

Navigating trade-offs: Risk and uncertainty in democracy promotion

Susan Dodsworth and Nic Cheeseman

University of Oxford

susan.dodsworth@politics.ox.ac.uk / nicholas.cheesman@politics.ox.ac.uk

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This paper examines how those who promote democracy can respond to eight key challenges that arise in their work. These include the challenges of managing uncertainty and balancing risk, as well as the challenges of adapting to context and working with a limited evidence base. In analysing those challenges, this paper breaks new ground, drawing on the body of practice accumulated by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. This is made concrete through internal program documents and interviews with key members of staff. We identify two trade-offs that democracy promoters must confront and propose a new framework that can be used to analyse them. This new framework recognises that when democracy promoters make decisions about how to respond to uncertainty or manage risk, it is not a question of avoiding risk and uncertainty entirely, but identifying which risks are worth taking and how much uncertainty is acceptable. By focussing attention on two particular trade-offs we offer democracy promoters, and those conducting research into their work, a clearer road-map for making and evaluating these decisions. In doing so, we provide concrete evidence of the gains that can be made when those who undertake democracy promotion make their experience public knowledge.

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, democracy promotion has become both a significant and controversial form of aid. While the late 1980's typically saw less than US\$1 billion spent on democracy promotion each year, that figure is now more than US\$10 billion (Carothers 2015). In 2005, USAID alone spent more than US\$1 billion on democracy promotion with the European Union not too far behind; its member states collectively spent about €2,500 million on democracy promotion in 2007 (Cheeseman 2015, 114–15). This increase was made possible by the dramatic change in geopolitical circumstances – after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western donors no longer felt the need to tolerate the authoritarian tendencies of many of their

Cold War allies – and was driven by a number of factors. Leading donors, including the US, UK and European donors, hoped that increases in democracy would pay dividends in terms of development, bolstered by increasing evidence that it was not necessary to pursue development first, and democracy later (Lekvall 2013). The belief that spreading democracy would reduce both interstate and internal conflicts was widespread. As the UN's Secretary General put it in 1995, democracy was a pillar "on which a more peaceful, more equitable and more secure world can be built" (Boutros-Ghali 1995, 3). This led donors, and in particular the US, to invest heavily in democracy promotion in the wake of military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Projects ranged from supporting political parties to strengthening legislatures, training electoral commissions and funding non-governmental organizations to share democratic values.

As the volume of aid dedicated to spreading and strengthening democracy increased, so too did criticism of how it was spent. Critics complain that the returns delivered by democracy promotion are often disappointing, and in some cases potentially counter-productive, either because of perverse, unintended consequences (Burnell and Gerrits 2010) or because efforts to promote democracy triggered a backlash from recalcitrant authoritarians and contributed to the closure of political space (Carothers 2006b). These questionable results are commonly attributed to a combination of factors including a lack of real commitment to the goal of promoting democracy, disagreements between donors about what democracy promotion ought to entail, an inadequate understanding about how to promote democracy in practice, and the willingness of donors to compromise (or abandon) democracy for other priorities such as combating terrorism (Brown 2005; Grimm 2015). As a result, democracy promoters are under increasing pressure to justify why they should receive public funds and how they spend it.

This paper provides both critics and proponents of democracy promotion with a new framework for analysing the trade-offs that must be made by those seeking to strengthen democracy abroad. This new framework consists of two trade-offs. The first concerns the *type* of approach employed. Typically, these focus either on an issue/event, or an institution/process. The second trade-off concerns the *scope* of the approach employed, its inclusiveness. This may be narrow or broad. In deciding whether a particular trade-off is worth it, democracy promoters face different types of risk and reward. Appreciating these is critical to informed and effective policy making. We illustrate the value of our framework by applying our new framework to several recent WFD programs.

In making this argument, the paper demonstrates how a collaborative approach to research by policy makers and academics can help democracy promoters to overcome some of the problems that they face. The framework presented below it is the product of a joint project between researchers at the University of Oxford and democracy promoters at the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). WFD is the UK's primary democracy promotion body; while formally independent of the government, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID) provide the vast majority of its funding. The research presented here represents a step towards more effectively bridging the gap that exists between research on, and the practice of, democracy promotion. It is based on a detailed review of internal WFD documents (including program proposals, reports and evaluations) relating to activities between 2010 and 2015, as well as external evaluations of WFD's works (including those commissioned by DFID and FCO), and interviews with key staff based in WFD's central office, selected field offices, and the UK political party offices that undertake the bulk of WFD's political party work. Insights are also drawn from the experience of other democracy promotion organisations, such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI),

Netherlands Institute for Multi-party Democracy (NIMD), and International Republican Institute (IRI) to ensure that the ideas put forward in this paper have broader applicability and relevance.

We begin our analysis by highlighting eight key challenges facing democracy promoters. These are the challenges of difficult cases, adapting to context, working politically, managing uncertainty, balancing risk, a tight funding environment, defining and demonstrating success, and – exacerbating all the rest – a limited evidence base. The second part of the paper then draws on an analysis of WFD’s experiences in democracy promotion to articulate our framework and explain how it can help policy makers to design better interventions. As with any kind of policy, risk cannot be eliminated, but it can be managed. The question policy makers must answer is how much risk they are willing to embrace for a given “reward”. We argue that this question becomes somewhat easier to answer if one moves from considering each democracy promotion project in isolation – in which case the risk of failure is often likely to appear to be too great – to thinking about the portfolio of democracy promotion activities undertaken by a given government or agency. When we move to a portfolio approach, it becomes possible to see how democracy promoters can pursue a diverse set of projects that balance more and less risky “investments”. The paper then concludes by identifying patterns in the activities of democracy promoters, and discussing their implications, before reflecting on how future research might help democracy promoters to manage risk and balance uncertainty more effectively.

1 Eight challenges in democracy promotion

Democracy promotion is not an easy task. Those working to strengthen democratic institutions – including parliaments, political parties and civil society – and to support democratic values – typically including transparency, accountability, equality and participation – face eight key challenges in their work. None are easy to overcome, and the last – the challenge of a limited evidence base – makes those that precede it even more difficult to deal with.

(i) The challenge of difficult cases

Even as criticism of their efforts has grown, democracy promoters have found themselves confronting an increasingly challenging operating environment. In the wake of the Cold War, the easy victories were won relatively quickly, as democracy promoters focused their attention on countries where political and socio-economic conditions were generally favourable to democracy (Burnell 2008). Today, the countries in which democracy remains absent or low quality are those where theory suggests that democratization is relatively unlikely (Plattner 2014). As Levitsky and Way (2015) observe, we are now left with countries where a combination of factors militate against democratization: weak states in which poverty is widespread, monarchies with access to vast oil wealth, and strong states with single party regimes whose success in delivering economic growth provides them with legitimacy. These cases represent a significant challenge to democracy promotion; the standard wisdom is that while it can help to “speed up a moving train” it has little impact when a regime’s political momentum is taking it away from, rather than towards, democracy (Carothers 1999, 304).

(ii) The challenge of adapting to context

‘Context matters’ has become something of a catch-cry in democracy promotion. Yet exhortations to pay attention to context can refer to a number of different things, none of which are necessarily straight-forward or easy to do. At the national or ‘macro’ level, democracy promoters have been advised to design programs that respond more effectively to a country’s

specific circumstances, including its history of conflict, the nature of its democratic trajectory and the extent to which the political elite are genuinely committed to democracy (Gershman 2004; Schlumberger 2006; Zeeuw 2010). Precisely which aspects of national context matter most, when they matter, and why, remains murky, in part because the evidence base supporting democracy promotion remains so limited (discussed below).

