too.

Table 7. Number of studies of interventions in the specific area of democratic decline

FCDO interest areas	No. of backsliding episodes category score declined *	No. of quantitative impact evaluations in area of decline **
Accountable governance and rule of law	48 (89%)	63 (94%)
Civic space and freedom	29 (76%)	31 (82%)
Corruption and economic democracy	8 (62%)	10 (71%)
Electoral integrity	18 (75%)	23 (85%)
Inclusive politics	12 (80%)	13 (93%)
Media	9 (60%)	9 (75%)
Total	**99**	**188**

Notes: * Percentages represent the proportion of the total number of backsliding episodes where quantitative impact evaluations were implemented in the same area. ** Percentages represent the proportion of the total number of quantitative impact evaluations included in the map that focus on an area experiencing a backsliding episode. See Appendix 6 for more information about the matching of FCDO areas and V-Dem/ International IDEA indices.

3.3.5. Impact evaluation study designs and conduct

Of the 188 included quantitative impact evaluations, 61 per cent of studies were randomised experiments (n = 114) as presented in Table 8 showing the frequency of the different study designs featured in the included studies. However, it is not always possible or feasible to randomise the provision of interventions or identify a natural experiment that exploits randomness in the assignment of an intervention (e.g., a public lottery). Quasi-experimental designs provide alternative approaches that can establish causal relationships between interventions and outcomes when carefully executed (Hansen et al., 2013; Chaplin et al., 2018; Fenton Villar and Waddington, 2019; Waddington et al., 2022). The data showed 39 per cent of quantitative impact evaluations used a non-experimental design (n = 74). Designs, such as statistical matching (n = 21) and difference-in-difference and fixed effects regressions (n = 44), were among the most common non-experimental methods applied in this literature.

Table 8. Frequency of included quantitative impact evaluations by study design

Evaluation design	No. of quantitative impact evaluations	% of quantitative impact evaluations
Experimental evaluations	114	61%
Non-experimental evaluations	74	39%
Difference-in-differences & Fixed effects	*44*	*23%*
Statistical matching	*21*	*11%*
Regression discontinuity design	*2*	*1%*
Instrumental variable estimation	*2*	*1%*

Some designs, such as instrumental variable and regression discontinuity designs, are generally less common in the broader evaluation literature possibly due to the data requirements often necessary to create a convincing application of the approach.[11] Novel illustrative examples of the application of these less common evaluation designs are starting to emerge in this literature. Rogger (2018) provided an example of the use of an instrumental design. The study used the number of years of experience of Nigeria's House Representatives as an instrumental variable to analyse the effects of Representatives' committee membership on the quantity and quality of public goods.

Table 9. Frequency of included qualitative evaluations by study design

Evaluation design	No. of qualitative evaluations	% of qualitative evaluations
Process tracing	4	44%
Contribution analysis	2	22%
Outcome harvesting	2	22%
Qualitative comparative analysis	1	11%
Contribution tracing	0	0%
General elimination methodology	0	0%
Realist evaluation	0	0%

In general, qualitative evaluations were rare in this area. Among the qualitative evaluations, process tracing (n = 4, 44%) was the most common design used (Table 9). Other qualitative study designs featured in this literature also included contribution analysis (n = 2, 22%), outcome harvesting (n = 2, 22%) and qualitative comparative analysis (n = 1, 11%).

The idea of complementing rigorous quantitative impact evaluations with qualitative data is also gaining currency in the development sector. Qualitative information can inform evaluation designs and provide valuable insights to better understand and explain findings from quantitative analysis. They may also help us to validate the main findings (White, 2008) or be another way to assess contribution to change. We found that approximately 22 per cent of the included quantitative impact evaluations (n = 41) collected and analysed both qualitative and quantitative data. This, again, was promising and highlighted that examples of the application

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[11] For example, identifying interventions with discontinuities or thresholds determining policy assignment can be challenging without having in-depth knowledge of the implementation of policies. Instrumental variables similarly require in-depth knowledge of policies to ascertain whether exogenous factors determine the assignment or uptake of the policy and, even with this knowledge, it may not be possible to identify suitable instrumental variables that explain some degree of variation in a policy variable but has no independent effect on the outcome of interest (Glewwe and Todd, 2022). Interrupted time series analysis requires that data is available for numerous time periods both before and after an intervention is implemented (Linden, 2015), which can be a challenging data requirement to satisfy.

of different impact evaluation methods becoming more available in this area of research. Mixed methods studies do, though, remained a minority of all impact evaluations on this topic and future research would benefit from the richness of information gained from triangulating between quantitative and qualitative data.

Integrating cost analysis into impact evaluations is key to understanding not only what works, but the cost-effectiveness of interventions. However, only about 12 per cent of impact evaluations identified reported some form of cost data (n = 22). This was also below the standards observed in other development sectors, where approximately one in five impact evaluations were integrating cost information into their evaluations (Brown and Tanner, 2019). This pattern suggested an important gap that could be improved in future research.

Finally, ethics approval and reporting are key steps to ensuring that study participants are not harmed during the implementation and evaluation of a programme (Evans, 2021). Despite this, a relatively small share of impact evaluations reported having obtained ethical clearance (n = 52, 28%). The remaining 136 studies (72%) did not report obtaining ethical clearance. This does not necessarily indicate that it was not obtained but improvements in transparency and the standard of ethical reporting in research are required in this domain.

3.3.6. Implementing agencies and funding

Information was also available about the reported types of implementing agencies, programme funders and research funders of the studies included. Table 10 shows that the most common programme-implementing agencies were government agencies (n = 71), made up of governments and government departments, implementing development programmes within their own countries. This was followed by non-profit organisations (n = 40), academic institutions (n = 9), international aid agencies (n = 8) and charitable or private foundations (n = 7). According to this data, relatively few studies reported for-profit firms (n = 1), or international financial institutions (n = 1) as programme-implementing agencies. The most commonly reported implementing agencies of evaluated programmes are the Government of India (n = 10) and to a lesser extent the Governments of Indonesia and Pakistan (n = 3 for each), the Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA; n = 2) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC; n = 2) (Table 11).

Table 10. Number of studies by programme implementing and funding agency types

	Programme Implementation		Research Funding	
	Implementing Agency	Funding Agency	Qualitative Evaluation	Quantitative Impact Evaluation
Academic institution	9 (5%)	7 (4%)	0 (0%)	29 (15%)

Charitable or private foundation	7 (4%)	3 (2%)	1 (11%)	8 (4%)
For-profit firm	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)
Government agency	71 (36%)	27 (14%)	0 (0%)	8 (4%)
International aid agency	8 (4%)	27 (14%)	5 (56%)	25 (13%)
International financial institution	1 (1%)	13 (7%)	0 (0%)	13 (7%)
Non-profit organisation	40 (20%)	7 (4%)	1 (11%)	12 (6%)
Not specified	89 (45%)	128 (65%)	2 (22%)	91 (48%)

Notes: Where more than one agency is reported by studies, multi-coding is permitted (i.e., a study may include more than one listed funder).

