

# Informational Democracy Promotion?

## Electronic Grey Literature and Democratization

### Abstract

The promotion of democracy has long been a cornerstone of states' foreign policy and the work of international organisations. The online diffusion of grey literature on 'best practice' by the international community has been one method for democracy promotion, which has been overlooked by the literature on democratisation and international organisations, however. This article provides a heuristic model for understanding the diffusion pathways, accelerants and barriers to use for this democracy promotion method. This is constructed using the analysis of original data about the nature, volume and direction of downloads from a major democracy promotion IGO from 2006-2017 alongside the process tracing of the impact of one key publication. The analysis suggests that the resources were more likely to be used by electoral management bodies lacking capacity as well as universities worldwide with less educational/research resources. Internet access was a barrier to diffusion. The use of the materials in the policy process is found to be dependent on actors strategically using them during decision-making policy windows. This notwithstanding, the production of grey literature provides a useful tool for democracy promotion.

**Key words:** democracy, democratization, digital divides, electoral integrity, electoral reform, policy transfer.

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<http://www.tfd.org.tw/opencms/english/publication/journal/list.html>.

The promotion of democracy and democratic institutions such as the running of elections was a key flank of foreign policy of Western governments since the middle of the twentieth century. The post-cold war period brought a renewed effort with many state funded international organisations seeking to promote democracy worldwide. One strategy from the international community was the diffusion of grey literature about how to build democratic institutions, made possible by the simultaneous development of the internet. Grey literature is here used to refer to documents such as books, technical reports and policy briefs which are not the product of peer-review, but which are published by organisations to advance the understanding of a particular area of policy practice. This has the great potential to encourage policy transfer, lesson-drawing, and policy diffusion so that knowledge could be shared on, for example, how to design alternative electoral systems, constitutions and manage conflict. Online democracy promotion mechanisms have been overlooked in the literature to date, however, since it has tended to focus on infrastructural rather than informational assistance.

This article opens a research agenda and provides a heuristic model for understanding how information is developed by the international community on ‘best practices’ and then used in the policy process to promote democracy. This is based on an initial analysis of the frequencies and patterns of supply and downloads from the website of one of the largest global international democracy assistance organisations, International IDEA from 2006-2017. This represents an innovative source of data for tracing democracy promotion activity. The supply of documents was predominantly focused on building electoral institutions, with a heavy focus on political parties and gender, but also broader constitutional design. A considerable demand came from the academic sector, especially universities with less resources for whom open-access educational/research resources would have been valuable. However, governmental officials and other actors were still major users of the documents. Country-level analysis of the drivers

of demand found that electoral management bodies lacking capacity were more likely to use the resources.

The article also undertakes process tracing analysis to study the ‘life journey’ of one key electronic resource to show how it shaped the design of democratic institutions. It demonstrates that the most accessed documents can shape deliberations about the design of democratic institutions and the demands of civil society groups, but that this is contingent on several factors. Uploading information to the web alone, does not automatically promote democracy. An information diffusion framework is then inductively generated from the empirical analysis to identify how the grey literature can promote democratisation – and some of the dangers and barriers faced. The contribution of the article is therefore to open a research agenda on an overlooked democratisation method, providing the first empirical and theoretical examination of informational democracy promotion. It has important consequences for understanding how democracy and political institutions are designed, and the barriers to change, in a digital age where democracy is more fragile around the globe.

The article begins by outlining the long view of democracy promotion and then sets out the literature on grey literature and policy change. Theoretical expectations are introduced about the likely patterns of diffusion, before the method, results and analysis of download data is provided. The case study is then introduced before the analysis then maps out the new framework.

### **The History of Democracy Promotion**

Democracy promotion has come in many forms and formats including mechanisms to support ‘free and fair’ elections, media assistance, civil society aid, rule of law reforms, and social

democratic reforms.<sup>1</sup> There is also evidence of the international community promoting democracy for many decades. In the sphere of elections, the United Nations was active in supporting overseas electoral assistance as far back as the 1940s, with the signing of Article 21 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the first UN observation of elections in the Korean peninsula. Early work was also undertaken by the Organization of American States (OAS), which had played a role in elections since 1962 when support was provided for the Costa Rican Presidential and the Dominican Republic general elections.<sup>2</sup> American foreign policy from the middle of the twentieth century focussed on promoting democracy indirectly, through a reading of modernisation theory, by trying to boost literacy and income levels.<sup>3</sup> There were also more direct interventions to promote the holding of elections and improved public administration. In 1966 the US Congress passed Title IX, to tilt assistance towards ‘the encouragement of democratic private and local government institutions.’ Programmes included civic education initiatives to promote democratic values and voluntary participation.<sup>4</sup> The 1980s saw the US government establish the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) – an alternative bipartisan idea from Congress. There was a step change in the nature and frequency of electoral missions in the 1980s and the 1990s - with landmark elections such as the Namibia 1989 contest which involved the external supervision and control of the electoral process by international actors.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Sandra Lavenex and Frank Schimmelfennig, "EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: from leverage to governance?" *Democratization* 18, no. 4 (2011), p. 885-909; Paul Poast and Johannes Urpelainen, *Organizing Democracy: How International Organizations Assist New Democracies* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> OAS, *Annual Report of the Secretary-General 1962* (Washington D.C.: Pan American Union, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> Seymour Lipset 1959 "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 53, No. 1 (1959): 69-105.

<sup>4</sup> Carothers, 2003, pp. 19-27.

<sup>5</sup> ACE, "Electoral Assistance", <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/focus/focus-on-effective-electoral-assistance/onePage>, accessed 2018.

The post-cold war period brought a proliferation of actors into electoral assistance at the international level, however, with a new range of methods. Building on what had been provided before, this included the defining of common practices, technical support, knowledge building, network building, legal reviews and election monitoring.<sup>6</sup> The uptake of these methods were very uneven. Von Borzyskowski used a cost-benefit analysis to argue that requests for technical election assistance were lower when the political costs to a regime were high because it is an autocracy, or the benefits low because there are strong electoral institutions.<sup>7</sup> On the provider side, she argued that ‘international organizations are less likely to provide such technical assistance when the government appears to lack political will for reform and full project implementation is unlikely’.<sup>8</sup> Another policy instrument for improving elections was the use of international practitioner conferences, which James shows was also skewed in geographical and professional participation.<sup>9</sup> The take-up of election observation missions shared similar unevenness.<sup>10</sup>

Democracy promotion has come under pressure, however, due to a combination of factors such as the rise of populist movements and austerity agendas have restricted the availability of public funds. Measures such as election observation have also been more difficult during the covid-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup> There has therefore been a need to evaluate and re-engineer democracy promotion methods.<sup>12</sup> Evaluations of past practices are rare. Analysis of overall patterns of

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<sup>6</sup> Sead Alihodžić, "The mechanics of democracy promotion tools: bridging the knowledge-to-practice gap." *Development in Practice* 26, no. 4 (2016): 431-43; Toby S. James, *Comparative Electoral Management: Performance, Networks and Instruments* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020): 184-95.

<sup>7</sup> Inken Von Borzyskowski, "Resisting democracy assistance: Who seeks and receives technical election assistance?" *The Review of International Organizations* 11, No. 2 (2016): 247-82.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 247.