Adapting to context means something slightly different at a more practical level. At its most basic, it means avoiding cookie cutter solutions, designing programs that respond to local demands and needs and thus facilitate local ownership. This sounds obvious, but it's clearly not. Comparing parliamentary strengthening programs in five Pacific Island countries, Kinyondo and Pelizzo (2013) found that few had been informed by an assessment of local needs. In one case, training was provided in a language (English) that only a handful of MPs spoke fluently. At a more sophisticated level, adapting to context means not assuming democracy can or should work the same everywhere, allowing space for different varieties of democracy. While calls to recognise the value of alternative versions of democracy – and in particular non-Western ones – have merit, there is as yet no clear blueprint of what such a democracy looks like, and no good roadmap for obtaining one (Youngs 2015).

(iii) The challenge of working politically

Almost universally, critics and supporters have advised democracy promoters to adopt more political approaches in their work. Such advice reflects a broader shift in international development, one that has seen practitioners attempt to reduce their reliance on technocratic solutions and to employ more political astute methods (Carothers and De Gramont 2013). In the realm of parliamentary strengthening, for example, democracy promoters have been urged to tackle the incentives that drive the behaviour of key individuals, such as parliamentary support staff and Members of Parliament (Menocal and O'Neil 2012; Power 2011). To this end, they have been advised to integrate their work with efforts to support political parties, which shape many of the incentives faced by MPs. They have also been told to expand their conceptualization of civil society to ensure it includes more than just (purportedly) apolitical, professionalized, urban-based NGOs (Carothers 2006a; Gershman 2004).

Yet again, none of this advice is easy to follow in practice. Integrating the less obviously political aspects of democracy promotion (such as support to parliaments) with the more obviously political (such as support to parties) is challenging. As Peter Burnell (2009) points out, parliamentary strengthening and political party support has traditionally been undertaken by different types of organisations that do not necessarily have the same ways of working, nor the same visions of how programs should be implemented. Moreover, the potential for synergies between the two types of work does not mean they will always be mutually reinforcing; stronger political parties do not always lead to stronger, more democratic legislatures, as the existence of dominant-party regimes such as that of Singapore's People's Action Party demonstrates (Rodan 1996).

(iv) The challenge of managing uncertainty

Democracy promotion often has to confront a very high degree of uncertainty. Among other things, practitioners must cope with uncertainty about the timing of elections, the outcome of those elections, and the intentions of political leaders who may publicly endorse the efforts of democracy promoters while undermining them in private. They also have to cope with complex and often speculative “theories of change” (Vogel 2012) because we lack academic and policy

consensus on how democratization works and what can be done to facilitate democratic reform (Brown 2005). Indeed, we even lack consensus about where and when democratization is feasible, and the capacity of donors to advance it (Barbara 2009). This high degree of uncertainty has a tendency to push democracy promoters towards familiar solutions. Unfortunately, these 'safe' options have less potential to make a real impact; they are typically more technically focussed, less adapted to local political realities, and do less to alter the incentive structures that explain why democratic institutions – be they parliaments, political parties or civil society – are weak in the first place.

A classic example of this is how democracy promoters respond to the high degree of turnover in parliamentary elections. In many newer democracies it is by no means unusual for most of a legislatures' members to be replaced in each election. In 2008, following visits to Kenya, Malawi, South Africa and Uganda, the UK's Africa All Party Parliamentary Group remarked that the rate of turnover of MPs was "often well over 50%" in all four countries (Africa All Party Parliamentary Group 2008, 24). Such high rates of turnover introduce significant uncertainty; it is very difficult to identify which MPs are likely to retain their seats in the future. This creates a risk that democracy promoters who invest in the skills and knowledge of MPs will see those investments amount to nothing once elections roll around again. The standard solution in this situation is to focus on building the capacity of parliamentary support staff such as committee clerks or research officers. Such investments in institutional capacity are valuable, but they inevitably have an attenuated impact on the behaviour of the MPs who constitute a legislature.

(v) *The challenge of balancing risk*

Democracy promoters must deal not only with the risk of failure, but also the risk that their work will have unintended consequences. Democratization is a complex process and attempts to intervene sometimes have unexpected and undesirable results. Organizations such as the African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption (APNAC), which recruits MPs committed to fighting corruption across African legislatures, have often found that many of their members are not returned, causing considerable disruption to their reform efforts. In many African states, clientelism has been institutionalised as part of an MP's role – constituents expect it – so is often those MPs that refuse to engage in clientelism and devote their time to longer-term structural reforms that are least likely to secure re-election (Lindberg 2010). Efforts to increase citizen engagement in politics can also backfire. A program designed to encourage citizens to monitor and report instances of electoral malpractice in Georgia's 2008 parliamentary elections successful did so, but in the process suppressed voter turnout by about 5% (Driscoll and Hidalgo 2014). Researchers speculated that surveys conducted as part of the intervention had discouraged respondents – and in particular supporters of the opposition – from voting by increasing fears of government surveillance.

Increasingly, democracy promoters must also balance the risk of triggering an authoritarian backlash. In the early 1990s Western donors at times got away with democracy promotion because dictators did not really believe it would work (Carothers 2016). The apparent success of democracy promotion in Serbia, where it appeared to add momentum to the fall of Slobodan Milosevic, closely followed by the colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, led many authoritarian leaders to think again and to resist democracy promotion. Similarly, in Africa, the early fall of authoritarian governments in Benin and Zambia was followed by a period in which incumbent presidents developed new strategies to outwit foreign donors, winning 88% of the elections they contested (Cheeseman 2010). While analysis of this phenomenon was initially

anecdotal (Carothers 2006b) new research demonstrates the problem in greater empirical depth. Savage (2015) shows that the risk that democracy promotion will inadvertently trigger repression is higher when recipients have a larger military. He theorizes that regimes with large militaries are more likely to feel threatened by political liberalisation and are more likely to have the capacity to suppress it. Another recent quantitative study demonstrates that higher aid flows increase the risk that a country will pass laws that restrict the financing of NGOs, a risk that is exacerbated by the holding of competitive elections (Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash 2016).

(vi) The challenge of the funding environment

In an era of economic austerity, aid budgets, including budgets for democracy promotion, are under increased public scrutiny. This hasn't always translated into budget cuts; in 2016 the UK government doubled its funding to the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, bringing it to £10.6 million, its highest ever level (Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2016). However, in some cases "democracy funds" are misleadingly labelled, and include resources targeted at national reconstruction following military interventions in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq – the amount of money being invested in legislatures and electoral commissions remains a small portion of the total budget. Moreover, even where budgets have been maintained, democracy promoters are being asked to do more, and to do it better. In particular, those working in this area are being pushed to adopt more innovative methods and to demonstrate their impact by measuring and quantifying results. As will be discussed below, democracy promotion is an area where this is particularly hard to do.

