

# Part 3

The assessment  
experiences

## The assessment experiences

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- [117] In Part 3, we pass on the experience of the teams and individuals who have conducted assessments in 20 different countries and to convey something of the enthusiasm and sense of purpose they have brought to what is inescapably a hard and complex task. As Parts 1 and 2 have shown, the International IDEA democracy assessment methodology sets out a standard methodology for assessors; however, the reports from assessors reveal a remarkably diverse range of democratic situations as between countries, approaches and techniques. All the assessments that have taken place have remained committed to the standard methodology and the central principle of local ownership of the assessment process that encompasses the research, the analysis, the consultation processes, and the identification of priorities for future reform. But, as Krishna Hachhethu, a Nepalese member of the South Asia regional assessment team, says, ‘Democracy has many stories’.
- [118] Therefore, while we standardize the assessment process, we neither standardize ‘democracy’ itself nor seek to standardize the way in which the assessment teams approach the task of assessing the quality of democracy in their country or region. The framework is designed to be flexible, allowing teams to add search questions or to adopt differing modes of consulting, communicating and analysing. Thus assessment teams have in practice largely kept within the overall framework, but have also adopted a remarkably diverse set of working methods, innovations, fund-raising initiatives and timescales, as well as engagements with governments, civil society and donors, and have learned from different experiences.
- [119] The assessment methodology was invented and first applied by Democratic Audit in the UK. The methodology was developed for universal use under the direct aegis of International IDEA and then pioneered over six months in eight countries – Bangladesh, El Salvador, Italy, Kenya, Malawi, Peru, New Zealand and South Ko-

rea. These pilot assessments covered different regions of the world and a mix of developed and developing countries in order for us to be able to test the process fully. The in-country assessments were preceded by a 'desk assessment' carried out by researchers at the University of Leeds, and nearly all of them involved a conference of outside experts and interested parties. These desk assessments drew primarily on Internet searches and standard texts, but were mainly confined to material in English. They were successful enough for us to be able to recommend a similar exercise in advance of direct in-country work. Since 2000, the assessment framework has travelled widely across regions of the world and between countries at different stages of democratization. The pilot assessments have been followed by assessment exercises in (in alphabetical order) Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Union (EU), Ireland, Latvia, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland (a province of the UK), the Philippines, the South Asia region (covering Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and the United Kingdom (the latest audit). These second-generation assessments were largely conducted independently of International IDEA, and in many cases resulted from a deliberate selection of the methodology as the most appropriate from among the many assessment methods currently used internationally. The assessment framework has also been used to provide input into other democracy and governance assessment projects, such as those initiated by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), AfriMAP, the Danish Association for International Co-operation (Mellemlfolkeligt Samvirke, MS), Développement Institutions et Analyses de Long terme (DIAL, Development Institutions and Long Term Analyses), and the Italian Institute for Human Science (Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane, SUM).

*The democracy assessment framework is designed to be flexible, allowing teams to add search questions or to adopt differing modes of consulting, communicating and analysing. Assessment teams have largely kept within the overall framework, but have also adopted a remarkably diverse set of working methods, innovations, fund-raising initiatives and timescales, as well as engagements with governments, civil society and donors, and have learned from different experiences.*

## Democracy has many stories

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Krishna Hachhethu's statement that 'democracy has many stories' struck a common chord at a conference held at International IDEA in March 2007 to collect and reflect on the experiences of the 17 assessments that had taken place so far. The quotes in this section, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the transcripts of the conference and workshops. Hachhethu argued that the founding principles of popular control and political equality should drive the process of assessment, but that assessors should be sensitive to the differing perceptions of democracy and key priorities among people across the world and in particular countries:

In the minds of the South Asian people maybe popular control and political equality are very process-driving, whereas the future of the South Asian understanding of democracy is primarily with their livelihood, freedom and social justice. So the basic guiding thread of democracy in the South Asian report is how to balance when we are developing. The trajectory of democracy in the West and in stable democracies and developing countries is very different and makes a big difference to understanding. If we ignore this part, if the people of the South Asia read a report that does not reflect their experience, their day-to-day life, it will be taken as one additional academic work. Everybody, every reader, should feel that there is some reflection of their experience and understanding.

[121]

This point about the differences of the democratic trajectory and experience between countries was also reflected in a distinction central to the Mongolian assessment, between what the assessors called 'core' and 'satellite' indicators, as they explain in their report:

The core indicators represent common values of democratic governance and satellite indicators mainly express national characteristics of democratic governance in Mongolia. Developing satellite indicators reflected the following principles:

- ▶ National characteristics of democratic governance
- ▶ They had to be contextually specific and grounded
- ▶ Promote local ownership among key stakeholders
- ▶ Strengthen the appeal for applying the framework to other countries
- ▶ Bridge the divide between universality and particularity (*Handbook of Democratic Governance Indicators* 2006: 10).

*The democratic trajectory and experience differ between countries. In South Asia people's understanding of democracy has to do primarily with their livelihood, freedom and social justice. 'The trajectory of democracy in the west and in stable democracies and developing countries is very different and [this] makes a big difference to understanding.'*

[122]

The South Asian quest for the meaning of democracy among the peoples of the five nations in the study highlights a significant development of the original assessment framework that happened with several of the assessment exercises – namely the use of opinion surveys and of ‘dialogues’ with experts to identify priorities and issues for research. The South Asian report, *State of Democracy in South Asia* (Lokniti 2008), explains that the teams used ‘four pathways’ to assess the quality of democracy in the five nations and to measure its relevance to the daily lives of their populations:

- ▶ ‘qualitative assessments’ adapted from the IDEA framework and conducted by in-country scholars;
- ▶ a thorough cross-country survey of lay opinion on the meaning of democracy, confidence in governing institutions, the status of minorities and so on;
- ▶ ‘dialogues’ with political and social activists to counterpose the opinions of the lay public; and
- ▶ case studies of inconvenient issues that contradicted ‘democratic wisdom’ to tease out the ‘puzzles of democracy’.

*A significant development of the original assessment framework happened with several of the assessment exercises in South Asia – the use of opinion surveys and of ‘dialogues’ with experts to identify priorities and issues for research. The assessments found great differences in perceptions between the politically aware and other citizens. It is not sufficient to consult and talk to the knowledgeable.*

[123]

The South Asian assessors found a tension between the views of the politically aware and those of other citizens – in the words of Professor Peter deSouza, between the ‘elite commonsense’ and ‘people’s commonsense’. It was to catch and reflect the multiple views and stories that the South Asian assessment employed its different methodologies. ‘When we have a dialogue with the activists, or when we had a dialogue with the enlightened people, the trust in political parties and Parliament was so low, but when we went to the people with the same questions, trust in parties and Parliament exceeded 50 per cent on average ... Teams need to think about these tensions in their reports’. Similarly, the Mongolian assessment held a ‘mirror survey’, putting the same questions to a mass sample and to elite groups. They found great differences in perceptions among parliamentarians and political elites, and between business elites and the public. Such findings are valuable in teasing out the tensions inherent in any democracy.

