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Promoting political competition through elections in low- and middle-income countries

An evidence gap map

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Evidence
Gap Map
Report 27

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About this evidence gap map report

This report presents the findings of a systematic search to identify and map the evidence base of impact evaluations and systematic reviews of interventions that aim to promote political competition effectiveness in low-and middle-income countries. The EGM was developed by 3ie and made possible with generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s Center for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance. All of the content of this report is the sole responsibility of the authors and does not represent the opinions of 3ie, its donors or its Board of Commissioners. Any errors and omissions are also the sole responsibility of the authors. Please direct any comments or queries to the corresponding author, Constanza Gonzalez Parrao, at cgonzalez@3ieimpact.org.

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Executive Summary

This Evidence Gap Map (EGM) report presents the findings of a systematic search to identify and map the evidence that evaluates interventions promoting political competition through elections in low- and middle-income countries (L&MICs).

Political competition is a key feature of any thriving democracy as free and fair elections are the basis for governance within democratic systems. A politically competitive society allows citizens the opportunity to form political parties, compete for power through elections and shape the direction of public policy (Strom, 1992). Free and fair elections are a fundamental concept in the effort to protect and promote human rights, and every citizen should have the right to vote and stand for office (OHCHR, 2011).

While a few reviews on this topic have been conducted, these do not address the effects of political competition interventions. Previous studies have focused on the relationship between highly politically competitive societies and the number of RCTs used to evaluate public policy (Dorsch et al., 2020), the relationship between electoral promises and voting behavior (Guo, 2020), and the impact of a range of development interventions on power-related outcomes (IRC, 2016). In addition, meta-analysis has been used to analyze the variables which affect voting behavior (Stockemer, 2017) and voter turnout (Cancela & Geys, 2016), and one qualitative systematic review has explored disability inclusion during elections (Virendrakumar et al., 2017).

This EGM included interventions related to political competition through the electoral cycle. The focus was on elections for formal positions related to government bodies, both at the national and devolved levels. This includes interventions related to at least one of the following dimensions: legal framework and electoral reform; political party and candidate development; civic participation; media ecosystems in elections; election management; electoral security and conflict prevention; electoral justice; and election observation and oversight. We also looked at both intermediate and final outcomes, which were into: genuine competition; free electoral process; transparent competition; inclusive participation and competition; accountable competition; impartial and effective election administration; political consensus and transfer of power; and social and human development.

The project aimed to understand the evidence on the effects of interventions to increase political competition in L&MICs among policymakers, researchers, and the development community to facilitate the use of evidence to inform policy and programming decisions.

Methods

We adopted a systematic search strategy for quantitative impact evaluations, specific qualitative evaluations (IEs), and systematic reviews (SRs) across four academic databases and 38 grey literature sources to identify relevant studies analyzing the effects of interventions around political competition. We also conducted forward and backward citation tracking of included studies and the solicitation of relevant papers from key stakeholders and the public.

We used the EPPI-Reviewer software to manage the process, including the use of its machine learning features to optimize the deduplication of records and the double-screening of studies at title and abstract and full text.

Using 3ie's EGM platform, we created an online map of studies according to the interventions and outcomes covered by included studies. This platform also allows users to explore the available evidence through filters (e.g., regions, populations, democracy levels, etc.). The interactive online map can be viewed at <https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/egm/political-competition-through-elections-evidence-gap-map>.

Main findings

An extensive search of peer-reviewed and grey literature, as well as citation tracking for included IEs and SRs, was conducted in October 2021 and January 2022. These searches returned a total of 34,139 records. After removing duplicates, we screened 25,648 studies by title and abstract. We identified 766 potentially relevant studies, which were screened based on full-text. We included 194 studies in the EGM, of which 188 used quantitative impact evaluation methods, four used qualitative methods that seek to establish causal inference, and two were systematic reviews. These studies were published from 2003 and their publication has expanded rapidly since 2010, with 31 studies being published in 2020 alone.

South Asia was the region with the highest number of evaluations. This is driven by India, which covered 27 percent of the evidence. Research was also focused on Latin America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of included studies were conducted in electoral democracies and in countries which were not classified as fragile and conflict-affected settings. Information on specific populations targeted by included interventions was generally lacking. The high proportion of studies evaluating interventions targeting the entire population can be driven by the number of interventions that act as legislative changes affecting the whole electorate; for instance, electoral system or electoral rules reforms.

The most common intervention category identified was *voter information, voter education, and GOTV*. This category included interventions that typically provided voters with information and reminders on where and when to vote, information on the incumbent's performance, information on corruption, or conducted anti-vote buying campaigns. The second largest intervention category was *quotas for elected positions*. Almost all of these studies evaluated the introduction of gender and caste-based quotas in India.

Outcomes related to *inclusive participation and competition* were the most common measures in two-thirds of the evidence. Over half of included studies measured immediate voting behavior, primarily through indicators of turnout and party/candidate vote share.

The two systematic reviews identified in the map focused on *quotas for elected positions* and on aspects of *voter information, voter education, and GOTV*. However, both were assessed as having low confidence, meaning their results are subject to a high risk of bias.

Conclusion and implications

This body of evidence is suited to shed a light on interventions implemented by public institutions at the national level and targeting all citizens from electoral democracy contexts. In addition, the studies in the EGM can particularly inform the two types of interventions for which we found the largest number of studies.

First, the evidence around *voter information*, *voter education*, and *GOTV* interventions is especially relevant for Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean contexts. These studies illustrate different ways to advise and encourage voters to participate in election processes and measure the effects that these interventions have on immediate voting behavior but also on other relevant measures for political competition. Second, the evidence on *quotas for elected positions* provides a rich example of the range of the short- and long-term effects of interventions that promote inclusion in political competition.

We did not identify studies evaluating interventions on *electoral justice*; this is the only area in which this EGM cannot provide insights. The evaluation of interventions focused on capacity building to support the implementation of electoral justice mechanisms, but also on the use of these mechanisms themselves should be prioritized.

Voter information, *voter education*, and *GOTV* and *quotas for elected positions* offer great potential for updated and high confidence synthesis to understand their effects. Future research could take the opportunity of comparing a range of different information/education electoral campaigns, covering interventions implemented in different regions, and including the most recent studies on these topics.

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List of acronyms

3ie	International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
CSO	Civil society organization
EGM	Evidence Gap Map
EMB	Electoral management body
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office, UK
GOTV	Get out the vote
HIC	High-income country
IE	Impact evaluation
L&MICs	Low- and middle-income countries
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
RCT	Randomized controlled trial
SR	Systematic review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1. Background

1.1 Development problem being addressed

Political competition acts as one of the main pillars of democracy. A politically competitive society allows citizens the opportunity to form political parties, compete for power through elections and shape the direction of public policy (Strom, 1992). The United Nations Human Rights Office stated that free and fair elections are a fundamental concept in the effort to protect and promote human rights, and that every citizen should have the right to vote and stand for office (OHCHR, 2011).

Despite the fact that political competition can lead to numerous positive outcomes for society, the current state of democracy globally is showing a concerning trend. The Freedom in the World Report showed a decline in global freedom, with 2020 marking the 15th consecutive year of decline. This year also marks the largest gap between countries showing deterioration and improvement since the decline began in 2006 (Freedom House, 2021). The 2006 BTI Transformation Index showed that 35 countries scored “excellent” in their political participation index, a figure which decreased to 22 countries in 2020. Additionally, the number of countries scoring “poor” on this index, the lowest possible score, also increased from 17 in 2006, to 26 in 2020 (BTI, n.d.). The Global State of Democracy Indices measured a representative government attribute, which combines aspects such as free and fair elections, universal suffrage, and freedom of political parties. From 2015 to 2020, the number of countries which scored “high performance” has decreased, while at the same time, the number scoring “low performance” has increased (Ellis et al., 2006).

To exacerbate this issue, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on the running of elections at both the national and local levels globally. At least 79 countries have postponed national and subnational elections since February 2020, and at least 42 countries have postponed a national election or referendum (International IDEA, 2021). However, the effect of the pandemic on electoral processes has been varied. In Africa, some governments have chosen to postpone elections whereas others have continued to go ahead. For example, elections have been conducted successfully in the Seychelles and Malawi, but Mali experienced significant post-election violence along with a military coup. There has also been a marked reduction in the number of international observers present during elections in Africa (Matlosa, 2021). In Latin America, the pandemic and policy response from governments weakened two crucial mechanisms of accountability, elections and protests (Murillo, 2020). Political leaders in South and Southeast Asia have also been able to use COVID-19 responses as a way to speed up the already rapid decline in democracy. For example, leaders have used the pandemic to expand their power via legislation, have marginalized opposition and enhanced their control of the legislature, and have used disinformation to hide public health failures (Kurlantzick, 2020). Thus, COVID-19 has not only allowed authoritarian governments to postpone elections, but it has also allowed them to consolidate their power and weaken opposition political parties.

1.2 Policy responses

Development assistance towards political competition dates back to the end of the post-Second World War period. The earliest instance of electoral assistance was the 1948 United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea which oversaw elections in the US-controlled south of the country (Price, 2004). Another early example of an election observation mission was the Organization of American States' (OAS) 1962 mission to Costa Rica (Vasciannie, 2018). Observation missions became a part of international norms in the 1990s (Hyde, 2011). Nowadays, governments are expected to invite international observers to witness elections processes. In 2006, more than 80 percent of the elections in the world were internationally monitored (Hyde, 2011).

The collapse of communism in the late 1980s led to an increase in opportunities and the emergence of a number of new organizations carrying out electoral missions. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), a multilateral organization, and the Carter Center, an NGO and world leader in electoral observation, began to deploy international observers around this time (ACE, n.d.-b). The Carter Center's arrival into the world of electoral observation marked the first instance of a non-multilateral organization, or non-governmental organization, beginning these activities.