The funding environment also makes democracy promotion difficult because it constrains them from making some of the more fundamental changes to the way they work. This sometimes prevents them from adopting the recommendations of experts that funders themselves have commissioned to conduct reviews. Several wide-ranging reviews of parliamentary strengthening programs (Menocal and O'Neil 2012; Tostensen and Amundsen 2010) have advised democracy promoters to adopt more long-term approaches, but many democracy promoters are working with funding cycles of 3 years (or less), a fact that precludes the design of programs with longer time horizons. Similarly, while research suggests that democracy promoters need to be better at adapting to context, recognizing local norms and practices that could inform new varieties of democracy, they still have to account to domestic audiences whose money is being spent. That domestic audience often expects to hear that its own version of democracy is being promoted. In 2015, the International Development Committee of the UK's House of Commons noted DFID's reliance on US organisations to implement democracy programs, expressing alarm at the prospect of UK taxpayer money being used to promote US models of democracy, even as it claimed to accept that there was no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to democracy (International Development Committee 2015, 45).

(vii) The challenge of defining and demonstrating success

Another important challenge for democracy promotion is defining and measuring success. Democracy is an essential contested concept and different democracy promoters have varying objectives. This makes it extremely difficult to determine what success looks like. This problem that is often particularly acute in the realm of political party support; does strengthening a single political party constitute success, or are we only successful if that translates to changes in the nature of the political party system? Evaluations of democracy promotion also run into a host of methodological challenges (Green and Kohl 2007). Democratization is also a complex, uneven and lengthy process. The benefits of a particular democracy promotion program may only come

to light years after its conclusion. To cope with this, many democracy promotion organisations have invested in strengthening their monitoring and evaluation systems, yet most evaluations take place months, not years, after the completion of a given program. The complexity of political change also means that confident attribution of causality is often all but impossible. The activities that comprise a program may be successfully completed, but the contribution of those activities to changes in the nature of the national political regime is generally extremely hard to detect. Democracy promoters do not have the luxury of testing what would have happened if their program had not occurred.

(viii) The challenge of a limited evidence base

The challenges identified above are exacerbated by the limited and conflicting evidence base on which it rests. There is a curious discrepancy between the findings of quantitative and qualitative research on democracy promotion. Cross-country statistical studies tend to show that, at the aggregate level, aid targeted at strengthening democracy does have a positive effect. Analysing the period between 1988 and 2011, Scott and Steele (2011) found that US aid targeted at democracy promotion was effective, even when controlling for the effect of democratization on aid allocation.¹ Newer studies draw on data from a broader range of donors. Dietrich and Wright (2015) provide evidence that democracy aid supports democratic consolidation by making multiparty failure² and electoral misconduct less likely. Similarly, Jones and Tarp (2016) report that stable flows of aid targeted at governance have a positive effect on political institutions. In contrast, qualitative analyses that focus on a limited number of countries in greater depth tend to struggle to find anything positive to say about the international community's efforts to promote democracy. Qualitative research is particularly rife with case studies that call into question the utility of political party support (for example Bader 2010; Spoerri 2010; Zeeuw 2010). From an academic point of view, the negative findings of such case studies are hard to reconcile with the cautiously positive findings of quantitative research. For practitioners and policy makers they are also problematic; they tell democracy promoters what not to do, but they offer very little in terms of positive guidance.

One reason why the evidence base on which democracy promotions rests is so limited is the fact that, until relatively recently, those who engaged in it rarely commissioned rigorous, independent evaluations of their own work. When they did, they were generally not made publicly available (Erdmann 2005). In part, this was because the kind of work done by democracy promoters demands discretion; it involves winning the trust of suspicious partners who are often working in highly repressive environments. However, in the last couple of years, some democracy promoters have taken steps to change this. In 2014, the Netherlands Institute for Multi-party Democracy (NIMD) published an evaluation of its direct party assistance (Schakel and Svåsand 2014), followed shortly after by an evaluation of its entire 2011-2014 program (Piron 2015). In 2015, the International Development Committee of the British Parliament conducted a public enquiry on the UK's contribution to parliamentary strengthening (International Development Committee 2015). That enquiry, which encouraged WFD to adopt a more critical approach to its work, helped to motivate the research project of which this paper forms part. These are

¹ Previous research suggests countries that democratize tend to receive an immediate increase in foreign aid (Alesina and Dollar 2000).

² They define 'multiparty failure' to include: (i) change of government via a coup or civil conflict; (ii) institutional change that excludes the opposition, either because opposition parties are banned or entirely absent from the legislature; or (iii) opposition withdrawal (e.g. boycott) so that the legislature includes only members of the regime (Dietrich and Wright 2015, 221).

significant steps forward, but there remains plenty of room for improvement. For too many democracy promoters, secrecy about their operations remains the default position.

2 Building bridges to overcome challenges

There are two bridges that need to be built if the challenges that confront democracy promotion are to be overcome. The first gap that requires bridging is the one between researchers concerned with democratization, and the practitioners who work to promote democracy. There is remarkably little interaction between those who conduct research on democracy and those who work to promote it. In 2010, Gero Erdmann observed a disconnect between research on political parties and political party assistance in practice. He complained that “the knowledge we have about political party assistance is not based on systematic political science research projects” (Erdmann 2010, 1280). For the most part, this remains the case today, both with respect to political party support and democracy promotion more broadly. Part of the reason for this is the fact that democracy promotion is a sensitive area. Organizations that engage in democracy promotion are wary of disrupting their programs by opening them up to outsiders. There is also significant competition for funding between democracy promoters, so they are often reluctant to share their experience lest they give away trade secrets. While understandable, this limits attempts to conduct systematic research.

The second bridge required is one that spans the gap between different forms of democracy promotion. In 2008, Greg Power observed that parliamentary and party support “remain almost entirely separate disciplines in terms of analysis, evaluation, and practice” (Power 2008, 23). Since then, democracy promoters have been repeatedly told that they should adopt more integrated, holistic approaches. Multiple reviews and evaluations have consistently advised them to link up support for parliamentary strengthening to programs that strengthen political parties (International Development Committee 2015; Menocal and O’Neil 2012; Tostensen and Amundsen 2010). Others suggest connecting parliamentary strengthening with work to support civil society (Burnell 2009). The good news is that the practice of many democracy promoters is changing. WFD’s new strategic plan places integrated programs that focus on parties within parliaments at the heart of its work (Westminster Foundation For Democracy 2015), and in the last few years it has launched a number of programs that seek to connect its parliamentary strengthening work with its support to political parties. The bad news is that academic analysis is lagging behind. Research continues to focus on different facets of democracy promotion – parliamentary strengthening, political party support and assistance to civil society – in isolation from each other.

The new framework presented below provides a means of grappling with the eight challenges of democracy promotion identified above. It helps to address the challenge of a limited evidence base by demonstrating that practitioners and researchers can work together to strengthen the empirical foundations that underpin democracy promotion. It shows that it is possible to draw on evidence from *both* parliamentary strengthening and party support programs to distil lessons that can be applied across different forms of democracy promotion. Our new framework will also help democracy promoters to make inroads in dealing with many of the other challenges we discussed in Section 1. This is particularly true of the twin challenges of managing uncertainty and balancing risk. Neither risk nor uncertainty can be entirely avoided. Indeed, one of the points our framework highlights is that riskier, uncertain programs may sometimes be desirable because they have the potential to deliver the greatest rewards. Our framework helps by providing a way of clearly identifying and articulating where and when this may be the case.