The most common programme funders were government agencies (n = 27) and international aid agencies (n = 27; Table 10). This was followed by international financial institutes (n = 13), non-profit organisations (n = 7) and academic institutions (n = 7). Fewer evaluations reported the charitable or private foundations (n = 3) and no studies reported for-profit firms as programme funders. However, the majority of studies also did not report the programme funding agency (65%, n = 128). As presented in Table 11, the most frequently reported individual funders of evaluated programmes were the World Bank (n = 12), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID; n = 9) and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO; n = 8). This was followed by the Government of India (n = 4) and the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (JPAL; n = 3).

In terms of who funded research, academic institutions (n = 29) and international aid agencies (n = 25) were the most commonly reported funders of impact evaluations (Table 10). Fewer evaluations report that international financial institutions (n = 13), non-profit organisations (n = 12), government agencies (n = 8) or charitable or private foundations (n = 8) funded impact evaluations. Very few quantitative impact evaluations reported or for-profit firms (n = 2) as funders. Meanwhile, more than half of the qualitative evaluations (n = 5) reported international aid agencies as the research funder and for-profit and non-profit organisations were also the reported funders of one qualitative evaluation each (respectively n = 1). However, a relatively large proportion of studies did not specify the research funding agency. For quantitative impact evaluations, 48 per cent (n = 91) did not specify the evaluations funder and 22 per cent of qualitative evaluations (n = 2) did not report this information either (Table 10).

Table 11. Top 5 most commonly reported implementing agencies and funders

	Programme Implementation		Research Funding	
	Implementing Agency	Funding Agency	Qualitative Evaluation	Quantitative Impact Evaluation
1.	Gov. of India (10)	World Bank (12)	Oxfam (2)	FCDO (11)

	Programme Implementation		Research Funding	
	Implementing Agency	Funding Agency	Qualitative Evaluation	Quantitative Impact Evaluation
2.	Gov. of Indonesia (3)	USAID (9)	BMZ (2)	World Bank (11)
3.	Gov. of Pakistan (3)	FCDO (8)	USAID (1)	USAID (6)
4.	IPA (2)	Gov. of India (4)	CARE (1)	3ie (4)
5.	IRC (2)	JPAL (3)	Comic Relief, UK (1)	IGC (4)

Notes: Where more than one agency is reported by studies, multi-coding was permitted (i.e., a study may include more than one listed funder). Acronyms: Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (JPAL), UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO, formerly DFID), German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), International Rescue Committee (IRC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), International Growth Centre (IGC).

Finally, FCDO (n = 11) and the World Bank (n = 11) were also among the most common individual funders of quantitative impact evaluations in this area. To a lesser extent, USAID (n = 6), 3ie (n = 4) and the International Growth Centre (IGC; n = 4) were reported funders of quantitative impact evaluations. Oxfam (n = 2) and BMZ (n = 2) were the two most common reported funders of qualitative evaluations. Otherwise, organisations such as USAID, CARE and Comic Relief UK were among the known funders of at least one qualitative evaluation in this area (Table 11).

Funding by international aid agencies

Reflecting donor interests, Table 12 presents further information about the intervention categories of interventions reported as being funded by international aid agencies. It also provides the categories of interventions for which international aid agencies have financed impact evaluations and qualitative evaluations. From the limited information available, we found that the reported information in evaluations most commonly indicated international aid agencies fund accountable governance and rule of law interventions (n = 9). This was followed by civic space and freedom (n = 6), corruption & economic democracy (n = 5) and inclusive politics interventions (n = 5). Very few of the evaluations reported international aid agencies were funders of electoral integrity (n = 2) and media and digital tech freedom (n = 2) interventions.

The data also indicates that the most common reported intervention categories for which international aid agencies funded evaluations were civic space and freedom interventions (n = 9). This was followed by accountable governance and rule of law (n = 5), media and digital freedoms (n = 5) electoral integrity (n = 5). While eight quantitative impact evaluations of multicomponent interventions also reported being funded by international aid agencies, very

few quantitative impact evaluations related to inclusive politics (n = 1) and corruption and economic democracy (n = 1) have been identified as being funded by these agencies. With respect to qualitative evaluations, international aid agencies mostly funded evaluations related to accountable governance and rule of law (n = 2) and corruption and economic democracy (n = 2; Table 12).

Table 12. Number of impact evaluations funded by an international aid agency according to intervention domain

Intervention domain	Programme Funding Agency	Research Funding Agency	
		Qualitative Evaluation	Quantitative Impact Evaluation
Accountable gov & rule of law	9	2	5
Civic space & freedom	6	0	9
Corruption & economic democracy	5	2	1
Electoral integrity	2	0	5
Inclusive politics	5	0	1
Media	2	0	5
Multicomponent	8	1	8

Notes: Where more than one agency was reported by studies, multi-coding is permitted (i.e., a study may include more than one listed funder).

We also compared the reported the frequency of programme and evaluation funding in each area from international aid agencies with the average levels of Official Development Assistance (ODA) on this topic during the past decade (OECD CRS, 2022). Again, we approximately matched the sectors of ODA programme funding to FCDO interest areas (see Appendix 7 for further details). The data presented in Table 13 shows the areas that receive the largest amount of ODA (accountable governance and rule of law and civic space and freedom) were also the most frequent the areas where international aid agencies were reported as funders of programmes and impact evaluations.

Contrary to the patterns of ODA expenditure, impact evaluations of civic space and freedom interventions were more regularly financed by international aid agencies than governance and rule of law interventions (Table 13). However, as described above, a large sample of the studies did not specify funding information and it is unclear how representative the funding data reported in studies are of actual funding trends by international aid agencies. Hence, it was not clear if international aid agencies disproportionately fund impact evaluations of civic

space and freedom interventions relative to accountable governance and rule of law interventions. If we consider broader patterns in the data and examine the distribution of the proportions of the total number of studies identified in each area (see final column of Table 13), the most common evaluated area was indeed related to interventions on accountable governance and the rule of law.

Table 13. ODA allocation per intervention domain and comparison with reported international aid agency (IAA) funding of interventions and evaluations.

	2012	2021	Average proportion ODA (2012,16, 21)	IAA Programme funding	IAA Qual. Eval. funding	IAA Impact Eval. funding	Total Impact Eval.
Accountable gov & rule of law	$7,205	$5,010	62%	24%	40%	15%	36%
Civic space & freedom	$2,545	$2,485	24%	16%	0%	26%	20%
Corruption & economic democracy	$258	$156	2%	14%	40%	3%	8%
Electoral integrity	$345	$167	2%	5%	0%	15%	14%
Inclusive politics	$131	$1,083	5%	14%	0%	3%	7%
Media	$309	$647	5%	5%	0%	24%	6%

Notes: ODA figures are in USD Millions at 2020 constant price. The average proportion ODA (2012-2021) is based on the average of ODA allocation in 2012, 2016 and 2021 for each domain. Data Source: OECD CRS (2022). IAA funding proportions were calculated based on figures reported in Table 12 and in studies. Total quantitative impact evaluation proportions were calculated based on figures reported in Table 4 and in studies. Multicomponent interventions are omitted from this table.