**Box 3.1.**

Excerpts from dialogues conducted for the State of Democracy in South Asia study

**The army and political parties**

‘The Prime Minister handles the Defence Ministry. Moreover the retired Generals are joining the political parties and they also keep linkages with the forces. In the last election, eight Generals got nominations from political parties and if they are refused by one party, they are wholeheartedly welcomed by the other party. This is a very dangerous trend in democracy of our country.’

*Prof. Amena Mohsin*

*(chair, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh)  
Dialogue on Democracy in Bangladesh, Dhaka, 27–28 March 2004*

**Discrimination against women**

‘Citing her experience in electoral politics, she said that during the campaign she meets many women who cry and talk about their preferences for women candidates but during the casting of votes, their sons and husbands would do it through proxy. Referring to the political parties, she said that these parties destroy not only democracy but also families. Turning to the Naga traditional societies, she said, “In spite of the big-hearted claims, like we do not discriminate against women, they would not allow the women to be a part of the village councils. It is not that they cannot accept women leaders; they may say, “Madam, Madam” to Sonia Gandhi or to lady officers, but they will ask their women not to open their mouths. This is a double standard.’

*Ms Valley Rose*

*(woman activist and politician, Manipur, India)  
Dialogue on Democracy and People’s Future, Manipur, Imphal, 26–27 February 2004*

### **Donors and public institutions**

‘The donors have played a big role in making the state institutions dysfunctional. For example, they do not want to support the university departments in conducting research, but would be willing to pay hefty money to the professors if they do the research through some private NGOs. I think what is happening is that individuals are operating, donors are operating, but all at the cost of public institutions. This process is furthered with donor policies and money.’

*Krishna Khanal  
(political scientist, Tribhuvan University, Nepal)  
Dialogue on Democracy in Nepal, Dhulikhel, 22–23 November 2003*

### **Politics an elite game**

‘There are feudals, industrialists, bureaucrats and politicians in the same family. They have formed networks against peoples’ rights. This is very disturbing. People are no more interested in politics, which they consider to be an elite game. People are more concerned about food, health care, employment, etc. The poverty ratio stands at 40–45 per cent. How can one think of democracy in such conditions?’

*Gul Rehman  
(Muttahida Labour Federation, Peshawar, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan)  
Dialogue on Democracy in Pakistan, Lahore, 7–8 February 2004*

### **Freedom from want**

‘Around one-third of the population of metropolitan cities is living in slums and they are denied the freedom from want and all other basic needs and rights of a human being. The majority of these slum dwellers belong to dalit and minority communities, and are living in constant threat of demolition of their huts. They are being denied even the most basic needs like water, sanitation and schooling facilities for their children. They neither have freedom from fear nor freedom from want. The democratic state, which was supposed to help them to achieve this freedom, is actively working in the direction to deny them these freedoms.’

*Prof. Hassan Mansur  
(president, People’s Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) Karnataka, India)  
Dialogue on Democracy and Human Security, Hyderabad, 18–19 September 2004*

### **Minorities and equality**

‘Reverend Rahula described two problems in granting special rights to minorities. “Firstly, it will perpetuate their second-class status. Secondly, the majority will continue to use the minorities for their advantage.” Rev. Rahula suggested that the majority-minority discourse needed to be transcended. He wanted all citizens to be educated on the value of equality. He also asserted that the majority-

minority distinctions could not be erased by means of legislation. It needed to be overcome through a counter valuing discourse of equality.’

*Reverend Rahula  
(young Buddhist monk teaching at Peradeniya University, Sri Lanka)  
Dialogue on Majorities and Minorities in Sri Lanka, Kandy, 20 September 2004  
(Lokniti 2008: 72)*

### Democratizing political parties

‘In my opinion, democracy in South Asia has not flourished and it won’t until we democratise our political parties. Our political parties more or less resemble private limited companies and family trusts. Take PPP, established by Zulfikar, inherited by Benazir, who will probably be followed by Sanam Zulfikar. The same is true for ANP. In India, the same is happening to the Congress. We need to follow the democratic processes as in the USA and UK, where the political parties elect leaders for each term. It is not a family affair where the son should follow the father and so on. Unless an effort is made to democratize the political parties, and unless they perform their role properly, democracy will not come.’

*Prof. Ahmed Zeb  
(Dera Ismail Khan, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan)  
Dialogue on Democracy in Pakistan, Lahore, 7–8 February 2004  
(Lokniti 2008: 149)*

### On the constitution

‘Sometimes, we say that we have a good constitution. But what’s the use of this constitution if it can’t protect me and tame the criminals? The criminals take me away at night and kill me in the morning and this constitution can’t ensure justice. One thing is clear: either we have a good constitution, which can protect us and protect our freedom of speech, or we don’t have any proper constitution.’

*Abdul Awal Mintoo  
(president, Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bangladesh)  
Dialogue on Democracy in Bangladesh, Dhaka, 27–28 March 2004.  
(Lokniti 2008: 38)*

*Source: All the quotations except the final three are taken from unpublished transcripts of the various dialogues conducted as part of the State of Democracy in South Asia project.*

[124]

There is a warning here. It is not sufficient to consult and talk to the knowledgeable. Professor Suhas Palshikar, one of the leaders of the State of Democracy in South Asia project, notes that ‘the dialogues held by this project have shown that the activists are radical and anti-establishment to such an extent that their assessment is at sharp variance with the general public sentiment. This distorts the nature of public debate emanating from assessments’.

**Box 3.2.**

**Ordinary people's views on the meaning of democracy, Mongolia**

Ts. 'To me, democracy is transparency. We have a lot of freedom. We say what we want to. Democracy in our country is copied very much from foreign countries. I am afraid that we may lose a lot of money by faulty promises and projects. I am afraid that through democracy we may lose our country to foreigners. We have good and bad things about democracy. What is stalling democracy are red tape, corruption and others. I believe that after democracy, my life has improved. When I became jobless, it has gone down.'

Sh. 'Democracy depends on what every person thinks about it. When I think of democracy, it is human rights and justice. Well, democracy is developing in Mongolia. But human rights are still violated and pressure on people is still there. Democracy is only beginning. In the future, it will be better.'

Kh. 'I understand democracy as freedom. And, locally, democracy is developing. Small things are also about democracy. We now have cell phones.'

Al. 'I don't know much about this. Democracy is the fact I am digging soil here.'

