

# Part 1

Democracy assessment:  
explaining the method

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- [1] Every person is entitled to live their life in dignity and free from fear, with a fair share in their country's resources and an equal say in how they are governed. Democracy is an attractive form of government because its principles embrace these human needs and desires and can often deliver them in reality. And the more experience people have of living in a democracy, as the democracy assessment in South Asia found (see Part 3), the more they support democracy.
- [2] The democratic ideal in and of itself seeks to guarantee equality and basic freedoms; to empower ordinary people; to resolve disagreements through peaceful dialogue; to respect difference; and to bring about political and social renewal without convulsions. The principle of 'popular rule', or rule by popularly elected representatives, is at the heart of this ideal, but it also has different and overlapping meanings for different people within and between nations and regions. Broadly, for people around the world it means popular control over elected rulers, equal rights and liberties, political freedom and freedom from want, the rule of law, justice and security, but with differing emphases. Thus, in countries in South Asia, equality of outcomes and community rights are a significant aspect of what people want from democracy; in Western Europe, political freedom and the rule of law are valued, although social rights also figure largely.
- [3] But these democratic ideals are easier to endorse in principle than to realize in practice. There is no such thing as a perfect democracy. Democracy is not an all-or-nothing affair, but rather a shifting continuum. Countries are more or less democratic overall, and more or less democratic in the various aspects of their political and social life.
- [4] The International IDEA democracy assessment framework gives groups of people in any one country a mirror with which they can assess the quality of their democracy and which will help them answer, in brief,

the apparently simple questions ‘How democratic are our country and its government?’ and ‘What are the strengths of our democracy, and what are its weaknesses?’. Yet these questions in turn raise others. How do we know exactly what we should be assessing, and by what criteria should we judge it as democratic? To answer these questions, the framework offers a clear conception of representative democracy and its core principles, and an understanding of how these principles may be realized through institutional, political and social practices.

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[5]

Since 2000, no fewer than 20 countries around the world – as different as Mongolia and Italy, Bangladesh and Kenya, Peru and Australia – have used the framework for democracy assessment to evaluate how well their democracies are working, to raise popular consciousness and to identify areas where they can be improved. Some assessments were pilot schemes promoted by International IDEA to test the viability of the assessment framework (Bangladesh, El Salvador, Italy, Kenya, Malawi, New Zealand, Peru, South Korea). Later ones have been initiated entirely from within the countries concerned, although by widely differing agencies – academic institutes, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and think tanks, and even governments themselves (Mongolia, the Netherlands). Some have been full assessments, as in the United Kingdom (UK), some a series of investigative reports, as in Australia, some a patient assembly of reports as funds become available, as in the Philippines; some have drawn heavily on extensive polling, as in the South Asia study of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Some assessment teams have sought to measure the changing strengths of their democracy over time. In the UK, Democratic Audit has carried out three assessments since 1998 and is committed to a further assessment in the next few years; Latvia will be conducting a smaller assessment exercise to monitor progress since its first in 2005.

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There are striking differences between the countries in which assessments have taken place, which suggests that the methodology has a universal application. The countries range in size from India, the world’s largest democracy, to El Salvador, in experience of democracy from New Zealand to Mongolia, and in level of economic development from European nations such as the Netherlands to Malawi in sub-Saharan Africa. Mongolia is a sparsely populated land with a largely nomadic way of life; the Netherlands is a densely populated modern state. Aus-

tralia and India are federal states; the rest are unitary states. The modes of funding and costs of the 17 projects so far have varied enormously (see Part 3 for a detailed analysis). But all the assessment projects share a common core. They have all adhered to the basic proposition that the only people who can have legitimacy in assessing the quality of their country's democracy are citizens of that country, and that country ownership of the assessment is necessary for it to be able to influence the course of democratic progress and reform.

*The International IDEA democracy assessment methodology has a universal application.*

- [7] In Annex A, 'Other ways of assessing democracy', we compare the IDEA framework with other methodologies for assessing democracy current in the world today and explain the essential differences in principle and practice between them. The International IDEA framework is, in brief, the only one to insist that only those who know a country's culture, traditions and aspirations are properly qualified to assess its democracy. The purpose of International IDEA's SoD assessment programme is to put the future of democracies around the world in the hands of their own citizens.
- [8] The main features of the International IDEA approach may be summarized as follows.
- ▶ Only citizens and others who live in the country being assessed should carry out a democracy assessment, since only they can know from experience how their country's history and culture shape its approach to democratic principles.
  - ▶ A democracy assessment by citizens and residents of a country may be mobilized by government or external agencies only under strict safeguards of the independence of the assessment.
  - ▶ The prime purpose of democracy assessment is to contribute to public debate and consciousness raising, and the exercise ought to allow for the expression of popular understanding as well as any elite consensus.
  - ▶ The assessment should assist in identifying priorities for reform and monitoring their progress.
  - ▶ The criteria for assessment should be derived from clearly defined democratic principles and should embrace the widest range of democracy issues, while allowing assessors to choose priorities for examination according to local needs.

- ▶ The assessments should be qualitative judgements of strengths and weaknesses in each area, strengthened by quantitative measures where appropriate.
- ▶ The assessors should choose benchmarks or standards for assessment, based on the country's history, regional practice and international norms, as they think appropriate.
- ▶ The assessment process should involve wide public consultation, including a national workshop to validate the findings.
- ▶ Old as well as new democracies can and should be subject to a similar framework of assessment.

*Only those who know a country's culture, traditions and aspirations are properly qualified to assess its democracy.*

## The assessment framework

[9] We stated above that the answer to the apparently simple question 'How democratic are our country and its government?' required first that we start with a clear conception of democracy and its core principles, and an understanding of how these principles may be embodied in institutional, political and social practices.

[10] First, then, what is democracy? If we examine the main currents of theorizing about democracy from the ancient Greeks onwards; if we pay attention to what those claiming to struggle for democracy have been struggling for; if, in particular, we have regard for the objections of opponents of democracy throughout the ages, then a relatively clear and consistent set of ideas emerges. Democracy is a *political* concept, concerning the collectively binding decisions about the rules and policies of a group, association or society. Such decision making can be said to be *democratic* to the extent that it is subject to the controlling influence of all members of the collectivity considered as equals.

[11] The key democratic principles are those of *popular control* and *political equality*. These principles define what democrats at all times and in all places have struggled for – to make popular control over public decision making both more effective and more inclusive; to remove an elite monopoly over decision making and its benefits; and to overcome obstacles such as those of gender, ethnicity, religion, language, class, wealth and so on to the equal exercise of citizenship rights.

[12] These two principles are most fully realized in small groups or associations where everyone is guaranteed an effective equal right to speak and vote on rules and policies in person. In larger associations, and especially at the level of a whole society, practical considerations of time and space demand that collective decisions be taken by designated agents or representatives acting on behalf of the rest. For most people, then, democracy is realized in the first instance not as direct popular control over public decision making, but as control over the decision makers who act in their place. How effective that control is and how equally distributed it is between individual citizens, and between different groups of citizens, according to their numbers, are key criteria for determining how democratic a system of representative government actually is, whether at national, regional or local level.

[13] Where does freedom or liberty fit into these two principles? It should be evident that there can be no ongoing popular control or influence over public decision making unless people are able to speak their minds freely, to debate openly with others, to associate freely with them, to receive and impart information without hindrance, and to have the means and the confidence to undertake and share in these activities. Popular liberties have been recognized as integral to the democratic principles of the recognized body politic since democracy's early days in ancient Athens. In this sense, therefore, liberty is entailed by the idea of democracy, and does not have to be 'added on' as something extra to it; nor is it even a uniquely modern political concept (although the growing emphasis in democratic ideals on economic, social and cultural rights is a modern concept).

*The key democratic principles are those of popular control and political equality. For most people, democracy is realized in the first instance not as direct popular control over public decision making, but as control over the decision makers who act in their place.*

[14] These two principles, then, of popular control and political equality, form the guiding thread of a democracy assessment. The more they are present, the more democratic we can judge a system of public decision making to be. As they stand, however, these principles are too general to serve as a precise assessment tool.

[15] In order to see how we get from them to the institutional procedures of representative government, and to a set of more precise criteria by

which they can be assessed, we need to consider how far these principles shape and inform the institutions and procedures of representative government. Here we define what we call the ‘*mediating values*’ through which people have sought to give effect to these principles in a country’s institutional arrangements and practice. These mediating values are set out in Table 1.1.

The first column of the table lists the main mediating values that derive from our two democratic principles. The second column sets out what is required for these values to be made effective in practice. The third column lists the typical institutions through which these requirements can be met in a system of representative government. Together they build up the main features of our democracy assessment framework.

*To consider how far the principles of popular control and political equality shape and inform the institutions and procedures of representative government, we need to define what are here called the ‘mediating values’ through which people have sought to give effect to these principles in a country’s institutional arrangements and practice.*

Table 1.1. Democratic principles and mediating values

## Basic principles:

- *popular control* over public decision making and decision makers
- *equality of respect and voice* between citizens in the exercise of that control

Mediating values	Requirements	Institutional means of realization
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rights to participate</li> <li>• Capacities/resources to participate</li> <li>• Agencies for participation</li> <li>• Participatory culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil and political rights system</li> <li>• Economic, social and cultural rights</li> <li>• Elections, parties, NGOs</li> <li>• Education for citizenship</li> </ul>
Authorization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validation of constitution</li> <li>• Choice of office holders/ programmes</li> <li>• Control of elected over non-elected executive personnel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referendums</li> <li>• Free and fair elections</li> <li>• Systems of subordination to elected officials</li> </ul>
Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislature representative of main currents of popular opinion</li> <li>• All public institutions representative of social composition of electorate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electoral and party system</li> <li>• Anti-discrimination laws</li> <li>• Affirmative action policies</li> </ul>
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear lines of accountability, legal, financial, political, to ensure effective and honest performance; civil service and judicial integrity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rule of law, separation of powers</li> <li>• Independent auditing process</li> <li>• Legally enforceable standards</li> <li>• Strong powers for scrutinizing legislation</li> </ul>
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government open to legislative and public scrutiny and debate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parliament as a forum for national debate</li> <li>• Freedom of information laws</li> <li>• Independent media</li> </ul>
Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility of government to electors and different sections of public opinion in policy formation, implementation and service delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematic, open and accessible procedures and channels of public consultation</li> <li>• Effective legal redress</li> <li>• Local government close to people</li> </ul>
Solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tolerance of diversity at home</li> <li>• Support for democratic governments and popular struggles for democracy abroad</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic and human rights education</li> <li>• International human rights law</li> <li>• UN and other agencies</li> <li>• International NGOs</li> </ul>

## Mediating values

[16]

- The list of mediating values is largely self-explanatory.
- ▶ Without citizen *participation* and the rights, the freedoms and the means to participate, the principle of popular control over government cannot begin to be realized.
  - ▶ The starting point of participation is to *authorize* public representatives or officials through free and fair electoral choice, and in a manner which produces a legislature that is *representative* of the different tendencies of public opinion.
  - ▶ If different groups of citizens are treated on an equal footing, according to their numbers, then the main public institutions will also be *socially representative* of the citizen body as a whole.
  - ▶ The *accountability* of all officials, both to the public directly, and through the mediating institutions of parliament, the courts, the ombudsman and other watchdog agencies, is crucial if officials are to act as agents or servants of the people rather than as their masters.
  - ▶ Without openness or *transparency* in government, no effective accountability is possible.
  - ▶ *Responsiveness* to public needs, through a variety of institutions through which those needs can be articulated, is a key indication of the level of controlling influence which people have over government.
  - ▶ Finally, while equality runs as a principle through all the mediating values, it finds particular expression in the *solidarity* which citizens of democracies show to those who differ from themselves at home, and towards popular struggles for democracy abroad.