The data also showed that the proportion of ODA expenditure on the accountable governance and rule of law (62%) area was significantly higher than the proportion of programmes (24%) and quantitative impact evaluations (15%) that were reported as funded by international aid agencies (Table 13). Some of the differences in these proportions might be explained by differences in the costs of implementing programmes and evaluations in these different areas (e.g., programmes in one area might be relatively more expensive than another). We also could not preclude the possibility that the approximate matching between the ODA data and the FCDO interest areas may explain some of the differences in the figures reported above. However, examining the distribution of the proportions of the total number of quantitative impact evaluations identified showed that a significantly smaller proportion of studies relate to accountable governance and the rule of law interventions (36%). This indicated that overall, there were proportionally less quantitative impact evaluations than the amount of ODA

expenditure in this area.

Finally, we found that areas where generally there was less ODA expenditure, such as areas related to corruption and economic democracy and inclusive politics, international aid agencies were also less frequently reported as funders of programmes and evaluations in these areas. Compared to the average proportion of ODA spent on media and digital technology freedom during the past decade (5%), international aid agencies were relatively frequent reported funders of quantitative impact evaluations in this area (24%). However, considering the limitations associated with reporting funding data, by examining the distribution of the proportion of the total number of quantitative impact evaluations identified, we saw that media interventions represent a small proportion of the overall evidence body of evidence (6%). The only area that might be perceived as representing a disproportionate volume of the total number quantitative impact evaluations relative to the average ODA expenditure in the area concerned electoral integrity (14% of quantitative impact evaluations compared to 2% of ODA expenditure). However, in absolute terms the actual number of quantitative impact evaluations related to electoral integrity interventions was not particularly large (n = 27), and so we do not believe this should be interpreted that research with promising agendas about electoral integrity interventions should be deprioritised relative to those focused on other areas.

3.3.7. Summary of synthesis evidence

We did not find a single systematic review specifically dedicated to the effects of interventions in backsliding contexts. Inevitably, many of the systematic reviews included in the source DRG EGMs may include studies that were implemented in backsliding contexts and conclusions about the general effects of the interventions covered by these systematic reviews may inherently be of interest to experts in this area. However, the existing syntheses did not specifically address the effect of those interventions in backsliding contexts. This reiterates a point previously highlighted that, while the concept and issue of democratic backsliding are frequently used, empirical analysis delineating practice in these contexts is more limited (Bermeo, 2016).

3.4. Conclusion

A body of evidence on the effect of democracy and freedom interventions in context of democratic backsliding exists. In this evidence gap map, we identified a growing literature on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions introduced to democratic backsliding contexts, consisting of 188 quantitative impact evaluations and 9 qualitative evaluations, with a significant share of the studies published in the past ten years. Within this literature, we

identified larger clusters of evidence on the effects of accountable governance and civic space interventions on institutional capacity, knowledge and norms, and participation outcomes. The evidence base is also present for a range of democratic contexts, featuring democratic and autocratic societies, as well as societies observing a democratic breakdown.

However, evidence on the effect of interventions addressing democratic backsliding is unevenly spread. Despite this encouraging trend, some areas, such as those related to media and digital technology interventions, inclusive politics and corruption and other aspects of economic democratic governance, has a more limited amount of evidence from quantitative impact evaluations. Furthermore, some contexts, such as those characterised by an FCAS status, outcomes (e.g., those related to trust and social cohesion), and different variations of interventions in areas may also warrant further research.

Considering the available evidence, the lack of systematic reviews dedicated to democratic backsliding contexts points to a clear limitation of this literature. The size and breadth of the existing evidence base presented a literature that would benefit from a synthesis and rigorous assessment of the findings from existing studies in these contexts. The proposed rapid evidence assessment (next chapter) would provide a positive step towards filling this research gap, as well as promoting the understanding, use and uptake of the existing evidence. However, limits to its overall scope means that future research would benefit from continued efforts to expand and update the body of evidence, particularly as new evidence becomes available in this growing evidence base.

3.4.1. Implications for policymakers

Policymakers are key stakeholders for the use and expansion of this body of evidence. Despite the limitations of the evidence base in some areas, we encourage decision-makers to consider the findings from the studies that are available when designing future policies and programs. Furthermore, the gaps we identified also pointed to an urgent need for investments in additional research. We would encourage funders, researchers and other stakeholders to begin addressing the most critical evidence gaps in a strategic and coordinated manner. This EGM highlights that there is a growing body of evidence that can be consulted when considering not only what works for relevant purposes, but also ways to design and implement interventions so that future evaluations are possible and are able to continue to contribute to this evidence base.

To contribute to addressing the gap in synthesis evidence, another related option is commissioning and developing 'living synthesis' projects so that reviews are regularly updated with new evidence, ensuring that decision-makers and other stakeholders have access to the

most up-to-date evidence in this area.

In the sector of democracy and freedom, policymakers are not only actors driving the production of primary and synthesis, they also have access to primary data that can be used to analyse the impact of interventions. Many interventions in the freedom and democracy sector are implemented by public institutions or target them (e.g., decentralisation, e-government, access to public data etc.). The work between public institutions and researchers can be a catalyser in the production of rigorous evidence and we encourage policymakers in engaging these forms of collaboration.

3.4.2. Implications for researchers

Democratic backsliding and breakdown contexts are characterised by lower levels of transparency and stability which can make access to data and fieldwork challenging for researchers and policymakers. Despite the growing body of evidence, gaps in contexts such as FCAS illustrate this challenge and the necessity to design and analyse interventions that will allow a diversification of the evidence base. More generally, only a small subset of studies effectively focuses on democratic backsliding and breakdown context. The findings of our mapping allow to highlight priorities for researchers to grow the body of evidence:

- Growing the body of primary evidence in interventions categories where no or lower number of evaluations are available. This is particularly relevant for intervention focusing on Corruption of Media which are available in lower proportion in democratic backsliding context.

- Growing the body of primary evidence in less studies geographies including FCAS but also continent such as Europe and Central Asia or Middle East and North Africa where gaps of evidence are identified in democratic backsliding contexts

- Consistent reporting between studies on aspects such as cost, equity and gender, pre-registration, ethical approvals and availability of primary data will provide additional findings and confidence in both primary and synthesis findings. It will also facilitate synthesis and learning across the sector to better understand what works and how to maximise impact.

- Considering the available evidence, the synthesis gap in democratic backsliding context can be filled and is a priority. The size and spread of the body of evidence will allow relevant findings to inform decision-making and intervention designs to promote democratic governance.

