

## Foreword: the state of democracy

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Democracy is the predominant form of government in the world today. For the greater part of the world democracy has been a rare or recent phenomenon, but successive waves of democracy throughout the 20th century meant that by the new millennium more countries were governed through democratic than through non-democratic forms of rule. Various attempts to enumerate democracies in the world agree that more than 60 per cent of all countries today have in place at least some form of minimal democratic institutions and procedures. The Community of Democracies lists more than 100 countries while the United Nations International Conference on New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD) has grown in depth, breadth and importance since it was inaugurated in 1988 as a forum for global democratic development. Increasingly, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations emphasize that democracy is an end in itself, as well as an important means to other ends, such as economic development, poverty reduction and greater protection of internationally recognized human rights.

There have been many explanations for the remarkable growth, spread and pace of democratization. Internal explanations focus on major socio-economic transformations; mobilization by social movements and civil society organizations; class alliances, challenges and revolutions ('coloured' or otherwise); and elite agreements and concessions. External explanations focus on the defeat of an incumbent regime in war; the role of 'contagion' from democratization processes in neighbouring states; the diffusion of democratic values through processes of globalization and various forms of international intervention, including support for civil society groups and nascent political party organizations, state building, institutionalization, and the specification of criteria for appropriate and acceptable forms of democratic rule; and armed intervention to depose existing regimes and construct democracy by force.

A crucial element in mapping, explaining and encouraging this growth in democracy has been the need for valid, meaningful and reliable ways to measure and assess democratic progress and the quality of democracy itself. Scholars and practitioners have adopted a number of strategies to measure democracy, including categorical measures, scale measures, objective measures and hybrid measures of democratic practices, as well as perceptions of democracy based on mass public opinion surveys. In certain instances, measures have been developed for particular needs and then used for other purposes, while in other instances general measures of democracy have been developed for a wide range of applications by the academic and policy community. The quest for comparability and broad geographical and historical coverage, however, has meant a certain sacrifice of these measures' ability to capture the context-specific features of democracy, while the turn to good governance, accountability and aid conditionality among leading international donors has created additional demand for measures of democracy that can be used for country, sector and programme-level assessments.

In response to these many developments and the proliferation of democracy measures, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) has developed an alternative framework for democracy assessment that moves away from country ranking and external judgement to comprehensive assessment based on national assessment teams led by governments or civil society and academic institutions. The framework combines a commitment to the fundamental principles of democracy, the mediating values that are related to these principles, and a range of questions about democratic performance. There is scope in the framework for using existing measures while at the same time incorporating much more context-specific information on the quality of democracy that can then be linked to domestic processes of democratic reform. Its use across new and old democracies as diverse as Mongolia and Italy, Bangladesh and Kenya, Peru and Australia has shown that it works, and demand continues for the framework to be applied in new and challenging contexts around the world.

After the successful application of its democracy assessment framework in over 20 countries, International IDEA, along with the UK-based Democratic Audit, the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex in the United Kingdom, and the larger 'State of Democracy' network, has drawn on the lessons, built further on the strengths of the framework, and incorporated these into the thoroughly revised framework contained here. *Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical*

*Guide* includes all the normative principles and practical elements of the framework, experiences from those countries that have used the framework, and the ways in which democracy assessment can be linked to the process of democratic reform.

The assessment framework outlined here upholds International IDEA's fundamental principles in supporting democracy worldwide:

- ▶ Democratization is a process that requires time and patience.
- ▶ Democracy is not achieved through elections alone.
- ▶ Democratic practices can be compared but not prescribed.
- ▶ Democracy is built from within societies.
- ▶ Democracy cannot be imported, or exported, but supported (International IDEA 2005: 12).