[17]

Much more could be said about each of these mediating values. Perhaps it will be sufficient here to clarify the distinction between the ideas of *accountability* and *responsiveness*, since they are frequently confused. Accountability involves office holders being required to account for actions they have taken *after* they have taken them (ex post), with the realistic prospect of appropriate sanctions being applied in the event of misconduct, negligence or failure. Responsiveness, on the other hand, involves having systematic procedures for consulting public opinion and relevant interests *before* policy or legislation is decided (ex ante), so that its content will reflect the views of those affected by it. Both responsiveness and accountability are necessary for effective popular control over government.

## Democratic institutions

[18]

The third column of Table 1.1 then sets out the institutions that provide the means to realize these mediating values. The list in this

column presents examples and is not exhaustive. And it will be observed that some institutions serve, or may serve, to realize more than one value. Thus the electoral process serves to realize the values of participation, authorization, representation and accountability simultaneously, and it is therefore against all these criteria that it can be judged. Similarly, the associational life of what is called ‘civil society’, including political parties, NGOs and other associations, contributes to a number of different values, and again it is consequently against a number of different criteria that it can be assessed. From the other side, a value such as participation also underpins the accountability and responsiveness of the process of government, and so ensures the interconnectedness of different elements in the assessment framework. If these complexities are understood, as well as the basic logic of the progression from key principles, through mediating values and their requirements, to institutional processes, then the account of the assessment framework that follows below should be readily understood. Our aim is to construct the assessment framework around a coherent narrative of democracy, rather than as a random set of items put together without explanation.

- [19] Democracy, then, begins with a set of principles or ‘regulative ideals’, and only then come the institutional arrangements and procedures through which these principles are realized. Although these arrangements and procedures form the subject of our assessment, as in the framework set out below, the criteria against which they are to be assessed are the core principles themselves, and the mediating values of accountability, representativeness, responsiveness and so on. It is these that determine how democratic we should judge our institutional arrangements to be.

## What the framework assesses

- [20] The full assessment framework is set out in Part 2 of this guide, which contains first the criteria (or search questions) that are used to systematize the assessment process, and then the full four-pillar framework itself. Here we describe and explain the framework (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2. The assessment framework: an overview

1. Citizenship, law and rights	2. Representative and accountable government	3. Civil society and popular participation	4. Democracy beyond the state
<p><b>1.1. Nationhood and citizenship</b> <i>Is there public agreement on a common citizenship without discrimination?</i></p> <p><b>1.2. The rule of law and access to justice</b> <i>Are state and society consistently subject to the law?</i></p> <p><b>1.3. Civil and political rights</b> <i>Are civil and political rights equally guaranteed for all?</i></p> <p><b>1.4. Economic and social rights</b> <i>Are economic and social rights equally guaranteed for all?</i></p>	<p><b>2.1. Free and fair elections</b> <i>Do elections give the people control over governments and their policies?</i></p> <p><b>2.2. The democratic role of political parties</b> <i>Does the party system assist the working of democracy?</i></p> <p><b>2.3. Effective and responsive government</b> <i>Is government effective in serving the public and responsive to its concerns?</i></p> <p><b>2.4. The democratic effectiveness of parliament</b> <i>Does the parliament or legislature contribute effectively to the democratic process?</i></p> <p><b>2.5. Civilian control of the military and police</b> <i>Are the military and police forces under civilian control?</i></p> <p><b>2.6. Integrity in public life</b> <i>Is integrity in the conduct of public life assured?</i></p>	<p><b>3.1. The media in a democratic society</b> <i>Do the media operate in a way that sustains democratic values?</i></p> <p><b>3.2. Political participation</b> <i>Is there full citizen participation in public life?</i></p> <p><b>3.3. Decentralization</b> <i>Are decisions taken at the level of government which is most appropriate for the people affected?</i></p>	<p><b>4.1. External influences on the country's democracy</b> <i>Is the impact of external influences broadly supportive of the country's democracy?</i></p> <p><b>4.2. The country's democratic impact abroad</b> <i>Do the country's international policies contribute to strengthening global democracy?</i></p>

## Citizenship, law and rights

[21]

Democracy starts with the citizen, and the subject of the first pillar of the framework is the rights of the citizen and the ability of the state to guarantee equal rights of citizenship to all through its constitutional and legal processes. This starting point is made more complex in a globalized world by the presence in many countries of non-citizens – migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers and so on – whose rights are often severely restricted or denied. The guarantee of *civil and political rights* needs no special justification in a democracy assessment, since these rights are manifestly necessary for participation in the political process in association with others. To include *economic and social rights*, however, is more contestable (and especially so in the case of non-citizens). Many political scientists take the view that democracy is about the *processes* of public decision making, rather than its *outcomes*, and that the delivery of economic and social rights is only one possible outcome of government, which is contested between different political parties in their policy programmes. Our view, in contrast, is that the inclusion of an economic and social rights audit is justifiable in terms of both process and outcome. As regards process, it is a necessary condition for the exercise of civil and political rights that people should be alive to exercise them and should have the capacities and resources to do so effectively. At the same time, people do – rightly – judge the quality of a democracy in terms of its ability to secure them the basic economic and social rights on which a minimally decent human life depends. If democracy cannot deliver better outcomes in this respect than authoritarianism, why should they support it? Such considerations have been especially strongly urged by our partners in the South in discussions about the content of the assessment framework.

*The guarantee of civil and political rights needs no special justification in a democracy assessment, since these rights are manifestly necessary for participation in the political process in association with others. In our view, it is also justifiable to include economic and social rights.*

## Representative and accountable government

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If the first pillar of democracy is the guarantee of basic human rights to citizens and non-citizens, the second comprises the institutions of representative and accountable government. The sections here in-

clude the familiar agenda of the electoral process, the political party system, the role of the parliament or legislature and other institutions in securing the integrity and accountability of government officials, and civilian control over the military and police forces. A separate section is devoted to integrity in public life, on the ground that the trustworthiness of public officials is an issue of central concern to all democracies and their citizens.

### *Civil society and popular participation*

[23] The third pillar of our assessment framework is devoted to what is conventionally called ‘civil society’. Democratic institutions depend for their effective functioning both on guaranteed rights upheld by the legal process and on an alert and active citizen body. Key elements contributing to the latter are independent and pluralistic media of communication, and a vigorous network of voluntary associations of all kinds, through which citizens can act to manage their own affairs and influence public policy. The vigour of associational life is in turn an important condition for securing the responsiveness of government policy, and ensuring that the delivery of public services meets the needs of the population, especially at the most local level.

### *Democracy beyond the state*

[24] The fourth pillar concerns the international dimensions of democracy. Its rationale is that countries do not form isolated units but are mutually interdependent, especially in their degree of democratic progress. So it is entirely relevant to consider how far the external profile of a country’s policy is supportive of democracy abroad. Ideally, in any global survey of democracy, the democratic character of the key international institutions, such as the World Bank and the United Nations (UN), should also be the subject of assessment, alongside that of individual countries. For reasons of space this cannot be undertaken here. However, we have included considerations of how far a country’s internal policy is determined by unaccountable external powers in our assessment framework at this point. Again, this has been especially urged in contributions from experts in the South.

[25] In federal systems of government, these international aspects may be more clearly relevant at the federal than the level of the individual state. Any assessment of countries with a federal structure will depend on the precise distribution of functions and powers between the different levels. Although assessing such countries, whether at federal or state level, or some combination of the two, will be more compli-

cated than assessing a unitary state, our framework is applicable to both levels, and can readily be adjusted to the circumstances of the particular country.

*In countries with a federal structure, the International IDEA framework is applicable to both the federal and the state levels, and it can readily be adjusted to the circumstances of the particular country.*

[26]

The complete framework, with the full list of assessment questions for each section, is contained in Part 2 of the guide. Even a cursory glance will reveal that it constitutes a substantial agenda of enquiry, which may be quite discouraging to undertake. Various possibilities are open to minimize the difficulty. One is to enlist a team of assessors with different types of expertise, as the assessment team in Latvia did, and to arrange an appropriate division of labour between them. Another is to go for a ‘broad but shallow’ approach which will address the full agenda but in a more impressionistic manner. A third is to select particular sections for assessment, in view of their significance in terms of current debate or priority of concern, or even in the light of the resources available, as the Philippines assessment has done. These and other strategies will be discussed more fully in the section on the assessment process below. But it is worth pointing out here that in the Philippines Edna Estefania Co was able to establish her rolling programme of assessments by taking advantage of the fact that individual sections of the framework have been constructed so that they form self-contained units of assessment (albeit in such a way that their location within an overall account of democracy and its components can be readily identified and understood).

[27]

This assessment framework, in conclusion, is one that can be used for both old and new democracies alike. This conclusion is based on the belief that democracy is a universal value that, as we have seen, incorporates a variety of perspectives and values within and between different nations and regions. However, many of the institutions and procedures created in the West over many generations of democratic struggle to subject the modern state to popular control, and to make that control more equal and inclusive, have a value for the new democracies as well, while the assessment process is enriched by the distinctive experience and perspectives of those engaged in establishing systems of democratic government for the first time. We hope that these perspectives are sufficiently reflected in our assessment

framework. In any case the framework is open to further modification to suit local conditions. We all need to learn from each other's experience. As democrats, we confront similar problems wherever we are, and similar resistances to making government representative, accountable or responsive, even if these are more acute in some places than others. And we are all engaged in processes of democratization, whether these are understood as an original institutionalization and consolidation of democratic procedures, or as their necessary reassertion and renewal in the face of decline.

*The framework is flexible. It can be used for old and new democracies alike, and reflects the experiences of both. Individual sections have been constructed so that they form self-contained units of assessment, and it is open to modification to suit local conditions.*

## The different elements of assessment

[28] The process of democracy assessment should begin with a full account of those cultural, political and economic aspects of the country and its history that have to be taken into account in order to provide an intelligible context for understanding the character of its democratic condition. We have not provided a checklist of these contextual aspects, as they will vary enormously from one country to the next. But assessors could well begin by asking themselves 'what is the basic information about the country that is necessary for a reader to make sense of our answers to the assessment questions?'. This introduction will also provide an opportunity to answer the question 'why are we conducting an assessment, and why now?'

[29] Once this introductory task has been accomplished, we move to the main work of addressing each section of the assessment framework. The framework in Part 2 is divided into four different analytical components or rows: (a) the assessment questions; (b) what to look for; (c) generalized sources; and (d) standards of good practice. The four sections in Table 1.3 provide an example of these distinctive elements at work. They need to be distinguished, as they represent analytically separate elements of the assessment process. Each of these is explained in turn below.

