



# The Impact of Protecting Civic Space

Review of the State of the Evidence

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# Introduction

This literature review surveys the state of the evidence for the positive impact on society of protecting civic space. It reviews academic literature as well as literature produced by international institutions and civil society, with a focus on literature produced after 2015.<sup>1</sup>

For the purposes of this review, “civic space” is defined as encompassing the fundamental freedoms of expression,<sup>2</sup> assembly, and association, as protected in Articles 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as in Articles 19, 21, and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the main international binding human rights treaty ratified by 173 countries.<sup>3</sup> As stated by the global civil society alliance, CIVICUS,

Civic space is the bedrock of any open and democratic society. When civic space is open, citizens and civil society organisations are able to organise, participate and communicate without hindrance. In doing so, they are able to claim their rights and influence the political and social structures around them. This can only happen when a state holds by its duty to protect its citizens and respects and facilitates their fundamental rights to associate, assemble peacefully and freely express views and opinions. These are the three key rights that civil society depends upon.<sup>4</sup>

An open civic space allows organizations, associations, and movements to associate, assemble, take action, and seek, receive, and impart information freely and independently. It is characterized by free and independent interactions between civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as between CSOs and the public, and an inclusive attitude toward CSO involvement in decision-making.

There is a widespread assumption that civic space and an active civil society contribute to good governance and economic development. CIVICUS’s credo, as referenced earlier, positions civic space as the bedrock on which political and social structures are built.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) similarly states that civic space is “a precondition for good governance and inclusive growth, as well as for effective and efficient open government policies and stakeholder participation initiatives” and has established a dedicated “Observatory of Civic Space” to monitor and promote civic space.<sup>5</sup> This paper reviews the literature that tests that assumption, assessing the state of the evidence for the impact<sup>6</sup> of protecting civic space in six areas:

- a) The impact of protecting civic space on development outcomes

<sup>1</sup> Older “standard-setting” literature is included as well, but given the political shifts and developments that have become increasingly pronounced since 2015, at the national level as well as internationally, recent literature will generally be more relevant.

<sup>2</sup> The term *freedom of expression* is often used interchangeably with the terms *free speech*, *freedom of speech*, and similar terms. This review will stick to the term *freedom of expression* as used in international human rights law. This is an umbrella term that includes notions such as “press freedom” and “media freedom.” The right of access to information held by or on behalf of public bodies, often also referred to as “freedom of information” or the “right to information,” which is considered part of the right to freedom of expression, is the subject of a separate review and is therefore excluded from the scope of this one.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://monitor.civicus.org/whatiscivilspace/>. The OECD defines *civic space* similarly as “the set of legal, policy, institutional, and practical conditions necessary for non-governmental actors to access information, express themselves, associate, organise, and participate in public life”: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/civic-space.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/civic-space.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> This review uses the term *impact* to denote long-term and relatively long-lasting change, over a period of a year or longer, as opposed to short-term *outcomes* or outputs that are produced by a project. Some of the literature uses the term *outcomes*, particularly in the context of development. To avoid confusion, this review will refer to this as “impact” where it is clear that the “development outcome” is long term.

- b) The impact of protecting civic space on democracy
- c) The impact of protecting civic space on corruption
- d) The impact of protecting civic space on trust in government
- e) The impact of protecting civic space on public service delivery
- f) The impact of protecting civic space on national/public safety

In each of these areas, the review will determine what evidence exists regarding the benefits of protecting and enhancing civic space.

The following pages first set out the methodology for the review. This is followed by a brief section reviewing literature on the questions of how civic space is to be measured and whether political developments over the last decade or so are to be described as “closing” civic space or merely changing its nature. The next section surveys the findings for each of the six focus areas, and the final section analyzes the findings and offers conclusions and recommendations for further research and analysis.

# Methodology

Given the nature of the topic, most of the literature in this review is multi-disciplinary, cutting across and incorporating literature from political science, economics, and human rights law and practice, among others. The review surveys literature from a variety of sources and institutions, including academia, think-tanks, civil society, national institutions, and intergovernmental organizations. From this variety of sources, peer-reviewed academic literature has been prioritized over literature produced by international organizations, institutions, think-tanks, and civil society organizations, and in this latter category, literature that is of an academic quality—meaning, that it is structured, researched, referenced, and generally backed up by evidence—is prioritized over other literature. Pamphlets, campaigning literature, and short blog posts are excluded altogether.

Empirical evidence is prioritized over theoretical literature, and to ensure that the review is relevant to current societal conditions, recent literature is prioritized over older literature. That is not to say that older theoretical literature is excluded; there is a rich literature on the value of defending freedom of expression, going back to the seventeenth century, and this remains relevant not least through the philosophical underpinnings it provides for the protection of rights and civic space.<sup>7</sup> But, to ensure that the literature review is relevant to current societal conditions, the focus is on literature from after 2012 (when the concept of “civic space” became more widely discussed).<sup>8</sup>

There is no particular geographic focus to the review. However, to ensure that the results of the review are as widely relevant as possible, literature that draws on empirical evidence and studies across multiple countries was prioritized over single-country studies (but not to the total exclusion of single-country studies, especially insofar as they serve to either illustrate global trends or provide important counter-evidence to a trend). For practical reasons, the focus is on English-language publications. While English is a major language and many studies that are of a global nature have been published in English, the non-inclusion of works published in French, Spanish, or other languages may result in a de facto narrowing of the geographical scope of this literature review to global studies, studies that cover countries where English is widely spoken, or studies by authors who happen to publish in English. As will be made clear in the recommendations, this should be remedied in any future literature reviews on this important topic.

## Academic Literature

The academic literature included in this review consists of the publications of eminent scholars, both in book form and in the form of journal articles. Preference has been given to peer-reviewed publications. Much of the literature has been sourced through academic search engines, such as Google Scholar and HeinOnline. Searches have been performed on these engines using search terms such as <“civic space” AND “corruption”>, <“freedom of association” AND “impact”>, <“media freedom” AND “development”>, and similar terms. The results have been prioritized on the basis of the criteria set out in the preceding section (evidence-based empirical literature prioritized over theoretical; recent literature over older; peer-reviewed literature over other work; pamphlets and blog posts excluded).

<sup>7</sup> National courts, such as the US Supreme Court and the German Constitutional Court, as well as international human rights courts, such as the European Court of Human Rights, have frequently referred back to the philosophical underpinnings of the right to freedom of expression—in particular, emphasizing the functioning of democracy as an important rationale for protecting the right to freedom of expression.

<sup>8</sup> Especially since the inception of the Civic Space Initiative in 2012, an alliance of four of the main global civil society organizations active in this field: the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, ARTICLE 19, CIVICUS, and the World Movement for Democracy (for background on this, see <https://www.icnl.org/our-work/global-programs/the-civic-space-initiative>).

## Civil Society Literature

Think-tanks, intergovernmental organizations, and NGOs have produced a large volume of literature on the importance of protecting civic space. An early example of this is the World Bank Institute's 2002 study, "The Right to Tell: the Role of Mass Media in Economic Development."<sup>9</sup> More recent material includes UNESCO's 2022 *Journalism Is a Public Good*.<sup>10</sup> Other think-tanks and international organizations (IGOs as well as NGOs) with relevant materials include the Institute for Development Studies, the OECD, and the World Bank. The websites of these organizations have been searched for relevant material, focusing on literature that shows empirical evidence of the impact of protecting civic space rather than literature that assumes or states its importance in general terms.<sup>11</sup>

A specific category of civil society publications concerns monitoring, evaluation, and learning publications published by funders as well as by implementers of civic space work. Some of this has been gathered on dedicated databases, such as the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse, and the Communication Initiative Network (the latter particularly in relation to media development and freedom of expression).<sup>12</sup> Some of the larger NGOs and philanthropies, such as Internews and the Media Development Investment Fund, have published impact studies on their own websites. These sources have been searched, and relevant material has been included, prioritizing studies that evidence trends over studies of single projects or programs, unless they illustrate a trend or provide important counter-evidence.

## Indices

A particular source of evidence for the impact of protecting civic space is found in the annual indices that are drawn up on issues such as development, the protection of democracy, press freedom, and anti-corruption, by organizations, such as CIVICUS, Transparency International, and others. These provide published evidence of the impact of promoting civic space, or significant components thereof, and more broadly inform the relationship between civic space and democracy, development, corruption, trust in government, public service delivery, and public safety. They are often published on an annual basis, which allows movements to be tracked over a period of time, and are often accompanied by narrative reports that explore the data. Insofar as these indices are structured, researched, referenced, and generally backed up by evidence—in other words, they are of an academic quality—they are included in this literature review despite them not being published in the form of a book or journal article. To allow for the tracking of movements over time, this review includes only indices that have been running for at least five years, with a consistent methodology.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank, "The Right to Tell: The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development," WBI Development Studies, 2002: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/15212>.

<sup>10</sup> *Journalism Is a Public Good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*, Global report 2021/2022, UNESCO 2022, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380618.locale=en>.

<sup>11</sup> There are literally thousands of civil society and IGO publications that invoke in general terms the importance of protecting civic space, freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, and democracy in general but without offering evidence. This literature has been excluded.

<sup>12</sup> See, respectively, <https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org>, <https://dec.usaid.gov/dec/home/Default.aspx>, and <https://www.comminit.com>.

# Civic Space

## MEASURING CIVIC SPACE

When measuring the impact of protecting civic space, it is obviously relevant that there should be a reasonable degree of agreement on how to define it. A simple quantitative measure of the number of organizations or media outlets—a metric that is sometimes advanced as proof of how open civic space is—is insufficient: qualitative indicators are needed as well.<sup>13</sup> As Columbia University professor Sheri Berman puts it in her often-cited *Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic*, “increased bird watching and league bowling are unlikely to have positive effects unless the nation’s political institutions are also revitalized.”<sup>14</sup> A degree of political engagement matters, as does independence, from government as well as from other undue influences. At the same time, it would be wrong to define civic space as only including organizations that pursue rights or democracy-related objectives; studies have shown that religious organizations, trade unions, and professional organizations can play an important role in pro-democracy drives.<sup>15</sup>

Scholarship on qualitative measures is constantly evolving and informs the development of civic space indices. The main two, CIVICUS’s Monitor and annual State of Civil Society,<sup>16</sup> draw on several independent sources, using quantitative as well as qualitative data and prioritizing local knowledge over regional or international assessment.<sup>17</sup> Other indices, such as Transparency International’s annual Corruption Perceptions Index and Reporters without Borders’ World Press Freedom Index, use similar approaches.<sup>18</sup>

These indices are not free from controversy. Many are produced by institutions that are based in wealthy and mostly northern countries, and scholars have criticized built-in biases in the methodologies of some of them. For example, upon close examination of the data and methodology of the Corruption Perceptions Index, Budsaratragoon and Jitmaneeojb criticized “unequal effects and the causal interrelations among multiple data sources” and a de facto bias in favor of countries with higher levels of economic development, casting doubt on the validity of the findings.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, looking through the lenses of Poland and Chile, Sapiezynska and Lagos criticize the freedom of expression indices produced by Reporters without Borders and Freedom House for neglecting to take into account the more subtle problems of democracies to do with media ownership, advertising, self-censorship, and the poor representation of diverse voices. In contrast, they praised UNESCO’s media development indicators for being broader and more complex and acknowledging positive actions

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, H. Fang, “Measuring China’s Non-Profit Sector” (Asia Foundation, 2019); A. Zimmer, K. Obuch, “If Not for Democracy, for What? Civil Society Organisations in Non-Democratic Settings,” chapter in *Realities, Challenges, Visions? Towards a New Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy*, C. Y. Robertson-von Trotha (ed.) (KIT Scientific Publishing, 2022), 77–91.

<sup>14</sup> S. Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 401–429.

<sup>15</sup> For example, J. Pinckney, C. Butcher, J. M. Braithwaite, “Organizations, Resistance, and Democracy: How Civil Society Organizations Impact Democratization,” *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>16</sup> The current CIVICUS Monitor and Index build on a pilot phase and predecessor publications going back to 2000, using a similar but evolving methodology: <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-center/reports-publications/csi-reports>.

<sup>17</sup> CIVICUS Monitor Methodology Paper, December 2021: <https://civicus.org/documents/civicus.monitor.methodologypaper-december2021.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/how-cpi-scores-are-calculated> and <https://rsf.org/en/index-methodologie-2022>.

<sup>19</sup> P. Budsaratragoon, and B. Jitmaneeojb, “A Critique on the Corruption Perceptions Index: An Interdisciplinary Approach,” *Socio-Economic Planning Services* 70 (2020): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0038012118301411>.

by the state to protect and promote the freedom of expression.<sup>20</sup> In response to criticism such as this, the methodology of the indices is constantly refined.<sup>21</sup> One of the latest innovations in the CIVICUS methodology is the inclusion of a quantitative indicator on freedom of assembly, developed by the University of Gothenburg's Varieties of Democracy Institute.<sup>22</sup> Reporters without Borders introduced five new indicators for the 2022 edition of its index: political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context, and security.<sup>23</sup>

## CLOSING OR JUST CHANGING?

Over the last decade, a significant amount of literature has been produced on the so-called “closing” or “shrinking” of civic space. These terms refer to measures introduced by governments that limit or restrict the work of civil society organizations, which can range from restrictions on receiving foreign funding to prohibitions on CSOs engaging in “political” work or lobbying—which human rights work is sometimes seen as—to the imposition of onerous and byzantine bureaucratic requirements, which can result in organizations that fail to comply being forced to disband. In some countries, there is violence and harassment of civil society actors, including arbitrary arrests and disappearances.<sup>24</sup> Literature produced over the last five years or so has discussed the impact of these measures on civic space and democratic backsliding, both in established democracies and in countries with less well-established democratic traditions, as well as the effectiveness of CSO initiatives to mitigate the impact of these measures.<sup>25</sup> This literature is referenced in this review as “negative evidence,” showing the impact of the suppression of civic space in the various separate areas reviewed in the following sections.

Some have suggested that it is incorrect to label this phenomenon as “shrinking” of civic space, arguing that in countries like China, there is in fact a mushrooming of civil society organizations.<sup>26</sup> Zimmer and Obuch point out that “[w]hile spaces may be constricting for the politically active parts of civil society, they are expanding for those engaged in mere service provision and for those who are clearly and ideologically supportive of the

<sup>20</sup> E. Sapiezynska, and C. Lagos, “Media Freedom Indexes in Democracies: A Critical Perspective through the Cases of Poland and Chile,” *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016). See also R. De Frutos and D. Giannone, “Methodological Changes and Challenges in the Measurement of Freedom of Information. An Analysis of the Reporters without Borders and Freedom House Indexes,” *Comunicação e sociedade* 33 (2018).

<sup>21</sup> S. I. Lindberg, M. Coppedge, J. Gerring, J. Teorell, and V-Dem, “A New Way to Measure Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* (2014).

<sup>22</sup> See <https://findings2021.monitor.civics.org/methodology.html> and <https://www.v-dem.net/>.

<sup>23</sup> See <https://rsf.org/en/rsfs-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation>.

<sup>24</sup> T. Roberts (ed.), “Digital Rights in Closing Civic Space: Lessons from Ten African Countries,” Institute for Development Studies (2021): <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/digital-rights-in-closing-civic-space-lessons-from-ten-african-countries/>.

<sup>25</sup> E.g., E. Kumi, “Pandemic Democracy: The Nexus of COVID-19, Shrinking Civic Space for Civil Society Organizations and the 2020 Elections in Ghana,” *Democratization* 29, no. 5 (2022); N. Hossain, and M. Oosterom, “The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Hunger and Poverty in the Global South,” *Global Policy* (2021); N. Annan, M. Beseng, G. Crawford, and J. K. Kewir, “Civil Society, Peacebuilding from Below and Shrinking Civic Space: The Case of Cameroon’s ‘Anglophone’ conflict,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 21, no. 6 (2021); L. O’Brien, and P. Micek, “Defending Peaceful Assembly and Association in the Digital Age: Takedowns, Shutdowns, and Surveillance,” *Access Now* (2020); N. Hossain, N. Khurana, S. Nazneen, M. Oosterom, P. Schröder, and A. Shankland, “Development Needs Civil Society—The Implications of Civic Space for the Sustainable Development Goals,” Institute for Development Studies (2019); T. Roberts (ed.), “Digital Rights in Closing Civic Space: Lessons from Ten African Countries,” Institute for Development Studies (2021); S. K. Mohmand, “The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Pakistan,” Institute for Development Studies (2019); F. Ní Aoláin, *The Role of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Closing Civic Space* (report by UN special rapporteur on human rights and counterterrorism), University of Minnesota (2019); A. Baker, C. Boulding, S. Mullenax, G. Murton, M. Todd, X. Velasco-Guachalla, and D. Zackary, *Maintaining Civic Space in Backsliding Regimes* (University of Colorado, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> For example, H. Fang, “Measuring China’s Non-Profit Sector,” Asia Foundation (2019).



regime.”<sup>27</sup> This is a phenomenon particularly, but not exclusively, in countries with less democratic tendencies: civil society organizations are encouraged or quietly incentivized to work in fields like service delivery, while space is restricted for those that are involved in politically contentious work, such as promoting democracy or protecting rights. The rise of the government-organized NGO—the so-called “Gongo”—is notable in this regard as well.<sup>28</sup> Even if it is accepted that space is changing, rather than closing, it would have to be described as a qualitatively significant change with clear implications for civil society organizations that (would wish to) work in sectors where space *is* shrinking.