4. Protocol for a rapid evidence assessment and evidence toolkit on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts

In this section, we present a protocol for a Rapid Evidence Assessment that will synthesise and appraise the evidence on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts. First, we outline our research questions, the criteria determining inclusion of studies in this review, and the methods we will use to describe and analyse this evidence. Following this, we summarise our approach to present a concise overview of the results in an evidence toolkit targeting FCDO advisors and staff, as well as other practitioners interested in this topic.

4.1. Research Questions

Based on the findings of the map of studies in Section 3, we aim to further synthesise and appraise the evidence identified on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts. The purpose of this research is to help promote the wider use and understanding of evidence on what works to address democratic backsliding. To support these aims, we will address the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of democracy and freedom interventions implemented in democratic backsliding contexts?

2. How do the effects of interventions vary according to contextual factors, such as regime type, country income status, implementer type? Do they vary according to whether backsliding is specifically acknowledged in the research, or whether the intervention has a specific objective to address an element of backsliding? Do they vary according to different sub-groups of a population?

3. What is the risk of bias of studies on the effects of democracy and freedom interventions implemented in democratic backsliding contexts?

4. Are there any reported unintended consequences associated with democracy and freedom interventions?

5. Which factors are reported as barriers to and facilitators of the effectiveness of democracy and freedom interventions in democratic backsliding contexts?

6. What evidence exists on the costs of the included democracy and freedom interventions?

4.2. Inclusion criteria and methods

Rapid Evidence Assessments (REA) are a form of evidence synthesis that has been developed to address policy-relevant questions in less time and with fewer resources than what is typically available for full systematic reviews (Ganann, Ciliska, and Thomas 2010; Khangura et al. 2012; Collins et al. 2015; Barends, Rousseau, and Briner 2017; Snilstveit et al. 2018). There is no single definition of a rapid review and recent analysis of study methods has highlighted the variation in rapid review methods (Hartling et al., 2015; Khangura et al., 2012; Tricco et al., 2017; Fenton Villar, 2022). However, such approaches typically involve adjusting methods used in traditional systematic reviews and adopt one or more shortcuts to give more timely answers to urgent questions (Schünemann and Moja, 2016). The approach and methodology below are developed in line with other types of rigorous evidence synthesis methodologies (Barends et al., 2017; Fenton Villar, 2022).

4.2.1. Criteria for including and excluding studies

The inclusion criteria for the rapid evidence assessment have been established in collaboration with FCDO's topic and commissioning experts. Our selection criteria follow the same approach as presented in Table 3 with the exception of the participants criterion that we will restrict to a smaller subset to align with scope and resources constraint. Our REA will then focus on individuals and organisations in the countries selected with FCDO:

- Sub-Saharan Africa: DRC, Kenya, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia
- Europe and Central Asia: Türkiye
- South Asia: Bangladesh, India (for a subset of studies related to trust and social cohesion), Pakistan
- East Asia and the Pacific: Indonesia and the Philippines

summarises the type of participants, interventions, comparison, outcomes and study designs (PICOS) that will be considered in this REA, along with other inclusion criteria. The majority of the criteria are in line with the EGM described in the previous section, but we have applied some additional restrictions to limit the scope of the exercise.

4.2.2. Overview of the body of evidence for the REA

Based on the inclusion criteria for the REA, we included 65 of the 197 studies identified during the EGM stage and published between 2009 and 2021. Similar to the EGM, no additional search was undertaken. The studies include 61 quantitative impact evaluations (37 experimental and 24 quasi experimental) and 5 qualitative evaluations (the list of included studies is available in the list of references) analysing the impact of interventions under 58

different backsliding years across 22 backsliding episodes. Table 14 presents the distribution of included studies for each of the 13 countries. The countries with the largest number of studies are Pakistan (n = 10), India (n = 10) and the Philippines (n = 10). The countries with the smallest number of studies in this sample are Kenya and Zambia, with one study identified from each context.

Table 14. Distribution of evaluations included in the REA by country.

Country	Regime type	Democratic backsliding Episode	Number of included evaluations
Bangladesh	CA (2007) EA (1990 – 1991, 2002 – 2006, 2008 – 2021) ED (1992 – 2001)	2007, 2014 – 2018	6
DRC	CA (1990 – 2005) EA (2006 – 2021)	2013 – 2017 2020	3
India	ED (1990 – 2018) EA (2019 – 2021)	2000 – 2021	10
Indonesia	EA (1990 - 1998) ED (1999 - 2021)	2009 – 2021	5
Kenya	EA (1990 – 2013, 2017 – 2021) ED (2014 – 2016)	2008 – 2012	1
Mozambique	CA (1990 – 1993) EA (1994 – 2021)	2009 – 2013	5
Niger	CA (2010) EA (1990 – 1992, 1996 – 1999, 2009) ED (1993-1995, 2000-2008, 2011-2021)	1996, 1999, 2009-2010, 2015-2021	2
Nigeria	CA (1990 – 1992, 1994 – 1998) EA (1993, 1999 – 2011, 2021) ED (2012 – 2020)	1994 – 1997 2003 – 2007 2019 – 2021	4
Pakistan	CA (1999 – 2001) EA (1990 – 1998, 2002 – 2021)	1999 – 2004 2015 – 2021	10
The Philippines	EA (2004 – 2009, 2018 – 2021) ED (1990 – 2003, 2010 – 2017)	2001 – 2005, 2016 – 2021	9
Tanzania	EA (1990 – 1995, 2000 – 2021) ED (1996 – 1999)	2015 – 2021	5
Türkiye	EA (2013 - 2021) ED (1990 – 2012)	2005 – 2021	4
Zambia	EA (1990 – 1993, 1996 – 1999, 2013 – 2021) ED (1994 – 1995, 2000 – 2012)	2010 – 2021	12
TOTAL			**65**

NOTE: CA = Closed Autocracy, EA = Electoral Autocracy, ED = Electoral Democracy, LD = Liberal Democracy. Source: V-Dem (2020)

Democratic regime and backsliding contexts

The 13 countries included in the analysis have had different experiences with democratisation

and democratic backsliding during the last 30 years. While all countries have experienced a change in their regime type according to the V-Dem Index, none of the selected countries has been classified as liberal democracy over the period and all the countries have experienced at least one form of autocracy (either closed autocracy or electoral autocracy). Bangladesh Niger, and Nigeria are the only countries on our list that have experienced closed autocracy, electoral autocracy and electoral democracy (Table 14). We can also categorise the included countries into three groups based on V-Dem indicator:

- Countries that experienced an overall increase in democratic standards over the period with some episodes of democratic backsliding (DRC, Kenya, Niger, Mozambique, Indonesia, and Nigeria). We observed some common features between countries in this group such as the regular occurrence of fraud during electoral processes, the limited exercise of basic civil liberties, political violence, and endemic corruption despite a multiparty system. Moreover, democracy in these countries was often challenged by the wider social and economic context such as regional tensions in DRC, and Islamist militant threats in Mozambique and Nigeria (Human Rights Watch 2021; 2022; 2023).