Table 1.3. The assessment framework: four elements

Assessment question	1.1.1. How inclusive is the political nation and state citizenship of all who live within the territory?					
<b>What to look for (criteria questions)</b>						
<p><i>1) Laws:</i> examine laws governing citizenship, eligibility, methods and timescale for acquiring it; any distinctions between partial and full citizenship, between men and women in the acquisition of citizenship.</p>	<p><i>2) Practice:</i> examine how fairly and impartially the laws are applied in practice.</p>	<p><i>3) Negative indicators:</i> investigate data on exclusions, second-class citizenship, discrimination in the acquisition of citizenship, etc.</p>				
<b>Generalized sources</b>						
<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><i>Global sources</i></th> <th style="text-align: center; width: 50%;"><i>Africa and the Middle East</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Amnesty International, <i>Annual Report</i>, &lt;<a href="http://www.amnesty.org">http://www.amnesty.org</a>&gt;</p> <p>Boyle, K. and Sheen, J., <i>Freedom of Religion and Belief: A World Report</i> (London: Routledge, 1997)</p> <p>Civil Rights group, &lt;<a href="http://civilrights.org/">http://civilrights.org/</a>&gt;</p> <p><i>Country reports</i> to the UN Human Rights Committee and Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, &lt;<a href="http://www.ohchr.org">http://www.ohchr.org</a>&gt;</p> <p>Davies, John and Gurr, Ted Robert (eds), <i>Preventive Measures: Building Risk Assessment and Crisis Early Warning Systems</i> (Lanham, Md: Rowman &amp; Littlefield, 1998)</p> <p>Department of Political Science, University of Kansas, <i>Kansas Event Data System</i>, &lt;<a href="http://web.ku.edu/keds/index.html">http://web.ku.edu/keds/index.html</a>&gt;</p> <p>Engendering Development – World Bank, &lt;<a href="http://www.worldbank.org/gender/prr/draft.html">http://www.worldbank.org/gender/prr/draft.html</a>&gt;</p> <p>Freedom House, <i>Annual Report</i>, &lt;<a href="http://www.freedomhouse.org">http://www.freedomhouse.org</a>&gt; <i>Freedom in the World</i></p> <p>Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, UK Department for International Development (DFID), Database on social exclusion, &lt;<a href="http://www.gsdrc.org">http://www.gsdrc.org</a>&gt;</p> <p>(cont'd)</p> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Africa Action, &lt;<a href="http://www.africaaction.org">http://www.africaaction.org</a>&gt;</p> <p>Centre for Arab Unity Studies, &lt;<a href="http://www.caus.org.lb/Home/index.php">http://www.caus.org.lb/Home/index.php</a>&gt; (cont'd)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Americas</i></p> <p>Andean Jurists, &lt;<a href="http://www.cajpe.org.pe">http://www.cajpe.org.pe</a>&gt;</p> <p>Center for Latin American Studies, Georgetown University, Political Database of the Americas, &lt;<a href="http://pdba.georgetown.edu/">http://pdba.georgetown.edu/</a>&gt; (cont'd)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Asia</i></p> <p>Alliance for Reform and Democracy in Asia, &lt;<a href="http://www.asiademocracy.org/">http://www.asiademocracy.org/</a>&gt;</p> <p>Asian Human Rights Commission, &lt;<a href="http://www.ahrchk.net/index.php">http://www.ahrchk.net/index.php</a>&gt; 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Standards of good practice	
<i>Criteria questions 1) and 2) have the following suggested standards:</i>	
<p><b>For 1): UN Conventions on Refugees and Statelessness:</b></p> <p>UN Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons, <i>Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees</i>, April 1954</p> <p>UN General Assembly, <i>Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness</i>, December 1975; <i>Declaration on Territorial Asylum</i>, December 1967</p> <p>(cont'd)</p>	<p><b>Indigenous peoples</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>International standards</i></p> <p>International Labour Organization (ILO), <i>Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries</i>, No. 169, 1991</p> <p>UN, <i>Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i>, 1994</p> <p>(cont'd)</p>
<p><b>For 1) and 2): UN Conventions on Minorities:</b></p> <p>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), <i>Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity</i> 2001;</p> <p><i>Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation</i>, 1966;</p> <p><i>Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice</i>, November 1978</p> <p>(cont'd)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Regional standards</i></p> <p>African Commission on Human and People's Rights, <i>Resolution on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' Communities in Africa</i>, 2000</p> <p>OAS, <i>American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i>, 2002, 2003;</p> <p><i>Declaration of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i>, 1995</p>

### The assessment questions

- [30] The first element comprises the questions that drive the assessment process and determine what we should be looking for. As is indicated above, these are set out separately at the start of Part 2 of the guide for ease of reference. The search questions share four distinctive features.
- [31] The first is that they are all quite broadly framed so as to provide room for all relevant issues, some of which cannot be precisely identified in a general framework. We recommend that assessors consider each search question in the light of row 2 (what to look for) to ensure that a particular issue of concern to their assessment is appropriately placed.
- [32] Second, the assessment questions are phrased in the comparative mode: how inclusive...? how equal...? how representative...? how impartial...? how accountable...? how effective...? and so on. This is because democracy is not an all-or-nothing affair, which a country either has or does not have. Rather it is a matter of degree – of

the extent to which the democratic principles and mediating values are realized in practice. What counts as 'to a good degree', and the concept of an appropriate comparator, are considered below. For the moment it is sufficient to emphasize that democracy is a continuum, and that the questions for assessment are phrased comparatively.

*The democracy assessment questions are phrased in the comparative mode: how inclusive...? how equal...? how representative...? how impartial...? how accountable...? how effective...? They entail a judgement about what is better or worse in democratic terms.*

[33]

A third feature of the assessment questions is that they each address a different aspect of the thematic area, or a different mediating value in respect of which it can be assessed. It follows that a country may perform better in some areas than in others, or better in some respects than in others. Not all the democratic values or practices necessarily fit neatly together. An electoral system may produce a highly representative legislature, but one that is also less clearly accountable to its electorate. A legislature may have strong checking powers over the executive, but the executive may have difficulty in achieving the policy programme on which it was elected. Government may be highly responsive to the public, but some sections of the public may have disproportionate influence over it. And so on. The form of the questions enables such distinctions to be readily drawn, and so encourages more complex or nuanced judgements to be made.

[34]

Fourth, the questions are all phrased in such a way that a more positive answer would indicate a better outcome from a democratic point of view. In other words, they all 'point in the same direction' along the democratic continuum. As such, they also entail a judgement about what is better or worse in democratic terms. Such judgements have already been justified explicitly by reference to the key principles and mediating values outlined earlier. One advantage of this directional uniformity is that the framework can easily be constructed as a questionnaire for preliminary use for training or educational purposes. A sample section is set out in questionnaire form in Annex B.

### *What to look for*

[35] The second row in the framework has sometimes been overlooked by assessors, but it plays a flexible and important part in complementing the search questions by indicating the types of issue that they cover and outlining the kinds of data that are needed to help answer the questions. Typically, they are structured in terms, first, of the legal position; then of how effectively the law is implemented in practice; then of any positive or negative indicators which are relevant to the question. So, for example, in answering a question about the freedom of assembly, we would need to know what rights are guaranteed in the country's laws and constitution, and any legal restrictions on their exercise. We would then need to know how effectively these rights are upheld in practice, and how any restrictions are interpreted, and at whose discretion. Finally, we would need to examine data on meetings or assemblies refused permission, or disrupted officially or unofficially, on levels of violence, injuries or deaths incurred, and so on, and to assess their incidence and significance in relation to those that have been allowed and held peacefully. A regrettably common feature of many countries is that rights that look perfectly secure in legal or constitutional terms are not upheld in practice. In other words, there is a significant gap between the *de jure* protection and *de facto* realization of such rights. The list of data suggested in the second section enables the assessment process to probe systematically behind the formal legal or constitutional position, and to examine how government is actually experienced in the everyday life of the citizens.

### *Generalized sources*

[36] The third section provides a list of suggested sources for the data required in the second section. At this point it is important to register the first of many caveats about our framework. The most useful sources for each question are likely to be those compiled in the country concerned – government statistics, opinion surveys, NGO investigations, academic analyses, and so on. To list all of these for every country in the world would be an impossible undertaking. We have itemized those sources that contain information either on most countries in a region, or globally. Although these require continual updating, they can provide a useful reference point. However, we do not pretend that they are a substitute for in-country sources, or that they are necessarily the most reliable, even when they come from a prestigious institution. Most have their own biases, which may well be Western ones, and they should therefore be treated with some caution. Most assessors in practice will want to use sources of data that are already in the public

domain, and judging their reliability is an important part of the assessment process, and important for its legitimacy.

### *Standards of good practice*

[37]

The final row concerns standards of good practice. Here, an even stronger reservation is in order. The issue of what are appropriate standards against which a given country's performance should be assessed is a contestable one, and must be a matter for decision by assessors in the country concerned. What counts as a good standard of performance in respect of each item for assessment? Who should we be comparing ourselves with to determine this? Is it some point in our country's own past, or the level attained by comparable countries in our situation, or some international standard beyond both? In this row we have made the best compilation we can of possible international standards and examples of good practice to serve as a point of reference. However, we do not want it to pre-empt discussion of which comparators are most appropriate for any given country assessment. To assist this discussion we have set out a full range of possible comparators in Table 1.4, with the rationale for each indicated, and also some of their methodological difficulties. A brief review of these will be useful at this point.

*What are appropriate standards against which a given country's performance should be assessed? This must be a matter for decision by assessors in the country concerned. What counts as a good standard of performance in respect of each item for assessment? Who should we be comparing ourselves with to determine this? Is it some point in our country's own past, or the level attained by comparable countries in our situation, or some international standard beyond both?*

[38]

First are *internally generated* standards. These have the great merit of local legitimacy. They can either look back, to some point in the country's recent past, from which progress (or regression) can be charted. Or they can be determined on the basis of popular expectations about the standards of democratic performance, for which there may be evidence from survey data, from participatory poverty analyses, or from scenario-based planning surveys. Or the government's own targets for the delivery of its policies or services may be used as a reference point. Or there can be a combination of all three.

Table 1.4. Possible comparators for standard setting

	Comparator	Rationale	Methodological difficulties
<b>A. Internally generated benchmarks</b>	The country's past	It is important to chart a country's capacity to progress, or the dangers of regression.	Which point in a country's past to select as a benchmark and why
	Popular expectations of performance	In a democracy, the people provide the appropriate measure of what should be expected from government.	How to determine popular expectations. The possibility of depressed expectations
	Government-set targets	Governments should be assessed against their own performance claims.	Governments have an interest in setting low targets that are easily attainable.
<b>B. Externally derived standards</b>	Comparator countries	Comparison with other countries can provide a useful measure of performance, and guide good practice especially where:	Inadequately standardized data collection and differences of context may make comparison between countries unreliable. Such comparisons may carry little legitimacy internally.
	Regional	they are close neighbours or culturally similar;	
	Economic ranking	they are at similar levels of economic development;	
	Time since democratic transition	similar periods of time have elapsed since the end of authoritarian rule;	
	Size/diversity	they experience similar problems or opportunities of size or diversity;	
	Good practice	they show examples of good practice that works.	
	International standards	Bodies such as the UN possess widespread legitimacy and have long experience of authoritative standard setting in many fields.	Not all international bodies carry the same authority, nor are all international standards equally recognized.

[39] *External* standards can be derived through comparison with similarly placed countries, whether regionally, economically, or in terms of size

or of the timing of the democratic transition. Or the assessment can refer to international standards of good practice as these are set out in United Nations and other international treaties, or as developed by authoritative bodies such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). It is the international standards that we have brought together in our fourth row, because they are the only ones that can be generalized; but we would emphasize that they are only one of a number of different possible bases for standard setting.