A rise in observation missions has increased the need for funding, but the nature of the missions themselves has also changed. Early observation missions were formed of small teams; for example just three observers were present on the OAS mission to Costa Rica in 1962 (Vasciannie, 2018). Previous missions were focused on the election day itself, but in the past two decades there has been an increased focus on all aspects of the election cycle. This new focus supports the entire electoral process and activities which build trust between the public and the system used to elect officials (FCDO, 2010). The change in focus on activities supporting all stages of the election cycle was evident in the UNDP's activities in Malawi's 2014 tripartite elections. UNDP had been supporting Malawi in creating an effective electoral commission before the election. Further support was provided for polling on election day, as well as long term activities to enact the results and mitigate and prevent electoral violence (Hajat & Tostensen, 2015).

Another popular set of activities within the political competition sphere are *get out the vote* campaigns. The earliest example of a voter mobilization experiment was in 1926 where letters were used to encourage voters' participation in a get out the vote campaign (Gosnell, 1926). Further research was later conducted in the 1970s (Kramer, 1970). Despite the early evidence on the effects of these campaigns, this field remained neglected (Gerber & Huber, 2016) until the 1990s, when there was an increase in voter mobilization campaigns implemented by multilateral as well as domestic government institutions and political parties (Ellis et al., 2006). Electoral observation and voter mobilization and information campaigns make up a significant amount of the current policy surrounding political competition.

FCDO (2010) proposed five areas where electoral assistance is required: systemic issues, planning issues, pre-election period, election operations and post-electoral period. More recently, USAID has reported the areas of electoral assistance where there is a need of modernization. Named issues within electoral assistance include foreign interference in elections, manipulation of new media platforms, cyber threats and corruption within the electoral process (USAID, 2020c).

The growing size of observation and electoral assistance missions is reflected in the funding of these missions, although reporting of exact spending figures on electoral assistance are uncommon. FCDO's spending on 'Government and Civil Society' increased 10 percent from 2018 to 2019 and accounted for a £1.3 billion budget (FCDO, 2020). USAID provides a detailed breakdown for 'Political Competition and Consensus Building' activities, whose budget has dropped every year since 2015, with an exception in 2019, and for 2020 amounted to a \$153 million budget (USAID, 2020a). Despite the detail provided by these two major donors, the funding landscape around political competition overall remains unclear.

1.3 Why it is important to do this EGM

Political competition is a key feature of any thriving democracy as free and fair elections are the basis for governance within democratic systems. Although the exact numbers are unclear, billions of dollars are being spent annually to support political competition. These funds must be utilized efficiently and effectively. There is a large amount of evidence which assesses the impact of political competition interventions, in particular voter education and electoral observers' programs, on outcomes related to inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability. 3ie's Development Evidence Portal includes more than 120 impact evaluation studies related to elections.¹

While there are a few reviews on political competition, these do not directly address the impact of political competition interventions. Studies have focused on the relationship between highly politically competitive societies and the number of RCTs being used to evaluate public policy (Dorsch et al., 2020), reviewed the relationship between electoral promises and voting behavior (Guo, 2020), and mapped the impact of a range of development interventions on power-related outcomes (IRC, 2016). Meta-analysis has been used by two studies to analyze the variables which affect voting behavior (Stockemer, 2017) and voter turnout (Cancela & Geys, 2016). Additionally, one qualitative systematic review looked at the under-explored area of disability inclusion during the electoral process (Virendrakumar et al., 2017). Given that no reviews have addressed the impact of political competition interventions, this evidence gap map compiles and provide easy access to interventions focused on impacting the electoral cycle in L&MICs.

1.4 Study objectives and questions

This project aimed to understand the evidence on the effects of interventions to increase political competition in L&MICs among policymakers, researchers, and the development community. The EGM and accompanying report do this by identifying and describing the available evidence in a clear and structured way. The project aimed to facilitate the use of evidence to inform policy decisions.

To meet this aim, the specific objectives of this EGM were twofold:

- Identify and describe the evidence on the effects of interventions to increase political competition in L&MICs
- Identify primary evidence and synthesis gaps

¹ <https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org>

To meet these objectives, we addressed three research questions (Table 1).

Table 1: EGM research questions

#	Research Question	Type
RQ1	What is the extent and what are the characteristics of empirical evidence on the effects of interventions to increase political competition through elections in L&MICs?	Coverage
RQ2	What are the major primary and synthesis evidence gaps in the literature?	Gaps
RQ3	What intervention/outcome areas should be prioritized for primary research and/or evidence synthesis?	Research needs

2. Scope

This map considered the impact of interventions promoting political competition through electoral processes. It covered interventions that focus on “the struggle for state or political power” (Lehoucq, 2011, p. 2) and that are directly linked to the concept of political participation. Political participation is “the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government” (United Nations, 2005).

This EGM exclusively focused on political competition through the lens of electoral processes and through the full spectrum of the election cycle: pre-election day, election day and post-election day.

2.1 Conceptual framework

2.1.1 Definitions

Political competition is a broad concept, only a part of which considers the electoral processes. However, for the purpose of this EGM, we focused on activities that promote political competition through elections as per USAID’s Programmatic Approaches Inventory’s definition:

“Promote legitimate contestation for ideas and political power through democratic political processes that reflect the will of the people. Support free and fair political competition, the constitutional, peaceful transfer of political power, and the resolution of disputes through a democratic and representative process. Create and support vehicles for people to debate public priorities, air alternative solutions, win support for proposed remedies and provide input to decisions that affect their lives.” — (USAID, 2020b).

Elections are “a process in which people vote to choose a person or group of people to hold an official position” (Collins, n.d.). However, conducting elections is not enough to ensure a democratic process. Elections must also be fair and transparent to ensure a democratic process (Carroll & Davis-Roberts, 2013). Elections can be understood both as a system and a cycle, and defined by a set of rules:

- Electoral system: “catalogue of norms and procedures used in an election to decide how to choose those who will hold the positions in dispute” (ACE, n.d.-a).

- Electoral cycle: “cyclical process that unfolds over many months before, during and after voting occurs” and leads to the selection of who will hold the positions in dispute (Carter Center, n.d.).

Electoral processes are expected to establish legitimate authorities consisting of accountable governments and officials (Carroll & Davis-Roberts, 2013). The accountability of elected representatives emphasizes the link between elections and democracy, which is defined by Lipset as “a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office” (Strom, 1992, p. 375).

2.1.2 The theory behind the interventions

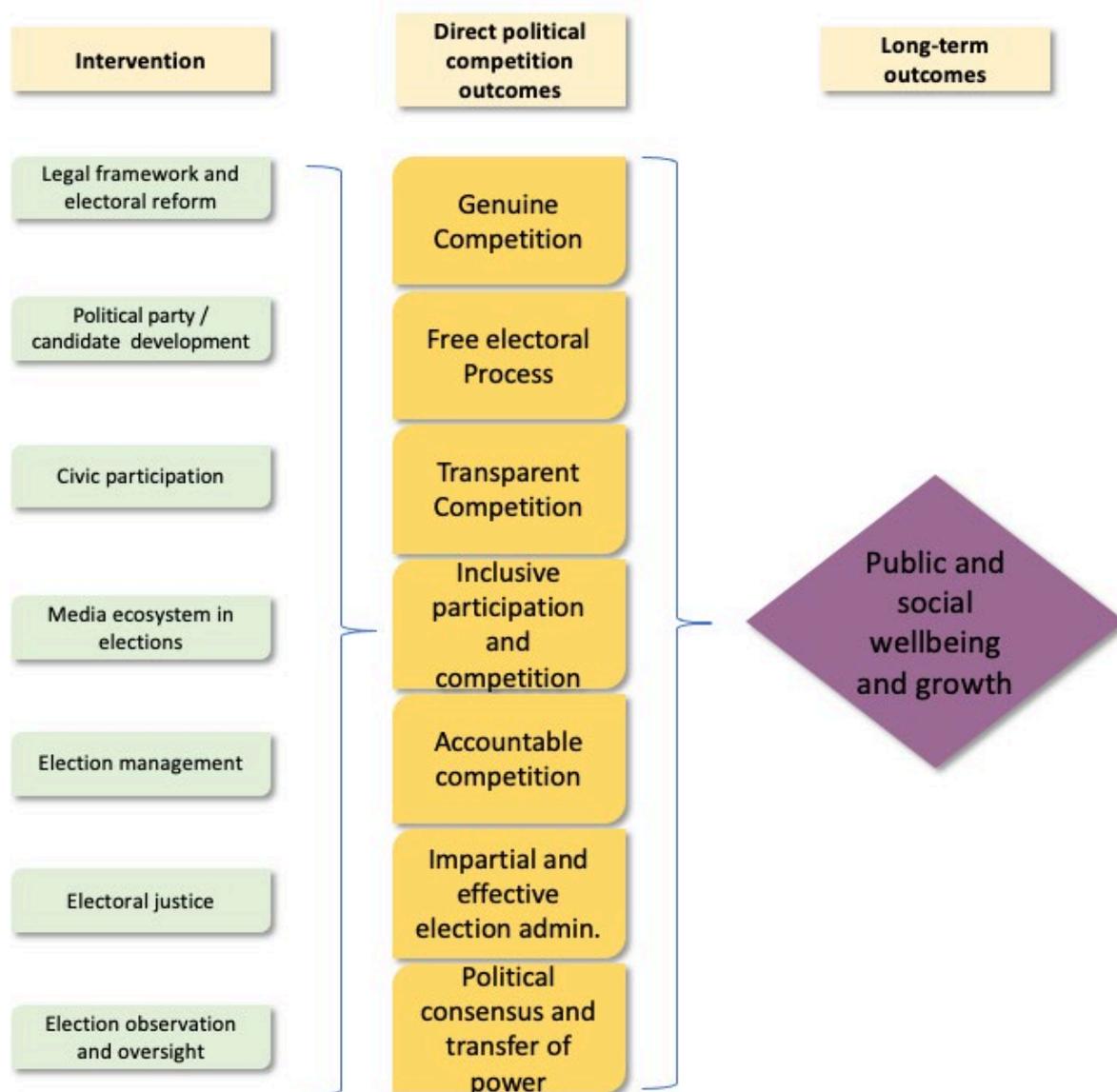
Economic literature is divided on the exact shape of the relationship between political competition and economic growth (Alfano & Baraldi, 2016; Pinto & Timmons, 2005). Some evidence indicates that greater levels of competition lead to policies which serve to protect and benefit the incumbent’s position (Lizzeri & Persico, 2005; Man, 2014; Mulligan & Tsui, 2006). Other literature has found that reaching an intermediate level of political competition leads to the establishment of favorable policies for economic growth (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Ariza Marín et al., 2021; Besley et al., 2005, 2010; McGuire & Olson, 1996; Padovano & Ricciuti, 2009; Plümpner & Martin, 2003). Political competition beyond a certain extent can have a negative impact on economic growth, the relation between political competition and growth appears as an inverted-U that leads to positive outcomes up to the optimal level of political competition (Alfano & Baraldi, 2016).