- Countries that experienced backsliding and an overall decrease in democratic standards over the period, despite some episodes of democratisation (Türkiye, the Philippines, Bangladesh and India). A common feature across these contexts was the overlap between politics and social groups, in addition to other challenges such as corruption and lack of electoral transparency. Bangladesh and India's contexts were characterised by intercommunity political violence and threatened human rights at all levels, such as the marginalisation of Muslim communities in India or the regular attacks against NGOs, journalist and officials in Bangladesh (Freedom House 2022a; 2022b).

- Countries where there have been fluctuations in democratic standards caused by episodes of backsliding and democratisation, but overall long-term democratic progress has stalled over the thirty-year study period (Pakistan, Tanzania, Zambia). A common feature was the existence of a multiparty system with regular elections but a lack of alternance. Long-term democratisation can be prevented by the low alternance such as the 60 years of power of the ruling party in Tanzania, politically restricted opposition in Zambia, and the tension between the Islamic Law and the Constitution in Pakistan (Freedom House 2022c; 2022d; 2022e).

The 13 countries included in the analysis also faced different challenges and areas of decline

during backsliding episodes (Table 15). Overall, we find that 82 per cent of the quantitative impact evaluations (n = 54) analysed the effects of an intervention directly relevant to an area of democratic decline during the backsliding episode and 76 per cent of the quantitative impact evaluations (n = 50) analysed the effect of an intervention directly relevant to the most challenged area of democracy in the country of the intervention.

Table 15. Most challenged areas and areas of democratic decline during backsliding episodes for countries included in the REA.

Some countries faced a specific programmatic challenge and area of democratic score decline, such as electoral integrity in Kenya, civic space and freedom in DRC, or both in Tanzania. In these countries, the democratic backsliding may be related to a decline in a specific aspect of democratic governance. Other countries such as Zambia, India and Bangladesh have experienced declining democratic scores across almost all areas during a backsliding episode. Overall, we find that 82 per cent of the quantitative impact evaluations (n = 54) analysed the effects of an intervention directly relevant to an area of democratic decline during the backsliding episode and 76 per cent of the quantitative impact evaluations (n = 50) analysed the effect of an intervention directly relevant to the most challenged area of democracy in the country of the intervention.

Table 15. Most challenged areas and areas of democratic decline during backsliding episodes for countries included in the REA.

Country	Most challenged democratic Areas	Areas of democratic decline
Bangladesh	Electoral integrity Accountable gov & rule of law	2007: Electoral integrity Civic space & freedom Accountable gov & rule of law Inclusive politics Media 2014 – 2018: Electoral integrity Civic space & freedom Accountable gov & rule of law Inclusive politics Media
DRC	Civic space and freedom	2013 – 2017 : Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Media 2020: Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Media

India	Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Inclusive politics Media	2017 – 2018: Accountable gov & rule of law Electoral integrity Inclusive politics Media Civic space & freedom
Indonesia	Electoral integrity	2009 – 2021: Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Media
Kenya	Electoral integrity	2008 – 2012: Electoral integrity
Mozambique	Electoral integrity Accountable gov & rule of law	2009 – 2013: Electoral integrity
Niger	Electoral integrity	1996: Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Media 1999 Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Media 2009-2010: Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity 2015-2021: Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Media
Nigeria	Electoral integrity Accountable gov & rule of law	1994 – 1997: Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity 2003 – 2007: Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity 2019 – 2021: Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity
Pakistan	Electoral integrity Accountable gov & rule of law	1999 – 2004: Electoral integrity Civic space & freedom
The Philippines	Electoral integrity	2001 – 2005: Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Media 2016 – 2021: Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity

| | | Media | | |

Tanzania	Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity	2018 – 2019: Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Media
Türkiye	Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Media	2005 – 2021: Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Media
Zambia	Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Inclusive politics Media	2016 – 2020: Accountable gov & rule of law Civic space & freedom Electoral integrity Inclusive politics Media

Interventions and outcomes

The studies included in the REA covered all six intervention domains and the five outcome domains that make up our framework. Table 16 shows that the largest cluster of studies concerns accountable governance and rule of law interventions (n = 25), followed by civic space (n = 17), and electoral integrity (n = 17) interventions. Within these domains, the majority of the studies in the accountable governance and rule of law focus on interventions related to decentralisation, administrative devolution, or reorganisation (n = 13). This is followed by capacity strengthening of public, judicial, and security sectors (n = 6), then access to public data and right of information (n = 2). Similarly, the civic space and freedom domain comprises studies focusing on public education and behaviour change interventions for civic awareness and participation (n = 12) and capacity building and support services targeting civil society organisations (n = 7). The electoral integrity domain, meanwhile, includes a cluster of studies focusing on voter information, voter education, and Get-Out-The-Vote Campaigns (n = 11). The rapid evidence assessment will examine the effects of individual intervention (see Appendix 8 for the full detailed mapping of individual interventions and outcomes included in the REA).

Table 16. Distribution of quantitative impact evaluations included in the REA by intervention-outcome pairing

Outcomes Interventions	Institutional capacity and service quality	Participation and civic/ political engagement by the general public	Knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and norms	Transparency and accountability	Trust/ social cohesion	Grand Total
Accountable governance	19	10	10	7	2	**24**

Electoral integrity	8	13	8	8		17
Civic space	8	11	12	6	3	17
Inclusive politics	9	6	1	3	3	11
Media	5	6	6	4	1	8
Corruption	7	4	3	2	4	7
Grand Total	40	33	30	19	10	65

Note: Some studies evaluate multicomponent interventions and may therefore be coded with multiple intervention domains. Thus, the grand total is not equal to the sum of the totals of each domain. The body of quantitative impact evaluation evidence is complemented by five qualitative evaluations: Bakibinga et al. 2014, Hearn et al. 2016, Long 2019, Smith et al. 2018 and Zehner 2021. Data provided in this table is subject to change following the coding of studies and their potential recategorisation.

4.2.3. Data extraction and coding procedures

We will extract the following data from each study encompassing the study's context, methods, and findings, along with information about the cost and implementation of the intervention. (Provisional data extraction forms are provided in Appendix 9.)

- Descriptive data including authors, publication date and status, as well as other information to characterise the study including country, category of intervention and outcome, and intervention design (e.g., whether the intervention has a specific objective to address an element of democratic backsliding).
- Methodological information on study design, analysis method, and type of comparison (if relevant).
- Quantitative data for outcome measures, including descriptions of outcome measures, sample sizes in each of the intervention and comparison groups, outcome means, SDs, and test statistics (e.g., *t* test, F test, *p*-values, 95 per cent confidence intervals, if available).
- Qualitative data for the conditions of implementation and main barriers and facilitators to the implementation of the interventions.
- Cost data for the cost associated with the implementation of the intervention.

Descriptive data, methodological information and cost data will be single coded by a trained reviewer and checked by another one. Two trained reviewers will independently code the quantitative data and any disagreement will be resolved through discussion with a third reviewer (who must be a core team member). Prior to proceed with independent data extraction, all coders will receive a training on quantitative data extraction (QEX) and Risk of Bias assessment (RoB). Only coders meeting the minimum threshold of similarity with the research team will be selected for independent data extraction. Additionally, all QEX and RoB

will reviewed for consistency by the research team and a sample will be reviewed in detail by the research team to ensure the quality of the data extraction process.