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<sup>27</sup> A. Zimmer, and K. Obuch, “If Not for Democracy, for What? Civil Society Organisations in Non-Democratic Settings,” chapter in C. Y. Robertson-von Trotha (ed.), *Realities, Challenges, Visions? Towards a New Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy* (KIT Scientific Publishing, 2022), 86.

<sup>28</sup> J. Y. J. Hsu., T. Hildebrandt, and R. Hasmath, “Conceptualizing Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations,” *Journal of Civil Society* 15, no. 3 (2019); M. Naím, “What Is a Gongo?,” *Foreign Policy* 13 (October 2009).

## Overview of the Literature

This section reviews the literature on the impact of measures and projects that promote civic space. It does so in relation to six specific outcomes:

1. the impact of promoting civic space on development outcomes
2. the impact of promoting civic space on democracy
3. the impact of promoting civic space on corruption
4. the impact of promoting civic space on trust in government
5. the impact of promoting space on public service delivery
6. the impact of promoting civic space on national/public safety

Within each of these sections, the literature on the impact of promoting civic space is reviewed, including measures taken in response to restrictions on civic space, along with any relevant literature on the impact of protecting significant component parts of civic space: freedom of expression (including media freedom and media development), freedom of association, and freedom of assembly.

## Civic Space and Development Outcomes

Does promoting civic space and respect for human rights result in better development outcomes? In 2009, Siobhán McInerney-Lankford was among many who argued for a rights-based approach to development, grounded in states' legally binding obligations to respect human rights generally, which would result in a closer correlation between rights and development.<sup>29</sup> In 2022, the link between rights, civic space, and development outcomes is accepted by many but questioned by others who point to development outcomes in countries where civic space is closed or repressed,<sup>30</sup> such as China and Rwanda.

International agencies, such as the United Nations Development Program and the World Bank, are long-standing proponents of the positive correlation between civic space, good governance, and development outcomes.<sup>31</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), informed by the results of numerous studies and agreed upon by the UN General Assembly in 2015, commit governments to various targets. SDG 16 is particularly relevant, requiring governments to “[p]romote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” This includes the following specific targets:

- Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels;
- Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels;
- Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements; and
- Encourage and promote effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> S. McInerney-Lankford, “Human Rights and Development: A Comment on Challenges and Opportunities from a Legal Perspective,” *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 1, no. 1 (2009). See also J. P. Martin, “Development and Rights Revisited: Lessons from Africa,” *Conectas Sur* 4 (2006).

<sup>30</sup> Following the terminology used by the CIVICUS Monitor: <https://monitor.civicus.org/>.

<sup>31</sup> See, among others, UNDP, “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (2015), <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>; World Bank, *World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends* (2016); M. Nelson, “Rethinking Media Development,” *Internews/World Bank Institute* (2012), [https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/resources/InternewsRethinking-Media-Dev.web\\_1.pdf](https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/resources/InternewsRethinking-Media-Dev.web_1.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> UNDP, note 30, targets 16.6, 16.7, 16.10, and 17.17.

Independent international watchdogs, such as the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, have highlighted the strong linkages between the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the implementation of the SDGs.<sup>33</sup>

Although the “civic space promotes development outcomes” stance of the World Bank, UNDP, and other large international institutions sometimes appears to be stated as organizational dogma, it is informed by solid evidence. The World Bank’s World Development Indicators, a compilation of cross-country comparable data on development, updated annually and with data for some indicators going back more than 50 years,<sup>34</sup> generally shows a clear correlation between civic space and development outcomes. Independent research comes to the same conclusion. Drawing on fifteen years of cross-disciplinary collaborative research, Acemoglu and Robinson argue that inclusive institutions are crucial to prosperity; preconditions include “the presence of civil society institutions that can coordinate the demands of the population.”<sup>35</sup> Other studies have similarly and consistently shown that the promotion of civic space and an enabling environment for CSOs across all sectors, including the promotion of human rights and democratization, offline as well as online, contributes to development outcomes.<sup>36</sup> In “The Business Case for Protecting Civic Rights,” a study that covered 19 million data points by 3,200 researchers in 201 countries, surveying a data set from 1900 to 2017, researchers found, among other things, that a country that moved from 0 to 1 on the V-Dem civil liberties index increased its per capita GDP by an average of 1.3 percent over a period of five years and that there is an even stronger positive correlation between the protection of civil liberties and human development outcomes, such as infant mortality.<sup>37</sup>

Civic space is particularly important at the local level. Researching the link between civic space and development in Nepal, Nazneen and Thapa conclude that “CSOs at the local level are vital for ensuring inclusion and that ‘no one is left behind’ by development.”<sup>38</sup>

A free press is a strong indicator of an open civic space, and analysts have long argued that there is a positive relationship between press freedom and development.<sup>39</sup> Writing in 2002, then-president of the World Bank James Wolfensohn placed a free press “at the core of equitable development” because of the media’s ability to expose corruption; keep a check on public policy, allowing people to voice diverse opinions on governance and reform; and help build public consensus to bring about change and arrive at better policies.<sup>40</sup> Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has pointed out that there has never been a famine in a country with a free press: “a free press and an active political opposition constitute the best early-warning system a country threatened by

<sup>33</sup> C. N. Voulé, “Exercise of the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association and the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda,” United Nations (2018); M. Kiai, *Achievements of Civil Society* (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association), United Nations (2017).

<sup>34</sup> <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>.

<sup>35</sup> D. Acemoglu, and J. A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (Profile Books, 2013), 460.

<sup>36</sup> T. Roberts (ed.), “Digital Rights in Closing Civic Space: Lessons from Ten African Countries,” Institute for Development Studies (2021); N. Hossain, N. Khurana, S. Nazneen, M. Oosterom, P. Schröder, and A. Shankland, “Development Needs Civil Society—The Implications of Civic Space for the Sustainable Development Goals,” Institute for Development Studies (2019); J. Wood, and K. Fällman, “Enabling Civil Society,” OECD (2019); D. Lewis, and N. Kanji, *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development* (Routledge, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> A. L. Hogg, R. Hodess, “The Business Case for Protecting Civic Rights,” the B Team (2018).

<sup>38</sup> S. Nazneen, and D. Thapa, “The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Nepal,” Institute for Development Studies (2019), 2.

<sup>39</sup> T. Susman-Peña, “Healthy Media, Vibrant Societies: How Strengthening the Media Can Boost Development in Sub-Saharan Africa,” Internews (2012); C. J. Coyne, and P.T. Leeson, *Media, Development, and Institutional Change* (Edward Elgar, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> “The Right to Tell: The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development,” WBI Development Studies (2002), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/15212>.

famines can have.”<sup>41</sup> For all these reasons, international agencies and civil society organizations now argue that journalism is a public good.<sup>42</sup>

Some evidence is emerging that the “closing” or “changing” of civic space, a process that has been in motion since the early 2010s, is beginning to impact on development outcomes. Reviewing a range of literature, the World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report for 2017 warned that restrictions on civic space risk endangering “the ability of businesses to achieve their SDG targets” lead to a brain drain in terms of talent and can sometimes be “just the initial sign of more authoritarian systems impacting all economic and societal actors.”<sup>43</sup> A multi-country study published in 2018 concluded that while the immediate impacts of closing space on development outcomes are likely to be minimal, in the long term, economic crises are more likely in settings where civic space is closed and it is improbable that development will continue to produce equitable, sustainable, or inclusive outcomes.<sup>44</sup> The 2019 synthesis report of a study that included a literature review, 12 desk-based country studies (covering Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Myanmar/Burma, Nepal, Russia, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe), and four in-depth country case studies (covering Brazil, Cambodia, Nepal, and Zimbabwe) similarly concluded that restrictions on civic space “lead to development outcomes that are more inequitable, less sustainable, and more exclusionary.”<sup>45</sup> The authors found that this was because closures of civic space make it difficult or impossible for marginalized groups to voice their concerns or to organize and empower their members, resulting in adverse impacts on the pace of development, its distribution across different groups, and its sustainability. The authors of “The Business Case for Protecting Civic Rights,” referenced earlier, found that even when controlling for oil production, the presence of free and fair elections, and country-fixed effects, such as culture or language, a one point move on the V-Dem Civil Liberties Index correlates with a 1.3% increase or decrease of per capita GDP over five years. They concluded, “The results are clear: limits on important civic freedoms are linked to negative economic outcomes.”<sup>46</sup> Measures that close or restrict online spaces, such as surveillance and internet shutdowns, are likely to produce similarly negative outcomes. Drawing on a ten-country survey of closing digital space online, as a result of measures such as surveillance and internet shutdowns, along with a literature review describing closing civic space offline, the Institute for Development Studies has stated that if these trends persist “the global challenge of achieving inclusive and sustainable development as defined in the SDGs is unattainable by 2030.”<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that not all studies have been conclusive: a large country-level study carried out in Pakistan in 2018–2019 saw indications of negative development outcomes but found that the data needed to corroborate this were not being collected.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>41</sup> A. Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 181.

<sup>42</sup> *Journalism Is a Public Good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*, Global report 2021/2022, UNESCO (2022); “Enabling Media Markets to Work for Democracy,” Luminare (2020).

<sup>43</sup> WEF, *Global Risks Report* (2017), chapter 2.2.

<sup>44</sup> N. Hossain, N. Khurana, S. Mohmand, S. Nazneen, M. Oosterom, T. Roberts, R. Santos, A. Shankland, and P. Schröder, “What Does Closing Civic Space Mean for Development? A Literature Review and Proposed Conceptual Framework,” Institute for Development Studies (2018).

<sup>45</sup> N. Hossain, N. Khurana, S. Nazneen, M. Oosterom, P. Schröder, and A. Shankland, “Development Needs Civil Society—The Implications of Civic Space for the Sustainable Development Goals,” Institute for Development Studies (2019), 54.

<sup>46</sup> A. L. Hogg, and R. Hodess, “The Business Case for Protecting Civic Rights,” the B Team (2018), 3.

<sup>47</sup> T. Roberts (ed.), “Digital Rights in Closing Civic Space: Lessons from Ten African Countries,” Institute for Development Studies (2021), 18.

<sup>48</sup> S. K. Mohmand, “The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Pakistan,” Institute for Development Studies (2019).

But there are counter-indicators and shifts in geo-politics that indicate challenges ahead. Skeptics have advanced that western-style NGOs are not necessarily effective in non-western settings, pointing out that encouraging civil society on its own is not a “magic ‘cure-all’ or panacea for the ills of the developing nations.”<sup>49</sup> Countries such as China and Vietnam, where CIVICUS rates civic space as “closed,” seem to have achieved positive development outcomes; Rwanda and Ethiopia are named as examples of countries where civic space is rated as “repressed” but that appear still to have achieved significant development outcomes.<sup>50</sup> The Institute for Development Studies has warned in relation to Nepal, close to both India and China, that “[t]he increased Indian and Chinese presence as development partners or investors allows the state to counter the frameworks and development agendas that come with being dependent on official development assistance.”<sup>51</sup> As a result, the framing by civil society of inclusive, equitable, and sustainable modes of development, centered on the internationally agreed SDGs, has been “dethroned” by new framing around infrastructure and large development projects.<sup>52</sup>

There is pushback against these arguments. A study based on research in Brazil, Ethiopia, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe points out that at the macro-level, restrictions on civic space were compatible with high rates of economic growth only if political elites were committed to this. The research also found that restrictions on civil society adversely affected civil society efforts to tackle poverty and hunger and reach marginalized groups. As a result, their exclusion from policy processes and services will deepen, and as civic space narrows, the most marginalized and disempowered groups face a growing risk of being left behind.<sup>53</sup> Drawing on a wide range of research, Hickey, Sen, and Bukenya similarly point out that regimes have only pursued economic policies that are inclusive and favor the poor when they have depended, for whatever reason (electoral or otherwise), on the support of the poor or of farmers.<sup>54</sup> Comparing the development of democratic India with authoritarian China, the economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen notes that China has had strong economic development but that it has been fragile and subject to power politics at the top. For example, when universal health care was withdrawn, life expectancy quickly went down. Arguing that such decisions could not be made in a democracy, Sen concludes that “press freedom and democratic guarantees are necessary for making a high-performing development path secure and stable, rather than fragile, even if such reforms can be more quickly ushered in the absence of democratic freedoms.”<sup>55</sup> Others have questioned the economic data and modelling for some of the countries that are proposed as examples of development outcomes with closed or repressed civic space. In regard to Rwanda, often cited as an example of economic growth while the government keeps a tight hold on civic space, a 2017 study has urged the need to cross-check macro-level statistical analysis with household

<sup>49</sup> H. Wiarda, *Civil Society: The American Model and Third World Development* (Routledge, 2003), 129.

<sup>50</sup> N. Hossain, N. Khurana, S. Mohmand, S. Nazneen, M. Oosterom, T. Roberts, R. Santos, A. Shankland, and P. Schröder, “What Does Closing Civic Space Mean for Development? A Literature Review and Proposed Conceptual Framework,” Institute for Development Studies (2018); S. Hickey, K. Sen, and B. Bukenya, “Exploring the Politics of Inclusive Development: Towards a New Conceptual Approach,” chapter in S. Hickey, K. Sen, and B. Bukenya (eds), *The Politics of Inclusive Development: Interrogating the Evidence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); M. Khan, “Political Settlements and the Governance of Growth-Enhancing Institutions,” SOAS (2010); G. White, “Civil Society, Democratization and Development (I): Clearing the Analytical Ground,” *Democratization* 1, no. 2 (1994).

<sup>51</sup> S. Nazneen, and D. Thapa, “The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Nepal,” Institute for Development Studies (2019), 6.

<sup>52</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>53</sup> N. Hossain, and M. Oosterom, “The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Hunger and Poverty in the Global South,” *Global Policy* (2021).

<sup>54</sup> S. Hickey, K. Sen, and B. Bukenya, “Exploring the Politics of Inclusive Development: Towards a New Conceptual Approach,” chapter in S. Hickey, K. Sen, and B. Bukenya (eds), *The Politics of Inclusive Development: Interrogating the Evidence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>55</sup> A. Sen, “Press Freedom: What Is It Good For?,” Index on Censorship (2013), 12.

data, because of the high political stakes of data collection and analysis and suspicions that the data may be incorrect or that it is interpreted in ways that are potentially misleading.<sup>56</sup>

Recent studies have suggested that a more nuanced look at democracy is required to ascertain the correlation between democracy and human development. In a large multi-year study, drawing on several data sets from 1900 to 2020,<sup>57</sup> Gerring et al. argue that democracy should be measured in a nuanced fashion, taking account of gradations of democracy and autocracy, and that democracies with strong electoral traditions, in particular, are more strongly associated with human development than others.<sup>58</sup> They also argue that the impact of democracy on human development depends upon a country's entire regime history.<sup>59</sup> This cautions against simplistic assumptions, but at the same time the authors conclude that if these factors are taken into account, the positive relationship between democracy and development is robust. Others similarly point out that an enabling environment for civil society does not bring about development on its own; drawing on a range of economic and political research covering several less developed countries, Collier notes that countries have tended to fall into one or several of four traps: a natural resource trap, a conflict trap, being landlocked with bad neighbors, and bad governance in a small country. While civil society plays a role in avoiding or climbing out of these traps, Collier argues that on its own it is not decisive.<sup>60</sup>

## Civic Space and Democracy

### Freedom of Expression, Civic Space, Protest, and Democracy

The literature on the linkages between civic space and democracy goes back to the writings of Milton and John Stuart Mill, who placed the value of protecting freedom of expression—the main pillar of civic space—in discovering “truth,”<sup>61</sup> and more recently Alexander Meiklejohn's positioning of freedom of expression as crucial to democracy.<sup>62</sup> These and similar philosophical works continue to influence modern thinking as well as courts and decision-makers around the world. Barendt refers to Meiklejohn's work as “probably the most attractive and certainly the most fashionable free speech theory in modern Western democracies.”<sup>63</sup>

Modern authors agree and extend the free speech argument to civic space more broadly. As Edwards puts it in his seminal work *Civil Society*, “voluntary associations are ... an essential pillar of promoting transparency, accountability, and other aspects of democratic governance ... it is civil society that provides the channels through which most people can make their voices heard in government decision making, protect and promote

<sup>56</sup> A. Ansoms, E. Marijnen, G. Cioffo, and J. Murison, “Statistics versus Livelihoods: Questioning Rwanda's Pathway out of Poverty,” *Review of African Political Economy* 44, no. 151 (2017).