Beyond a purely economic relationship, political competition can also have positive effects on other areas. Fearon (1999) proposed two mechanisms via which elections can lead to improved public policies: sanctioning and selection. The former relates to officials being motivated to choose policies the public desires in an attempt to win reelection, while in the latter, voters are able to select candidates who share the electorate’s ends.

Given the relationship between political competition, economic growth, and public policy, increasing political competition within societies is a main focus of the development sector through the promotion of free, fair, and inclusive elections, along with the ability to form political parties. For example, studies have found that the inclusion of women in politics increases government investments in public goods (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Lott, Jr. & Kenny, 1999); reductions to ballot restrictions increase the number of parties standing at elections (Drometer & Rincke, 2009); and higher levels of political competition are associated with parties selecting higher qualified candidates to stand at elections (Galasso & Nannicini, 2009).

Lastly, political competition is conducive to creating a democratic society. By holding politicians accountable and providing citizens with opportunities to shape the political environment, political competition through elections is a route to democracy (Strom, 1992; United Nations, n.d.). Nonetheless, in younger democracies, “a super-heated campaign with numerous candidates may actually impede democracy” (Gottlieb & Kosec, 2019). Once again, the hypothesis of a U-shape relationship between competition and democracy highlights the importance of finding the right level of political competition.

Figure 1: Theory of change



2.1.3 Criteria for including or excluding studies

We developed a list of relevant interventions and outcomes to be included in the Political Competition EGM (more details are provided in section 3.2 Conceptual framework development). To allow for easy representation in the intervention-outcome framework, we made this list exclusive and exhaustive: all interventions within our area of interest should be represented in the matrix and none should be represented more than once.

The list of interventions and outcomes, as well as the conceptual framework, led to the creation of the inclusion/exclusion criteria for this EGM (Table 2) and set the scope of the review in a way that is both comprehensive and manageable. Further details on the inclusion-exclusion criteria are presented in Appendix A.

Table 2: Summary of inclusion criteria for this EGM

Criteria	Definition
Population	We included studies targeting any population type, implemented in any L&MIC (see Appendix A1).
Interventions	This EGM exclusively focused on interventions related to political competition through the electoral cycle. The focus here is on elections for formal positions related to bodies which form part of a government, at both the national and devolved levels. This includes interventions related to at least one of the following dimensions: Legal framework and electoral reform; Political party and candidate development; Civic participation; Media ecosystems in elections; Election management; Electoral security and conflict prevention; Electoral justice; and Election observation and oversight (see Appendix table 1). We included studies that evaluated the impact of at least one of the listed interventions. For studies that evaluated multi-component interventions, they were included if at least one of the subcomponents matched one of the intervention categories.
Outcomes	We looked at both intermediate and final outcomes (see Appendix table 2). The outcomes that we looked at were grouped into: Genuine competition; Free electoral process; Transparent competition; Inclusive participation and competition; Accountable competition; Impartial and effective election administration; Political consensus and transfer of power; and Social and human development. We included studies that measured the impact of relevant interventions on at least one of the listed outcomes. We included all outcomes of interest measured by these studies.
Study designs	We included impact evaluations and systematic reviews that measured the effects of a relevant intervention on outcomes of interest (see Appendix section A4). For impact evaluations, we included counterfactual study designs that used an experimental or quasi-experimental design and/or analysis method to measure the net change in outcomes that were attributed to an intervention (i.e., policy, program, or project). We included randomized and non-randomized studies that were able to take into account confounding and selection bias. We also included qualitative evaluations that followed specific methodological approaches to account for effectiveness. Lab-in-field and survey experiment studies were excluded as they look at the effect of short-term exposure and test experiments which are not real-life settings. For systematic reviews, we included effectiveness reviews that synthesized the effects of an intervention on outcomes of interest. We excluded reviews that only described programmatic approaches or synthesized findings on barriers and facilitators to implementation.
Other	Studies published in any language were included, although search terms used were in English only. Studies published from 1990 onwards were eligible. We included ongoing and completed impact evaluations and systematic reviews. For on-going studies, we included prospective study records, protocols, and trial registries (see Appendix section A5).

3. Methodology

3.1 Overall approach

EGMs aim to establish what we know, and do not know, about the evidence evaluating the effects of interventions in a thematic area (Snilstveit et al., 2016). They present existing evidence within specific thematic areas or sectors in a structured framework of interventions and outcomes. In this way, EGMs serve as effective tools for policymakers, donors, practitioners, and researchers in making evidence informed decisions within specific sectors, and help prioritizing efforts in specific thematic areas. To collect and collate the existing evidence, we have followed the standards and methods for EGMs developed by 3ie (Snilstveit et al., 2016; 2017). Appendix B details additional information on the development, interpretation, and use of EGMs.

3.2 Conceptual framework development

We developed the intervention-outcome framework by consulting the literature cited in the previous sections. We validated the framework through consultations with stakeholders within USAID and an external Advisory Group of experts. Saad Gulzar, the subject matter expert for this project, provided essential input to develop the intervention and outcome categories.

3.3 Search strategy

We adopted a systematic search strategy following published guidelines (Kugley et al., 2017). This strategy was designed to address potential publication bias issues by systematically searching academic bibliographic databases and implementing additional searches for grey literature in specialist organizational websites, websites of bilateral and multilateral agencies and repositories of research in international development. We conducted searches across four academic databases and 38 organizational websites in October 2021. Appendix C includes the full list of sources and an example of a search string employed in the search.

Where possible, the review team contacted key experts and organizations through an Advisory Group to identify additional studies that met the inclusion criteria. To minimize the possibility of missing relevant evidence, we also conducted backward (studies cited in an included study) and forward (studies that have cited an included study) citation tracking in January 2022 for each study included at full-text screening.

3.4 Screening protocol

Studies were independently screened at title-and-abstract by two team members. Once coders reached an agreement rate of 85 percent or above based on the inclusion or exclusion of a study, they began to screen at title-and-abstract independently. Once a substantial number of studies were screened, we used them to train EPPI-Reviewer's machine learning tool 'Classifier' which ordered all remaining unscreened studies into their probability of being includable. Using the probability of inclusion, studies were screened by a single coder, prioritized based on the likelihood of inclusion. Ultimately all studies were screened.

All studies included at title-and-abstract were screened by two independent reviewers at full-text, with differences reconciled. Records located through backward and forward citation tracking were ranked using the EPPI Reviewer Classifier function. All studies below 50 percent probability of inclusion were automatically excluded, and those above 50 per cent were screened at title and abstract by a single coder. More details of the screening process are presented in Appendix D.

3.5 Data extraction and critical appraisal

For the data extraction, we followed the Development Evidence Portal protocol and refined it based on the map's framework and stakeholder feedback. All data was extracted directly in the Development Evidence Portal platform by one team member and studies were coded based on the authors own words. The data extraction tool is available in Appendix E.

All included systematic reviews were critically appraised following Lewin and colleagues (2009). Drawing on guidance provided by Snilstveit and colleagues (2017), each systematic review was rated as high, medium or low confidence, indicating the level of confidence we have in the findings of the review based on the methods the authors used. The critical appraisal tool used is presented in Appendix F. We extracted and summarized the findings of the high- and medium-confidence systematic reviews.

3.6 Dealing with multi-component interventions

Multi-component interventions were defined as activities with components across several intervention categories of the intervention-outcome framework, which are jointly evaluated in one study. These were differentiated from multi-arm interventions, which are activities with components in multiple intervention categories but for which a study provides an independent effect estimate for each component. Studies evaluating multi-arm interventions were categorized into each of the intervention categories for which they provided an effect estimate. In turn, multi-component interventions were identified in five studies. Because we were not able to identify only one main component for these interventions, we grouped them together forming a new multi-component intervention category.

The team recognizes the limitations of this approach as it masks the individual components of these studies and presents them as packages. However, given the small number of studies, and in order to avoid double-counting studies that do not present independent effect estimates, the team selected the above approach to allow a consistent categorization of the body of evidence that reflects more accurately the evaluation of such interventions.

3.7 Analysis and reporting

This report accompanies the interactive map and addresses the research questions through an analysis of the characteristics and trends of the available evidence.

To answer Research Question 1 regarding the extent and characteristics of the evidence base, we present the distribution of studies by date of publication, intervention(s) studied,

outcomes reported, and population considered, including regions, countries, and specific population groups.

To answer Research Question 2 regarding gaps in the evidence, we combined knowledge of the evidence distribution with sectoral knowledge to determine meaningful primary evidence gaps, where no IEs exist, and synthesis gaps, where no up-to-date or high confidence SRs exist despite a cluster of IE evidence.

To answer Research Question 3 regarding priority areas for primary research and synthesis, we shared the draft findings with stakeholders at USAID and the Advisory Group and solicited input regarding policymakers and practitioners' priorities.

