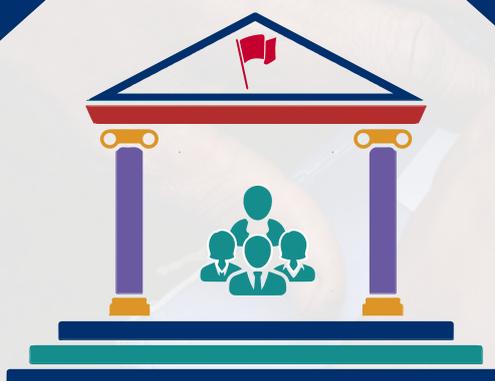




Strengthening good governance in low- and middle-income countries



Understanding good governance

Good governance is an important aspect of development, enabling it when “political decisions benefit the common good, rather than narrow elite interests, and when governments that deliver public goods and services are accountable to citizens in their spending and delivery” (FCDO 2009, 6). Yet, globally, governance indicators point to challenges. For example, in 2020, the number of free countries reached its lowest level in 15 years (Freedom House 2021), the progress in governance quality in Africa saw a decline for the first time in a decade (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2020), and almost 40 per cent of people in Asia and the Pacific perceived public services, such as policing, as highly corrupt (Transparency International 2017, 14).

Despite these challenges, good governance remains a shared goal for donors, governments and multilateral organizations. Emerging as a development priority in the 1990s, good governance is now an underlying principle to the Sustainable Development Goals, and international aid in this area has grown in recent decades. For example, official development assistance commitments for government and civil society programs rose from \$2.5 billion in 1995 (the first year for which data is available) to \$12.7 billion in 2019 (OECD 2021). However, questions remain about whether and how governance interventions are a cost-effective approach to development and poverty reduction (Cheney 2019; Rodden and Wibbels 2019, 342; Carothers and de Gramont 2011; Grindle 2004).

Previous synthesis efforts to better understand the evidence around governance have covered inclusive political processes and accountable governments, focusing on: interactions between citizens and the state (Phillips et al. 2017, 92); citizen engagement interventions including participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability mechanisms (Waddington et al. 2019); social accountability interventions (Zahan 2021); and interventions measuring cross-cutting service delivery and power-related outcomes (IRC 2016). However, these studies did not differentiate between interventions across various transparency, accountability, and oversight mechanisms; nor did they consider other critical aspects of good governance, such as public financial or administrative management.

To support evidence-informed governance policy and programming, USAID’s DRG Center commissioned 3ie to develop this EGM with the aim of: (1) identifying and describing the evidence evaluating the effects of interventions to strengthen good governance in low- and middle-income countries (L&MICs); and (2) identifying potential primary evidence and synthesis gaps. The EGM was created through a systematic search and screening process in which we identified relevant quantitative IEs, specific qualitative evaluations that address effectiveness, and SRs. The EGM intends to facilitate the use of evidence to inform decisions among policymakers, researchers, and the development community.

Highlights



- A total of 504 eligible studies were identified, including 465 quantitative impact evaluations (IEs), 19 qualitative studies with designs that account for effectiveness, one study that used quantitative and qualitative eligible designs, and 19 systematic reviews (SRs).
- The intervention categories most commonly evaluated were:
 - Tax policy and administrative reforms, and management of non-tax revenues
 - Decentralization, administrative devolution, or reorganization
 - Management innovations and civil service reforms
 - Citizen observers, monitoring of front-line service providers, and reporting mechanisms
- Outcomes on human and social development and growth were more frequently studied than direct governance measures. Only a few studies reported outcomes on internal governance processes and accountability and quality of policymaking.
- There is a lack of high confidence and up to date SRs. Of the 19 SRs on the map, only nine were assessed as high-confidence. Despite having more than 100 primary studies, no SRs were identified for tax policy interventions.
- The studies in the map were published between 1999 and 2022 and were mainly conducted in China, Brazil and India.
- Only 10 per cent of studies evaluated interventions implemented in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and 46 per cent were conducted in electoral democracies. The interventions in the evidence gap map (EGM) did not generally target specific population groups or settings.