<sup>57</sup> The study used data from the Gapminder project, covering most sovereign countries from 1900 to 2012, to measure human development (see <https://www.gapminder.org>), and data from the Varieties of Democracy project, which measures democracy for most sovereign countries from 1900 to the present (see <https://www.v-dem.net/>).

<sup>58</sup> Gerring, C. H. Knutsen, M. Maguire, S. E. Skaaning, J. Teorell, and M. Coppedge, “Democracy and Human Development: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement,” *Democratization* 28 no. 2 (2020).

<sup>59</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>60</sup> P. Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>61</sup> J. Milton, “Areopagitica”; A speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing (1644), as republished in *Milton and the Modern Media: A Defence of a Free Press* (Accrington: B&D, 2005); J. S. Mill, *On Liberty* (1859), as republished by Penguin Classics (1982).

<sup>62</sup> Meiklejohn, *Free Speech and Its Relation to Self-Government*, as expanded in *Free Speech and Its Relation to Self-Government* (New York: Harper Collins, 1960).

<sup>63</sup> E. Barendt, *Free Speech* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.

their civil and political rights, and strengthen their skills as future political leaders.”<sup>64</sup> Civil society organizations provide an important link between citizens and the government, strengthening democratic connections,<sup>65</sup> and opinion surveys in global south countries agree that the public generally has a favorable view of CSOs that advocate for rights and democratic values.<sup>66</sup> Studying data from 1900 onward, Bernhard et al. conclude that an active civil society and institutionalized political parties can be mobilized to protect democracy from authoritarian takeovers.<sup>67</sup> A 2021 study drawing on experiences in the Caucasus, South-Eastern, and Central Europe argues that the best way to understand the significance of civic engagement for democracy is to experience a society where the space for independent civil society is constrained or actively suppressed and warns that dismantling of civil society goes hand in hand with dismantling democracy.<sup>68</sup> Civic space and democracy indices consistently show a strong positive correlation between the protection of civic space and democracy.<sup>69</sup> Some scholars have argued that there isn’t always a positive link between civil society and democracy and that other factors play into this as well. For example, analyzing the experience of Germany’s Weimar Republic, Berman points out that there was active civic life in Germany but that groups catered only to their own communities: Protestants, Catholics, socialists, all had their own societies, but few bridged the divides between communities. This, along with failing political institutions, eventually provided Adolf Hitler’s Nazi party the opportunity to present themselves as a party for all and seize power.<sup>70</sup>

Within civic space, the media are very important. The European Commission’s High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism, a group of independent experts set up in 2011 to provide independent evidence-based advice on media policy, states in its final report, “Democracy requires a well-informed, inclusive and pluralistic public sphere; the media are, to a large extent, the creators as well as the ‘editors’ of this public sphere.”<sup>71</sup> UNESCO’s World Trends report of 2022, based on data-driven analysis of trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence, and the safety of journalists, emphasizes the role of independent journalism, “providing citizens with trusted information and facts they need to participate in a free and open society. Journalism simultaneously acts as an independent watchdog and agenda-setter.”<sup>72</sup>

Independent studies have shown that engaged media audiences exhibit increased political knowledge and discussion. A case study conducted during Uganda’s 2016 parliamentary elections demonstrated that voters who were exposed to electoral messages from multiple candidates were less likely to vote for ruling party candidates.<sup>73</sup> An earlier study across seven Asian and African countries found increased political participation for the audiences of political debate programs.<sup>74</sup> A wide-ranging study of sub-Saharan African countries found

<sup>64</sup> M. Edwards, *Civil Society*, 4th edition (Polity, 2020), 15.

<sup>65</sup> C. Barnett, M. Punton, J. Hamaus, H. Derbyshire, J. Agar, and C. Banda, *Final Evaluation Report of the Tilitonse Fund*, Itad (2016).

<sup>66</sup> R. Wike, and C. Bishop, “Public Attitudes Toward Human Rights Organizations: The Case of India, Indonesia, Kenya and Mexico,” Pew Research Center (2017).

<sup>67</sup> M. Bernhard, A. Hicken, C. Reenock, and S.I. Lindberg, “Parties, Civil Society, and the Deterrence of Democratic Defection,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 55, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>68</sup> G. Illmeier, D. Mussnig, and F. Steiner, “On the Significance of Civil Society for Liberal Democracy—Perspectives from the Caucasus, South-Eastern and Central Europe,” *Der Donauraum* 60, no. 4 (2021).

<sup>69</sup> *State of Civil Society Report*, CIVICUS (2021); “World Development Indicators,” World Bank (2021); *Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege* (Freedom House, 2021).

<sup>70</sup> S. Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997), 401–429.

<sup>71</sup> High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism, “A Free and Pluralistic Media to Sustain European Democracy,” European Commission (2013), 10.

<sup>72</sup> *Journalism Is a Public Good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*, Global Report 2021/2022, UNESCO (2022), 20.

<sup>73</sup> M. R. Platas, and P. J. Raffler, “Closing the Gap: Information and Mass Support in a Dominant Party Regime,” *Journal of Politics* 83, no. 4 (2021).

<sup>74</sup> A. Scavo, and C. Snow, “Media and Political Participation: Fostering Inclusive Governance,” BBC Media Action (2016).



that “political stability in Africa seems strongly connected to the presence of a free press,” which in turn is linked to literacy.<sup>75</sup> The authors concluded, “literacy, a free press, and democracy can create a virtuous cycle that lays the ground for improvements in governance.”<sup>76</sup> The authors note evidence from China and Singapore to the contrary but do not elaborate (African countries being the focus of their study). A 2020 donor study called for the establishment of a public interest journalism fund on the basis of the finding that independent public interest media systems are central to democratic self-determination and will be vital for countries to shape their own futures.<sup>77</sup> Democracy needs an independent media and vice versa.<sup>78</sup> The role of community media has been emphasized, particularly in terms of the contribution they make to civic space and democracy at the local level. Studies have consistently found high levels of audience engagement, leading to civic engagement at the local level as well as regionally and nationally.<sup>79</sup> A 2010 study on the impact of satellite TV in the Middle East and North Africa found that while coverage of political issues was limited, they nonetheless increased the cause of democracy, however incrementally.<sup>80</sup>

There is some pushback on the positive link between media freedom and democracy. Scholars have pointed out that the media does not always perform this “ideal” function of a non-partisan watchdog of democracy and that an unbalanced media landscape can in some situations be harmful to civic engagement and democracy. For example, a South African study found that the link between media and democracy is “often very tenuous in practice” because of challenges such as unequal access to the media, the orientation of mainstream media toward elite audiences, and renewed attempts by sources of power to control the free flow of information.<sup>81</sup> The alignment of the media with elites and its failure to serve or represent other audiences has also been identified in Brazil, where some have posited it as a contributing factor to the impeachment in 2016 of Dilma Rousseff.<sup>82</sup> A global study found discontent with democracy even when people believed that free speech as such was quite well-protected.<sup>83</sup> According to the Edelman Trust Barometer 2021, which surveyed 33,000 people in 28 countries across Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe, trust in the media is low, with only politicians scoring lower in the “trust rankings.”<sup>84</sup>

<sup>75</sup> The authors relied on figures from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics finding that the literacy rate for free press countries had risen from 60% in 2002 to 77% by 2009: <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=210>.

<sup>76</sup> T. Susman-Peña, “Healthy Media, Vibrant Societies: How Strengthening the Media Can Boost Development in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Internews* (2012), 9 and 56.

<sup>77</sup> “Enabling Media Markets to Work for Democracy,” *Luminate* (2020); see also “Media Development Investment Fund Impact 2021: Elections, 2021.”

<sup>78</sup> J. Trappel, and H. Nieminen, “Media and Democracy: A Couple Walking Hand in Hand?”, *Comparative Media Policy, Regulation and Governance in Europe*, chapter in L. d’Haenaens, H. Sousa, and J. Trappel (eds.), *Comparative Media Policy, Regulation and Governance in Europe* (Intellect 2018); S. Roy, “Media Development and Political Stability: An Analysis of Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Journal of Developing Areas* 48, no. 2 (2014).

<sup>79</sup> R. W. James, E. Romo-Murphy, M. Oczon-Quirante, “A Realist Evaluation of a Community-Centered Radio Initiative for Health and Development in Mindanao, Philippines,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 6 (2019); “Community Radio: Its Impact and Challenges to Its Development,” NED-Cima (2008); B. Jallof, *Impact Assessment of East African Community Media Project 2000–2006: Report from Radio Mang’etele, Kenya, and Selected Communities*, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (2007). See also the sizeable collection of studies on the impact of community radio assembled by the Communication Initiative: <https://www.comminit.com/media-development/content/impact-community-media>.

<sup>80</sup> D. Horan, “Shifting Sands: The Impact of Satellite TV on Media in the Arab World,” NED-Cima (2010).

<sup>81</sup> W. Chuma, H. Wasserman, and T. Bosch, “Questioning the Media-Democracy Link: South African’s Journalists’ Views,” *African Journalism Studies* 38, no. 1 (2017): 27; M. P. Sebola, J. P. Tseola, and M. Molopa, “Conventional Mass Media and Social Networks in a Democratic South Africa: Watchdogs for Good Governance and Service Delivery,” *Bangladesh E-Journal of Sociology* 11 no. 2 (2014).

<sup>82</sup> A. de Albuquerque, “Protecting Democracy or Conspiring against It? Media and Politics in Latin America: A Glimpse from Brazil,” *Journalism* 20, no. 7 (2017).

<sup>83</sup> R. Wike, L. Silver, and A. Castillo, “Many across the Globe Are Dissatisfied with How Democracy Is Working,” *Pew Research Center* (2019).

<sup>84</sup> “Trust Barometer,” Edelman (2022), <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer>.



Dissatisfaction with traditional media has been one of the factors behind the growth over the last decade of online media outlets. Many of these have been remarkably successful in building engaged audiences and providing platforms for discussion around issues of democracy, particularly in countries where legacy media have become polarized and independent media are under threat. A 2022 study across Africa, Asia, and the Americas found that 76% of reporting from start-up digital media outlets had led to increased civic engagement—a key ingredient of democracy (Sembra 2022). The founder of one such outlet, Rappler’s Maria Ressa, received the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize together with Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov for their fearless defense of independent journalism and freedom of expression. Engaging communication in action around issues of politics and democracy is at the heart of Rappler’s mission, and it has become one of the Philippines’ largest media outlets.<sup>85</sup>

While earlier studies theorized that social media and the online space for debate and discussion that they provide would have a significant positive impact on democracy, more recent studies call for a more nuanced look, particularly with regard to the danger of polarization: social media have been found to tend to lock people into bubbles of like-minded individuals, causing them to become entrenched in their own views.<sup>86</sup> The phenomenon has been exacerbated as political campaigns have moved online, as evidenced by successive US presidential elections.<sup>87</sup> This is not a uniquely US phenomenon; it has been observed across the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa. A study conducted during Ghana’s 2020 elections found that online political campaigns resulted in more hate speech and increased polarization and undermined democratic development.<sup>88</sup> Even when online campaigns are not fueled by hatred or filled with fake news, politicians with smart social media strategies can dominate online spaces, resulting in social media becoming propaganda platforms rather than online spaces for debate or discussion.<sup>89</sup> A related issue is information spread by bots, automated accounts programmed to post and respond to content on social media. For example, the so-called “Guptabots” that appeared in the South African Twitter-sphere in 2016 posted messages about “white monopoly capital” to deflect attention from corruption scandals involving the Gupta family, financial backers of the South African president.<sup>90</sup> The rapid speed with which “fake news,” misinformation, and disinformation spreads online has also been identified as a serious threat to democracy. An often quoted 2018 MIT study that surveyed an eleven-year data set from Twitter found that false news spreads faster online than true stories.<sup>91</sup> It should be noted, however, that the extent of the threat is an issue of debate: a 2021 study criticizing earlier studies for an unscientific definition of “fake news” and failing to analyze its consumption and impact on audiences warns against policy responses that are borne out of a “moral panic” and calls for more empirical research.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>85</sup> As per Rappler’s mission statement, at <https://www.rappler.com/about/mission-statement-journalism-communities-technology/>. As of 2021, it was the Philippines’ fourth largest news and media website: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021/philippines>.

<sup>86</sup> For example, C. Sunstein, “Is Social Media Good or Bad for Democracy?,” *Conectas Sur* 27 (2018); D. Tonga, “The Impact of New Media Technologies on Zambia’s 2016 Presidential Elections” (2017).

<sup>87</sup> L. Grimminger, R. Klinger, “Hate Towards the Political Opponent: A Twitter Corpus Study of the 2020 US Elections on the Basis of Offensive Speech and Stance Detection,” arXiv:2103.01664 (2021); B. L. Ott, “The Age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the Politics of Debasement,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>88</sup> E. Kumi, “Pandemic Democracy: The Nexus of COVID-19, Shrinking Civic Space for Civil Society Organizations and the 2020 Elections in Ghana,” *Democratization* 29 no. 5 (2022).

<sup>89</sup> N. Ruiz-Alba, and R. Mancinas-Chávez, “The Communications Strategy via Twitter of Nayib Bukele: The Millennial President of El Salvador,” *Comunicacion y Sociedad* 33 no. 2 (2020).

<sup>90</sup> T. Roberts (ed.), “Digital Rights in Closing Civic Space: Lessons from Ten African Countries,” Institute for Development Studies (2021).

<sup>91</sup> S. Vosoughi, D. Roy, and S. Aral, “The Spread of True and False News Online,” *Science* 359, no. 6380 (2018). See also J. Machleder, S. Maguire, S. Abbott, R. Hendley, and L. Camacho, “Disinformation Primer,” USAID (2021).

<sup>92</sup> F. Miró-Llinares, and J. C. Aguerri, “Misinformation about Fake News: A Systematic Critical Review of Empirical Studies on the Phenomenon and Its Status as a ‘Threat,’” *European Journal of Criminology* (2021).

Scholarship around freedom of assembly, protests, and democracy agrees there is a clear link between protests and democracy, but the literature points out the multitude of types of protest and protest movements, with some leading to lasting change and others floundering. A study of the complexities of global protests found that results are heavily context dependent: political outcomes of major protests include no perceptible impact, no change in the formal political system but long-term shifts in public mentality, regime change and an attempt at democratization, a democratic revolution, anti-democratic coups, prolonged civil war, and long-term chaos.<sup>93</sup> A Thailand/Malaysia study found that without codified freedoms and physical spaces for deliberative interactions, civil society flourishes during tumultuous times but flounders after its immediate goals are achieved.<sup>94</sup> A 2021 empirical analysis of the political impact of the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests found that the pro-democracy camp's vote share was higher in constituencies with higher levels of protest activities, although the size of the impact was relatively small and there were several other determinant factors.<sup>95</sup> It has also been noted that protests can have undemocratic demands: the exercise of the right to freedom of assembly, itself a democratic human right and essential component of civic space, can have anti-democratic demands, and there have been cases where public mobilization has led to authoritarian coups (for example in Chile and Thailand, as described by Bello and Buruma).<sup>96</sup> Research has consistently shown that there is a strong positive correlation between the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of association and assembly and democracy.<sup>97</sup>

## THREATS AGAINST CIVIC SPACE

“Democracies nurture themselves from a range of societal voices, critical and less critical of the state. However, if the critical voices are silenced, the space for democratic deliberation narrows.”<sup>98</sup> To protect democracy, it is important to defend civic space. The World Economic Forum has warned that threats to civic space can lead to political instability.<sup>99</sup> A study commissioned by the Belgian foreign affairs ministry warned that restrictions on civic space “contribute to wider movements of democratic recession, through reduced scrutiny and reporting on policies and on human rights abuses as well as on attempts to subvert independent institutions” and result in “political polarisation, hate campaigns (e.g. on social media), violence as well as an erosion of norms—such as the acceptance of the role of opposition.”<sup>100</sup> Restrictions on CSO activities and work can erode civic space, as UN and OAS independent experts have pointed out in response to Guatemalan laws that prohibit CSO

<sup>93</sup> T. Carothers, and R. Youngs, “The Complexities of Global Protests,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2015); M. Giugni, and L. Bosi, “The Impact of Protest Movements on the Establishment: Dimensions, Models, and Approaches,” chapter in *The Establishment Responds: Power, Politics, and Protest since 1945*, K. Fahlenbrach, M. Klimke, J. Scharloth, and L. Wong (eds.) (2012); F. Kolb, *Protest and Opportunities: The Political Outcomes of Social Movements*, Campus Verlag (2007).