- [40] Assessors may in fact choose to use a number of different assessment standards, or to employ different ones for different sections of the framework. Thus using government-set targets may be appropriate in the field of economic and social rights, while allowing popular expectations of performance to set the standard for access to justice or the conduct of elected representatives. This must be a matter for country-based decision. Two general points are worth making, however.

*Assessors choose to use a number of different assessment standards or to employ different ones for different sections of the democracy assessment framework.*

- [41] The first is that the purpose of the assessment is to identify strengths as well as weaknesses, and to chart progress as well as to identify what most needs improving. An unrelieved diet of bad news is simply debilitating. So a combination of looking back to a reference point in the past, from which improvement can be charted, with a future-oriented standard or benchmark which helps identify what still has to be done, may well have merit. Like athletes in training who use past performance to measure their progress as well as a national or international standard to provide a target to aim for, a democracy assessment can also employ benchmarks of both kinds.

- [42] The second point to make is that we cannot avoid taking a position on relevant standards or benchmarks if we are engaged in a democracy assessment. What position we take will determine both what data we look for in answering a given question and how we present it. 'Letting the facts speak for themselves' does not relieve us from making a judgement, even if this is only done by implication. So, for example, if our question is about public access to government information, then the examples of government non-disclosure that

we draw attention to in any findings will depend on a prior conception we have of what count as legitimate exceptions from the norm of disclosure (to protect privacy, say, or national security, or commercial confidentiality), and what do not – as well as, of course, whether the government manipulates such categories to withhold information which could properly be released.

*We cannot avoid taking a position on relevant standards or benchmarks if we are engaged in a democracy assessment.*

## Charting the process of the assessment

[43] The purpose of this section is to explore the assessment process itself and to identify the kinds of choices that have to be made in each of its stages. The basic assumptions guiding our account are that the primary, though by no means the only, purpose of a democracy assessment is to contribute to public debate and consciousness raising, and that the appropriate people to undertake an assessment are the citizens of the country concerned.

### *Legitimizing the assessment*

[44] The starting point should be the coming together of a group of people committed to the idea of a democracy assessment in their country, some of whom may become involved in the assessment process itself. We could call this group the ‘steering group’, which will take responsibility for raising funds for the project and overseeing its execution. At two key points at least, this group will need to call in the help of a much larger body of people, which is representative of civil society in its different aspects, and may also include sympathetic individuals from government and the public sector. These people are required first, at the start of the project, to discuss the issues that will serve to guide the focus and direction of the assessment, and to help launch the enterprise; and, second, towards the end, to discuss the preliminary findings of the assessment, to suggest improvements, and to prepare the ground for it to be disseminated as widely as possible. The more representative this wider body is, the greater the legitimacy the resulting assessment will have, and the greater will be the chance of its influencing public debate and the policy process itself. Key mem-

bers of this body might be identified and brought in from the first meeting to act as a standing advisory group available for consultation throughout the assessment process.

*The initiators of democracy assessment will need the help of a much larger body of people that is representative of civil society in its different aspects, and may include sympathetic individuals from government and the public sector.*

*These people are required to discuss the issues that will guide the focus and direction of the assessment, help launch the enterprise, discuss the preliminary findings, suggest improvements and prepare the ground for the assessment to be disseminated as widely as possible. The more representative this wider body is, the greater the legitimacy the resulting assessment will have, and the greater will be the chance of it influencing public debate and the policy process itself.*

[45]

It is worth giving further consideration to the issue of how to enhance the legitimacy of a democracy assessment. Since conducting such an assessment necessarily entails *assessing*, or making judgements (even if the judgements are positive as well as critical), a common question asked is ‘By what or whose authority are you doing this?’. Anyone who is likely to be offended by critical aspects of the assessment will be inclined to question the credentials of the assessors by claiming that they have ‘axes to grind’ or that they are identified with a narrow group of disaffected or oppositional elements in the country’s politics. Alternatively, if the assessment is thought to be too soft on known deficiencies, the assessors run the risk of being typecast as ‘loyalists’ or supporters of the government. Their legitimacy is thus an important issue.

[46]

Two different ways of increasing the legitimacy of the assessment can be distinguished, both of which are required.

*The legitimacy of the assessors is an important issue. Anyone who is likely to be offended by critical aspects of the assessment will be inclined to question the credentials of the assessors, or they run the risk of being typecast as ‘loyalists’ or supporters of the government. It is essential to choose assessors whose professionalism and objectivity are beyond question, and the assessment should have a broad social and political base.*

- [47] The first is *professional*: the enterprise should be systematic, rigorous, and conducted according to the highest possible standards in terms of the quality of data used, the verification of sources, and so on. In this context it is essential to choose assessors whose professionalism and objectivity are beyond question. A comparative knowledge of good and bad practice in the different aspects of democratic government is also important. It is here that external or international experts with experience of conducting such assessments elsewhere can make a positive contribution, by giving added professional legitimacy to the work.
- [48] The second form of legitimacy is *political*: the assessment should have a broad social and political base, through the wider consultative body, which should be referred to for advice on potentially contentious issues around the focus, priorities and benchmarks of the assessment, and for comment on its findings. This body should be as widely representative as possible, and some care may be required in selecting members to make up a body that is representative of potential stakeholders without being too unwieldy. A consultative body should be socially representative, in terms of gender, ethnicity and so on, as well as representative of different political viewpoints. People who are publicly recognized as having independent voices will prove particularly valuable in such a context, as they will help to ensure the objectivity of the assessment process.
- [49] A key point to make is that every group of assessors, however well qualified, should involve the public and other interested parties as fully as possible in their inquiries and deliberations from the very beginning, and conduct the assessment in a wholly transparent way. A number of benefits derive from the early adoption of an inclusive and transparent process. One is that constant public involvement and scrutiny should broaden the sweep of issues and information that the group takes into account and lessen the dangers of bias and accusations of bias. A second is that public involvement and knowledge will broaden the 'ownership' of the project beyond the immediate group of assessors. Finally, the earlier the process of information and consultation begins, the more effective will be the final dissemination of the findings, and the greater the readiness to take them seriously.

*Every group of assessors, however well qualified, should involve the public and other interested parties as fully as possible. Public involvement and scrutiny should broaden the sweep of issues and information, lessen the dangers of bias and accusations of bias, and broaden the 'ownership' of the project.*

[50]

Focus groups, consultative workshops or deliberative polls are all means by which a wider public can become included in the project. Focus groups are especially useful for soliciting the views and experience of identifiable groups or minorities within wider society, as well as for obtaining views on specific issues. The South Asia study made extensive use of opinion polling in the five nations it assessed, as well as dialogues and case studies (see Box 1.1). In the UK, Democratic Audit has also collaborated closely in a regular series of polls on democracy issues commissioned by a major trust, framing and interpreting the majority of the questions asked. In Ireland a survey of public attitudes to democracy and the rule of law was undertaken at the outset of the assessment process, and its remarkable findings provided considerable publicity for the launch of the assessment. Such initiatives, if they can be afforded, can do much to legitimize and sharpen the conclusions of democracy assessments. It is also possible to make use of existing polls, but care should be taken about the built-in assumptions of the pollsters, any potential bias in the framing of questions, the sample size and similar questions.

### *Key stages of the assessment process*

[51]

It is now time to turn to the assessment process itself, and explore more fully what is involved. In what follows we have selected three key stages of the process for analysis in turn: (a) the initial decisions which will set the direction for the assessment as a whole, and which might form the agenda for a consultative workshop; (b) the process of data collection, analysis and organization, which forms the core of the assessment; and (c) the convening of a national workshop to consider the report and its provisional findings.

### *Preliminary decisions for the assessment process*

[52]

A programme of issues to be discussed and decisions to be taken at an early stage of the assessment process, say at an orientation workshop with a consultative group, is set out in Figure 1.1. Many of the issues are in practice interconnected, such that decisions on one will constrain or complement choices on others. Most obviously, if financial resources are modest and there is little chance of additional sources of income being available for the project, this will have implications throughout the decisional process. For purposes of analytical clarity, however, we have separated the issues into discrete decisions, and arranged them into a logical sequence, or ‘decision tree’, to serve as a guide. We discuss each issue briefly in turn below.

**Box 1.1.**

**Mobilizing a pluralist approach: the State of Democracy in South Asia Project**

The State of Democracy in South Asia study deliberately chose a strategy of using a plurality of methods. This was not only because what was being attempted was a comparative study of five democracies – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – at various stages of democratic development and contending with different internal forces, but also because of the firm belief that a single method would only give a partial picture and, a limited reading of a complex reality. A single method is bound to be deficient.

The epistemic starting point of the study was the assumption that we must simultaneously use both qualitative and quantitative approaches to give a more comprehensive account of the working of democracy in South Asia. The challenge would be to integrate the findings of the different approaches and present a coherent story. This was done with some difficulty. The study adopted four research pathways: (a) a cross-section attitudinal survey; (b) dialogues; (c) qualitative assessments similar to the State of Democracy framework; and (d) case studies, because each gave us an insight into a different slice of political reality.

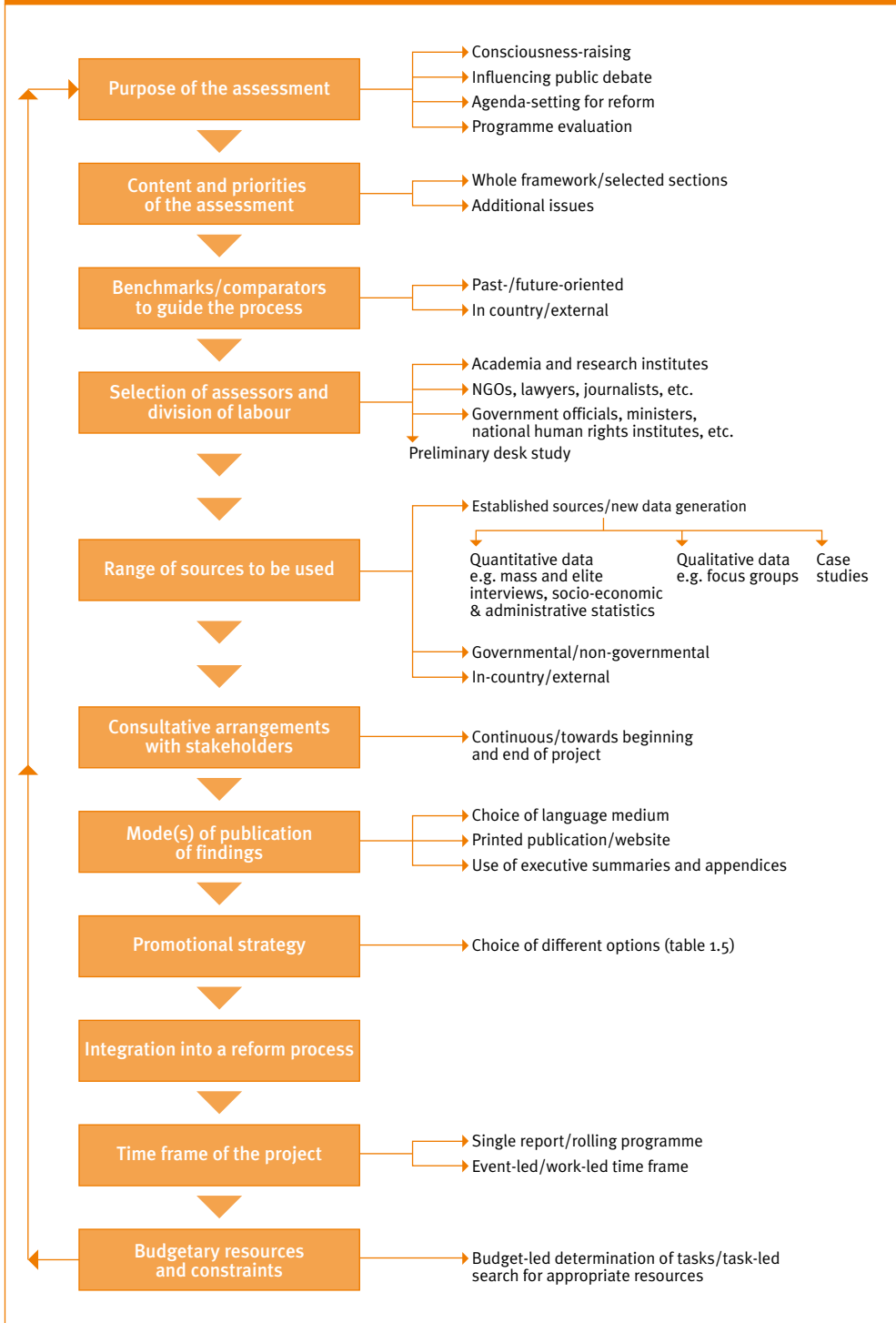
The cross-sectional *survey* of citizen's attitudes on issues of politics in South Asia, which was the principal pathway, sought to investigate citizens' views on a range of issues such as the meaning of democracy, trust in institutions, levels of activity, human security, etc. This produced a huge data set of the attitudes and perceptions of different sections of the population on democracy in South Asia.