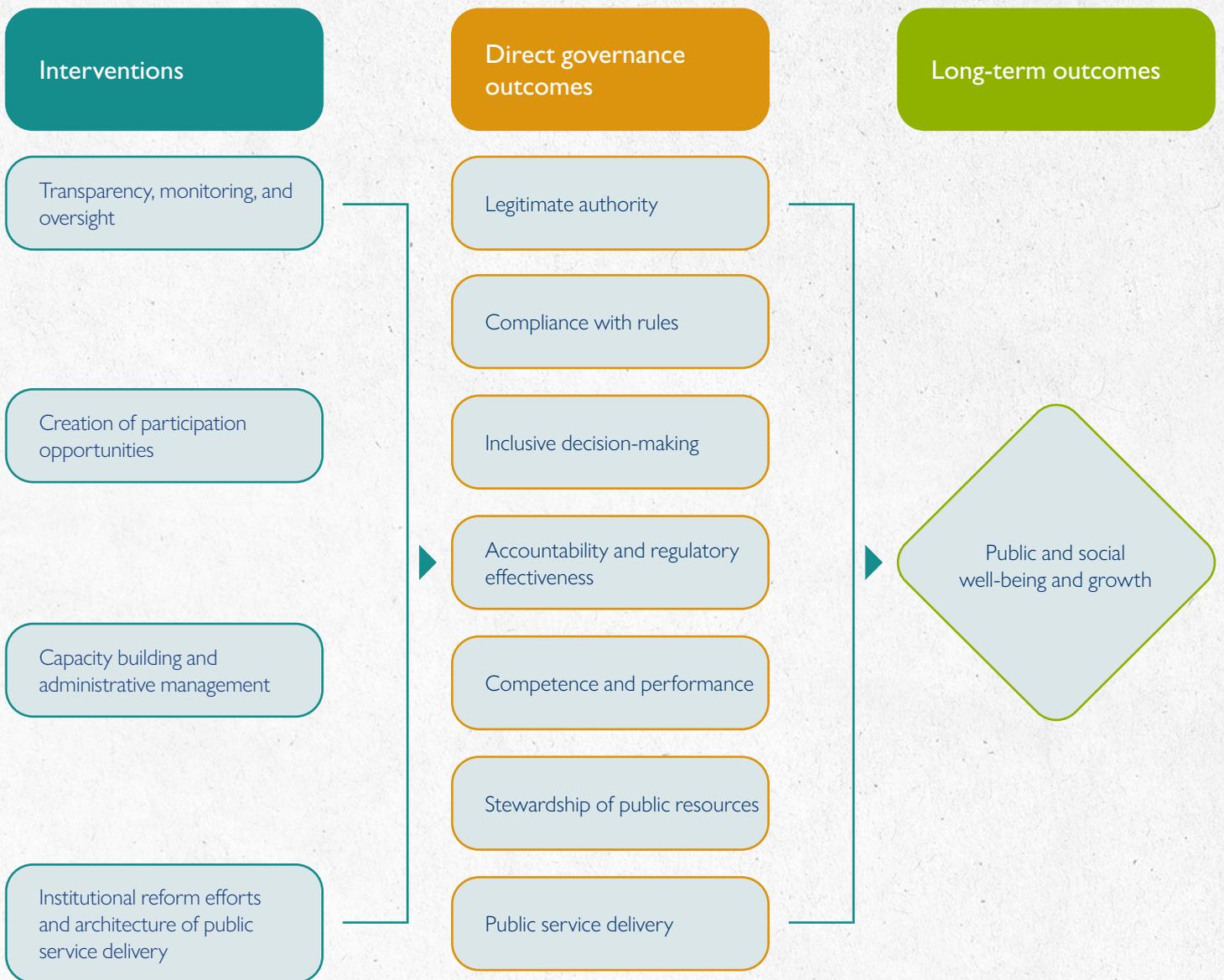


Defining governance interventions and outcomes

The principle of “open, inclusive, and accountable governance” is at the core of the theory of change of this EGM (FCDO 2019, 32). In the absence of an established set of criteria to define and measure “good” governance, we focused on aspects of governance effectiveness that are more accessible, including effectiveness of public administration, responsiveness, and accountability (United Nations 2012; FCDO 2009). We considered interventions that strengthen governance effectiveness to support good governance and achieve longer-term impacts including public and social well-being and growth (Figure 1).

Using this conceptual framework, we have developed an interventions and outcomes framework with categories that are exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Table 1). The EGM focused on interventions from, through, or directed towards government institutions; hence, we aimed to capture interventions targeting government effectiveness, changes to how governments work, and the architecture of public service delivery.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for governance interventions