<sup>9</sup> James, *Comparative Electoral Management*, p.177-81.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy: When International Election Observation Works and Why it Often Fails* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Erik Asplund, Lars Heuver, Fakiha Ahmed, Bor Stevense, Sulemana Umar, Toby S. James, and Alistair Clark. 2021 "Election Observation during the covid-19 pandemic" *International IDEA*, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/elections-and-covid-19-international-electoral-observation-2020>.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Carothers "Rejuvenating Democracy Promotion," *Journal of Democracy* 31, No. 1 (2020): 114-23.

foreign aid spending often report that it had no effect,<sup>13</sup> but often the analyses do not always differentiate between foreign and democracy aid – the latter is a subset of the former.<sup>14</sup> The majority of the literature, which has focussed on the effects of electoral observation, did show that it could have some positive effect.<sup>15</sup> Lührmann explored the effects of UN technical assistance, which includes mediation, support on electoral management and capacity development for non-state actors.<sup>16</sup> Uberti and Jackson found a small, short-term but statistically significant effect of election-support on the integrity of elections.<sup>17</sup>

### **Grey literature as a method of policy diffusion**

One method of democracy assistance that has not been explored is the use and distribution of ‘grey literature.’ Grey literature is defined by Adams, Smart and Huff as ‘knowledge artefacts that are not the product of peer-review processes characterizing publication in scientific journal’.<sup>18</sup> The origins of the term are the German phrase *Graue literatur*. The documents that are commonly considered to count as grey literature include ‘technical and project reports, working papers, discussion papers, technical manuals, information sheets [and] conference papers’.<sup>19</sup> There is some debate on what should be included, however, with the lines between

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen Knack, "Does Foreign Aid Promote Democracy?", *International Studies Quarterly* 48, No. 1 (2004): 251-66.

<sup>14</sup> Carie A. Steele, Daniel Pemstein, and Stephen A. Meserve, "Democracy promotion and electoral quality: A disaggregated analysis," *Governance* 34, No. 2 (2021), pp.505-521.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy: When International Election Observation Works and Why it Often Fails* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Anna Lührmann "United Nations electoral assistance: More than a fig leaf?" *International Political Science Review* 40, No. 2 (2018): p. 181-96.

<sup>17</sup> Luca J. Uberti and David Jackson, "Does Aid Promote Electoral Integrity?". *The Journal of Development Studies* 56 No. 6 (2020): 1067-1094.

<sup>18</sup> Adams, Richard J, Palie Smart, and Anne Sigismund Huff, "Shades of grey: guidelines for working with the grey literature in systematic reviews for management and organizational studies," *International Journal of Management Reviews* 19, No. 4 (2016): 433.

<sup>19</sup> Amanda Lawrence "Electronic Documents in a Print World: Grey Literature and the Internet," *Media International Australia* 143, No. 1 (2012): 123.

‘working papers’ and ‘drafts’ being very blurry, for example.<sup>20</sup> The authors and consumers of grey literature are thought to include bodies such as ‘government departments and agencies, universities, think-tanks, non-government organisations, corporations and professional bodies’.<sup>21</sup> The impetus is a rapid need for information on ‘what works’ that can be used for commercial and public advantage.

Grey literature offers a potentially important method for policy transfer, lesson-drawing or policy diffusion, which involves the ‘knowledge about how policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting’.<sup>22</sup> Wolman and Page develop a theory of policy transfer based on the spread of communication and information. They argue that much of the literature on policy transfer has an ‘inability thus far to penetrate the black box’ of how it actually occurs.<sup>23</sup> Too much work has simply sought to classify types of policies that have been transferred. What is needed, they suggested, is research ‘that focuses on information networks, including producers, senders, and facilitators of information we are as well as recipients’.<sup>24</sup> They argued that we should therefore first identify the communications network through which receivers and senders are linked. Second, we need to understand how information is processed. Information itself might be neutral, but the way in which it is processed never is. Third, we need to understand how information is assessed by recipients. Do they think that the information is of high-quality and treated as valid and accurate? Fourthly, how, if at all, are recipients using the information?

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<sup>20</sup> Lea Myohanen, Elizabeth Taylor, and Latrina Keith, "Accessing grey literature in public health: New York Academy of Medicine's Grey Literature report," *Publishing research quarterly* 21, No. 1 (2005): 49.

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence, p.123.

<sup>22</sup> David Dolowitz and David Marsh, "Who learns what from whom: a review of the policy transfer literature." *Political Studies* 44, No. 2 (1996): 343-57.

<sup>23</sup> Harold Wolman and Ed Page, "Policy transfer among local governments: An information–theory approach," *Governance* 15, No. 4 (2002), p. 478.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p.478

There has been some research on the diffusion and use of grey literature in other policy or research areas.<sup>25</sup> There has been no similar study into the diffusion and use of grey literature in the field of democracy and electoral assistance. There has been a considerable effort to examine the effects of election observation reports, but research on ‘best practices’ are different and outside of this remit. This is a major gap given the importance that it could be playing in spreading information in the age of globalisation and the internet.

### **Research Questions and Theoretical Expectations**

This article therefore considers the following research questions. Firstly, what are the patterns of demand and supply in the grey literature for democracy promotion materials? This would be a major step forward in the literature on democracy promotion since this currently focusses on the financial expenditure on democracy assistance. Secondly, what are the drivers of demand or barriers to diffusion? This is an important question for ascertaining where democracy assistance is reaching in the world, how knowledge is diffused, and how actors are digitally connected. Thirdly, can the literature cause democracy promotion?

In answering questions one and two, it is possible to develop some by drawing on the literature on the drivers of internet usage. There remains a significant digital divide in the world.<sup>26</sup> Rates of internet usage varied around the world in 2016 from virtually universal coverage of

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<sup>25</sup> Anne Gentil Beccot, "The driving and evolving Role of Grey Literature in High-Energy Physics," in *Grey Literature in Library and Information Studies*, eds Dominic J. Farace and Joachim Schöpfel (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter Saur, 2010). June Crowe, Gail Hodge and Daniel Redmond "Grey Literature Repositories: Tools for NGOs Involved in Public Health Activities in Developing Countries." in *Grey Literature in Library and Information Studies*, eds Dominic J. Farace and Joachim Schöpfel (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter Saur, 2010). Lea Myohanen, Elizabeth Taylor, and Latrina Keith, "Accessing grey literature in public health: New York Academy of Medicine's Grey Literature report," *Publishing research quarterly* 21, No. 1 (2005): 44-52.

<sup>26</sup> Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide? Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Panayiota Tsatsou *Digital divides in Europe: culture, politics and the Western-Southern divide* (Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang, 2011). José Manuel Robles, Cristobal Torres-Albero & Guillermo Villarino, "Inequalities in digital welfare take-up: lessons from e-government in Spain", *Policy Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2021.1929916>.