3 A new framework for analysing trade-offs in democracy promotion

Drawing on an analysis of WFD programs, we have developed a framework for analysing two critical trade-offs that arise in democracy promotion. This framework is primarily based on an analysis of selected WFD programs delivered between 2012 and 2015, though it has also been informed by recent evaluations of the work of other democracy promoters, such as NDI, NIMD and IRI (including Piron 2015; Schakel and Svåsand 2014). Our analysis of WFD programs included, *but was not limited to*, the specific programs discussed in detail below. However, it is worth noting that this analysis is not exhaustive – it did not capture *all* WFD programs conducted in that period. Rather, we targeted larger programs where either WFD or one of the UK political party international offices were active over a longer time frame. Significantly, the analysis captured *both* parliamentary strengthening programs managed by WFD’s central office, and party support programs managed by the UK political parties, who are responsible for that component of WFD’s mandate.

In analysing WFD’s experience in democracy promotion, we drew on documentary evidence (e.g. program proposal, reports and evaluations) supplemented by both formal interviews (17)³ and informal discussions with the people responsible for managing and/or delivering those programs. One weakness of this approach is that it relies heavily on self-assessment of programs, including the perspective of program beneficiaries only to the extent that they are reported in program documents. This could create a bias towards classifying programs as successful. Yet while some program reports may have erred on the side of optimism, in interviews respondents were generally quite frank in acknowledging where programs could have performed better in terms of navigating particular trade-offs and were reasonably cautious in claiming credit for changes in the political landscape. In future research we intend to also speak to the end users of programs to access a different perspective on the impact of democracy promotion and how it can be improved.

(i) Why we need a new framework

Our motivation for developing a new framework stems, in part, from the complexity of democracy promotion. As was made evident by the discussion in Section 1, democracy promotion is made difficult by a number of different challenges. Moreover, those challenges do not exist independently of each other. The steps that democracy promoters take to deal with one, may exacerbate another. Sometimes democracy promoters know what they ought to do to overcome a given challenge, but issues relating to a second stop them from doing it. Thus, democracy promotion inevitably involves a series of compromises or trade-offs. This means that when democracy promoters make decisions about how to respond to uncertainty or manage risk, it is not a question of avoiding risk and uncertainty entirely, but identifying which risks are worth taking and how much uncertainty is acceptable. By focussing attention on two particular trade-offs we offer democracy promoters, and those conducting research into their work, a clearer road-map for making these decisions. Most notably, the framework provides democracy

³ Interviews were conducted between February and June 2016. We deliberately targeted respondents based on their positions and experience. They included WFD’s Regional Directors, Senior Programme Managers and Programme Managers, key staff from the WFD Multi-Party Office, and staff from the international offices of UK political parties (including the Labour Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Democrats and Scottish National Party). A limited number of Country Representatives, MPs and party experts/consultants involved in WFD programs were also interviewed.

promoters with a way of justifying risk-taking to funders, and provides funders with a way of assessing whether programs have been designed in a manner that balances risk against reward.

This new framework is also designed to channel the findings of other researchers and make them available to those working in democracy promotion. Several years ago, Peter Burnell argued that democracy promoters need to shift from relying almost exclusively on ex post evaluations of their work, to drawing on both ex post evaluations, and ex ante appraisals of their strategies and plans conducted before they are put into practice (Burnell 2008). To do so, they need evidence-based tools for evaluating the design of their programs before those programs are implemented and while they are in operation. Political scientists are not particularly good at providing such tools; academic research tends to focus on explaining what has happened, rather than what has yet to happen. This paper is intended to rectify this situation, providing a mechanism through which experience from past programs can be fed back into policy-making and program design.

(ii) Two trade-offs in democracy promotion

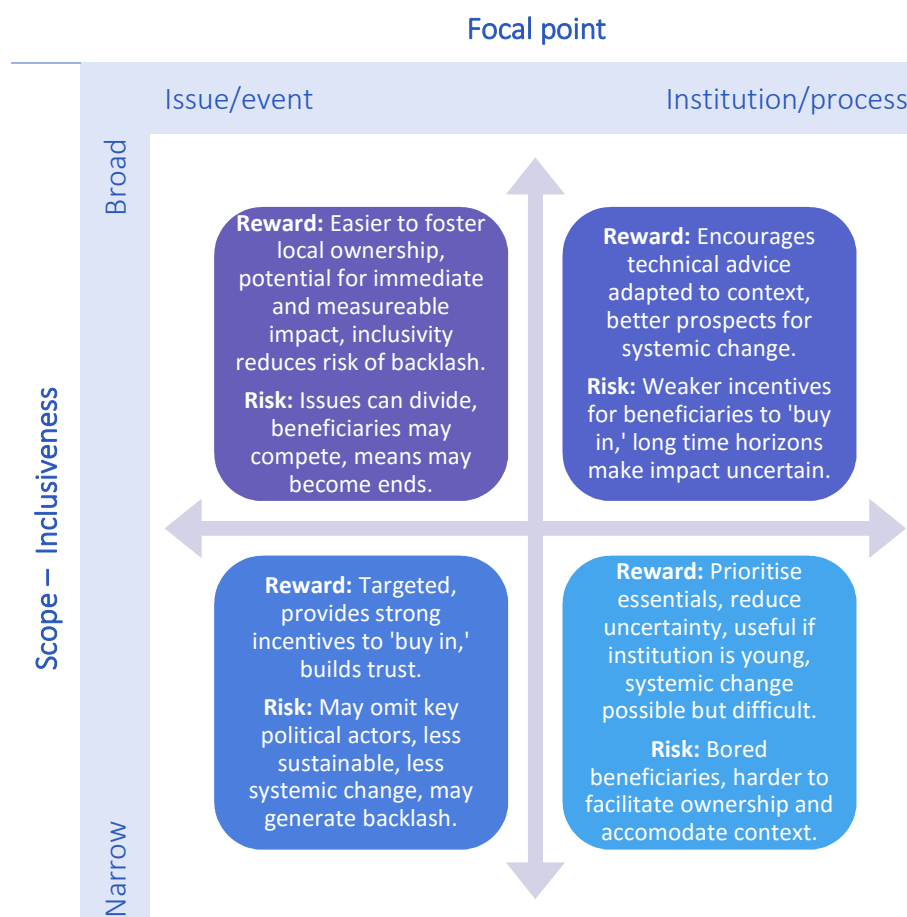
Our framework centres on two critical trade-offs that arise in democracy promotion. The first relates to the type of approach employed in a program; should it be one that focusses either on a thematic issue (like gender) or a specific event (like an election) as a vehicle for promoting more fundamental institutional changes, or should it be one that expressly focusses on a particular institution and its processes (like parliamentary committee hearings)? The second trade-off relates to the scope of a program, the decision about who it should include. This may be either narrow, for example including a limited number of parliamentary clerks, or it may be broad, encompassing a more inclusive mix of political actors such as (in the case of a parliamentary strengthening program) those from civil society. Each of these trade-offs interacts with the other, producing four main options for program design. Figure 1, below, illustrates the different options and summarises the risks and rewards associated with each one. We discuss these in more detail in the following section.

An important point to note here is that these are not the only trade-offs that arise in democracy promotion. Democracy promoters encounter other dilemmas as well, such as the choice of whether to respond quickly to events, launching new programs when sudden windows of opportunity for political reform appear, or to invest in targeted countries over the longer term in the hope of fostering incremental change. We chose to focus our framework on the two trade-offs it features for several reasons. One is that they arise particularly frequently. Indeed, it is impossible to design a democracy promotion program without making some kind of decision about where to focus and who to include. A second reason is that analysing democracy promotion by reference to these two trade-offs provides a way of making some of the challenges discussed above – such as managing risk, working politically and adapting to context – far more concrete. As such, a framework that centres on these two trade-off provides a way of translating the general recommendations made by past evaluations and research into concrete decisions about democracy promotion should actually be done in specific cases. A third reason is that these two trade-offs cut across all areas of democracy promotion, including both parliamentary strengthening and political party support. As such, they provide a means of breaking down the barriers that exist between these sub-fields, both in terms of research and practice.

