DRG LEARNING, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH (DRG-LER) II ACTIVITY

DRG POLICY EVIDENCE SUPPORT RESEARCH REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS IV

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY V

INTRODUCTION 1

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUB-QUESTIONS 1

METHODOLOGY 3

SUMMARY OF KEY TERMS FOR THE LITERATURE REVIEW 4

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: DOES THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE SUPPORT THE CASE FOR DEMOCRACY? 6

- DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS 6
- DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW 7
- DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC GOODS PROVISIONS 7
- DEMOCRACY AND CORRUPTION 8
- DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES 9
- DEMOCRACY AND CONFLICT 10
- DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA FREEDOM 11
- TYPE OF AID 13
- AID CONDITIONALITY 14
- ATTRIBUTES OF DONORS AND TARGET COUNTRIES 15
- DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AND OTHER OUTCOMES 15

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: HOW HAS THE GLOBAL CONTEXT FOR DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNANCE PROMOTION CHANGED SINCE 2013 AND WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT EMERGING DRG TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES? 16

- MEASURING DEMOCRACY 17
- TRENDS IN LEVELS OF DEMOCRACY 18
- TRENDS IN REPRESSION 23
- TRENDS IN DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP 25
- CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS 28
- CITIZEN SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY 28
- POLARIZATION 29
- PROTESTS 29
- EDUCATION 30
- ETHNICITY 31
- ECONOMIC FACTORS 31
- INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS 32
- INTERNATIONAL FACTORS 34
- STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK ON SOCIAL MEDIA 38
- STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK ON CHALLENGES TO DRG PROMOTION 39
- STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR DRG PROMOTION 40

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2013 DRG STRATEGY AND WHAT WERE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF USAID'S APPROACH? 41
LESSONS LEARNED 41
STRENGTHS 43
WEAKNESSES 44
RESEARCH QUESTION 4: LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IN USAID'S APPROACH TOWARD DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNANCE PROMOTION TO INCREASE AID EFFECTIVENESS? 47
ADDRESS DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES HOLISTICALLY AT THE GLOBAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS 47
MORE NUANCED AND DEEPER ANALYSIS OF PROCESSES AND THE DIRECTION OF TRENDS 47
EMPHASIZE THE CONTEXT RATHER THAN FOCUSING ON DRG OBJECTIVES 48
NEED TO CRITICALLY REFLECT ON WHAT IS NOT WORKING ALONG WITH WHAT IS 48
HAVE A LONGER VISION FOR THE CDCS 49
FOCUS ON USAID'S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE AND ROLE 49
CONCLUSION 49
REFERENCES 50
ANNEX A: CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS 61
ANNEX B: FGD AND KII PROTOCOLS 65

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Geographic breakdown and counts of stakeholder consultations 4

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Electoral democracy over time 19
Figure 2: Electoral democracy by region over time 20
Figure 3: Electoral democracy by income level over time 21
Figure 4: Disaggregating Electoral Democracy 21
Figure 5: Freedom of expression by income level over time 22
Figure 6: Repression of physical integrity rights over time (government-sponsored political torture and killings) 23
Figure 7: Repression of physical integrity rights by region over time (government-sponsored political torture and killings) 23
Figure 8: Repression of physical integrity rights by income over time (government-sponsored political torture and killings) 24
Figure 9: Number of democracies and dictatorships in power 25
Figure 10: How democracies collapse to dictatorship 26

ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
E&E	Europe & Eurasia
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PRC	People's Republic of China
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESEARCH STUDY OVERVIEW

The global context for democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) is characterized by democratic backsliding, where domestic and foreign actors are actively undermining democratic norms. Governance and political crises, along with rising inequality and disappointment in the provision of basic services, have eroded democratic legitimacy and public trust in government in many countries.

With these issues in mind, USAID's Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (the DRG Center) is updating the current USAID DRG Strategy, released in 2013, to a new DRG policy that will inform DRG learning and future programming. NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC) conducted research to support the drafting of the new DRG policy. This report is the culmination of the research study and is based on evidence from relevant academic and gray literature, as well as consultations with DRG experts, USAID Mission staff, and country stakeholders.

RESEARCH METHODS AND QUESTIONS

The literature review summarizes key findings from academic and gray literature relevant to democracy promotion and published since 2013. Literature was selected based on (1) relevance to the research questions, as well as associated citations; (2) ad hoc searches in Google Scholar and other academic databases; and (3) a consideration of the literature's academic rigor. In May and June 2022, NORC conducted 16 focus group discussions (FGDs) and six key informant interviews (KIIs) with DRG experts, USAID Mission staff, and country stakeholders identified by USAID's DRG Policy Collaboration Working Group to get their feedback and input into the following research questions address in this study:

1. Does the research evidence support the case for democracy?
2. How has the global context for democracy, human rights, and governance promotion changed since 2013 and what are the most important emerging DRG trends, challenges, and opportunities?
3. What are the lessons learned from implementation of the 2013 DRG Strategy and what were the strengths and weaknesses of USAID's approach?
4. Looking ahead, what needs to change in USAID's approach toward democracy, human rights, and governance promotion to increase aid effectiveness?

FINDINGS

RQ1: Does the research evidence support the case for democracy?

DEMOCRACY AND POSITIVE OUTCOMES (LITERATURE)

- Democracies are more likely to respect human rights, offer more media freedom, invest in public goods, limit corruption, and avoid economic crises and conflict. However, new research points to nuances in the relationship between democracy and many of these outcomes. For example, democracy tends to worsen corruption in poorer countries but improves levels of corruption in richer countries. Broadly speaking, however, the gains of democracy increase as levels of democracy increase.

EFFECTIVENESS OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION (LITERATURE)

- The relationship between democracy promotion and improvements in the quality of democracy is context dependent; thus, a one-size-fits-all democracy promotion strategy is unlikely to be effective.
- The effectiveness of democracy promotion also depends on the aid type, timing, and attributes of the donor and targeted country.

RQ 2: How has the global context for democracy, human rights, and governance promotion changed since 2013 and what are the most important emerging DRG trends, challenges, and opportunities?

RECENT DEMOCRACY TRENDS (LITERATURE)

- From 2013 to 2020, the global decline in democracy has been slight, with declines primarily driven by democracies backsliding but remaining intact.
- Primarily low-income countries had democratic gains while primarily middle-income countries had democratic declines.
- Democracies most commonly collapse when elected leaders erode executive constraints to push their countries towards authoritarianism.
- The prevalence and strength of historical relationships between democracy and certain protections have changed since 2013. For example, freedom of expression and freedom of association, two of three key components of the electoral democracy index, declined in countries classified as democratic in 2013 but remained steady in those considered authoritarian.
- The path to democratization continues to be through elections in which authoritarian incumbents lose or choose not to run in.

NEW FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH HIGHER LIKELIHOOD OF DEMOCRACY (LITERATURE)

- Nonviolent protests movements were successful in nearly every instance when they featured 250,000 or more participants with at least 50 percent female participation. And, among nonviolent campaigns that succeeded, high women's participation was associated with substantial increases in democracy five years later.
- While elections have short-term risks for dictatorships, they extend authoritarian rule in the long term when dictatorships strategically make the timing of elections unpredictable or irregular. Thus, compelling dictatorships to keep a regular election cycle, as well as encouraging subnational elections and de jure judicial independence increases the probability of a regime transitioning to democracy.
- Common regional shocks, such as economic crises, are linked to clustering of authoritarian regime breakdowns and these breakdowns diffuse across similar regime types.
- New research also links remittances to democratization by lowering economic dependence on the state and providing resources to political opponents.

EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON DEMOCRACY (LITERATURE)

- Research indicates the COVID-19 pandemic led to some violations of democratic standards in most countries and serious violations in some autocratic countries.
- Government-sponsored misinformation and censorship was also prevalent during the pandemic.
- Most countries that had postponed elections due to the pandemic later held them, although voter turnout was lower in a majority of these countries.

EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DEMOCRACY (LITERATURE & STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK)

- Social media is a double-edged sword for democracy promotion: on the one hand it can benefit democracy, by amplifying voices, exposing abuses, and mobilizing mass protests, but on the other hand it can undermine democracy, by serving as a tool for manipulation and disinformation, among other things.
- Recent research indicates that social media have both increased protests against dictatorship and decreased the effectiveness of these movements.
- Social media is being used to marginalize and intimidate women and the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Discussions about social media and its impact need to be included in broader conversations around content management, free speech, and equity in digital spaces.

CHALLENGES TO DRG PROMOTION (STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK)

- Stakeholders noted the increasing persecution and censorship of civil society worldwide, and suggested USAID expand its definition of civil society to include the private sector, academia, churches, and political parties.
- Censorship of free speech has discouraged effective opposition and affects the inclusion of women and other marginalized groups.
- The PRC and Russia are promoting their authoritarian governance models through energy provision and lending practices.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DRG PROMOTION (STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK)

- Involving local stakeholders in implementation and considering the long-term impact of these relationships will ensure sustainability of democracy programming.
- USAID should do more to support the democratic consolidation processes that follow citizen-driven, pro-democracy uprisings.
- USAID should build on existing foundations by seeking out and bolstering pro-democracy government reforms.

RQ 3: What are the lessons learned from implementation of the 2013 DRG Strategy and what were the strengths and weaknesses of USAID's approach?

LESSONS LEARNED (STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK)

- Empower local staff to share lessons learned to future cohorts of foreign service officers by institutionalizing better information sharing practices.
- Use the data we have and learn from it by aggregating and analyzing to highlight what worked, what did not work, and why.
- Be more flexible, adaptable, and nuanced in democracy programming approaches to build incrementally on a country's successes instead of working to fit a country into predetermined priorities.

STRENGTHS (STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK)

- The DRG approach has stressed the inclusion of women and vulnerable populations and should apply nuanced analysis to the impact of this work, e.g., unintended negative consequences.
- USAID's integration of Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS) aids with assessing what is happening on the ground and adapting approaches as needed.
- USAID's strength lies in its decentralized programmatic decision-making that is adapted to local contexts, but it should still strategize at the regional level.

WEAKNESSES (STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK)

- Inconsistencies in USAID's DRG messaging can delegitimize democracy promotion efforts.
- Prioritizing U.S. contractors for compliance hurts the implementation of projects and undermines localization efforts.
- Rigidly applying DRG definitions and approaches curtails effective responses to changing and different contexts that are more varied today than they were in 2013.

RQ 4: Looking ahead, what needs to change in USAID's approach toward democracy, human rights, and governance promotion to increase aid effectiveness?

RECOMMENDATIONS (STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK)

- Address democratic challenges holistically by linking countries and projects to global and regional efforts.
- Provide more nuanced and deeper analysis of processes and the direction of trends.
- Emphasize the context rather than focusing on DRG objectives.

- Critically reflect on what is and is not working by building on evidence gap maps, developing learning agendas, and expanding academic research.
- Have a longer vision for the CDCS that integrates learning agendas academic research instead of reporting out on indicators.
- Focus on USAID's comparative advantage and role as a spotlighting rather than enforcing organization, with the positionality to work with diverse stakeholders and empower local leadership.

INTRODUCTION

USAID's Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (the DRG Center) is committed to advancing learning and evidence-based programming around all aspects of DRG policy, strategy, program development, implementation, and evaluation.

The current USAID DRG Strategy, released in 2013, was informed by the global DRG context in the early years of the Obama administration. This strategy aimed to support the establishment and consolidation of inclusive and accountable democracies to advance freedom, dignity, and development. Given the drastically changed global context for democracy promotion, characterized by global democratic backsliding, USAID now requires new policy guidance to inform the development of future programming. The new DRG policy must respond to the transformed global context, incorporate the policy priorities of the Biden-Harris Administration, and incorporate improvements in DRG learning and measurement.

To this end, USAID commissioned a literature review, key informant interviews (KIIs), and consultations with several key USAID internal and external stakeholders focused on key trends in the DRG sector, lessons learned, and emerging opportunities and challenges for democracy promotion. Findings and analysis from this research will provide an evidence base to inform the forthcoming policy.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUB-QUESTIONS

USAID posed the original questions and NORC proposed the sub-questions to provide direction and focus to the broad questions. The sub-questions were also further revised by USAID in consultation with NORC.

1. Does the research evidence support the case for democracy?

   - What does new literature say about the benefits of democracy as a political system? Does it demonstrate that democracy can deliver positive outcomes related to upholding human rights, rule of law, peaceful resolution of conflicts, as well as socio-economic outcomes? Does the evidence vary by type of democracy? Is there new literature examining the case for democracy outside of traditional disciplines?

   - What does recent academic literature say about the effectiveness of democracy promotion by USAID and other donors? Does it support the case for democracy promotion in terms of consolidating democratic regimes, preventing democratic backsliding, and strengthening democratic institutions, systems, and processes?

2. How has the global context for democracy, human rights, and governance promotion changed since 2013 and what are the most important emerging DRG trends, challenges, and opportunities?

   - What trends do global democracy indices (such as V-Dem and other third-party indices) depict over the period from 2013 till 2021? Are there common geo-political or regional patterns? Are there factors that present unique challenges for democracy promotion? What are the key messages to emerge from these trends for democracy promotion efforts? To the extent that 2021 data is available, is there any change in these trends over the past year?

- Have the literature's findings regarding the critical factors important for democracy changed since 2013? Are there new factors associated with a higher likelihood of democracy today or that are shown to influence contemporary pathways of democratic decline? Do any create new opportunities for effective democracy promotion or should otherwise inform such efforts?

- What does research reveal about the overall effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions, if any, on democracy and/or democracy promotion efforts? According to the literature, how did social media and new technologies help or challenge democracy promotion efforts during the period under examination? Is there evidence that they influenced the efficacy of pro-democratic civil society activities and/or social movements?

3. What are the lessons learned from implementation of the 2013 DRG Strategy and what were the strengths and weaknesses of USAID's approach?

    - How did the 2013 DRG Strategy address the context for implementation of DRG programs? Was the 2013 DRG Strategy effective in foreseeing specific contextual developments/changes?

    - Did the underlying logic and assumptions of the 2013 DRG Strategy hold or did programming adaptations diverge significantly from the assumed pathways for change?

    - Under what DRG technical areas (rule of law, governance, elections and political transitions, civil society, human rights, and media) were the 2013 DRG Strategy outcomes mostly promising/in line with expectations? And what DRG technical areas were outcomes mostly difficult to achieve?

    - Did the focus on objectives like participation, inclusion, and accountability advance or hinder the strategy when compared to the more traditional focus on DRG sub-sectors?

    - What are lessons learned/experiences from the elevation of Human Rights into DRG development work?

    - How well did DRG integration work (such as in health, education and humanitarian assistance)? What should DRG integration 2.0 look like?

    - Were there key differences in lessons learned (at country level and strategy level) from implementation by country contexts (authoritarian regimes, hybrid regimes and developing democracies) and/or country characteristics (conflict/fragility, transitional contexts, backsliding contexts) and/or USAID's targeted geographic regions?

4. Looking ahead, what needs to change in USAID's approach toward democracy, human rights, and governance promotion to increase aid effectiveness?

    - How can lessons learned from implementing the previous Strategy be incorporated into a new Policy?

    - Is USAID DRG assistance delivered to the right locations and at the right scale?

    - What needs to change in USAID's approach to DRG to increase impact and aid effectiveness?

- Are there specific adjustments needed to theories of change of specific DRG technical areas?
- Are there new cross-cutting themes that need to be considered for an improved DRG policy?
- What elements or perspectives from the 2013 strategy should stay the same?
- Should the policy organize priorities around the two outcomes listed in the 2013 DRG strategy (participation/inclusion and accountability) or reframe priorities?
- Should DRG integration, or doing development democratically, continue to be elevated? If so, what, if anything, needs to change to scale impact?
- Should specific sub-sectors of DRG be emphasized in the new DRG policy? For instance, with the administration's elevation of anti-corruption and human rights, should the DRG policy emphasize these areas or seek to maintain a degree of equity among the DRG sub-sectors?
- What was accomplished in the development of DRG evidence and what more needs to be done?

METHODOLOGY

Literature Review: The literature review summarizes key findings from recent academic and gray literature relevant to democracy promotion since 2013. The research team flagged studies for review using a multi-pronged strategy. First, it leveraged the research team's expertise in this subject matter, which has written extensively on themes related to democracy and political change and is deeply engaged in this literature, to identify those studies most relevant to the research questions. This process was complemented by a careful probe of two literature reviews offered by USAID's Theories of Democratic Change initiative on transitions to and from democracy (released in 2015 and 2017), each of which involved peer-review workshops featuring prominent academics in the field. Next, from this "seed" set of studies, the research team identified additional studies by looking for citations linked to the studies in this set (both that these studies cited and vice versa). This exercise was complemented with ad hoc searches in Google Scholar and other academic databases, derived from insights that emerged from the initial review process. The research team also carried out broader searches as a final pass, to ensure that any relevant gray or other literature not flagged thus far was identified. Only those studies that the research team deemed "academically rigorous" (based on considerations such as the impact of the research, whether it was peer-reviewed, the reputational quality of the publication outlet, and research design) were flagged for review. The responses to the research questions integrate as much of this literature as possible, while balancing the broad scope of the tasking with the level of effort allocated. In addition to reviewing the academic and gray literature relevant to democracy promotion since 2013, the research team also documented trends in democracy over time using the leading indicators in the field.

The responses to the research questions below seek to make clear the breadth of empirical support in the literature for the relationships discussed, as well as areas where there are debates, mixed findings, and/or gaps with respect to key relationships of interest. In many instances findings in the literature lack the nuance desirable to effectively inform practitioner strategies. That said, where greater details in terms of relationships and causal pathways are present in the research, they are indicated in the summaries below.

Stakeholder Consultation: NORC conducted 16 focus group discussions (FGDs) with DRG experts, USAID Mission staff and country stakeholders across the US and all 5 geographic regions where USAID works – Africa, Asia, Europe & Eurasia (E&E), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Six key informant interviews (KIIs) were also done with DRG experts. A geographic breakdown of the 57 stakeholders consulted for this research is provided in Table 1 below. Annex A details the names, designation, and countries where the stakeholders were based. We consulted with a total of 57 DRG stakeholders with DRG experts and local stakeholders discussing research questions two and four, while USAID Mission staff discussed research questions three and four. However, due to the interconnected nature of these research questions, there are instances in which stakeholder feedback for one research question provided important insights for another.

The list of stakeholders and their contact information was compiled by USAID's DRG Policy Collaboration Working Group. NORC reached out and set times to conduct all FGDs and KIIs remotely via Zoom. All stakeholder consultations were carried out from May to June 2022. Annex B includes the questions used in the KIIs and FGDs.