<sup>94</sup> K. Balassiano, and A. R. Pandi, “Civic Space and Political Mobilisation: Cases in Malaysia and Thailand,” *Development Studies* 49, no. 11 (2013).

<sup>95</sup> F. L. F. Lee, “Impact of Protest Activities on Electoral Outcome: The Case of Hong Kong’s Anti-ELAB Movement,” *The Social Science Journal* (2021).

<sup>96</sup> W. Bello, “How Middle-Class Chileans Contributed to the Overthrow of Salvador Allende,” *The Nation* (2016); I. Buruma, “A Polite Coup,” *Harper’s Magazine* (2015).

<sup>97</sup> F. S. Bethke, and J. Pinckney, “Non-Violent Resistance and the Quality of Democracy,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 38, no. 5 (2021).

<sup>98</sup> “Press Freedom and the Global State of Democracy Indices,” International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *The Global State of Democracy* (2019), 8.

<sup>99</sup> WEF, Global Risks Report chapter: “Citizens and Civic Space at Risk,” World Economic Forum (2017).

<sup>100</sup> J. Bossuyt, and M. Ronceray, “Claiming back Civic Space: Towards Approaches Fit for the 2020s?,” Belgian Department for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (2020), iv.

activities that result in “changes to public order.”<sup>101</sup> Restrictions on accessing foreign funding push civil society organizations toward domestic sources of funding. While this can result in enhanced legitimacy—a positive effect—there is a risk that domestic funders may nudge civil society away from controversial issues—a negative effect.<sup>102</sup> In countries such as Turkey and Hungary, pressuring the independent media has been part of an overall crackdown on democratic values;<sup>103</sup> in other countries, such as the western Balkans, the weakness of the independent media has been identified as one of the factors in the overall deterioration of democracy.<sup>104</sup> Anti-media populism and accusations of “media bias,” such as has been seen in countries ranging from the United States to Venezuela can also pose a threat to democratic values.<sup>105</sup>

Scholars have also warned of the threats to online civic space and the use of digital tools to clamp down on civil society. A study across ten African countries found that government measures such as internet shutdowns, the take-down of material, and surveillance threaten to make inclusive governance of the type required under the SDGs impossible.<sup>106</sup> The Internet provides opportunities for civic space but can also be a tool for repression.<sup>107</sup>

## UNCIVIL SPACE AND ILLIBERAL MEDIA

Civic space is populated by a whole variety of groups, including not only pro-democracy and human rights groups but also groups that do not engage in democracy at all and groups that pursue anti-democratic objectives. Civil society organizations that promote ideals that deny or undermine democratic values and respect for rights are deeply problematic,<sup>108</sup> and the emergence of an “uncivil” civil society and an illiberal media has been identified as a real threat to democracy.<sup>109</sup> As noted in the section on closing space, the rise of the GONGO (government-organized NGO) is another worrying phenomenon. These organizations are closely aligned with the government, and their existence does not widen democratic engagement, no matter how many of them there are.

A related problem is that of media capture: the alignment and forcing (not forging) of allegiances between media outlets and the government of the day.<sup>110</sup> In many countries, there is a worrying increase of GONGOS

<sup>101</sup> “Guatemala: UN and OAS Experts Sound Alarm about ‘Choking’ NGO Law,” July 1, 2021: <https://reliefweb.int/report/guatemala/guatemala-un-and-oas-experts-sound-alarm-about-choking-ngo-law>.

<sup>102</sup> E. Kumi, and R. Hayman, “Analysing the Relationship between Domestic Resource Mobilisation and Civic Space: Results of a Scoping Study,” INTRAC (2019).

<sup>103</sup> S. Corke, A. Finkel, D. J. Kramer, C. A. Robbins, and N. Schenkkan, *Democracy in Crisis: Corruption, Media, and Power in Turkey* (Freedom House, 2014); M. Akser, and B. Baybars-Hawks, “Media and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Model of Neoliberal Media Autocracy,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5, no. 3 (2012).

<sup>104</sup> V. Stojarová, “Media in the Western Balkans: Who Controls the Past Controls the Future,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 20, no. 1 (2019).

<sup>105</sup> M. Kellam, “Media Freedom Decline in Democracies: Lessons from Latin America,” *Comparative Politics Newsletter* 28, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>106</sup> T. Roberts (ed.), “Digital Rights in Closing Civic Space: Lessons from Ten African Countries,” Institute for Development Studies (2021).

<sup>107</sup> B. Zaid, “Internet and Democracy in Morocco: A Force for Change and an Instrument for Repression,” *Global Media and Communication* 12, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>108</sup> S. Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 401–429.

<sup>109</sup> M. Bernhard, “What Do We Know about Civil Society and Regime Change Thirty Years after 1989?” *East European Politics* 36, no. 3 (2020); P. Surowiec, and V. Štětka, “Introduction: Media and Illiberal Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics* (Taylor & Francis, 2020).

<sup>110</sup> W. Horsley, “Media Capture in Central and Eastern Europe: The Corrosive Impact on Democracy and Desecration of Journalistic Ethics,” chapter in book, *The Routledge Companion to Journalism Ethics*, L. Trifonova Price, K. Sanders, and W. Wyatt (eds.) (2021); N. Burazer, “Media Capture—An Increasing Threat to Serbian Democracy,” *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 2, no. 3 (2021); M. Nelson, “What Is to Be Done? Options for Combating the Menace of Media Capture,” chapter in book, *In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy*, A. Schiffrin (ed.) (CIMA, 2017).

and government-aligned or captured media outlets; an entire ecosystem has sprung up of organizations with names such as “Myanmar Women’s Affairs Federation” or “Global Journalism Council” that seem independent but that are not.<sup>111</sup> Roggeband and Krizsán argue that in many countries closure is a selective mechanism: CSOs identified as critical of or even anti-government face obstruction and restraints, while the space for pro-government CSOs is expanded.<sup>112</sup> These organizations and captured outlets cannot simply be ignored: they hijack public debate and create a space for discussion that many ordinary citizens don’t realize isn’t free and independent. They actively undermine democracy.<sup>113</sup>

Similar to the literature on the influence of countries like China on development and civic space, one study that surveyed 163 countries identified higher rates of media censorship in democratic countries that trade intensively with China.<sup>114</sup> The author theorizes that this may be because of active Chinese support for censorship measures or decreasing negative scrutiny of it or even more likely because of China’s relative apathy about freedom of expression and democratic values generally in the countries that it trades with. The author posts several caveats—co-efficient sizes are small; China’s support for censorship appears largely passive, and this may dissipate in the future; and domestic political institutions are key determinants, not an outside government—but nevertheless maintains that the study contributes an important understanding on the impact of China’s growth beyond its borders.

## Civic Space and Corruption

The literature suggests a positive correlation between the strength of civil society, including media freedom, and the reduction of corruption, when other conditions such as political competition and government transparency are also present. Writing in 2018, Hossain and Santos conclude from a literature review alongside data from country case studies in Pakistan and Ethiopia that there is a consistent negative correlation between the strength of civil society and corruption.<sup>115</sup> Earlier studies reached similar conclusions. Reviewing country-level data along with qualitative research, Grimes concludes that her findings are “cautiously supportive of the expected promise of a strong civil society,” particularly in combination with political competition, press freedom, and government transparency.<sup>116</sup> A 2014 study conducted by the Hertie School of Government reviewing a data set drawn from the World Bank’s Control of Corruption Index, the International Country Risk Guide’s Corruption Risk Index, the Global Corruption Barometer 2013, the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Survey, and the World Values Survey 2008 finds that civil society is an essential element in successful anti-corruption drives.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>111</sup> The Myanmar Women’s Affairs Federation is reportedly run by the wives of Myanmar’s military rulers (Naím, “Democracy’s Dangerous Impostors,” *Washington Post*, April 21, 2007); the GJC is tightly aligned with the governments of the Organization of Turkic States (as is made clear in its vision and mission statement: <https://www.gjc.org.tr/mission-vision/>).

<sup>112</sup> C. Roggeband, and A. Krizsán, “The Selective Closure of Civic Space,” *Global Policy* 12, no. S5 (2021).

<sup>113</sup> W. Horsley, “Media Capture in Central and Eastern Europe: The Corrosive Impact on Democracy and Desecration of Journalistic Ethics,” chapter in book, *The Routledge Companion to Journalism Ethics*, L. Trifonova Price, K. Sanders, and W. Wyatt (eds.) (2021); N. Burazer, “Media Capture—An Increasing Threat to Serbian Democracy,” *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 2, no. 3 (2021); M. Nelson, “What Is to Be Done? Options for Combating the Menace of Media Capture,” chapter in book, *In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy*, A. Schiffrin (ed.) (CIMA, 2017).

<sup>114</sup> J. Gamso, “Is China Exporting Media Censorship? China’s Rise, Media Freedoms, and Democracy,” *European Journal of International Relations* 27, no. 3 (2021).

<sup>115</sup> N. Hossain, and R. Santos, “Assessing the Impacts of Changing Civic Space on Development Outcomes: A Methodological Discussion,” Institute for Development Studies (2018).

<sup>116</sup> M. Grimes, “The Contingencies of Societal Accountability: Examining the Link between Civil Society and Good Government,” *Studies in Comparative Development* (2012).

<sup>117</sup> A. Mungiu-Pippidi, “Quantitative Report on Causes of Performance and Stagnation in the Global Fight against Corruption,” Hertie School of Governance (2014).

Mungiu-Pippidi emphasizes that the reason that civil society is so important in anti-corruption drives is because NGOs are among the main users of anti-corruption tools, such as transparency laws.<sup>118</sup> Other studies have similarly emphasized the important role that civil society plays in combating corruption. For example, reviewing country data, Themudo concludes that the impact of civil society largely depends on its ability to act as a watchdog and generate public pressure,<sup>119</sup> and McCoy and Heckel, writing in 2001, identified “the explosion of domestic NGOs” alongside a freer, more investigative media as crucial factors in the development of a global anti-corruption norm.<sup>120</sup> According to research from 2015 and 2017, Estonia and Georgia were top performers on anti-corruption because they had a thriving civil society, as well as strong political leadership.<sup>121</sup> A Nigerian study demonstrated the impact of a joint newspaper/CSO/university investigation that found that 36% of health-care procurement expenditures went to operational facilities: the Nigerian government pledged more health-care centers and to use open contracting in procurement processes.<sup>122</sup> There are some skeptics. Villanueva, having reviewed about 20,000 observations of about 200 countries from 1789 to 2018 from the V-Dem project, points out that civil society on its own is not sufficient; transparency of laws and predictability of enforcement, rigorousness, and impartiality of public administration are even more important. Villanueva goes so far as to say that “[the assertion that] civil society organizations are an all-powerful actor by themselves may be an overestimation of civil society’s potential.”<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless, Villanueva agrees CSOs are among the necessary ingredients.

For all these reasons, international anti-corruption institutions consistently stress the importance of civil society. Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, based on a global data set, states that “[t]he fundamental freedoms of association and expression are crucial in the fight for a world free of corruption.”<sup>124</sup> The Expert Advisory Group on Anti-Corruption, Transparency, and Integrity in Latin America and the Caribbean appointed by the Inter-American Development Bank in 2018 recommends that engaging civil society and the private sector is one of four pillars of a systemic reform compact (the other three being regional and global initiatives, domestic initiatives including on such matters as infrastructure and contract renegotiations, and the initiative and leadership of the Bank itself).

Alongside, and as part of, civic space, press freedom is a crucial factor in fighting corruption: Themudo finds strong empirical evidence that “civil society’s anticorruption impact must acknowledge its significant dependence on civil society’s ability to generate public pressure against corruption and that, in turn, the public pressure mechanism is strongly conditioned by the extent of press freedom ... civil society strength has a strong anticorruption impact in countries with more press freedom, it has no significant impact on corruption in countries with less press freedom.”<sup>125</sup> Themudo even finds that press freedom helps reign in corruption

<sup>118</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>119</sup> N. S. Themudo, “Reassessing the Impact of Civil Society: Nonprofit Sector, Press Freedom, and Corruption,” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* 26, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>120</sup> J. L. McCoy, and H. Heckel, “The Emergence of a Global Anti-Corruption Norm,” *International Politics* 38 (2001): 69. See also P. Ralchev, “The Role of Civil Society in Fighting Corruption and Organized Crime in Southeast Europe,” *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 4, no. 2 (2004); A. M. Florini, and P. J. Simmons, “What the World Needs Now?,” chapter in A. M. Florini (ed.), *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society*, Japan Center for International Exchange / Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000.

<sup>121</sup> Open Government Partnership, “Global Report: Democracy beyond the Ballot Box” (2019); M. Chene, “Successful Anti-Corruption Reforms,” Transparency International (2015).

<sup>122</sup> “Making the Case for Open Contracting in Healthcare Procurement,” Transparency International, Crown Agents Foundation (2017).

<sup>123</sup> P. A. G. Villanueva, “Why Civil Society Cannot Battle It All Alone: The Roles of Civil Society Environment, Transparent Laws and Quality of Public Administration in Political Corruption Mitigation,” *International Journal of Public Administration* 43, no. 6 (2020): 558.

<sup>124</sup> Corruption Perceptions Index, Transparency International (2022): <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2021-highlights-insights>.

<sup>125</sup> N. S. Themudo, “Reassessing the Impact of Civil Society: Nonprofit Sector, Press Freedom, and Corruption,” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* 26, no. 1 (2013): 20. See also B. Harasymiw, “Civil Society as an Anti-Corruption Actor in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine,” *Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* 61, no. 3 (2019).



within civil society itself. A 2007 multi-country empirical study found that the evidence indicates, although not conclusively, that the direction of causation runs from a freer press to lower corruption.<sup>126</sup> World Bank research has consistently found a strong correlation between media freedom and corruption.<sup>127</sup> A 2012 study found the correlation strongest in countries where power resides primarily in parliament rather than with a president and increases with judicial independence.<sup>128</sup>

A 2013 research paper challenged the assumption of an unambiguous correlation between media freedom and corruption. The researchers point to the difficulty of measuring the concepts of media freedom and corruption and with regard to corruption perceptions argue that the public may simply be wrong in them.<sup>129</sup> Later studies do suggest a correlation. A 2016 study finds that press freedom, on its own, has a measurable impact on corruption and that the effect increases with reach.<sup>130</sup> Flavin and Montgomery's findings confirm that a correlation does exist and argue that in those cases where perceptions may be wrong, there is a role for the media in educating the public.<sup>131</sup> A 2020 study identifies a reputational premium associated with press freedom: corruption perceptions are improved by greater press freedom. This is most evident in countries with low to moderate levels of corruption by global standards.<sup>132</sup> A 2021 study examining the impact of press freedom on corruption in business found that countries with greater press freedom have significantly fewer incidences of bribery involving public officials and that a free press is associated with a reduction in reported incidents of corruption.<sup>133</sup> Multi-country collaborative reporting projects such as the Panama, Pandora, and Paradise papers have exposed corruption on a grand scale leading to structural reform as well as the removal of corrupt senior government leaders around the world.<sup>134</sup> The Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project's latest impact

<sup>126</sup> S. Freille, M. E. Haque, and R. Kneller, "A Contribution to the Empirics of Press Freedom and Corruption," *European Journal of Political Economy* 23 (2007).

<sup>127</sup> M. Nelson, "Rethinking Media Development," Internews/World Bank Institute (2012); "The Right to Tell: The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development," WBI Development Studies (2002). Relied on by others, such as UNESCO, *Journalism Is a Public Good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global/Multi-Country Report 2021/2022*, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380618.locale=en>.