Figure 1 presents outcomes of these trade-offs as four discrete choices. However, the trade-offs that arise in democracy promotion are rarely absolute: the four options illustrated above are not mutually exclusive in practice. Larger programs allow different options to be combined. Longer programs allow different approaches to be employed sequentially. The former was the case in the

WFD's program in the DRC's Province Orientale, the latter was the case in its program in Kyrgyzstan. Both are discussed in more detail below.

Figure 1 Trade-offs in democracy promotion



(iii) Where to focus: Issues and events, or institutions and processes?

One trade-off that arises in the design and implementation of democracy promotion programs is the choice of where to focus. Here there are two main options. The first is to focus on a particular issue (a substantive topic or theme, such as gender-based violence) or a certain event (such as an election or a party conference); an issue or event-based approach. These approaches are not really about the issue or event; while democracy promoters do see progress on specific issues (such as gender-based violence) as intrinsically valuable, they are ultimately a tool for promoting more fundamental shifts in procedures and practice. The second type of is to focus on a specific institution and its internal processes and procedures, what can be termed an institutional approach. This type of program centres on efforts to ensure that the individuals who work within political institutions (parliaments, parties and civil society) have the basic skills and knowledge necessary to make them work.

Different types of approach prevail in different areas of democracy promotion. In the realm of legislative strengthening, democracy promoters tend towards institutional approaches; these commonly include efforts to build the capacity of parliamentary support staff (in particular those

who support parliamentary committees) and to advance reforms to a parliament's rules of procedure or standing orders. The popularity of institutional approaches stems, in large part, from their ability to reduce uncertainty: while the electoral fortunes of individual MPs are often highly uncertain, a parliament's support staff and procedural rules are far more likely to survive beyond the electoral cycle. When it comes to supporting political parties, democracy promoters tend to default towards approaches that centre on issue or events. In this case, much of their appeal lies in the gravitational pull of elections, the events that define democracy and provide political parties with most of their *raison d'être*. Political parties are generally eager to improve their electoral fortunes, so programs that place their focus here find it relatively easy to facilitate local ownership.

Several previous reviews have recommended that democracy promoters make greater use of issue-based approaches with respect to parliamentary strengthening programs (Menocal and O'Neil 2012; Tostensen and Amundsen 2010). They did so on the basis of concern that institutional approaches were often perceived as boring by beneficiaries – who could see no clear benefit from such programs – and sometimes led to misguided approaches to transplant procedures used in one context to another. In contrast, it was argued, issue-based approaches were more likely to facilitate local ownership and provide beneficiaries with concrete incentives to back reforms. Yet WFD's experience suggests that *neither* type of approach makes it impossible to do this, nor does either approach guarantee it. This point becomes more obvious when we look beyond parliamentary strengthening (where issue and event-based approaches are still relatively new) to political party support. Political parties are, predictably, eager to be involved in programs that offer them support geared around an upcoming election. Yet taking an institutional approach does not automatically preclude a high degree of local ownership; this may be exactly what program beneficiaries want.

Issue and event-based approaches may appeal because they produce more immediate results that can be easily measured and linked to program activities. This facilitates monitoring and evaluation and thus reduces uncertainty about the impact of democracy promotion. For example, in a parliamentary strengthening program centred in the issue of gender-based violence, supporters may be able to point to a new bill or legislative amendment. In a political party support program geared around an election, the election builds in an easily quantifiable measure of impact into the program: the performance of the party in terms of votes. Yet this fall in uncertainty with respect to immediate impact comes at the cost of other risks: factors beyond the control of democracy promoters could torpedo a party's electoral fortunes, and a legislative proposal, once passed, may have little impact on social behaviour. Issue or event-based approaches also entail a risk that means become ends; that the particular issue or event employed as a focal point distracts from the pursuit of more ambitious institutional outcomes. Adopting event-centred approaches entails a risk that more ambitious objectives, such as fundamental changes in the nature of political institutions, are not pursued.

This is why institutional approaches remain important. They support the (initially) less-obvious, longer-term changes that are an essential part of democratic consolidation; a parliament's ability to hold regular committee hearings or a political party's ability to manage leadership succession in a democratic manner. When successful, such programs are more sustainable because they leave behind lasting institutional capacity. Sometimes institutional approaches are an essential first step – addressing very basic issues like time management, staff morale and the availability of meeting spaces – before issue or event-based approaches can put reformed procedures into practice. Institutional approaches also appeal when the political landscape is highly uncertain; if

democracy promoters invest in strengthening processes and procedures their investments are less vulnerable to the fluctuating political fortunes of individuals. As a result, they entail fewer (or at least, less obvious) political risks than programs centred on issues or events. Some issues and events are very sensitive; making them the focus of a program can increase the risk that it will be perceived as outside (and in most cases, Western) interference in domestic politics. This can create a backlash, both against democracy promoters, who may be perceived as pursuing their own political agenda, and against the individuals and organisations who participate in such programs, who may find themselves they champion issue – such as LGBT rights – that put them at odds with public opinion or those in power. While institutionally focussed programs bring their own risks – shifting the institutional status-quo can trigger instability and conflict – they tend to be politically ‘safer.’

(iv) Who to include: Narrow the scope, or make it broad?

The second big trade-off that arises in democracy promotion relates to the scope of a program. Simply put, it is the question of who to include. Here, choices can increase or mitigate different forms of risk or uncertainty. In the case of parliamentary strengthening programs, democracy promoters often direct their attention to a narrowly defined group of parliamentary staff, such as the clerks who support parliamentary committees. In many ways, this decision is defensible; staff perform essential functions in any parliament, and in a country where electoral turnover is high, staff constitute the core of a parliament’s institutional memory. Directing attention to MPs increases uncertainty, because there is no guarantee they will be re-elected. This is a significant concern in some developing countries; it is almost always flagged as a risk in proposals for parliamentary strengthening programs. Yet MPs, the elected representatives of the people, cannot be ignored entirely. To do so runs the risk that key political figures will be excluded from the program, something that often renders them unsustainable in the long term.

This problem is even more acute when it comes to political party support. Democracy promoters can target the party leadership, hoping that that will institute top-down political reforms. Often this takes the form of study visits or exchanges in which senior party figures are given the opportunity to see how things are done elsewhere. These kinds of programs – which are both narrow in scope and focussed on an event – represent something of a gamble. Their success is dependent both on the political fortunes of those individuals and on their (assumed) willingness to implement reforms. The flip side of this is programs that leave leaders out, focussing instead on a party’s youth wing or women’s wing. These programs are narrow in a different way. While their success is less tied to the political fortunes of an individual (a factor reinforced by the fact that their focus is on the party’s institutional structure and process rather than an issue or event), excluding leaders is risky because they are often in a position to block the reforms that are being advanced.

Democracy promoters are increasingly attempting to bring a broader range of actors into their work. They have been encouraged to build links between civil society and parliaments, as well as between civil society and political parties. In practice, this has the potential to bring both risks and rewards. Including local NGOs and CSOs can make it easier to identify the substantive problems that could form the focus of an issue-based approach. When CSOs and NGOs are included as local partners (i.e. they help to deliver a program) rather than simply beneficiaries, their participation helps to ensure that expert advice is adapted to local political context. Yet bringing in more actors creates more opportunities for disagreement, and increases the risk that beneficiaries will see each other as competitors for political power, rather than partners in

political change. In some contexts, this is a significant concern; in countries where democracy is less established, MPs and civil society activists often view each other with distrust and suspicion.