Table 1: Geographic breakdown and counts of stakeholder consultations

STAKEHOLDERS	TOTAL	ASIA	AFRICA	LAC	MENA	E&E	US
USAID Mission staff	15	2	4	6	2	1	-
Local Stakeholders	16	5	4	1	2	4	-
DRG Experts (FGDs + KII)	26	-	1	2	-	2	21
Total	57	7	9	9	4	7	21[1]

SUMMARY OF KEY TERMS FOR THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The focal point of the literature review is on democracy, which at the most basic level is a political system where free and fair elections are used to select the leadership (Kendall-Taylor, Lindstaedt, and Frantz, 2019). One advantage of a minimalist conceptualization of democracy, such as this, is that it enables researchers to evaluate democracy's impact on other related outcomes of interest, such as respect for human rights. Among democracies, there is quite a bit of variance in their quality, with some democracies featuring greater protections of civil liberties and political rights than others. The same is true of autocracies (where free and fair elections do not determine the leadership), in that provisions of basic freedoms vary substantially, with some authoritarian systems featuring considerably more civil liberties and political rights than others.[2] A transition to democracy (or democratization) is therefore a

[1] Many of the DRG Experts have extensive experience in and are from countries outside of the U.S. but are currently working at U.S.-based institutions.
[2] This review uses the terms autocracy, dictatorship, and authoritarian regime interchangeably, as is common in the literature.

movement from an autocracy to democracy. It is a distinct instance of political liberalization – which is an improvement in the quality of democracy (a distinction discussed in further detail shortly). Democracies can also decline in quality – a process referred to as democratic backsliding. In some instances, democratic backsliding leads to full democratic collapse (a transition from democracy to autocracy); in other instances, however, it leaves democracy weakened but intact.

With this background in mind, it is important to note that the factors that influence democratization (or political liberalization more broadly) do not necessarily also influence democratic collapse (or democratic backsliding more broadly). For this reason, the literature review will be careful to differentiate between factors that are important for movement away from democracy from those important for movement toward it.

NOTE ON CONCEPTUALIZATION AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE LITERATURE

Some studies in the literature conflate democratization – a transition from dictatorship to democracy – with political liberalization – a change in any political system (democracy or dictatorship) that makes it more competitive and/or participatory (Frantz, 2018). While occasionally political liberalization in authoritarian settings is part of a transition to democracy, often it is not (see Conroy-Krutz and Frantz (2017) for a lengthier discussion of this). Political liberalization can occur in a variety of contexts, in other words, only some of which are signals of democratization. The conflation of these distinct processes often surfaces when studies use increases in continuous measures of democracy (such as Polity scores, Freedom House ratings, or V-Dem polyarchy scores) to capture democratization. While such increases reflect political liberalization, they are only indicative of democratization when a country's score or rating moves past a certain cut-off level (e.g., when Freedom House ratings are "Free").

This distinction is important given that political liberalization in an authoritarian context does not necessarily suggest a likely transition to democracy. In fact, political liberalization in many instances is actually an indicator of a savvy authoritarian regime adapting its survival tools (Kendall-Taylor and Frantz, 2014). While political liberalization in authoritarian regimes can bring with it certain improvements for citizens, such as greater (albeit still limited) civil liberties or political rights, it is not necessarily signal of impending transition to democracy and should not necessarily be interpreted as such. Recent research has made this clear (Edgell et al. 2021): there is very little that is different about episodes of liberalization that perpetuate authoritarian rule versus those that lead to democratization. The only difference, according to this research, is that where political liberalization leads to democracy, improvements in the administration of elections came earlier in the liberalization process than in those episodes where it led to continuation of autocracy.

Moreover, all of the positive outcomes associated with democracy that the literature reveals (discussed below) are for those set of countries that are actually democracies, where free and fair elections select the leadership, not for partially liberalizing authoritarians. They are not applicable to those countries that do not feature such electoral contests, regardless of the label (e.g., hybrid, semi-authoritarian) observers may ascribe to them.

This should be kept in mind when interpreting the research findings, as the literature review uses the same terms as the research it cites. Factors that are reported to increase the prospects of

democratization should be viewed as increasing prospects of political liberalization, absent further investigation into how democratization is measured in the study referenced.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: DOES THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE SUPPORT THE CASE FOR DEMOCRACY?

What does new literature say about the benefits of democracy as a political system? Does it demonstrate that democracy can deliver positive outcomes related to upholding human rights, rule of law, peaceful resolution of conflicts, as well as socio-economic outcomes? Does the evidence vary by type of democracy? Is there new literature examining the case for democracy outside of traditional disciplines?

Many of the findings that predate 2013 remain uncontested today. The general message to emerge from the literature is that evidence in support of democracy for a variety of normatively desirable outcomes is high (see Kendall-Taylor, Lindstaedt, and Frantz (2019) for a review of this literature). Democracies are more likely to respect human rights, invest in public goods, and limit corruption (particularly when there is a freer press and as democracy deepens).[3] Their economic growth rates are on par with those of dictatorships, but the growth they produce is of higher quality (steadier patterns and with gains more likely to benefit citizens, as reflected in education, health, and life expectancy). The gains of democracy increase as levels of democracy increase. (Note that the literature reviewed below typically does not evaluate whether the gains are equal across populations.) Relevant post-2013 research on these themes is summarized in what follows.

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

- Democracy is among the strongest predictors of levels of repression, and new research since 2013 disaggregates and adds nuance to measures of repression in democracies
  - As institutional structures grow more inclusive, democracies are less likely to repress. Police agencies' likeliness of using torture in democracies compared to autocracies varies by target (e.g., political dissidents vs. criminals)

The overwhelming finding in the literature is that democracies have significantly less repression of human rights than autocracies. Recent literature confirms this relationship but adds nuance to our understanding of it. Specifically, scholars have begun to disaggregate democracy in their analyses of repression. This is a positive development, given that many measures used to capture democracy and repression have overlapping components, such that they will be correlated by design (Hill, 2016).

New research shows, for example, some democracies are more likely to protect human rights[4] than others. Democracies that feature more inclusive institutional structures – in terms of voting access,

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[3] In much of this research, democracy is measured using continuous indicators that place countries on a scale according to their level of "democratic-ness." Here, the positive effect of democracy on the outcomes discussed are found to be even greater at higher levels of democracy.

[4] Human rights protection, as measured in this research, refers to respect for physical integrity rights specifically (i.e., freedom from torture, arrest and political imprisonment, extra-judicial execution, and disappearance).

electoral representation, and legislative structure – repress less than those where such structures are more exclusionary (Joshi, Maloy, and Peterson, 2019).

New research has also leveraged better data to unpack the perpetrator and targets of repression. One study shows, for example, that police agencies are less likely to use torture in democracies than in autocracies, albeit only towards political dissidents; they are not less likely than autocracies to use torture against criminals or marginalized communities (Jackson, Hall, and Hill, 2018).

To summarize, the overall message is that democracies have large advantages over autocracies in their protection of human rights. In fact, democracy is among the strongest predictors of levels of repression identified in the literature (Hill and Jones, 2014).

DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW

- Recent research on the relationship between democracy and the rule of law points to short-term increases in rule of law when countries transition to democracy, but causality has not been clearly established

Democracy is often associated with the rule of law, but the two are distinct concepts (Gutmann and Voigt, 2018). The rule of law refers to a system where "laws are public knowledge, are clear in meaning, and apply equally to everyone" (Carothers, 2006, p. 4). Such a system is possible in both democratic and authoritarian contexts. Whether democracy fosters the rule of law more than autocracy is therefore an empirical question. Early research found that democracy and the rule of law are mutually reinforcing, such that more of one tends to lead to more of the other (Rigobon and Rodrik, 2005). The relationship is not found to be strong, however. More recent research finds that the rule of law tends to increase when countries transition to democracy, but the effects are short term (Assiotis and Sylwester, 2015). Given the ambiguity of the findings and challenges encountered in demonstrating the relationship is causal, future research is needed to better understand whether democracy improves the rule of law.

DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC GOODS PROVISIONS

- Research since 2013 confirms that democracy leads to better provision of public goods (better access to electricity, education, and more social protection spending and policy commitments to combat climate change) than dictatorship
- However, not all sectors of a democratic society benefit equally from better provision of public goods, with the electoral majority benefiting the most
- High corruption levels also decrease democracy's positive impact on climate policies

A large body of research shows that democracy leads to better public goods provisions than autocracy (Varieties of Democracy, 2022a). Recent research has further confirmed these findings, expanding to a wider variety of domains. Borang et al. (2016), for example, show that when there is corruption that is relatively under control, increases in democracy lead to substantial improvement in access to and consumption of electricity. (This study suggests that the ability of democracies to provide public goods is likely contingent on the quality of the institutions implementing them.) Likewise, Murshed et al. (2020) find that social protection spending (which includes spending on the provision of goods and services) is

higher in democracies than in dictatorships. Democracy is beneficial for some education outcomes, as well. Though democracy does not influence the quality of education citizens receive – likely because it is more difficult for voters to hold politicians accountable in this regard – it does lead to better access: educational enrollment and the average years of schooling are both higher in democracies than in dictatorships (Dahlum and Knutsen, 2017a; Harding and Stasavage, 2013).

As a reflection of the democratic advantage in public goods provisions, citizens in democracies have better health – including longer life expectancy, lower infant mortality rates, and fewer deaths from non-communicable diseases (Wang, Mechkova, Andersson, 2019; Bolyky et al., 2019). Importantly, these relationships hold even when taking into account income level. Conversely, autocratizing countries – those countries transitioning from democracy to dictatorship – see worse estimated life expectancy, health service coverage, and out-of-pocket spending on health (Wigley et al., 2020). That said, the positive gains of democracy appear to be most evident as democracy deepens (i.e., once countries reach higher levels of democracy and/or have sustained it for at least a decade of time) (Varieties of Democracy, 2021c).

Despite the positives of democracy for public goods provisions in general, there is evidence that electoral considerations influence which sectors of society will benefit most from them. Democratic governments are more likely to provide public goods to sectors that comprise the electoral majority, for example. As an illustration, in Sub-Saharan African countries with rural majorities, competitive elections significantly increased access to education and decreased infant mortality rates, but only for those living in rural areas (Harding, 2020). There is also evidence that electoral considerations affect which types of public goods will be prioritized, such that democratic politicians are more likely to provide those public goods that can be easily attributed to their actions (Harding, 2015; Dahlum and Knutsen, 2017a),

New research has examined the impact of democracy on policies to reduce climate change, a type of public good that has recently gained more attention in the literature. The evidence indicates that democracies have more ambitious climate policies than autocracies do. As levels of democracy increase, so do policy commitments to combat climate change (Torstad et al., 2020). Democracy's positives for the environment are dampened, however, if corruption is high. Only those democracies with relatively low corruption levels are associated with impactful climate policies (Povitkina, 2018).

DEMOCRACY AND CORRUPTION

- New research indicates the role of wealth in mediating the relationship between democracy and corruption: democracy tends to worsen corruption in poorer countries but improves levels of corruption in richer countries

- Different components of democracy have different effects on corruption (e.g., electoral accountability helps mitigate corruption, while judicial and legislative constraints increase corruption)

Most research finds democracy to reduce corruption, but the relationship is nuanced. Fully consolidated democracies (where democracy has been maintained for some time) have far lower levels of corruption than other political systems, but levels of corruption in new and/or partial democracies can be higher than in autocracies. (Note that this literature typically does not explore whether these relationships differ based on corruption type.)

New research sheds light on the mechanisms underlying this relationship. There is evidence, for example, that levels of wealth condition the impact of democracy on corruption: poorer countries are more likely to see democracy worsen corruption, whereas richer democracies are more likely to see corruption improve (Jetter, Agudelo, and Hassan, 2015). This relationship holds even when taking into account potential reverse causality between corruption and levels of wealth. The message to emerge is that one reason that new and/or partial democracies may experience higher corruption is that they are often poorer.

There is also evidence that different components of democracy affect corruption differently. Freedom of expression and freedom of association are each found to have an inverted curvilinear relationship with corruption[5]. That said, electoral quality consistently has a negative linear effect, suggesting that electoral accountability plays a strong role in mitigating corruption. Moreover, the evidence shows that judicial and legislative constraints each have a negative linear effect on corruption, specifically corruption on the part of the executive. Taken together, the evidence suggests that when all components of democracy are strong, corruption is likely to be quite low (McMann et al., 2020, 905).

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that measuring corruption is challenging and existing measures are imperfect, such that inferences about democracy's relationship to corruption should be treated with some caution (Treisman, 2015). The issue of reverse causality is an additional methodological challenge in this literature, given the possibility that corruption influences a country's chance of and experience with democracy.

DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

- Democracies tend to be better at avoiding economic crises, but current literature suggests a weak relationship between democracy and economic growth
- Studies that show democratic transitions improve economic outcomes attribute this impact to various factors: economic reforms, improved fiscal capacity, better social (education and health) outcomes, and increased foreign aid
- The impact of democratization on economic outcomes also varies by region

The relationship between democracy and economic growth remains contested, with mixed findings largely a result of the data used, sample selection, and statistical modeling choices (Colagrossi, Rossignoli, and Maggioni, 2020; Knutsen, 2021). That said, there is no evidence in recent literature that democracy is harmful for economic growth; studies either find that democracy has no clear effect on growth or that the effect is positive. To summarize the current state of the literature: a conservative approach would put forth that the relationship between democracy and growth is not strong, but a positive relationship is "our 'best guess'" (Knutsen, 2021, 1509).

The most influential study suggesting democracy is good for growth is by Acemoglu et al. (originally circulated in 2014 but published in 2019). The authors find that democratic transitions increase GDP per capita by 20 percent in the 25 years that follow. They suggest that the positive gains of democratization

[5]An inverted curvilinear relationship is an inverted U shape. This implies an initial positive association between corruption and freedom of expression. However, as freedom of expression increases, corruption reaches a plateau and then begins to decrease.

are due to the economic reforms, improved fiscal capacity, and better education and health outcomes that come with democracy.

Other research offers a more complicated portrait, however. Hariri (2016), for example, shows that democratization is associated with growth because of foreign aid. Influxes of foreign aid following democratic transitions push democratizing countries on a path towards greater growth, suggesting that the boost in growth triggered by democratization comes not from democratic institutions but from the tendency of aid allocations to increase in such contexts.

Ruiz Pozuelo, Slipowitz, and Vultein (2016) also challenge Acemoglu et al.'s findings, suggesting that that they do not properly account for endogeneity: given that countries are more likely to undergo a transition from autocracy to democracy when they are experiencing economic crisis, it is difficult to ascertain the direction of causality. Once this endogeneity concern is properly accounted for, the authors do not find any positive effects of democracy on economic growth.

That said, in their meta-analysis of recent literature, Colagrossi, Rossignoli, and Maggioni (2020) find that there is a positive and direct effect of democracy on growth. There are also regional differences in the relationships unearthed, with studies particularly likely to find a positive impact of democracy on growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, but less so in South Asia, suggesting that the relationship between democracy and growth may vary depending on context.

Looking at the variance of economic growth rates, there is far more consensus and a clearer message. Recent research shows that democracy is a safer and less risky economic bet than autocracy (Varieties of Democracy, 2021a). Democracies have less variance in their economic performance than autocracies do and are better at averting economic crisis (Knutsen, 2020). In this way, democracy offers citizens a valuable "economic safety-net," by protecting them from economic disasters (Knutsen, 2020, 19).

DEMOCRACY AND CONFLICT

- Literature on the relationship between democracy and conflict since 2013 is consistent with previous literature that democracies do not engage in war with other democracies
- Countries transitioning from autocracy to democracy or falling in the middle of the autocracy-democracy spectrum increases the likelihood of civil war and terrorism

The relationship between democracy and conflict is complex and multi-faceted, but many findings in the literature remain unchanged. Democracies and autocracies fight wars with one another, as do autocracies with other autocracies. Democracies, however, do not fight wars with other democracies. This implies that more democracy in the world would be associated with more peace (Varieties of Democracy, 2021d). A higher concentration of democracies within a region is also valuable: being in a region with high (as opposed to low) levels of democracy decreases the likelihood a pair of states will engage in armed conflict by around 70% (Altman et al., 2020).

Democracies are also less likely to fight civil wars than are dictatorships, but transitions from autocracy to greater democracy elevate chances of civil war, as does falling in the "middle" of the autocracy-democracy political spectrum (Varieties of Democracy, 2021d). That said, empirical findings in this particular area of research are often unclear (Jones and Lupu, 2018). See USAID's Theories of

Democratic Change Phase III: Transitions from Conflict (Dresden, Flores, and Nooruddin, 2019) for a thorough evaluation of this literature.

Adding further complexity, new research finds that different components of democracy work together to influence civil war risk (Fjelde, Knutsen, and Nygard, 2020). Specifically, executive constraints are particularly valuable for reducing civil war risk. When countries feature executive constraints and mechanisms for vertical accountability (as measured by free and fair elections and freedom of expression) together, the risk of civil war is virtually nonexistent. As such, at the highest levels of democracy, civil war onset is unlikely. That said, vertical accountability only lessens the chance of civil war when executive constraints are high.

Earlier research suggested that democracies were more likely to experience terrorism than autocracies, but new research has revealed a more nuanced relationship: terrorism is more likely in political systems that are neither fully democratic nor fully autocratic (Jones and Lupu, 2018).

DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

- Democracies offer more media freedom than autocracies, both in terms of availability and access
- Excluded groups in all political systems face at least some lack of access due to digital discrimination, but this is more prevalent in autocracies than democracies

Research shows that democracies have a sizeable advantage over autocracies in terms of media freedom, with respect to both the flow of information and the ability of citizens to access it. Stier (2015), for example, shows that democracies have significantly greater media freedom than do autocracies. Among the latter, electoral autocracies, monarchies, and military dictatorships have the freest media, communist dictatorships have the most restricted, and personalist and non-ideological one-party dictatorship are in the middle.

Looking to new media technologies, Internet penetration continues to be substantially higher in democracies than autocracies (Varieties of Democracy, 2022a). While all political systems offer less Internet access to excluded ethnic groups than to the rest of the population, this sort of digital discrimination is far more serious in autocracies than in democracies (Weidmann et al., 2016). Authoritarians not only give citizens of all stripes less access to the Internet, but they also interfere with media flows, frequently engaging in cyberattacks and restricting Internet access altogether, particularly at the time of elections (Lutscher et al., 2020).

What does recent academic literature say about the effectiveness of democracy promotion by USAID and other donors? Does it support the case for democracy promotion in terms of consolidating democratic regimes, preventing democratic backsliding, and strengthening democratic institutions, systems, and processes?

- Strategies for democracy promotion should be context dependent
- The effectiveness of democracy promotion is contested in current literature, with some scholars arguing external aid contributes to authoritarian regime stability by decreasing the need for public

accountability and others asserting that strategic allocations can improve human rights and democracy in some instances.