Defining governance interventions and outcomes

Table 1: Governance interventions and outcomes groups

| Intervention groups | Outcome groups |
|---|--|
| <p>Transparency, monitoring, and oversight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions that seek to produce relevant information, including public records or budgets, to allow for greater scrutiny and accountability of public decisions and governance processes <p>Creation of participation opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions that aim to create opportunities for citizens, civil society, or other stakeholders to provide inputs for or participate in governance processes, such as decision-making or service delivery <p>Capacity building and administrative management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions aimed at improving the capabilities of government institutions and public decision-makers (including elected officials, bureaucrats, and service providers) through training, management innovations, or technology adoption <p>Institutional reform efforts and architecture of public service delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions that seek to reform national and/or local government institutions, or develop new policies, in support of advancing the collective interests of a community and the ability to finance and target public service delivery | <p>Legitimate authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizens' voluntary acceptance of the authority of government institutions <p>Compliance with rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ability of governments to elicit compliance with laws and rules <p>Inclusive decision-making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which governance is inclusive of different groups, interests, and views in society <p>Accountability of public decision-makers and quality of policymaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The accountability of institutions and policymakers and quality of policy efforts <p>Competence and performance of public officials, public servants and decision-makers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The qualifications, knowledge, and effort of public officials, public servants, and decision-makers <p>Stewardship of public resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The management of public finances and resources by government institutions <p>Public service delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality and accessibility of public services <p>Public and social well-being and growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizens' engagement with the public sector; and social or economic outcomes that are directly or indirectly influenced by government institutions |

Note: These are illustrative examples of the interventions and outcomes framework. The full list is included in the EGM technical report.



Main findings

We conducted an extensive search for evidence in four academic databases and 46 grey literature sources (i.e. research and information that is not accessible in academic or commercial databases; Keenan 2018), and tracked the citations of included IEs and SRs in December 2021 and January 2022. This process yielded a total of 98,625 records. After the removal of duplicates and screening of records, we included 504 unique studies: 465 quantitative IEs, 19 qualitative studies with designs that account for effectiveness, one study that used both quantitative and qualitative designs, and 19 SRs.

Half of the studies were published between 2018 and 2022, and one third were conducted in the East

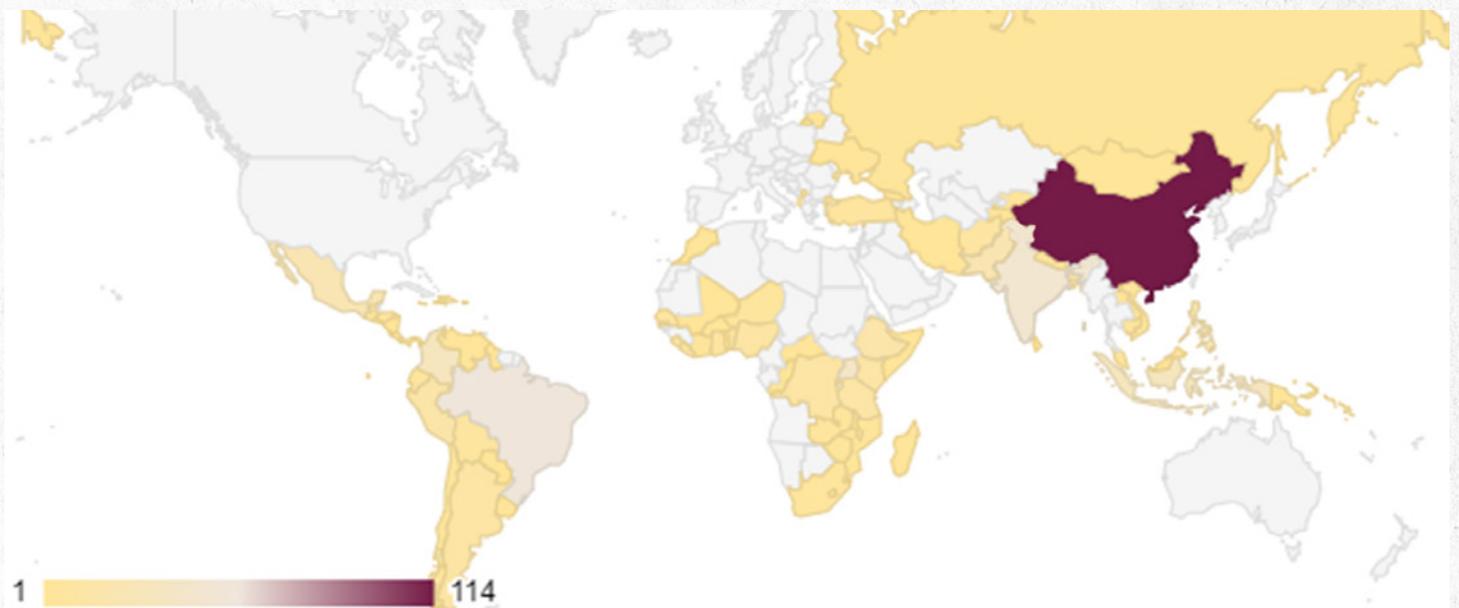
Asia and the Pacific region. Eighty-six per cent of the studies were published in the last decade. The majority of the studies were conducted in East Asia and the Pacific (34%), Latin America and the Caribbean (29%), and Sub-Saharan Africa (25%). This is driven by the large number of primary studies conducted in three countries: China (n = 114), Brazil (n = 56), and India (n = 47; Figure 2).