98 per cent in Iceland to, near non-use of 1 per cent in Eritrea according to World Bank data.<sup>27</sup>

A fairly obvious hypothesis would therefore be to expect downloads to be higher in those countries where general internet use is much higher. Hence:

- H1: *Downloads are greater in states with greater levels of internet access*

More complex questions arise, however, when we begin to consider the nature of the regimes which are more likely to access the documents. It is often assumed that internet diffusion within a given polity corresponds to the stage of socio-economic development that society has reached. According to Manuel Castells, societies can progress towards becoming network societies which are defined as ‘a society whose social structure is made up of networks powered by micro-electronics-based information and communications technologies.’<sup>28</sup> These are societies which are globalised, have reached socio-economic development and are internet (and network) rich. Internet usage has therefore been showed to be higher in countries to be correlated with income and GDP,<sup>29</sup> globalisation, democracy,<sup>30</sup> education,<sup>31</sup> and infrastructure.<sup>32</sup> This assumes a relatively linear pathway of evolutionary development, akin to modernisation theory, in which indicators of ‘development’ all come together.

Drawing from this, we might expect that the downloading of documents might be higher states with greater level of democracy. This is because they will tend to come with richer levels of

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<sup>27</sup> [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?year\\_high\\_desc=false](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?year_high_desc=false), date accessed 24<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Manuel Castells, ‘Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society: A Theoretical Blueprint’ in eds Manuel Castells *The Network Society: a Cross-cultural Perspective* (Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, 2004): 3.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Beilock and Daniela V. Dimitrova, "An exploratory model of inter-country Internet diffusion." *Telecommunications Policy* 27, No. 3-4 (2003): 237-52. Phanindra V. Wunnava and Daniel B. Leiter, "Determinants of Intercountry Internet Diffusion Rates," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 68, No. 2 (2009): 413-26.

<sup>30</sup> Javier Corrales and Frank Westhoff "Information technology adoption and political regimes," *International Studies Quarterly* 50, No. 4 (2006): 911-33.

<sup>31</sup> Frederico Cruz-Jesus, Tiago Oliveira, and Fernando Bacao. 2018. "The global digital divide: evidence and drivers." *Journal of Global Information Management* 26, No. 2 (2018): 1-26.

<sup>32</sup> Phanindra V. Wunnava, and Daniel B. Leiter "Determinants of Intercountry Internet Diffusion Rates." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 68, No. 2 (2009): 413-26.

civil society who will seek out and download documents helping them to diagnose and address any gaps remaining in their quality of democracy. There will be fewer limitations on their ability to search for the information and fewer sanctions for doing so. State officials will also be freer to search for and use such documents and would have a reasonable expectation that they would be able to use them. Democracy is often thought to be a driver of internet usage.<sup>33</sup>

- *H2a: Downloads are greater in states with greater levels of democracy*

But at the same time, democracy might have the opposite effect on downloads. Those states with greater democratic deficits will have greater need for the documents. Civil society groups are known to be important agents for democratisation.<sup>34</sup> It may therefore seek it out to mobilise and further download the material. Hence, we could conversely hypothesise that:

- *H2b: Downloads are lower in states with greater levels of democracy*

Given the evolution towards digital, networked societies envisaged by Castells, we might expect other properties of societies to be important too. One of these is the size and quality of the university sector in each country may explain the download rates. More universities would mean more researchers writing on the topic and more students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses also using them for their essays and assignments. Hence:

- *H3: Downloads are greater in states with stronger university sectors*

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<sup>33</sup> Corrales and Westhoff 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y Nanetti. 1994. *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Rollin F. Tusalem "A boon or a bane? The role of civil society in third-and fourth-wave democracies." *International Political Science Review* 28, No. 3 (2007): 361-86.

Moreover, other literatures on internet diffusion suggest that the absence of English proficiency can be a driver of digital divides.<sup>35</sup> It would therefore be logical to expect that downloads would be greater in the English-speaking world. Hence:

- *H4: Downloads are greater in states where English speaking is more prevalent*

It is also possible, however, to consider that there might be factors specific to electoral policy shaping the patterns and contours of demand, which can be drawn from the literature on electoral integrity, giving more varied demands for the material. The extent to which EMBs are autonomous and have capacity may also be important in how they download the documents.<sup>36</sup> Being an autonomous organisation from government could make an EMB more likely to search out policy solutions from other polities since there would be greater prospect of implementing what they might find, and they are less likely to be directed by government. Greater organisational capacity might matter too. A better resourced EMB would have time and resource to research different ways of running elections overseas and seek out further advice.

- *H5a: Diffusion is greater in states where electoral management bodies ('EMBs') are more independent and*
- *H5b: Diffusion is greater in states where electoral management bodies ('EMBs') have greater capacity.*

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<sup>35</sup> Matteo Grazzi and Sebastián Vergara. 2012. "ICT in developing countries: Are language barriers relevant? Evidence from Paraguay." *Information Economics and Policy* 24, No. 2 (2012): 161-71.

<sup>36</sup> Holly Ann Garnett "Evaluating Election Management Body Capacity" *International Political Science Review* 20, No. 3 (2019): p. 335–53; James 2020; Carolien van Ham and Holly Ann Garnett "Building impartial electoral management? Institutional design, independence and electoral integrity" *International Political Science Review* 40, No. 3 (2019): 313-34.

## Methods

This article charts the use of the grey literature in democracy promotion through an analysis of download data of publications from the website of one major international assistance organisation, International IDEA (IDEA). The article empirically focusses on just one organisation – International IDEA. However, this was arguably the most central and proactive in using knowledge dissemination as a policy tool, compared to organisations who focused on using election observation and other mechanisms.<sup>37</sup> Knowledge sharing through the use of grey literature was a key early strategy of the international community, and many INGOs and NGOs were proactive at setting up libraries shortly after they were established. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) was founded in 1987 with support from USAID to ‘monitor, support, and strengthen the mechanics of the election process in developing countries’ and to ‘undertake any appropriate education activities which contribute towards free, fair, and credible elections’.<sup>38</sup> One of IFES’ first steps after being established was to set up a resource centre in 1989 in Washington DC to provide information on electoral systems such as books, file materials, periodicals, posters, videos and other materials. These were used to service the needs of ‘IFES staff, consultants, and field officers, election officials, legislators and non-partisan civic groups.’ By 1997, it covered 1,500 squared feet.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy for Africa (EISA) was established in Johannesburg in 1996 as an NGO to promote ‘credible elections, citizen participation, and strong political institutions for sustainable democracy in Africa’.<sup>40</sup> When EISA was

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<sup>37</sup> James, 2020, 160-96.

<sup>38</sup> IFES, Republic of Haiti General Elections December 16, (Washington DC: IFES, 1990), p.2.

<sup>39</sup> Ray J. Kennedy "Clif White's "Centre of Knowledge" a Reality." *Elections Today* 7, Spring-Summer No. 1-2 (1997).

<sup>40</sup> EISA "About Us." <https://www.eisa.org.za/about.php>, 2 February 2019

established, early work included setting up an Electoral Education Centre in Johannesburg to house scholars.<sup>41</sup>

IDEA was founded as an intergovernmental organisation in Stockholm, in 1995. The institute set out its aims in a declaration to promote ‘the advancement of sustainable democracy worldwide and within this context to improve and consolidate electoral processes’.<sup>42</sup> Further members states joined including Benin, Brazil, Canada, Indonesia and Mexico bringing the total number to 31 in 2016. The Institute gained observer status in the UN General Assembly in 2003 and an office was also established in Brussels. The dataset covers 2006-2017.