The *dialogues* sought to elicit the views of people from civil society organizations and political movements on the working of democracy in South Asia. Since such activists have to continuously campaign and mobilize they have a different view of accountable power and popular control. These views are necessary to complement the aggregate picture emerging from the cross-sectional survey. The dialogues give a more cynical reading of the working of democracy (see the quotations in Box 3.1).

The *qualitative assessment* was based on the template developed by International IDEA whereby experts were asked to respond to questions that were given to them. The same methodology of the democracy assessment of the State of Democracy framework was followed.

The *case studies* commissioned were intended to give an in-depth account of some aspects of the working of democracy in South Asia, particularly those considered as 'inconvenient facts'. These refer to the puzzles and paradoxes that emerge as each country tries both to domesticate and to become domesticated by democracy. These intensive studies serve as theoretical challenges – hence the 'inconvenient facts' – to global debates on democracy since it is not quite clear whether they constitute an advance towards or a retreat from the process of deepening democracy.

Figure 1.1. Preliminary decisions for the assessment



(a) The Purpose of the assessment

[53] The options set out here are not mutually exclusive, as it is perfectly possible to incorporate an agenda-setting or programme-evaluation dimension into a wider goal of influencing public debate about the state of democracy in the country. However, it is important at the outset to come to a clear and agreed understanding of the main aims of the assessment, as this will help justify it to a wider public, including possible funding bodies. Decisions here will also help shape much of what follows. In particular, the timescale of the project is likely to depend on its precise purpose. Thus the broader purpose of influencing public debate about the country's democracy might well suggest orienting publication of the results to the election calendar or other significant national occasion to which the assessment can contribute. A more specific reform purpose might require focusing the assessment more narrowly on a constitutional reform process with a timetable already established for public consultation. And evaluating reforms that are already under way might involve adapting to a review timetable which has already been officially set.

[54] These examples are only suggestive. What is important is to recognize the integral link between the purpose of the assessment, its possible content, and its mode and timetable of publication. A further point to make here is that, as regards a possible reform agenda, it is better to use a democracy assessment to identify priorities for reform, or to clarify the principles to guide such reform, than to set out precise proposals or blueprints for change. The disadvantage of the latter is that the assessment process as a whole may become discredited in the eyes of those who do not agree with specific proposals for reform being made, even if otherwise they would be sympathetic to its larger purpose. So, for example, an assessment might well draw attention to the deficiencies of a First Past The Post (FPTP) electoral system, from a democratic point of view, in the context of a given country. But it should stop short of recommending some specific alternative which might prove much more contentious, not least because all electoral systems have some disadvantages. Specific reform proposals could form a supplementary agenda for research, but should be kept separate from the assessment itself (see the section 'from assessment to reform' below, paras 110–11).

(b) The content and priorities of the assessment

[55] We have already acknowledged that the assessment framework we have developed is very extensive, and may seem discouragingly large at first sight. Its advantage lies precisely in its completeness, and in the way in which the different aspects of a country's democratic life

can be located in the context of the whole. It may well be that the expertise and information required to answer the questions already exist in the country, and that the main problem lies in identifying it and bringing it together. Thus a legal expert might well be able to access the data relevant to the section on the rule of law quite readily, a human rights lawyer the section on civil and political rights, an electoral analyst the section on free and fair elections, and so on. So what appears a formidable task at first sight becomes more manageable once it is broken down into its component sections, as the Advanced Social and Political Research Institute (ASPRI) found for its assessment of Latvia. But it remains a large and complex task to pull it all together.

[56]

The experience that International IDEA has developed through piloting the assessment framework with in-country experts suggests that a group of three or four people, each with different expertise, and working with research assistance, requires a minimum of six months to complete a preliminary assessment that covers the whole framework. However, this involves using existing data and sources, and means that some questions can be answered more fully than others. Generating new data, say, through opinion surveys, or through consultative benchmarking with consumer groups, or through other forms of research, would extend the time and cost considerably. Much depends, therefore, on the depth to which the issues are to be investigated.

*A group of three or four people, each with different expertise, and working with research assistance, requires a minimum of six months to complete a preliminary assessment that covers the whole framework. Generating new data by means of consultative benchmarking with consumer groups or other forms of research would extend the time and cost considerably.*

[57]

If the cost in time and resources of undertaking the whole assessment proves prohibitive, then a number of possibilities suggest themselves, all involving *selection* of some kind. One is to select those issues or sections that are most salient to public concern and political debate, and to concentrate on those. If this approach is adopted, it is important that the selection be made explicitly, and in the context of the framework as a whole, so that it is possible to see how the assessment is to be

located within the overall context of the country's democratic life. If this sense of overall context is lost, there is a danger that any resulting assessment will appear partial and one-sided. It should also be remembered that one purpose of a democracy assessment may be to raise the profile of issues which have so far escaped public attention.

[58] A second strategy is that of the 'rolling programme', with different issues and sections undertaken successively as time and resources permit. This was the approach adopted by the first Democratic Audit of the UK and in the Philippines. In the UK, Democratic Audit began by investigating the state of citizens' rights, before proceeding to an audit of the country's central political institutions, with the findings of each published in separate volumes. These large studies were complemented by the interim publication of original research papers on more specific issues with a reform focus, which helped bring the auditing process to public attention before the fuller studies were completed. In the Philippines, the assessment received piecemeal funding to carry out assessments on each of the four main pillars of the framework, thereby allowing a complete assessment to be carried out over a longer period of time.

[59] In Australia, the assessment has been built up with a series of research projects on issues judged particularly salient for the country's democracy, including political finance, the representation of minorities, how well Australian democracy serves women, and many others.

*If the cost in time and resources of undertaking the whole assessment is prohibitive, it is possible to concentrate on those issues or sections that are most salient in public concern and political debate, or to undertake different sections of the framework successively.*

[60] Whichever of these approaches is adopted, the important thing is that any selection that is required should be consonant with the identified purpose, proposed timescale and anticipated impact of the assessment. These goals will naturally depend on country-specific considerations, for which generalizations are difficult to make. By the same token, there may well be some distinctive issues or questions that call for investigation, which are not fully covered in our assessment framework. Adding questions or adapting them to the conditions or

priorities of the individual country must be a matter for local discretion, although the advantage of maintaining comparability with assessments being conducted elsewhere should also be recognized.

*Some country-specific considerations or questions, which are not fully covered in our assessment framework, may call for additional investigation. Adding or adapting questions to the conditions or priorities of the country must be a matter for local discretion.*

(c) Benchmarks or comparators to guide the process

[61]

The importance of being clear about possible benchmarks or comparators against which a country's level of democracy might appropriately be assessed has been discussed above, and the different possibilities are set out and explained in Table 1.4. We have also emphasized the advantage of combining both a backward-looking frame of reference, to chart possible progress, and a present- or future-oriented standard, to identify levels of attainment. Here we discuss possible practical difficulties associated with the different choices.

[62]

The purpose of selecting a *reference point in the country's past* is to provide a sense of historical perspective to what is otherwise a contemporary snapshot without any context, as well as to assess possible progress. Two practical problems present themselves. The first is how to select an appropriate time-point for reference; the second, how to make an effective comparison in the absence of any systematic assessment having been conducted for the earlier period in question. These problems are much less acute for the new democracies: the point of transition from a previous authoritarian regime provides an obvious reference point. There is also likely to be considerable public agreement on what the defects of that regime were, to provide a basis for assessing change. Finally, there will probably already be a programme of constitutional and public sector reform under way, and there may be ample material for assessing its effectiveness. For longer-established democracies, the selection of a past reference point may be somewhat arbitrary, and its logic therefore less compelling, unless there has been a clear moment of substantial political or constitutional change in the recent past.

*Benchmarks or comparators have to be selected against which a country's level of democracy can appropriately be assessed. These may be a reference point in the country's past, or other internal or external target standards.*

[63] The selection of *target standards* as the comparator often proves more controversial. As is suggested above, *domestic* benchmarks are likely to have greater legitimacy than external ones, especially for newly established democracies. Using popular expectations of government performance would seem an entirely appropriate standard for a democracy assessment, but there are some practical difficulties. One is that clear evidence of such expectations may not exist in the public domain, and the cost in time and resources of collecting new survey data, conducting focus group discussions or other participatory exercises, is high. When collected, the evidence from public opinion may be ambiguous or uncertain, especially on issues such as the inner workings of government, say, as compared with the delivery of public services. However, the collection of evidence about popular expectations of government in appropriate areas could form a very useful product of a democracy assessment, especially when coupled with people's own assessment of the extent to which their expectations are actually met in practice.

[64] A complementary strategy to the above, which is also much cheaper, is to identify *official targets* for areas of public life, which can be used as possible benchmarks. Most constitutions contain statements of rights and responsibilities, and it is entirely appropriate to investigate how far these are realized in practice. Governments themselves set standards or targets for many areas of public life – standards for the conduct of public officials, or for the practice of open government; future targets for the improvement of health and education or the reduction of poverty; citizens' charters for the delivery of public services; goals and mission statements of all kinds. Again, identifying these and relating them systematically to the assessment framework can itself be a useful part of the assessment process. Moreover, no benchmark can have greater legitimacy than assessing institutions against their own self-proclaimed standards, even if these are merely intended for declamatory or public-relations effect.

[65] The usefulness of *externally derived* standards, by contrast, depends very much on how far these are likely to be endorsed by domestic public opinion. If there are natural regional or other comparators, to

which a country's people will usually relate, then their comparative attainment in different areas could be used to establish a standard of good practice for domestic assessment. Where neighbours are regarded with hostility, on the other hand, such a course may simply prove counterproductive. A familiar practical difficulty with comparative tables is that of standardization: data may be collected in quite different ways in different countries, and differences of context and significance may render them less truly comparable.