Sometimes external factors, such as a limited budget may trump other concerns. More inclusive programs tend to cost more, while a narrowly targeted program has the advantage of focussing limited resources on the most important actors. This constraint weighs more heavily on some democracy promoters than others; WFD is an important figure in democracy promotion, but its budget is easily exceeded by US democracy promotion organisations, such as NDI.

(v) *Navigating the trade-offs*

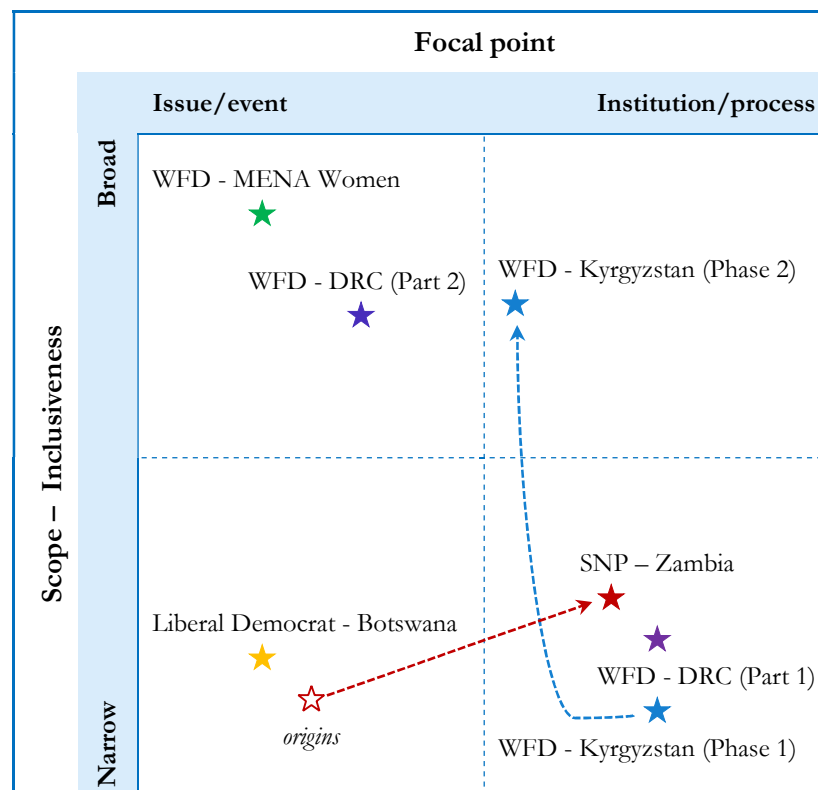
This framework suggests four “ideal types” of programme. We do not intend to suggest that any of these types is inherently better than any of the others – the point is rather that each comes with costs and benefits, and are likely to be more or less suited to achieving different types of goals. Given the different risks and rewards these programmes can generate, and the diversity of challenges that democracy promoters face, large organizations are likely to be involved in a range of projects that conform to two, three or four of the categories. This is a good thing: a diverse portfolio of programmes can enable democracy promoters to balance high risk/higher reward projects against low risk/lower reward ones, pushing the envelope while ensuring that they have concrete achievements to report to funders.

4 The framework in practice

As is perhaps clear from the preceding section, whether or not the risks inherent in any given approach to democracy promotion are justified by its (potential) rewards depends, inevitably, on context. Yet which aspects of context matter most, and how do they affect the trade-offs that arise in democracy promotion? Applying our new framework to several WFD programs helps to move from exhortations that ‘context matters’ to more concrete suggestions about how democracy promotion can be adapted to context. Here we consider each category in turn, through the lens of five different democracy promotion programs; two parliamentary strengthening programs managed by WFD’s central office (one in the DRC’s Province Orientale, one in Kyrgyzstan); one regional program centred on women as political leaders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), also managed by WFD’s central office; and two bilateral party support programs. In the first of these the Liberal Democrats provided support to the Botswana Movement for Democracy. In the second, the Scottish National Party (SNP) provided support to the Forum for Democracy & Development in Zambia.

As Figure 2 shows, these five programs – some of which had multiple phases or parts – can be mapped against the framework presented above. In each of these programs, different trade-offs were made with each having different implications for risk and uncertainty.

Figure 2 Categorization of selected WFD programs



(i) Narrowly inclusive with focus on issue or events

The Liberal Democrat's support to the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD) provides an example of a program that adopted a narrow scope in combination with a focus on a particular event. The program, *Building a Blueprint for Best Practice in Sister Party Constituency Campaigning*, centred on Botswana's general election, held in October 2014. The primary goal of this program was to ensure that the BMD's leader, Gomolemo Motswaledi, was elected as the MP for his constituency (Gaborone Central), and to put the BMD and the broader coalition of which it was part (the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC)) in a position to be recognised as the official opposition. This program formed the final part of a three-year strategy for engagement with the BMD; in 2012 and 2013 the Liberal Democrats had provided BMD with support to identify, train and select future election candidates, and strengthened the capacity of the party to develop and test campaign messages through polling.

The program was very narrowly defined; its scope encompassed only a small sub-set of the party (the campaign team and party leadership) and while the program did include activities linked to the election as a whole, a single (albeit strategically important) constituency was put centre-stage. This represented a particularly high-risk strategy: most, though perhaps not all, of its eggs were in one basket. The ultimate success of the program was tied to the personal and political fortunes of a single individual. In this case that risk did in fact materialise in a very unfortunate and unexpected way; Gomolemo Motswaledi, died in a car accident in 2014. This left the Liberal Democrats facing a dramatic increase in uncertainty. Its previous investment in building a strong rapport with the party's leader and his advisers was lost. It was by no means clear that the party's new leader, Ndaba Gaolathe, would support the *Building a Blueprint* program. One expert involved in the program recounted a frank conversation with him, in which they asked directly,

“Do you want me to come?” (interview, 7 June 2016). Fortunately, in this case, the program’s focus on a particular event provided a strong incentive for the new leader to say yes; the program was adapted to target his constituency, Bonnington South.

The *Building a Blueprint* program is also illustrative of the heightened risk of backlash that is one of the downsides of focussing on specific issues or events. In this case, the program had a very overly political objective, one that could easily have triggered a negative reaction from the Government of Botswana. During the planning process, the FCO flagged concerns that the program could have a negative effect on the bilateral relationship between the two countries. However, this risk does not appear to have materialised. The expert involved most heavily in the campaign for Bonnington South reported that they did not encounter any complaints that suggested the program had been perceived as interference on the part of the UK government (interviews, 7 June 2016). Context appears to have played a significant role here; Botswana is one of the most democratic countries in Africa, with one of the longest histories of respecting civil liberties and political rights. The (successful) gamble made by the Liberal Democrats in this case, would have been far harder to justify in a more repressive environment.

This program also demonstrates that while this kind of approach can offer more immediate and measurable successes, they very rarely lead to change at the national or systemic level. In the case of the *Building a Blueprint* program, the Liberal Democrats were able to point to some very clear successes; Ndaba Gaolale won the seat of Bonnington South and the wider electoral success of the BMD was sufficient to see it, as part of the UDC, become the official opposition. Yet, some of those gains came at the cost of other opposition parties (including the party supported by the UK’s Labour Party, the Botswana Congress Party) rather than at the cost of the governing party, the Botswana Democratic Party. As such it is unlikely (though not impossible) that the electoral gains of the BMD will translate to change at the level of the political party system, and thus further consolidation of democracy. This reflects an important weakness of democracy promotion programs that combine limited inclusiveness with a focus on issues or events. Such programs may, however, lay the groundwork for different types of programs that are better able to foster system level changes. This was the case in Zambia, where (as Figure 2 illustrates) a more institutionally focussed program was built on the foundations of more event-centred programs that had helped to build relationships of trust between key party figures in the SNP and the Forum for Democracy & Development (FDD).

(ii) Narrowly inclusive with focus on institutions or process

In 2012, the SNP launched a multi-year program of support to the FDD in Zambia. As part of that program, the SNP has provided the FDD with advice on campaign strategy and tactics, but the bulk of its work has been directed towards more foundational issues, such as the development of local branches and the recruitment of party members. As such, the program combines a relatively narrow scope (it only includes those within the party) with a focus on the party as an institution and its internal processes. To date, the most tangible result to flow from this programme has been linked an initiative to sell party membership cards, launched in 2012. This has expanded the membership base of the party and moved it a small but significant step towards a firmer, more sustainable financial footing. The initiative also triggered changes in the FDD’s internal structures and boosted its electoral fortunes.

Internal WFD evaluations report that local branches are now more visible and appear better organized, while in the 2015 Presidential by-election the FDD increased its vote share in most of the areas where the membership drive was implemented by a much wider margin than it did in

other areas. More significantly, however, the initiative has helped to reinforce the FDD's commitment to campaigning on issues, rather than personalities. This is notably because the FDD remains a smaller party in Zambia – in the August 2016 general election its vote-share was higher than in 2011, but remained well below that of the two major parties. Yet there are signs that these changes in its behaviour are having some impact on the political party system as a whole. Following an assessment visit in March 2016, the SNP's evaluation team cautiously pointed to evidence from several sources suggesting that the FDD's adoption of policy-based positions had the potential to shift the nature of political discourse in Zambia. The report noted that "this is how the FDD was portrayed in independent news articles and talked about on radio – including public call-in shows."⁴ This shows how a more institutionally-focused approach can make gains at the level of the political system possible (though not easy) to achieve.

WFD's parliamentary strengthening work also provides illustrations of this kind of approach. The program *Increasing Democratic Participation in Province Orientale* provides one example. In this sub-national program WFD worked to strengthen the capacity of the Provincial Assembly of the Province Orientale (PAPO) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), between 2012 and 2015. WFD employed a two-pronged approach. The first, larger, component of the program adopted a narrowly inclusive, institutionally-focussed approach; it provided MPs and staff from PAPO with training on essential procedural issues and skills, including those relating to committee hearings. In this case such an approach was warranted primarily because of the age of the PAPO; it was very young and was working from a very limited base. Yet the institutional approach did come with downsides; there was a risk that it would prove difficult to get participants interested in these less exciting issues. WFD compensated for this in two ways: it invested heavily in building and maintaining a strong relationship with the Speaker of the Parliament, and it used a strategic purchase of IT equipment (a single photocopier, something that WFD normally would not fund) as an incentive to engage. The extremely low baseline capacity of the PAPO also proved to be an unanticipated advantage because it meant that participants were more enthusiastic about the opportunities that WFD provided. As one WFD program manager observed, "Everything was big for them. Everything we wanted to do, they wanted to do it" (interview, 24 February 2016).

In the DRC, the focus on PAPO as an institution also heightened the risk that program activities would not be adequately adapted to context; the apparent (but often superficial) similarities between institutions mean that this type of program is more likely to invite 'cookie cutter' solutions. A common mistake in democracy promoters is to assume that the rules and procedures with which they are familiar can be transferred elsewhere. This risk was particularly acute in this case, where WFD (an organization familiar with the operations of the UK Parliament) was seeking to support a legislature whose reference points were francophone, rather than anglophone, institutions. WFD circumvented this risk by making the program a little more inclusive; it collaborated with a local partner, the *Réseau Congolais de Personnels des Parlements* (RCPP, a network of parliamentary staff), which bore primary responsibility for delivering training on issues of rules and procedures.

WFD faced similar challenges with respect to its support to Kyrgyzstan's national parliament, the Jogorku Kengesh. That program, which ran from 2012 to 2015, had two phases, the first of which also employed a relatively narrow and institutionally-centred approach. Activities included

⁴ SNP/WFD, *Zambia FDD Provincial Support Programme 2012-2016*, Mid-Term Evaluation 2015-2016, May 2016, p. iv.

the development of regulations to govern Regional Committee Hearings and training committee staff on how to conduct them. As in the DRC, such an approach was made necessary by the relative age of the Jogorku Kengesh. It was not ‘young’ in the sense of only recently being established (as was the case for PAPO), but it was ‘born again’ because a revolution in 2010 fundamentally changed the nature of its role. WFD wanted to strengthen the ability of the parliament to engage with regional communities, but in the absence of relevant rules and experience, it needed to address those gaps first. In Kyrgyzstan, the risk that it would be difficult to keep beneficiaries interested in an institutionally-focussed program materialized to a much greater degree; the absence of a substantive or thematic focal point made it hard to keep parliamentary staff and MPs interested. WFD’s Country Representative reported that they tended to complain that the procedural issues being addressed were boring (interview, 26 February 2016). This downside was not avoided, but it was balanced out by Phase 2 of the program (discussed below), which introduced more of a focus on substantive issues.

(iii) Broadly inclusive programs that focus on institutions and process

In Phase 2 of its Kyrgyzstan program, WFD helped the Jogorku Kengesh to put the Regional Committee Hearings into practice. With WFD support, the parliament piloted the process in two provinces, Osh and Naryn, with selected parliamentary committees. In this phase, the focus remained primarily on the institutional process, but a slightly more issue-based approach was taken. MPs had to respond to substantive problems, such as problems with the water supply in Naryn, that local CSOs raised through the pilot hearings. However, the primary goal was to entrench the Regional Committee Hearing process, rather than produce concrete outcomes with respect to the issue raised in hearings. This phase of the program was also more inclusive. WFD provided support to CSOs, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to engage with the parliament more effectively. The hope here was that by providing both CSOs and MPs with experience in the process of regional committee hearings, the parliaments engagement with regional communities would become more regular and systematic. As WFD’s Regional Director put it, “we are not doing issue-based approaches for the issue, but to build experience with practice” (interview, 23 February 2016). In this program, there was a clear desire to avoid conflating means and ends, a risk that is often associated with programs that focus primarily on an issue or event.

The WFD’s program in Kyrgyzstan illustrates another downside associated with programs that focus on institutions and procedures; the risk that long-term horizons make impact uncertain. In the view of WFD, the program was successful because it demonstrated that regional committee hearings can be an effective, sustainable, channel of communication between the national parliament, local councils, and CSOs. This was a valuable achievement in a context where the relationship between MPs and CSOs is often marked by distrust and suspicion, and where civil society remains weak outside the capital city. Yet new processes and procedures take time to become entrenched. Only time will tell whether the regional committee hearings prove to be sustainable means of connecting the Jogorku Kengesh to regional communities.