This study is possible because between 2006-17, IDEA asked users to provide key user information when they download publications. This was provided to the author under an agreement with IDEA for analysis. This allows the identification of patterns and trends in document usage in a way which is not possible for other INGOs or EMBs.

There are some limitations to the dataset. Firstly, the dataset will *underestimate* the total number of downloads because providing user information was optional, so there are other downloads that would not have been recorded. Over time, documents from IDEA also began to appear on websites other than the IDEA website. This means that the actual usage and readership will be higher than that which is estimable from the data.

Secondly, the dataset is also not a complete data matrix because of how the information was recorded by International IDEA. Information about users included the publication that was downloaded, alongside the users’ gender, organisational type and country. This was provided in a cross-tab and it was not technically possible for IDEA to provide this in a full data matrix format. We can therefore determine how many downloads were from, for example, from New

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<sup>41</sup> EISA, *Annual Report 1996-1997* (Johannesburg: EISA, 1997): 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> IDEA, *Declaration of the founding conference of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance* (Stockholm: IDEA), 1995: 2.

Zealand and how many were from government officials, but we can't say how many were downloaded by the New Zealand Government.

Thirdly, precise geographical location is also not known because an IP address was not stored (country was), but collecting this information and using it for academic study would raise considerable privacy and security issues. Fourthly, it is not possible to check external validity to the dataset as it is only available from one IGO. The data may therefore not be a perfect, but given real world scenarios and privacy issues, still provides a new insight into uncharted territory of the dissemination of a major NGO's democracy promotion material from a highly reputable organisation.

### *Independent variables*

Treating the volume of downloads as a measure for the demand for online democracy promotion materials, this article will explore the determinants of this demand using a variety of independent variables.

*Level of democracy* is measured using the V-Dem liberal democracy index.<sup>43</sup> This is an expert index which measures whether states have the *de facto* properties of electoral democracy as set out by Robert Dahl in his concept of polyarchy. The index also measures whether the rule of law, respect for civil liberties, and constraints on the executive by the judiciary and legislature are observed.<sup>44</sup> The measure for liberal democracy is used rather than electoral democracy because we are interested in more than the quality of the elections. The 2016 liberal democracy measure was used (unless stated otherwise) as this was when the download data ended.

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, Staffan I. Lindberg, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, et al., *V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v7* (Gothenburg: VDEM, 2017).

<sup>44</sup> V-Dem, *Democracy Facing Global Challenges: V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2019* (Gothenburg: V-Dem, 2019): 10.

The *strength of the university sector* is measured by the number of universities in each country, and the number of universities in the top 100, 200, and 500 universities as ranked by *The Times Higher League Table*. Data was taken from the "Webometrics Ranking of World Universities" for 2017, which was compiled by the Cybermetrics Lab, a research group belonging to the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), the largest public research body in Spain.

*Internet usage* was taken from the World Bank data – as the percentage of the population with access in 2016.<sup>45</sup>

*English language proficiency* was measured using Cook and Liu's data on whether English is used in the school curriculum is used, as well as whether English is taught as a subject in schools. These have a binary coding of 0 and 1 in their dataset.<sup>46</sup> Their most recent measure in the dataset, typically for 2004, is used. An English-speaking additive index score was created by the author for each country between 0 and 2. A score of 0 indicated that English was neither used in the school curriculum and was not a subject in schools. A score of 2 indicated that both were. A score of 1 indicated that one of the two possibilities was true.

Measures of *EMB capacity and autonomy* were taken from the Varieties of Democracy dataset for 2016.<sup>47</sup>

## **Descriptive Analysis**

### *Overall usage*

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<sup>45</sup> World Bank, *Individuals using the internet (% of population)* <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS> on 24th November 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas R. Cook and Amy H. Liu, 'Using Linguistic Networks to Explain Strength of Intellectual Property Rights', *World Development* 87 (2016): 128-138.

<sup>47</sup> Coppedge et al. 2017.

The data reveals that there was an enormous usage of the International IDEA literature between 2006-2017. A total of 656 documents were published and there was a total of 248,441 document downloads in the dataset. The volume of downloads increased significantly over time, as Figure 1 demonstrates, peaking in 2010, but with a noticeable decline thereafter. This decline seems to indicate that the literature was being used less frequently. An alternative explanation is that documents were increasingly being deposited in other websites. For example, at the time of writing the *Electoral System Design Handbook* was available to freely download from external sites including IFES, Election Observation and Support, GSDRC, The Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform in Canada.<sup>48</sup> The data from 2017 ended in March 2017.

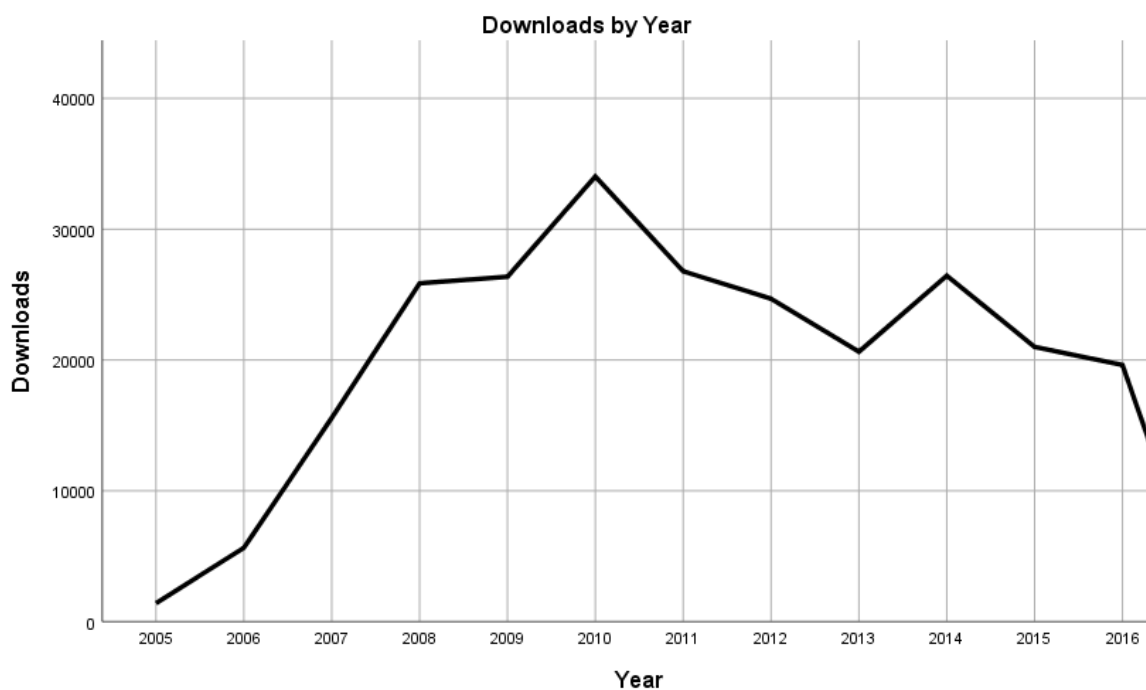


Figure 1: Total downloads by year, 2005-2016

### Substantive publication focus

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.eods.eu/library/IDEA.Electoral%20Systems%20Design%20EN.pdf>, [https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/esd\\_english\\_0.pdf](https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/esd_english_0.pdf), <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/electoral-system-design-the-new-international-idea-handbook/>, <http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca/en-CA/docs/Intermediate/IDEA%20Handbook.pdf> date accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020



Table 1 details the number of downloads for the five most downloaded publications. *The Electoral System Design* handbook was by far the most popular publication, with nearly double the number of the next downloaded publication. This volume was also especially influential given that it was translated into ten other languages (Arabic, Burmese, Myanmar, Portuguese, Sinhala, Tamil, Nepali, Spanish, Indonesian, Thai). It was written by three academics and set out the range of different electoral systems around the world, some criteria for evaluating them and their likely consequences (see below).