[66]

Similar qualifications apply to the international standards and examples of good practice that we have collected in row 4 of our assessment framework. Not all of these have been developed by official international or regional bodies of which the country being assessed may be a member. Nor do such standards necessarily command legitimacy in the country itself. However, where the standards are long-established and are widely recognized internationally or regionally they constitute a valuable resource. What is needed is a sensitive application of them that acknowledges such contextual circumstances as the time frame of the country's democratic evolution and its level of economic development. A useful starting point is to identify which of the main international or regional conventions identified in our fourth row a country has signed up to, and with what reservations or qualifications. This process will at least establish where the country stands officially with regard to the standards that the respective conventions seek to uphold.

[67]

As is explained above, there are more firmly accepted international standards for some sections of our framework than others, for example, covering human rights in all their aspects, refugees and asylum seekers, social and environmental targets, and some others. Agreement on standards for political institutions is mostly a long way off, although many states' legislatures have signed up to the IPU's declaration of standards for free and fair elections. However, it is a distinctive feature of the current international scene that all kinds of bodies, international, regional and national, both official and civil society-based, are engaged in developing standards for all aspects of public life; and it can be expected that some of these will gain increasing international acceptance over the coming years.

*Internal target standards are likely to have greater legitimacy than external ones. They include popular expectations of government performance (if evidence exists), statements of rights and responsibilities contained in the constitution, and official targets.*

[68] In conclusion, and in the light of what we might describe as an uneven patchwork of different kinds of benchmarks or standards, we would expect that agreement on these will evolve over the course of the assessment, and be clearer for some sections and issues than others. The important thing at the outset, however, is to be aware of the range of options available, and their respective implications, as a matter for early discussion.

(d) Selection of assessors and division of labour

[69] As already discussed, a democracy assessment will need to call on a variety of different kinds of expertise to cover the different sections of the framework. Between them the assessors will need to cover human rights, legal affairs, social and labour issues, the media and public opinion, as well as the more institutional aspects of politics and public participation. The team of assessors ought to be an interdisciplinary group, which might include lawyers, journalists and academics working in the social sciences.

[70] Listing all the desirable qualities of assessors runs the risk of postulating some super-heroic norm for our prospective group! It goes without saying that they will need professional experience in data collection and analysis. At the same time, conducting a democracy assessment is different from producing a standard academic or journalistic article, and involves a readiness to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the country's democratic life within an explicitly evaluative framework, and to do so with sufficient detachment and impartiality to avoid charges of bias and with sufficient writing skills to make the report accessible.

*The usefulness of externally derived standards will depend very much on how far these are likely to be endorsed by domestic public opinion. Not all internal standards command legitimacy in the country itself; a country may not have signed the relevant conventions; and in general agreement on standards for political institutions is a long way off. The international standards in some sections of the International IDEA framework are more generally accepted than those in other sections.*

[71] The process adopted by International IDEA for some of its pilot assessments was to use researchers experienced in its methodology to

undertake a preliminary desk assessment using country-based as well as international sources, so as to provide a starting point for the in-country experts. Desk studies were also prepared for the Mongolian assessment. They helped to identify gaps in information on the country that needed to be addressed and complemented the full range of outputs for the assessment project (see Part 3). It is important to note that as a preliminary sifting device desk studies have generally proved useful to the in-country assessors, but they are not a substitute for their own judgement and expertise. Dividing the assessment into two stages in this way is neither necessary nor always desirable.

(e) The use of sources

[72] The use of sources is discussed more fully in the next section (see paras 78–88). Here it is sufficient to note a couple of issues that merit preliminary discussion within a consultative group. The first is whether the resources available will permit new research into public opinion of the kind that is typically quite expensive, whether involving opinion surveys, consultative forums or other research. The usefulness of these to the assessment, both for identifying public expectations and for gauging popular assessment of government or regime performance in specific areas, has already been indicated. A preliminary review of what is already available in the public domain would make a useful contribution to such a discussion.

[73] A further contribution that a consultative group could make to the discussion of possible sources would be to identify from their own contacts and experience those agencies, organizations or individuals already engaged in data collection and analysis in areas relevant to the democracy assessment. It may well be the case that there are campaigning groups or organizations based in the country which already keep systematic data on human rights violations, prison conditions, the incidence of corruption, the harassment of journalists and so on which could provide an invaluable source of information alongside official statistics and academic investigations. Identifying such organizations and linking them where appropriate to the assessment process would offer an additional resource to the project.

(f) Consultative arrangements with stakeholders

[74] The importance of involving a wider consultative group of stakeholders at the beginning of the assessment process, and benefiting from their comments on a draft of the report and its conclusions towards the end, has already been stressed. Whether this group, or some of

its members, should have a standing advisory role throughout must be a matter of judgement, according to the expected timescale of the project, and whether significant decisions affecting focus, content or funding are likely to have to be made as the work progresses.

(g) Publication and promotion

[75]

The issues to be considered under this heading are reviewed in paragraphs 96–108. The essential point to make here is that it pays to give careful consideration at the outset of the project to the questions of who the target readership or readerships of the assessment may be, what form or forms of publication are appropriate for this anticipated readership, whether translation will be required, and so on. Choice of publisher or publishing outlet and a promotional strategy can then also be planned at an early stage. As well as publishing the report in hard copy, modern dissemination strategies also involve publication on a website (with links as far as possible), email distribution, and brief popular summaries in hard copy and electronic form. Such strategies require forward planning.

(h) Timescale and financial resources

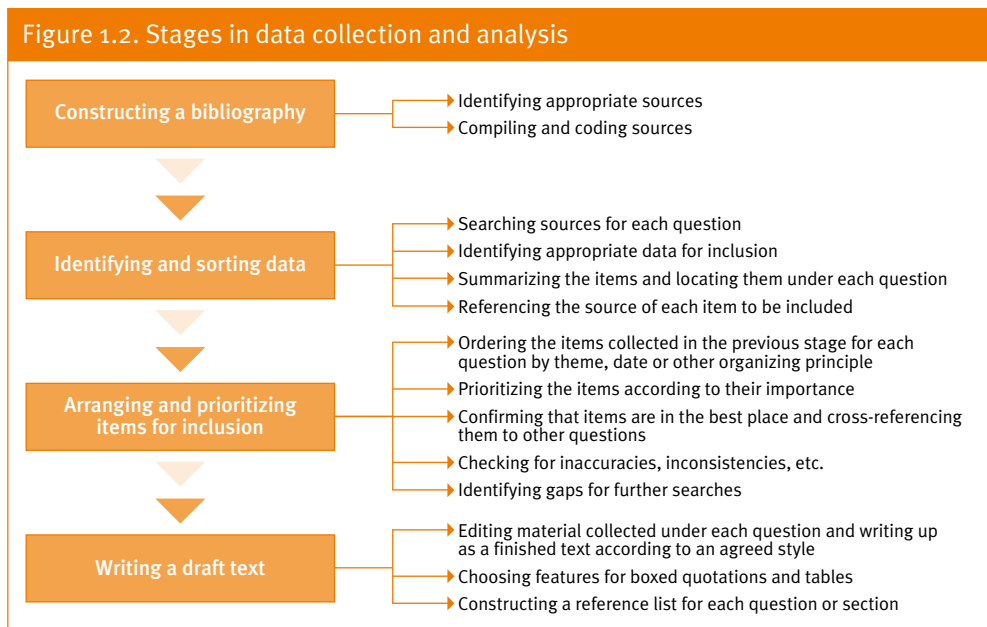
[76]

The decision on a timescale for the project will largely depend on decisions already made on a number of the issues identified above. Even if the assessment is not directed towards a clearly defined future moment in the country's constitutional or political evolution, potential funding sources will expect a realistic deadline for completion of the programme of work. And the resources obtained will in turn condition the extent or coverage of the assessment, or the depth to which it can probe. An initial exploration of these resourcing considerations may well have to be undertaken prior to a wider consultative meeting. Indeed, the programme of decisions to be taken in the formative stage of the project may better be understood as an evolving or iterative process, in view of their interconnectedness, rather than as the agenda for a single meeting. However, it is important that all the issues should be subject to consultation and made the focus of a workshop with potential stakeholders in the project, so that the project can benefit from their experience and contacts, and the issues can be tested against the widest possible range of viewpoints.

*It is important that all the issues should be subject to consultation and made the focus of a workshop with potential stakeholders in the project, so that the project can benefit from their experience and contacts, and the issues can be tested against the widest range of viewpoints.*

### Data collection, analysis and organization

[77] This section concerns the core process of a democracy assessment, and offers guidance on data collection and analysis. Most assessors will develop their own method of working, and there is no one correct method for proceeding in what is inevitably a time-consuming and sometimes laborious activity. However, Figure 1.2 itemizes the stages and tasks that we have found useful in conducting an assessment. Again, each stage is discussed briefly in turn.



#### (a) Constructing a bibliography

[78] The simplest way of constructing a bibliography is to take each section of the framework in turn, using standard bibliographical searches and other information to hand about likely sources. Academic books and articles are useful for their quality of analysis. Online sources from government departments, official statistical services, polling

organizations, NGOs, news reports, and so on, tend to be more up to date. Our experience is that most sources will be specific to one section of the framework, although they will most likely be relevant to more than one question within it. So it makes good sense to construct the bibliography on a sectional basis, with coding for specific questions where appropriate. Cross-referencing to other sections or questions is a relatively straightforward matter. When the exercise has been completed once, it will become clear which sections or questions are less well covered, and where a more concentrated further round of searching may be required. Adding further items to the bibliography is likely to be an ongoing process throughout the assessment.

[79] Two features of our assessment framework will be of assistance in this stage. Row 2 of the framework sets out the typical data required for answering each question, and thus provides pointers to possible sources. So, for example, many begin with the state of the law, which suggests that the country's constitution, its bill of rights and more specific legal codes will be necessary sources. Investigating how the law is implemented in practice, on the other hand, is likely to require the use of less official sources of information, such as NGO reports or academic studies. Sometimes an official report, say, from the legislature or ombudsman's office, on implementation of the law can throw light on whole areas of government practice.

[80] Row 3 of the framework identifies international or regional sources covering more than one country, organized by section and question. They are the ones we have ourselves found useful, and they are organized in a way that is precisely geared to the assessment process and its requirements. Many tend to be written from a Western perspective, however, and in any case they are no substitute for country-specific sources, to which they should be seen as a potentially valuable complement, rather than as an alternative.

[81] Assessing the reliability of different sources is obviously an important task, but depends on local knowledge and experience, and it is impossible to generalize about it. The value of official sources, for example, may well depend on whether the statistical office is genuinely independent of government or is merely another arm of the government's propaganda machine. Past experience will be an essential guide in this context.

#### (b) Identifying and sorting data

[82] This stage comprises the painstaking work of reading and, identifying relevant data or evidence and filing or recording it under the

appropriate question. Again it makes sense to proceed on a section-by-section basis, since most of the sources will contain material that is relevant to more than one question (although rarely to more than one section). An important point to bear in mind is that few, if any, of the sources used will be structured towards answering the assessment questions, since they will have been compiled or written for quite different purposes. So the data will need to be ‘dug out’ from the sources, and a lot of irrelevant material either ignored or discarded.