This Guide provides a robust package of materials that are grounded in many years of experience and practical application in old and new democracies across the world. This volume is complemented by another, entitled *Assessing the Quality of Democracy: An Overview*, which provides an introduction to the framework, including its fundamental democratic principles, its mediating values, the assessment search questions, examples of its application around the world, the typical steps in carrying out an assessment, and its value as a tool for promoting democratic reform. Both volumes should prove highly attractive to grass roots democracy activists, civil society organizations, reform-minded actors in political society and in government, and those international donor agencies and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that are committed to building democracy for the future.

# Preface

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Democracy has spread and taken root in many parts of the world in the past three decades. While the performance and quality of these democracies differ, more people than ever before are governed by elected representatives. The democratic form of government has thus achieved global dominance. Regimes that have so far failed to usher in a democratic dispensation lack legitimacy. Citizens in such countries continue to demonstrate their aspirations for freedom, dignity and the opportunity to elect governments of their choice through engagement in various forms of struggle – regardless of the risks they may encounter in doing so.

While ‘transitional moments’ such as the first democratic elections or the departure of an authoritarian government can be formative moments of democracy, historical evidence shows that the building of democracy and the consolidation of democratic institutions are long and complex processes. Along this road it becomes essential to assess the performance of democratic institutions and the quality of democratic processes.

Various institutions have developed and continue to develop measures and tools for gauging democratic performance and quality. Since 2000, International IDEA has contributed to this field through the development of the State of Democracy (SoD) assessment methodology outlined in this Guide. International IDEA is guided by the premise that democracy is a universal value and aspiration. However, it is also an inherently local political process that must be supported through context-sensitive approaches which are anchored on local leadership and local ownership of democracy-building processes. This principle underpins International IDEA’s approach to democracy building generally and to the SoD assessment methodology in particular.

In this guide we set out a democracy assessment methodology that puts the responsibility for evaluating the quality of democracy in the hands of citizens and others who reside in the country being assessed. Notwithstanding the invaluable role played by external actors in supporting democratization processes in various countries, it is our conviction that sustainable democracy can only be achieved if those who are affected by its daily practice are the people who ultimately pass judgement on its strengths and weaknesses, and that they are the ones who determine priority areas for reform. The SoD assessment methodology is a tool for citizens to use in undertaking these tasks. It is a global public good that presents an opportunity for citizens of countries with developing and developed economies, and of new and old democracies, to take charge of and contribute in meaningful ways to bettering the performance and quality of their democracies.

Since the methodology was launched in 2000, a network of its users has developed in different parts of the world. The lessons and experiences they shared with us have greatly enriched this Guide. Others seeking to undertake a democracy assessment using the methodology stand to benefit from lessons learned so far in the application of the methodology in different contexts. Importantly, they will be better informed about how to plan and implement SoD assessments in ways that maximize the possibility of the findings being used and linked to actual reform.

In putting together this guide, International IDEA seeks to provide a user-friendly knowledge resource for those seeking to improve the quality of their democracies. At a time when the debate on democracy and governance assessment is very much on the radar screen of development agencies, bilateral and multilateral organizations, and national actors, International IDEA offers a methodology for ‘self-assessment’ which has so far been applied in no fewer than 20 countries in different parts of the world. For those engaged in democracy assistance, the SoD methodology provides an opportunity for such assistance to be informed by locally defined priorities for democratic reform.



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# Acronyms and abbreviations

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ACDA	Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (USA)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
EUMAP	EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme (OSI)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
ICAC	Independent Commission against Corruption (Hong Kong)
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966
IDASA	Institute for Democracy in South Africa
International IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IIDH	Interamerican Institute for Human Rights (Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos)
IKNOW	International Knowledge Network (of Women in Politics)
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMER	International Migration and Ethnic Relations (Bergen, Norway)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	non-governmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OUA	Organization of African Unity
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSF	Open Society Forum
OSI	Open Society Institute
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SoD	State of Democracy (methodology)
TASC	Think Tank for Action on Social Change (Ireland)
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDAW	United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNTS	United Nations Treaty Series
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization