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DOI:
10.1002/pad.1822

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):
Dodsworth, S & Cheeseman, N 2018, 'Risk, politics and development: Lessons from the UK's democracy aid', *Public Administration and Development*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 53-64. https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1822

Risk, politics and development: Lessons from the UK's democracy aid

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[This is the authors' Accepted Manuscript. Please see the journal *Public Administration and Development* for the published version]

Abstract

Political risks are inescapable in development. Donors keep them in check with a range of tools, but existing options provide little guidance about how political forms of risk can – or should – shape program design. This paper presents a novel framework that offers practical guidance on how to think about and manage some of these risks. This is based on a review of programs delivered by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which provides a specific type of aid: democracy assistance. Political forms of risk have a strong influence on that aid, so it provides a valuable example. Our framework centres on two trade-offs inherent in the provision of aid for democracy support. The first relates to the type of approach employed in a program; should it focus on a thematic issue or a specific event, or should it focus primarily on an institution and its processes? The second concerns the scope of a program in terms of who it includes. Understanding the costs and benefits of these trade-offs will help development practitioners to make decisions about political risks in a more rigorous and transparent way and, potentially, to shift from a culture of risk-aversion, to one of informed risk-taking.

Keywords

foreign aid, development, political risks, democracy support, political economy analysis

Introduction

International development can be a risky business. Practitioners and policy-makers confront a wide range of risks, often in highly uncertain contexts (Ika 2012). It is therefore unsurprising that development agencies have developed bureaucratic cultures generally regarded as risk averse, sometimes excessively so. The former head of the evaluation department at the UK's Overseas Development Administration (now the Department for International Development, DFID) has pointed to this one reason why evaluations of past programs often fail to trigger changes in practice (Cracknell, 2001). In 2010, Andrew Natsios (the head of USAID from 2001 to 2006) complained that aid agencies were under such constant pressure to reduce risk that it undermined their impact and compromised good practice (Natsios, 2010). More recently, the increased – and widespread – emphasis on measuring results has triggered concern due to its potential to further entrench risk-aversion within the bureaucracies that manage aid (Holzapfel, 2016).

Yet things are, slowly, changing. Advances in the field of project management have stressed that producing results in development requires aid agencies to *take* risks, not simply *avoid* them (Ika, 2012). Thus, in the World Development Report 2014, the World Bank declared its intent to shift from an institutional culture of risk-aversion, to one of informed risk taking (World Bank, 2013). Putting this into practice, however, is not straight-forward. A variety of obstacles at different levels – individual, donor agency and state – can prevent the effective management of clearly identified risks (Hallegatte and Rentschler, 2015). These include the difficulty of translating knowledge into action and, frequently, a bias towards maintaining the status quo. Complicating matters, decisions about how to manage risks almost inevitably involve difficult trade-offs (World Bank, 2013: 4, Box 1). Reducing one type of risk can raise

another. Accepting more risk might maximise the potential impact of a program, but also increase the chance that it might fail. This makes it difficult to work out how risk can – or should – shape program design.

This article moves this debate forward by presenting a new framework for analysing some of the trade-offs that arise in program design, focussing on those that emerge from, and shape, the political dimensions of risk. This framework provides a way of translating the identification and assessment of those risks into concrete action. It is based on an analysis of how political forms of risk affect aid that is given for a particular purpose: supporting democracy. As Section 2 explains, this is an area in which political risks are particularly problematic, and so represents a valuable example of the challenges that donors face. We believe that lessons about how these challenges can be managed in this area will be relevant to a much wider range of development activity. We draw on a review of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's (WFD) programs to articulate our framework (in Section 3) and to demonstrate (in Section 4) how it can help practitioners to better manage the political dimensions of risk. Finally, the conclusion considers the increasing need for analytical tools that can improve the management of political risk in democracy aid. We argue that thinking in terms of trade-offs can help development practitioners to shift their thinking – and practice – from patterns that entrench risk-avoidance, to ones that encourage informed risk-taking.