4.2.4. Measures of treatment effects

An effect size (or treatment effect) expresses the direction and magnitude of the difference in outcomes between groups of observations, such as the difference in outcomes between observations in the intervention and comparison groups (Borenstein et al., 2009a; Valentine et al., 2015).

Effect sizes presented in empirical studies are rarely independent of the scale or unit of the outcome in the study and the scale or unit of the outcome are generally not directly comparable across studies. To facilitate cross-study comparisons of the magnitudes of studies effects in our analysis, we will extract data from each study to calculate standardised effects sizes. We will choose the appropriate formulae for standardised effect size calculations in reference to, and dependent upon, the data provided in the included studies and the outcome category (see Appendix 10 for an example effect size formulae sheet) (Borenstein et al., 2009a).

If different outcome categories exist under the same outcome construct, for comparability of estimated effect sizes, we will convert estimates to the most common standardised metric. We will use common transformations outlined in Borenstein et al. (2009a) for converting between different measures of standardised effects. When studies provide multiple estimates for the same effect (e.g., using different model specifications), we will extract the authors' preferred specification if they have identified one. Otherwise, we will select the estimate with the smallest standard error.

4.2.5. Criteria for determination of independent findings

It is important that our analysis accurately captures and accounts for co-dependencies between study estimates. This is because standard meta-analytic methods assume effect size estimates are independent and failure to qualitatively recognise that estimates are derived from the same intervention or study can distort (inflate) our perceptions of the availability of evidence. Dependent effect sizes can arise in several circumstances. For example, co-dependencies between estimates can arise when several publications stem from one study, or several studies are based on the same data set. Some studies might have multiple treatment arms that are all compared to a single control group. Other studies may report outcome measurements from several time points or use multiple outcome measures to assess related outcome constructs. All such cases yield a set of statistically dependent effect size estimates (Borenstein et al., 2009b).

We will assess the extent to which relationships exist across the studies included in the review. We will avoid double counting of identical evidence by linking papers prior to data analysis by using information provided in the studies to help support these assessments, such as sample sizes, programme characteristics, and key implementing and/or funding partners. Where we have several publications reporting on the exact same effect in the same underlying sample, one main study will be used for data extraction and the linked studies will be stored to help any required search for further or missing information. To identify the main study, priority will be given to journal articles and, in the case of multiple reports/working papers, the most recent one will be selected. We will extract effects reported across different interventions, outcomes and subgroups within a study. We will address dependent effect sizes using data processing and selection techniques. We will utilise several criteria to select one effect estimate per outcome per study (further details of the criteria determining effect estimate selection are available in Appendix 11).

4.2.6. Unit of analysis issues

Unit of analysis errors can arise when the unit of allocation of a treatment is different to the unit of analysis of effect size estimate, and this is not accounted for in the analysis (e.g., by clustering standard errors at the level of allocation). We will assess included studies for the prevalence of these issues and, where they exist, account for them by adjusting the reported standard errors (*SE*s) according to the following formula (Higgins et al., 2020; Hedges, 2009):

$$(d)' = (d) \cdot 1 + (m - 1)c$$

Where *d* is the effect size, m is the average number of observations per cluster and c is the intra-cluster correlation coefficient. If the included studies use robust Huber-White *SE*s to correct for clustering, we will calculate the *SE* of *d* by dividing *d* by the t-statistic on the coefficient of interest.

4.2.7. Dealing with missing data

In instances where there is missing or incomplete data, we will make every effort to contact study authors to obtain the required information. If we are unable to obtain the necessary data, we will report the characteristics of the study but state that it could not be included in the meta-analysis or reporting of effect sizes due to missing data. In line with recommendations on collating data in systematic reviews from study authors (see Mullan et al., 2009), we will report the number of studies for which authors were contacted, the information requested, any important details of the method of eliciting information, and the response of authors to the

request.

4.2.8. Critical appraisals

We will assess the risk of bias in included studies using 3ie's risk of bias tool (see Appendix 12). This examines both the internal validity and statistical conclusion validity of experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluation designs (Waddington et al., 2012). Two reviewers will undertake the risk of bias assessment independently. If there are disagreements, we will resolve them by discussion and the involvement of a third reviewer (who must be a member of the core team). We will compile a risk of bias assessment for each estimate we extract. This is to account for the fact that estimates for different outcomes in the same study may score differently in the assessment.

We will assess the risk of bias based on the following criteria, coding each estimate as "Yes", "Probably Yes", "Probably No", "No" and "No Information" for each domain:

- Factors relating to baseline confounding and biases arising from differential selection into and out of the study (e.g., assignment mechanism).
- Factors relating to bias due to missing outcome data (e.g., assessment of attrition).
- Factors relating to biases due to spill overs, crossovers and contamination.
- Factors relating to biases in outcome measurement (e.g., social desirability or courtesy bias, recall bias).
- Factors relating to biases in reporting of analysis.

We will report the results of the assessment for each of the assessed criteria for each estimate. In addition, we will use the results of the risk of bias assessments to produce an overall rating for each study as either "High risk of bias", "Some concerns" or "Low risk of bias", drawing on the decision rules in RoB2.0 (Sterne et al., 2019), rating studies as follows:

- "High risk of bias": if any of the bias domains were assessed as "No" or "Probably No".
- "Some concerns": if one or several domains were assessed as "No Information", and none were "No" or "Probably No".
- "Low risk of bias": if all the bias domains were assessed as "Yes" or "Probably Yes".

We will provide a description in our analysis of the outcomes of our assessment of reliability of included studies, and we also intend to explore whether there are systematic differences in estimated effects between primary studies with different risk of bias. We will conduct sensitivity analysis to assess the robustness of the results to the risk of bias associated with included studies.

4.2.9. Data synthesis

To synthesise the effects of democracy and freedom interventions, we will combine a narrative synthesis of study findings with a cross-study meta-analyses of intervention effects. Our narrative synthesis will examine the range of intervention effects and the study settings. We will then include studies in the same meta-analysis when we identify two or more effect sizes using a similar outcome construct, the same intervention type, and where the type of comparison group is judged to be similar across the studies. If there are too few studies, or the included studies are considered too heterogeneous in terms of interventions or outcomes, we will present a narrative discussion of individual effect sizes alone (Wilson et al., 2011).

Because heterogeneity exists in theory due to the variety of interventions and contexts that could be included in the review, we will use inverse-variance weighted, random effects meta-analytic models to synthesise the effect estimates (Higgins and Thomas, 2020). We will use the metafor package (Viechtbauer, 2010) in R software to conduct the meta-analyses (R Core Team, 2020).