(iv) Broadly inclusive programs that focus on issues and/or events

The second, smaller component of WFD’s program in the DRCs Province Orientale illustrates some of the risks and rewards associated with broadly inclusive programs that adopt a focus on specific issues or events. This smaller component of the program targeted female MPs, bringing them together with women from several different CSOs. While the primary goal of this component was to build the leadership skills of participants, it had both a thematic focus –

gender – and a focus on a specific substantive issue that was selected by participants – the reform of traditional chieftaincies to improve gender quality. This acted as a focal point for capacity building activities and provided participants with a common interest, an incentive to work together. This was particularly valuable as in the early stages of the program because the inclusion of a broader range of actors proved a challenge; as in many less established democracies, provincial MPs and CSOs in Province Orientale tended to view each other as competitors. The relationship between them was one of suspicion rather than solidarity. Allowing program participants to nominate a substantive issue in which they had a common interest reduced the risk that the combination of issue and inclusivity would result in division and competition, rather than co-operation.

One risk that commonly arises in issue-based democracy promotion programs is that of a local backlash. This problem is most acute when the issue that is the focal point of a program is perceived as reflecting the interests or values of foreign actors. WFD program to support female political leaders in the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA Women Program) illustrates how this kind of risk can be managed. This regional program aimed to strengthen the capacity of women MPs in MENA and, in doing so, to support the progression of legislative reforms relevant to women. One of the program's key achievements was the formation of a coalition to combat violence against women. This coalition of women MPs and CSOs from eleven different countries has developed a model law protecting women against violence and worked to draw attention to gender-based violence in a number of other ways. Dealing with this issue, in this region, represents a significant risk; violence against women is a sensitive topic, often viewed as a matter that should be confined to the private sphere rather than subject to public debate. It is an area where Western organisations are often accused of seeking to impose their values on others. The inclusivity of the MENA Women program – in the sense that it included women from a wide range of countries in the region, some more progressive than others – helped to reduce this risk. It allowed the program to leverage variation across different countries in the region, drawing on examples from within MENA rather than the West. One of WFD's Regional Directors explained that such examples were perceived as “a more legitimate source of advice because it's theirs” (interview, 17 February 2016).

5 Moving past ‘context matters’

Democracy promotion is a particularly difficult task. Some remain sceptical as to whether it is even possible. That scepticism is, in large part, due to the challenges that arise in this field: difficult cases, adapting to context, working politically, managing uncertainty, balancing risk, a tight funding environment, defining and demonstrating success, and – complicating all the rest – a limited evidence base. In an effort to respond to those challenges, we have presented a new framework for analysing democracy promotion programs. This framework provides a way of identifying and evaluating the risks and rewards associated with different ways of promoting democracy. It facilitates a more nuanced analysis of risk and uncertainty and helps to translate exhortations that ‘context matters’ into something more concrete. Applying our new framework to the WFD programs discussed above offers several key insights. Those examples make it clear that context has a very strong effect on how the risks and rewards associated with each trade-off weigh up against each other. Since context is never fixed, this means the balance between the two sets of trade-offs is dynamic. Whether the risks of one approach are outweighed by the rewards it can offer will vary between different countries and will change in a given country over time. This explains why the advice that ‘context matters’ has been so difficult to put into

practice; it has rarely been clear which particular aspects of context matter most, when they matter, and how democracy promoters should respond.

Fortunately, the application of our new framework to the cases above provides some guidance in this area, helping us to move the debate past the simple conclusion that ‘context matters.’ One finding from the cases featured in this paper (and reinforced by our broader analysis of WFD’s programs) is that the age of an institution (and in particular, the age of a legislature) is important and can have a variety of different effects on whether a particular trade-off is worth making. Sometimes democracy promoters need to work with parliaments that are young, in the sense that they have only recently been established. Today, the establishment of an entirely new national legislatures is rare (a product of the rarity of succession). It is far more common to find young parliaments at the sub-national level, where they are the result of decentralization. This was the case with the PAPO in the DRC. In other cases, a parliament is not so much young as ‘born again’ because its role has undergone some fundamental change. In the 1990s, this meant a formal transition from dictatorship to democracy. Occasionally – as was the case in WFD’s Kyrgyzstan programme – it still does. Today parliaments are more likely to be rendered young again by less dramatic constitutional changes.

Both parliaments that are young and those that are ‘born again’ are, in the words of one WFD expert, ‘in a position to overhaul or start again with institutional culture’ (interview, 3 March 2016). In such cases, programs that focus on institutions have an obvious appeal; they tend to appear to democracy promoters as the natural choice. Yet WFD’s experience, viewed through the lens of our new framework, suggests that this may not always be the best option because there may be important differences between those institutions that are genuinely young and those that are ‘born again.’ Institutions that are truly young tend to have much more limited capacity, so the individuals that comprise them are more likely to embrace programs with an institutional focus, regardless of their tendency to cover less exciting procedural topics rather than substantive issues. This was clearly the case in with respect to the PAPO in the DRC. Institutions that are born again (be they a parliament or a political party) may be in need of programs that emphasise process and procedures just as much. However, they need it for a different reason; their existing ways of operating are no longer fit for purpose. In this type of context, such as that of Kyrgyzstan’s Jogorku Kengesh, the individuals who make up institutions are likely to be far less enthusiastic about programs that lack an issue or event-based focus.

Our framework, together with the examples discussed above, also helps us to work towards a more nuanced understanding of how democracy promoters might need to respond to the nature of an existing political regime. As discussed in Section 1, democracy promoters increasingly find themselves confronting hard cases. They are working in environments where democracy is relatively unlikely to flourish, even as empirical evidence mounts that democracy promotion can trigger backlash when an existing regime feels threatened. The framework we present helps to identify where this risk is greater, and some of the steps that can be taken to mitigate it. It suggests the risk of backlash is most acute when democracy promotion focusses on specific events or issues, and when it adopts a narrow approach, including a limited range of political actors. The risk of backlash is heightened when these two things are combined. As such, the Liberal Democrat’s program of support to the BMD in Botswana was a relatively high risk approach; it targeted an event that would inevitably be contentious (an election) and explicitly aimed to improve the electoral fortunes of a single party (and, above all, a single candidate). In the context of Botswana this risk was mitigated rather than exacerbated by context; though the same party has ruled since independence, respect for civil liberties and political rights is

reasonably well entrenched. In another context, such as Uganda (where opposition parties are regularly harassed and intimidated), this risk would have been magnified rather than reduced.

Our broader review of WFD programs, together with discussions with WFD staff, pointed to several ways in which external factors – in particular the funding environment – affect the way that democracy promoters weight up the trade-offs we feature in our framework. At the end of the day, democracy promoters must account to their funders for the ways in which they have spent their money. This could discourage democracy promoters from taking risks, pushing them to default towards ‘safer’ options; generally, those that focus on institutions and processes. Yet this is not be the only way that the funding environment shapes risk taking by democracy promoters. Some WFD staff reported that they did feel able to take chances and risk failure, as long as a program was designed to ‘fail fast’, building in ways of detecting failure so that WFD could pull out before too much money was wasted. On the surface this seems like good news, yet closer consideration reveals some problems. One of the challenges of democracy promotion is that of defining and measuring success. As we explain in Section 1, this is the product of several factors, not least the fact that democratization is a slow and complex process that does not easily lend itself to clear markers of success. If democracy promoters are pressed too hard to design programs that include such markers, there is a risk that they will tend to use those programs that can provide them (issue or event-based approaches) even if this is not the kind of approach that best suits the circumstances. In short, pressure to manage risk by making failure easy to identify may in fact make failure more likely.

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