<b>Publication title</b>	<b>Downloads</b>
Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook	12470
Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns	5558
Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers. A Revised Edition.	5113
Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide	4341
Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators	4309

*Table 1: Most downloaded publications*

Rather than focussing on the popularity of a single title, the overall number of downloads for publications on a theme provide a better overall view of the demand and supply for online democracy promotion grey literature. A coding system was deployed by the author in which each publication was coded into one of 52 categories according to their substantive focus. The code categories were developed inductively from the publication title, but the concept of the electoral cycle was used to differentiate between possible categories of election focussed

materials,<sup>49</sup> however, the substantive focus went beyond this and so the scheme was only partially useful. Publications were coded to a single category to which they were best suited, although multiple themes may have been covered to some extent in the title.

Figure 2 is a scatterplot mapping the number of downloads for each theme on the x axis, against the number of publications in that theme on the y axis. It demonstrates that publications on the topic of political parties received the most aggregate downloads, followed by electoral systems, gender, constitutional design and then conflict. As might be expected, there was a clear correlation between the supply of publications on a topic and the demand (downloads), with an  $r^2$  of 0.861. The line on Figure 2 maps the expected number of downloads if demand met supply according to a linear equation ( $y=55.82+3.76E2*x$ ). There was a relatively low number of downloads of publications on gender, constitutions and local democracy – all of which are above the line. However, there was a higher ratio of demand for publications on electoral systems, conflict, democracy measurement and campaign finance. Some publications were translated into multiple languages which might have skewed the results. An identical analysis was also therefore undertaken on the English only publications. This showed the same trends of demand and supply.

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<sup>49</sup> ACE, *Electoral Cycle*, <http://aceproject.org/ero-en/topics/electoral-management/electoral%20cycle.JPG/view>, accessed 2 July 2020.

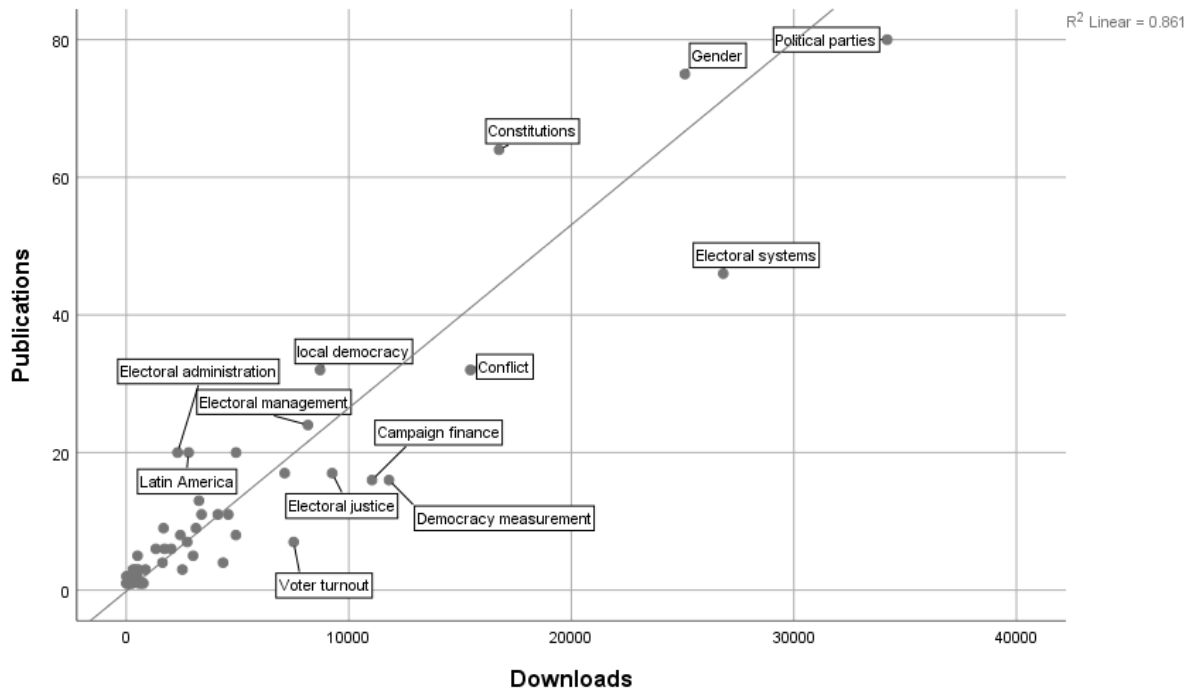


Figure 2: Demand and supply in the download of publications.

### Organisational use

Data was captured on *who* downloads the documents. Responses were translated and coded into categories. Some information was incomplete and had to be discarded. However, data for 241,957 downloads was usable, which was 97.4 per cent of the overall dataset. Table 2 demonstrates that the vast majority of downloads were actually by individuals describing themselves as academics (48.8 per cent) with NGOs the next ranked category (15.5 per cent). This suggests that although much of the grey literature developed by International IDEA was designed with practitioners in mind, there has been a huge transfer of knowledge to the academic sector. Searching for select IDEA publications using Google Scholar helps to illustrate this point. As of June 2020, the first version of the *Electoral System Design* guide was cited 315 times and the second edition 2008 version was cited 551 times. Knowledge transfer to practitioners remains high, however. Documents were downloaded nearly 25,000 times by government officials around the world, for example. Academics are more numerous

in population around the world than practitioners, NGOS and INGOs. Moreover, although the category ‘academic’ was selected by many, this is likely to include *student* downloads – which could be a high volume given that the reading is free to download and suitable for teaching material such as electoral systems on classes relating to comparative politics. Nonetheless, it does show a considerable knowledge transfer from IOs to the academic sector, which was not the primary goal of the publications.

<b>User category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Academic	48.8
NGO	15.5
Other	12.0
Government	10.2
International Organization	8.1
Political Party	3.1
Parliament	1.3
Library	1.0

*Table 2: Downloads by user type*

#### *Geographical distribution*

The USA was the country to have downloaded the most documents, followed by Mexico and Peru. Peru’s relatively high download rate can be explained by the presence of some country specific publications on Peru. The percentage of downloads in the USA accounted for a tenth of the world. It makes sense to account for population size in such estimates because larger countries are much more likely to download the documents more, having more people to do

so. However, as Figure 3 illustrates, the relationship between population and downloads was weak with a very low  $r^2$  value.