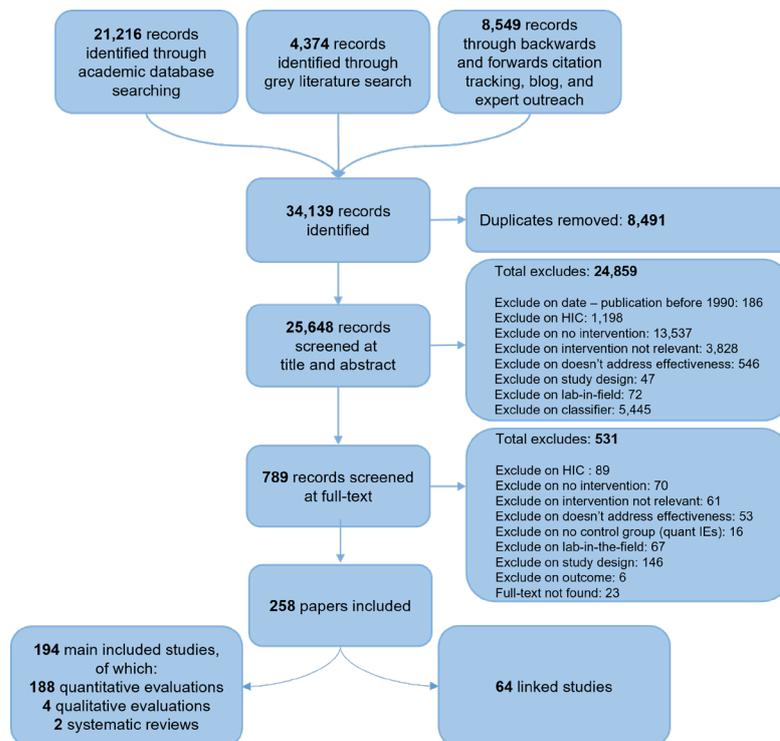
4. Findings

Following the PRISMA guidelines for reporting (Page, et al., 2021), this section presents the search results, characteristics of included studies, and the interventions and outcomes captured in the map. The interactive online map can be viewed at <https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/egm/political-competition-through-elections-evidence-gap-map>.

4.1 Volume of the evidence

Through our systematic search process, we identified 34,139 records, of which 8,491 records were identified as duplicates (Figure 2). We screened 25,648 records for inclusion based on their title and abstract. The main reasons for excluding records were not including an intervention (70%) or not including a relevant intervention (20%).

Figure 2: PRISMA Diagram of systematic search and screening



Source: 3ie (2022).

We included 789 records for screening based on full-text but were unable to locate the full-text for 23 records. In total, we screened 766 records on full text. The most common reason a record was excluded at full-text was not utilizing an includable study design (27%). Based on full-text screening, we included 258 studies, of which 64 were linked records.² This resulted in the inclusion of 194 unique studies: two systematic reviews and 192 impact evaluations (188 quantitative and four qualitative studies). The full list of included studies is included in Appendix G.

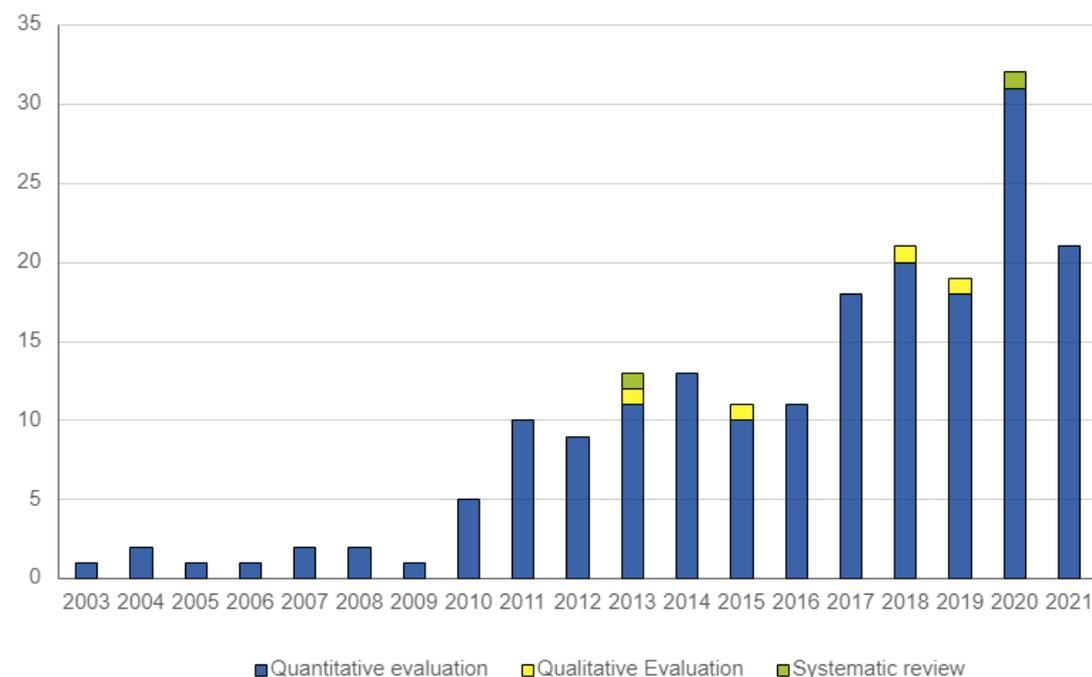
4.2 Characteristics of the evidence base

4.2.1 Publication trend over time

Beginning in 2003, there has been a gradual increase in the number of quantitative studies, and since 2010 this increase has risen dramatically (Figure 3). Four includable qualitative evaluations were identified, the first published in 2013. Two systematic reviews were identified, published in 2013 and 2020. Of all 194 included studies, two were protocols/ongoing evaluations. For these studies, the date of publication refers to the publication shown in the protocol or preliminary results.

Two working papers were identified for inclusion but without a specific publication year. These studies were not included in the figure below.³

Figure 3: Publication trend of IEs and SRs over time



Source: 3ie (2022). Note: The main search for studies was conducted in October 2021; hence the EGM does not cover all studies published in 2021.

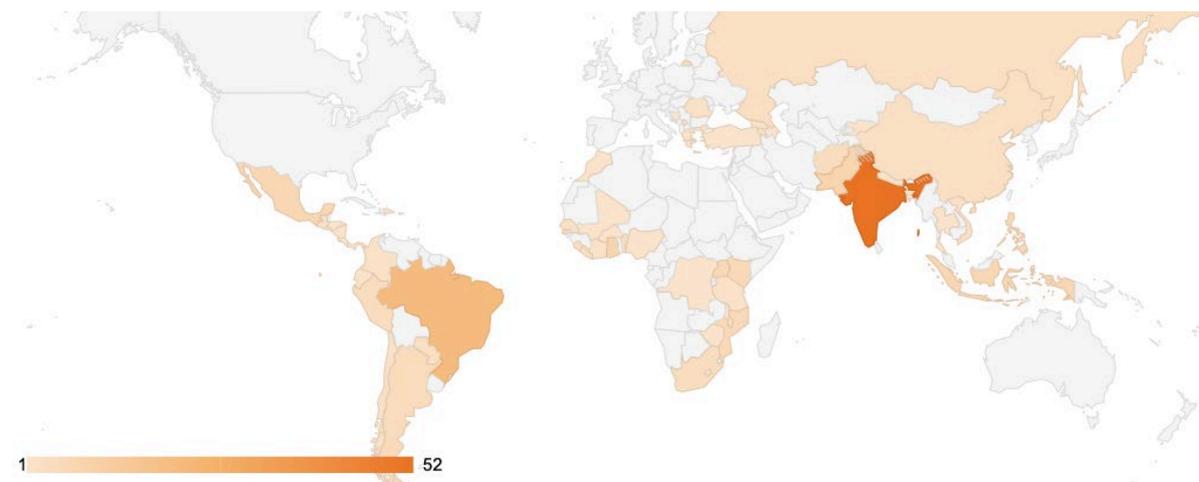
² Linked records are study versions produced by the same authors studying the same intervention and research question. For instance, a working paper would serve as the linked record of a journal article. We identified the latest version of a study as the main record, and all older versions as linked records.

³ In both cases, authors were contacted for more information, but no response was received.

4.2.2 Geographical coverage

Most studies took place in South Asia (n = 66, 34%; Figure 4), where India was the country with the single largest evidence base (n = 52, 27%). Sub-Saharan Africa (n = 54, 28%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (n = 45, 23%) were also well represented, with Brazil having the second highest number of evaluations (n = 22, 11%). Beyond India and Brazil, there was no single country represented in more than eight evaluations (Ghana, n = 8; Pakistan, n = 8). Fewer evaluations were conducted in countries from East Asia and the Pacific (n = 20, 10%), and Europe and Central Asia (n = 11, 6%), while little evidence was found for countries in the Middle East and North Africa (n = 1, 1%).

Figure 4: Geographical evidence base



Source: 3ie (2022).

There were two evaluations categorized as multi-country.⁴ One study assessed UNDP electoral assistance in countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa (Birch & Muchlinksy, 2017). The other study assessed UN electoral support in African countries (von Borzyskowski, 2019). Neither paper mentioned the specific number of countries covered in their analyses, and they are not included in Figure 4.

The geographic coverage, combined with the first year of the intervention, allowed for an exploration into the income level, fragility context, and regime types the interventions were working within. The majority of the evaluations covered low-income (n = 87, 45%) or lower-middle-income countries (n = 62, 32%). Upper middle-income countries were represented in 48 evaluations (25%), while one evaluation covered a high-income country (1%).⁵ The majority of included studies were conducted in countries which were

⁴ For practical reasons, studies covering more than 15 countries are categorized as “multi-country” in the Development Evidence Portal platform, with no disaggregated data for each of these countries.