- Many factors are attributed to potentially mitigating or increasing the effectiveness of external aid for democracy promotion, including the influence of the PRC (particularly in Africa), the size of the recipient's military, and the timing of aid (during the time of a country's democratization)

The bulk of the literature devoted to the effectiveness of external efforts to improve the quality of democracy looks at foreign assistance broadly speaking, with far fewer studies examining the impact of democracy promotion support specifically. This limitation should be kept in mind when drawing inferences from the findings in the research. Note that the terminology used in what follows (e.g., aid versus assistance, democracy support versus foreign aid) mirrors what was used in the research reviewed.

Scholars continue to debate the effectiveness of external efforts to improve the quality of democracy (see Kendall-Taylor, Lindstaedt, and Frantz (2019) for a review of this literature). Some evidence suggests such efforts have little positive effect on democracy and may even help keep authoritarian incumbents in power. As several recent studies have documented, aid recipients in many instances have used aid allocations for their own purposes, directing it to their support groups instead of using it for political reform or even distributing it to elites to stash in offshore bank accounts (Briggs, 2014; Andersen, Johannesen, and Rijkers, 2022). Scholars have suggested that, in this way, aid serves a similar function for developing countries as other non-fiscal resources, such as oil revenues (Morrison, 2014), such that it contributes to authoritarian regime stability by lowering the government's need to tax and be accountable to citizens.

Other recent work, however, has challenged this perspective. One study asserts that the pro-incumbent effects of aid are only apparent in the Cold War period: geo-political changes since the end of the Cold War altered the effect of aid on democracy in ways that foster democratization (Bermeo, S.B., 2016). Because donor preferences for democracy rose in the post-Cold War period, there are more restrictions on how governments must spend allocations. That said, for a number of authoritarian regimes of strategic importance – specifically those that are top recipients of U.S. military aid (which is not a component of most aid measures) – aid continues to prevent democratization, given the absence of genuine pressures for reform in those contexts.

Carnegie and Marinov (2018) also find that aid can have a positive impact on democracy. Leveraging a methodological approach that accounts for the fact that donors are strategic in their allocations of aid, this research reveals that "shock" influxes of aid lead to improvements in human rights (immediately) and democracy (after a delay). Short-term bursts of aid (which, the research reports, are common) have a positive impact on human rights and democracy by increasing donor's leverage over recipient states. These positive effects, however, are also short term, suggesting that providing sustained aid allocations – should recipient improvements be sustained – would encourage longer-lasting reforms.

Some research – looking at the efficacy of aid to Africa – has suggested that the positive impact of development aid on fostering democracy diminished since the PRC became an alternative source of foreign assistance (Li, 2017). Other research contests this finding, however, indicating that if the impact was limited, it was due not to the PRC but other factors instead (Hackenesch, 2018). Understanding of

the impact of the PRC on the effectiveness of foreign aid programs is therefore inconclusive (Hackenesch, 2019).

Taken together, the overall portrait to emerge is that the efficacy of external efforts to improve the quality of democracy is context dependent, varying based on factors such as the type of aid, the time-period and timeframe under analysis, and the targets of such efforts. This suggests that a one-size-fits-all democracy promotion strategy is unlikely to be effective, as practitioners increasingly recognize (Carothers, 2016), For this reason, despite concerns among some in the field that aid is an ineffective democracy promotion tool, many others suggest that donors should not abandon support for such efforts, as researchers work to better understand the nuances of the aid-democracy relationship (Evans and van de Walle, 2019).

To summarize, external efforts can have a positive effect on democracy, under certain conditions, many of which have emerged in recent literature. Relevant new research is discussed below.

TYPE OF AID

- Recent research discussed below highlights two domains of aid and two strategies that are effective for political liberalization: democracy aid, technical assistance, civic education, and community electoral insecurity warning
- Democracy aid, which targets civil society, free media, and human rights, primarily leads to political liberalization by encouraging multi-party politics and electoral accountability
- Technical assistance with elections improves election quality, strengthens electoral institutions, and decreases electoral violence, but research suggests this effect is short-term
- Investments in civic education and town hall programs improve civic participation and decrease sensitivity to voter intimidation

One of the strongest messages to emerge in the field is that the type of aid matters: democracy aid (as opposed to development aid or foreign aid more broadly) is what supports democracy building (Gisselquist, Nino-Zarazua, and Samarin, 2021). [6] Dietrich and Wright (2015), for example, show that in Africa economic aid increases the chance that countries will adopt multiparty politics but does not influence the survival of such systems. Democracy aid, by contrast, does not influence whether countries will transition to a multi-party system but does influence the system's survival. It does so by decreasing the chance of electoral misconduct. That said, neither economic nor democracy aid influence the competitiveness of the opposition, which is a necessary condition to see alternation in power. This implies that democracy aid primarily leads to political liberalization by encouraging multi-party politics, albeit in ways that do not threaten incumbent governments (and therefore do not lead to democratization in a meaningful sense). This is an important distinction given research indicating that in many African governments, the transition to multi-partyism had little effect on improving governance (Bleck and van de Walle, 2018).

[6] The bulk of the studies Gisselquist, Nino-Zarazua, and Samarin (2021) reviewed did not look at specific types of targets and instead were cross-national.

This finding – that democracy aid at least modestly increases the quality of democracy – is consistent with research examining the impact of Swedish and other international aid (Nino-Zarazua et al., 2020). This research finds that democracy aid – which targets civil society, free media, and human rights – is most effective at fostering democracy. Its impact appears to be greater with respect to fostering increases in levels of democracy than at preventing democracy from declining. Likewise, it must be stable and steady to exert an impact; volatile flows are not found to be effective for improving the quality of political institutions (Jones and Tarp, 2016).

Democracy aid is also shown to improve electoral accountability. Economic voting – an indicator of citizens holding governments accountable for observed performance – is more likely when states received democracy aid. This suggests that "not only does democracy aid work, but it works for the 'right' reasons" (Heinrich and Loftis, 2019, 156).

Technical assistance – which refers to donor funded personnel to help with training locals or filling in areas where domestic actors/institutions/organizations need assistance – also has a positive effect on political liberalization (Gibson, Hoffman, and Jablonski, 2015). This helps explain why aid was ineffective at fostering democratization during the Cold War (when it was available for use for patronage purposes), but effective after its end (when it primarily came in the form of technical assistance). This finding is consistent with more recent research, which shows that technical assistance with elections is valuable for improving election quality (von Borzyskowski, 2019). It helps strengthen electoral institutions, improve the credibility of elections, and lessen electoral violence. Though aid spending for election support has a positive impact on election quality, some research finds that it is short-run effect and small in size (Uberti and Jackson, 2020). This research indicates that returns to aid investments diminish over time and are lower when allocated toward more developed economies.

Research also evaluates the impact of two specific types of democracy promotion strategies: civic education and town halls and community electoral insecurity warning systems (Mvukiyehe and Samii, 2017). Using evidence from Liberia, it finds that civic education and town hall programs have a sizeable effect on civic participation and can shift voters toward national (as opposed to parochial) candidates; they also improve voters' sensitivity to voter intimidation. Electoral insecurity warning systems, by contrast, had less noticeable effects but did modestly reduce parochial voting.

AID TIMING

There is evidence that foreign aid allocations at the time of democratization – regardless of whether the transition from authoritarianism to democracy is measured in loose or strict terms – improve economic growth (Hariri, 2016). Though this research did not explore the consequences of this for democratic consolidation, it implies – given the correlation between economic development and democratic survival (Treisman, 2020) – that allocations of foreign aid at the time of democratization may strengthen democracy by increasing the robustness of the economy.

Note that aid allocated at the time of democratization has other positive effects, as well, in light of early literature showing that where democratizing states receive substantial democracy aid the chance of civil conflict is lower (Savun and Tirone, 2011).

AID CONDITIONALITY

Recent research looks at the impact of foreign aid – conditioned on reforms in participative processes and government accountability – on levels of democracy (Birchler, Limpach, and Michaelowa, 2016). Using evidence from World Bank and International Monetary Fund lending programs, it finds that aid linked to those conditions is effective at fostering increases in levels of democracy. The argument is that where aid is fungible, authoritarian regimes can use it for their own goals; fungibility decreases, however, when conditionality relates to more inclusive and transparent decision-making processes and improved government accountability mechanisms.

ATTRIBUTES OF DONORS AND TARGET COUNTRIES

Research finds that democracy aid is more effective in improving democracy when it comes from a larger set of donors (Ziaja, 2020). Having a large number of donors is usually thought to be ineffective for promoting democracy, but this study suggests that such fragmented democracy aid can be helpful. When there are more donors there are more ideas, such that local actors playing a role in democratization have more choices available to them. This creates a market of ideas that is more adaptable to the needs of the recipient country. This study implies that, "The practice by some donors, such as the United States and Germany, of distributing democracy aid via various agencies and political foundations may actually be more effective because of their internal diversity" (p. 445).

Research also indicates that attributes of the targeted country – specifically the size of its military – impact the efficacy of democracy assistance for promoting democracy (Stasavage, 2017). Data on USAID democracy promotion activities indicate that the effect of democracy assistance is limited where recipient militaries are large, as militaries are better able to use repression to stifle pressures for political liberalization. Where recipient militaries are small, however, democracy assistance is more likely to lead to political liberalization.

DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AND OTHER OUTCOMES

- Democracy promotion is effective in sustaining peace in post-conflict countries, promoting judicial independence, maintaining institutions that support democracy
- Democracy promotion branding and remittances also have a positive impact on democracy

Though not directly related to this sub-question, new research confirms earlier findings that democracy support can stabilize peace in post-conflict states. Looking at post-civil war peace episodes, one study finds that external support for politics and governance – e.g., assistance with elections, technical state capacity, human rights, and civil rights – was a key factor shared among peaceful cases (Mross, Fiedler, Gravingholt, 2022). Additional research shows that democracy aid – particularly support that fosters "controlled competition" (where there is substantial combined support for institutional constraints and competition) – helps prevent conflict resurgence in post-conflict democratization processes, at least during the first five post-conflict years (Mross, 2021). Importantly, democracy support is not associated with renewed violence. This implies that democracy support in post-conflict areas is important for sustaining peace.

Democracy aid is also found in certain conditions to be effective at promoting judicial independence – a factor important to preserving the quality of democracy, though not directly a measure of it. Research shows that democracy aid is more likely to improve judicial autonomy in low-capacity states as opposed

to high-capacity states (Ariotti, Dietrich, and Wright, 2021). The argument is that low-capacity states are fertile grounds for the successful implementation of donor programs that strengthen judicial independence because recipient governments face substantial pressures to develop judicial independence as a means of attracting external revenues to fulfill budgetary needs.

Other research examines the impact of democracy aid on protection of presidential term limits specifically (Nowack and Leininger, 2021), which can play a role in constraining executive powers if not democracy directly. It finds that democracy aid (even in moderate amounts) was effective in the post-Cold War era of countering efforts to evade term limits in Africa and Latin America. Democracy aid is not as effective, however, at preventing presidents from trying to evade term limits. The results suggest that targeted aid – democracy aid in particular – can be helpful in the maintenance of institutions important for democracy.

Recent research also speaks to the value of democracy promotion branding. Looking specifically at the experience of a network of health clinics in Bangladesh partially funded by USAID, research examined the impact of the project being marked with the USAID logo (Dietrich, Mahmud, and Winters, 2018). It found that the logo itself was ineffective at communicating information about US sponsorship to local communities. Once the US financing role was made explicit, however, local communities were found to view the US in a more positive light than those that were not aware of the US role. Moreover, information regarding donor financing improved respondents' perception of their local government.

Though somewhat unrelated, there is also new research illustrating that remittances have a positive impact on democracy (discussed in greater detail below), particularly in terms of increasing the chance of democratic transition, which holds potential for new pathways for promoting democracy (Escriba-Folch, Wright, and Meseguer, 2022).

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: HOW HAS THE GLOBAL CONTEXT FOR DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNANCE PROMOTION CHANGED SINCE 2013 AND WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT EMERGING DRG TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES?

What trends do global democracy indices (such as V-Dem and other third-party indices) depict over the period from 2013 till 2021? Are there common geo-political or regional patterns? Are there factors that present unique challenges for democracy promotion? What are the key messages to emerge from these trends for democracy promotion efforts? To the extent that 2021 data is available, is there any change in these trends over the past year?

- From 2013 to 2020, primarily low-income countries had democratic gains while primarily middle-income countries had democratic declines
- Sub-Saharan Africa experienced the most declines, as well as the most increases, in democracy during this period
- In a trend that has become more prevalent since 2013, democracies most commonly collapse when elected leaders erode executive constraints to push their countries towards authoritarianism

- The path to democratization continues to be through elections in which authoritarian incumbents lose or choose not to run in

By major indicators, levels of democracy declined from 2013 to 2020, though the decline at the global level is subtle. (Note that data for 2021 are not yet available.) Some declines occurred in places that were already autocratic, but most occurred in democracies. Among those democracies that declined between 2013 and 2020, the majority remained intact and did not collapse to authoritarianism.

While the countries with democratic gains during the period were primarily low income (with a typical GDP per capita of less than $1,000), those with democratic declines were primarily middle income (with a typical GDP per capita of more than $4,000). This suggests that moderate levels of per capita wealth no longer provide democracy with the sort of resilience to backsliding that has been typical.

Sizable democratic losses outnumbered sizable democratic gains, but improvements in democracy occurred in a number of countries during the period, such as the Gambia, Madagascar, and Fiji. Though Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the most declines in democracy, it is also the region with the most increases, and – in fact – its increases outnumbered its declines.

Democracies continue to outnumber autocracies by a fairly large margin, and transitions to democracy still outpace transitions to authoritarianism. The rate at which democratic transitions are outpacing transitions to authoritarianism is declining, however. Moreover, many of the world's most populous countries are autocratic, including Russia and the People's Republic of China.

The mode of democratic collapse has continued to change since 2013, picking up on a trend that began at the turn of the century. Whereas coups used to be the primary way that democracies fell apart, incumbent takeovers (also referred to as authoritarianizations) have now surpassed them. The data show that today's democracies are most commonly dismantled from within, with democratically elected leaders getting rid of constraints on their rule to push the countries they lead to authoritarianism.

The most common pathway for democratization did not change during the period. It continues to be via elections that authoritarian incumbents lose or choose not to run in. In general, however, elections in dictatorships are associated with long-term authoritarian stability.

MEASURING DEMOCRACY

- Measures of democracy fall into two categories: continuous and categorical
- Continuous measures of democracy are used in studies exploring the quality of democracy, i.e., political liberalization or democratic backsliding
  - Most of these studies use data from the Varieties of Democracy electoral democracy index
- Categorical measures of democracy rely on binary classifications of whether free and fair elections were used to select leadership and are used in studies looking at regime change, i.e., democratization or democratic collapse

There are a variety of approaches to measuring democracy used in the literature, each with their advantages and drawbacks. They fall into two categories: continuous and categorical. Continuous

measures of democracy place political systems on a linear continuum of democratic-ness. They are preferable in studies seeking to capture whether a country's political system has improved or declined in terms of the quality of its democracy, as with research on political liberalization or democratic backsliding. Until recently, most researchers used combined Polity scores to measure democracy in this way, provided by the Center for Systemic Peace's Polity Project. This project has stopped providing regular updates to its data, however, due to funding issues.[7] Today most studies instead use data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-dem 11.1) (Coppedge et al., 2021), which offers an electoral democracy index (in addition to other related indices). The electoral democracy index primarily is based on the extent to which free and fair elections are used to select the leadership, freedom of association, and freedom of expression.

Categorical approaches to measuring democracy, by contrast, classify political systems according to whether they are democratic or authoritarian. They typically base this classification on a minimalist definition of democracy, focusing on whether free and fair elections are used to select the leadership. Transitions to (or from) democracy are therefore captured by an event that transpires (rather than movement past (or away from) a predetermined cutoff point, as with most continuous measures). This approach is preferable in studies seeking to measure regime transitions, as with research on democratic collapse or democratization. One of the more common sources of categorical data on democracy is from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). These data run through 2010 and were updated by Frantz through 2020.

Evaluating trends over time using both continuous and categorical measures of democracy can offer important insight into contemporary political dynamics. In the figures that follow, the gold vertical lines represent the year 2013.

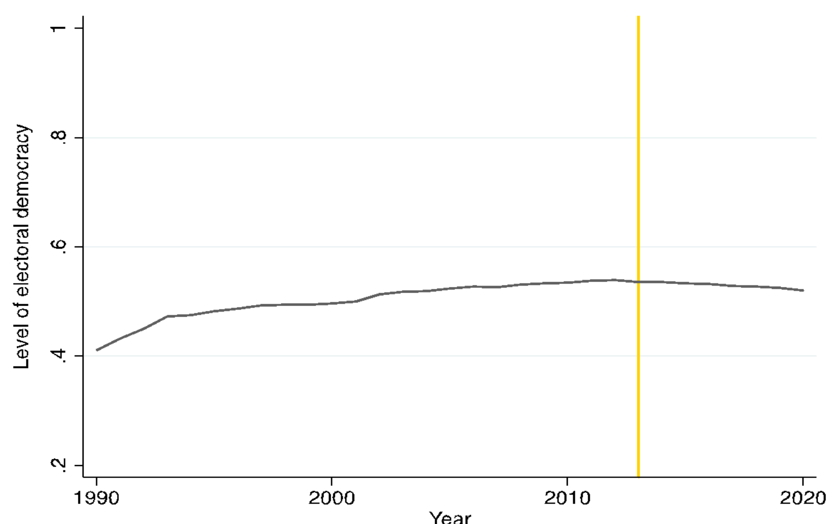
TRENDS IN LEVELS OF DEMOCRACY

- As of 2020, there were 89 democracies in power, 55 autocracies, and 5 failed states, compared to 2013, where there were 88 democracies in power, 59 autocracies, and 2 failed states
- From 2013 to 2020, the global decline in democracy has been slight, with declines primarily driven by democracies backsliding but remaining intact.
- Democratic gains primarily occurred in low-income countries, while democratic losses mainly occurred in middle-income countries
- Freedom of expression and freedom of association, two of three key components of the electoral democracy index, declined in countries classified as democratic in 2013 but remained steady in those considered authoritarian
- From 2013 to 2020, moderate increases in repression were more common than decreases

Figure 1 offers trends in levels of democracy over time, as measured by the Varieties of Democracy's electoral democracy index (V-dem 11.1, 2021). Note that the patterns shown here are nearly the same when looking at the Varieties of Democracy's liberal democracy index instead.

[7] See "Research and Development," Center for Systemic Peace, https://www.systemicpeace.org/csprandd.html (accessed April 7, 2022).