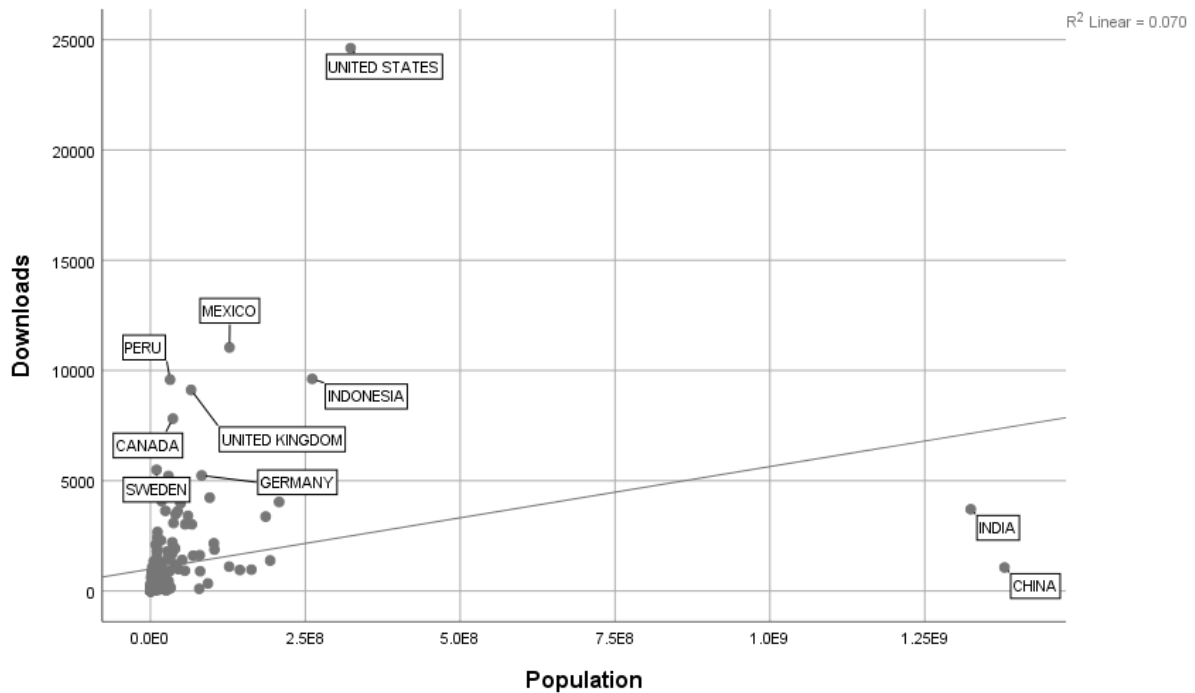


Figure 3: Relationship between downloads and population

### Multivariate analysis

To identify the underlying drivers of the demand for online democracy promotion materials, correlations were run against the number of downloads per capita and are reported in Table 3. The unit of analysis was country using data on the log of all publication downloads. Table 3 presents data from all countries but the USA was removed as a robustness check. The USA may have a higher level of downloads because firstly, since IDEA has UN General Assembly observer status, is it possible that when people meet up in New York for a UN Session, there is discussion about new report IDEA reports. The second is that there are a number of international students who are interested in democratic diffusion, and who are writing on this

for their class papers and theses. This might cause a US academic bump.<sup>50</sup> Removing the USA did not alter the results, however.

The table provides some support for H1 which suggested that internet usage would be an important driver ( $\beta = .222, p < 0.01$ ). There is a small amount of evidence for H2a that downloads are greater in democracies, but the correlation is not significant. Interestingly, this did become significant a ( $\beta = .167, p < 0.05$ ) when the USA was removed. A correlation was therefore run against all data using the VDEM Polyarchy measure instead which revealed a marginal effect ( $\beta = .153, p < 0.05$ ).

Analysis in Table 3 runs counter to H3. Having more universities per capita substantially increased the volume of downloads ( $\beta = 519, p < 0.01$ ), but states with higher quality universities were *less* likely to download the documents.

The correlations between English speaking and downloads were also counter to expectations. The English-speaking index constructed was negatively associated with downloads ( $\beta = -.196, p < 0.01$ ). To test for robustness, correlations between downloads and the two separate measures used by Cook and Liu were run. These also demonstrated a strong negative relationship. The analysis therefore also ran counter to H4.

Finally, there was no evidence to support H5 about the role of EMB capacity and independence.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Correlation with downloads</b>
Internet usage	.222**
Liberal democracy (VDEM, 2016)	.146
Top 100	-.162
Top 200	-.175*

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<sup>50</sup> I am grateful to a reviewer for these points.

Top 500	-.225*
Top 1000	-.275**
Total number of universities	-.437**
Total number of top 1000 universities per capita	-0.68
Total number of universities per capita	.519**
English rating	-.196**
EMB autonomy (VDEM, 2016)	.088
EMB capacity (VDEM, 2016)	.004

*\*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), \*\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

*Table 3: Pearson correlations between log of county-level downloads and independent variables*

Multi-variate analysis was introduced to better understand the drivers of usage. Table 4 below therefore provides an OLS regression with the log of number of downloads per capita as the dependent variable. All cases were included, but separate models run to test whether including the US had any effect, which it did not.

The level of democracy and EMB autonomy remain insignificant factors. The effect of the internet usage continues to be statistically significant and strong ( $\beta = .346$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The quantity of universities per capita has a strong positive effect, but not the quality<sup>51</sup> of those universities. English proficiency continues to have a negative effect strong ( $\beta = -.239$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), but the capacity of the EMB ( $\beta = -.629$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) has the strongest.

	Standardised Beta	Standard Error
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<sup>51</sup> The number of top 1000 universities per capita.

Internet usage	.346**	.003
Liberal democracy	.193	.648
Number of universities per capita	.581**	7021.862
Quality of universities	-.065	.014
English proficiency rating	-.239**	.091
EMB autonomy	.037	.095
EMB capacity	-.629**	.091
Constant	-3.959	.200
R2	.497	
N (countries)	211	

\* significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), \*\* significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: OLS regression with log of country-level downloads as the dependent variable.

### Discussion

Overall, the results provide support for H1, that internet access is an important determinant in shaping access – and that internet access therefore remains a barrier for the spread and usage of grey literature in general. Only a small amount of evidence was provided to support H2 that democracy was important. There was no evidence for H5a (EMB autonomy) was important.

There was strong evidence to disprove H3, H4 and H5b which generate important findings. Contrary to H4, downloads were higher where English proficiency was lower, even though roughly half (51.2%) of the documents were in English. This might be because IDEA



successfully translated a sufficiently high volume of these for this to be a problem.<sup>52</sup> Language should not therefore be ruled out as a barrier altogether, but there was no evidence to support the initial hypothesis. A correlation between democracy and English proficiency may partially explain this.

Contrary to H3, downloads were higher where the *number* of universities was high, but not the quality was high. It has already been noted that there was a large informational transfer to the academic sector. Resourcing might be one explanation for why the lower ranked universities are downloading more. The IDEA materials were all free and openly accessible, whereas academic books and articles are usually behind paywalls. A positive effect of the grey literature therefore might plausibly have been to boost knowledge in less economically developed states.

Contrary to H5b, downloads were higher where EMB capacity was lower. One positive lesson that we could take from this initial analysis for democracy promotion is that the literature was being used by EMBs most in need of informational support because they lacked the capacity to develop this in house. This suggests that the provision of this by international organisations is an important democracy promotion tool.