⁵ Although the map focuses on L&MICs, one evaluation (Peisakhin et al., 2020) covered an intervention taking place in Russia in 2014. While Russia was classified as a high-income country in 2014, since 2015 it has consistently been classified as upper middle-income. As such, we decided that the results of the evaluation could help inform policy decisions in an upper middle-income country.

not classified as fragile and conflict-affected situations in the first year of the intervention (n = 178, 92%). In turn, the majority of the evaluations reported on an intervention conducted in an electoral democracy (n = 121, 62%), followed by electoral autocracy (n = 55, 28%), liberal democracy (n = 8, 4%) and closed autocracy (n = 7, 4%).⁶

4.2.3 Population and setting

Population and setting refer to data extracted from included studies used as filters on the interactive map. A full list of these filters is presented in Appendix Table 3. Information of the populations targeted by included interventions was lacking. A majority of the studies provided no specific information on the age groups targeted (n = 162, 84%). When information on the age groups targeted was available, the most common category was the whole population (n = 23, 12%), followed by youth (n = 8, 4%), adults (n = 7, 4%) older adults (n = 7, 4%), and adolescents (n = 5, 3%).

Information on targeted sex was not explicitly available in 42 percent of the studies (n = 81). In 36 percent of the included studies, the intervention explicitly targeted the whole population (both males and females; n = 69), while in 23 percent of the studies the intervention targeted females only (n = 44).

Few interventions targeted a vulnerable population. Caste-based groups were targeted in seven percent of studies (n = 14), mainly evaluating the introduction of caste quotas in India. Racial/ethnic groups were the other vulnerable population targeted, present in one percent of the studies (n = 2).

Over one-third of the studies did not report on the targeted setting; urban or rural (38%, n = 74). However, 32 percent of the studies evaluated an intervention which affected the whole population (n = 62), regardless of the setting. The remaining studies targeted a population living in rural settings (16%, n = 32), and populations living in an urban or peri-urban environment (13%, n = 26).

Public institutions were the most common stakeholder to implement the programs evaluated in included studies (n = 106). Of these, 44 evaluated interventions within the *quotas for elected positions* category (hereafter, *quotas*), 17 focused on *electoral system reforms*, and 12 on the *electoral rules reforms*. Many interventions included in the map could only be implemented by national or local governments; hence, these categories make up a large proportion of the public institutions group.

Domestic national organizations, defined as domestic NGOs and CSOs, as well as the private sector, were the second most common implementing stakeholder within included studies (n = 54). International organizations were the third most common (n = 14), political parties were the fourth (n = 7), while 12 percent of the studies did not clearly report this information (n = 23).

Citizens were the most commonly targeted actor (n = 90), and over half of these studies covered interventions in the *voter information, voter education, and GOTV* category (hereafter, *voter information*; n = 65). Public institutions were the second most commonly

⁶ Three studies were excluded from this analysis: the two multi-country evaluations do not have associated regime types, and one evaluation was conducted in Puerto Rico (Bobonis et al., 2016), which is not included in the V-Dem dataset.

targeted actor (n = 84), which was largely made up of *quotas* at the legislative level (n = 43). Public officials (n = 23) were the third most commonly targeted actor with *voter information* being the largest intervention in this category (n = 11). Political parties and candidates were targeted in 20 studies. No information was specified in five papers, while no study was found to evaluate an intervention which targeted a domestic national organization.

The majority of included interventions were implemented at the national level (n = 127). The most common intervention implemented at the national level was *quotas* (n = 42). The local level was the second most common (n = 39), where the majority of studies come from the *voter information* category (n = 22). Fewer studies evaluated interventions implemented at the sub-national (n = 36), household (n = 4), and individual (n = 1) levels.

4.2.4 Interventions

The ***legal framework and electoral reform*** intervention group represented 15 percent of all studies (n = 30; Figure 5). Each of the 17 studies in the *electoral system reform* category utilized quasi-experimental methods to take advantage of system reforms as natural experiments. These interventions included the introduction or removal of local elections (e.g., Skoufias et al., 2014; Malesky et al., 2014), or changes to party thresholds in the electoral system (e.g. Pellicer & Wegner, 2014).

Evaluations of *electoral rules reforms* included, among others, the introduction of educational qualifications for potential electoral candidates (e.g., Afzal, 2014), and reforms to the level of fines for abstention (e.g., Gonzales et al., 2022). One study evaluated an *electoral reform process* aiming to create a more inclusive and open political reform process using a qualitative evaluation method (Carmo, 2018).

Political party and candidate development was the second most common intervention group (30%, n = 59), driven by the large number of studies within the *quotas* intervention category. Of these studies, 41 evaluated the introduction of gender and caste-based quotas in India. Two other studies evaluated gender quotas in Lesotho (Clayton & Tang, 2018) and Costa Rica (Jones, 2004). The remaining paper evaluated the introduction of ethnic quotas in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hodžić & Mraović, 2015). One of the studies in this intervention group (Jones, 2004) evaluated a quota set internally by parties; all others evaluated quotas implemented at the legislature level.

Evaluations within the *platform development, constituent engagement, and political campaigning* category evaluated the effects of different campaign platforms (e.g., Wantchekon, 2003; Brazys et al., 2015), and campaign techniques (e.g., Bowles & Larreguy, 2019; Wantchekon et al., 2017). Two studies evaluated interventions within the *party inclusiveness* category (Ichino & Nathan, 2013; Gulzar et al., 2021), while one study evaluated an intervention within the *candidate's education* category (Ravanilla, 2016).

Civic participation was the largest intervention group (39%, n = 75). Covering 34 different countries, studies evaluated a variety of interventions, and most commonly *voter information* interventions (n = 71). These interventions provided voters with information and reminders on where and when to vote (e.g., Aker et al., 2017), provided information to voters on the incumbent's performance (e.g., Bhandari et al., 2021);

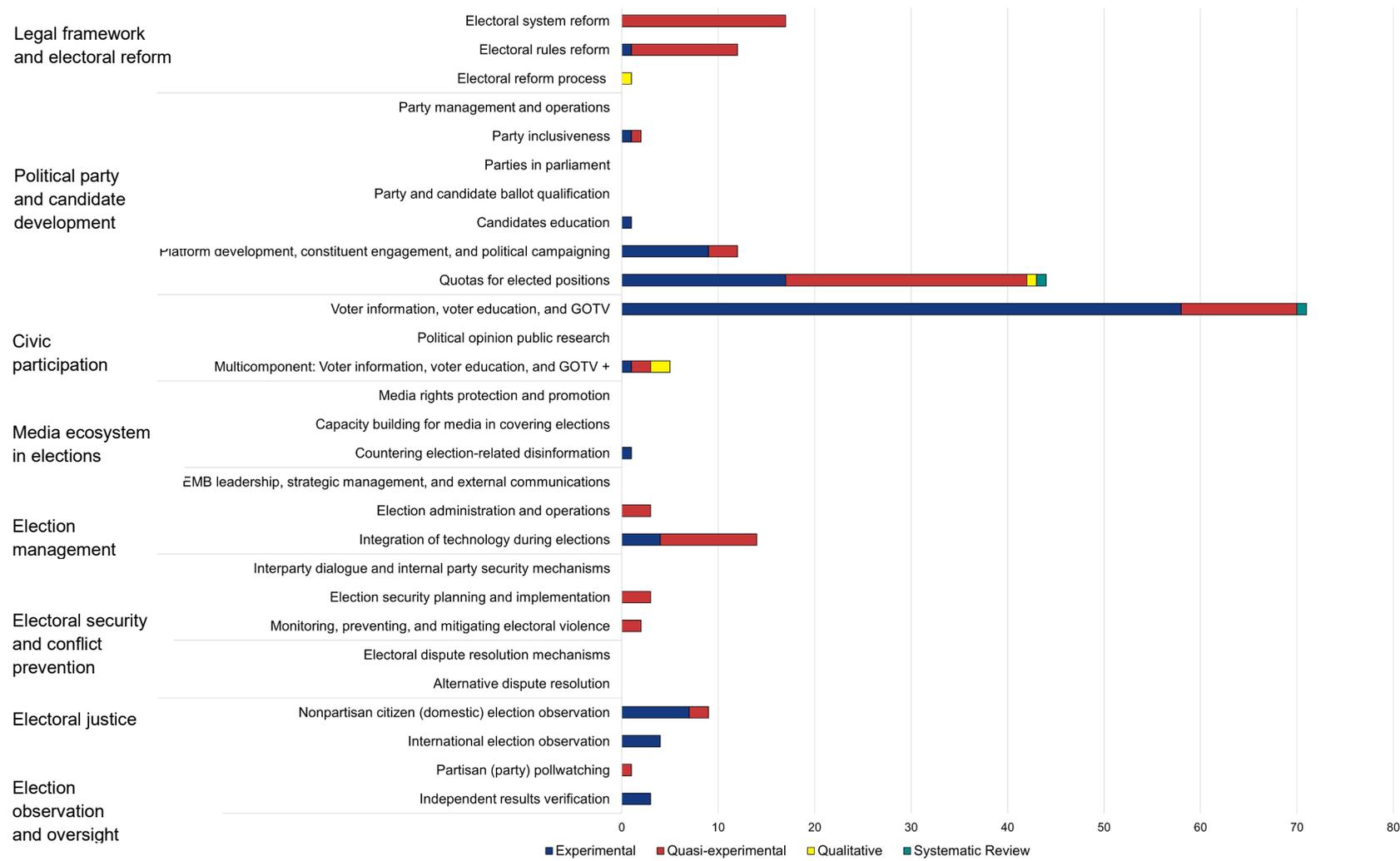
Banerjee et al., 2010; Banerjee et al., 2014), provided voters with information on corruption (e.g., Cañete-Straub et al., 2020; Rundlett, 2018), and conducted anti-vote buying campaigns (e.g., Blattman et al., 2019; Hicken et al., 2017).

This group included the only *multi-component* intervention category in the map (n = 5). In each of these studies, at least one of the components was related to the *voter information* category. We found no evaluations for the *political opinion public research* category; however, two of the multi-component studies evaluated programs which involved conducting and presenting the findings of opinion polls (Delgado, 2013; Ferree et al., 2017). One paper used a qualitative design to analyze a program providing a number of activities, such as voter education, candidate education, electoral management body support, and advocacy for electoral reform (Christopolos, et al., 2019). The other two studies with multi-component interventions evaluated a combination of election support from external actors: election assistance and observation (von Borzyskowski, 2019), and voter education and peacekeeping (Smidt, 2020).