We will also conduct a qualitative description of the barriers and facilitators to interventions' effects, as well as their costs. This information will be extracted both from the quantitative impact evaluations (when this information is available in the study) and the qualitative evaluations. We will not undertake an additional search for qualitative evidence or costs.

4.2.10.   Sub-group analysis and investigation of heterogeneity

In our analysis, we will examine the distribution of estimated effects across intervention and outcome categories . We will also statistically assess heterogeneity by calculating the Q statistic, I2, and τ2 to provide an estimate of the amount of variability in the distribution of effect sizes (Borenstein et al., 2009a). We will complement this assessment with a graphical analysis using forest plots and, whenever feasible, we will conduct moderator analyses using meta-regression to investigate sources of heterogeneity.

Following the PROGRESS-PLUS approach (Oliver et al., 2017), we will assess moderators falling into three broad categories of extrinsic, methodological and substantive characteristics. Examples of these categories include:

- Extrinsic characteristics: E.g., funder of the study (e.g., NGO vs private sector vs government investments), publication type, publication date.
- Methodological characteristics: E.g., study design, risk of bias, length of follow-up, categories of outcome measures.

- Substantive characteristics: E.g., participant characteristics (gender, age, socio-economic status, education), context (geographical setting; democratic setting), intervention type, intervention features – such as whether the intervention has a specific objective to address an element of democratic backsliding, type of implementing agency).

We intend to use random effects meta-regression to investigate the association between moderator variables and heterogeneity of treatment effects (Borenstein et al., 2009a), and subgroup analyses to investigate heterogeneity by treatment subgroups (e.g., men and women, poor and non-poor, and so on). If these strategies are not possible (e.g., if we do not have a sufficient number of studies or data), we will discuss and explore the factors which may be driving the heterogeneity of results narratively by conducting cross-case comparisons (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

4.2.11.   Sensitivity analysis

We will conduct sensitivity analysis to assess whether the results of the meta-analysis are sensitive to the removal of any single study. We will do this by removing studies from the meta-analysis one-by-one and assessing changes in results. We will also assess the sensitivity of our results to the inclusion of studies with a high risk of bias by removing these studies from the meta-analysis and comparing results to the main meta-analysis results. Furthermore, we will assess the sensitivity of our results to outliers. We will use studentised residuals to examine whether studies' estimated effects may be outliers (Viechtbauer and Cheung, 2010) and studies with a studentised residual larger than the $100 \times (1 - 0.05/(2 \times k))$th percentile of a standard normal distribution will be considered potential outliers.

4.2.12.   Assessment of reporting biases

If meta-analysis is feasible, we will assess reporting biases in the literature using a rank correlation test (see Begg and Mazumdar,1994). We will also use a regression test (Sterne and Egger, 2005), using the standard error of the observed outcomes as predictor, to check for funnel plot asymmetry.

4.3. Evidence Toolkit

The rapid evidence assessment will be accompanied by an evidence toolkit summarising the key findings. The following sections present our approach for the development of the evidence toolkit.

4.3.1. What are evidence toolkits

The main objective of a toolkit is to help decision-makers and other stakeholders access curated resources about what works to address societal issues and challenges. They are developed as an entry point to help users learn about the strength of evidence related to the effects of a particular category of intervention and the possible barriers to and facilitators of the effectiveness of each intervention. They can also provide information on contextual considerations and implementation issues that might be associated with an intervention.

4.3.2. Summary of toolkit contents

The approach to the toolkit will be developed in consultation with FCDO's experts to ensure the presentation of evidence reflects the priorities and intended use of the toolkit. The toolkit will include an introduction to the topic and a brief description of the methods used to create it and its intended uses. The main content of the toolkit will comprise a series of curated summaries (approximately 2 pages in length) of each intervention included in the rapid evidence assessment, with a further page including a bibliography and reference list for each intervention.

**Figure 5.** Example of draft 2-page design of evidence toolkit
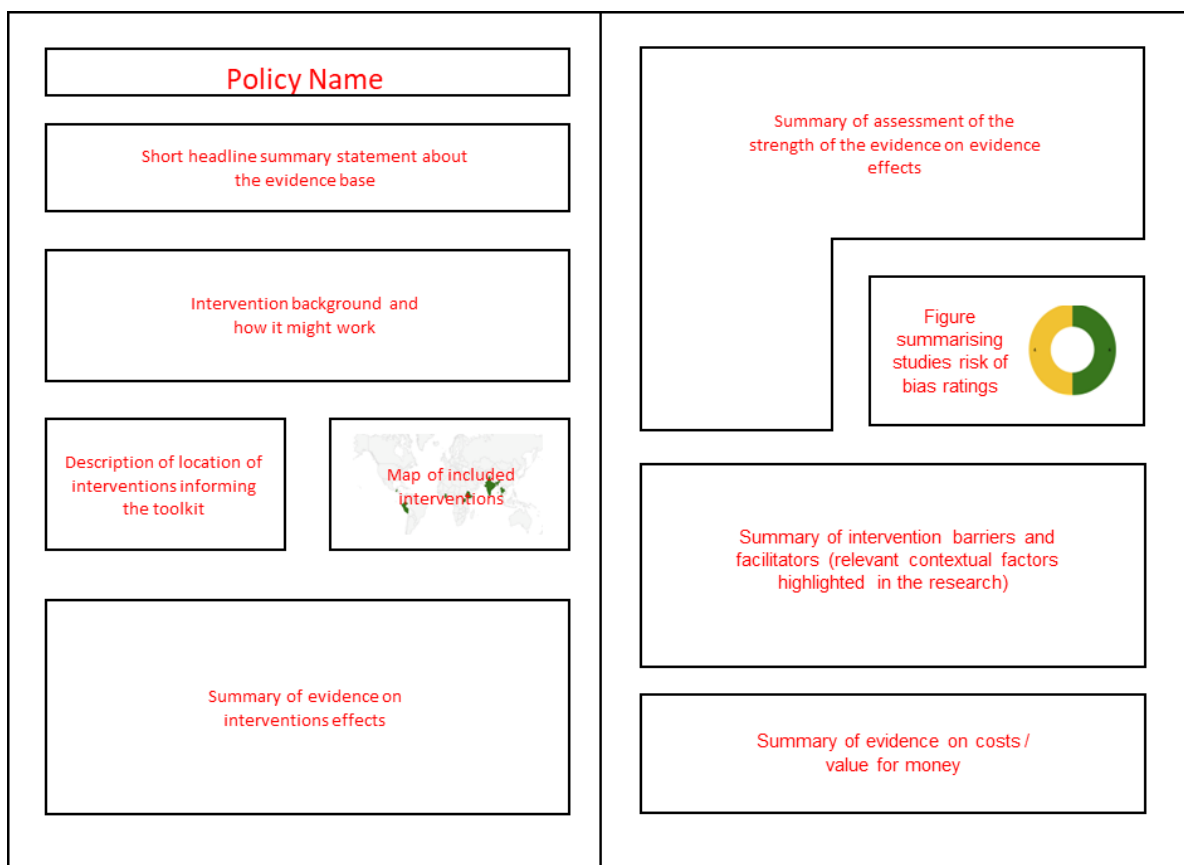
Figure 5 provides a sketch of the 2-page spread intended for each intervention. The design

will be developed further, based on feedback and findings, with inputs from 3ie's evidence communication and knowledge translation experts. The final presentation of the information will be decided in consultation with FCDO.