Figure 1: Electoral democracy over time



The graph shows that global levels of electoral democracy began to slowly decline, starting in 2013. They are currently back to their levels around 2004. The global decrease since 2013 is fairly slight, however. The average democracy level was .54 in 2013 and declined only to .52 in 2020. Compare this to the average in 1992, which was .45. That said big gains in democracy were outnumbered by big losses.

The biggest democracy gains (increases of .2 or more) from 2013 to 2020 were nearly all in countries that were authoritarian but transitioned to democracy during the period: Armenia, Guinea-Bissau, the Gambia, Madagascar, and Fiji. Democratic gains were also seen in Nepal, which was already democratic at the start of the period but improved the quality of its democracy during it. None of the largest gains were in countries that remained authoritarian.

The biggest democracy losses (decreases of .2 or more) from 2013 to 2020 were nearly all in countries that were democratic as of 2013. In most instances, democracy collapsed to authoritarianism (Bolivia, Hungary, Turkey, Comoros, and Thailand), but in some instances it remained weakened but intact (Poland, India). In two cases, non-democracies experienced large declines (Libya, Yemen).

Looking at moderate democracy gains (increases of .1 or more) from 2013 to 2020, the majority (47%) occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with a third (33%) in Asia and the Pacific, and a fifth (20%) in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The median per capita income of these countries was $781, suggesting that gains primarily occurred in low-income contexts. Importantly in only two instances did the country experience gains but remain authoritarian (Central African Republic and Ethiopia), suggesting the gains led to genuine improvements in democraticness.

Looking at moderate democracy losses (decreases of .1 or more) from 2013 to 2020, again the losses outnumber the gains. There is quite a bit of regional variation here. Though SSA represented the most (36%), Eastern Europe and Central Asia and Asia and the Pacific each experienced 18%, and Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) each experienced 15%.

Importantly, the median per capita income of these countries was $4,028, suggesting that they occurred in middle income contexts, which are traditionally more robust to backsliding.[8]

Only a minority (28%) of democracy losses occurred in countries considered authoritarian as of 2013, suggesting that entrenchment of authoritarianism is not driving the trend, but rather backsliding in democracies, which a majority of the time (64%) did not lead to collapse.

Taken together, the data suggest that the global trend of democratic decline is really a story of democracies backsliding but remaining intact. It is important to remember, however that once backsliding has started, it is difficult to reverse (Boese, et al., 2021). As such, we may see a rise in new dictatorships in the years to come.

Figure 2: Electoral democracy by region over time

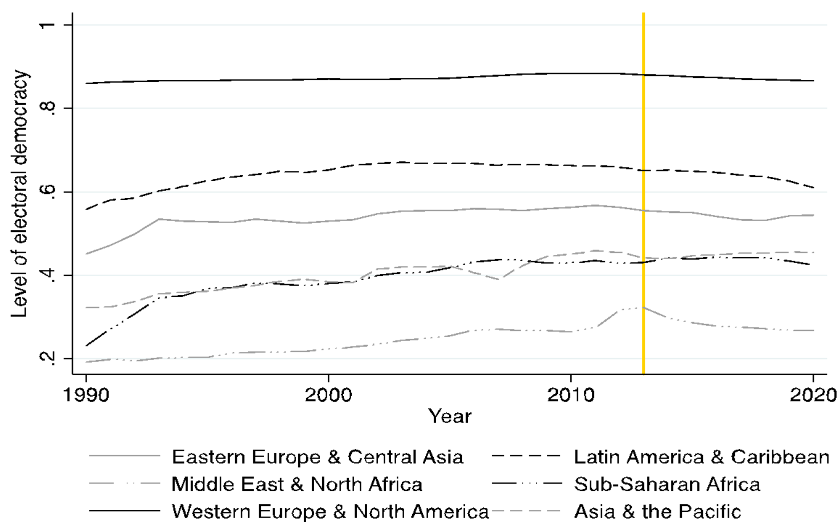


Figure 2 offers regional trends. It shows that Western Europe and North America have had the steadiest electoral democracy levels. Electoral democracy has also been fairly steady in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Since 2013, we have seen declines in MENA and Latin American and the Caribbean. Electoral democracy levels have risen since 2013, however, in Asia and the Pacific. SSA has seen a slight decline in the past few years.

[8] Data on income come from the World Development Indicators (2021), measured as GDP per capita in constant 2010 USD.

Figure 3: Electoral democracy by income level over time

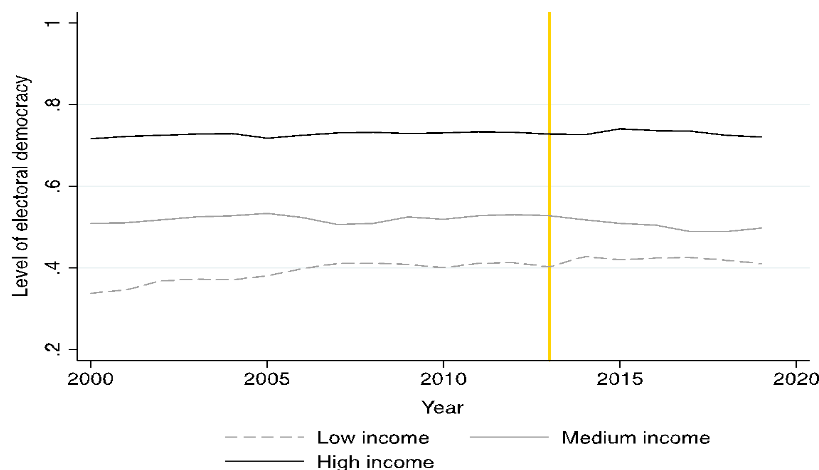


Figure 3 shows patterns based on income level (measured by GDP per capita), with low income referencing the lowest quartile of GDP; high income referencing the highest; and medium income referencing everything in between. The data indicate that declines in electoral democracy are driven by middle income countries, which started to decline in 2013 but began to rebound in 2019. The highest income countries also contributed to declines, starting in 2016. The low-income countries do not appear to have contributed to the decline, though they too started to deteriorate in 2018.

Figure 4: Disaggregating Electoral Democracy

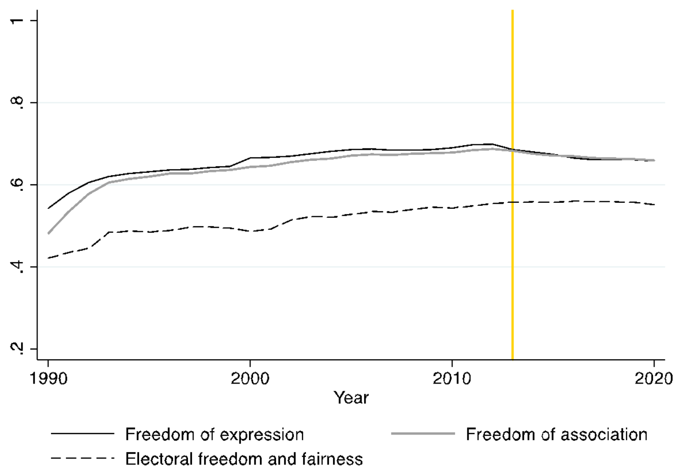


Figure 4 breaks down the three key components of the electoral democracy index: freedom of expression, freedom of association, and electoral freedom and fairness. It reveals that freedoms of expression and association started to steadily decline, starting in 2013.

If we compare freedom of expression in 2020 with its level in 2013, declines were more numerous than improvements. The region with the most countries with gains was Asia and the Pacific, followed by SSA (63% of countries with gains were in those two regions). Declines were not restricted to any particular region. These same patterns hold when looking at freedom of association, except that countries with declines were more frequently from SSA (with MENA and Asia and the Pacific not too far behind).

Electoral freedom and fairness, however, does not appear to have changed too much since 2013. This suggests that the overall declines in electoral democracy captured above are being driven by declines in freedoms of expression and association, not necessarily by declines in electoral integrity.

Moreover, the data show that freedom of expression and freedom of association declined in those countries considered democratic in 2013 but remained steady in those considered authoritarian. This suggests that the aggregate declines in democracy that appear in the data (shown in Figure 1) are primarily occurring due to decreases in freedoms of expression and association in democracies.

Figure 5: Freedom of expression by income level over time

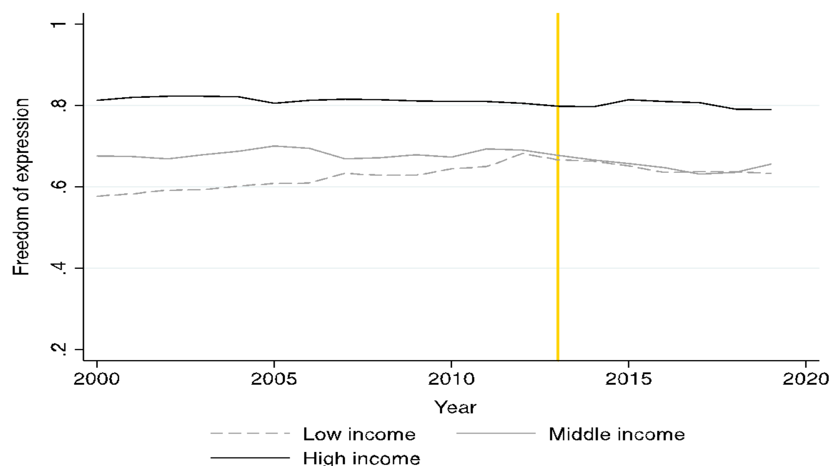


Figure 5 looks at trends over time in freedom of expression based on levels of income (patterns are similar when looking at freedom of association instead). It shows that declines occurred in the middle-income and low-income countries, but the middle-income countries began to rebound in 2018, the same year that the high-income countries started to decline. Looking at country changes from 2013 to 2020, the average level of per capita wealth is about the same in the countries experiencing improvements as in the countries experiencing declines.

TRENDS IN REPRESSION

Figure 6: Repression of physical integrity rights over time (government-sponsored political torture and killings)

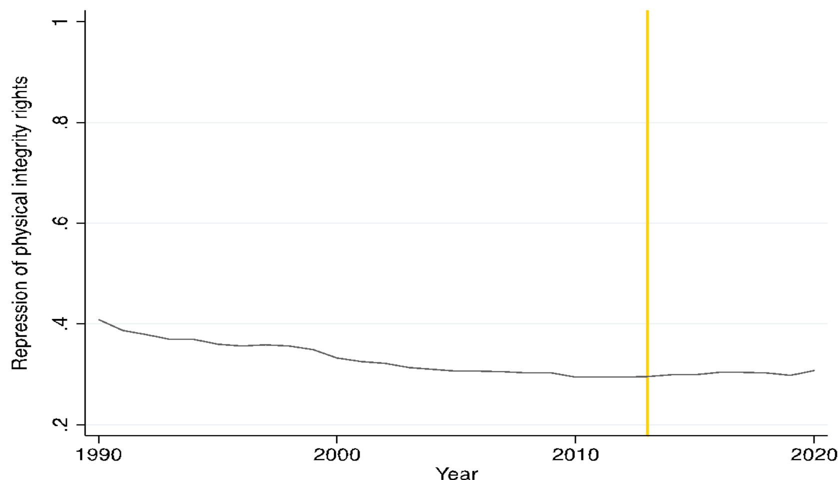


Figure 6 shows trends over time in repression, using the Varieties of Democracy's physical violence index. It reveals that repression of physical integrity rights – or government-sponsored political torture and killings – remained steady since 2013, with a slight uptick in 2020. Comparing countries from 2013 to 2020, the data show that moderate increases in repression were more common than decreases, however.

Figure 7: Repression of physical integrity rights by region over time (government-sponsored political torture and killings)

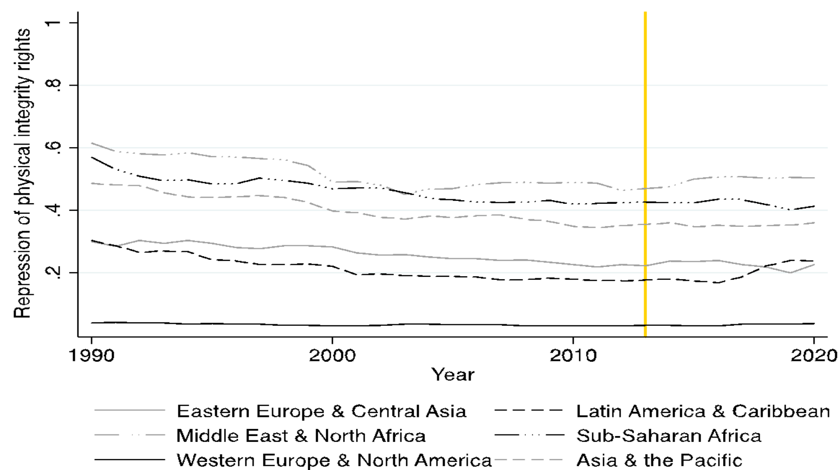


Figure 7 disaggregates the repression data by region. It shows that repression of physical integrity rights since 2013 got worse (though remained steady) in MENA, improved in SSA, maintained steady in Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (for the most part) and in Western Europe and North America (though the latter increased slightly), and got a lot worse in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Regionally, if we compare countries from 2013 to 2020, moderate increases in repression were predominately in Latin America and the Caribbean and SSA (representing 60% of countries with increases). The bulk of the moderate reductions in repression were in countries in SSA (60%). This suggests that countries with moderate increases in repression were less numerous than those with moderate decreases in SSA.

Figure 8: Repression of physical integrity rights by income over time (government-sponsored political torture and killings)

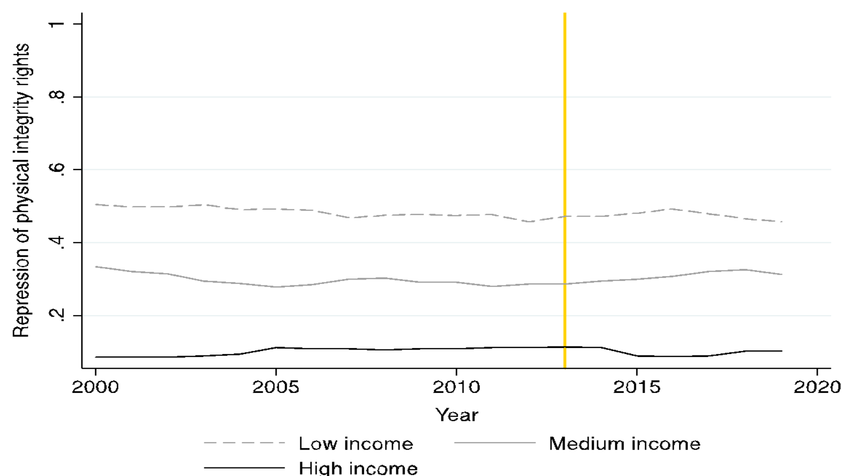


Figure 8 breaks down the repression data based on income levels. Among high income states, repression of physical integrity got better starting in 2015, but then worsened in 2018; among medium income states, it got worse since 2013; among low-income states it also worsened since 2013, but started to improve beginning in 2017.

Among countries experiencing moderate increases in repression from 2013 to 2020, the level of per capita wealth was mid-range ($2,855). Interestingly, the level of per capita wealth among those countries where repression moderately improved was quite a bit lower ($1,476).

TRENDS IN DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP

Figure 9: Number of democracies and dictatorships in power

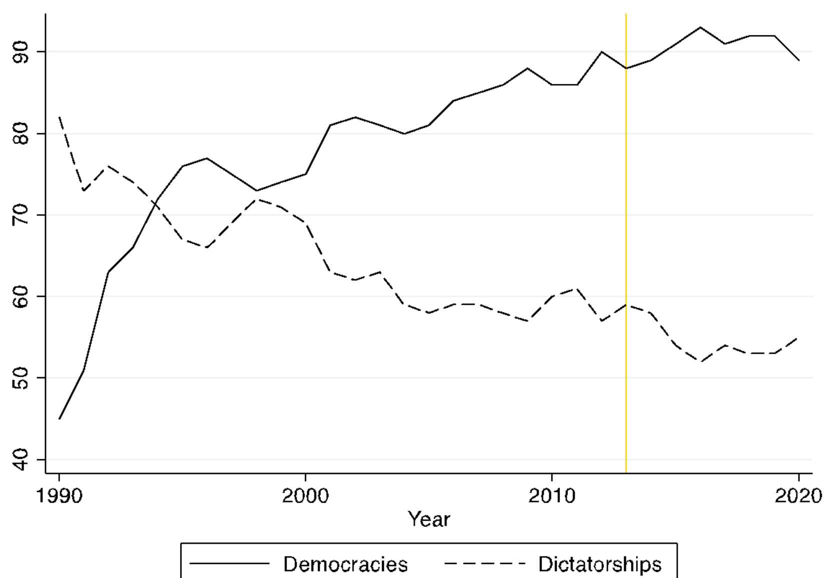


Figure 9 displays the number of democracies and dictatorships in power over time, using data by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). As of 2020, there were 89 democracies in power and 55 autocracies. The number of dictatorships steadily declined from 2013 to 2016 (from 59 to 52) but increased starting in 2017. Though democracies outnumber autocracies, many of the world's largest countries in terms of population size are autocratic, including Russia and the People's Republic of China.

In 2020, none of the world's dictatorships were in Western Europe and North America, 7% were in Latin America and the Caribbean, 16% were in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 16% were in Asia and the Pacific, 21% were in MENA, and 39% were in SSA. Put differently, 66% of countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia were democratic in 2020 (no change since 2013), 80% of Latin America and the Caribbean (a 10% decrease since 2013), 24% of MENA (a 5% decrease since 2013), 44% of SSA (a 9% increase since 2013), all of Western Europe and North America (no change since 2013), and half of Asia and the Pacific (no change since 2013). Thus, though SSA has more of the world's dictatorships than any other region, it also appears to be experiencing the most gains in terms of democracy. Democratic transitions occurred in the Gambia and Madagascar, for example, albeit with renewed authoritarianism in Benin). Latin America and the Caribbean by contrast is a region well represented by democracies, but one that may be experiencing challenges to democracy, as exemplified by developments in El Salvador and Nicaragua during the period.

Democratizations outpaced transitions to authoritarianism during the period. In total, nine countries that were democratic in 2013 were authoritarian by 2020, compared to ten countries that were authoritarian in 2013 but considered democratic by 2020. That said, the rapid pace of democratizations that followed the end of the Cold War has decelerated. From 1991 to 2000, for example, there were 38 instances of democratization, compared to 13 instances of transition to dictatorship. The data therefore

suggest that the rate at which democratic transitions are outpacing transitions to authoritarianism is declining.