Ten per cent of the studies evaluated interventions implemented in fragile and conflict-affected settings, based on World Bank data (n.d.). The interventions in the EGM did not usually target specific population groups or settings, and 46 per cent of the studies were conducted in countries with electoral democracies.



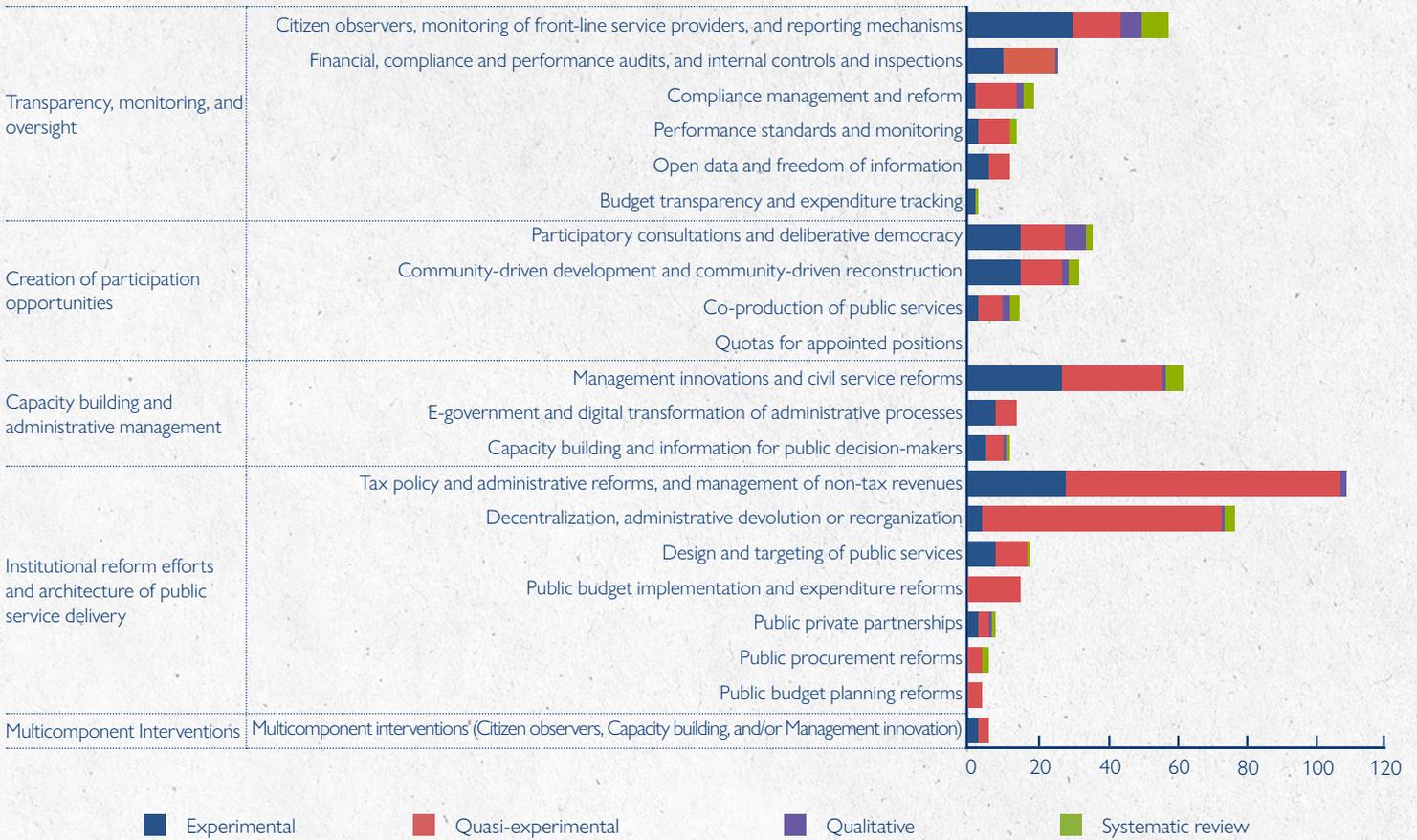
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Figure 2: Geographical coverage of the evidence



Main findings

Figure 3: Distribution of interventions by study type



The most commonly evaluated interventions were tax policies, decentralization, management innovations, and citizen observers (Figure 3). All intervention categories of the EGM are covered by at least one study. The *institutional reforms* intervention group was the most frequently studied, driven by evaluations of *tax policy and administrative reforms, and management of non-tax revenues* (n = 108) and *decentralization, administrative devolution, or reorganization* (n = 77). Evaluations of *management innovations and civil service reforms* were also prevalent (n = 62), and targeted salaries, incentives, and capacity building of government staff and sectoral management reforms. Within the *transparency, monitoring, and oversight* intervention group, a substantial portion of included studies were also conducted to evaluate *citizens observers, monitoring of front-line service providers, and reporting mechanisms* (n = 58).