*Source: A sample focus group: Handbook of Democratic Governance Indicators (DGIs): Method, Process and Lessons Learned in Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar: UNDP Mongolia and Follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on New and Restored Democracies, 2006), p. 138.*

[125]

TASC, the Think Tank on Action for Social Change which conducted the democracy assessment in the 'two Irelands', used a major opinion poll to provide a series of findings on democratic issues that were published with great success to gain publicity for the launch of the research programme and to set a framework of popular opinion for the assessment itself. The assessors in Latvia commissioned an opinion poll to assess 'the dynamics of society democratization', covering such issues as minority rights protection, trust in public institutions, people's ability to influence the decisions of public bodies, and political and social activism. For an example of the results, see Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1. Trust in public institutions, Latvia**  
[Figures are percentages]

Television	66.7
Newspapers	59.9
The president	59.4
The church	59.0
The army	54.9
Local government	48.1
The police	42.5
The health care system	37.6
The trade unions	36.4
The courts	35.6
The government	25.0
The Saemia (Parliament)	22.0
The political parties	10.4

*Source:* Compiled from Advanced Social and Political Research Institute (ASPRI), *How Democratic is Latvia? Audit of Democracy* (Riga: University of Latvia, Commission of Strategic Analysis, 2005), pp. 225–8.

[126]

Assessment teams that were unable to afford their own opinion surveys tended to make use of surveys undertaken for other purposes, even though they had no role in framing the questions. However, one advantage of using existing surveys is that they can track changing trends over time. An example from the Netherlands assessment suggests that people's confidence in democracy can decline as well as increase (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Opinions about politics and social trust, the Netherlands  
[Figures are percentages of number of respondents]

Agree with the following statement	1992	1996	2000	2002	2004
Whatever the government does, it is of little use to daily life	23	21	–	–	36
People like me have no influence whatever on what the government does	46	46	52	49	54
I don't think that members of the House and ministers care much about what people like myself think	46	42	48	46	51
When I look at politicians' actions, I think they're arrogant	–	–	–	48	55
Members of the House devote too much attention to the interests of a few rich groups instead of the general interest	57	54	58	60	64
What we need are fewer laws and institutions and more courageous and dedicated leaders	38	30	33	-	61
In general, most people are trustworthy	–	56	47	52	53

Source: Netherlands Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, *The State of our Democracy 2006* (provisional translation) (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006), p. 139

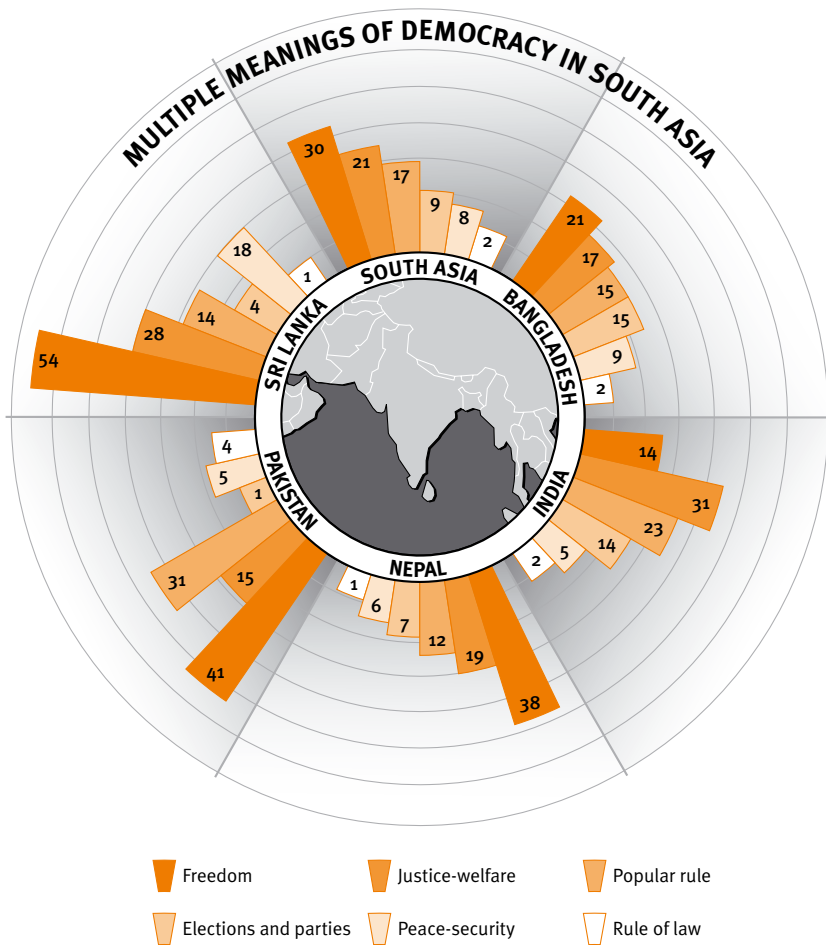
[127]

Democratic Audit in the UK has collaborated with a major trust to run a longitudinal series of opinion polls on democracy issues over 15 years. The organization takes part in drawing up the questions to be asked and uses the results in its assessments and one-off reports; at a time when electoral reform was an issue, it also persuaded the trust to commission major opinion polls to calculate the outcomes of, or 're-run', the 1992 and 1997 general elections under the alternative electoral systems under consideration, asking respondents to vote on dummy ballot papers. This exercise introduced a practical and measurable element into a public debate that would otherwise have been dominated by unprovable assertions. In Australia the audit has been able to have some questions directly related to democracy issues added to the Australian Election Study (AES), conducted at the time of each federal election. As in other countries, the AES has found that voters take a less relaxed view than political elites of what is acceptable in terms of public spending.

[128]

The use of opinion polling helps assessment teams to identify what people find important about democracy and to gauge how deeply a democratic culture runs in any country. The South Asian project provides a vivid example of this process. It found that ordinary citizens in South Asia have reworked the textbook ‘Western’ model of democracy to emphasize ‘the idea of people’s rule, political freedom, equality of outcomes and community rights’. Its report illustrates the findings across the five nations with a striking diagram (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Multiple meanings of democracy in South Asia  
 [Figures are percentages of responses]



Source: Lokniti: Programme for Comparative Democracy, *State of Democracy in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 26, reproduced by kind permission.

These findings make an interesting comparison with the results of a survey conducted for the assessment in the Republic of Ireland (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Perceptions of the most important feature of democracy, Ireland [Figures are percentages of respondents selecting what they think is the most important feature of democracy]

A more equal society	Strong and stable government	The rule of law	Voting for a government in elections	A free market economy	No opinion
38	29	16	10	5	2

Source: Clancy, Paula, Hughes, Ian and Brannick, T., *Public Perspectives on Democracy in Ireland* (Dublin: Democratic Audit Ireland Project, Think Tank for Action on Social Change (TASC), 2005), p. 2

## Democracy assessments: origins, funding and form

[129]

The origins, funding and form of assessments differ greatly. The pilot assessments funded by International IDEA were all university-based and most of the non-International IDEA assessments so far – nine individual country assessments and the South Asian regional assessment – have their roots in universities, but there have been wide variations in the funding and the process. The Australian National University won large grants from the Australian Research Council in 2001 and 2004 for its continuing assessment process; the Advanced Social and Political Research Institute (ASPRI) at the University of Latvia received state funding from Latvia’s Commission of Strategic Analysis for its full-scale democracy audit. At the other end of the scale, the assessment carried out by John Henderson at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand, was ‘under-resourced’ and had to confine itself to an ‘academic exercise’ with a single report-back seminar; and Edna Estefania Co, who leads the assessment

*There have been wide variations in the funding of the assessments and in the process. The pilot assessments were all university-based and most of the non-IDEA assessments so far have their roots in universities. Some have been well funded; some have been under-resourced. Some have been government-led and some have tied the government into the reform process. One was a classic ‘stocktaking exercise’ designed to establish what had been achieved by various donor-led democratization projects.*

process at the National College of Public Administration and Governance at the University of the Philippines, is carrying out ad hoc assessments section by section, governed by local priorities and the changing agendas of donor organizations. According to Edna Co, ‘Donor agendas ebb and flow and it’s quite problematic for carrying out a full programme, as some parts of the framework are politically sensitive. For example, civilian control of the military is a bit too sensitive, and so is the section on democracy beyond the state because USAID, the biggest donor, is very wary on this subject’. Three assessments – in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland and the UK – sprang from civil society, the first two of them funded by international donor organizations, and the third by two UK charitable trusts.

[130]

The assessments in the Netherlands and Mongolia were government-led, although the Dutch assessment was funded wholly by the government, whereas the UNDP’s Oslo Governance Centre provided technical assistance and various international donors supplied the funds for the Mongolian exercise. Originally, it was felt that state-led assessments were liable to be biased towards the executive and contravened a golden rule that all assessments should be citizen-led. But the assessments in Mongolia, the Netherlands and Latvia (which was in a sense state-sponsored) seem to have been carried out without inappropriate intervention. Indeed, as Todd Landman, who took part in the Mongolian assessment, reports, ‘the Mongolian experience was an eye-opener because the government was very open to all sorts of information, analysis and critical comments and reflections from civil society, human rights bodies and international donors’. The experience has also tied the government into the reform process. The Latvian team gained further legitimacy for their work as it became possible to argue abroad, ‘You see, this country is democratic because they have this critical report of themselves’. (In the same way, Edna Co is able to use the assessment framework in a politically sensitive nation because it is ‘an internationally recognized methodology’.) In the Netherlands, Maarten Prinsen experienced no constraints on the assessment – ‘I am a civil servant for more than 21 years, so I know how it works in government’ – and indeed ministers and his department shared in highlighting aspects of the report and disseminating its findings widely.

[131]

The assessments that came about independently of IDEA seem generally to have been undertaken out of a perceived need to ‘take stock’ of the country’s responses to in-country needs and, on occasion, to a crisis. The most dramatic of these was probably the democracy assessment undertaken by the government in the Netherlands. It was provoked by the conjunction of two political murders – of the film-

maker Theo van Gogh and the politician Pim Fortuyn – by radicals, threats against other opinion leaders and politicians, major electoral shifts from the major to smaller political parties, and the rejection of the EU constitution in a referendum in 2005. Maarten Prinsen, the senior state official who took the initiative, explains that ‘There was a big difference between the politicians and the thoughts of the people. All these things were the basis of the decision to have a comprehensive overview of what’s happening in our democracy in the Netherlands’.

[132]

The one-year assessment process in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a classic ‘stocktaking exercise’ designed to establish what had been achieved by various donor-led democratization projects in the ten years after the end of the war. The assessment, funded by the Open Society Forum (OSF), had three main objectives: to identify the strengths and weaknesses of democratic practice in the country; to identify priorities for reform; and to provoke public debate on how effective Bosnian democracy was. The Australian assessment grew out of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the nation’s federation. Marian Sawer, leader of the assessment, said:

There was a lot of celebration around our democratic heritage – the fact that we are one of the oldest democracies in the world, the first country to vote itself into existence, the first country in which women could both vote and stand for Parliament. But it was quite clear that it was time we took a really hard look at ourselves; we needed to problematise a lot of our political practices that departed a long way from democratic principles ... basically, we had to de-stabilise the celebration that was going on and get people to talk seriously about what was defective in our democracy.

[133]

In the Irish case, TASC’s major donor, Atlantic Philanthropies, was coincidentally initiating a major programme on human rights that aimed to bring about concrete and sustainable social change in Ireland (both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) within a relatively short time frame of 15 years or so. TASC saw the assessment as an opportunity to create benchmarks against which it could measure the achievement of the programme objectives. For TASC itself, taking on the challenge was a way of demonstrating and asserting the contribution that NGOs could make in a polity with few such independent bodies.

[134]

Democratic Audit in the UK was inspired by the damage that the repressive policies of the Thatcher governments were believed to be do-

ing to political freedom and by concern about the absence of effective checks and balances on government power; the Liberal Democrat peer, Lord (Trevor) Smith, founder of the audit, said that the charitable trust that set it up took the view that ‘the free-market government was carrying out audits of practically everything else, we thought that we should “audit” our democracy itself’.

## Coordinating the assessments

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There have been as many differing arrangements for carrying out assessments as there have been projects. However, the breadth of the investigations necessary to conduct full assessments has generally obliged the projects to involve a wide range of contributors. The norm seems to be that projects generally have a small core of people who coordinate the research and draft reports together with a wider set of experts, who have often been recruited from outside the institution carrying out the assessment and who usually seem to work independently of each other. For example, the Democratic Audit of Australia currently has a core team of seven people, but draws heavily on the academic institutions of Australia for its great range of discussion papers and ‘focused audit’ reports. The comparative dimension is strengthened by contributions from experts in Canada, New Zealand and the USA on the regulation of political finance and from Professor Olof Petersson in Sweden on the regulation of opinion polls.

*The breadth of the investigations needed for full assessments has generally obliged the projects to involve a wide range of contributors. Projects generally have a small core of people who coordinate the research and draft reports together with a wider set of experts, often recruited from outside the institution carrying out the assessment and usually working independently of each other.*

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For its most recent assessment of democracy in the UK in 2001, Democratic Audit had a small core team of two editors and two researchers, drawing together contributions from 26 academics, journalists, lawyers and interest group experts (some of whom contributed voluntarily). The Latvian project worked through a single coordinator, with teams of two people each jointly investigating the 14 sections of the original assessment framework. In all 25 people contributed to the assessment, from 12 different institutions, including the European Parliament. Mongolia’s democracy assessment was undertaken by a team of eight social science researchers housed by the Institute of Philosophy, Sociol-

ogy and Law at the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, generally viewed as leading experts in their academic fields. Each researcher was assigned an area of responsibility to analyse relevant international and national research documents, official reports and data published by organizations as part of their responsibilities. The Bosnian assessment, a one-year exercise, involved 16 researchers and eight other team members. They decided that they would carry out the assessment ‘step by step’ rather than complete the full 14 sections in one go. The Irish audit had a core team of four writers/editors and three researchers with 15 contributors and drew on academic and civil society partnerships with, for example, the National Women’s Council of Ireland (who ran a gender check) and Amnesty International (Ireland) on human rights. TASC also held a series of expert round tables to evaluate the draft findings of each section. The whole enterprise was preceded by an independent and high-level Irish Commission which held public hearings across the island and consulted widely in Ireland and Northern Ireland; after reporting and making recommendations in 2005, members of the Commission continued to act as a Standing Advisory Committee to the audit. Dino Djipa, who, as research director of Prism, the social research company hired by the OSF, conducted the Bosnian survey, found that the framework presented ‘a challenge of capacity’ in terms of the breadth of expertise required; the ability of researchers to understand and implement the methodology; their diversity and the varying depths of their commitment and analyses; their writing styles; and the task of coordinating their work. ‘The important message as far as the OSF is concerned, is that the internal and external capacity for such a demanding project should have been evaluated with more caution and less enthusiasm.’ Yet he also recorded that various authorities had found the assessment to be a ‘cornerstone’ for future assessment, ‘precious and instructive’ and valuable for training purposes (‘although reading it will give you a systematic sweat’).

*The framework in some cases has presented a challenge of capacity in terms of the breadth of expertise required, researchers’ ability to understand and implement the methodology, and the task of coordinating their work. The internal and external capacity for such a demanding project should be carefully evaluated.*

[137]

Maarten Prinsen described graphically how the Dutch assessment was conducted:

At the ministry, we did it ourselves, we formed a small team of some trainees, a few students, and a left-over civil servant who had nothing else to do and applied to join. We used NGOs, especially scientific institutions, who collect data on politics, political parties, etc, in the Netherlands, and some government bodies relevant to some subjects. In the end, especially in the end, a lot of civil servants gave inputs on state of our legislation and implementation. For example, I got a set of 35 comments by our secret service. All read, of course, the chapter of human rights ... Afterwards we finalised our report, we didn't have a draft with a workshop because the workshop would be too big because the assessment covers such a large field, so many subjects, and there wouldn't be enough time to discuss it all. So we finalised the report after a few internal debates with a few colleagues and gave it to our two ministers at that time, the Minister of the Interior and the Special Minister for Government Reform. They highlighted eight topics (see Box 3.3).

### Box 3.3.

#### Announcing the State of Our Democracy report in the Netherlands

'Mr Atzco Nicolai and Mr Johan Remkes initiated a nationwide debate concerning the quality of democracy in the Netherlands. This debate will be based on the report "The State of our Democracy 2006" ... The report makes it clear that in general the democratic values in the Netherlands are well kept. Also according to international standards the quality of our democracy stands firmly ... However, the ministers Nicolai and Remkes also indicated eight weak points for a policy agenda, which they consider to be "untamed" problems:

- Social cohesion and integration of the "new Dutch"
- Free expression of (political) opinion in danger?
- The uncertain role of political parties
- Displacement of political arenas: independent governing bodies, quangos, public office holders and informal links not liable to democratic control
- Political and administrative complexity
- "Drama democracy" and policy accumulation
- Fitting European decision making into Dutch democracy
- Decreasing confidence in politicians.

Concerning these points the ministers want to stimulate and/or initiate debate in the Dutch society. To this aim the ministers pose the question whether the state of the Dutch democracy has been adequately described in the 2006 report, and whether the above mentioned points of concern require the development of new policies.'

Source: Netherlands Ministry of the Interior, Press release, 11 December 2006

[138]

The choice of comparators can contribute to the workload – sometimes unavoidably, as in the case of Australia. As Australia is a federal state, the Australian Democratic Audit has been obliged to conduct a comparative assessment across nine internal jurisdictions, looking for best (and worst) practice in all areas, from freedom of information to the conduct of Parliament and the standards of electoral administration. It also tracks processes whereby, as Marian Sawer points out, public decision making has been moving from parliaments and public debates into intergovernmental forums where decisions take place behind closed doors. The Australian audit treats Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom as ‘comparator democracies’, taking advantage of the audits that have already taken place in these countries and of good practice where it is emerging. The Irish audit was initially designed to measure democracy and human rights across a still-divided

**Box 3.4.**  
**Party systems and social diversities in South Asia**

“The electoral system in South Asia was not designed to address the issue of diversities. Each of the countries in the region, in part because of their common history as part of the British empire, adopted a parliamentary form of government with a simple plurality (first past the post) system of elections, though Sri Lanka subsequently shifted to a presidential system with proportional representation in elections, a system otherwise considered more suitable to represent diversities. What is significant is that neither the FPTP nor the PR systems produced the expected outcomes, either a two-party system in the former or a multi-party system in the latter. Instead electoral coalitions have come up in which dominant parties need the support of a number of smaller parties to secure a majority. Party systems in the region have found a way to address both regional and social diversities ...

With region, religion, caste and ethnicity constituting the dominant factors defining the social base, South Asia not only seems to have entered a phase of the ethnicisation of politics with each party claiming sectional support, but has also necessitated the emergence of coalition politics. While the emergence of ethnicity based parties appears to redefine ideologies and marginalise policy issues from the electoral arena, they have no doubt brought parties closer to popular aspirations and made it easy for citizens to identify with political parties. Similarly, while the rise of coalition politics has brought greater instability, it has also provided a mechanism for reconciling the competing claims of parties that represent different social constituencies.’

*Source:* Lokniti: Programme for Comparative Democracy (2008) *State of Democracy in South Asia* (New Delhi: OUP), pp. 82-3

Ireland, both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland. The idea was that a parallel assessment might contribute to rapprochement between the two polities on the island and enhance democracy in both by identifying ‘mutual lessons’ and possible common democracy-related projects. The original intention was to integrate the two assessments in the final report(s), but constraints of time and resources made this impossible. However, the exercise was conducted in the same way using similar sources and approaches, and two distinct reports provide a wealth of comparable raw data. The South Asian project also, of course, has a built-in comparative framework, in terms of both popular and elite opinion and the subjective assessment process. This has enabled the assessors to identify common features between the countries as well as significant differences.

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The UK audit uses data and information from EU member states and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries as comparators, mostly on economic and social conditions (for a special report on economic and social rights), but also for example on freedom of information regimes and counter-terrorism measures. Comparative work puts a strain on the research resources of assessment teams where it is not available in appropriate form from secondary sources. A degree of caution is needed in the use of quantitative international data as benchmarks since they frequently embody qualitative assumptions and practices that cast poorer countries in particular in a negative light: for example, the Human Development Index weights economic growth unduly for such nations, and Transparency International’s corruption index rests too heavily on the perceptions of small samples of Western business executives.