Figure 10: How democracies collapse to dictatorship

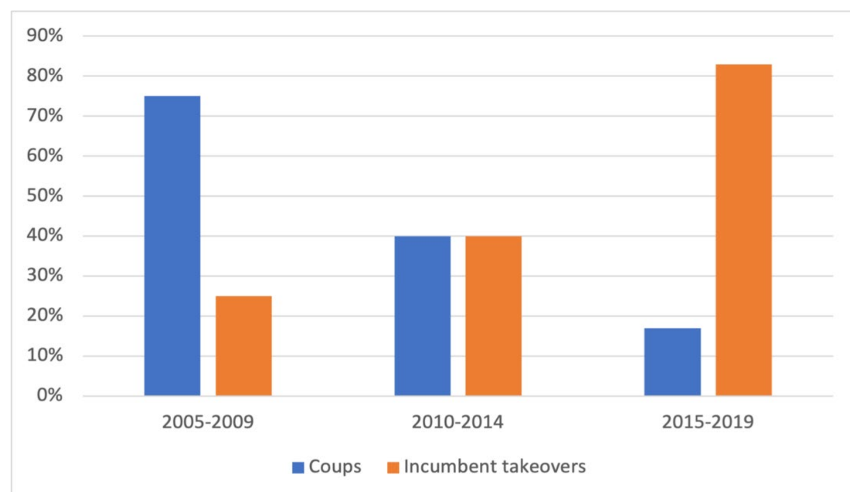


Figure 10 offers data on how democracies collapse to dictatorship (as offered by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, 2014). It shows that in the 1990s, as was true in the Cold War era, coups were a more common method to topple democracies than incumbent takeovers (also referred to as authoritarianizations). (Other forms of democratic collapse, such as rebellions or foreign invasions, are far less common and not shown here.)

From 2010 to 2014, just as many democracies were toppled by incumbent takeovers as were cut short by coups. Fast-forward to 2015 and the numbers start to differ, with the majority of democracies falling apart at the hands of incumbents and far less so via coup.

Importantly, even when the mode of democratic breakdown was a coup, executive efforts to get rid of constraints was often the cause – as exemplified in the coups that toppled democracy in Guinea in 2021 and Bolivia and 2019. In both of those instances, the democratically elected leader tried to extend their time in office and pursued other political moves that were threatening to democracy, prompting the military intervention.

The data therefore suggest that actions on the part of democratically-elected incumbents to reduce constraints on their rule are the key threat to democracy today.

Looking instead at how dictatorships transition to democracy, the data reveal that the most common pathway for democratization did not change during the period. It continues to be via elections that authoritarian incumbents lose or choose not to run in. Examples include the surprising loss of Mahinda Rajapaksa in Sri Lanka's 2015 elections ushering in a transition to democracy there, as well as free and fair elections in 2014 in Guinea Bissau that brought an end to a brief period of military rule.

It is important to remember, however, that while elections are frequently the mode through which authoritarian regimes transition to democracy, most authoritarians hold elections and most usually win

them. Elections in authoritarian regimes are associated with long-term regime stability (Knutsen, Nygard, & Wig, 2017).

Protests are the second most common way that authoritarian regimes transition to democracy. They do not rank higher despite the fact that they are increasingly a common mode of exit for authoritarian leaders because the leader's ouster may not immediately (or in some instances ever) give way to democratization.

Has the literature's findings regarding the critical factors important for democracy changed since 2013? Are there new factors associated with a higher likelihood of democracy today or that are shown to influence contemporary pathways of democratic decline? Do any create new opportunities for effective democracy promotion or should otherwise inform such efforts?

- Literature published since 2013 adds nuance to existing studies on democracy
- Democratic backsliding is a top-down process that begins with leaders eroding democratic and governance norms, and only one in five democracies avoids collapse once authoritarianism gains momentum
- While there is scant evidence suggesting that citizen support for democracy increases the likelihood of democratization, it can help sustain democracy
- Political polarization is seen as harmful to democracy because it incentivizes and is used to justify undermining democratic principles to maintain or win power
- Nonviolent protests movements were successful in promoting democratization in nearly every instance when they featured 250,000 or more participants with at least 50 percent female participation
- Expanded access to education can play a role in supporting democracy, and the positive effect of education on democracy is greater in less developed countries
- Ethnic divisions only harm democracy to the extent that they are politicized
- While economic development plays a critical role in sustaining democracy, economic inequality is harmful for the quality and longevity of democracy
- Dictatorships and autocracies with fewer regular elections and subnational elections are more vulnerable to democratization than those with fixed election cycles
- Remittances are shown to foster political liberalization by raising incomes across the national economy

The literature devoted to the factors that matter for democracy is extensive. In some instances, new research has not challenged pre-existing findings or settled debates, but in other instances it has offered fresh insight and/or nuance. This is particularly true with respect to research on democratic transitions, which is more robust than research on democratic decline (see Lust and Waldner (2015), Conroy-Krutz and Frantz (2017) and Kendall-Taylor, Lindstaedt, and Frantz (2019) for reviews). While researchers are

increasingly investigating the causes of democratic decline, efforts to explain it "remain inchoate" (Waldner and Lust, 2017, 94). That said, this literature is expanding remarkably fast.

One key message to emerge is that democratic backsliding today is typically a process driven from above (as discussed earlier), with incumbent leaders and elites leveraging political conditions in ways that deteriorate democracy (Bermeo, N., 2016; Svolik, 2019). New research shows that once this process starts, it is difficult to halt (Boese, et al., 2021). When movement to authoritarianism gains momentum, only one in five democracies avoids breakdown (the conditions for which are discussed in greater detail in the institutional subsection below).

These and other new contributions to our understanding of the critical factors for democracy are summarized below. To structure the discussion, these factors are divided into four broad categories: cultural and social, economic, institutional, and international.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS

Because culture tends to be static, it is challenging to identify it as a cause of democratic change in a country at a given time and – for this reason – many scholars see cultural explanations for democracy as too slow-moving to serve as explanatory factors (Conroy-Krutz and Frantz, 2017). In addition, recent research has questioned whether the survey-based measures commonly used in studies of culture's impact on democracy are valid methods for operationalizing key concepts (Lust and Waldner, 2015). New findings also suggest the casual arrow runs in the opposite direction, with pro-democratic cultural values being a product of democracy rather than a cause of it (Dahlum and Knutsen, 2017b). The body of recent literature therefore confirms earlier skepticism with respect to culture's impact on democracy.

That said, there is some evidence that factors at least somewhat related to culture – such as education and citizen support for democracy – do influence democracy, not in terms of fostering democratization but stabilizing democracy once it has emerged. These and other social factors are summarized below.

CITIZEN SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

A number of studies have examined how citizen support for democracy influences its viability. The latest research shows that citizen support for democracy is important for helping sustain democracy, but not for helping autocracies democratize (Claassen 2020a). We lack understanding, however, of exactly how support for democracy translates into greater democratic stability (Mattes, 2018). Complicating matters even more, new research also shows that support for democracy declines in the face of democratic gains and increases in the face of democratic losses (Claassen 2020b). The general message to emerge is that the relationship between citizen support for democracy and democratic viability is complex and not fully understood (Mattes, 2018).

For example, there is some evidence that citizen support for democracy is driven by elite cues: even when citizens report strong support for democracy, elite messaging can sway their opinions and move them in an anti-democratic direction (Fossati, Muhtadi, and Warburton, 2021). These findings are consistent with recent research suggesting that policy outcomes in democracies often do not reflect public preferences, which are easily exploited from the powerful above (Achen and Bartels, 2016).

To summarize, there is little evidence that citizen support for democracy increases the chance of democratization. Authoritarian regimes have many tools at their disposal to ensure their continued rule even in the face of strong citizen support for democracy. That said, citizen support for democracy does appear to help sustain democracy, though precisely how and why is unclear.

POLARIZATION

Political polarization is shown to be harmful to democracy according to a number of recent studies, particularly in terms of elevating the chance of democratic decline from within (see, for example, Svolik, 2019; Haggard and Kaufman, 2021; McCoy and Somer, 2021). The argument is that polarization gives voters incentive to accept the leadership's undermining of democracy in order to advance their partisan interests. As society's political divisions deepen, "political leaders and their supporters are incentivized to use any means available to win the struggle for power" (McCoy and Somer, 2021, p. 10). From this perspective, polarization is a societal factor that incumbent governments leverage to harm and dismantle democracy.

PROTESTS

Protests often do not bring about the downfall of authoritarian regimes, but they do create opportunities for political change that did not exist prior. Here, the conventional wisdom remains unchallenged. Protests can be destabilizing for authoritarians, with nonviolent campaigns more likely to result in democratization, but violent campaigns more likely to result in transition to new dictatorship (see Conroy and Krutz and Frantz (2017) for a review). Whether successful protests are violent is therefore of critical importance for prospects of democracy. Yet, scholars lack understanding of the conditions favorable to the onset of nonviolent protests. While there is some new evidence that protest movements with substantial involvement of students and graduates are less likely to turn violent (Dahlum, Forthcoming), most existing theories cannot explain nonviolent protests well (Chenoweth and Ulfelder, 2017).

New research has shed light on the nuances of protest dynamics in dictatorships, nonetheless.

One study, for example, looks at the pathways through which nonviolent protests can lead to democratization (Kim and Kroeger, 2019). It shows that nonviolent protests increase the chance of democratization both in the way that they elevate an authoritarian regime's risk of overthrow and coerce elites into adopting democratic reforms in the face of threats to the leader and regime's survival.

Other research shows that specific types of civil society participation influence whether protests are likely to be successful at fostering democratization (Pinckney, Butcher, and Braithwaite, 2022). It reveals that where civil society groups are both durable (as measured by their age) and not seeking political power themselves (meaning that they did not have a direct alliance with a political party), the chances of resistance episodes leading to democratization are higher. In such environments, groups are better able to hold elites accountable during the transition process, as opposed to where the movements are dominated by office-seeking organizations, such as political parties.

New research has also looked into how protests against dictatorships influence citizen attitudes toward the regime (Tertytchnaya and Lankina, 2019). Using evidence from Russia, it reveals that the early weeks of protest movements generally increase broader grievances with the regime, but exposure to regime

media coverage of protest events reduces support for the movement as do reports of state violence against protestors. Additional research (also using evidence from Russia) lends insight into which sectors of society are likely to join pro-democracy protests. It shows that state-sector employees are less likely to protest in response to electoral fraud (even when accounting for ideology) than are middle-class professionals and those from the private sector. In this way, the growth of middle-class state-dependent sectors can weaken the strength of pro-democracy movements (Rosenfeld, 2017).

New research also informs our understanding of when election fraud is apt to lead to protest, showing that it is more likely when government spending only benefits a narrow sector of society. In such environments, we are more likely to see broad societal anti-regime sentiment, which facilitates mobilization when elections are stolen (Rod, 2019). Recent research provides insight, as well, into when opposition-initiated protests against fraudulent elections are more likely to lead to democratization, revealing that it is more likely when there is substantial international support (Beaulieu, 2017).

Though not directly dedicated to the relationship between protest and democracy, new research does shed light on the conditions under which resistance campaigns are likely to be successful (in terms of achieving the campaign's main goal). Marks and Chenoweth (2020) emphasize the role of women's participation in these campaigns, showing that it increases their odds of success by improving numbers, legitimacy, and tactical innovation. Nonviolent protests movements were successful in nearly every instance when they featured 250,000 or more participants with at least 50 percent female participation. And, among nonviolent campaigns that succeeded, high women's participation was associated with substantial increases in democracy five years later. That said, greater women's involvement in failed campaigns had a higher rate of repression and subsequent declines in democracy. This is likely due to authoritarians' perception that greater mobilization of women in such campaigns is particularly threatening to their rule. As Marks and Chenoweth write, "There seems to be particularly acute retaliation against women for challenging a male-dominated system through mass participation" (p. 5).Greater gender inclusivity in nonviolent protests, therefore, appears to bring with it both positives (greater chances of campaign success and, in such instances, greater chance of improvements in democracy) and risks (should the movement fail, the outcomes are worse for women and gender equality). This is not to suggest that women should not participate in such movements, but rather to gain insight into the ways in which their participation influences regime calculations and responses.

EDUCATION

There is some evidence that education has the potential to positively impact democracy. Using data from Nigeria, for example, researchers found that better educated citizens are more likely to attend to politics, vote, and get involved in community organizations (Larreguy and Marshall, 2017). In this way, greater access to education can play a role in supporting democracy, but researchers urge caution before inferring that it directly increases prospects of democratic consolidation. Whether local-level dynamics will scale up to national-level outcomes, in other words, requires further research. Importantly, education's positive influence on political participation only exists in countries that have passed minimum thresholds of democracy (Croke et al., 2016).

These findings are consistent with earlier research on civic education programs in developing democracies, which were found to be effective at increasing participants' engagement in local politics. It is unknown, however, whether these programs have broader impact on democratic consolidation at the national level (Lust and Waldner, 2015).

Looking to authoritarian contexts, new research shows that education – particularly higher education and gender equality in education – can have a democratizing impact (Sanborn and Thyne, 2014). The positive effect of education on democracy appears to be greatest in less developed countries. This suggests that efforts to expand and improve education have the best chance of influencing democracy if they are devoted to poorer countries (Aleman and Kim, 2015).

New research also offers some evidence that the educational background of the leadership matters for democracy. Where leaders are educated at Western universities, the regimes they lead are more likely to democratize (Gift and Krcmaric, 2015). The logic is that this sort of educational experience socializes leaders to favor democracy while also generating transnational linkages that influence their willingness to democratize later.

ETHNICITY

The general message in the literature is that ethnic divisions only harm democracy to the extent that they are politicized (Beissinger, 2008; Lust and Waldner, 2015). There is little evidence in the literature that ethnic diversity directly hurts democracy (Fish and Brooks, 2004); where it does, its effects are either indirect or the result of other confounding factors (Beissinger, 2008). This is at least in part because the existence of ethnic divisions says little about whether ethnicity will be politically salient (Beissinger, 2008; Houle, 2018).

Consistent with this, recent research shows that while ethnic fractionalization is not detrimental to democracy, ethnic voting – which implies that ethnicity is relied on as a tool for political mobilization – is (Houle, 2018). When members of different ethnic groups support different political parties, the quality of democracy declines. This confirms earlier messages that it is not the presence of many ethnic groups that is harmful for democracy, but the political salience of ethnicity. It implies that "policies aimed at reducing the salience of ethnicity in politics may help reinforce democracy" (p. 838).

ECONOMIC FACTORS

New research has yet to resolve a number of debates regarding how economic factors influence democracy (see Kendall-Taylor, Lindstaedt, and Frantz (2019) for a review). In terms of economic development, a recent review of the literature suggests that there is no causal relationship between levels of wealth and democracy (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2018). Though economic development and democracy are tightly correlated, evidence is not robust that increases in levels of wealth lead to a greater chance of democracy (Fritzsche and Vogler, 2020).

There is little evidence that economic development directly *causes* democratization, but there is quite a bit of evidence that it is important for supporting democratic systems. (And, conversely, economic crises remain one of the biggest predictors of democratic breakdown.) Economic development plays a critical role in sustaining democracy, increasing the chances democracy will survive once it takes root. While higher levels of wealth also make authoritarian systems more stable, should richer dictatorships democratize, the prospects that the transition will endure are higher (Svolik, 2015). Even though economic development is broadly seen as a factor protecting democracy from collapse to authoritarianism, experiences such as Turkey's transition to dictatorship have generated concerns about whether this relationship will continue to hold in the years to come (Brownlee, 2016).

Lastly, debates persist in the literature regarding whether economic inequality influences the emergence of democracy. Scholars continue to mostly agree, however, that inequality is harmful for the quality and longevity of democratic rule.

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

Institutional factors play a major role in both the emergence and survival of democracy. In terms of halting democratic erosion, accountability mechanisms appear particularly important: where formal and informal processes exist for holding leaders accountable, backsliding is more likely to be stunted (Graham, Miller, and Strom, 2017; Laebens and Luhrmann, 2021; Lurhmann, 2021). Any response to executive overreach needs to be timely, however, given that democratic breakdown grows more likely each additional year that the backsliding process lasts (Boese, et al., 2021).

A variety of accountability mechanisms have been highlighted as important in the literature. One study shows, for example, that judicial oversight of the executive is a critical accountability mechanism for preventing democratic breakdown at the hands of incumbents (Boese et al., 2021). Another study shows that institutionalized parties and an active civil society play a valuable role in holding leaders accountable and preventing democratic erosion (Bernhard, et al., 2020).

This latter finding is consistent with other new research, which shows that the nature of the leader's support party matters for understanding democratic backsliding. Where leaders win office backed by personalist parties -- weak parties that primarily exist as a vehicle for leaders to secure office -- the risk of democratic erosion escalates (Frantz et al., 2021). Populist support parties are likewise associated with an elevated risk of democratic backsliding (see Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) for a review). Though not synonymous with personalist parties, populist parties tend to share low party institutionalization. As such, efforts to build programmatic and/or institutionalized political parties in democracies could be effective at protecting democracy from breakdown from within.

After the transition to democracy, regimes led by authoritarian successor parties are shown to be less likely to backslide. This is because authoritarian successor parties tend to be more professionalized and experienced than their upstart rivals after the transition to democracy (Langston, 2017). It is potentially in this way that they help prevent democratic backsliding, which the aforementioned research suggests is often levied by leaders backed by weak support parties (Frantz et al., 2021). That said, there are also numerous examples of authoritarian successor parties thriving and later destabilizing democracy, as with the return to power of Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Kendall-Taylor, Lindstaedt, and Frantz, 2019).

Among countries that were once democracies, transitioned to authoritarianism, and then democratized again (e.g., Sri Lanka and Madagascar), maintenance of independent organizations that could check government actions was a common thread (Lara Otaola, 2022). Countries that were able to restore democracy after bouts of authoritarianism featured autonomous checks and balances on the part of civil society and/or citizen groups. This finding bears the caveat, however, that it only examines those cases that did return to democracy (the dependent variable does not vary).

Presidential systems with substantial executive powers – specifically greater control over the legislature and judiciary – are shown to be more likely to experience democratic backsliding, according to evidence from Latin America (Pérez-Liñán, Schmidt, and Vairo, 2019). Where presidents are institutionally weak,

by contrast, democratic stability is more likely because incumbents lack the capacity to pursue a power grab. This study does not suggest that presidential systems are more prone to backsliding than other systems, but rather that -- among presidential systems -- those that feature power asymmetries are more likely to be at risk of democratic breakdown. This implies that executive weakness may not be harmful for developing democracies.