Quotas for appointed positions is the only intervention category without an eligible study. Although the evaluation of quotas for elected positions is prevalent, as presented in the political competition EGM (Gonzalez Parrao et al. 2022), we found no study on quotas for non-elected positions that met the inclusion criteria. This discrepancy may relate to fewer quotas for appointed positions implemented in L&MICs, or to difficulties in rigorously evaluating such interventions.

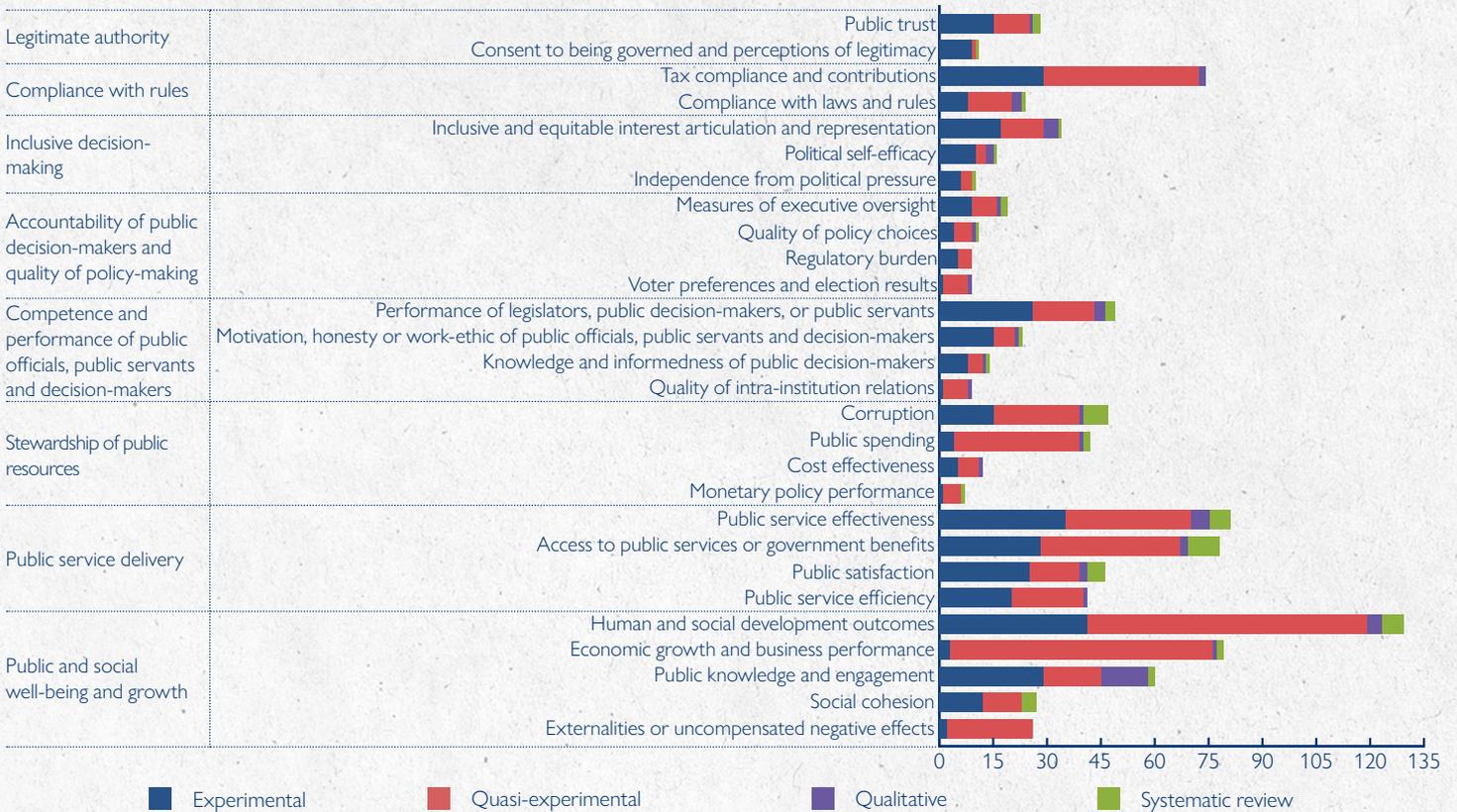
Outcomes in human and social development and growth were more frequently studied than more direct indicators of governance quality (Figure 4). Two thirds of included studies measured outcomes related to the *public social well-being and growth* group, mainly through two categories: *human and social development and economic growth and business performance*. The prevalence of these development outcomes could be related to the fact that these indicators can rely on publicly available or more easily accessible panel data. In turn, the most commonly studied outcomes that measured governance more directly focused on access to *public services, tax compliance and contributions, and public service effectiveness* measures. There is little evidence on outcomes measuring internal governance processes and accountability and quality of policymaking, such as *regulatory burden* (n = 9), *voter preferences and election results* (n = 9), *monetary policy performance* (n = 7), and *quality of intra-institution relations* (n = 4).