<sup>128</sup> L. Camaj, "The Media's Role in Fighting Corruption: Media Effects on Governmental Accountability," *International Journal of Press/Politics* 18, no. 1 (2012). See also S. Bhattacharyya, and R. Hodler, "Media Freedom and Democracy: Complements or Substitutes in the Fight against Corruption?," Centre for the Study of African Economies (2012); M. A. Färdigh, E. Andersson, and H. Oscarsson, "Reexamining the Relationship between Press Freedom and Corruption," Quality of Government Institute, University of Gothenburg (2011); M. A. Färdigh, E. Andersson, and H. Oscarsson, "Press Freedom and Corruption," chapter in *Good Government*, S. Holmberg, and B. Rothstein (eds.) (2012).

<sup>129</sup> L. Becker, T. Naab, C. English, and T. Vlad, "Measurement Issues and the Relationship between Media Freedom and Corruption," University of Georgia (2013).

<sup>130</sup> N. Dutta, and S. Roy, "The Interactive Impact of Press Freedom and Media Reach on Corruption," *Economic Modelling* 58 (2016).

<sup>131</sup> P. Flavin, and F. Montgomery, "Freedom of the Press and Perceptions about Government Corruption," *International Political Science Review* 41, no. 4 (2019). See also W. Schauseil, N. Zúñiga, and D. Jackson, "Media and Anti-Corruption," Transparency International (2019).

<sup>132</sup> M. Breen, and R. Gillanders, "Press Freedom and Corruption Perceptions: Is There a Reputational Premium?," *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>133</sup> N. Binhadab, M. Breen, and R. Gillanders, "Press Freedom and Corruption in Business-State Interactions," *Economic Systems* 45, no. 4 (2021); N. Binhadab, M. Breen, and R. Gillanders, "The Role of a Free Press in Combating Business Corruption," Munich University (2018). See also A. Talebia, F. Momenib, and E. Shojaei, "Media Freedom and Corruption in Different Countries of the World," *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education* 12, no. 13 (2021); O. Bondarenko, M. Utkina, and M. V. Kolenisnikova, "The Role of Mass Media in Preventing Corruption," *The Law, State and Telecommunications Review* 13, no. 1 (2021); B. I. Hamada, G. Abdel-Salam, and E. Abdelwahed Elkilany, "Press Freedom and Corruption: An Examination of the Relationship," *Global Media and Communication* 15, no. 3 (2019).

<sup>134</sup> M. Hrvolova, J. D. Katz, and J. Alexander, "The Anti-Corruption Role of Free Media and Investigative Journalism," German Marshall Fund (2021). See also the ongoing impact of the Panama Papers as reported by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists: <https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/five-years-later-panama-papers-still-having-a-big-impact/>.

data claims US\$7.4bn in fines levied and monies seized as a result of its journalism.<sup>135</sup> The Media Development Investment Fund, which invests in media across the world, has surveyed its investees, finding that 78% of their corruption and accountability reporting had a measurable impact: “media played a central role in uprooting corruption and holding those in power accountable.”<sup>136</sup> The form of journalism does matter—celebrity-focused reporting is less likely to have an impact than public interest journalism—and impact also depends on the interaction of journalism with other variables at the economic, political, and cultural levels and in international connections.<sup>137</sup> Corruption manifests at the local level as well as globally, and so just as global journalism projects have an impact on global corruption, community media have an impact at the local level.<sup>138</sup>

The closing space literature warns of the impact on corruption of measures to restrict civic space. A 2019 report analyzing the impact of a wave of closures of civic space across Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Eastern Europe that primarily affected human rights-based and liberal democratic organizations found unequivocally that closing space measures impact directly on key development targets, including in particular the fight against corruption (the other targets at risk are reducing violence, maintaining the rule of law, promoting accountability and institutions, enabling participation and representation, and upholding access to information and fundamental freedoms).<sup>139</sup> In the methodological paper that preceded this study, the lead authors note that “grand corruption thrives under conditions of secrecy and a cowed press.”<sup>140</sup> A team of researchers who studied “digital” clampdowns across ten African countries found that as civic space was restricted offline (a.k.a. in the “real world”), activism has moved online—but this was swiftly followed by an online clampdown, including measures such as internet shutdowns, blocking, filtering, and surveillance, which meant that the conditions under which corruption thrives were perpetuated.<sup>141</sup> A multi-country study and literature review published in 2005 found that “economic and political restrictions [on the press] are strongly associated with corruption ... it is political pressures which have a slightly stronger effect on corruption.”<sup>142</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association points out the correlation between closing civic space and, among others, “[c]orruption and inefficient allocation of resources stemming from a decrease in monitoring and accountability demands by civil society.”<sup>143</sup>

The World Economic Forum puts a price tag on the closing of civic space and associated corruption, pointing at evidence that puts the annual global cost of bribery—just one form of corruption—at US\$1.5 to US\$2 trillion, nearly 2% of global GDP.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Impact to Date, Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project: <https://www.occrp.org/en/impact-to-date>. OCCRP is a non-profit consortium of media outlets that report on organized crime and corruption.

<sup>136</sup> Media Development Investment Fund Impact 2021: Corruption, Media Development Investment Fund: <https://static.mdif.org/2021-impact-dashboard/index.html#/slide-corruption1>.

<sup>137</sup> B. Hamada, *Off and Online Journalism and Corruption: International Comparative Analysis*, Intech Open (2020).

<sup>138</sup> As evidenced in the sizeable collection of studies on the impact of community radio assembled by the Communication Initiative: <https://www.comminit.com/media-development/content/impact-community-media>.

<sup>139</sup> N. Hossain, N. Khurana, S. Nazneen, M. Oosterom, P. Schröder, and A. Shankland, “Development Needs Civil Society—The Implications of Civic Space for the Sustainable Development Goals,” Institute for Development Studies (2019).

<sup>140</sup> N. Hossain, and R. Santos, “Assessing the Impacts of Changing Civic Space on Development Outcomes: A Methodological Discussion,” Institute for Development Studies (2018).

<sup>141</sup> T. Roberts (ed.), “Digital Rights in Closing Civic Space: Lessons from Ten African Countries,” Institute for Development Studies (2021).

<sup>142</sup> S. Freille, M.E. Haque, and R. Kneller, “A Contribution to the Empirics of Press Freedom and Corruption,” *European Journal of Political Economy* 23 (2007): 854.

<sup>143</sup> C. N. Voulé, “Exercise of the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association and the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda,” United Nations (2018), 14.

<sup>144</sup> *Global Risks Report* chapter: “Citizens and Civic Space at Risk,” World Economic Forum (2017).

Social media can play an important role in the fight against corruption, although research on this is still in its infancy.<sup>145</sup> Looking at evidence from 150 countries, earlier research found a robust and statistically significant negative relationship between social media use and corruption.<sup>146</sup> A 2017 study found quantitative evidence that information and communication technology can support collective citizen action and thus contribute to the control of corruption.<sup>147</sup>

Some studies have found a negative relationship between civil society campaigns and the reduction of corruption. A 2020 study found that the wrong kind of anti-corruption messaging encouraged bribery and undermined democratic values and behaviors.<sup>148</sup> Earlier studies have found similarly; how anti-corruption reporting is worded matters. It is suggested that messaging such as “corruption is rife” leads to apathy or even more bribery, whereas positive messaging that “corruption is going down” may have a more positive impact on attitudes.<sup>149</sup> This is probably more to do with how reporting and advocacy around issues of corruption are worded than with respect for civic space as such—it is basically an issue of messaging.

## Civic Space and Trust in Government

In countries around the world, trust in government is at a worryingly low level. Writing in 2022, after two years of COVID-19 misinformation, researchers at a global communications firm sounded the alarm over an “epidemic of misinformation and widespread mistrust of societal institutions and leaders around the world ... leaving the four institutions—business, government, NGOs and media—in an environment of information bankruptcy.”<sup>150</sup> That is quite a claim—but the literature on trust in government and civil society does not entirely back it up, painting instead a more heterogeneous picture.

On the one hand, some studies have demonstrated that civic engagement, and meaningfully engaging with the public in a broader sense, leads to increased trust in government.<sup>151</sup> An Indonesia study from 2010 indicated that trust in government had increased with greater democratization and respect for freedom of expression.<sup>152</sup> A study in South Korea found a clear positive correlation between participatory political culture and confidence in public institutions.<sup>153</sup> On the other hand—or perhaps rather, in other contexts—research has found lower levels of trust in the media as well as in civil society organizations.<sup>154</sup>

A nuanced view is required. With regard to the media, it is important to point out that trust in some forms of media is higher than others. In Europe, the Reuters Institute has reported high levels of trust for public service

<sup>145</sup> C. K. Jha, “Information Control, Transparency, and Social Media: Implications for Corruption,” chapter in *Media Controversy: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (2 Volumes), Information Resources Management Association (2020).

<sup>146</sup> C. K. Jha, and S. Sarangi, “Does Social Media Reduce Corruption?,” *Information Economics and Policy* 39 (C) (2017).

<sup>147</sup> N. Kossow, and R. M. B. Kukutschka, “Civil Society and Online Connectivity: Controlling Corruption on the Net?,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 68 (2017).

<sup>148</sup> N. Cheeseman, and C. Peiffer, “Why Anti-Corruption Campaigns Are Bad for Democracy,” SOAS Consortium Anti-Corruption Evidence (2020).

<sup>149</sup> A. Corbacho, D. W. Gingerich, V. Oliveros, and M. Ruiz-Vega, “Corruption as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Costa Rica,” *American Journal of Political Science* 60, no. 4 (2016); C. Peiffer, “Message Received? Experimental Findings on How Messages about Corruption Shape Perceptions,” *British Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 3 (2018); G. Walton, and C. Peiffer, “The Limitations of Education for Addressing Corruption: Lessons from Attitudes towards Reporting in Papua New Guinea,” Crawford School Development Policy Centre, Discussion Paper (2015).

<sup>150</sup> Trust Barometer, Edelman, 2022: <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer>.

<sup>151</sup> “Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services,” OECD (2009).

<sup>152</sup> P. Tjiptoherjanto, “Trust in Government: The Indonesian Experience,” *International Public Management Review* 11, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>153</sup> M. Shin, “Confidence in Public Institutions and Democracy in South Korea,” *Korea Observer* 37, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>154</sup> C. Bour, “‘Substantial Mutuality’: The Road to Trust between NGOs’ Stakeholders,” *Journal of Leadership and Developing Societies* 5, no. 1 (2020).



media, especially in Northern Europe.<sup>155</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have caused a further increase in trust in public service media, especially in western European countries where public service media already have strong brands.<sup>156</sup> With regard to trust in civil society, context is important. Where Bour indicated low levels of trust in NGOs that are seen as disconnected from the public,<sup>157</sup> Winter et al. describe increased trust in civil society in Greece when it stepped in to remedy the country's failing institutions.<sup>158</sup>

Multi-country studies have found a positive correlation between respect for civic space—the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association—and trust in government. A study of data from twenty-nine European countries that stretched over a decade found that respect for freedom of expression and citizen involvement in the democratic process was significantly related to government trust.<sup>159</sup> At a very basic level, a study of media consumption in Kosovo found that media reporting informed public attitudes toward the government.<sup>160</sup> Whether trust is increased is of course closely related to how the government actually performs: accurate media reporting on a poorly performing government will not increase trust; accurate reporting on a relatively well-performing government will. Surveying a wide data set, a 2022 paper finds that “citizens everywhere seem to generally trust leaders more if they believe them to be competent, honest and disinterested ... In information environments with plural media and freedom of expression, citizen’s judgments correlate more closely with objective measures estimating the actual quality of political institutions.”<sup>161</sup>

The same study finds that pre-existing attitudes are an important factor and that it is hard to sway people from their opinions: “[i]n states lacking freedom of speech and the press, citizens also trust governments more if the authorities are believed to have similar qualities of competency, integrity and impartiality. But these subjective perceptions turn out to be relatively poorly correlated with objective indicators of the quality of governance.”<sup>162</sup> Audiences often engage with media outlets that they know and feel they can relate to, which leads to the formation of echo chambers. A 2015 study across several European countries found that the pro- or anti-government slant of media outlets interacted with the audience’s ideological views, leading to the reinforcement of pre-existing attitudes. The research also found that counter-attitudinal information barely alters trust in government.<sup>163</sup>

Some research suggests that it is in the interest of both civil society and government to increase trust in institutions and that they should work together toward this end. Multi-stakeholder initiatives, where government, business, and civil society come together to discuss issues ranging from internet governance to transparency of the extractive industries, can be an important tool in enhancing trust in government. A 2019 study found that multi-stakeholder initiatives “are important to help build cohesion, enrich institutions and

<sup>155</sup> *Digital News Report 2020*, Reuters: <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2020/>.

<sup>156</sup> *Digital News Report 2021*, Reuters: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>.

<sup>157</sup> C. Bour, “‘Substantial Mutuality’: The Road to Trust between NGOs’ Stakeholders,” *Journal of Leadership and Developing Societies* 5, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>158</sup> L. Winter, I. Korbiel, A. Koukou, and K. Sarikakis, “Solidarity Rebooted: Trust and the Rise of Civil Society in Times of Crisis,” *Journal of Greek Media & Culture* 4, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>159</sup> J. Spiteri, M. Briguglio, “Does Good Governance Foster Trust in Government? An Empirical Analysis”, in S. Grima, P. Marano (eds.) *Governance and Regulations’ Contemporary Issues* (Contemporary Studies in Economic and Financial Analysis, Vol. 99), Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018, pp. 121-137.

<sup>160</sup> L. Camaj, *Mass Media and Political Culture: Examining the Impact of Media Use on Political Trust and Participation in Kosovo* (Indiana University, 2011).

<sup>161</sup> P. Norris, “Trust in Government Redux: The Role of Information Environments and Cognitive Skills,” Harvard Kennedy School (2022), 15.

<sup>162</sup> *Idem*, 15.

<sup>163</sup> A. Ceron, and V. Memoli, “Trust in Government and Media Slant: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Media Effects in Twenty-Seven European Countries,” *International Journal of Press/Politics* 20, no. 3 (2015).

enhance citizen trust in government.”<sup>164</sup>

## Civic Space and Public Service Delivery

A significant number of civil society organizations are engaged in service delivery, so at one level, there is a clear correlation between protecting and promoting space for these organizations to do their work and public service delivery. But that is not the same as saying that the protection of civic space improves public service delivery. CSOs that deliver public services are often contractors for the government; they have only limited independence, bound as they are to deliver on contracts. Similarly, media that deliver government messages do not do that in their role of public watchdogs: they are mere conduits for information. In some settings, CSOs step in where the government is dependent on foreign aid or is failing to provide public services.<sup>165</sup> In this context, they have somewhat greater independence.

This section surveys the literature on the linkages between the protection of civic space and public service delivery, focusing on literature that discusses the higher-level linkages between the protection of civic space as a concept and public service delivery and the watchdog function of the media. Where relevant, it will discuss some of the literature on CSOs that step in where governments are unable to provide public services.<sup>166</sup>

As stated in the introduction, civic space implies the ability of CSOs freely and independently to associate, assemble, and take action; to seek, receive, and impart information; and to interact with the public. Civic space also implies an inclusive attitude toward CSO involvement in decision-making. At this higher level, OECD research has shown that public engagement makes public services more accessible, cost-effective, and efficient.<sup>167</sup>

Research from the 1990s and early 2000s onward indicates that civic space—and specifically, civic activism—is required to provide accountability and ensure that public services are delivered.<sup>168</sup> Among other things, CSOs identify needs for public services, criticize poorly functioning services, and link with users of public services. Public assemblies can help hold government and corporations to account, thereby promoting good governance.<sup>169</sup> An often-quoted example is that of the Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa, which forced the government to reverse its decision to not provide antiretroviral drugs to individuals infected with HIV.<sup>170</sup> Such successes involve a complex web of interactions between the public, CSOs, and government institutions that requires an enabling civic space environment: “a growing consensus is that social accountability functions through coalitions of actors and groups across civil society working at multiple levels to raise questions and enforce accountability.”<sup>171</sup> By way of negative evidence, a 2019 study found that restrictions

<sup>164</sup> International Development Association, Special Theme: Governance and Institutions (2019), 25.