1 Types of risk and the limits of solutions so far

In 2012, the OECD identified three broad, and sometimes overlapping, categories of risk that affect development programs. Contextual risk is external to programs, including risk from economic or political shocks at the 'macro' level, as well as 'micro' level risks, such as

the absence of political support for reforms among key individuals. Programmatic risk captures risks relating to program failure, both in the sense of failing to achieve objectives and in causing unintended negative effects. Institutional risk is 'internal' from the perspective of donors and implementers, encompassing adverse effects for their staff and stakeholders. As Table 1 shows[1], each of these broad categories includes several types of risk, many of which have a political dimension; that is, either their origins or effects are political.

Table 1 Forms of risk in international development

Category	**Contextual**	**Programmatic**	**Institutional**
Definition	The range of potential adverse outcomes that could arise in a certain context. Risk that is external to the program, at both 'macro' and 'micro' levels.	Risk relating to program failure, including; (i) the potential for interventions to not achieve their objectives; and, (ii) the potential for interventions to cause harm.	Risk that is 'internal' from the perspective of donors and implementing partners, including adverse effects for their staff and stakeholders.
Specific types	• Political and social risks e.g. instability and conflict. • Economic and developmental risks, e.g. negative growth. • Humanitarian risks, e.g. refugee flows. • Risks relating to security and law and order, e.g. crime.	• Failure due to inadequate understanding of context, flawed needs assessment. • Unintended political bias in effects of aid. • Political risks for recipients. • Negative economic effects, e.g. on macroeconomic stability or tax effort.	• Operational security e.g. threats to staff. • Financial and fiduciary risk, e.g. corruption. • Reputational risk e.g. due to failure, or provision of aid to 'inappropriate' recipients. • Political risk, e.g. when aid is provided to recipients whose interests do not align with those of donors.
Political dimensions – examples from democracy aid	• Elections; uncertain timing, turnover of MPs due to election, changing balance of power in legislature. • Lack of 'political will' to pursue reforms among leaders. • Changes to policy and legislation, e.g. regulation of political parties, not caused by programme activities.	• Failure to identify relevant 'veto players' who block change, e.g. in party rules. • Undermining domestic legitimacy of programme beneficiaries, e.g. civil society. • Imposition of institutional models inappropriate in context. • Programme activities trigger repression.	• Harassment of staff, withdrawal of permits to operate in country. • Damage to reputation if aid is provided to actors lacking democratic credentials. • (Domestic) political pressure if programmes fail to produce measurable results or progress is slow.

[1] This table is based on the typology presented by the OECD (2012), with additional details added by the authors.

The political dimensions of risk are often particularly thorny. In 1996, Piers Gillespie and his co-authors (Gillespie et al., 1996) lamented that many otherwise well-designed development programs failed because their architects failed to conduct explicit assessments of political risks. These programs fell afoul of a range of factors; some were blocked by local leaders who saw them as a threat (or simply as poorly aligned with their own priorities), others by competition – or outright conflict – between different arms of government. Today, donors (and their implementing partners) use a variety of tools to keep the political dimensions of risk in check. These include new aid modalities, political economy analysis (PEA), and day-to-day risk management during implementation. But each of these approaches has limitations. Aid modalities which make payment contingent on results provide one example of why. These instruments help to 'insulate' donors from political fallout when programmes fail to achieve their objectives (a political form of programmatic risk), but they cannot shift all risk from donor to recipient (Clist, 2016). Even if failure is detected early a considerable amount of resources – often a third – will already have been spent and hence lost.

Efforts to make aid 'politically smarter' using PEA – which (among other things) attempts to identify potential veto-players – or by 'Thinking and Working Politically' (TWP) also represent an attempt to come to grips with the political dimensions of risk. In various guises – among them DFID's Drivers of Change and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Strategic Governance and Corruption Analysis (SGACA) – these tools and approaches have helped practitioners to identify whether interventions might be resisted by particular interest groups, produce unintended political side-effects, or affect (and be affected by) formal and informal political institutions (Leftwich, 2011). Unfortunately, the adoption of PEA tools has sometimes been limited to a cohort of specialist governance advisors (Carothers and De Gramont, 2013). Moreover, while PEA is now routinely carried out, it has often had limited

impact on program design and implementation (Hout, 2012; Hout and Schakel, 2014; Unsworth, 2009). One reason for this is that the broad contextual analysis provided by the first generation of PEA tools tended to offer little in the way of concrete guidance about how political risks could be managed in practice, rarely offering clear operational solutions at the program level (Carothers and De Gramont, 2013: 5; Unsworth, 2009).