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Main findings

Figure 4: Distribution of outcomes by study type



One third of the studies used a randomized evaluation design. In contrast, the majority of primary studies in the map (61%) used a quasi-experimental design. The paucity of studies with an experimental design may illustrate the difficulty of implementing this evaluation approach to analyze the impact of a range of governance interventions. While randomized evaluations were more commonly used to study transparency and participation interventions, this design was less frequently used to evaluate the most popular interventions in the EGM: *decentralization* and *tax policy*. Similarly, public budgeting interventions (public budget planning reforms and public budget implementation and expenditure reforms) were not evaluated using experimental designs.

There is a lack of qualitative evaluations on governance interventions. We identified 19 studies using an eligible qualitative evaluation design, and one that included eligible quantitative and qualitative designs. Qualitative studies were usually conducted to evaluate interventions related to *citizen observers* and *participatory consultations*, and were often published as institutional reports. Another possible alternative for understanding this gap is that researchers may use variations of these qualitative designs, but may not label them as such. If this is the case, our search strategy may have missed

those studies. Qualitative studies may be informative when large-scale experiments or observational studies are not feasible, but they can still try to approximate counterfactual scenarios methodically and transparently.

Equity was considered in only 14 per cent of included studies. The most-used approaches for considering equity targeted vulnerable populations and conducted subgroup analyses. Socio-economic status and sex of participants were the most common dimensions considered. Systematically incorporating equity approaches can help to identify heterogeneous treatment effects, to consider not only average effects, but also potential distributional consequences, and to safeguard against discriminatory effects in governance programming.

There is a gap in the reporting of ethical approvals among included studies. While most of the studies that reported this information were experimental evaluations (which account for one third of studies in the EGM), only 31 per cent of all randomized evaluations reported having ethical clearance. This is a key research stage to ensure the protection of study participants and their communities; however, this gap may result from a lack of reporting on such information, rather than researchers failing to conduct an ethical clearance process.

Main findings

There is an overall lack of high-confidence and up to date SRs in the governance sector. Although the EGM includes 19 SRs, only four were assessed as high-confidence, and five as medium-confidence. The *transparency, monitoring, and oversight* intervention group has the highest number of high or medium SRs, which particularly synthesized interventions around citizen observers. In turn, the *institutional reforms* interventions group has the largest synthesis gap on the map. Despite the large number of primary studies available, we did not identify SRs covering *tax policy* interventions.

While the SRs present relevant findings across the four intervention groups of the map, in many cases evidence on the effectiveness of these interventions is weak, and the reviews do not tend to synthesize effect sizes. The main conclusions for each group, and cross-cutting findings, are summarized below:

- **Interventions that promote direct engagement between public service providers and their users can have a positive effect on improving access to services** (SMD = 0.08, 95% CI = 0.00, 0.15)¹ **as well as the quality of public services** (SMD = 0.10, 95% CI = 0.03, 0.18), **but are not effective in reducing other intermediate outcomes, such as the cost of services** (SMD = 0.07, 95% CI = -0.11, 0.24; Waddington et al. 2019). In turn, **community monitoring interventions can have a positive effect on reducing episodes of corruption** (SMD = 0.15, 95% CI = 0.01, 0.29; Molina et al. 2017), particularly when combined with incentives that establish consequences to corruption activities (Hanna et al. 2011). In the health sector, community audits may also help to improve quality of services and the knowledge and empowerment of communities (Squires et al. 2020).
- **Citizen engagement interventions can have a positive effect on increasing some measures of participation in the governance of service provision**, such as meeting attendance (SMD = 0.69, 95% CI = 0.22) and knowledge about the services provided (SMD = 0.09, 95% CI = 0.01, 0.17), **but they do not seem to improve measures of provider responsiveness**, such as politicians' performance (SMD = 0.06, 95% CI = -0.17, 0.05) and staff motivation (SMD = 0.23, 95% CI = -0.08, 0.54; Waddington et al. 2019). However, the evidence on community-driven development interventions is weak in showing a positive effect on collective trust (RD = 0.35, SE = 0.14)² and a negative effect on inter-group relations (RD = -0.20, SE = 0.10; King et al. 2010).
- **Anti-corruption interventions that use financial and non-financial incentives may hold promise for reducing corruption in the short term** (Hanna et al. 2011). The evidence on the impact of interventions to hire, train, and remunerate public servants in the health and education sectors in L&MICs is inconclusive and/or of low quality (Rockers and Bärnighausen 2013; Carr et al. 2011).
- **Interventions to ensure contract enforcement, such as in public procurement reforms or public-private partnerships, may promote higher levels of investment**, although the evidence is weak (Aboal et al. 2012). In terms of changes in the design of healthcare systems, there is a modest association between reducing user charges and improvements in health outcomes, potentially through increased access to health services (Qin et al. 2019). Finally, there is limited evidence that *decentralization* policies may help to reduce corruption, particularly when they involve community accountability mechanisms and settings with infrastructure and staffing capacity (Hanna et al. 2011).
- Cross-cutting recommendations across these SRs include **designing and implementing interventions that consider local structures, complexities and values, and incorporate capacity-building components of local actors and groups.**



Promising areas for future research

In addition to helping stakeholders to identify relevant literature, this EGM is a starting point for building evidence on governance. Based on the gaps identified, there are opportunities for conducting future IEs and SRs. We suggest several areas in which future work could be useful (Table 2), and also encourage stakeholders to consider their priorities and interests when reviewing the EGM.

While public financial management is a critical component of good governance (USAID 2018), this EGM is unable to draw major policy implications around this topic due to the scarce evidence identified. Policymakers and researchers can help to fill the gap regarding the effectiveness of interventions in public budget planning, implementation, management, and transparency through the strategic allocation of funding to produce this evidence.

In terms of the outcomes that governance interventions can affect along the theory of change, there is an opportunity for researchers and decision makers to expand the range of measures that are currently reported in the evaluations and SRs on the map. While longer-term development and social and economic outcomes are frequently used, future research could incorporate other immediate outcomes focused on direct changes in government processes, accountability, and quality of policymaking. These governance measures may be less readily available than social outcomes, but would help in understanding the mechanisms through which governance interventions succeed.



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Table 2: Suggested areas for future research in governance

| Type of gap | Areas for future research |
|------------------------|--|
| Interventions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Transparency, monitoring, and oversight: budget transparency and expenditure tracking ■ Creation of participation opportunities: quotas for appointed positions ■ Institutional reforms: public budget planning reforms; public procurement reforms; public-private partnerships |
| Outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Inclusive decision-making: independence from political pressure ■ Accountability of decision makers and quality of policymaking: executive oversight; voter preferences and election results; quality of policy choices; regulatory burden ■ Competence and performance of public officials, public servants, and decision makers: quality of intra-institutional relations ■ Stewardship of public resources: monetary policy performance |
| Geography and settings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Countries in the Middle East and North Africa region ■ Countries in the Europe and Central Asia region ■ Fragile and conflict-affected settings |
| Synthesis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Transparency, monitoring, and oversight: financial, compliance and performance audits, and internal controls and inspections; open data and freedom of information ■ Creation of participation opportunities: coproduction of public services ■ Capacity building and administrative management: capacity building and information for public decision makers; e-government and digital transformation of administrative process ■ Institutional reforms: public budget implementation and expenditure reforms; tax policy and administrative reforms, and management of non-tax revenues |

Promising areas for future research

In terms of geographical coverage, conducting or commissioning research in Europe and Central Asia and the Middle East and North Africa can help to address the evidence gaps in these regions. Both regions integrate countries and contexts relevant to governance effectiveness regarding their democracy levels and governance transitions. Analyzing the effectiveness of governance interventions in those regions could contribute to a better understanding of what works in a broader range of contexts.

Similarly, practical and logistical limitations may impede the implementation of studies in fragile and conflict-affected settings, as they appear to be markedly understudied. For example, these contexts could present challenges in accessing accurate and reliable data and collaborating with communities and local and national governments. From a methodological perspective, new approaches could be developed to conduct rigorous evaluations of governance interventions within fragile and conflict-affected settings. Due to critical and unique governance needs in fragile contexts (Oxfam 2013), there would be value in understanding what is feasible and worth prioritizing.