<sup>165</sup> L. Winter, I. Korbil, A. Koukou, and K. Sarikakis, “Solidarity Rebooted: Trust and the Rise of Civil Society in Times of Crisis,” *Journal of Greek Media & Culture* 4, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>166</sup> This section ignores literature on CSOs that are government contractors: although their work is generally of public benefit, their existence and performance is not indicative of respect for civic space (and some have warned of the opposite: “CSO mandate for service delivery at the expense of a focus on strengthening rights and inclusion, and at a time when the inclusion agenda is also losing ground in public policy, is likely to be adverse for development outcomes” (S. Nazneen, and D. Thapa, “The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Nepal,” Institute for Development Studies, 2019).

<sup>167</sup> “Together for Better Public Services: Partnering with Citizens and Civil Society,” OECD Public Governance Reviews (2011).

<sup>168</sup> World Bank, *Making Services Work for Poor People: World Development Report 2004*.

<sup>169</sup> European Commission for Democracy through Law, *Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly*, 3rd edition (2019).

<sup>170</sup> M. Heywood, “South Africa’s Treatment Action Campaign: Combining Law and Social Mobilization to Realize the Right to Health,” *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 1, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>171</sup> N. Hossain, N. Khurana, S. Mohmand, S. Nazneen, M. Oosterom, T. Roberts, R. Santos, A. Shankland, and P. Schröder, “What Does Closing Civic Space Mean for Development? A Literature Review and Proposed Conceptual Framework,” Institute for Development Studies (2018), 20.

on civic space introduced in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda had a negative impact on the response to HIV/AIDS in these countries.<sup>172</sup>

Not all of the literature agrees that the link is unambiguous, pointing to other factors that influence public service delivery apart from civic space. A 2019 study of 20 lower and middle income countries cast doubt on the ability of CSOs to achieve much impact at all, concluding that “interventions promoting citizen engagement by increasing citizen pressures on politicians to hold providers to account are not usually able to influence service delivery.”<sup>173</sup> But other research indicates that during the initial year of the COVID-19 pandemic, CSOs were able to engage in service delivery as well as hold governments to account, suggesting a strengthening of civic space.<sup>174</sup> Even when pay-offs do not immediately materialize, there will be longer-term impact through the empowerment of CSOs to more forcefully demand accountable governance and public service delivery.<sup>175</sup>

Research suggests that countries with greater controls on civic space, such as Rwanda, achieve good ratings on indicators such as overall economic growth but struggle to deliver complex public services, with low-level officials blindly implementing targets that they have been set without questioning them.<sup>176</sup> Research in countries including Pakistan, Zimbabwe, and Cambodia has similarly concluded that “high-quality public services ... are unlikely to emerge under conditions of closing civic space and media restrictions ... without the demands for accountability generated by an open and vibrant civil society, [the country] may not succeed in delivering the kinds of public services needed to nourish, education and care for its population.”<sup>177</sup>

Some of the literature focuses on the linkages between respect for media freedom and public service delivery. A study of World Bank Governance Indicators for 2002–2008 found that relative freedom of the media is an indicator of good public services, along with other factors, such as the organizational environment and political characteristics and taking into account countries’ economic development.<sup>178</sup> Another study found a link between infant mortality, media freedom, and democracy.<sup>179</sup> A study carried out in Pakistan found that public service delivery had deteriorated significantly due to an inability to see the value of the media: “T[h]e reason that most of the policy-makers fail to utilise the potential of the media in communicating public policy and service delivery to the masses, owes to a mindset that is pervasive in the civil service and which sees the media as an irritant rather than a key player and enabler in public policy and subsequently service delivery.”<sup>180</sup> Community media has been identified as a powerful tool to hold local level public officials to

<sup>172</sup> “Reinforcing Marginalization: The Impact of Closing Civic Space on HIV Response in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda,” ICNL (2019).

<sup>173</sup> H. Waddington, A. Sonnenfeld, J. Finetti, M. Gaarder, J. Denny, and J. Stevenson, “Citizen Engagement in Public Services in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review of Participation, Inclusion, Transparency and Accountability (PITA) Initiatives,” Campbell Systematic Reviews (2019), 1.

<sup>174</sup> C. Anderson, R. McGee, N. J. Nampoothiri, and J. Gaventa, with S. Forquilha, Z. Ibeh, V. Ibezim-Ohaeri, A. Jawed, A. Khan, C. Pereira, and A. Shankland, “Navigating Civic Space in a Time of COVID: Synthesis Report,” Institute for Development Studies (2021).

<sup>175</sup> V. Mechkova, M. Bernhard, and A. Luhrmann, “Diagonal Accountability and Development Outcomes,” V-Dem Institute / Open Government Partnership (2019).

<sup>176</sup> N. Hossain, and R. Santos, “Assessing the Impacts of Changing Civic Space on Development Outcomes: A Methodological Discussion,” Institute for Development Studies (2018).

<sup>177</sup> P. Schröder, and S. Young, “The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Cambodia,” Institute for Development Studies (2019), 27. See also M. Oosterom, “The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe,” Institute for Development Studies (2019); S. Nazneen, and D. Thapa, “The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Nepal,” Institute for Development Studies (2019).

<sup>178</sup> I. M. García-Sánchez, B. Cuadrado-Ballesteros, and J. V. Frías-Aceituno, “Does Media Freedom Improve Government Effectiveness? A Comparative Cross-Country Analysis,” *European Journal of Law and Economics* 42 (2016). Joshi comes to a similar conclusion: A. Joshi, “Review of Impact and Effectiveness of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives,” Institute of Development Studies (2010).

<sup>179</sup> S. Wigley, and A. W. Arzu, “The Impact of Democracy and Media Freedom on Under-5 Mortality, 1961–2011,” *Social Science & Medicine* 190 (C) (2017).

<sup>180</sup> H. R. Khan, “Media Management for Public Service Delivery: Challenges for the Policy-Makers,” *Criterion Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (2019).

account and demand better public services.<sup>181</sup> A 2009 study that reviewed data from 1993–2007 argued that even dictatorships need a degree of media freedom: “a dictator needs an independent source of information on the outcomes of his policies. Otherwise, he cannot provide incentives for his bureaucracy, which may result in poor economic performance and eventually cost him his job.”<sup>182</sup>

## Civic Space and Public Safety

A wide range of CSOs engage in activities that contribute to public safety, from organizations that work on peacebuilding (for example in post-conflict areas) to organizations that work to prevent domestic violence and organizations that advocate for criminal justice or prison reform or against police brutality. All require an enabling civic space environment in order to be able to do their work. From this wide range of organizations, peacebuilding CSOs perhaps need the widest possible space within which to operate: they need to be able to engage with a wide range of actors, sometimes operating in gray areas (motivated always by peacebuilding and “do no harm” imperatives).<sup>183</sup> Annan suggests that, during conflict, CSOs contribute to peacebuilding in at least three ways: by engaging with the most-affected communities and building an evidence base of the consequences of conflict for civilians, by drawing national and international attention to the conflict, and by pushing for a negotiated settlement.<sup>184</sup> In the aftermath of conflict, there is a role for peacebuilding CSOs to support a non-securitized space for and build the capacity of civil society.<sup>185</sup> Community radio as well as grassroots CSOs can play a powerful role in bringing together people within a community and building understanding between communities.<sup>186</sup>

Wider civil society—beyond peacebuilding CSOs—also makes a clear contribution to public safety. Drawing on research and input from states, UN agencies, CSOs, and national human rights institutions, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association in 2018 urged states not to restrict civic space, as the evidence suggested that this “generates an environment in which there is a heightened risk of social conflict, including violence.”<sup>187</sup> The impact on civic space of measures introduced to counter-terrorism has been particularly criticized.<sup>188</sup> A 2022 study of the effectiveness of 158 laws and regulations over a period of eight years that restricted NGO activities with the aim of countering terrorism, as tracked by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, found no evidence whatsoever of decreased terrorist incidents as a result of any

<sup>181</sup> B. Jallof, “Impact Assessment of East African Community Media Project 2000–2006: Report from Radio Mang’etele, Kenya, and Selected Communities,” Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (2007). See also the collection of impact studies assembled by the Communication Initiative: <https://www.comminit.com/media-development/content/impact-community-media>.

<sup>182</sup> G. Egorov, S. Guriev, and K. Sonin, “Media Freedom in Dictatorships,” Cowles Foundation for Research in Economics (2009), 28. See also G. C. Sheen, H. H. Tung, and W. Wu, “Power Sharing and Media Freedom in Dictatorships,” *Political Communication* 39, no. 2 (2021).

<sup>183</sup> G. Holmer, “Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective,” U.S. Institute of Peace (2013).

<sup>184</sup> N. Annan, M. Beseng, G. Crawford, and J. K. Kewir, “Civil Society, Peacebuilding from Below and Shrinking Civic Space: The Case of Cameroon’s ‘Anglophone’ Conflict,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 21, no. 6 (2021).

<sup>185</sup> G. Holmer, “Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective,” U.S. Institute of Peace (2013).

<sup>186</sup> R. Bilali, “Voices for Peace,” USAID (2019); L. Kogen, “Assessing Impact, Evaluating Adaptability: A Decade of Radio La Benevolencija in Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC,” Annenberg Center for Global Communication Studies (2014); P. Omach, “Civil Society Organizations and Local-Level Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 51, no. 1 (2014). See also the collection of impact studies assembled by the Communication Initiative: <https://www.comminit.com/media-development/content/impact-community-media>.

<sup>187</sup> C. N. Voulé, “Exercise of the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association and the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda,” United Nations (2018), 21; M. Kiai, “Achievements of Civil Society (report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association),” United Nations (2017).

<sup>188</sup> D. Cortright, A. Millar, L. Gerber-Stellingwerf, G. A. Lopez, E. Fackler, and J. Weaver, “Friend not Foe: Opening Spaces for Civil Society Engagement to Prevent Violent Extremism,” Cordaid (2011).

of these laws.<sup>189</sup> In 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism conducted a study on the impact of counter-terrorism measures on civil society. Drawing on a combination of literature, state reports, and civil society communications, the study found that “[c]ivil society’s existence and vibrancy is itself a manifestation of a robust democracy that shows resilience to threats of terrorism and violent extremism.”<sup>190</sup> Hegre et al. found that countries that protect civic space are less likely to engage in war,<sup>191</sup> although many have pointed out that this does not rule out their involvement in conflict (countries that protect civic space, such as the US and the UK, have been involved in dozens of armed conflicts since World War II, including interventions that did not have mass popular support, such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq).<sup>192</sup>

The closure of civic space can be a direct threat to public safety. Research carried out for the Belgian ministry of foreign affairs found “[d]eteriorated civic space contributes to wider movements of democratic recession [and] often results in political polarisation, hate campaigns (e.g. on social media), violence as well as an erosion of norms—such as the acceptance of the role of opposition.”<sup>193</sup> Koo and Murdie’s research of the impact of NGO restrictions as a means of fighting terrorism, referenced earlier, found that they were in fact counterproductive. They stated, with “confidence”: “NGO restrictions are not only an ineffective counterterrorism policy but ... they may backfire and lead to more future attacks.”<sup>194</sup>

Civil liberties scholars such as Thomas I. Emerson advocated that freedom of speech acts as a “safety valve,” allowing a civilized way to let off steam: “The principle of open discussion is a method of achieving a more adaptable and at the same time more stable community, of maintaining the precarious balance between healthy cleavage and necessary consensus.”<sup>195</sup> While evidence since 1962 suggests that the unfettered exercise of freedom of expression is not quite as unproblematic as Emerson suggested, research does agree that media freedom contributes to public safety. A 2020 study using data from a 45-year dataset found a clear correlation between freedom of expression and a lower incidence of terrorist incidents. The authors dismiss the “safety valve” argument, finding no evidence of that, and instead pose that the greatest correlation appears to be between discussion freedom and the ability of the police and intelligence services to obtain more intelligence. While the researchers call for more research on just how restrictions on freedom of expression lead to more terrorism, their findings “clearly speak against political action against terrorist threats that restricts the right to free discussion in democracies.”<sup>196</sup> A 2021 multi-country study, using a 25-year data set, found a negative correlation between media freedom and state violence: when media freedom is constrained, leaders can deny or reframe state violence and so evade scrutiny. In contrast, a free media is associated with higher political costs for repression and so effectively reduces the risk of escalating state violence.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>189</sup> J. W. Koo, and A. Murdie, “Do NGO Restrictions Limit Terrorism? Smear Campaigns or Counterterrorism Tools,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>190</sup> F. Ní Aoláin, and A. Charbord, “The Role of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Closing Civic Space” (report by UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counterterrorism), University of Minnesota (2019), 39.

<sup>191</sup> H. Hegre, M. Bernhard, and J. Teorell, “Civil Society and the Democratic Peace,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 1 (2019).

<sup>192</sup> S. Chan, and W. Safran, “Public Opinion as a Constraint against War: Democracies’ Responses to Operation Iraqi Freedom,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 2, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>193</sup> J. Bossuyt, and M. Ronceray, “Claiming back Civic Space: Towards Approaches Fit for the 2020s?,” Belgian Department for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (2020), iv.

<sup>194</sup> J. W. Koo, and A. Murdie, “Do NGO Restrictions Limit Terrorism? Smear Campaigns or Counterterrorism Tools,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022), 16.

<sup>195</sup> T. I. Emerson, “Toward a General Theory of the First Amendment,” *Yale Law Journal* 72 (1962), 884.

<sup>196</sup> L. Skjoldager Eskildsen, and P. Bjørnskov, “Does Freedom of Expression Cause Less Terrorism?,” *Political Studies* 70, no. 1 (2020), 18.

<sup>197</sup> S. C. Carey, B. González, and N. J. Mitchell, “Media Freedom and the Escalation of State Violence,” *Political Studies* (2021).

As is also pointed out in the literature on civil society and democracy, it is undoubtedly true that some CSOs pursue anti-democratic ideals. Their work can divide communities and lead to hatred, violence, and war. Among the worst examples is that of Radio des Mille Collines, which played a leading role in the incitement of hatred that resulted in the Rwandan genocide of 1994.<sup>198</sup> It should be pointed out that the development of hate radio goes beyond the international human rights law framework that should guide civic space policy: human rights law requires states to combat any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence, and Radio des Mille Collines should not have been allowed to broadcast incitements to hatred and violence.<sup>199</sup> Other research indicates that some CSOs have naively contributed to deteriorating public safety by focusing on headline economic development and neglecting justice and democracy. For example, Uvin argues that western development CSOs in Rwanda ignored and even reinforced the inequality, exclusion, and humiliation of the Tutsi ethnic group that characterized economic and social life in Rwanda in the 1980s and 1990s and which eventually led to the 1994 genocide.<sup>200</sup> An open civic space is made up of a multitude of actors, not all of which are perfect—even if some believe that they act with good intentions. As the research indicates, however, imposing restrictions that go beyond what is permitted under international human rights law is likely to lead to deterioration of public safety.

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<sup>198</sup> C. L. Kellow, and H. L. Steeves, “The Role of Radio in the Rwandan Genocide,” *Journal of Communication* 48, no. 3, 1998.

<sup>199</sup> Under Article 20(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the main global human rights treaty that has been ratified by 173 countries.

<sup>200</sup> P. Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (Kumarian Press, 1998); P. Uvin, “Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise and Ethno-National Conflict,” *American Society of International Law Proceedings* 95 (2001).



# Discussion of the Available Evidence

## A Bird's Eye Overview: Numbers and Comparison of Studies with Initiatives for Enhancing Civic Space

The body of literature included in this review includes 190 titles. All were retrieved using the methods mentioned in the introduction, searching academic databases and the websites of institutions known to produce authoritative literature in this field. While this is not an exhaustive study of the entire body of literature on the topic, it is a representative sample.

The majority of the literature is academic in nature: out of the 190 publications, 116 are from academic publishers. The literature also includes 54 publications from CSOs that are of an academic quality (meaning that they are structured, researched, referenced, and generally backed up by evidence); 16 publications from relevant inter-governmental organizations; and two studies published by government publishers. Taken as a whole, this means that the literature can be said to be of a strong quality. Many of the works have been peer-reviewed, and the vast majority are of an academic quality. There are no off-the-cuff blog posts or opinion pieces. Put simply, the quality of the literature means it is to be taken seriously.

The majority of the literature is fairly recent: 128 of the titles are from 2015 or later, 29 are from 2010–2015, and 33 are from before 2010. This focus on recent work is intentional: it has ensured that the literature reviewed is relevant to present-day societal conditions. Earlier literature has been included only if it has remained relevant or to illustrate evolutions in research and academic insights. The pre-2010 titles include some of the classic works (including some seventeenth- and nineteenth-century philosophical works) and research that has withstood the test of time.