Despite advances made by TWP community (Dasandi, Marquette and Robinson, 2016), and the evolution of 'second generation' PEA tools (Menocal, 2013), research still provides limited guidance in terms of how program design can shape (or be shaped by) the political dimensions of risk. A Dutch review of the SGACA process reported that many of the studies it produced were "of limited practical use" (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010: 1, cited in Carothers and De Gramont, 2013: 149). Given this, we still need better ways of translating assessments of political risks into concrete decisions about program design. This is precisely what our framework aims to provide.

2 Our evidence base

We develop our framework from an analysis of democracy assistance programs. Such programs use aid to facilitate free and fair elections, strengthen legislatures, support political parties, encourage the growth of a robust and vibrant civil society, and to spread democratic norms and values among individuals. These programs account for a small but significant proportion of Official Development Assistance (ODA). Between 2010 and 2015,

international donors spent about $8 billion on democracy assistance each year, representing almost 5% of all ODA.[2]

The impact of these funds is rarely easy to detect, largely because democracy assistance programs face many challenges. While research on the international dimension of democratization suggests 'linkage' (which includes democracy assistance) can play an important role in encouraging political reform (Levitsky and Way 2006), others stress the limited ability of foreign powers to overcome domestic barriers to democratic consolidation (Cheeseman 2015, Ch 4). Thus, the effects of political party assistance have been described as limited at best, and rarely transformative (Svåsand, 2010), while NGOs tasked with democracy promotion deliver programs that have some positive impacts but avoid confronting dictators directly (Bush 2015). Despite these limitations, recent quantitative analyses suggest that, on the whole, democracy aid has a positive effect on the quality of political institutions (Jones and Tarp, 2016), and supports democratic consolidation (Dietrich and Wright, 2015).

We focus on democracy aid because – when it comes to the political dimensions of risk – it provides a particularly valuable example. Table 1, above, includes examples of some of the most common political forms of risk that arise in democracy aid. These kinds of risk are especially multi-faceted and acute when it comes to donor activity that may strengthen or weaken the position of ruling and opposition parties in other countries. Those working to deliver democracy aid must deal with the risk of backlash by authoritarian incumbents; a growing body of empirical data (for example, Dupuy et al., 2016; Savage, 2015) supports

[2] Authors' calculations based on data from the OECD-DAC Creditor Reporting System. In calculating the amount spent on democracy assistance, we have included the following sectors: legal and judicial development, democratic participation and civil society, elections, legislatures and political parties, media and the free flow of information, human rights, and women's equality organizations and institutions.

anecdotal evidence indicating that aid intended to support democracy can trigger systemic and sophisticated resistance that ultimately reinforces the position of authoritarian regimes (Bermeo, 2016; Carothers, 2006). Democracy aid also comes with a risk of unintended side-effects. The complexity of democratization means that attempts to intervene in that process sometimes have undesirable consequences that are difficult to anticipate in advance. In one case, attempts to reduce electoral malpractice inadvertently supressed voter turnout, apparently because it made voters wary of government observation (Driscoll and Hidalgo, 2014). Further complicating matters, practitioners managing democracy aid must confront high levels of uncertainty with respect to the political context. This includes uncertainty about the timing of elections, their outcome, and the intentions of political leaders. These factors complicate the task of designing sustainable projects on issues that require long-term engagement.

This article draws on evidence from WFD, the UK's primary democracy support body. While formally independent of the government, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID) provide most of its funding. The framework we present was developed inductively, and is based on a range of evidence: a detailed review of internal WFD documents (program proposals, reports and evaluations) relating to activities between 2010 and 2015; external evaluations of WFD's work (commissioned by DFID and FCO); interviews with key staff[3] at WFD; and informal discussions with other people involved in WFD programs. Access to these documents, and people, was provided (by WFD) as part of a broader collaborative project between WFD

[3] We conducted 17 interviews between February and June 2016, choosing 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). We also interviewed a limited number of Country Representatives, MPs and party experts/consultants involved in WFD programs.

and the University of Birmingham.[4] We focus on WFD in part because it is an important actor in the field, and in part because it has given us extensive access to internal documents – something that is quite exceptional. Though one might expect providers of democracy assistance – who typically advocate transparency as a 'democratic value' – to welcome research into their work, few are willing to give academic researchers (as opposed to paid consultants) unfettered access to their internal documents. Were we seeking to make a specific causal argument about the factors that promote or retard democratization, our reliance on evidence from WFD might limit the generalizability of our findings. However, this problem is less acute given that our goal is to present an analytical framework rather than a causal claim.