### **The Effects of Grey Literature**

Did the literature help democratisation? Further research was therefore undertaken to provide a detailed examination of the impact and use of one document by policy makers through process tracing techniques. Process tracing involves the ‘systematic examination of diagnostic

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<sup>52</sup> IDEA’s working practice was to translate when this was initiated and done by end users, when it was agreed as part of original package/design (subject to budget) or it was translated post-facto by IDEA based on popularity of product. Source: email correspondence with IDEA staff, June 2021. The vast majority (71.3%) of downloads were English documents.

evidence selected and analyzed in light of research'<sup>53</sup> which would include qualitative materials. It is suggested by Fairfield and Chapman that this should involve the development of 'clearly specified, mutually exclusive hypotheses'<sup>54</sup> at the start of the study. The examination of these hypotheses against the evidence can enable carefully reasoned inferences and generalisations. Hence, it is considered that:

- *H6a: Grey literature downloads were influential in bringing about policy change, which supported democratisation*
- *H6b: Grey literature played no role in bringing about policy change, which supported democratisation.*

This article therefore now focusses on the case study of the *Electoral System Handbook*. Interviews and correspondence were undertaken with the publication authors to identify the effects of the handbook from their personal experience. These interviews were then triangulated against other sources, including interviews with members of the international electoral assistance community, and practitioners from electoral management bodies.<sup>55</sup> This is the document that was most downloaded. Hence it the grey literature was to have any impact, then it is most likely to have done so here.

The handbook was one of the earliest publications from International IDEA. It was the brainchild of Andrew Reynolds who joined the organisation in 1996 as a post-doctoral appointment shortly following the completion of his PhD at University of California. International IDEA had only recently been founded and the instructions given were relatively

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<sup>53</sup> David Collier, 'Understanding Process Tracing' PS: Political Science and Politics 44, No.4(2011): 823.

<sup>54</sup> Tasha Fairfield and Andrew E. Chapman, 'Explicit Bayesian Analysis for Process Tracing: Guidelines, Opportunities, and Caveats,' *Political Analysis* 25, No. 3(2017): 379.

<sup>55</sup> Interviews with the authors were: teleconferencing interview Andrew Reynolds, 20 May 2020; email exchange, Benjamin Reilly, 2 June 2020; former IDEA official, February 2018. In addition, ten semi-structured interviews were undertaken with senior past or present members of international organisations during 2017 and 2018 as part of a broader project on the work that international electoral organisations undertake (see: James, 2020, chapter 8). Names and organisations have been anonymised.

light in touch. He was asked to ‘just do something’ that he thought would be the most useful resource for the organisation. He therefore developed a voter turnout website and started to work on the handbook because ‘there was a huge gap – there was simply no handbook or cookbook with a menu of options’. Benjamin Reilly later joined him on the project. The handbook was first published in hardcopy format with copies circulated without prior request but then was later put online for download.

An informational approach was a key pillar of the International IDEA strategy. Although there were a variety of organisations who were providing electoral support, often with on the ground logistics, International IDEA took a different approach by being ‘not so hands on in countries, but the niche that International IDEA came into at that time- the mid ‘90s, was this idea of empowering practitioners through applied research information at your fingertips. So, it was very much a way of thinking that with these handbooks, websites, and so forth, that you would be able as an election practitioner to directly access prepared knowledge on how to run elections’ (private interview, February 2018). According to another official, ‘some of the books were given away, but there was equally some attempt almost to sell books as a commercial publisher’ (private interview, March 2018). The development of the internet meant that hopes of an income stream dissipated:

‘There’s now a recognition that knowledge resources and databases are produced as global public goods. The organisation exists in order to disseminate stuff to people involved in processes of democratic change’ (private interview, March 2018).

The handbook would be used in a variety of settings. It would become a key material as part of a training course for electoral officials called BRIDGE, which was run on electoral systems

127 times between 2001-17.<sup>56</sup> It would also be embedded into academic courses by virtue of being freely accessible, as suggested by the high usage within universities in Table 2 above.

The handbook would lead to invitations for Reynolds and Reilly to both advise actors in the design of the electoral system around the world. Reynolds came to be invited as an advisor in over 30 countries between 1995 and 2018, on missions where he was employed by organisations including the UNDP, OSCE, NDI and national electoral management bodies. Reilly was also invited to Asia (Indonesia and Kyrgyzstan), Africa (Senegal and Namibia), and also in the Middle East (Lebanon). Importantly, the handbook was used in all of these missions. ‘Every time I go, I take the handbook,’ said Reynolds. The handbook would then be translated, if necessary, for some journeys and made available to those on the ground. It would be the basis of the introduction to different electoral systems. The handbook took on a cult status. ‘I remember being in Omar, Jordan – and there was literally a line of people out of the door with people asking to sign it.’

There were specific examples where the handbook was instrumental in change. For example, in 2000 Reynolds was contracted to advise the Guyana parliamentary oversight committee on electoral system reform, after being proposed by the US-based National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). There had been violence following the 1997 general elections but a peace accord was brokered which involved constitutional reform. A Constitutional Reform Commission had been established in 1999.<sup>57</sup> Reynolds produced a report, wrote several clarifying documents and met with stakeholders in Georgetown. His report set out the options for reform drawing from the handbook.<sup>58</sup> They asked him to make proposals which

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<sup>56</sup> BRIDGE, *BRIDGE Statistics Summary*. <https://www.bridge-project.org/statistics/>, date accessed 1st June 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Arif Bulkan, "Democracy in Disguise: Assessing the Reforms to the Fundamental Rights Provisions in Guyana," *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 32, No.3 (2004): 613-55.

<sup>58</sup> OSCR, Fourth Report on the Oversight Committee on Constitutional Reform. (Georgetown Oversight Committee on Constitutional Reform, 2000).

would maintain proportionality, build in districts but also add in gender equity. Although he considered that there was little support for gender equity amongst some politicians, in his report to the parliament Reynolds recommended that it adopted either a 50% ratio or a 33% ratio based on the handbook. He anticipated that both would be declined, but the latter was adopted since it was lower value and was taken forward into law: ‘I just pulled out a paragraph from the handbook and they didn’t question it further. I had no power, but as an “international official” and “expert” the handbook had some weight.’

The handbook was also heavily cited in a government report in Tonga, published in 2009.<sup>59</sup> A commission had been established to make recommendations on constitutional and electoral reform following a pro-democracy movement that sought to reduce the powers of the monarch. The report republished three pages of the handbook that defined the Single Transferrable Vote electoral system and recommended that it ‘is used as the fairest and most representative system of voting’.<sup>60</sup> Only 18 of the 82 recommendations were accepted without amendments and 19 were rejected outright. The electoral system proposal was one not to be adopted – with a mixed member system used instead.<sup>61</sup> In this case, it was the hard copy handbook that was used, however, rather than the electronic version. Ben Reilly explained that ‘my sense is that there is now so much out there online that it can often be more of a hindrance than a help, overwhelming electoral reformers with information’.