The number of studies included in the review is small compared to the number of initiatives for enhancing civic space and probably minuscule compared to the number of projects relevant to promoting democracy, the rule of law, or human rights. While consolidated figures across the sector are not available, the grants database of the Ford Foundation<sup>201</sup> shows that for 2015–2022, the focus period of this review, 81 grants whose purpose was at least in part to protect “civic space” were made to 68 grantees across Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East, and the United States, along with another 448 grants whose purpose was to “support civil society” or similar purposes. The total value of these grants was US\$262,773,333. This just is the number of grants and activities funded by the Ford Foundation—admittedly among the larger donors but still only one donor. While each of these grants will have come with requirements to monitor impact and progress and report back to the Ford Foundation, it is likely most of them will have escaped the attention of academic researchers thus far. This would suggest a vast potential area of future research.

## LANGUAGE AND GEOGRAPHY

As indicated earlier, the body of works reviewed does not constitute the entirety of the literature reviewed on this topic. One major shortcoming is that, for practical reasons, only English-language publications have been reviewed. While English is a major language, it is not the only language in which scholarship is published, and significant literature in French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, or other languages has been omitted. This results in two important limitations. First, insights from scholars who publish in these languages are not represented in the review. This is remedied only to some extent by the inclusion in this review of works

<sup>201</sup> <https://www.fordfoundation.org/work/our-grants/grants-database/grants-all>.

that cite or rely on research produced by these scholars. The second limitation is geographic: scholarship in and concerning some regions, such as Central and South America or West Africa, is produced mainly in Spanish and in French. The exclusion of Spanish and French language literature has resulted in a de-facto omission of insights from research conducted in these regions (to name but two).

The linguistic limitation is quite clearly reflected in the geographic focus of the literature. The majority of the literature (119 publications) is either global in nature or has a multi-country focus that spans several continents. Of the literature that is geographically focused, 23 publications cover African countries, 20 are Europe-focused, 15 cover Asia, 9 cover the Americas, 2 cover Africa and Asia, and only 1 is focused on the Middle East. This leaves quite significant geographical gaps—although it should be emphasized, again, that for what it is (i.e., recent literature produced in the English language), it is representative.

However, despite the comparative omission of research from some regions, the conclusions of the review are most likely generalizable at least at a headline level. While accounting for differing local conditions, multi-country studies included in this review that span different continents have not found significant differences in impact between one continent and another. For example, there is no evidence that restrictions on civic space to combat terrorism may be counter-effective in one country but effective in another country.<sup>202</sup> That said, the literature does indicate that alongside the protection of civic space, there are many other variables that impact on issues such as development, democracy, corruption, trust in government, public service delivery, and public safety. These differ from region to region and from country to country. Detailed findings are not therefore necessarily generalizable, unless the country to which research is generalized is similar in relevant respects to the country where the research was conducted.

## UNDER-RESEARCHED AREAS (OR POSSIBLE THEMATIC BIASES)

The overall focus of the literature review is on the impact—positive or negative—of the protection and promotion of civic space. As was stated in the introduction, civic space has been defined as consisting of three components: the fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. In conducting the literature search, systematic searches were conducted that have included each of these search terms, as well as related terms. For example, searches for “freedom of expression” were also conducted with the term “free speech,” “press freedom” (a much-researched and much-discussed component of the right to freedom of expression), and other similar terms; searches for “freedom of assembly” were supplemented with searches for similar terms, such as “protest”; and searches for “civic space” were supplemented with searches for similar search terms, such as “civil society.” For each of the results of these searches, care was taken to include only literature relevant to the practical impact of the concept, rather than literature discussing other aspects (for example, there is much literature on the decline of freedoms, but only literature that is relevant to impact has been included).

These searches resulted in a high number of results for literature related to civic space (96 out of 190) and related to freedom of expression (89 out of 190). Hardly any literature was found that discusses specifically the impact of the freedoms of assembly and association on the six focus areas. This results in what appears to be an imbalance in the text, with significant sections devoted to the impacts of civic space, freedom of expression, and media freedom and far less to the other areas. It should be noted that this is not to say that there is no academic literature on the freedoms of association and assembly; there is. But most of the literature focuses on fluctuating levels of respect for these freedoms; hardly any literature was found, in the post-2015 priority time frame, that discusses the specific impact of these freedoms. This could be an indication that these areas

<sup>202</sup> See, for example, J. W. Koo, and A. Murdie, “Do NGO Restrictions Limit Terrorism? Smear Campaigns or Counterterrorism Tools,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 7 no. 1 (2022).



are under-researched. However, there may be other explanations. The imbalance may be the result of the shortcomings of key-word-based searches: the authors and publishers of relevant academic works may simply not have included the key words used in the searches in the titles, abstracts, or descriptions. Another reason for the imbalance might be the background of the author of this review, whose professional experience in the field of freedom of expression and familiarity with academic works in that area may have led to a bias in the results despite the author's best efforts to the contrary.

Another apparent imbalance concerns the literature in each of the specific impact areas of development, democracy, corruption, trust, public service delivery, and public safety. Of the 190 works reviewed, 80 have concerned the impact of the protection of civic space or one of its component parts (as discussed earlier, mostly freedom of expression) on democracy. The second and third most researched areas are development, with 50 titles, and corruption, with 45. These areas are of clear relevance to policymakers and also attract interest from researchers (some commissioned by or linked to policymakers, such as the World Bank). The areas of trust in government, public service delivery, and public safety seem to have attracted fewer researchers—or at least, those who publish in English. This could be an indicator of potential gaps in the research. But a possible alternative explanation is, as suggested earlier, shortcomings in key-word-based searches. While “democracy,” “corruption,” and “development” are single-word terms that are well understood and for which there are relatively few synonyms used by academic authors, “trust in government,” “public service delivery,” and “public safety” are multi-word terms for which there are numerous synonyms and alternatives. While numerous searches were performed for possible alternatives, for example conducting broad searches for just the words “trust” and “government” instead of the phrase “trust in government,” this may have resulted in the omission of relevant works whose authors and publishers have simply used alternative words and phrases in titles and abstracts. The professional experience of the author—in human rights and rule of law, but not in public administration more generally—may also have resulted in a bias.

## **Definitions: Development, Democracy, Corruption, Trust, Public Service Delivery, and Public Safety**

The points of impact each constitute huge areas of research in and of themselves, with academic arguments on issues of definition ongoing. To name but a few obvious ones: in the area of “development,” there are distinct notions around economic development and human development; within the area of “democracy,” while there is a broad understanding of what that means in practice, there are gradations, and countries move along scales of varying levels of democratic governance; as regards corruption, there is similarly a broad understanding of the term, but it encompasses a range of phenomena and behaviors that may manifest differently from country to country or across regions (even the UN Convention against Corruption<sup>203</sup> does not define corruption). The literature reviewed uses the terms in different ways sometimes and sometimes in acknowledgment of these issues in definition: for example, the section of democracy refers at several points to the “Varieties of Democracy” project, an ongoing project to conceptualize and measure democracy around the world, whose insights are incorporated in recent academic work.

While it is valid to point out these differences of interpretation and definition, on balance, it would be a mistake to make too much out of them or to use these differences to in some way to invalidate the research or this review. The differences are not huge, and while authors who write about “democracy” or “corruption” may differ on minutiae, they broadly tend to agree on the meaning of these terms. It is however fair to note that the more recent research tends to incorporate the more advanced insights, for example from the aforementioned

<sup>203</sup> Adopted 2004: [https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/tools\\_and\\_publications/UN-convention-against-corruption.html](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/tools_and_publications/UN-convention-against-corruption.html).

V-Dem project.<sup>204</sup>

## CLAIMING IMPACTS

A more problematic issue may be around claims of impact. As several of the authors of works included in this review have noted, it would be overly simplistic to draw a straight line from the protection of civic space to, say, development.<sup>205</sup> A multitude of other factors come into play. This has however been noted whenever relevant. The authors of studies included in this review that have surveyed large data sets have been careful to calibrate their research so as to account for other factors. Perhaps question marks around impact can be placed on some of the studies that are more qualitative in nature or publications from bodies such as the World Bank or UN Special Rapporteur who tend to present as dogma statements such as that “protecting civic space improves democracy”—but even then, these statements of dogma are usually informed by evidence-based research even when the research is not included in the document that states the dogma (such as a World Bank position paper or a Special Rapporteur’s annual report).

A related question is: how is impact defined? In some fields, researchers go by a fairly rigid difference between outcomes and impact, the former denoting immediate outcomes that result from a given activity and the latter denoting more systemic longer-term change. But not all researchers follow the same terminology, and sometimes the terminology differs between fields: in the areas of health or development, for example, the language of “outcomes” seems to be far more common than in the area of democracy. In this literature review, the term impact is used to denote longer-term systemic change, and the literature has been interpreted accordingly.

Studies of countries where civic space is closing (or changing) have found interesting and significant outcomes of impact. While randomized control trials are otherwise impossible in this field, closing space studies have compared outcomes over a period of time during which civic space has been constricted and have been able to measure changes as a result. This is as close to a randomized control trial as might be possible, and the results of these studies are significant. As one study remarked, people in a given country might not value the importance of civic space until it closes.<sup>206</sup>

## UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The answer to the question “Were there any unintended consequences?” depends on the intention behind the initiative concerned. In the context of this review, if the intention of opening up civic space is just that—to open up civic space and provide an enabling environment for all kinds of civic activity—then there are no unintended consequences. However, if the intention behind opening up civic space is to promote democracy, development, and the enjoyment of human rights, then the main unintended consequence flagged in literature is the opening

<sup>204</sup> For example, H. Hegre, M. Bernhard, and J. Teorell, “Civil Society and the Democratic Peace,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 1 (2019); V. Mechkova, M. Bernhard, and A. Luhrmann, “Diagonal Accountability and Development Outcomes,” V-Dem Institute / Open Government Partnership (2019); S. I. Lindberg, M. Coppedge, J. Gerring, and J. Teorell, “V-Dem: A New Way to Measure Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* (2014).

<sup>205</sup> For example, P. Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>206</sup> G. Illmeier, D. Mussnig, and F. Steiner, “On the Significance of Civil Society for Liberal Democracy—Perspectives from the Caucasus, South-Eastern and Central Europe,” *Der Donauraum* 60 no. 4 (2021).

up of space to CSOs that pursue undemocratic motives and groups and media outlets that promote hatred.<sup>207</sup> The phenomenon of so-called captured media outlets raises similar concerns.<sup>208</sup> It is suggested that any policy responses to counter this should themselves be grounded in a human rights framework: any restrictions should go no further than is mandated under parameters of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the main UN human rights treaty.<sup>209</sup>

It is significant to note that the closing space literature finds severe unintended negative consequences from the imposition of restrictions on civic space. For example, in the area of public safety, the literature indicates that civic space restrictions and restrictions on freedom of expression imposed with the stated aim of combating terrorism tend to lead to more terrorism, not less.<sup>210</sup> Similarly, the literature finds a strong negative correlation between the imposition of restrictions on civic space and development outcomes.<sup>211</sup>

There were some minor unintended consequences in a few of the focus areas:

- The literature on trust in government flagged that there is a positive impact of promoting civic space only if government does actually perform in a way that inspires trust (if there is reporting that shows a government to be ineffective, then an obvious consequence is that trust will be diminished—although an argument could be made that if this results in that government being voted out of office, that would at least inspire trust in the democratic system).<sup>212</sup>
- The literature on corruption flagged public apathy and even increased corruption as a result of certain forms of reporting, but this may be an issue more to do with advocacy and the wording of reports than the opening up of civic space and reporting as such on corruption.<sup>213</sup>

<sup>207</sup> C. Roggeband, and A. Krizsán, “The Selective Closure of Civic Space,” *Global Policy* 12, no. S5 (2021); M. Bernhard, “What Do We Know about Civil Society and Regime Change Thirty Years after 1989?,” *East European Politics* 36, no. 3 (2020); P. Surowiec, and V. Štětka, “Introduction: Media and Illiberal Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics* (Taylor & Francis, 2020); S. Berman, Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 401–429.

<sup>208</sup> W. Horsley, “Media Capture in Central and Eastern Europe: The Corrosive Impact on Democracy and Desecration of Journalistic Ethics,” chapter in book, *The Routledge Companion to Journalism Ethics*, L. Trifonova Price, K. Sanders, and W. Wyatt (eds.) (2021); N. Burazer, “Media Capture—An Increasing Threat to Serbian Democracy,” *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 2 no. 3 (2021); M. Nelson, “What Is to Be Done? Options for Combating the Menace of Media Capture,” chapter in book, *In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy*, A. Schiffrin(ed.) (CIMA, 2017).

<sup>209</sup> Noting in particular the provisions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association and the prohibition on hate speech.

<sup>210</sup> See, for example, J. W. Koo, and A. Murdie, “Do NGO Restrictions Limit Terrorism? Smear Campaigns or Counterterrorism Tools,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022); J. Bossuyt, and M. Ronceray, “Claiming Back Civic Space: Towards Approaches Fit for the 2020s?,” Belgian Department for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (2020).

<sup>211</sup> See, in particular, N. Hossain, N. Khurana, S. Nazneen, M. Oosterom, P. Schröder, and A. Shankland, “Development Needs Civil Society—The Implications of Civic Space for the Sustainable Development Goals,” Institute for Development Studies (2019).

<sup>212</sup> P. Norris, “Trust in Government Redux: The Role of Information Environments and Cognitive Skills,” Harvard Kennedy School (2022).

<sup>213</sup> N. Cheeseman, and C. Peiffer, “Why Anti-Corruption Campaigns Are Bad for Democracy,” SOAS Consortium Anti-Corruption Evidence (2020); A. Corbacho, D. W. Gingerich, V. Oliveros, and M. Ruiz-Vega, “Corruption as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Costa Rica,” *American Journal of Political Science* 60, no. 4 (2016); C. Peiffer, “Message Received? Experimental Findings on How Messages about Corruption Shape Perceptions,” *British Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 3 (2018); G. Walton, and C. Peiffer, “The Limitations of Education for Addressing Corruption: Lessons from Attitudes Towards Reporting in Papua New Guinea,” Crawford School Development Policy Centre, Discussion Paper (2015).

# Conclusions

## Does the Evidence Support the Case for Protecting Civic Space?

The evidence cited in this review certainly supports the case for protecting civic space. A sizeable body of high-quality literature produced mostly by academic researchers and institutions finds evidence of positive impact in each of the focus areas (development, democracy, combating corruption, and enhancing trust in government, public service delivery, and public safety). Most of the literature reviewed is from 2015 or later and thus corresponds with modern societal conditions, and the evidence is drawn from large, multi-country studies or studies of data sets spanning dozens of countries and sometimes several decades backed up by smaller studies focused on one or only a small number of countries.

As well as demonstrating the positive impact of the protection and promotion of civic space, some of the literature demonstrates the impact of measures that restrict civic space. This research is more recent but tends to show almost unequivocally that restrictions on civic space produce negative outcomes for democracy, development, corruption, enhancing trust in government, public service delivery, and public safety. This evidence of “negative impact” is arguably even stronger than the evidence of positive impact, because it demonstrates what changes in a country when civic space moves from “open” to “narrowed” or even further down the CIVICUS rankings.

While most of the literature reviewed is in English and the single-country studies reviewed tend to be Anglophone countries, the literature includes a number of multi-country or global studies that suggest that the results are generalizable to other regions. While there are a few outlier countries, for example countries where there appears to be strong macro-economic development despite civic space restrictions, research suggests that economic development in these countries may be unevenly spread and fragile.

Of course opening up civic space is not on its own going to deliver development and democracy, end corruption, improve public service delivery, enhance trust in government, and strengthen public safety. Many other factors go into delivering these outcomes, and the literature acknowledges this. The literature does however appear to suggest that open civic space is a necessary ingredient in order to achieve sustained improvements in these areas.

## Further Research

As indicated in the previous section, there are areas that this literature has not covered, as well as a clear need for further research. The linguistic and geographical limitations of this literature review call for a further review encompassing at least Spanish and French language literature and ideally also literature in Arabic, Portuguese, Russian, and Chinese. It would be surprising if the results of such a review, or reviews, were at odds with the finding of this review, but conducting them would produce a body of literature that would be hard to argue against.