### Putting the democratic messages across

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There is considerable variety in the balance of the actual outputs between full assessments, special reports, partial audits and monitoring or follow-up reports, and in the ways in which they are published and disseminated. Most of the projects published a single volume reporting on a full assessment, with the South Asian team also publishing separate country reports and considering plans to publish the case studies and ‘dialogues’ separately. Publishing full assessments in one book brings problems. As Dino Djipa and others have said, there is a ‘challenge of awareness’ because they are ‘complex and extensive documents that really don’t appeal to the wider public’. In Bosnia, he says, ‘it was perceived that the notion of democracy is taken really for granted, too abstract, too far from the wider public immediate concerns’. Maarten Prinsen agrees. The Dutch report was published

on the Internet and as a book, with a press release, but he felt that it dealt with ‘so many different aspects of democracy, it was too much for journalists to take up, even a focus on eight points was too much’. Stuart Weir, from the UK, says that it is inevitably difficult for commentators and the media fully to grasp the findings of assessments that deal with such broad and interconnected issues regarding the quality of their democracy – especially as the very idea of democracy is generally contested. Also full assessments tend to produce very long books. However, he feels that it is important to try to conduct full assessments every four or five years because the longitudinal perspective makes major questions and trends more visible over time and strengthens the case for reforms. Democratic Audit has conducted three major audits – the first on political freedom and civil and political rights, the second on political power and democratic control, the third a full 14-section audit – and now plans a ‘monitoring audit’ (six years after the last) to assess progress on key questions as political power in the UK shifts. Both the OSF in Bosnia and the Latvian team have plans for a full follow-up assessment in two to four years’ time, and the Latvians are now preparing a monitoring report because ‘events in Latvia are going in an interesting direction’, as Juris Rozenvalds said. ‘The report will have bullet points, to show where democracy is going up, where it is going down, and so on, accessible to the broad public.’

*There is considerable variety in the actual outputs, between full assessments, special reports, partial audits and monitoring or follow-up reports, and in the ways in which they are published and disseminated. Most of the projects have published a single volume reporting on a full assessment, but these do not appeal to the wider public and it is difficult for commentators and the media fully to grasp the findings of assessments that deal with such broad and interconnected issues. Different methods have been used to make the results of the comprehensive assessments more digestible. Specialist, focused reports may have more impact than the full audit.*

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Different methods have been used to make the results of the comprehensive assessments more digestible for those who find a large book unmanageable. For the Mongolian assessment, five national experts were selected to ‘score’ the assessment findings on a five-point scale from 5 (most democratic) to 1 (least democratic), and the results were published together in tabular form (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4. Expert indicator scores for citizenship, law and rights, Mongolia

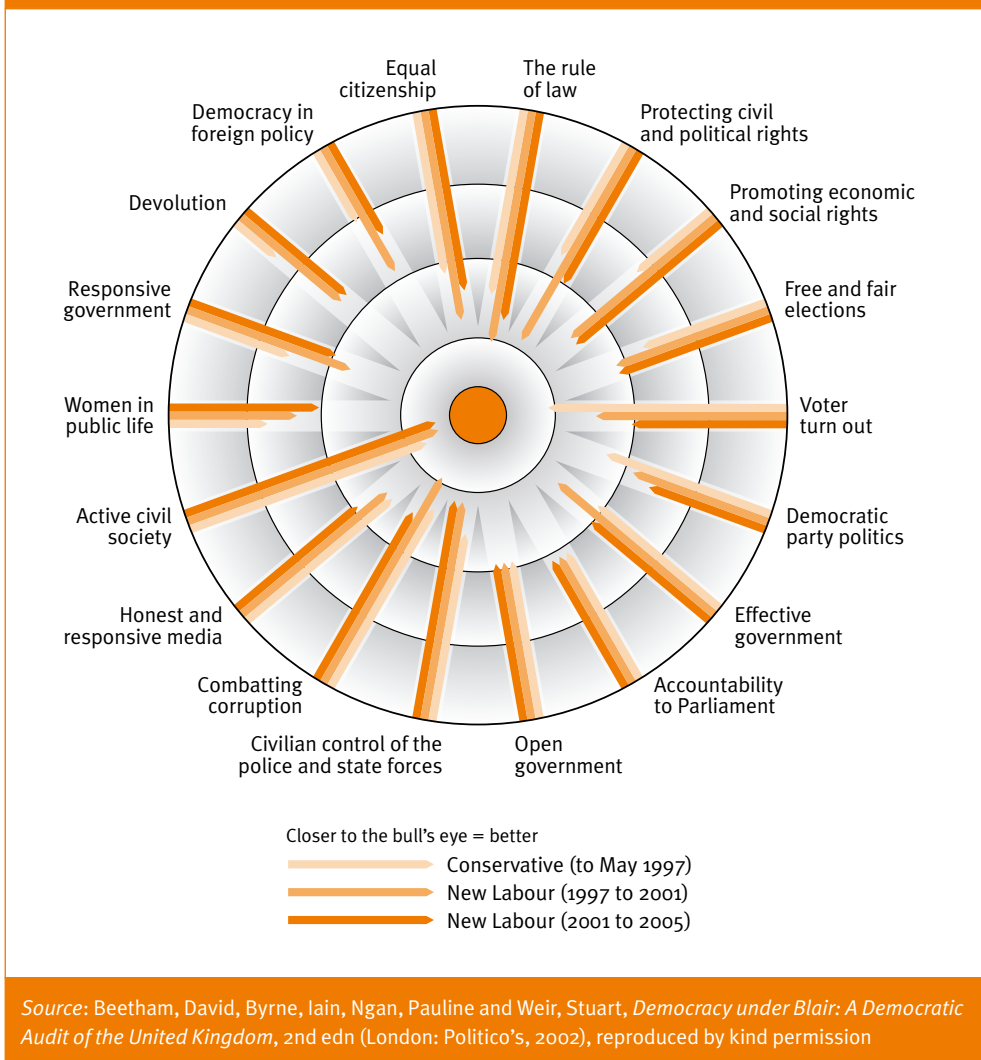
Core indicators	Average score by Mongolian experts
<i>Nationhood and citizenship</i> Is there public agreement on a common citizenship without discrimination?	4.0
<i>Rule of law and access to justice</i> Are state and society consistently subject to the law?	3.0
<i>Civil and political rights</i> Are civil and political rights equally guaranteed for all?	2.2
<i>Economic and social rights</i> Are economic and social rights equally guaranteed for all?	2.6
<b>Average score for core indicators</b>	<b>2.95</b>
<b>Satellite indicators</b>	
To what extent is equality in civil and socio-economic rights secured for migrants?	2.6
To what extent do effects of social traditions and personal interests support the process of ensuring equality of rights?	2.4
<b>Average score for core and satellite indicators</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<i>Source: Handbook of Democratic Governance Indicators (DGIs): Method, Process and Lessons Learned in Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar: UNDP Mongolia and Follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on New and Restored Democracies, 2006), p. 62</i>	

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At the end of each of the 14 sections or chapters of the Latvian assessment a similar table was constructed for each question, the results being marked on a scale from 'very good' to 'good', 'satisfactory', 'poor' and 'very poor'. There then followed a brief item on the 'best feature' for that section, then the 'most serious problem' and finally a 'suggested improvement'. Taken together, these provide a quick snapshot of the democratic condition in the country. In the latest UK audit, the findings from each section were summarized together at the end of the book in bullet-point form, and these were in turn edited for publication as a separate pamphlet. An interesting innovation for this pamphlet was the construction of a bull's-eye figure, to show at a

glance a comparison of democratic progress between each section, and over time, between successive audits (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2. The UK DA target



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Another strategy is to produce specialist reports as stepping stones towards a complete assessment. Marian Sawer, from Australia, says that their focused reports have more impact than their full audit 'because it is easier for people to get their minds around the focused audits'. She reports that the influence of the reports has been felt particularly in areas such as electoral administration, political funding and women's equality.