Looking to the impact of institutional factors on transitions to democracy, a large body of research has examined the role of institutions that mimic democracy. For example, today most authoritarian regimes hold elections, which vary in their competitiveness but share in common that they fall short of standards of free- and fairness, ranging from Azerbaijan under Ilham Aliyev to Singapore under the People's Action Party. Research shows that while elections have short-term risks for dictatorships given the potential they could lose them – a risk that is substantially elevated if the economy is performing poorly (Lucardi, 2019) – they extend authoritarian rule in the long term (Knutsen, Nygard, & Wig, 2017). Looking at Southeast Asia, for example, research finds that there is little evidence that elections caused democratization, except for the Philippines in 1986 (Morgenbesser and Pepinksy, 2019). Where elections were associated with democratization, it was simply because they were the end result of an already-in-place process of regime change.

Recent research also indicates that dictatorships manage the risks posed by elections by strategically timing when they are held (Nygard, 2020). When elections are unpredictable, it is more difficult for civil society and opposition groups to effectively mobilize, making dictatorships with less regular elections less vulnerable to collapse than those where the electoral cycle is fixed. This implies that pressures to compel dictatorships to stick to a regular election cycle could be beneficial for bringing about political change.

There is also new evidence that subnational elections can increase democratization prospects (in autocracies that allow multiple parties to run in them) (Lucardi, 2016). Using evidence from Mexico, this research finds that subnational elections can improve opposition parties' performance by giving them access to needed resources and valuable governing experience, while also increasing their visibility to the electorate. All of this increases the chance that opposition parties will receive electoral support in future races elsewhere in the country.

Looking to other institutions in dictatorships, new research finds that party strength plays a key role in understanding when authoritarian incumbents might choose to democratize (Riedl et al., 2020). When the incumbent party is strong – enough so that it can be fairly certain that its members have a good chance of winning genuine elections – the probability of the regime transitioning into a thriving democracy is higher, as occurred in Ghana and Taiwan.

Recent research has also examined the role of courts in fostering electoral integrity in dictatorships, given that many dictatorships feature institutions of *de jure* judicial independence and also hold multi-party elections (Harvey, 2022). It finds that de jure judicial independence incentivizes the opposition to use the courts, thereby reducing electoral fraud by giving greater legal exposure to the regime and its electoral-manipulating agents. This finding only holds, however, when competition is low and the regime senses its hold on power is secure.

INTERNATIONAL FACTORS

The bulk of the literature examining the role of international factors and democracy focuses on the impact of external aid and democracy promotion (discussed extensively above). That said, there is additional research devoted to democratic diffusion and remittances (focusing on the role of each in facilitating democratization), which is worth reviewing.

First, there is some evidence that democratic movements cluster in time and space (see Conroy-Krutz and Frantz, 2017 for a review). The dynamics underlying this process are complex, however, and may not be the result of diffusion. For example, recent research calls into question prior findings in the literature that pro-democracy protests diffuse, geographically or temporally (Brancati and Lucardi, 2019a; Brancati and Lucardi, 2019b). Researchers argue that protests might occur among neighboring countries at the same time, not because of a process of diffusion, but because of commonality among countries in other respects (such as food or oil price spikes). Consistent with this, other recent research shows that it is not diffusion processes that lead to spatial and geographic clustering of authoritarian regime breakdowns, but rather common regional shocks – such as economic crises (Houle et al., 2016). Diffusion does appear to occur once authoritarian regimes collapse, however, such that the new regimes that form are more likely to be democratic if other states geographically near them are too (Houle and Kayser, 2019).

Offering additional nuance, recent research reveals that authoritarian breakdowns diffuse across similar *regime types* (Goldring and Greitens, 2020). Because regime type influences vulnerability to protest and the specific tactics likely to be successful, when one authoritarian collapses, it increases the chance that others that share similar features will do the same, as well as chances of democratization after.

Apart from diffusion, new research shows that remittances (an international factor that also has an economic component) increase the chance of democratization. By raising individual incomes and making voters less dependent on state transfers from the regime, remittances can weaken electoral support for authoritarians, particularly in party-based regimes that rely on state transfers to mobilize supporters (Escriba-Folch, Meseguer, and Wright, 2015). (Note that this research does not differentiate the type of political system from which the remittances originate.) Even outside of party-based dictatorships, remittances are shown to foster political liberalization by raising incomes across the national economy, thereby lowering economic dependence on the state (Bearce and Park, 2018). Remittances may also pave the way for democratization via their impact on protests: research shows that remittances increase the chance of anti-government protests in dictatorships by providing resources political opponents can use to organize against the regime (Escriba-Folch, Meseguer, and Wright, 2018). Remittances are shown to improve the quality of democratic institutions too, though they are more effective in doing so in developing countries where government spending is low (Deonanan and Williams, 2017).

What does research reveal about the overall effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions, if any, on democracy and/or democracy promotion efforts?

- Research indicates the COVID-19 pandemic led to some violations of democratic standards in most countries and serious violations in some autocratic countries

- Some governments used public health measures to justify restricting civil society, particularly freedom of assembly, but most of these governments implemented restrictions for the full population, not to specific, targeted groups
- Government-sponsored misinformation and censorship was also prevalent during the pandemic
- Most countries that had postponed elections due to the pandemic later held them, although voter turnout was lower in a majority of these countries

One difficulty in assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global democracy is that government actions restricting civil liberties and political freedoms often can be justified from a public health perspective. Determining what actions are "in excess of what is warranted by public health initiatives" is difficult to assess and often subjective (USAID, 2022a, 5). That said, the evidence (see Kolvani et al., 2021; USAID, 2022a) indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions led to serious violations of democratic standards. Importantly, however, these regressions occurred primarily in those countries that were already autocratic (Kolvani et al., 2021). Examples include restrictions implemented in Hungary, Zimbabwe, and Laos.

Though many feared that weak democracies would transition to autocracy in this context, there is not robust evidence that this occurred (Kolvani et al., 2021). A majority of the world's countries used the pandemic to violate democratic standards in some capacity (most frequently by limiting media freedom), but these restrictions became far less frequent as the pandemic progressed (Kolvani et al., 2021; USAID, 2022a). By the time of the most recent assessment (July 2021), most countries had either no violations in place or the violations that existed were minor (Kovani et al., 2021). That said, low- and middle-income countries in Asia and MENA appear to have seen an increase in democratic violations in 2021 (USAID, 2022b).

There were a few instances of worrying trends in weak democracies, such as in Cote d'Ivoire (where the executive was allowed to rule by decree) and Sri Lanka (where the legislature was dissolved for some time due to delays holding elections), but there were also instances of the courts pushing back against such efforts, as in Lesotho and Malawi (Kolvani et al., 2021). A number of African countries were able to prevent the spread of misinformation without restricting media freedom, as well, by using innovative methods (USAID, 2022b).

Preliminary research suggests that some governments used public health measures to justify restricting civil society, particularly freedom of assembly (but in some instances freedom of expression too) (Bethke and Wolff, 2020). That said, in contrast to other major global events that led to similar restrictions, such as 9/11, most governments implemented them for the full population, not to targeted, politically motivated groups. Moreover, in many instances civil society rebounded. While protest movements that began prior to the pandemic in many countries faced restrictions and dwindled immediately after – as in Colombia, Chile, Algeria, Lebanon, Hong Kong, and India – protest levels eventually returned to normal in most countries (USAID, 2022a, 10).

The pandemic also paved the way for government-sponsored spread of misinformation (Pomeranz and Schwid, 2021). Governments clashed with journalists seeking to disseminate accurate information in countries such as Belarus, Peru, Kuwait, and Brazil, with governments in Kenya, Cambodia, Sri Lanka,

Serbia, and the Philippines even taking legal action against reporters covering the pandemic. As such, censorship rose in the face of the pandemic, often in ways that undermined public health responses.

Though many countries postponed scheduled elections following the start of the pandemic, the vast majority (77%) subsequently held them (International IDEA, 2021). The evidence suggests that countries were able to learn and adapt in ways that allowed them to hold elections even under challenging conditions. At the same time, the pandemic lowered voter turnout in a majority of the countries that held national elections.

To summarize, the overall message thus far is that the worst fears about the pandemic enabling aspiring authoritarians to weaken democracy did not pan out. That said, it is possible that any pandemic-related negative consequences for democracy will take time to unfold.

According to the literature, how did social media and new technologies help or challenge democracy promotion efforts during the period under examination? Is there evidence that they influenced the efficacy of pro-democratic civil society activities and/or social movements?

- Social media is a double-edged sword for democracy promotion: on the one hand it can benefit democracy, by amplifying voices, exposing abuses, and mobilizing mass protests, but on the other hand it can undermine democracy, by serving as a tool for manipulation and disinformation, among other things

- Recent research indicates that social media have both increased protests against dictatorship and decreased the effectiveness of these movements

Recent research on the impact of social media on democracy suggests that the relationship is complex (Persily and Tucker, 2020). Tucker et al. (2017) offer a theoretical framework for thinking about the political consequences of social media for democracy based on two observations. The first is that social media helps solve collective action problems, giving a voice to those who have traditionally been left out of mainstream media political discussions. The second is that the openness of social media environments counterintuitively lends itself to the use of censorship. As they write, "This double reality of the open online world—able to give a voice to the voiceless, but also bendable toward the aims of censorship and exclusion—explains why thoughts about social media can run either to optimism or (as has been more the case recently) to pessimism when it comes to the implications for democracy" (p. 48). For this reason, social media can be used to both enhance and restrict freedoms and in both democratic and authoritarian settings.

In democracies, for example, social media on the one hand have the potential to level the political playing field, giving politicians new tools for connecting with voters and increasing their ability to fund their campaigns and mobilize supporters (Diamond and Whittington, 2018). But on the other hand, social media also opens the door for manipulation, via bots, external electoral interference, and online disinformation, among other challenges. Groups in democracies with illiberal aims – such as terrorist organizations – can also use social media to undermine democracy in line with their interests (Tucker et al., 2017).

Beyond giving fringe groups in democracies a platform for rapidly spreading their message (Tucker et al., 2017), social media also appear to be transforming political campaigns in democracies in ways that

undermine party building. New technologies enable aspiring politicians to win office without having to rely on well-organized political parties. This is consistent with research linking social media with the personalization of politics (Enli and Skogerbo, 2013). Given that weak incumbent parties are associated with an elevated risk of democratic decline (Frantz et al., 2021), social media may in this way be contributing to the contemporary wave of democratic backsliding. Actions that promote a return to party-based (as opposed to personalist) politics in the digital era may be effective in countering this.

Studies linking social media with democratic backsliding are limited, however. As Luhrmann (2021, 1031) writes, research is needed to better understand "how the rise of social media relates to processes of autocratization and how online debates could become more civil and fact-based. Future studies should shed light on this important topic."

Social media technology has had dual effects in authoritarian systems, as well (see Frantz and Kendall-Taylor (2021) for a lengthy review of research related to digital autocracy). Research shows, for example, that social media have increased protests against dictatorships (Diamond and Whittington, 2018). Surveys of citizens from Tunisia and Egypt following the Arab Spring show that protest participants were more likely to be heavy Internet and social media users (Breuer, Landman, and Farquhar, 2015). Yet, at the same time, social media appears to be decreasing the effectiveness of such movements. Researchers assess that this is because social media diminish the need for organization building, which is a critical component to a successful mobilization effort (Chenoweth et al., 2019).

Likewise, while social media in dictatorships have exposed human rights violations, corruption scandals, and even electoral fraud, authoritarians have learned to use social media to their advantage, disseminating propaganda and filling the information space with regime narratives, as well as controlling and surveilling the online activities of ordinary citizens (Diamond and Whittington, 2018). Authoritarian regimes in Russia and the PRC are leading the charge, leveraging digital tools in distinct ways to suit their political objectives. The evidence suggests that they are wise to do so: those autocracies that have access to digital tools are associated with a longer survival rate (Frantz, Kendall-Taylor, and Wright, 2020).

Looking at new technologies more broadly, there was similarly initial optimism that Internet and mobile phone diffusion would be beneficial for democratization. Recent research casts doubt on this, however, revealing little impact of emerging media diffusion on prospects for democratization (Mays and Groshek, 2017; Choi and Jee, 2021). New research shows that while greater Internet and mobile phone penetration increase the chance of political protests, they also increase the chance of political repression in response (Christensen and Groshek, 2020). That said, Internet and mobile phone penetration may assist countries through other avenues, such as by fostering economic development (Conroy-Krutz and Frantz, 2017).

In these ways, social media appear to be a double-edged sword for democracy (Diamond and Whittington, 2018). On the one hand, they have been used successfully to challenge authoritarian control over information, expose regime abuses of power, and mobilize mass protests. Research shows, for example, that expanded mobile broadband Internet has led to decreases in government approval and increases in perceptions of government corruption (Guriev, Melnikov, and Zhuravskaya, 2019). On the other hand, however, they pose a clear challenge to democracy promotion, not just for the ways authoritarians (and even some democrats) have adapted new technologies to suit their political needs and prolong their hold on power, but also for the ways in which they undermine organization building.

Given that social media are almost certainly here to stay, responses to the challenge they bring for democracy will require adaptation and innovation.

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The second research question was also asked to DRG experts and local stakeholders. In the sections below, we focus on stakeholder responses pertaining to the influence of social media, followed by the challenges and opportunities for democracy promotion.

Many stakeholders agreed that the impact of social media on civic participation and democracy promotion has been both positive and negative. On one hand, social media has democratized access to information and created new spaces for the civic participation of diverse groups who can demand accountability from their leaders. For example, in Latin America, many groups have used social media to coordinate protests around social issues. On the other hand, in recent years, social media platforms have become polarized spaces through which users mobilize followers and demonize opponents more than they advance social change. DRG experts noted how optimism around the use of social media for social change during the Arab Spring quickly dissipated with the rise of disinformation and "fake news," which is often shared more rapidly than actual news. One local stakeholder said, *"[B]ecause of bots and hackers and fake accounts, you really don't know what's happening and whether something is really trending or not, or whether, if you see something is being liked and shared, whether actually people are liking it or are bots doing it, or even if you're talking to a real person or not"* [FGD, Local Stakeholders].

Additionally, autocratic regimes have realized that clamping down on access to the Internet, as well as access to information on social media, can control what one stakeholder in an FGD with DRG experts called "*the last standing civic space."* Some governments have coopted protest language and social media tools to spread disinformation and undermine social movements. A DRG expert explained that in Sudan, the government created a fake protest group on Facebook calling for a Sudan Spring and asking people to sign up and attend. The government used information from the Facebook page to identify activists who were then arrested and tortured. Similarly, the military junta in Myanmar used videos of activists being tortured to prevent people from mobilizing. Thus, through social media, *"[g]overnments that want to stay in power have really figured out how to stay in power"* [FGD, DRG Experts].

Stakeholders also noted that some governments tend to exercise more control over Internet access and social media during specific periods, such as elections. Voters have been fed incorrect information, or their access to information has been cut off altogether, curtailing their ability to make informed choices. Governments have also used national security as an excuse for censorship and control of digital spaces. One DRG expert explained that in Nigeria, *"[the government] shut down Twitter for everyone. [O]nce you say, 'Don't muzzle public opinion,' then they say to you, 'But it's for the sake of national security.' Meanwhile, what it really means is regime protection and not national security, so it's honestly a very complex space where we are all struggling"* [FGD, DRG Experts]. In China, companies like Alibaba and Huawei suppress political information through filters, so that those searching for certain phrases or words would be diverted. Another DRG expert said, *"China has been in particular very effective at filling data voids with, you know, you type in Xinjiang or whatever, and it will pop up RT, Sputnik, whatnot. So, it's not just social media; it's also the way they've manipulated filters and web space"* [FGD, DRG Experts].

Stakeholders noted the gendered ways in which social media is used to instigate violence and curtail free speech. One DRG Expert discussed how online harassment and violence particularly targets women and

the LGBTQIA+ community to intimidate these groups from participating in the political process. For example, "*there's more and more evidence* every day *showing that women journalists are disproportionately attacked and especially in very sort of gendered vitriolic ways*" [KII, DRG Expert]. In addition to women facing more frequent attacks, they are also more prone to sexualized attacks that target their personhood rather than policies they stand for, according to another DRG expert who has done research in recent years on social media, gender, and political candidates. Furthermore, stakeholders pointed out that social media is being used to systematically delegitimize women as political leaders through disinformation campaigns, including deep fake videos. Thus, *"[d]emocratic backsliding is one of those things that connects to the anti-gender movements, connects to violence against women in politics, connects to gender disinformation"* [KII, DRG Expert]. Stakeholders expressed the need for USAID to prioritize work around protecting women journalists, politicians, and human rights defenders who are increasingly attacked through social media channels.

Stakeholders suggested that USAID look beyond the issue of social media to the interconnected but broader issue of content management and free speech in digital spaces, as well as the growing digital divide that is often along socioeconomic and geographical lines. One DRG expert said they did not believe that content moderation mechanisms were effectively identifying hate speech, particularly in the Global South. Additionally, USAID should consider the role of states versus private companies in regulating these platforms to promote civic participation and dialogue as well as protect human rights.

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK ON CHALLENGES TO DRG PROMOTION

SHRINKING OF CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

Stakeholders noted the increasing persecution and censorship of civil society around the world. A country stakeholder discussing Bangladesh stated, *"[B]oth our political rights as well as civic right[s] are sinking very, very rapidly and we have a one-party state, basically one party"* [FGD, Local Stakeholders]. For example, a DRG expert said that because USAID and other international organizations work closely with civil society organizations for democracy promotion, many authoritarian regimes have tried to infiltrate and co-opt these organizations. Thus, people in many of these countries are moving this work to informal associations. USAID will need to do some investigation into these contexts in which networks and grassroots leaders are truly representative of civic voices.

To address this challenge, one USAID Mission staff member suggested that we redefine our understanding of what we consider a civil society organization, saying, *"Business associations do all of the things that human rights org[anization]s do but they do it for economic issues, and that is often overlooked. This could be focused on in the future"* [FGD, USAID Mission Staff]. Another USAID Mission staff member from the LAC region emphasized, "*I think our concept of civil society should be an ample one, not just the traditional concept of NGOs, but also the private sector, academia, even churches, political parties, so we have to open up our minds about civil society in terms of increasing the nature of stakeholders"* [FGD, USAID Mission Staff]. Other USAID Mission staff have found success in working with civil society to support democracy in countries where USAID is limited in its ability to work with government institutions. For example, one USAID Mission staff member based in the LAC region said the Mission was working with civil society to strengthen the independence of the media.

INCREASING LIMITATIONS ON DIALOGUE AND FREE SPEECH

Censorship of free speech presents a key challenge, which can be linked to the suppression of civil society space and has left a void in the creation of *"legitimate spaces for consensus building"* [FGD, Local Stakeholders]. For example, in an FGD one country stakeholder discussed the *"statistical pandemic"* that is a result of governments censoring data related to the effects of COVID-19. Stakeholders noted the numerous government crackdowns on journalists who were reporting on corruption around responses to COVID-19. Censoring free speech has also resulted in the breakdown of one government's accountability to citizens in Asia, where involuntary disappearances of the opposition are going unchallenged. A DRG expert said it was crucial for USAID to continue supporting independent media and spotlighting the imprisonment of journalists.