In sheer numerical terms, the number of projects and initiatives to protect civic space far outstrips the number of academic studies that have been conducted. This alone would seem to call for more research, particularly on the topic of closing civic space: this is a relatively recent phenomenon and, as the research acknowledges, the effects of restrictions on civic space take time to manifest themselves in terms of measurable impacts on democracy, corruption, development, and the other focus areas.

In addition, this literature review has found far less research on the positive impact of protecting the freedoms of assembly and association than research on civic space as such or freedom of expression or one of its related areas. Unless an unconscious bias has crept into the research methodology, this would also seem to indicate an area of further research. Similarly, less research was found on positive impact on the areas of trust in government, public service delivery, and public safety, which may also indicate a need for further research.

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Akser, M., and B. Baybars-Hawks	<a href="#">Media and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Model of Neoliberal Media Autocracy</a>	Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication	2012	Turkey
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Bondarenko, O., M. Utkina, and M. V. Kolenisnikova	<a href="#">The Role of Mass Media in Preventing Corruption</a>	The Law, State and Telecommunications Review	2021	Ukraine
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CIVICUS	<a href="#">CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report</a>		2021	global/multi-country
Collier, P.	The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done about It	Oxford University Press	2008	global/multi-country
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Corbacho, A., D. W. Gingerich, V. Oliveros, and M. Ruiz-Vega	<a href="#">Corruption as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Costa Rica</a>	American Journal of Political Science	2016	Costa Rica



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Hrvolova, M., J. D. Katz, and J. Alexander	<a href="#">The Anti-Corruption Role of Free Media and Investigative Journalism</a>		2021	global/multi-country
Hsu, J.Y.J., T. Hildebrandt, and R. Hasmath	<a href="#">Conceptualizing Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations</a>	Journal of Civil Society	2019	global/multi-country
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International Center for Not-For-Profit Law	<a href="#">Reinforcing Marginalization: The Impact of Closing Civic Space on HIV Response in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda</a>		2019	Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda
International Development Association	<a href="#">Special Theme: Governance and Institutions</a>		2019	global/multi-country
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Khan, M.	<a href="#">Political Settlements and the Governance of Growth-Enhancing Institutions</a>	SOAS	2010	global/multi-country
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Kolb, F.	<a href="#">Protest and Opportunities: The Political Outcomes of Social Movements</a>	Campus Verlag	2007	global/multi-country

Koo, J.W., and A. Murdie	<a href="#">Do NGO Restrictions Limit Terrorism? Smear Campaigns or Counterterrorism Tools</a>	Journal of Global Security Studies	2022	global/multi-country
Kossow, N., and R. M. B. Kukutschka	<a href="#">Civil Society and Online Connectivity: Controlling Corruption on the Net?</a>	Crime, Law and Social Change	2017	global/multi-country
Kumi, E.	<a href="#">Pandemic Democracy: The Nexus of COVID-19, Shrinking Civic Space for Civil Society Organizations and the 2020 Elections in Ghana</a>	Democratization	2022	Ghana
Kumi, E., and R. Hayman	<a href="#">Analysing the Relationship between Domestic Resource Mobilisation and Civic Space: Results of a Scoping Study</a>	INTRAC	2019	global/multi-country
Lee, F.L.F.	<a href="#">Impact of Protest Activities on Electoral Outcome: The Case of Hong Kong's Anti-ELAB movement</a>	The Social Science Journal	2021	Hong Kong
Lewis, D., and N. Kanji	<a href="#">Non-Governmental Organizations and Development</a>	Routledge	2009	global/multi-country
Lindberg, S.I., M. Coppedge, J. Gerring, and J. Teorell	<a href="#">V-Dem: A New Way to Measure Democracy</a>	Journal of Democracy	2014	global/multi-country
Luminate	<a href="#">Enabling Media Markets to Work for Democracy</a>		2020	global/multi-country
Machleder, J., S. Maguire, S. Abbott, R. Hendley, and L. Camacho	<a href="#">Disinformation Primer</a>	USAID	2021	global/multi-country
Martin, J.P.	<a href="#">Development and Rights Revisited: Lessons from Africa</a>	Conectas Sur	2006	Africa
McCoy, J.L., and H. Heckel	<a href="#">The Emergence of a Global Anti-Corruption Norm</a>	International Politics	2001	global/multi-country
McInerney-Lankford, S.	<a href="#">Human Rights and Development: A Comment on Challenges and Opportunities from a Legal Perspective</a>	Journal of Human Rights Practice Vol 1   Number 1	2009	global/multi-country
Mechkova, V., M. Bernhard, and A. Luhrmann	<a href="#">Diagonal Accountability and Development Outcomes</a>	V-Dem Institute, Open Government Partnership	2019	global/multi-country
Media Development Investment Fund	<a href="#">Media Development Investment Fund Impact 2021: Corruption</a>		2021	global/multi-country
Media Development Investment Fund	<a href="#">Media Development Investment Fund Impact 2021: Elections</a>		2021	global/multi-country

Meiklejohn, A.	Free Speech and Its Relation to Self-Government	As expanded in Free Speech and Its Relation to Self-Government, New York: Harper Collins 1960	1960	global/multi-country
Mill, J.S.	On Liberty	As republished by Penguin Classics, 1982	1859	global/multi-country
Milton, J.	Areopagitica; A Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing	As republished in Milton and the Modern Media: a Defence of a Free Press, Accrington: B&D, 2005	1644	global/multi-country
Miró-Llinares, F., and J. C. Aguerri	<a href="#">Misinformation about Fake News: A Systematic Critical Review of Empirical Studies on the Phenomenon and Its Status as a 'Threat'</a>	European Journal of Criminology	2021	global/multi-country
Mohmand, S.K.	<a href="#">The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Pakistan</a>	Institute for Development Studies	2019	Pakistan
Mungiu-Pippidi, A.	<a href="#">Quantitative Report on Causes of Performance and Stagnation in the Global Fight against Corruption</a>	Hertie School of Governance	2014	global/multi-country
Naím, M.	<a href="#">What Is a Gongo?</a>	Foreign Policy	2009	global/multi-country
Nazneen, S., and D. Thapa	<a href="#">The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Nepal</a>	Institute for Development Studies	2019	Nepal
Nelson, M.M.	<a href="#">Rethinking Media Development</a>	Internews / World Bank Institute	2012	global/multi-country
Nelson, M.M.	<a href="#">What Is to Be Done? Options for Combating the Menace of Media Capture</a>	Chapter in book, In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy, Schiffrin, A. (ed.), CIMA	2017	global/multi-country
Ní Aoláin, F., and A. Charbord	<a href="#">The Role of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Closing Civic Space (Report by UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counterterrorism)</a>	University of Minnesota	2019	global/multi-country



Norris, P.	<a href="#">Trust in Government Redux: The Role of Information Environments and Cognitive Skills</a>	Harvard Kennedy School	2022	global/multi-country
O'Brien, L., and P. Micek	<a href="#">Defending Peaceful Assembly and Association in the Digital Age: Takedowns, Shutdowns, and Surveillance</a>	Access Now	2020	global/multi-country
Omach, P.	<a href="#">Civil Society Organizations and Local-Level Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda</a>	Journal of Asian and African Studies	2014	Uganda
Oosterom, M.	<a href="#">The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe</a>	Institute for Development Studies	2019	Zimbabwe
Open Government Partnership	<a href="#">Open Government Partnership, Global Report: Democracy Beyond the Ballot Box</a>		2019	global/multi-country
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	<a href="#">Together for Better Public Services: Partnering with Citizens and Civil Society</a>	OECD Public Governance Reviews	2011	global/multi-country
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	<a href="#">Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services</a>		2009	global/multi-country
Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project	<a href="#">Impact to Date</a>		2021	Europe
Ott, B.L.	<a href="#">The Age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the Politics of Debasement</a>	Critical Studies in Media Communication	2016	United States
Peiffer, C.	<a href="#">Message Received? Experimental Findings on How Messages about Corruption Shape Perceptions</a>	British Journal of Political Science	2018	Indonesia
Pinckney, J., C. Butcher, and J. M. Braithwaite	<a href="#">Organizations, Resistance, and Democracy: How Civil Society Organizations Impact Democratization</a>	International Studies Quarterly	2022	global/multi-country
Platas, M.R., and P. J. Raffler	<a href="#">Closing the Gap: Information and Mass Support in a Dominant Party Regime</a>	The Journal of Politics	2021	Uganda
Ralchev, P.	<a href="#">The Role of Civil Society in Fighting Corruption and Organized Crime in Southeast Europe</a>	Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies	2004	Europe
Reuters	<a href="#">Digital News Report</a>		2021	global/multi-country

Reuters	<a href="#">Digital News Report</a>		2022	global/multi-country
Roberts, T. (ed.)	<a href="#">Digital Rights in Closing Civic Space: Lessons from Ten African Countries</a>	Institute for Development Studies	2021	Africa
Roggeband, C., and A. Krizsán	<a href="#">The Selective Closure of Civic Space</a>	Global Policy	2021	global/multi-country
Roy, S.	<a href="#">Media Development and Political Stability: An Analysis of Sub-Saharan Africa</a>	Journal of Developing Areas	2014	Africa
Ruiz-Alba, N., and R. Mancinas-Chávez	<a href="#">The Communications Strategy via Twitter of Nayib Bukele: The Millennial President of El Salvador</a>	Comunicacion y Sociedad	2020	El Salvador
Sapiezyńska, E., and C. Lagos	<a href="#">Media Freedom Indexes in Democracies: A Critical Perspective through the Cases of Poland and Chile</a>	International Journal of Communication	2016	Poland, Chile
Scavo, A., and C. Snow	<a href="#">Media and Political Participation: Fostering Inclusive Governance</a>	BBC Media Action	2016	Africa, Asia
Schauseil, W., and N. Zúñiga Jackson, D.	<a href="#">Media and Anti-Corruption</a>	Transparency International	2019	global/multi-country
Schröder, P., and S. Young	<a href="#">The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Cambodia</a>	Institute for Development Studies	2019	Cambodia
Sebola, M.P., J. P. Tsheola, and M. Molopa	<a href="#">Conventional Mass Media and Social Networks in a Democratic South Africa: Watchdogs for Good Governance and Service Delivery?</a>	Bangladesh E-Journal of Sociology	2014	South Africa
Sembra Media	<a href="#">Inflection Point International: A Study of the Impact, Innovation, Threats, and Sustainability of Digital Media Entrepreneurs in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa</a>		2022	global/multi-country
Sen, A.	Development as Freedom	Oxford University Press	2001	global/multi-country
Sen, A.	<a href="#">Press Freedom: What Is It Good For?</a>	Index on Censorship	2013	China, India
Sheen, G.C., H. H. Tung, and W. Wu	<a href="#">Power Sharing and Media Freedom in Dictatorships</a>	Political Communication	2021	global/multi-country
Shin, M.	<a href="#">Confidence in Public Institutions and Democracy in South Korea</a>	Korea Observer	2006	South Korea

Skjoldager Eskildsen, L., and P. Bjørnskov	<a href="#">Does Freedom of Expression Cause Less Terrorism?</a>	Political Studies	2020	global/multi-country
Spiteri, J., and M. Briguglio	<a href="#">Does Good Governance Foster Trust in Government? An Empirical Analysis</a>	Emerald Publishing Limited	2018	Europe
Stojarová, V.	<a href="#">Media in the Western Balkans: Who Controls the Past Controls the Future</a>	Southeast European and Black Sea Studies	2019	Western Balkans
Sunstein, C.	<a href="#">Is Social Media Good or Bad for Democracy?</a>	Conectas Sur	2018	global/multi-country
Surowiec, P., and V. Štětka	<a href="#">Introduction: Media and Illiberal Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe</a>	East European Politics, Taylor & Francis	2020	Europe
Susman-Peña, T.	<a href="#">Healthy Media, Vibrant Societies: How Strengthening the Media Can Boost Development In Sub-Saharan Africa</a>	Internews	2012	Africa
Taleb, A., F. Momenib, and E. Shojaei	<a href="#">Media Freedom and Corruption in Different Countries of the World</a>	Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education	2021	global/multi-country
Themudo, N.S.	<a href="#">Reassessing the Impact of Civil Society: Nonprofit Sector, Press Freedom, and Corruption</a>	Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions	2013	global/multi-country
Tjiptoherijanto, P.	<a href="#">Trust in Government: The Indonesian Experience</a>	International Public Management Review	2010	Indonesia
Tonga, D.	<a href="#">The Impact of New Media Technologies on Zambia's 2016 Presidential Elections</a>		2017	Zambia
Transparency International	<a href="#">Corruption Perceptions Index</a>		2022	global/multi-country
Transparency International, Crown Agents Foundation	<a href="#">Making the Case for Open Contracting in Healthcare Procurement</a>		2017	global/multi-country
Trappel, J., and H. Nieminen	<a href="#">Media and Democracy: A Couple Walking Hand in Hand?</a>	Chapter in L. d'Haenaens, H. Sousa, J. Trappel (eds.), Comparative Media Policy, Regulation and Governance in Europe	2018	Europe

UNESCO	<a href="#">Journalism Is a Public Good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development; Global Report 2021/2022</a>		2022	global/multi-country
United Nations Development Program	<a href="#">The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</a>		2015	global/multi-country
Uvin, P.	<a href="#">Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise and Ethno-National Conflict</a>	American Society of International Law Proceedings	2001	Rwanda
Uvin, P.	<a href="#">Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda</a>	Kumarian Press	1998	Rwanda
Villanueva, P.A.G.	<a href="#">Why Civil Society Cannot Battle It All Alone: The Roles of Civil Society Environment, Transparent Laws and Quality of Public Administration in Political Corruption Mitigation</a>	International Journal of Public Administration	2020	global/multi-country
Vosoughi, S., D. Roy, and S. Aral	<a href="#">The Spread of True and False News Online</a>	Science	2018	global/multi-country
Voulé, C.N.	<a href="#">Exercise of the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association and the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda</a>	United Nations	2018	global/multi-country
Waddington, H., A. Sonnenfeld, J. Finetti, M. Gaarder, J. Denny, and J. Stevenson	<a href="#">Citizen Engagement in Public Services in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review of Participation, Inclusion, Transparency and Accountability (PITA) Initiatives</a>	Campbell Systematic Reviews	2019	global/multi-country
Walton, G., and C. Peiffer	<a href="#">The Limitations of Education for Addressing Corruption: Lessons from Attitudes towards Reporting in Papua New Guinea</a>	Crawford School Development Policy Centre Discussion Paper	2015	Papua New Guinea
White, G.	<a href="#">Civil Society, Democratization and Development (I): Clearing the Analytical Ground</a>	Democratization	1994	global/multi-country
Wiarda, H.	<a href="#">Civil Society: The American Model and Third World Development</a>	Routledge	2003	global/multi-country
Wigley, S., and A. W. Arzu	<a href="#">The Impact of Democracy and Media Freedom on Under-5 Mortality, 1961–2011</a>	Social Science & Medicine	2017	global/multi-country
Wike, R., and C. Bishop	<a href="#">Public Attitudes toward Human Rights Organizations: The Case of India, Indonesia, Kenya and Mexico</a>	Pew Research Center	2017	India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico

Wike, R., L. Silver, and A. Castillo	<a href="#">Many across the Globe Are Dissatisfied with How Democracy Is Working</a>	Pew Research Center	2019	global/multi-country
Winter, L., I. Korbiel, A. Koukou, and K. Sarikakis	<a href="#">Solidarity Rebooted: Trust and the Rise of Civil Society in Times of Crisis</a>	Journal of Greek Media & Culture	2018	Greece
Wood, J., and K. Fällman	<a href="#">Enabling Civil Society</a>	OECD	2019	global/multi-country
World Bank	<a href="#">World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends</a>		2016	global/multi-country
World Bank	<a href="#">Making Services Work for Poor People: World Development Report 2004</a>		2003	global/multi-country
World Bank	<a href="#">World Development Indicators</a>		2021	global/multi-country
World Bank Institute	<a href="#">The Right to Tell: The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development</a>	WBI Development Studies	2002	global/multi-country
World Economic Forum	<a href="#">Global Risks Report chapter: Citizens and Civic Space at Risk</a>		2017	global/multi-country
Zaid, B.	<a href="#">Internet and Democracy in Morocco: A Force for Change and an Instrument for Repression</a>	Global Media and Communication	2016	Morocco
Zimmer, A., and K. Obuch	If Not for Democracy, for What? Civil Society Organisations in Non-Democratic Settings, chapter in Caroline Y. Robertson-von Trotha (Hrsg.), Realities, Challenges, Visions? Towards a New Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy	KIT Scientific Publishing	2022	global/multi-country