While the SRs included in the map cover the four intervention groups, the map's central gap is its lack of synthesis of tax

policy interventions – considering that this category has more than 100 primary studies. In addition, there are other seven intervention categories on the map with at least 10 evaluations available that do not have an SR, or only have an SR assessed as low-confidence. Categories may benefit from high-quality synthesis to determine whether these interventions are effective. Lastly, five of the nine high- or medium-confidence SRs on the map were published between 2009 and 2012. Researchers and decision makers should also prioritize updating the current reviews with the latest evidence, particularly in areas where reviews found limited or low-quality studies.

More research should be done to develop reliable metrics of governance and make them available for use in program evaluation, as current studies often do not directly measure the areas they want to influence. Confidentiality issues may restrict access to government data, but there may also be a lack of government capacity to produce and monitor relevant indicators. Researchers can contribute to building the evidence base by identifying creative ways to evaluate governance interventions and outcomes, and advocating for these evaluations to be embedded in governance programming efforts.



Using the evidence patterns in the EGM

EGMs are tools for decision-making and can be used to:

1. Inform research agenda-setting: the EGM findings can help to identify priority areas for future research investment, particularly when combined with expertise from diverse stakeholders to effectively interpret the gaps..

1. Investments in new IEs may be particularly beneficial when they target interventions for which limited evidence exists, or where there is limited evidence on the effects of the intervention on a population or context of interest. For example, the map shows evidence gaps relating to public financial management. Interventions focused on *public budget planning, implementation, management, and tracking* receive funding for implementation, but there is a scarcity of evidence evaluating their effects. Improving the availability of rigorous evidence could help to facilitate evidence-informed action around these interventions.

2. Where large concentrations of primary evidence already exist, investments in additional IEs may not provide as much value as investments in evaluations of interventions and outcomes with little or no evidence. For example, the map includes more than 100 studies evaluating *tax policies* in L&MICs. Synthesizing this evidence may be a better approach for strategically allocating future research resources, especially as there are no current SRs in this area.

3. Where there are concentrations of primary evidence and existing SRs are out of date, have methodological limitations, or do not cover populations of interest, commissioning or conducting new high-quality SRs could better inform the effects regarding such topics. For example, the map includes three SRs on *capacity building and administrative management* interventions. However, only one was assessed as high confidence, and the latest

SR was published in 2011. Updating these reviews may help to ensure that policymaking and programming are informed by the best available evidence.

2. Support policy and program design: hyperlinks in the online EGM enable easy access to rigorous evidence that can be consulted when designing new policies and programs. Stakeholders considering the adoption of specific interventions may reference evaluations in the relevant row to understand the likely effects of such interventions.

Conversely, stakeholders interested in influencing a specific outcome may reference evaluations in the corresponding column to understand which interventions may affect that outcome. Stakeholders can also use the filters in the EGM to identify interventions relevant to their geographies and populations of interest. For example, we found a wealth of studies conducted in China, Brazil, and India; users interested in these countries may wish to use this filter to identify relevant studies.

3. Identify examples of IEs undertaken in particular contexts or that use particular method: this can be useful for identifying potential challenges and strategies applied to address obstacles, which may strengthen the quality of future research. Stakeholders considering rigorously evaluating their work may reference evaluations of similar interventions for ideas on how evaluations can be conducted. For example, stakeholders interested in undertaking IEs in fragile contexts may use this filter to identify relevant evidence and understand the methods and approaches used when conducting evaluations in such complex environments. Similarly, the methods filter can be used to identify intervention areas in which qualitative research is more often used, such as *participatory consultations and deliberative democracy* interventions.



About the summary report

The studies upon which this report is based were identified through the governance EGM by Gonzalez Parrao and colleagues (2022). The authors systematically searched for published and unpublished IEs and SRs through January 2022, then identified, mapped, and described the evidence base of interventions that aim to strengthen good governance through governance effectiveness. The map contains 19 SRs and 485 IEs. The characteristics of the evidence are described and mapped according to a framework of 20 interventions

and 28 outcomes. The Governance EGM can be viewed at: <https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/egm/good-governance-through-government-effectiveness-evidence-gap-map>.

This summary report was authored by Etienne Lwamba, Lina Khan, Ashiqun Nabi, and Constanza Gonzalez Parrao. They are solely responsible for all content, errors, and omissions. The report was designed and produced by Akarsh Gupta, Mallika Rao and Tanvi Lal.

Endnotes

¹ SMD = standardized mean difference; CI = confidence interval.

² RD = risk difference; SE = standard error.



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February 2023