One study was identified within the *media ecosystem in elections* intervention group, which came from the *countering election related disinformation* category. This study evaluated a program that trained voters on how to identify disinformation, including how to perform searches to identify the sources of images (Badrinathan, 2021).

The *election management* intervention group represented nine percent of all included studies (n = 18). Within the *integration of technology during elections* category, studies covered interventions such as e-voting technology (e.g., Fujiwara, 2015; Schneider et al., 2020; Alvarez et al., 2011) and the use of technology to reduce electoral fraud (e.g., Gonzalez et al., 2021). Within the *election administration and operations* category, studies evaluated the effects of gendered polling stations (Chattha & Lakhtakia, 2020), secret ballot boxes (Gingerich, 2013), and thresholds for polling station capacity (Harris, 2021).

Figure 5: Frequency of interventions reported in included studies by study design



Source: 3ie (2022). Note: One study may evaluate interventions with multiple-arms, thus the total number of studies in this figure is greater than the number of included studies.

Five studies, reported in four papers, were identified within the **electoral security and conflict prevention** intervention group (2%). Those in the *election security planning and implementation* category evaluated a capacity-building electoral violence prevention strategy (Birch & Muchlinski, 2017), and an increase in security presence at polling stations (Condra et al., 2019; Singh, 2020). In the *monitoring and mitigating electoral violence* category, studies evaluated an anti-violence campaign (Collier & Vicente, 2014), and an attitude-transforming strategy to prevent electoral violence (Birch & Muchlinski, 2017).

No studies were identified for the **electoral justice** intervention group, either within the *electoral dispute resolution mechanisms* or the *alternative dispute resolution* categories.

The **election observation and oversight** group covered eight percent of included studies (n = 15). Within the *nonpartisan citizen (domestic) election observation* category, studies evaluated the effect of observers deployed by organizations within the country hosting the election. Studies in the *international election observation* category evaluated observers deployed by international organizations. Within the *independent results verification* category, researchers sent letters to polling station managers indicating an independent monitor would photograph the stations vote count, and then compared results presented at polling stations to official results (Berman et al., 2019; Callen & Long, 2015; Callen et al., 2016).

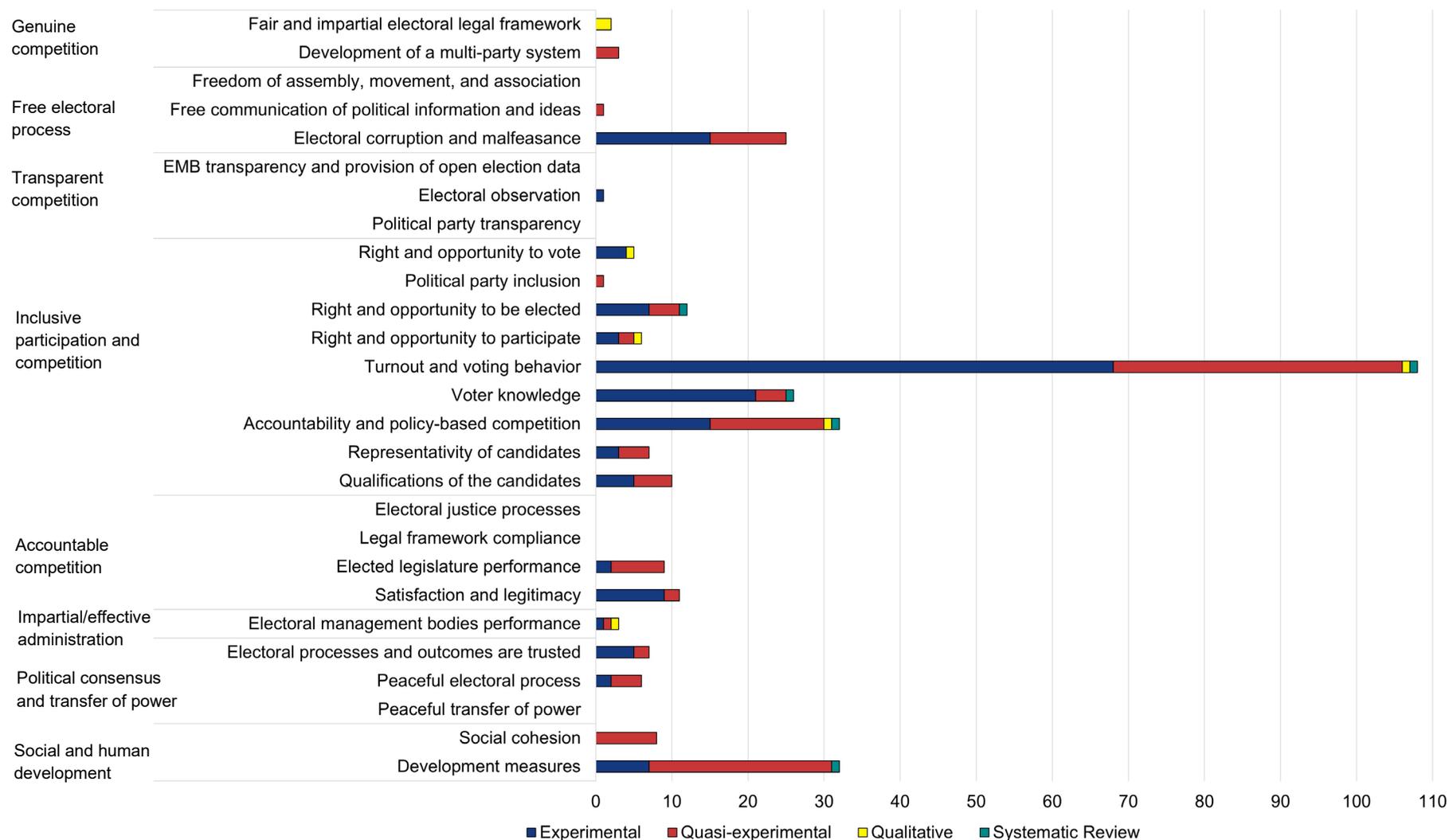
Of the two systematic reviews identified, one synthesized evidence on the impact of gender *quotas* in India (Dekker, 2013). The author conducted a narrative synthesis and provided direction of effects for each of the 17 included studies. The other review synthesized the evidence on *voter information* related specifically to corruption (Incerti, 2020). Through a meta-analysis of the eight included studies, the author studied the effect of field experiments providing voters with information about corrupt politicians on the corrupt politicians' vote share.

4.2.5 Outcomes

Two-thirds of the included studies reported effects on more than one outcome (n = 130; Figure 6). **Genuine competition** was one of the least populous outcome groups. *Fair and impartial electoral legal framework* was the only outcome category covered solely by qualitative studies, which measured the extent to which women can participate and lobby during the legislative process (Delgado, 2013) and the participation of the electorate during a specific legislature process (Carmo, 2018).

The **free electoral process** outcome group was the third most common group, measured in 13 percent of included studies (n = 25). *Electoral corruption and malfeasance* was measured in different ways; for example, turnout (e.g., Buzin et al., 2016; Hyde, 2007), party vote share (e.g., Almeida, 2013; Buzin et al., 2016; Hyde, 2007), and voter registration numbers (e.g., Ichino & Schüнден, 2012), were used as indicators to identify irregularities suggesting electoral fraud.

Figure 6: Frequency of outcomes reported in included studies by study design



Source: 3ie (2022). Note: Studies may report multiple outcomes, therefore the total number of studies in this figure is greater than the number of included studies.

One study measured an outcome in the **transparent competition** outcome group: the number of citizens becoming electoral observers was measured after a recruitment drive (Ferree et al., 2017).

Inclusive participation and competition was the most populous outcome group: 76 percent of all studies measured at least one outcome from this group (n = 148). Two-thirds of these studies measured *turnout and voting behavior*, primarily through turnout and party/candidate vote share. Studies which measured *accountability and policy-based competition*, mainly looked at whether politicians invest in public goods post-election (e.g., Martinez-Bravo et al., 2011; Dunning & Nilekani, 2013; Afridi et al., 2017). *Voter knowledge* was measured in 25 studies, which included indicators of both general political matters and specific knowledge after voter education initiatives (e.g., Finkel et al., 2012; Briery et al., 2019). Two studies measured *representativity of candidates* in terms of caste (Karekurve-Ramachandra & Lee, 2020) and sex (Labonne et al., 2019).

Outcomes related to the rights of eligible voters to participate in elections were measured in multiple studies. Ten of the 12 studies that assessed the *right and opportunity to be elected* evaluated the effect of *quotas*. The other two studies measured the number of candidates standing from different groups; one evaluated a *voter information* intervention where researchers encouraged the participation of marginalized groups as election candidates through the provision of report cards (Banerjee et al., 2014), and the other evaluated a *party inclusiveness* intervention which encouraged the creation of local grassroot networks (Ichino & Nathan, 2013).

The **accountable competition** outcome group was represented in 10 percent of all studies (n = 19). Within this group, *satisfaction and legitimacy* was the most common outcome category including, for example, indices of government satisfaction from the electorate (Berman et al., 2019). Indicators of *elected legislature performance* were measured in different ways; for example, by creating an index of legislature effort (Bó & Rossi, 2011), or measuring uptake and rates of schooling and immunization in areas where the intervention was implemented (Skoufias et al., 2014).

Within the **impartial/effective administration** group, authors included indicators of *electoral management bodies performance* to measure the electorates satisfaction with the electoral process and how it was implemented (e.g., Christopolos et al., 2019; von Borzyskowski, 2019; Marx et al., 2020).

The **political consensus and transfer of power** outcome group was measured in seven percent of the studies (n = 13). The category *electoral processes and outcomes are trusted and accepted as legitimate* was usually measured as trust in the whole electoral process, but also in regard to the introduction of new e-voting technology (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2011; Alvarez et al., 2013). Studies measuring *peaceful electoral process* included indicators of the absence of violence during an electoral process (e.g., Birch & Muchlinski, 2017).