- [83] In identifying what is relevant, the main search questions of row 1 of the assessment framework obviously provide the chief guide, supplemented by two further search tools. Row 2 of the framework provides a systematic account of the data relevant to answering each question, and is particularly helpful at this point. Any decisions already taken about benchmarks, whether past attainments, present standards or future targets, provide what can be described as the fine-tuning for the search process.
- [84] What sort of data will the assessor be looking for? Anything which throws light on the general condition of the body politic in the relevant area, or which is symptomatic of its condition, is germane. This may be a brief summary by an authoritative expert, the findings of a report, official or unofficial, a statistical table, a legal judgement, an opinion survey, a newspaper or media investigation, some key event or series of events or experiences which typifies a more general condition, or any combination of these. At this stage the more kinds of evidence that can be collected, the better.
- [85] It is clear, and has been so from the various experiences in using the framework around the world, that a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data should be collected and analysed. Historical, legal and contextual information provides important background for establishing a baseline assessment of democracy. Qualitative data on people’s experiences of democracy, their perceptions, and areas in need of reform can be collected through a variety of means, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus groups, national reflective workshops and conferences. Quantitative data collection and analysis can complement the qualitative work, where numerous indicators across the rows of the framework can be collected to provide a descriptive mapping of democracy. These can be used for ‘second order’ analysis that seeks to identify explanatory factors that account for the patterns observed in the descriptive analysis. If the data are available, such analysis can identify the broad contours in the democratic experience as well as examine significant differences in that experience

across different social demographic categories, such as age, gender, income, occupation, geographical location, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation and indigenous identity.

*A mixture of qualitative and quantitative data should be collected and analysed.*

[86] The goal of combining qualitative and quantitative methods is to provide as rich and robust a portrait of the democratic experience as possible within the resource constraints of any one assessment project. It is also possible that carefully selected quantitative data can provide a 'snapshot' to illuminate a whole area of public life. For example, figures of the size of the prison population compared with the supposed prison capacity, of the proportion of prisoners awaiting trial, of the average time taken to bring a case to court – all these can give a rapid insight into the state of a country's criminal justice system.

[87] Two pieces of cautionary advice are worth giving here. First, avoid making a judgement about the answer to a given question before looking for the data and in this way predetermining the selection of data. Most answers will involve evidence that points to a mixed state of affairs, neither wholly good nor wholly bad, and assessors should try to keep an open mind until the bulk of the relevant data has been collected. The second caution is more elementary: make sure that all verbatim extracts from other sources are placed within quotation marks, so that they do not end up in a finished draft as if they are an original text.

[88] The product of this stage of the assessment might thus be a substantial

*Avoid making a judgement about the answer to a given question before looking for the data. Most answers will involve evidence that points to a mixed state of affairs.*

list of items collected under each question, of very different kinds, with the sources of each identified, and cross-referenced to other questions to which they might also be relevant. They may well be in no particular order and contain much overlap and duplication. But better more than less at this stage. By now it should also be clear where substantial gaps in the record occur, and where new research might be commissioned for the most urgent issues, if funding permits.

## (c) Arranging and prioritizing the items

**[89]**

This is the stage of arranging the material collected so that it provides a clear picture, or tells a coherent story, even if it is a complex one. It is a good idea at this point to go back to the original question and remind yourself what would count as a relevant answer to it. Then it is a matter of arranging the items in an appropriate order, whether it be of thematic type, order of significance, or historical priority, according to what seems best for the particular question and in the light of the overall focus of the assessment. This stage may well overlap with the start of writing a draft text, since arranging material in order is itself part of the process of ‘telling a story’ which will link the discrete items of data or evidence together. One way of thinking of an answer to the assessment questions is as a brief summarizing judgement, with the evidence arranged so that it supports, expands or explains the judgement in a systematic way.

**[90]**

Two issues are likely to emerge at this stage, if not before. The first is that there may well be inconsistencies, as well as duplication, between the different sources from which data have been collected, and further investigation will be needed to resolve any possible contradiction. A second issue concerns continuing gaps in the evidence, for which further sources may still need to be identified.

## (d) Writing a draft report

**[91]**

If the above stages have all been carried out, writing the report should not prove unduly onerous. Presumably by now a decision will have been taken on the form and length of a finished draft, although both may need to be modified in the light of the material assembled. It makes for easier reading to avoid long unbroken chunks of text, which may be varied with tables, summaries, quotations, exemplary events or experiences, and so on, to complement a more discursive account.

## (e) Setting the report in context

**[92]**

It will be important at this point to consider the kind of introduction the report will need. How will you explain and justify the assessment process to the potential reader? What information is needed to make the assessment intelligible in the context of the country’s distinctive character and present condition? This information will almost certainly include a discursive summary of the country’s recent process of democratic development, and of any features in the country’s politi-

cal traditions and culture that may have given the process its distinctive trajectory and help explain its current condition. An introductory narrative of this kind will also help provide a justification for conducting a democracy assessment at this particular juncture.

- [93] Other items that might be included in an introduction to the report are basic facts about the country's current political system, and leading socio-economic and human development indicators, if these are not already included in the relevant sections of the assessment.

### *Convening a national workshop*

- [94] A key point in the assessment process is the convening of a national workshop to discuss the draft report and its provisional findings in order to improve its content and presentation. Although this event could be confined to professional and academic experts, it will have much more impact if it is widened to include leading public figures, government and party officials, and representatives of human rights and other campaigning organizations, as well as media personnel and sympathetic figures from neighbouring countries. A wider body of this kind, representative of political society as a whole, will subject the findings to a more searching test and improve the analysis and its presentation, and also enable the findings to reach a much wider audience and give them much greater legitimacy.

- [95] Workshops undertaken by International IDEA in countries selected for our pilot study have included in their membership such figures as the chairmen of the official and unofficial constitutional review bodies (Kenya); party delegates and leading diplomats (Malawi); senior

*A key point in the assessment process is the convening of a national workshop to discuss the draft report and its provisional findings.*

representatives from the police and human rights organizations (El Salvador); the clerk of Parliament and the chief electoral commissioner (New Zealand); and a regional prosecutor and a senior journalist (Italy). The two international conferences organized by the Mongolians included a variety of international and national stakeholders who provided reflection and advice on the design, implementation and follow-up activities of the assessment. The proceedings of the workshops for the pilot studies as well as those in Mongolia aroused substantial public interest and were widely reported in the national

press. In many cases the quality of comment and discussion by participants led to significant revision and improvement of the assessment report. For an example of a successful workshop, see Box 1.2.

### Box 1.2. Report on the Kenya Democracy Workshop

The workshop, opened by the Swedish ambassador to Kenya, Ms Inga Björk-Klevby, was attended by about 45 people, including members of Parliament, academics, lawyers, representatives of national NGOs, local representatives of government and international organizations.

The first session was devoted to a debate on the constitutional reform process, at which leading representatives of the two alternative review bodies – the civil society-based Ufungamano, and the official parliamentary forum – presented the arguments for their respective organizations. The rest of the seminar was taken up with an audiovisual presentation of the key findings of the report, and a discussion organized around nine key questions advanced by Professor Njuguna Ng’ethe, the report’s principal investigator:

- What conception of democracy is implied or implicit in this particular comparative framework of democracy assessment?
- Is this conception useful for the Kenyan situation?
- Is this conception legalistic, institutional, political, economic, and social, and how are these different aspects weighted in the framework?
- Can the framework capture the dynamics of change or can it only take a static snapshot of the ‘state of democracy’?
- Does the comparative framework adequately balance the elements within the democratic process?
- How are these components of the democratic process implicitly or subsequently weighted, and what is the resulting utility of this ranking?
- What is the nature of the epistemology underlying this framework? E.g., would an ‘ordinary’ citizen generate the same democratic ‘menu’, or a more utilitarian one?
- Is it useful to be comparative?
- What are the real determinants of democratization and are these captured by the framework?

The workshop was fully reported in the next day’s press, and the organizers gave interviews for both radio and television. A key issue discussed at the conclusion of was how to disseminate the findings more widely, including linkages with existing civic education projects.

The Workshop was organized by the Series on Alternative Research in East Africa Trust (SAREAT) and International IDEA and held at the Norfolk Hotel, Nairobi, on 22 June 2000.

Democratic Audit in the UK held a workshop on a recent report on the country's counter-terrorism laws and strategy which benefited from a wide-ranging and diverse composition, including a former senior judge, a high-ranking intelligence official, human rights lawyers, leading politicians from the three largest parties, defence lawyers, representatives of relevant NGOs and national journalists.

*Strategies for making democracy assessments public*

- [96] The ultimate aim of a democracy assessment is to give a country's society a thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of its democratic arrangements for people to consider and (if possible) act on. So the final report has to be widely disseminated and promoted to ensure that its findings are fully debated. One of the major benefits of adopting the transparent and inclusive strategy that we recommend above for the process of democracy assessment is that it provides a public platform from which to disseminate and promote these findings. The earlier the process of information and consultation begins, the more effective will be the final dissemination of the findings. The interested parties and the wider public will be better prepared to understand, assimilate and, as necessary, act on the findings if they have already been informed and involved in shaping them.
- [97] The job of disseminating information on a subject like democracy is often a difficult one for groups to undertake. Moreover, almost any group undertaking a democracy analysis is likely to be constrained by limited resources. None has the kind of promotional resources that a major commercial company can mobilize. The assessors' own circumstances and resources will vary considerably, as will the conditions in the countries they are assessing. Many groups of assessors will be attached to academic institutions without practical experience of promotional campaigns and with only very limited opportunities for direct access to the public or to NGOs, which may well have more promotional experience.
- [98] In many countries, state control of the media deliberately constrains coverage. Consequently, public interest in analysis of a political system is rarely strong, except where tyranny, misrule, persecution of minorities and corruption have inspired desire for change towards a more democratic polity. Then it can emerge, even where state control of the media is very strong and intimidation of journalists is common.
- [99] The difficulties of communication in poorer countries with largely rural and illiterate populations, usually with no or limited access to

the print or electronic media, are frequently – and rightly – stressed. But there are also immense difficulties in more developed societies with more educated populations and diverse media sources. In such countries, attempts to raise questions of the quality of democracy, human rights abuse, discrimination and so on tend to be drowned out in the clamour of commercial and entertainment matter on most media. Moreover, modern media tend to be interested in politics only at the level of the major political figures and their activities rather than at that of detailed analysis of political arrangements. This trend is intensified by the emphasis on ‘personalities’ in the commercial and entertainment worlds. Across the spectrum of countries, the state and major interests are usually able to dominate communications and block or downplay messages which they find unpalatable.

*In many countries, even where the media are free and communications are good, the job of disseminating information on a subject like democracy is often difficult. No assessment group has the kind of promotional resources that a major commercial company can mobilize. The state and major interests are usually able to dominate communications and block or downplay messages which they find unpalatable. It is essential for assessment groups to adopt realistic strategies for getting their messages across.*

[100]

It is therefore essential for assessment groups to adopt realistic strategies for getting their messages across. As we argue above, the earlier they seek to inform and involve outsiders in their processes and the more transparent these processes are, the stronger their hold on public interest will be. The wider the range of those who are involved, the more likely it is that people will regard their findings as broadly representative and relevant. They can begin by issuing information on the assessment task that they are undertaking and inviting comments on and contributions to their work through press releases, leaflets, conferences (not necessarily their own) and, if possible, an interactive website of their own. It is useful at an early stage to try to establish a constructive relationship with journalists from the most sympathetic media outlets. An example of how to do this, and of a practical media strategy more generally, is provided from the experience of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), an organization which aims to promote democracy in South Africa (see Box 1.3).

**Box 1.3.**

**A media strategy for raising democratic awareness**

IDASA employs different tactics in trying to get a message across, depending on who it wants to inform or influence. If it wants to increase public awareness, it uses a mixture of media to inform people – through radio first of all, using African-language radio stations and their own Democracy Radio programme, and then through either South African television or mainstream newspapers such as *The Sowetan* or the *Sunday Times*.

If IDASA wants to speak to those in power and to influence the opinion-forming class, it tends to use the English-language radio (SAFm) and *Business Day*, a serious and highly respected newspaper. IDASA has established good working relationships with SAFm and the political staff of *Business Day*, which makes it more likely that its press releases and information will be followed up.

IDASA's media experience has taught it how to 'package' an issue as a media story and to identify the appropriate 'hook' – that is, an event or report on which IDASA has relevant data and views. IDASA realizes that it does not have the resources to reach out to the whole population of South Africa, especially given the diversity of socio-economic, ethnic and cultural groups that are to some extent reflected in the demography of the media and their range. So choosing the right media and the right outlets for any given message is critical.

Instead of seeking to reach the whole population or 'wider society', IDASA concentrates on serving 'civil society' – that is, the policy-making, opinion-forming and active elements in society, and sympathetic and interested groups within these active elements. It operates a 'niche' marketing strategy. When lobbying, it targets such 'niche' groups as its links to wider communities and the population as a whole. Its media strategies, described above, are its main routes for informing and influencing these key groups and recruiting friendly organizations and individuals within them.

*Source:* Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)

**[101]**

These first stages will not make a very wide impact. The aim should be to inform and involve interested parties – scholars, journalists, lawyers, public officials, politicians and other people of influence – with the underlying purpose of using them, in turn, to pass the information on and raise wider interest. This kind of 'ripple effect' is usually the most any group could hope for, and the IDASA media strategy is a model for this way of operating. It targets the media that are most appropriate for the groups it is aiming at and the messages it wants to get across.

- [102] The most likely weaknesses for any assessment group attempting to promote its work and findings are, as is stated above, the limited resources at hand and its inexperience in using the media. If it is possible to recruit an experienced journalist or public relations officer, this should be done, even in a voluntary capacity. However, the great strength of a group will generally lie in its collective expertise and knowledge. Issuing individual reports, briefing journalists and submitting articles for publication are all ways of building up a reputation for expertise in the media.
- [103] During its work the group should therefore seek to develop and sustain interest and involvement by publishing reports of preliminary inquiries or findings; holding seminars or conferences; submitting articles to journals, newspapers and magazines; publishing and updating information on its findings, if this is available; and encouraging others to contribute. Table 1.5 summarizes the different forms of product, means of dissemination and potential audiences for the democracy assessment.

### *Publication and media strategies*

- [104] Publication and media strategies are interconnected and should be considered and planned for together – the main aim being to reach as wide an audience as possible through the media and the distribution of a book or report, with a significant secondary aim of influencing policy makers and opinion leaders. The more relevant and policy-oriented an assessment is, the easier it will be to attract attention. To begin with, it is usually possible to engage political and academic circles in a country. With the pilot IDEA studies, for example, we were able to ensure that the initial findings of the assessment teams were subjected to scrutiny and comment by informed outsiders at a specially convened seminar and were revealed to the public gaze, if only to a limited degree, through the Internet. The final assessments were then published as printed reports and the body of information and argument on which these reports were based was placed on the Internet.

### *Engaging the media*

- [105] It is important to plan well in advance for the release of the final report. All manner of media events can be organized around the report. The national workshops mentioned above are only one means of disseminating the findings. Another may well be a speech by a single highly-respected individual, or a simple press conference. If a commercial publisher is involved, it will usually have some resources for publicity and experience of book launches. The report should be written with some thought as to its reception. Above all, the report should

be written in simple and accessible terms. It should not be too long. Its contents and direction should bear in mind popular preoccupations and interests. Democracy is vital to most people's well-being, but is often discussed or argued over in a relatively abstract way. Make sure that any democracy assessment addresses popular concerns and shows how democratic advance is relevant to those concerns.

Table 1.5. Different modes of disseminating the findings

Product	Content/format	Medium	Audience
Full report, hard copy	Full assessment	Publication in English and in-country language/s	Elite: opinion formers in government and the media, political parties and experts
Full report, electronic copy	Full assessment plus linkages and data archive	World Wide Web: significant portals and listings	Elite Internet users, international interested parties and opinion formers
Executive summary/ press release	Aggregated executive summaries (all sections)	Press conference	Urban, literate, journalists and government
Academic conference and conference documents	Full assessment as background paper, conference report papers from participants	Conference pack and online postings and papers	Academics, policy makers and students
Extracts by section (specialist interest)	Executive summaries and specific sections	Sector- and interest-specific journals and in-house magazines; specialists	Interest-specific, such as educators, health workers, media, local government officials etc.
Extracts by section, (popular issues)	Derivative popular texts around current affairs	Popular magazines and newspapers	Literate, educated
Questionnaires, civic education summaries, classroom kits	Cartoon, non-textual or basic language, video or audio	Community voluntary organizations, churches, NGOs, schools, community centres, libraries (gatekeepers)	General, including the illiterate or poor
Interviews and features by radio and TV personnel	Verbal and visual summaries	Radio and TV	General, including the illiterate and poor

[106]

It is important to issue a media notice of the report that bears these issues in mind. A media notice or press release should go to all the media, print and broadcast. It should be brief and to the point. Do not try to summarize the whole report, except perhaps as a final paragraph. Instead, go for the key points or most controversial or surprising findings and highlight these. If there is strong public interest in a particular political issue, relate the findings to that issue. Furthermore, it is no good just sending out press releases. Think first about the best day of the week to release the information and which of the media that day will be likely to follow up the notice. Decide which are the best media outlets for reaching the audience that you want. If possible, prepare certain journalists in advance. Try to obtain the fax numbers or email addresses that get to the right people. Always follow up a press release with a polite telephone inquiry to ask whether it has been received and noticed; too often, it will otherwise simply go unread and unnoticed, or rejected. Such an inquiry gives you the chance to ‘sell the story’. We have frequently found that a polite reminder can gain media attention that the initial press release has failed to engender.

[107]

The natural course is to go for a ‘big bang’ release of a report or document, but it is possible to vary this approach considerably. A democracy assessment will usually raise a variety of key issues, and each of these can be raised independently during the course of the work and after the release of the final document, for example, in interim reports, articles in specialist magazines, television or radio current affairs programmes or interviews, evidence to official bodies, evidence to political parties, attendance at other seminars and conferences, and leaflets addressed to a variety of audiences. All these and other means can be used to promote and disseminate the findings of a democracy assessment. It is also important to think carefully about the media chosen. Who reads this or that newspaper? Is television tightly controlled? Are radio stations the rural population’s main source of information? Is that or this columnist, reporter or radio producer more sympathetic and interested than others? Examples of the different dissemination strategies used by a variety of country assessment teams are given in Part 3 (see paras 146–9). The experience of the UK Democratic Audit can be summarized here by way of example (see Box 1.4).

[108]

One or two lessons from this experience may be relevant to others. First, the idea of choosing topics that will be of interest for separate publication early on, and which will provide ‘hooks’ for media attention, is a good way of publicizing the whole enterprise. Second, the choice of publisher is a key question. You need to consider at what price the publisher will market the country report; how good the publisher’s

**Box 1.4.**  
**Dissemination experience from the UK Democratic Audit**

Democratic Audit has published three national assessments of UK democracy: ‘audits’ of political and civil rights and governing arrangements, in 1998 and 1999, and a third full assessment using the IDEA framework in 2002. The first two were published as academic books and were bound by the conventions and economics of publishing, resulting in costly books. The publisher put hardly any resources into their dissemination, and that was targeted to the academic community and not the wider public. However, Democratic Audit did publish and invite debate on the criteria by which the assessors were to proceed through the broadsheet press and current-affairs television executives. The very idea of a ‘democratic audit’ was enough to arouse interest, and the fact that this was an academic enterprise with a university base gave it sufficient legitimacy in journalists’ eyes. The 2002 assessment, in contrast, was more popularly produced and published, with a provocative cover and catchy title, and the first print run of 2,000 copies sold out. For all three assessments the audit also undertook its own dissemination strategy, and was able to obtain a high level of exposure on BBC and other radio programmes.

As the audit had continuous funding from a UK trust, the assessors have also had the means to publish interim reports on particular issues – notably on the accountability of parastatal agencies, the UK electoral system, far-right political parties, and counter-terrorism legislation – as well as a book on economic and social rights. These activities have bolstered its profile in the media and with an interested but limited public. The reports were all promoted with press releases and media appearances. The reports on parastatal agencies attracted a great deal of interest from the print and electronic media – so much so that the audit cooperated with a commercial television channel to produce a special documentary on such agencies. Learning from this experience, Democratic Audit now publishes brief popular summaries of its books and reports for circulation to MPs and other influential groups, and holds expert seminars to discuss and disseminate the findings. It also places PDFs on its own and other websites to give further exposure to its work.

distribution network is at getting the report to a wide audience; what languages it will be published in, and so on. It may in certain circumstances be better to choose self-publication. Third, if you can persuade prominent politicians, journalists and others to debate your findings, you will almost certainly generate publicity. Finally, most newspapers publish reviews of books, so it is worth targeting the books editors to ask for a review. Depending on resources, groups can seek to consult the public through opinion surveys, conferences, media interviews and articles. Even consulting other experts on aspects of its continuing work is a valuable, if small-scale, way towards dissemination.

[109]

A group of assessors will need to adopt a media strategy very early on to ensure that it is able to disseminate its findings effectively. The media, imperfect though they may be, are the principal means by which all actors in civil society can inform and influence public opinion. However, no group can hope to reach all sections of society through one medium on its own – the national press, a television station or a specialist journal. Usually, only governments and major commercial organizations can achieve a wide dissemination of information to a country's population. Groups should therefore identify their main targets for particular aspects of their findings and cultivate and employ the specific media most likely to reach those groups. For the most part, they should aim for opinion formers, interest groups and other active elements. Their greatest weaknesses are likely to be limited resources and inexperience in dealing with the media. Their greatest strength will be the knowledge base that they can assemble through their work and its objectivity and relevance to the concerns of their society and country.

### From assessment to reform

[110]

Throughout this account we have stressed that a democracy assessment is not an end in itself but a means to assist a democratic reform process by providing the systematic evidence, argument and comparative data on which reforms might be based. The influence of an assessment, whether in whole or part, whether as a full assessment or as thematic research projects, may work *directly*, through its influence on relevant government ministers and officials, or *indirectly*, by strengthening the pressure from campaigning groups and key organizations. Or the influence may be more *diffuse*, through its broader informational and educational effect on a wider public.

*Assessment groups should identify their main targets for particular aspects of their findings and cultivate and employ the specific media most likely to reach those groups. For the most part, they should aim for opinion formers, interest groups and other active elements. Their greatest weaknesses are likely to be limited resources and inexperience in dealing with the media. Their greatest strength will be the knowledge base they can assemble through their work and its objectivity and relevance to the concerns of their society and country.*

[111]

This means that publication of the assessment findings should not necessarily be regarded as a final step. The assessment will usually remain relevant to a country's politics for some time to come, and be an ongoing point of reference for campaigning. Moreover, it could well form the basis for a further and separate stage, which is that of working up specific reform proposals, perhaps in association with relevant campaigning groups and experts in key areas identified by the assessment. Part 4 of the guide examines this further stage in more detail, using experience from assessments carried out to date.