**Box 3.5.**  
**How well does Australian democracy serve Australian women?**

The aim of this focused audit has been to consider the extent to which Australian democracy has promoted the equality of men and women, or gender equality for short. Gender equality is understood here as a complex goal that requires governments to address both equality of opportunities and sex-based differences. The diversity of Australian women's lives adds further complexity, necessitating that a gender-equal democracy must discriminate neither against nor between women . . .

[In addressing these principles] the report considers a number of key issues in the provision of gender equality, specifically:

- the legislative framework that is intended to eliminate discrimination against women;
- the history and current functioning of the policy machinery that was developed in order to monitor the impact of public policy on women;
- the level of representation of women in Australia's parliaments, on public sector boards, in local government and in the judiciary; and
- the degree to which women's non-governmental organizations are consulted with, have access to, and are supported in their relationships with government . . .

On the whole, the picture that emerges from this assessment is not positive. Whereas Australia was once a leader in the global struggle for gender equality, the report makes clear that in recent years Australia has resiled from this commitment and many of the achievements of an earlier period have now been undone. This is most obviously true with regard to the dismantling of women's policy machinery and the silencing of the women's non-governmental sector. While the body of legislation designed to protect women from discrimination remains substantially intact, it is evident that on its own the legislative framework is inadequate to ensure a substantial political equality between women and men measured against the indicators outlined above.

*Source: Maddison, Sarah and Partridge, Emma, How Well does Australian Democracy Serve Australian Women? (Canberra: Australian National University, Democratic Audit of Australia, 2007), pp. xiii–xiv*

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Democratic Audit in the UK also publishes 'focused reports' on particular issues, such as the accountability of quasi-governmental bodies, electoral reform, the conduct of foreign policy and far-right political parties, partly to raise awareness about these issues and the audit's work in general, partly as research exercises that can later feed into full audits. Stuart Weir says, 'The report on quasi-governmental bodies, which are very numerous and influential in the UK and have major executive and public service functions, had a major impact in

the media and with the public, and led to a significant reassessment by government of their role and accountability. In fact, both government and parliamentary committees have used our methodology for assessing the accountability and openness of these essentially non-democratic agencies'. Other reports have also had a very real impact, such as a recent report assessing Britain's anti-terrorist legislation from the standpoint of human rights and its impact on community relations (see Box 3.6).

**Box 3.6.**

Terrorism, community and human rights

We have concentrated on government laws and practice that diminish or remove protections of the liberty of the individual and the right to fair trial. But the restrictions on freedom of speech and association can have a “chilling” effect on individuals as they watch their words or change their behaviour to avoid suspicion, and on society at large as they diminish the space for democratic debate around issues that are best publicly resolved. ... What is likely is that debates within the Muslim communities that need to be had will be constrained, as a Bangladeshi woman in one of our focus groups describes, while the more malevolent “preachers of hate” will retreat out of sight and their views will become more difficult to challenge. At the same time, necessary engagement between the majority and minority communities will also be constrained and the normal processes of integration will be slowed or narrowed ...

As we have argued throughout this report, a continued commitment to the rule of law and respect for human rights is integral to a successful counter-terrorism strategy. We can only defend the democratic and open way of life if we demonstrate a continuing commitment to its values and practice in the way we actually combat terrorism.

*Source: Blick, Andrew, Choudhury, Tufyal and Weir, Stuart, The Rules of the Game: Terrorism, Community and Human Rights (York: Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, 2006), pp. 66–7*

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The Philippines project has adopted the framework as a ‘permanent monitoring tool’, but for the reasons explained above Edna Co who leads it has been obliged to carry out assessments of sections of the framework instead of a full assessment. So far she and colleagues have completed a report on free and fair elections and the democratic role of political parties, funded and published by the German Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung, a report on economic and social rights funded by Christian Aid and a report on political corruption. The reports have been very timely and apt in terms of the political and democratic cir-

cumstances in the Philippines and it is a tribute to Edna's persistence that so much has been achieved.

### Box 3.7.

#### The challenge of corruption in the Philippines

Much leeway in the use of discretion and authority effectively holds the state capture to narrow interests, as happened during Marcos' authoritarian rule, and in large scale graft and corruption in the post-Marcos era. The enforcement of rules has been uneven and arbitrary, and centred on personalities. A transactional culture of fixing the rules, of negotiating around them and skirting them has developed. Such shortcuts inform citizens in their own dealings with the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures.....

The efforts to curb corruption are visible in the laws, executive orders and anti-corruption bodies, of which there are many in the Philippines. However, the continuing challenge is for these mechanisms to be seriously enforced and executed. The other acute concern is the extent to which citizens and officials are committed to institutionalizing the rules so that they become part of the social norms. And, finally, Filipinos look up to their leaders as exemplars of integrity and have a hard time of it finding them. Embedding rules into social norms and institutions, and showing leadership by example are strategic challenges that society has to work on, even without support from external donors. Donors, including development banks, pour aid into the creation of strategies and mechanisms to battle corruption. However, unless anti-corruption projects are truly owned by the Filipino people and an anti-corruption culture develops, there is little hope of sustaining these remedial strategies.

*Source: Lim, Millard, Jayme-Lao, Maria, Juan, Lilibeth and Co, Edna, Philippine Democracy Assessment: Minimizing Corruption (Manila: Ateneo University Press, 2007), pp. 175–6*

## Dissemination

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The most high-profile exercise in dissemination has probably been that in the Netherlands, where the audit had considerable government backing in terms of both political will and resources. After an internal review, the report was handed over to two ministers – the minister for the interior and the special minister for government reform – who highlighted eight topics and drafted a side letter to the report. The report was then published, with a press release, in book form and on the Internet and was taken up by the large newspapers. Copies were distributed not only to the media but also to NGOs (250 of them), government bodies and other interested parties. The queen of the Netherlands then happened to choose one of the eight topics –

violence and threats against politicians and opinion leaders – in her Christmas address on television to the Dutch public. Her intervention created a major media debate around the topic. The government organized a series of public debates on the report with members of the general public, and not with experts, on freedom of speech, government structures, the media and politics, citizenship and trust. ‘The debate on citizenship and integration was the most popular of all’, says Maarten Prinsen. ‘No minister attended but I was there with a few colleagues and more than 200 people came, also people with headscarves.’ The government finally organized a big conference including more than 550 people, with two ministers present, and then published a small book on the future of Dutch democracy.

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Other assessment teams have had to proceed with far fewer resources, but the pattern has been at least to publish a report in book form and electronically on a website, to release the findings to the press and to organize a public presentation or debate, sometimes – as in Ireland and the United Kingdom – inviting well-known ministers, politicians, public officials and experts to take part and attract a wider audience. The UK-based Democratic Audit now also publishes popular and eye-catching leaflets, summarizing the main findings, which are also posted on the audit’s website and sent to politicians and other opinion leaders by email.