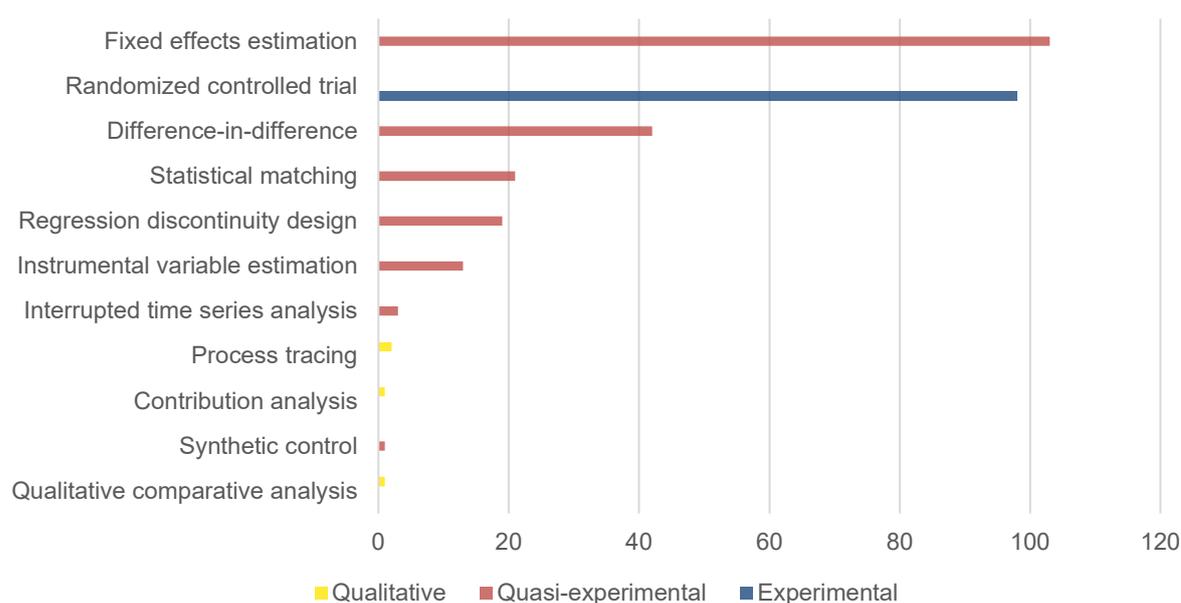
The outcome group covering **social and human development** measures represented 19 percent of all included studies (n = 37). The *development measures* category goes beyond the political competition sphere, including studies that measured indicators on child labor (e.g., Kaletski & Prakash, 2016), educational attainment (e.g., Beaman et al.,

2011), and child nutritional development (e.g., Pathak & Macours, 2017). *Social cohesion* was measured through the occurrence of ethnic conflict (e.g., Bazzi & Gudgeon, 2018; Pierskalla & Sacks, 2017), as well as through the stigma felt towards other ethnic/ racial groups (e.g., Chauchard, 2014).

4.2.6 Study design

Of the 192 included impact evaluations, 51% used an experimental study design (n = 97), 47% used a quasi-experimental design (n = 91), and 2% used a qualitative design (n = 4; Figure 7). One systematic review used meta-analysis (Incerti, 2020), and the other used narrative synthesis (Dekker, 2013).

Figure 7: Frequency of included studies by study designs



Source: 3ie (2022). Note: A single study may use a combination of research designs, each of which is included in this figure. Thus, the total number of studies in the figure is greater than the number of included studies.

The majority of the 97 experimental studies included in the map evaluated *voter information* interventions (n = 58). The other intervention category with more than 10 studies which utilized an experimental method was *quotas* (n = 17). Most experimental studies did not use a combination of methods (n = 47); however, the most common methods used in conjunction with an experimental design were fixed-effects (n = 38) and instrumental variable (n = 6) estimations.

The most common intervention evaluated using quasi-experimental methods was *quotas* (n = 25), where 68 percent of studies used fixed-effects (n = 17). Two intervention categories were evaluated using only quasi-experimental methods: *election security planning and implementation*, and *electoral system reforms*. The most common quasi-experimental method, fixed-effects estimation, was often used with difference-in-differences (n = 25). Three includable qualitative designs were identified: contribution analysis, process tracing, and qualitative comparative analysis. *Electoral reform process* (n = 1) is the only intervention category covered solely by evaluations using qualitative designs.

Of all included studies, 17 percent reported having obtained ethics clearance for conducting the evaluations (n = 33): 31 were randomized evaluations and two were quasi-experimental evaluations. In turn, 10 percent of studies presented any form of cost evidence of the interventions implemented (n = 19). The cost data most commonly reported was the total budget for the intervention, though some papers presented this information disaggregated at different levels and for different activities (e.g., Bidwell et al., 2020; Habyarimana et al., 2020; Callen et al., 2015; Roza et al., 2014). Five studies reported cost-benefit analyses (Garbiras-Diaz & Montenegro, 2021; Cruz et al., 2018; Vasudevan & Schechter, 2021; Guan & Green, 2006; Giné & Mansuri, 2018). In these studies, authors were able to identify the cost associated with relevant outcomes; for instance, the program cost of one additional vote.

4.3 Ongoing studies

Two ongoing studies were identified for inclusion in this map. One will evaluate the impact of female quotas in India, with an added component dedicated to voter information directed towards women (Chowdhury et al., 2018). Preliminary results reported outcomes relating to turnout, the right and opportunity to vote, the right and opportunity to participate in politics, and the right and opportunity to be elected.

The other study will evaluate a civic education program in Côte d'Ivoire including a specific component on elections (Arriola et al., 2015). Measured impacts will relate to turnout and whether electoral processes and outcomes are trusted and accepted.

4.4 Findings from high and medium confidence SRs

The two systematic reviews identified in the map (Incerti, 2020; Dekker, 2013) were assessed as having low confidence, meaning their results are subject to a high risk of bias. Neither review reported an appraisal of the quality of their included studies. Moreover, Incerti (2020) also did not provide key details on the way in which the search for studies was conducted. As both reviews are subject to a high risk of bias, we have not reported their main findings.

5. Gaps analysis

The following sections discuss the interpretation of the EGM's findings. In the first section we discuss the gaps of primary evidence identified – where few or no impact evaluation evidence exists for particular interventions, outcomes, and populations. The second section describes synthesis gaps, where there is a cluster of primary evidence but a lack of up-to-date and high-quality SRs (Snilstveit et al. 2017). Finally, we highlight methodological considerations of the map's primary evidence. More information on how to interpret EGMs is available in Appendix B.

5.1 Primary study evidence gaps

Outside of India, there is a lack of evidence on the effects of quotas on political competition. Of the 44 evaluations relating to quotas in the map, 41 were conducted in India. The randomized introduction of India's landmark quota legislation does not necessarily imply that the country has been over-evaluated. It rather shows an interest in

evaluating the impact of this legislative change on a broad range of outcomes, and that the effects of quotas for elected positions may be under-evaluated in other countries and regions.

There is an absolute gap of evaluations on electoral justice interventions. These interventions focus on capacity building and the effective use of dispute resolution mechanisms. Rigorously evaluating the use of electoral dispute mechanisms seems to be a challenge, as the use of these mechanisms may not lend itself to a counterfactual design where it is possible to see the effects of what would have happened if the mechanisms were not in place. It may be that these interventions have been evaluated, but without the use of rigorous methods to identify causality.

Key areas of political competition have little rigorous evidence: disinformation, and electoral security, observation and administration. Countering election related disinformation has become a key area in political competition with the growth of the internet. USAID has recently begun funding the Initiative for Media Freedom, which aims to counter disinformation during elections across a number of countries and regions (Countering Disinformation, n.d.). Only one disinformation study was identified in this EGM, a training program in India. The lack of studies may be due to the emergence of this new area of research.

Only five studies were identified within the *electoral security and conflict prevention* group, which could be considered a gap of evidence in light of the number of policies and programs focused on peaceful elections and the prevention of electoral violence. This gap may also be related to the fact that only seven studies looked at outcomes within the *political consensus and transfer of power* outcome group, which measures instances of electoral violence. Rigorously evaluating outcomes on electoral security seems to be an understudied area, despite electoral violence being common in many elections in L&MICs.

Eleven evaluations were identified around domestic and international election observation. This is despite the fact that it was one of the first and is still one of the most common interventions in the political competition space. Only two of these evaluations studied the effect of observation on measures beyond *corruption and malfeasance*, and *turnout and voting behavior*.

Likewise, election administration and operation is also an area where few evaluations were identified, but which is key in political competition programming. The three studies identified for this type of intervention measured only outcomes related to *turnout and voting behavior*.

Two-thirds of the outcomes in the framework are understudied. This EGM included 27 outcome categories; of these, only eight categories were measured by 10 or more studies. *Voting behavior* was the most common outcome reported in included studies (n = 107), mainly as indicators of turnout and party/candidate vote share. These measures are perhaps the most fundamental outcomes related to political competition during elections, but they are also widely available to researchers and require little or no firsthand data collection. Other outcomes, which require primary data collection or for researchers to conceptualize and define the indicator, are less studied.

Certain geographic regions are understudied. Evaluations of interventions implemented in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean made up a significant majority of the evidence base (n = 161, 83%). Few evaluations reported on interventions in East Asia and the Pacific (n = 20), and Europe and Central Asia (n = 11).⁷ Only one study evaluated an intervention in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The reasons for the lack of evidence in the MENA region are not apparent. Although many countries in this region score low in V-Dem's Participatory Index Score (2022), which measures whether free and fair elections are held, evaluations included in this EGM have been conducted in other low scoring settings. For instance, *voter information* interventions were identified in China, Bangladesh, and Turkey, all of which score within the bottom 40 countries of this index. While it is unlikely that a lack of electoral participation on the part of citizens is a driver in understanding this gap of evidence, it may be that interventions in the MENA region exist but have not been evaluated rigorously for other reasons.