Interpreting the magnitude of effects

Effect estimates can be difficult to interpret in the absence of context, the toolkit will attempt to provide interpretations of effect sizes that make clear their practical significance. As well as reporting the estimate of the effect, we will report whether this might be interpreted as a small, medium, or large effect. However, because a standardised effect lacks a familiar scale, interpreting what counts as a small or large effect is often challenging. Furthermore, given the categories of included outcomes there does not appear to be a straightforward transformation of the standardised effect size.[12,13]

Researchers regularly interpret effects using benchmark values suggested by Cohen (1988); that effect sizes of about 0.20, 0.50, and 0.80 standard deviations (or equivalent) be considered small, medium, and large. However, these magnitudes do not derive from any obvious context of relevance to intervention effects or even from a review of empirical effects (Ellis, 2010). The approximated values provided by Cohen (1988) were based on intuitive examples from the biological world (mainly using the difference in the body heights of men and women). The medium effect simply represents a difference in heights that is likely to be visible to the naked eye. A small effect size is noticeably smaller than a medium effect, but not so small that it is trivial. The large effect size is an equal distance from the medium effect as the chosen small effect size. Cohen (1988) highlighted the limitations of the derivations of his approximations, conceding these values are no more reliable than his own intuition and that they will not apply to all fields.

More recent attempts to examine effect sizes observed in empirical research indeed show the benchmark values established by Cohen (1988) do not reflect well those commonly found in applied research. For example, looking at the effects reported by both meta-analyses and randomised control trials of education interventions, Hill et al. (2008) find the average reported effect size regularly ranges between 0.2 and 0.3 standard deviations. Bosco et al. (2015) also

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[12] For example, in the education sector, a common transformation applied to test score outcomes involves comparing the effect size in standard deviations to the average annual or monthly improvement rate in test scores. In doing so, the research may report the effect in terms of months' or years' worth of progress.

[13] We have also considered metrics based on Cohen's U3 index but consider this isn't an intuitive transformation for the intended audience of the toolkit. One further approach we may explore is standardising the estimates to response ratios rather than standard deviations. However, this requires sufficient information to be regularly reported in the underlying studies (e.g., the control group mean).

show empirical effect sizes from studies in the field of applied psychology exhibit tertial partitions at values approximately one-half to one-third of the values previously suggested by Cohen (1988).

This also corresponds with the findings of various systematic reviews on the effects of interventions in low- and middle-income countries. For example, the results of a meta-analysis by Piza et al. (2016) indicate business support to small and medium enterprises (SME's) improves firms' performance and development by between 0.1 to 0.2 standard deviations. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Snilstveit et al. (2016a) shows the range of estimated effects for various types of education programmes is generally below 0.3 standard deviations. Some other examples of reviews of interventions reporting modest empirical effect sizes along these lines include those by Waddington et al. (2014) on farmer field schools, Vaessen et al. (2014) on microcredit, Oya et al. (2017) on agricultural certification schemes, Waddington et al. (2019) on participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability (PITA) initiatives and Gonzalez Parrao et al. (2021) on aquaculture interventions. Furthermore, similar toolkits from evidence brokers focused on interventions in high-income countries have also adopted modest thresholds to indicate small, medium, and large effects.[14]

Reflecting this discussion, we will adopt the following thresholds to interpret the magnitude of the reported effects in standard deviations: <0.1 (small or minute), 0.1 – 0.3 (medium), >0.3 (large). These reflect common magnitudes reported in reviews of interventions' effects in international development. We may make further adjustments to these thresholds once we understand the range of effects in this literature. However, one limitation of doing so is that if all effects are reasonably small in this sample of studies, further adjustments may classify an intervention as having "large" effects, when in fact they are relatively small in practice. In that case, it will be more appropriate to label these descriptions as small, medium and large only relative to other democracy and freedom interventions.

Strength of evidence assessment

We will also report an assessment of the strength of the evidence. This will be based on a modified version of the GRADE assessment criteria, which is a transparent framework for developing and presenting summaries of evidence (see Schünemann et al., 2016). The assessment will consider the strength of evidence of a body of literature based on the criteria below:

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[14] E.g., the Youth Endowment Fund toolkit impact ratings indicate small, medium, and large effects are equivalent to magnitudes of <0.1, 0.1 to 0.25, and 0.25+ standard deviations.

- Limitations in study design (risk of bias)

- Inconsistency of results

- Imprecision

- Publication bias

The details of the assessment tool are provided in Appendix 13. A key modification of the criteria reflects the assessment of study risk of bias. GRADE is developed for clinical practice – which as a field has a strong bias towards randomised (experimental) evaluations. The risk of bias assessments in this modified version is based on 3ie's risk of bias tool, which does not implicitly discriminate against non-randomised designs to the same degree. This reflects research indicating that non-randomised can establish causal relationships between interventions and outcomes when carefully executed (Hansen et al., 2013; Chaplin et al., 2018; Fenton Villar and Waddington, 2019; Waddington et al., 2022).

We will rate the strength of the evidence in line with the conventional GRADE ratings (high, moderate, low, very low confidence) (see Schünemann et al., 2016; Section 5). However, we will not consider the associated criteria related to upgrading the strength of evidence rating due to large estimated effects. Rather our rating will simply reflect our confidence that the true effect lies close to that of the estimate of the effect (whether this be a small, medium or large effect). These assessments are typically used following a synthesis performing a meta-analysis. When it is not possible or meaningful to perform a meta-analysis, we will use adapted guidance to apply the criteria above to narrative summaries of effects (e.g., Murad et al., 2017).

Headlines and summary statements about the evidence base

A headline summary of the assessment of the evidence on each intervention will be reported at the top of each 2-page spread. The following criteria will determine the types of statements made about the evidence on each intervention/outcome.

- **What works well?**

a. Large effects with high-confidence strength of evidence rating.

- **What works or is promising?**

a. Medium effects with medium- to high-confidence strength of evidence rating.

b. Large effects with medium-confidence strength of evidence rating.

- **What doesn't appear to work?**

a. Negative or small effect with medium- to high-confidence strength of evidence rating.

- **What is unclear?**

a. Small / medium / large effects with low- or very low-confidence strength of evidence rating.

These statements will consider contextual factors that appear to affect how an intervention works. For example, the statement may report that the intervention appears to work well in improving a particular outcome in democratic states but its effects in autocratic states is unclear. Alternatively, an intervention may appear promising for engaging women in democratic processes, but the evidence indicates that it does not appear to have similar effects among young men. In other words, the statement should reflect what is known and unknown based on the evidence of its effects in particular contexts and populations.

Acknowledgement

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