The document-based component of our analysis included, *but was not limited to,* the specific programs discussed in detail below. We also reviewed documents for a much broader range of programs, listed in the Appendix. These included parliamentary programs managed by WFD's central office, and political party programs delivered either by the international offices within UK political parties, or by the WFD's multi-party office, which together comprise WFD's second 'wing'.[5] Our review was not exhaustive – we did not examine all WFD programs conducted between 2010 and 2015. Rather, we targeted larger programs and smaller programs that – cumulatively – formed part of longer term relationships between one of the 'arms' of WFD and a program partner.[6] In addition, we selected cases so as to

[4] This research project includes a post-doctoral position funded by WFD. It has produced a series of policy papers available at http://www.wfd.org/political-economy-of-democracy-promotion/.
[5] WFD has a bifurcated structure. The 'central' office is primarily responsible for parliamentary strengthening programs, civil society support, and electoral assistance. The UK parties' international offices and WFD multi-party office (which supports the programs of smaller UK parties, such as the Green Party and Democracy Unionist Party) are responsible for political party assistance programs. These are considered one of the main pillars of WFD's work, and are subject to the same basic requirements (in terms of approval and reporting) as programs managed by WFD's central office. Political party programs managed by the UK parties are funded from WFD's core budget and, despite their more overtly partisan political objectives, are categorised as Official Development Assistance.
[6] Most of WFD's political party work falls into the latter category.

capture: (i) programs from a variety of different countries and regions; (ii) parliamentary and political party programs; and, (iii) with respect to the latter, programs provided by a relatively balanced mix of UK political parties. This ensured our sample of programs was broadly representative of WFD's work.[7]

Drawing on two different forms of democracy assistance, in which risk can be expected to manifest in varied ways, also helps to ensure our analytical framework can 'travel,' rather than being of utility only to a particular type of program. More specifically, party-led programs tend to avoid some political risks because they are one step removed from the government, and hence less liable to be accused of infringing on the sovereignty of the states in which partners are located. However, they are also likely to face higher risks in terms of the prospects for sustainability. They often involve parties supporting "sister" organizations abroad, and are therefore more narrow than other forms of WFD activity. Looking at both types of projects allows us to gain insights in to the range of risk profiles in democracy assistance.

We used interviews with WFD staff to explore how they describe the advantages and disadvantages of different types of programs and to identify which programs had, in the eyes if WFD staff, been more successful in balancing political forms of risk. This guided our analysis of the documentary material. As a result, our approach relies heavily on staffs' own assessments of programs and how they managed political forms of risk. The perspective of program beneficiaries is included only to the extent that they are reported in program documents. This could create a bias towards classifying programs as successful in their

[7] While we reviewed a smaller number of parliamentary programs (see Appendix), these were typically larger than the party programs.

approach to political risks. However, we found that interviewees were generally frank in acknowledging both the strengths and weaknesses of their programs.

The nature of our evidence base makes our approach novel. The secrecy within the democracy promotion community – noted above – means that the kind of comparative analysis at the program level conducted in this article is largely absent from academic literature on democracy support. Existing research primarily consists of large-n cross-national quantitative studies and qualitative case studies of one or two countries. Comparative analysis at the program level exists, such as Carothers's (2006b) work on political party assistance, and Bush's (2015) research on NGOs, but it remains relatively rare. The scarcity of analysis at the program level makes it difficult to translate the findings of academic research into tools that may be useful to policy-makers and practitioners. The work presented here therefore serves as a timely demonstration of both the feasibility and utility of program-level analysis.

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

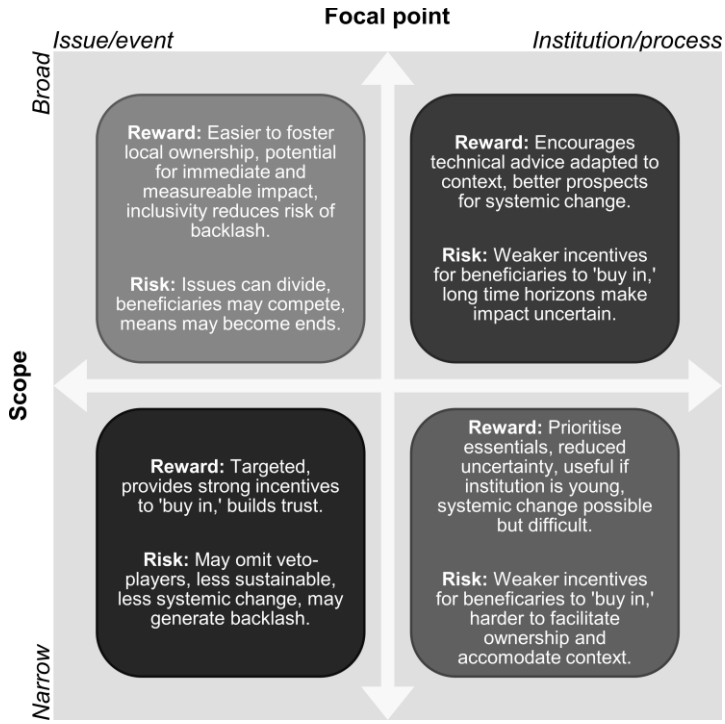
By far the most difficult thing about managing the political dimensions of risk is that they have no single origin. As Table 1 makes clear, political risks have multiple sources and come in many forms, many of which interact with each other in complex ways. When practitioners move to reduce one form of political risk, they may increase political risks from other sources. Thus, democracy support inevitably involves a series of compromises or trade-offs. In making decisions about how to respond to political forms of risk, it is not a question of avoiding it entirely, but identifying which risks are worth taking. As one WFD staffer put it, "We need to be able to take risks, but measured risks" (interview, 16 February 2016). By focussing attention on two trade-offs that arise in the design and delivery of democracy aid,

we offer aid managers – and those conducting research into their work – a tool for making – and evaluating – these decisions. In contrast to existing analytical tools, our framework, with its emphasis on trade-offs, allows us to translate existing research into concrete suggestions that can guide decisions about program design and implementation.

(i) Two trade-offs in democracy support

Our framework centres on two critical trade-offs that arise in democracy support. These are not the only trade-offs that donors face, but our review of WFD activities suggests that they are two of the most pertinent. 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 an institution and its processes (like parliamentary committee hearings)? The second trade-off relates to the scope of a program, the decision about who should be included. 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. As Figure 1 illustrates (and as we discuss in more detail in the next section), each option comes with different forms of political risk, and with different rewards. Recognising these trade-offs more explicitly provides a way of making decisions about how to manage political risks more rigorous and more transparent.

Figure 1. *Trade-offs in democracy support*



An important point to note here is that these are not the only trade-offs that arise in democracy support. In supporting democracy, aid providers 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. The two trade-offs we focus on are, however, the ones that arise most frequently. Indeed, it is impossible to design a democracy support program without making a decision about where to focus and who to include.

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

One trade-off that arises in the design and implementation of democracy support programs is the choice of where to focus. Here there are two main options. The first is to adopt an

issue or event-based approach focus by concentrating 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). These approaches are not fundamentally concerned with the issue or event; while democracy promoters do see progress on specific issues as intrinsically valuable, they are ultimately a tool for promoting more fundamental shifts in procedures and practice. One WFD manager explained, "We are not doing issue-based approaches for the issue, but to build experience with practice" (interview, 23 February 2016). An alternative strategy 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 support. 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 parliaments rules of procedure or standing orders. The popularity of institutional approaches stems, in large part, from their ability to reduce political forms of risk: 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 due to concerns 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. In short, they would help to reduce political risks. Yet WFD's experience suggests that *neither* type of approach makes it impossible to do this, nor does either approach guarantee it. 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, especially when parties are young. Similarly, in relation to legislative strengthening, one WFD staffer comment that the choice between an issue-based approach and a broader, institutional strategy "really depends what phase a parliament is in" (interview, 16 February 2016).

Issue and event-based approaches often appeal to donors 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 support. 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 and votes. This can be appealing to those providing party support, some of

whom "are very clear about wanting their work to translate into votes" (interview, 3 May 2016). Yet this fall in uncertainty with respect to immediate impact come at the cost of creating new political risk: factors beyond the control of democracy promoters could torpedo a parties' electoral fortunes, and a legislative proposal, once passed, may not be effectively implemented. Issue or event-based approaches also entail a risk that means become ends; that the issue or event employed as a focal point distracts from the pursuit of the larger goal of building stronger and more effective institutions that can sustain democratic gains over time.

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. Thus, they entail fewer (or at least, less obvious) political risks than programs centred on issues. Some topics are very sensitive; making them the focus of a program can increase the risk that the project is perceived as representing 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. Here, as one interviewee observed, "a lot of the risk is the risk to our partners" (interview, 18 May, 2016). 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 support 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 political risk. 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 risk, 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 potential problem in program proposals. 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. Membership of political parties is often fluid, and an individual's engagement in politics is not fixed. One WFD manager involved in party programs described difficulty of identifying "the people we can rely on [to remain engaged in politics]" (interview, 27 April 2016). One way to mitigate

this risk is to target the party leadership, who are presumably more invested in the party's future, 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 able to block reforms if they feel excluded.

Partly as an attempt to mitigate these challenges, 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. Moreover, when these groups 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. One WFD manager observed that with inclusive programs "there is a risk of trying to pack too many things in" (interview, 17 February 2017). 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.

(v) Navigating the trade-offs

This framework suggests four "ideal types," none of which is inherently better than any of the others, but all of which come with different costs and benefits, and are likely to be more or less suited to achieving different types of goals. However, it is also important to keep in mind that the four options illustrated in Figure 1 are not mutually exclusive because larger programs may allow different options to be combined. This is a good thing: a diverse portfolio of programs can enable democracy supporters 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 the political forms of risks inherent in any given approach to providing democracy aid are justified depends, inevitably, on context. Yet which aspects of context matter most, and how do they affect the trade-offs that arise in democracy support? Applying our new framework to several WFD programs helps to move from exhortations that 'context matters' to more concrete suggestions about how democracy support can manage political risks. Here we consider each category in turn, through the lens of several; different 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 delivered by two UK parties (the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party) under the WFD umbrella (see footnote 5, above).

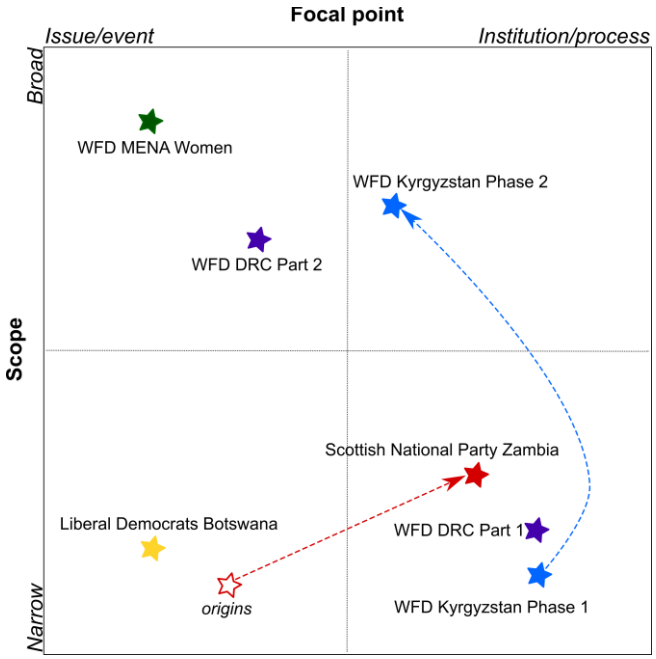
These programs were selected because, as Figure 2 shows, they provide useful examples of the full range of different approaches that we identify in Figure 1. They are not intended to be representative of all WFD programs, nor do they constitute the entire evidence base on which our framework is based (see Section 2). Instead, they are illustrative examples, chosen because they demonstrate the different trade-offs that were made and their implications for different political dimensions of risk.

(i) Narrowly inclusive issue based programs

The Liberal Democrat's "sister party" 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 an event. In this relatively politicised type of aid (which nevertheless forms part of the UKs' Official Development Assistance) UK political parties support like-minded partners abroad on a partisan basis, has the advantage that it is often easer to build trust between politicians of similar stripes. 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.

Figure 2. *Mapping WFD programs*



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 generally, 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 single event provided a strong incentive for the new leader to say yes and the program was adapted to target the constituency in which he was standing, Gabarone Bonnington South.

The *Building a Blueprint* program also illustrates the heightened risk of backlash that is one of the downsides of focussing on specific issues or events. In this case, the project 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). While this was partially due to efforts to distinguish the programs of WFD's party offices from those of the UK government, context also appears to have played a significant role; 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. It would also have been harder to justify had the program been delivered by WFD's central office, rather than the Liberal Democrats, as it was easier for the latter to distinguish themselves from the UK government. Thus, this example illustrates the different risk 'profiles' associated with different kinds of democracy assistance programs.

This program also demonstrates that while issue based approaches 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 could point to some very clear successes; Ndaba Gaolathe 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 be translated into a more effective opposition better placed to hold the government to account. This reflects an important weakness of democracy support 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 prior event-centred collaboration 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 institution based programs

In the *Increasing Democratic Participation in Province Orientale* 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. As indicated in Figure 2, 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).

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. Each phase – indicating separately in Figure 2 – took a different approach. The first phase employed a relatively narrow and institutionally-centred approach. Activities included 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 of bored beneficiaries materialized to a much greater degree; the absence of a substantive focal point made it hard to keep parliamentary staff and MPs interested. They tended to complain that the procedural issues being addressed were boring (interview, 26 February 2016). This

downside could not be avoided, but it was balanced out by Phase 2 of the program (discussed below), which introduced more substantive issues.

(iii) Broadly inclusive institutional programs

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. As Figure 2 shows, 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 had raised during 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: 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 take time to entrench. Only time will tell whether the regional committee hearings prove to be sustainable means of connecting the Jogorku Kengesh to regional communities, highlighting the temporal dimension of political risks.

(iv) Broadly inclusive issue based programs

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. As Figure 2 illustrates, this smaller component of the program took a different approach. It 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, highlighting a key risk of more inclusive strategies. However, as in many other cases, early recognition and action helped to mitigate the impact of this risk. More specifically, by allowing program participants to nominate a substantive issue in which they had a common interest, the project

secured greater buy-in, reducing the danger that disagreement over the focal point of the project would lead to competition, rather than co-operation.

One risk that commonly arises in issue-based democracy support programs is that of a local backlash. As we highlight in Figure 1, 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's 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 several 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 explains why we place the program in the upper left quadrant of Figure 2 (rather than the lower left). In practical terms, this inclusivity allowed the program to leverage variation across different countries in the region, drawing on examples from within MENA rather that 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). This program therefore

demonstrates the way in which more inclusive programs can generate benefits and risks at the same time.

Conclusion: moving towards risk portfolios

Democracy support is a form of aid that is particularly vulnerable to political forms of risk. Our framework makes it clear that in democracy support, as in any area of development, practitioners cannot fully insulate themselves from political forms of risk even if they adopt the best possible program design. They can, however, manage it more effectively. The question policy-makers and practitioners must answer is not how to eliminate risk, but how much risk they are willing to embrace for a given reward. Our framework helps with this task. For example, it suggests that some kinds of interventions can exacerbate the likelihood of authoritarian backlash, and points to steps that can be taken to mitigate that risk. More specifically, it suggests the risk of backlash is most acute when democracy support focuses on specific events or issues, and when it adopts a narrow or exclusive approach, though further research would be required to confirm this pattern. Moreover, the risk of backlash appears to be heightened when these two things are combined.

Given this, the Liberal Democrat's program of support to the BMD in Botswana represented a relatively high-risk approach; it targeted an event that was likely to be contentious (an election) and explicitly aimed to improve the electoral fortunes of a single party. However, in this case the risk was deemed to be worth it, in part because the consequences of failure in the relatively benign context of Botswana were unlikely to be severe. That example, together with the others we discuss, also makes it clear that the way in which risks manifest and play out is heavily shaped by the political environment in which a program takes place.