5.2 Synthesis gaps

Only two systematic reviews were identified. Based on the information reported in their publications, both reviews were appraised as having low confidence, meaning there is a high risk of bias in their results.

The two most common interventions lack an updated and high confidence synthesis. *Voter information* and *quotas* were covered by the two systematic reviews identified in the map. In addition to these reviews being assessed as low confidence, the review on *voter information* only focused on interventions providing information on corruption to voters. In turn, the review that narratively synthesized evaluations of gender quotas in India was published almost a decade ago.

There are multiple intervention-outcome combinations with potential for synthesis. For example, four intervention categories (*platform development, constituent engagement, and political campaigning; quotas; voter information; and integration of technology during elections*) include 10 or more studies that reported *turnout and voting behavior* outcomes. The intervention category *voter information* also has 10 or more studies that measured outcomes on *voter knowledge* and *accountability and policy-based competition*. Finally, there are at least 10 studies of *quotas* interventions that reported *development measures*.

5.3 Methodological gaps

There is a scarcity of qualitative evaluations. Only four qualitative evaluations (2%) were identified for inclusion within this EGM. Of the eight qualitative methodologies identified as includable for this map, only three were used. Relevant studies using realist evaluations, contribution tracing, qualitative impact assessment protocol, general elimination methodology and outcome harvesting were not identified. This gap may also be indicative of qualitative researchers not stating the research method used, as for this

⁷ Europe and Central Asia as a region includes many HICs, which are excluded from this EGM.

map, a qualitative design methodology was only included if the authors explicitly stated using one of the eligible designs.

Ethical approval and cost data are underreported in included studies. Only 17 percent of studies reported having obtained ethics approval for conducting the evaluations. The majority of these studies with ethical clearance were randomized evaluations. Quasi-experimental methods are better suited to taking advantage of secondary data, such as official electoral results or longitudinal surveys, which was the data source in many of the included evaluations. Likewise, data on the interventions' cost was rarely reported in studies (10%), which undermines the possibility of conducting cost-effectiveness analysis across interventions. The underreporting of ethics clearance and cost data does not necessarily mean that evaluations did not receive this approval or collect this type of information; it may be the case that authors simply did not report this information in the studies included in the map.

6. Conclusions and implications

The evidence base covering political competition is large, yet highly clustered. We were able to identify 192 impact evaluations and two systematic reviews published between 2003 and 2021. These studies evaluated interventions from 18 of the 28 categories outlined for the map, and measured their effect on 21 of the 27 outcomes related to political competition. Since 2010, there has been a marked rise in the number of rigorous evaluations published on this topic.

The evidence is clustered around two intervention categories: *voter information* and *quotas*, which make up over half of all included studies. *Turnout and voting behavior* is an outcome category reported in a majority of studies (55%). *Accountability and policy-based competition* (16%), *development measures* (16%), *voter knowledge* (13%), and *electoral corruption and malfeasance* (12%) are the other outcome categories most commonly reported.

The body of evidence is also clustered regionally, with South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean accounting for over 80 percent of the studies. India was identified as the country with the largest number of studies (27%). A majority of the interventions in the map were implemented by a public institution (55%), at the national level (65%), and they most often targeted citizens (46%). The high proportion of studies evaluating interventions targeting the whole population across different categories may be driven by the number of includable interventions that act as legislative changes affecting the entire electorate; for instance, *electoral system* or *electoral rules reforms*.

Included interventions on political competition were usually implemented in fairly accessible settings. Based on V-Dem data, a majority of the studies were conducted in electoral democracies the first year the interventions were implemented, followed by electoral autocracies. These two regime types, which sit in the middle of a four-category scale, represent settings where liberal and/or electoral principles are restricted. Hence, included interventions would focus on supporting, rather than building, political competition. In turn, based on World Bank data, only nine percent of studies took place in fragile, conflicted, and violent contexts. Elections are not often undertaken in contexts of fragility and violence, but are conducted once these conflicts have been alleviated or ended.

The evaluation designs of included studies differ by the intervention types. It is more feasible, for example, to randomly allocate *voter information* interventions than *electoral systems reforms*, which are usually rolled out nationally at once. The feasibility of randomizing *voter information* interventions is reflected in the evidence, where 82 percent of *voter information* studies used an experimental design, and all included studies within the *electoral system reforms* category used a quasi-experimental technique. The suitability of evaluation methods to different interventions also extends to qualitative designs. *Electoral reform process*, a category that captures inclusivity in the planning and implementation of electoral processes, includes one study which used a qualitative design. Moreover, *fair and impartial electoral legal framework* is the only outcome category measured solely using qualitative designs. Given that outcome measures within this category may involve subjective views on what fair and impartial means in a particular context, qualitative methods may be better placed to assess them.

6.1 Implications for policy

Stakeholders wishing to draw from existing research evaluating interventions that encourage participation in political competition processes have a large base of evidence to utilize, which covers a variety of countries and contexts. The EGM provides a range of studies for decisionmakers to reference when making evidence-informed decisions regarding political competition policy and programming.

Policymakers and implementers can refer to this EGM considering the following:

- Given no existing high or medium confidence systematic reviews exist, the findings from individual impact evaluations may be consulted for consideration in the design of policy and programs. Caution is advised when consulting individual studies, taking into account the following:
 - Conclusions on the effects of an intervention should not derive from single studies due to potential methodological weaknesses.
 - Single studies may provide estimates of the effect of an intervention in a specific context. However, these results may not be transferable to other settings.
- Evidence around *voter information*, *voter education*, and *GOTV* interventions is especially relevant for policymakers focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, given the prevalence of studies in these regions. This literature covers a range of outcomes, including immediate measures, such as turnout, and other relevant outcomes, such as inclusive electoral participation, corruption, electoral management, and public satisfaction, legitimacy and trust.
- A large body of evidence exists for *quotas for elected positions* within India. While this group of studies provide rich evidence of short- and long-term effects of interventions that promote inclusion in political competition, this evidence may not be applicable to contexts outside of India.

6.3 Implications for future research

Through this EGM, we have identified a large body of evidence on political competition interventions, which is highly clustered. In addition, we have identified both absolute primary research gaps and synthesis gaps. Future research might consider the following:

- Future research should prioritize evaluating interventions for which no studies were identified. The *electoral justice* intervention group should act as a top priority, given this was the only group for which no studies were identified.
 - For intervention areas where studies were identified, yet the evidence is concentrated on specific groups or geographical regions, future research should seek to extend this evidence base. For instance, while there is a large evidence base on *quotas*, this is almost exclusively focused on India.
 - Commonly implemented intervention areas with few existing rigorous evaluations, such as electoral-related media, electoral justice, and parliamentary conduct (UNDEF, 2013; International Media Support, 2006; NIMD, 2014), provide opportunities to fill evidence gaps. For example, *countering election-related disinformation* is an intervention category subject to recent policy and programming developments but with a limited pool of evidence in L&MICs. With this topic becoming a widely implemented intervention, rigorous evaluations should follow to report on its effectiveness (USAID, 2020c).
- Future research should focus on continuing to evaluate commonly used outcome indicators, such as turnout, as well as measures that are currently less available to decisionmakers, such as those related to transparency of electoral processes and bodies.
 - The restricted availability of these outcomes may be related to the fact that they require primary data collection or that they can vary based on researchers' own conceptualization. For instance, political party transparency measures – which reflect, among others, campaign finance data and candidate selection processes – were not measured in any of the studies on the map.
- Upcoming research should encourage evaluations of interventions implemented in the Middle East and North Africa, and East Asia and the Pacific. Though relevant interventions take place in these regions, thus far rigorous evaluations do not seem to be part of policy and program evaluations. Integrating evaluations into programming in these regions could help alleviate this evidence gap.
- Priorities for future synthesis work could follow the areas outlined in Section 5.2. Synthesis gaps, which highlight intervention-outcome combinations with 10 or more studies. Interventions such as *voter information* and *quotas* and outcomes such as *turnout and voting behavior* are areas ripe for future synthesis.
 - Evidence synthesis can also help integrate different interventions to make the findings relevant to a broader range of contexts and stakeholders. For example, the Metaketa Initiative's first round of evaluations looked at the impact of very similar interventions providing information on politicians' performance in six countries.⁸ This replication approach provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of a specific intervention conducted in conditions favorable to evaluation. However, future synthesis efforts can also acknowledge and account for the range of interventions being implemented across L&MICs, as shown in this map.

⁸ The Metaketa Initiative (EGAP, n.d.), is a collaborative project aimed to produce rigorous evidence on topics related to governance and politics, including political competition. The EGM includes an evaluation for each of the six Metaketa interventions which were successfully implemented in Round 1.

Online appendixes

Online appendix A: Criteria for including or excluding studies

<https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/PC-Technical-EGM-Report-Online-appendix-A.pdf>

Online appendix B: About Evidence Gap Maps

<https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/PC-Technical-EGM-Report-Online-appendix-B.pdf>

Online appendix C: Search strategy

<https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/PC-Technical-EGM-Report-Online-appendix-C.pdf>

Online appendix D: Screening and data extraction protocol

<https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/PC-Technical-EGM-Report-Online-appendix-D.pdf>

Online appendix E: Data extraction tool

<https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/PC-Technical-EGM-Report-Online-appendix-E.pdf>

Online appendix F: Critical appraisal tool

<https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/PC-Technical-EGM-Report-Online-appendix-F.pdf>

Online appendix G: List of included studies in the EGM

<https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/PC-Technical-EGM-Report-Online-appendix-G.pdf>

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A politically competitive society allows citizens the opportunity to form political parties, compete for power through elections, and shape the direction of public policy. Although political competition can lead to numerous positive outcomes for society, the current state of democracy globally has shown a concerning trend. While there are a few reviews on political competition, these do not directly address the impact of interventions. The authors of this report present the findings of a systematic search to identify and map the evidence base of impact evaluations and systematic reviews of interventions that aim to promote political competition effectiveness in low- and middle-income countries.

Evidence Gap Map Report Series

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