Limitations on free speech have given way to the even broader suppression of ideas. Populist movements have amplified anti-feminist sentiments, and as one DRG expert explained, "attacking… the concept of gender equality, and that includes women [and] also members of the LGBTQIA+ community. [I]t really kind of picked up maybe in 2015, 2016, and it's becoming a very serious issue in many parts of the world that really affects democracy and inclusion."

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC) AND RUSSIA'S EXPANDING SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

The PRC and Russia present not only democracy challenges, but also security and geostrategic challenges. One USAID Mission staff member based in Europe & Eurasia discussed the Mission's current strategy to lessen dependence on Russian energy, improve economic development, and reach out to minorities who are often targets of Russian disinformation. In an FGD another DRG expert said, *"China and Russia have both been interested in expanding their sphere of influence over their regional areas and therefore exporting authoritarianism and autocratic practices and undermining democratic reforms and democratic advocates and movements. And so, again, I think there has to be a dimension of how the Cold War is reviving and that's changing the whole international climate."* The PRC has been gaining support abroad through its lending practices and promotion of authoritarian governance models. The U.S. still lacks a coherent policy around how to address the PRC and Russia's influence worldwide.

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR DRG PROMOTION

PROGRAMS THAT IMPROVE LOCALIZATION

There are opportunities for USAID to be more intentional about the ways it engages with local partners and improves their capacities for sustainability. One country stakeholder said, *"Growing CSO[s] with different expertise are the main opportunities for sustainable peace and democracy."* For example, in one country in Latin America, a USAID Mission staff member said that 95 to 98 percent of USAID's programs were being implemented by local organizations. In addition, the Mission is providing capacity building to ensure sustainability.

Another stakeholder emphasized that relationship-building with the right organizations should be the central focus of USAID's DRG strategy. Using indicators, inputs, and outputs are irrelevant without positive, strong relationships with local groups, including thinking about how those relationships might evolve over time. For example, in Bosnia, one civic organization's relationship with USAID grew so that its local budget increased from $400,000 to millions of dollars administered by a government contractor. However, due to this relationship, over time, other local organizations began to see this civic

organization as an *"arm of the U.S. government"* and despite the increased funding, this organization faced a significant challenge of legitimacy in this context [KII, DRG Expert].

Thus, as USAID strengthens localization efforts, Missions should make strategizing around relationship-building a priority while also considering long-term consequences.

CITIZEN-DRIVEN PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS

DRG experts noted that despite a broad sense of disillusionment among the general population around politics and social change, USAID should do more to not only support these regional movements, but also support the democratic consolidation processes that follow uprisings. In an FGD, one DRG expert said, *"[T]he citizen demand for democracy and good governance, which I think is still there [is] quite high in many countries."* Another DRG stakeholder drew on the example of the second Arab Spring between 2018 and 2022. There were massive, citizen-driven protests in countries such as Sudan, Algeria, and Lebanon that USAID could have supported more holistically to sustain support for democracy.

BUILDING ON GOVERNMENTS' OWN REFORMS

Stakeholders discussed the opportunity for USAID to support pro-democracy institutions and reforms that are already in existence. For example, one country stakeholder said police reform efforts in Latin America supported some areas of rule of law and human rights, which USAID could leverage to increase government sensibility to vulnerable populations. Additionally, when there are country budgets behind certain initiatives, it is an indicator of local commitment and sustainability over the long term. Another country stakeholder said that USAID's positionality as a funder could be leveraged more effectively if USAID were stricter in following up and making more demands of governments to implement reforms for which they received assistance.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2013 DRG STRATEGY AND WHAT WERE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF USAID'S APPROACH?

This question was only asked to USAID Mission staff across the five geographic regions where USAID operates. Feedback and input are grouped into three areas below: lessons learned, strengths, and weaknesses.

LESSONS LEARNED

EMPOWER LOCAL STAFF TO SHARE LESSONS LEARNED TO FUTURE COHORTS OF FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICERS

USAID Mission staff in the MENA region mentioned that security barriers to Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) interacting with most of civil society and political leaders were a significant challenge. They said it was difficult to implement program assessment tools because they did not have opportunities to access people and do outreach. Additionally, because of this lack of access, they did not know if programs were successfully reaching grassroots movements. To address this issue, one Mission staff member

recommended institutionalizing better information sharing practices between local staff and FSOs by "[e]*nsuring that local staff are equipped to relay lessons learned to [the] next round of foreign service officers*" [FGD, USAID Mission Staff].

USE DATA THAT WE HAVE AND LEARN FROM IT

Many Mission staff members said that when analyzing program implementation, it is important to identify positive activities, reinforce and build upon these attributes, while also correcting activities that show limited or negative results. One Mission staff member said, *"The data is all there, but the question is whether we use this to learn."* They recommended USAID focus on challenges, lessons learned, and best practices in implementation approaches. Another Mission staff member said that knowledge management processes need to be improved so that information is not just gathered through reporting, but also aggregated and analyzed to highlight what programming worked and did not and why, to inform stakeholders and future strategies for relationship-building moving forward. Criticizing the reporting format as unproductive for DRG learning, a Mission staff member said, *"I think we struggle because we have to send numbers to Washington, but numbers don't capture democracy, right? Like you can do polling, and you can work on some of these other things, but numbers don't actually tell the story of the quality of a democracy"* [FGD, USAID Mission Staff]. Current indicators often fail to capture important contextual factors that are critical for making informed decisions.

CONTEXTUAL ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER IN THE NEW DRG POLICY

Stakeholders discussed some of the contextual developments and changes that were either missed by the 2013 DRG strategy or will be important to consider for the new DRG policy. While these contextual factors tend to differ by region, one DRG expert said China's influence and the increasing prominence of authoritarian leaders are important to look at globally. According to another DRG expert, global trends or events such as a global recession, high levels of migration, and climate change may impact voter behavior in various ways. Many stakeholders noted the 2013 DRG strategy did not foresee the digital transformation of society, as well as associated opportunities and challenges for democracy promotion.

BE MORE FLEXIBLE, ADAPTABLE, AND NUANCED IN DEMOCRACY PROGRAMMING APPROACHES

USAID Mission stakeholders generally agreed that DRG programs should be adaptable in responding to the evolving and nuanced contexts of different countries. One USAID Mission staff member said that no government implements all the reforms USAID would ideally like to see all at once, and the incremental nature of nation-building needs to be bolstered by acknowledging good practices and working with actors to improve restrictive ones:

> *"[T]his narrative of choosing the winners. These are good actors. These are bad actors so when you come with that mentality into an electoral process, your assessment is really off. You're not really being, if you will, you're not being an honest broker… what I see as a problem is that we're not building on successes, you know, in any endeavor there are positive things and there are negative things. So, if an approach is a black and white, it's all either good or bad, that doesn't help with nation-building philosophy. Nation-building is incremental, there's a lot of problems, there are ups and downs, but I think for us we need to be able to identify the positive things, reinforce them and build on them while fighting for correcting the negative things. That's what I don't see in a lot of interventions, especially the political and electoral*

> *processes. You can have all the indicators… but unless we really take a more balanced and nuanced approach, we may not be able to inform those indicators in the right way" [FGD, USAID Mission Staff].*

However, the recommended incremental approach can be hindered by an inherent tension in USAID's work between *"what works"* programmatically and *"what politics require."* Another USAID Mission staff member said the politics of navigating as a U.S. government agency sometimes entails implementing programs that are not aligned with best practices, and this hurts USAID's credibility in the long term.

Knowing what mechanisms and tactics are effective requires flexibility in reconsidering the approaches used if they are not working. A USAID Mission staff member said it was important for USAID to think not just about the priorities, but also the process of implementation to achieve goals under those priority areas. For example, several stakeholders said DRG programming should be integrated into education programming because of its long-term impact on civic participation. The education sector was repeatedly raised as a key mechanism for supporting democracy across all stakeholder groups. One country stakeholder said, "*Democracy does not start at the ballot boxes. Democracy starts from the education system"* [FGD, Local Stakeholders]. It is important to note, however, that academic literature does not support a causal relationship between education and citizens' political participation at the national level. .

STRENGTHS

INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The DRG approach has stressed the inclusion of women, which are half of every population, as well as vulnerable populations, especially youth, women, and people with disabilities. However, there is still more to be done for the LGBTQIA+ community and on diversity and inclusion. One opportunity for USAID is to move beyond a focus solely on workshops and expanding political participation of these groups to analyzing the impact inclusive democracy has in particular communities, including both positive impacts and unintended negative consequences. In an FGD a DRG expert provided the following example: *"After empowering women financially, we found things like higher levels of intimate partner violence…No one had thought about what it might do within families if you empower women financially."* This discussant felt that interventions could be targeted at the community level rather than at individual households. Research on these topics is also limited and difficult to find; this is an area in which USAID could take a leadership role.

Stakeholders also mentioned that inclusive democracy looks different across contexts, such that interventions need to be differentiated among democratizing, backsliding, and stable but fragile democracies. In continuously democratizing countries, leadership is often interested in inclusion and broadening their support base, so awareness-raising and promotion are often sufficient. In backsliding countries, one respondent noted that*"it is absolutely essential that we keep issues of diversity and inclusion up towards the front, but that it be it be couched within or made part of a larger push to maintain those rights, for everyone"* [FGD, USAID Mission Staff]. In fragile countries, leadership is sometimes actively trying to keep society fractured to maintain their own political or economic interests, and here it is important to work on issues of diversity or inclusion focusing on particular communities to ensure these groups' rights are maintained.

INTEGRATION OF DRG IN COUNTRY DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION STRATEGIES

USAID Mission staff noted there has been integration of DRG in the Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS) since governance is an issue across several sectors including health, water, and sanitation. However, one Mission staff member noted that this integration was Washington-driven, and that having governance as a cross-cutting issue does not always work for all Missions. Another Mission staff member in a different geographic location stated that every Mission is focusing on DRG to some extent, and development requires being able to assess what is happening on the ground and adapt approaches as needed. USAID Mission staff implied that having tools such as a systems approach or political economy analysis was sufficient and there was no need for USAID to do anything more.

USAID IS POSITIONED TO TAKE ON A MORE REGIONAL APPROACH TO ACHIEVE GOALS

Because programmatic decision-making is decentralized at the Mission level, USAID can take a more regional approach. This requires: (1) developing country programs that take regional trends into consideration, and (2) having regional strategies and theories of change that clearly recognize actions that need to happen in a country for the region to become more democratic. For example, issues such as corruption, civil society development, women's empowerment, gender-based violence, etc., can be addressed by utilizing the ecosystem of international democracy organizations that did not exist 40 years ago. USAID has the resources to integrate these efforts at the regional level for a higher impact at the local level and vice versa. One stakeholder elaborated on the importance of regional impacts:

> *"[W]hat happened in Namibia had a huge impact on South Africa transition, what happens in Niger affects Nigeria, what happens in Cote d'Ivoire has a huge impact on the region, what happens in Georgia has an impact on other countries in Eurasia, and it's true in every region of the world, smaller less 'strategically important countries' can be extremely important and you don't need as many resources operating in Georgia as you would in Ukraine or Russia. You don't need as many resources operating in Niger as you would in Nigeria, but we have to invest, I think, in new and emerging democracies to help sustain democratic systems, and I think why USAID is so important is that they have tended to focus on that long-term because they have a development head, and so they understand the long-term nature of this, and that's where USAID's strength is." [KII, DRG Expert]*

WEAKNESSES

USAID'S DRG MESSAGING DOES NOT ALIGN WITH U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIONS IN SOME SETTINGS

The global conversation around DRG has moved beyond labeling countries as "good" or "bad" to focusing on policies and practices. Mission staff talked about the ways in which U.S. policies and politics contradicts or undermines its messaging and work abroad. One USAID Mission staff member discussed the recent Internet Governance Forum, where Russia and China scolded the U.S. for its position on Edward Snowden, using this issue as an example of U.S. hypocrisy in dealing with digital rights. Another USAID Mission staff member provided another example of U.S. hypocrisy, explaining that lobbyists in the U.S. have legalized corrupt processes in many African countries. For example, in certain electoral processes, the U.S. government has been criticized for prematurely choosing the winners. One USAID Mission staff believed reports on these situations tend to be unfair, focusing more on human rights abuses than on the electoral process itself. However, now that citizens have broader access to information, the U.S. government can no longer *"control the narrative"* around the divergence between USG discourse and practice.

When USG actions do not align with USAID's DRG messaging, this inconsistency can delegitimize democracy promotion efforts. In many instances, politics prevents Mission staff from calling out actors (who the USG is aligned with) when they violate human rights or commit violence in the political process. Their actions are overlooked or justified as opposed to strongly denounced, unlike the way similar actions are denounced when actors the USG does not support commit the same crime. This sends a message that the USG does not value human rights universally, and that USG criticism depends on who commits the violations. In an FDG one Mission staff member elaborated, *"[W]e tend to say that we don't have a dog in the fight, but we generally do, and people see through it [and] that really undermines our ability to impact in many areas, in especially when we talk about corruption, I've had so many people come to me, and in, you know, in different African countries, and most recently in [redacted] and tell me the problem that we have in promoting transparency in election and political processes."*

SLOW PROGRESS ON THE LOCALIZATION PROCESS; MONEY OFTEN FLOWING TO U.S. CONTRACTORS

One local stakeholder revealed USAID's administrative requirements are barriers to local organizations priming on projects. Because compliance is sometimes prioritized over performance due to USAID's bureaucratic and administrative processes, U.S. contractors who may not understand the local context are often brought on to implement projects, which can be a challenge for effective programming. The stakeholder explained that USAID often works with contractors who do not understand the local context and through these contracts, most of the money meant to help locals goes back to the U.S. The stakeholder said, *"[T]hey need to stop implementing these projects through the contractors, and especially the profit making contractors, for-profit contractors, they are even worse."* [FGD, Country Expert]

There remain institutional difficulties in moving forward with the localization agenda, however. USAID Mission staff were asked if they believed USAID was a strong supporter of civil society and whether USAID's approach worked in their contexts. Many people noted that geopolitics plays a role in whether or not USAID is able to implement their strategies: *"We have interventions for working with civil society, but if the government doesn't feel pressure to create this environment they won't"* [FGD, USAID Mission Staff]. In many contexts, local governments are actively opposing civil society which makes collaboration difficult. Various responses alluded to the importance of local government buy-in of USAID objectives to support civil society. Additionally, USAID should look beyond the traditional concept of NGOs to partner with and include the private sector, academia, activists, social movements and even churches and political parties to diversify and increase the types of stakeholders with which USAID engages.

In addition, current program models do not ensure the sustainability of civil society organizations. In an FGD one USAID Mission staff member said: *"I think one of the biggest shortcomings with civil society programming is that we as USAID, we shy away from institutional support."* The usual model of sustainability is training. It should change to provide core support through funding and capacity building to organizations that will make them sustainable.

RIGIDITY OF DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES CURTAILS RESPONSE TO CHANGING AND DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Since electoral and political contexts are always changing, the most important element in DRG programing is flexibility and adaptability, and this is not always seen in USAID's approaches. USAID Mission staff and country experts said the categorizations of different country types and characteristics

are often too rigid in their applicability. While these categories might be theoretically useful, in practice, it's difficult and often not useful to put all the political and contextual nuances of a country in a box. For example, the hybrid country type, based on the categorization of countries from the 2013 DRG Strategy, is more varied today than it was in 2013. There is a need to better define what hybridity entails, as well as align it with the type of political system in a country, to target programs more effectively.

In an FGD, one USAID Mission staff member explained:

> *"I would just like to second that I think, you know Colombia has had five decades of conflict. Technically, we signed a peace accord in 2016, but we know that that did not bring peace. Like we still see violence and, in many cases, especially amid COVID we were talking about how confinement, displacement, forced recruitment of children, human rights defender homicides, so many of these other issues have actually gotten worse and so, like whether or not we're classified as a "conflict country" or "country in transition" is less important than looking at the situation on the ground and adapting our programming to what's going on where we know there's windows of opportunities and where we see the most need."*

DRG experts also discussed the need for USAID to think beyond programming for specific democratic actors (i.e., civil society, political parties, media, etc.) to integrating different areas of programming. Additionally, framing issues and priorities around the four objectives of the DRG policy has been challenging for analyzing contexts that are complex and fall outside those objectives. Finally, using *"mechanical indicators"* can hinder deeper analysis of trends, particularly now that governments understand how to navigate and speak the language that ticks the boxes of measures such as, *"gender equality."*

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IN USAID'S APPROACH TOWARD DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNANCE PROMOTION TO INCREASE AID EFFECTIVENESS?

This question was asked to all stakeholders -- USAID Mission staff, local stakeholders in different countries, and DRG experts. Stakeholders recommended that USAID strategize at both global and regional levels while applying more nuanced analysis to understand the direction of democratic trends. They also recommended that USAID focus on its comparative advantage in spotlighting key issues and empowering local leadership. Finally, stakeholders discussed the importance of investigating what is and is not working to make better impact; emphasizing and responding to context instead of narrowly working within DRG objectives; and strategizing over longer periods of time than the current CDCS format allows.

ADDRESS DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES HOLISTICALLY AT THE GLOBAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS

Stakeholders recommended that USAID pursue a holistic approach with contextually flexible implementation. Instead of operating at the country and project level, USAID should link countries and projects to regional or global efforts. They noted that the entire democratic ecosystem is currently working unevenly when it needs to work together to solve democratic challenges.

> *"I think DRG, Washington should have a broader role to promote some uniformity in the way [the] DRG strategy is implemented. Second, is the notion of thinking regionally and globally which will require a different type of funding mechanisms, which will linking regional and international funding efforts to local programs." [KII, DRG Expert]*

For example, in places where government is really fractured, USAID needs to address democracy as a security issue and widen the scope of who is considered legitimate to work with, including traditional elders, religious leaders, youth groups, etc. One local stakeholder recommended that USAID address democracy as a security issue and expand the scope of informal institutions that are considered legitimate to work with.

When designing programs more holistically, stakeholders stressed the importance of linking and integrating different development sectors, specifically education. They noted that education is a transversal sector, important for women and for the future of countries. Focusing on education helps nurture good citizens in the future who will be able to develop democracy and protect democratic integrity.

On the demand side, there is a need to address threats to democracy by focusing on societal resilience, community building, and social cohesion as well as bolstering informal institutions and expanding the understanding of institutions that are deemed legitimate based on the context.