In light of this, the framework we present should be seen as a compass that can assist with navigation, not a detailed map with the 'correct' route marked out.

One implication of our analysis is that the question about how to balance political risks becomes somewhat easier to answer if one moves from considering each project in isolation – in which case the risk of failure due to political factors is often likely to appear to be too great – to thinking about the portfolio of democracy support activities undertaken by a given government or agency. A portfolio approach makes it possible to see how those using aid to support democracy can pursue a diverse set of projects that balance more and less risky 'investments.' Thus, while Mark Buntaine (2016) analyses how development organizations, such as the World Bank, can make portfolio composition decisions so as include the types of projects most likely to succeed, our analysis suggests the impact of aid might be increased if practitioners are – under the right circumstances – open to including projects that may fail. The challenge is to identify when it is worth 'discounting' risk in light of a (potential) greater impact.

While the pattern of risks we discuss in this article may require some transposition if our focus shifts to more traditional development goals, we believe that the value of thinking in terms of trade-offs in program design will remain. Adopting an approach centred on trade-offs forces us to recognise that there is no 'risk-free' option. Moreover, by providing development practitioners with a means of evaluating and justifying political risks in a more rigorous and transparent way, such a framework can help them to move from a culture of risk avoidance, to one of informed risk taking. Leading donors, such as the World Bank, have publicly declared their commitment to such a cultural shift. Changing practice remains a difficult task, but one that frameworks such as this may make easier.

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Appendix Programs included in documentary review

Type of program	Country/Region	Primary Partner/s	Relevant 'arm' of WFD
Parliamentary*	Balkans	Network of Parliamentary Committees on Economy, Finance and European Integration of the Western Balkans	WFD Central Office
	Democratic Republic of Congo	Provincial Assembly of the Province Orientale	
	East Africa	East African Legislative Assembly	
	Iraq	Kurdistan Parliament, Council of Representatives, Dar al Khibra	
	Jordan	Parliament of Jordan	
	Kenya	County Assemblies	
	Kyrgyzstan	Supreme Council of Kyrgyzstan	
	Middle East and North Africa	Arab Institute for Parliamentary Training and Legislative Studies	
		Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries	
	Nigeria	National Assembly of Nigeria	
	Pakistan	Provincial Assembly of the Punjab	
Integrated**	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Party of Democratic Action, Party of Democratic Progress, Social Democratic Party, Nasa Stranka	WFD Central Office & UK Parties
	Tunisia	Assembly of the Representatives of the People	
Political party - Bilateral	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Party of Democratic Action, Party of Democratic Progress	Conservative Party
		Social Democratic Party	Labour Party
		Nasa Stranka	Liberal Democrats
	Botswana	Botswana Democratic Party	Conservative Party
		Botswana Congress Party	Labour Party
		Botswana Movement for Democracy	Liberal Democrats
	Ghana	New Patriotic Party	Conservative Party
	Moldova	Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova	Conservative Party
		Democratic Party of Moldova	Labour Party
		Liberal Party of Moldova	Liberal Democrats
		Ecologist Alliance of Moldova	WFD Small Party Office (Greens)
	Montenegro	Social Democratic Party	Labour Party
	Serbia	G17 Plus	Conservative Party
		Democratic Party, Social Democratic Union	Labour Party
		Liberal Democratic Party Serbia	Liberal Democrats
	South Africa	African Christian Democrat Party	WFD Small Party Office (DUP)
	Uganda	Forum for Democratic Change	Conservative Party
		Social Democratic Party of Uganda	Labour Party
		People's Progressive Party	WFD Small Party Office (SDLP)
	Ukraine	Social Democracy Platform	Labour Party
	Zambia	United Party for National Development	Liberal Democrats
		Forum for Democracy and Development	WFD Small Party Office (SNP)
Political party - Network	Africa	Africa Liberal Network	Liberal Democrats
		Democrat Union of Africa	Conservative Party
		Women's Academy for Africa	Labour Party
	Middle East and North Africa	Tha'era (Arab Women's Network)	Labour Party

* Some parliamentary programs included support to civil society as well as legislative strengthening, thought the latter was the primary goal.

** Integrated programs typically combine legislative strengthening with support to political parties on a cross-party basis. In the period between 2010 and 2015, WFD launched a very small number of integrated programs.