There were also anecdotal cases of influence, where the authors were approached while in their home universities. Reynolds explained that:

‘Someone from Liberia once phoned up and asked how big the Liberian parliament should be – I looked at the Matthew Shugart formulae which predicts the size of

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<sup>59</sup> CEC, *The Constitutional and Electoral Reform Commission’s Final Report* (Nuku’alofa: Constitutional and Electoral Commission, 2009)

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

<sup>61</sup> I. C. Campbell, "The Nettle Grasped." *The Journal of Pacific History* 47, No. 2(2012), p. 211-25.

assemblies, which was found in the handbook. So I pulled down the handbook and said that I suppose in theory that we could plug the numbers of voting age population, literacy rates and working age population into the algorithm. I took the book and I did that... and that's how big the Liberian parliament is.'

More broadly, the handbook had an agenda-setting and awareness raising power. It was not set out to give a single preferred system, 'but it is agenda-setting for outlining the choices.' It therefore helped to set out the decision-tree that countries needed to consider. It would also bring comparative and global knowledge where there was little knowledge outside of the parochial settings. Reynolds explained that:

'I was always stunned at the insular nature of electoral administrators and party people' who might know little of electoral systems over the border. Everyone thinks that they are unique and no one else has done what they are doing. The handbook gave evidence of similar and different experiences.'

Was it Reynolds and Reilly's broader scholarship that was important in achieving the invitations to be experts and policy change, rather than the handbook? Both subsequently authored monographs and journal articles on electoral system design. Invitations were made prior to this, however, while they were employed at International IDEA and the handbook also gave the authors further gravitas to take forward the message, Reynolds explained:

'The handbook helped. I was associated with that and it opened doors – and I was often introduced as one of the authors of the handbook. I was often introduced as a leading world expert on electoral systems and they would hold up the handbook and say "this is proof!" So it was a powerful door-opener'.

The handbook would not always be positive force for democratisation. Political leaders and parties would often use the handbook to work out the outcome that would suit them – and then

pick the system accordingly. ‘They are not necessarily interested in the altruistic niceties of electoral system design,’ Reynolds explained. In cases where a democratic system was not the key goal for decision makers, advisors were not welcome. For example, following the Arab Spring and the collapse of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, there was a need for a new constitution, but expert advisors were not welcome:

‘The military had absolutely no interest in thinking about this at all and wouldn’t let us get in. I was sent by the US National Security Council and Mike McFaul, who was one step away from Obama, couldn’t get me in, despite all the foreign aid the US was providing.’

However, in other cases it could help civil society and opposition groups identify the mechanisms that would help them realise their goals. ‘I was in a lot of cases where the groups did not know what they should be fighting for,’ Reynolds said.

*Discussion: a framework for informational democratisation*

Overall, there was therefore good evidence that in support of H6a, that the grey literature downloads were influential in bringing about policy change, which supported democratisation, but this was conditional on circumstances. From the download data, case study and prior literature discussed, the article now inductively proposes a theory of how the grey literature could promote democracy by understanding the dissemination pathways, accelerants and blockages (Figure 4).

Grey literature can be published by democracy promoters independently or in collaboration with academics (stage 1). Information can reach users directly via download (stage 2), but there will be some demand accelerants. The statistical analysis above showed that low EMB capacity will causes EMBs to use the resources. The open-access nature of the literature means that it will also be used by the academic sector rather than, or to compliment, expensive

paywalled materials. The case study showed that it will also reach audiences through practitioner courses and invitations for the authors to advise/speak at events. In the case study above, this was the authors of the publication but it could also be the publishing organisation. Passively making information available, however, will often be an insufficient step towards readership. There will therefore usually be a need for necessary for proactive promotion, as the case study revealed. This could include writing directly to policy makers, the submissions of evidence to parliamentary committees or potentially the use of social media (stage 2). There are also clear windows of opportunity that arise when constitutional commissions are set up to evaluate options for reform. At this point entrepreneurial organisations are given the chance to submit evidence or propose an expert which can lend itself to the use of the grey literature. The weight of organisations such as the UN, NDI and IDEA to promote the grey literature is therefore important through their organisational reputation, resource capacity to identify these opportunities or broader political back-channelling.

There are a number of barriers to grey literature usage (stage 3). The analysis of the download data in this article suggests that internet access was important. Language could be one barrier, but this was not supported by the quantitative evidence above. The case study pointed to how the strategies of actors was important too. External literature on change in electoral institutions also points to how the incumbent's partisan interests shape can be policy blockages, but so can other act-contingent considerations.<sup>62</sup> There is also a finite limitation on policy makers' time preventing them from taking what they learn and read forward – as well as political limitations on their power. Dissemination may therefore never occur and there will be no democracy promotion as a result of these barriers.

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<sup>62</sup> Kenneth Benoit 2004. "Models of Electoral System Change." *Electoral Studies* 23, No. 3 (2004): 363-89; André Blais, *To Keep or To Change First Past the Post? The Politics of Electoral Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Toby S. James, *Elite Statecraft and Election Administration: Bending the Rules of the Game* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Alan Renwick, *The Politics of Electoral Reform: Changing the Rules of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).



If documents are used to change the actions of actors (stage 4) then it might be in a way to *adversely* affect democracy. Autocrats might consult the literature to locate the institutions that will maximise their power and introduce them, the case study suggested. Yet there will also be occasions in which they may consider that their interests are not adversely affected and so will continue with reform. Additionally, civil society will be equipped with new knowledge that will help them identify and advocate their demands. Democracy promotion may therefore occur through the citation of grey literature in parliamentary reports, related reports and eventually the passage of new legislation in stage 5.



*Figure 4: The informational pathways and barriers to democracy promotion*

## Conclusions

There have been enormous volumes of resource and political will invested in democracy promotion around the world since the middle of the twentieth century. This accelerated in the post-Cold War period. One major plank of democracy promotion was the use of grey literature which suddenly became much easier to diffuse following the widespread availability of the internet. This article has charted this development for the first time by undertaking the first empirical analysis. This suggests that grey literature produced by international organisations did have a global diffusion. The analysis suggests that the resources were used by electoral management bodies lacking capacity as well as universities worldwide who may have lacked educational/research resources. This is therefore an important advance in our understanding of how the international community has promoted democracy – and how this has changed over time. It shows the importance of digital network connections. The existing literature on electoral governance has focussed on the physical interactions between actors and personnel across national EMBs, members of the international community and other stakeholders.<sup>63</sup> This focus on digital grey literature opens up opportunities to consider the nature of informational networks in future research.

At the same time, the research also centres attention on the barriers to informational policy transfer. Actors cannot simply upload information and wait for policies to change. Internet access does seem to remain one barrier which is a well-documented problem in the literature on digital divides but brings an under-reflected issue in the democracy promotion literature to the fore. The case study also revealed that the use of even the most widely read and downloaded information is contingent on political factors. The case study presented shows a ‘successful’ outcome where the information helped to inform stakeholders of the range of

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<sup>63</sup> James, *Comparative Electoral Management*.

options available for democratic design – but there will be many other cases of non-use of the materials. As was noted, an increasing volume of information in some subject areas may make it difficult for electoral reformers to identify the most reliable and accurate in an age of misinformation. I(N)GOs therefore play a vital role in supporting the transmission of the information to polities through the deployment of experts, quality assurance and proactive lobbying. Democracy cannot therefore be promoted by information alone – it requires financial and political support, but the strategic deployment of information can help. The model presented may also broadly apply to the use of grey literature in other policy areas.