MORE NUANCED AND DEEPER ANALYSIS OF PROCESSES AND THE DIRECTION OF TRENDS

Stakeholders noted a need to move beyond rigid indicators to deeper analysis around why and how backsliding and democratization trends are happening. In an FGD with local stakeholders one discussant

noted *"I think it's less important to say the country is backsliding as a whole and more important to say along particular domains of democracy that we have some sort of backsliding…it's also important to talk about movements forward."* Similarly, this discussant continued that it is difficult to make a general statement that a specific country is developing. It is likely more accurate that there is room for improvement in specific areas, for example, elections. Another discussant gave an example of a country that is really developing and moving forward with fiscal transparency, but still having problems with trafficking. Thus, clearly classifying the ways in which a country is moving in certain directions is important.

> *"What I think we need to do is think harder, analytically about the causes of backsliding, not just are they moving back, but why they're moving back, about which there's very little real analytical understanding and then saying what opportunities or challenges does that raise for us in a plan for the next decade." [FGD, DRG Experts]*

USAID should also recognize the regional effects of democratic trends within a country, and similarly, consider the regional effects of democracy promotion programming during design and implementation.

EMPHASIZE THE CONTEXT RATHER THAN FOCUSING ON DRG OBJECTIVES

Discussants in FGDs with DRG experts and local stakeholders suggested that there is a need to let the country context drive DRG activities, not just the four DRG objectives laid out in the previous strategy.[9] In an FGD a DRG expert stated that a country's context is usually much more complex, such that doing a DRG assessment and planning activities around the four objectives may be too prescriptive: *"[T]he rigidity of the methodology made it very hard to actually implement the actual drivers of the context. [Not] everything needs to be framed within those four objectives, some of them might be more applicable than others, in essence."* Using Yemen as an example, a local stakeholder said that there should be less of a focus on themes, and more on how the strategies can be applied to the reality on the ground.

NEED TO CRITICALLY REFLECT ON WHAT IS NOT WORKING ALONG WITH WHAT IS

Several stakeholders stressed the need to do critical reflections of what is not working or not moving in the right direction, rather than solely focusing on the success stories or impact of programs (which are usually the focal point of independent or internal evaluations). This could be done by continually building on evidence gap maps currently being developed for each of the six work areas led by the DRG Center. To improve such learning, one DRG expert also discussed the importance of learning agendas and academic research to get a more nuanced and scientific understanding of progress, rather than focusing on indicators to measure development.

Defining and sharing problems and creating opportunities for cross-contextual learning across countries and regions was also highlighted. Another DRG focus group discussant felt that USAID should change its philosophy and stress mutual learning experiences between established democracies and other developing democracies as appropriate, since sometimes innovations in democracy can start at the grassroots level in developing countries and then spread elsewhere. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a well known example of this. The USG could consider lessons regarding

[9] The 2013 DRG Strategy has 4 development objectives: (1) Promote participatory, representative and inclusive political processes and government institutions, (2) Foster greater accountability of institutions and leaders to citizens and to the law, (3) Protect and promote universally recognized human rights, and (4) Improve development outcomes through the integration of DRG principles and practices across USAID's development portfolio.

effective constitutional or electoral reform *"which are at the heart of the problem of democracy in America"* [FGD, DRG Expert].

HAVE A LONGER VISION FOR THE CDCS

According to DRG experts, USAID needs to think more long term with respect to its CDCS. *"These are currently five years long. Five years is nothing when we want to focus on genuine sustainable social change"* [FGD, DRG Expert]. This DRG discussant suggested that USAID could move in the direction of developing flexible long-term strategies for 10, 15, or 20 years. This would involve abandoning many of the current indicators to measure progress, as well as eliminating the need to report on these indicators on a quarterly or annual basis as changes do not occur that quickly. Instead, USAID should consider focusing more on integrating learning agendas and academic research in lieu of utilizing these indicators.

FOCUS ON USAID'S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE AND ROLE

USAID Mission staff in FGDs and a DRG expert in a KII noted that USAID Washington needs to reflect on its role (i.e., its relationship to other parts of USG and U.S. geopolitical interests) as well as its comparative advantage. It should focus on spotlighting rather than enforcing issues, and also be realistic about expectations from civil society versus government. USAID sometimes makes assumptions that civil society can actually force change, yet in some places the systems are not designed to do that. Thus, funding is provided to civil society to give them a voice, but they do not see the results.

> *"Our comparative advantage, lies in transparency and in investigative journalism, helping civil society shine a light, and its supporting investigative journalists, supporting anti-corruption watch dogs, and promoting transparency and accountability in a country. Our comparative advantage is not in in helping law enforcement deal with this stuff. So, I think we need to be working where our comparative advantage is." [FGD, USAID Mission staff]*

USAID is also well-positioned to design interventions at different levels and work with diverse stakeholders. It should use its positionality to empower local leadership, particularly around election processes.

> *"I think USAID can be generally more flexible with things like shifting what level the interventions take place in. There's a lot of, for example, community driven development type of initiatives, working with NGOs, working with different types of groups, and what I find is that USAID tends to be a little more nimble and a little bit more flexible with the ability to do those types of things, relative to the other actors in the space, other bilateral actors other multilateral actors." [FGD, DRG Experts]*

CONCLUSION

Both the academic literature since 2013 and DRG stakeholders provide robust evidence for new policy guidance that informs the development a revised DRG Strategy. The global context for democracy promotion is characterized by democratic backsliding in many countries, shrinking civil society space, and disillusionment around citizen-driven movements for social change. However, USAID is positioned to strengthen bilateral efforts by strategizing at regional levels and consolidating support from the network of intergovernmental organizations, CSO and NGO networks, and donor aid agencies working on democracy promotion globally. Findings and analysis from this research point to the importance of utilizing DRG evidence and data for learning, as well as using those insights to apply a more nuanced approach that emphasizes and responds to local context over broad objectives.

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ANNEX A: CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS

DRG EXPERT CONSULTATIONS				
GROUP	**NAME**	**COUNTRY**	**TITLE**	**ORGANIZATION**
DGE1	Yuen Yuen Ang	United States	Associate Professor	University of Michigan
	Pippa Norris	United States	Lecturer	Harvard University
	José Ugaz	Peru	Jurist	Government of Peru
	Mai Hassan	United States	Associate Professor	University of Michigan
	Elin Bjarngard-Social	Sweden	Associate Professor	Uppsala University
	Patrick Quirk	United States	Senior Director, Strategy, Research, and Center for Global Impact	International Republican Institute
DGE2	G'benga Sesan	Nigeria	Executive Director	Paradigm Institute
	Maria Paz Canales	Chile	Global Policy Advisor	Derechos Digitales
DGE3	Matt Andrews	United States	Senior Lecturer	Harvard University
	Jonathan Fox	United States	Associate Professor	American University
DGE4	Erica Chenoweth	United States	Associate Professor	Harvard University
	Anne Meng	United States	Assistant Professor	University of Virginia
DGE5	Nic Cheeseman	United Kingdom	Professor of Democracy	University of Birmingham
	John Githongo	Kenya	Journalist/CEO	Inuka
	Cesi Cruz	United States	Assistant Professor	University of California Los Angeles
	Vukasin Petrovic	United States	Chief of Party	DT Institute
DGE6	Saskia Brechenmacher	United States	Fellow, Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
	Laura Thornton	United States	Director and Senior Fellow, Alliance for Securing Democracy	German Marshall Fund
	Gerardo Berthin	United States	Vice President, International Programs	Freedom House
	Anna Mysliwiec	United States	Policy Manager	Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab

COUNTRY CONSULTATIONS (USAID MISSION STAFF)				
GROUP	**NAME**	**COUNTRY**	**TITLE**	**ORGANIZATION**
CE1 Africa	Nina Bowen	Zambia	Director, Democracy, Human Rights & Governance	USAID
	Andrew Greer	Mali	Deputy Director, Office of Peace, Democracy, and Governance	USAID
	Ina Pislaru	Ghana	Senior Regional Governance Advisor	USAID
	Noelle Ojo	Ghana	Foreign Service Officer	USAID
CE2 Asia	Walter Doetsch	Indonesia	Director, Office of Democratic Resilience and Governance	USAID
	Mohamed Dansoko	Philippines	Senior Program Officer	USAID
CE3 E&E	Keti Bakradze	Georgia	Project Management Specialist	USAID
CE4 LAC	Rosa Marie Colorado	El Salvador	DRG Foreign Service National	USAID
	Alfonso Velazquez	Paraguay	Program Officer	USAID
	Jeffrey Levine	Dominican Republic	Agricultural and DRG Office Director	USAID
	Lisette Dumit	Dominican Republic	Senior Specialist, Citizen Security, Rule of Law and Justice	USAID
CE5 MENA	David Denehy	Iraq	Acting Deputy Director, Stabilization, Governance, and Economic Opportunity Office	USAID
	Kipp Efinger	Jordan	Foreign Service Officer	USAID

LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS				
GROUP	**NAME**	**COUNTRY**	**TITLE**	**ORGANIZATION**
CE6 Africa	Moussa Bambara	Mali	Program Manager	USAID
	Badie Hima	Mali	Resident Director	National Democratic Institute
	Paul Amegakpo	Guinea	Resident Director	National Democratic Institute
	Linga Mihowa	Malawi	Country Director	OxFam
CE7 Asia	Mathieu Andre	Cambodia	Technical Lead, Social Accountability and Advocacy	World Vision
	Syed Yusuf Saadat	Bangladesh	Research Fellow	Centre for Policy Dialogue
	Adnan Topan Husodo	Cambodia	Coordinator	Indonesia Corruption Watch
	Badiul Alam Mujumdar	Bangladesh	Global Vice President	The Hunger Project
	Fahmida Khatun	Bangladesh	Executive Director	Centre for Policy Dialogue
CE8 E&E	Tamar (Tamuna) Karosanidze	Georgia	Chief of Party	East West Management Institute
	Nino Gelashvili	Georgia	Journalist	Radio Liberty
	Sona Ayvazyan	Armenia	Deputy Director	Transparency International Anticorruption Center
	Isabella Sargsyan	Armenia	Human Rights and Justice Programmes Director	Eurasia Partnership Foundation
CE9 LAC	Michel Camacho	Dominican Republic	Public Policy and Regulatory Advisor	TierOne
CE10 MENA	Ilyas Mohammed	Yemen	Deputy Chief of Party	Global Communities
	Gregory Johnsen	Yemen	Writer	Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS				
GROUP	**NAME**	**COUNTRY**	**TITLE**	**ORGANIZATION**
KII1	Ken Wollack	United States	Chairman	National Democratic Institute
KII2	Eileen Donahoe	United States	Executive Director, Global Digital Policy Incubator	Stanford University
KII3	Mona Lena Krook	United States	Associate Professor	Rutgers University
KII4	Larry Garber	United States	Senior Associate	Center for Strategic and International Studies
KII5	Tom Carothers	United States	Senior Vice President	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
KII6	Jerry Hyman	United States	Task Order Manager	DevTech Systems, Inc.

ANNEX B: FGD AND KII PROTOCOLS

DRG EXPERT CONSULTATION FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

TOPIC	QUESTION
DRG Changes and Trends Since 2013	2b/c.1. In your mind, have there been specific global, regional, or country-level factors that have changed the way USAID promotes democracy since 2013? What are those factors? a) What challenges or opportunities have these factors presented for democracy promotion?
Opportunities for Strengthening Democracy	2d.1. In your opinion, are there specific indicators or trends that signal windows of opportunity for democracy promotion? What are those indicators or trends?
Challenges of Democracy; Opportunities for Strengthening Democracy	2f.1. Social media has become more influential since 2013. In your opinion, what has been the role of social media in promoting or impeding broader inclusion in democracy? a) How have different governments used social media to help or hurt democracy promotion?
Challenges of Democracy	2e.1. Did the COVID-19 pandemic have different effects on different populations regarding their democratic participation? Please elaborate. What do you think this means for future democracy promotion programming? a) What are the gendered dimensions of the pandemic's impact on democratic participation?
DRG Changes and Trends Since 2013; Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4a/d.1. Free and fair elections are understood as a key indicator of democratic integrity. What other indicators – beyond free and fair elections - would you include to assess the integrity of a democracy? Have you seen new indicators since 2013 that help to capture our understanding of democratic integrity?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4b.1. Are there specific contextual factors that need to be included in the new DRG Strategy?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4a.2. To what extent do you think USAID's democracy programming and good governance programming should go together? In the absence of democracy, do you think USAID should focus on good governance and vice versa?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4d.2. In your opinion, in which situations would USAID's DRG investments be more effective: In pushing the momentum of democratization or trying to prevent democratic backsliding? Why?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4e.2. Do you think there are new cross-cutting themes we haven't covered that should be considered for an improved DRG Strategy?

COUNTRY CONSULTATION FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

TOPIC	QUESTION
Lessons Learned from Implementation of 2013 DRG Strategy	3a.1. The 2013 DRG Strategy presents two different but overlapping ways of categorizing countries: by type (authoritarian, hybrid, developing democracies, liberal democracies), by characteristic (conflict, transitional, backsliding), and by geographic region. Was the 2013 DRG policy's categorization of countries into four types/context (authoritarian regimes, hybrid regimes, developing democracies, and liberal/consolidated democracies) helpful for your work? Did you use it in your work? a) Was the PITA (Promoting Integration, Tolerance, and Awareness) lens useful in preparing for new or changing country contexts?\ b) Is there a need for an additional typology, and if so, which one?
Lessons Learned from Implementation of 2013 DRG Strategy	3b/c.1. Were the 2013 DRG Strategy outcomes of (1) greater citizen participation and inclusion, and (2) more accountable institutions and leaders easier or more difficult to achieve under the DRG technical areas (rule of law, governance, elections and political transitions, civil society, human rights, and media)? **Note to Moderator:** Take each technical area and discuss if the 2 outcomes were easier or more difficult to achieve.
Lessons Learned from Implementation of 2013 DRG Strategy	3b/c.3. The 2013 DRG Policy outlined an approach to support and defend civil society. a) How did that approach work? b) Does it need any changes? c) Are there other development sectors where USAID could integrate DRG principles to maximize USAID's DRG impact?
Lessons Learned from Implementation of 2013 DRG Strategy	3b.2. The 2013 DRG Strategy encouraged DRG integration in other development sectors. What has been achieved in this area and what are the lessons learned from this initial effort?
Lessons Learned from Implementation of 2013 DRG Strategy	3d.1. How does USAID implement inclusive democracy practices, and what does that look like across different contexts?
Lessons Learned from Implementation of 2013 DRG Strategy	3d.2. How does USAID implement more accountable institutions and leaders across the different country contexts?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4a.1. How can lessons learned from implementing the 2013 DRG Strategy be incorporated into a new Policy, and is there sufficient documentation to do this?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4b.1. Are there specific contextual factors that need to be included in the new DRG Strategy?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4c.1. What were the obstacles to implementing the 2013 DRG Strategy? Specifically, what general programming considerations have been missed and need to be incorporated in a new DRG strategy?
DRG Changes and Trends Since 2013; Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4d.2. In your opinion, in which situations would USAID's DRG investments be more effective: In pushing the momentum of democratization or trying to prevent democratic backsliding? Why?

LOCAL STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

TOPIC	QUESTION
DRG Changes and Trends Since 2013	2b/c.1. In your mind, have there been specific global, regional, or country-level factors that have changed the way USAID promotes democracy since 2013? What are those factors? a) What challenges, if any, have these global, regional, or country-level factors presented for democracy promotion? What opportunities, if any, have these factors presented for strengthening democracy? b) Are there examples of opportunities for democracy promotion since 2013 that USAID missed or worked on? Please elaborate.
Opportunities for Strengthening Democracy	2d.1. In your opinion, are there specific indicators or trends that signal windows of opportunity for democracy promotion? What are those indicators or trends?
Challenges of Democracy; Opportunities for Strengthening Democracy	2f.1. Social media has become more influential since 2013. In your opinion, what has been the role of social media in promoting or impeding broader inclusion in democracy? a) How have different governments used social media to help or hurt democracy promotion?
Challenges of Democracy	2e.1. Did the COVID-19 pandemic have different effects on different populations regarding their democratic participation? Please elaborate. What do you think this means for future democracy promotion programming? a) What are the gendered dimensions of the pandemic's impact on democratic participation?
DRG Changes and Trends Since 2013; Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4a/d.1. Free and fair elections are understood as a key indicator of democratic integrity. However, there are many countries around the world where elections take place, but they are either rigged or unfairly administered. What other indicators would you include to assess the integrity of a democracy? Have you seen new indicators since 2013 that help to capture our understanding of democratic integrity?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4b.1. Are there specific contextual factors that need to be included in the new DRG Strategy?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4a.2. To what extent does USAID need a more nuanced distinction between democracy and good governance in formulating the next DRG strategy?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4d.2. In your opinion, in which situations would USAID's DRG investments be more effective: In pushing the momentum of democratization or trying to prevent democratic backsliding? Why?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4e.2. Do you think there are new cross-cutting themes we haven't covered that should be considered for an improved DRG Strategy?

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

TOPIC	QUESTION
DRG Changes and Trends Since 2013	2b/c.1. In your mind, have there been specific global, regional, or country-level factors that have changed the way USAID promotes democracy since 2013? What are those factors? c) What challenges or opportunities have these factors presented for democracy promotion? d) Are there examples of opportunities for democracy promotion since 2013 that USAID missed or worked on? Please elaborate.
Opportunities for Strengthening Democracy	2d.1. In your opinion, are there specific indicators or trends that signal windows of opportunity for democracy promotion? What are those indicators or trends?
Challenges of Democracy; Opportunities for Strengthening Democracy	2f.1. Social media has become more influential since 2013. In your opinion, what has been the role of social media in promoting or impeding broader inclusion in democracy? b) How have different governments used social media to help or hurt democracy promotion?
Challenges of Democracy	2e.1. Did the COVID-19 pandemic have different effects on different populations regarding their democratic participation? Please elaborate. What do you think this means for future democracy promotion programming? b) What are the gendered dimensions of the pandemic's impact on democratic participation?
DRG Changes and Trends Since 2013; Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4a/d.1. Free and fair elections are understood as a key indicator of democratic integrity. What other indicators – beyond free and fair elections - would you include to assess the integrity of a democracy? Have you seen new indicators since 2013 that help to capture our understanding of democratic integrity?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4b.1. Are there specific contextual factors that need to be included in the new DRG Strategy?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4a.2. To what extent do you think USAID's democracy programming and good governance programming should go together? In the absence of democracy, do you think USAID should focus on good governance and vice versa?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4d.2. In your opinion, in which situations would USAID's DRG investments be more effective: In pushing the momentum of democratization or trying to prevent democratic backsliding? Why?
Proposed Changes to New DRG Strategy	4e.2. Do you think there are new cross-cutting themes we haven't covered that should be considered for an improved DRG Strategy?

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