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There are several success stories. Five hundred copies of the Latvian report were published in Latvian and sold out, a considerable achievement in a small country. The Latvian team plan to publish the report shortly in English and it has also been published on the Internet. To emphasize the importance of democracy to Latvia, ‘at least one copy was sent to every Latvian embassy outside the country’. The audit team also engaged in debates with almost every faction in Parliament and with the political and academic elite. As Marian Sawyer has said, focused reports can gain considerable public attention. For example, the Australian audit published a report on how well Australian democracy was serving women. More than 300 people attended its launch in Canberra – ‘which is a lot of people for Canberra’ – and it won a great deal of media coverage and attention. In Mongolia, 500 copies of the report in Mongolian and 1,000 copies (of a shorter version) in English were published in addition to 3,000 brochures and other materials that were distributed to stakeholders across Mongolia. This was accompanied by a follow-up international conference, attended by representatives of 12 countries and 23 international organizations, and other events throughout the country to publicize the findings.

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Many teams are able to maintain websites to give longer life to their findings. The website of the Australian audit is a very well organized archive of all their reports and discussion papers, along with news and reports on democratic events in comparator nations. All the reports and papers are downloadable as well as being available in print form. The audit draws attention to new reports and papers and democratic developments through a large email network that includes many journalists and politicians. In Bosnia, the OSF has set up a website, the Pulse of Democracy, 'to give the opportunity to a lot of people – not only the researchers – to talk about issues of democracy', says Dino Djipa. 'Basically, they have taken five different topics addressed in the assessment and have invited different people to write short articles around them. They want to use the website to initiate a wider discussion.' Similarly, Democratic Audit is going into partnership with OpenDemocracy, a website on global democratic and human rights issues, to run a blog focused on the UK where the audit will publish instalments of the forthcoming audit of the UK for people to comment on before the report is finalized.

*Many assessment teams are able to maintain websites to give longer life to their findings.*

## Engaging the public

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These efforts to disseminate the findings of the assessments are of course designed to try to engage the general public as well as the country's political class in public debate on how to improve a country's democracy. It seems that the government-led assessment in the Netherlands came very close to achieving this kind of breakthrough. The dramatic political murders of two well-known public figures and the popular rejection of the EU constitution in a referendum raised consciousness among the people, as well as inspiring the assessment, and thus made media coverage and public debate more likely. Most assessment teams have neither the resources and public standing of the Dutch Government nor the 'benefit' of the specific circumstances that made the assessment particularly salient and relevant.

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The other assessment teams have given much thought to the questions of how to make the assessments relevant to the everyday concerns of

the people and how to achieve a wider public debate. The teams in South Asia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina were especially preoccupied about the gap between expert assessment and popular experience. Dino Djipa, from Bosnia and Herzegovina, explains the central difficulty that the OSF assessment there faced. The Bosnian assessment team had three objectives – to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their democracy; to identify priorities for reform; and to provoke public debate on how effective democracy was in practice. The assessment won praise for its quality from the expert community, but on the third objective, Dino Djipa says they achieved only partial success:

Such complex and extensive assessment really doesn't appeal to the wider public. It was perceived that the notion of democracy is taken really for granted and too abstract; and that the wider public immediate concerns are really somehow irrelevant to democracy. People are really concerned about their economic situation, unemployment, low salaries, and these kinds of things; and the key challenge is how to explain to them to what degree these problems are connected with the way democracy works. And there is a problem of also the political culture, or the lack of political culture or tradition of democracy in the country.

In his view, the assessment process had to engage more deeply with the concerns and experience of ordinary people if there were to be a genuine breakthrough to a wider debate about the quality of a country's democracy. As in all the assessments, the OSF engaged experts for the assessment in Bosnia and Herzegovina – inevitably, given the complexity of the issues involved. But for Dino Djipa, this raised problems about the principle of 'local ownership'.

How was the notion of local ownership perceived in terms of its relation to citizens? To what degree are we really citizens? In the context of this assessment, it means a completely different thing: to what degree did ordinary citizens contribute to this whole assessment; in a way what did we learn from them how they see how democracy works in Bosnia Herzegovina? Because most of this analysis is based really on the work of the experts in the different fields. Okay, for example, they have addressed the issue of reviewing the results of different public opinion polls, let's say, conducted by different organisations about different issues. But there was no effort to systematically work with the citizens, to learn from them what they really experience and how they really see some of these problems.

The media did not help to bridge the gap. They were obsessed by numbers and not by the analysis. ‘They were mostly interested in the results of the survey of experts we conducted using this questionnaire, and very nice coloured charts used in the presentation.’

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In Ireland, TASC also found that its 650-page report was too rich and dense to encourage people to engage with its findings. It sent copies to the 166 new members of Parliament in June 2007, and to civil servants and others, but feared that they would go onto shelves and stay there. However, TASC learned that many people who did make the effort to engage with the material found it rewarding and it is now to promote the report as a valuable desktop reference book for use by politicians, civil servants, journalists and civil society. It has commissioned a short brochure for people active in public policy issues who may not be interested in democracy as such, but who could benefit from the report’s data, analysis and judgements on matters of concern to them. The 166 members of Parliament will get a second chance to make use of the audit report.

*Assessment teams have given much thought to the question of how to make the assessments relevant to the everyday concerns of the people, achieve a wider public debate, and bridge the gap between expert assessment and popular experience.*

## Engaging *with* the public

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An equal share in social and economic provision is clearly one of the principal benefits that people expect from democracy, but it is something that our assessments tend to deal with at an analytical and aggregate level rather than at an experiential and individual level. Peter deSouza suggests that democracy assessments can measure the ‘transaction costs’ of citizens’ experience of claiming benefits or services from the state more fully. As he stated at a workshop,

The democratic state, of all states is under an obligation to recognise the equal claims of all citizens. This means that it must make every effort to have in place institutions and policies that meet the needs of its citizens equally. It must not

discriminate or favour but must respond to the claims made on it in terms of the merit of those claims. We know in practice, however, that this is an ideal picture of the democratic state and that the actual state that we face and meet everyday is not remotely like this. It has deficits, distortions and deviations. The citizen has to be prepared to expend some costs when transacting with the state. In a democratic state such costs are supposed to be lower as compared to the transaction costs incurred in non-democratic states.

If these 'transaction costs' were to be measured alongside other aspects of democratic performance, then the assessments would be engaging with matters of real significance to people generally, and doing so could make the significance of democracy to everyday lives more evident and real to people. In addition to seeking to engage people with their evaluation of the quality of their democracy, assessors might also engage more fully *with* people if they reported on the popular experience of what their democracy actually delivers or does not deliver to them. In this way, democracy assessment must include and try to capture the experiences of the citizen of democracy at the everyday level as well as in more macro 'performance' terms.

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Peter deSouza identifies five areas at least where the citizen has to enter into transactions with the state:

- (1) *the protection of the citizen's life and liberty*, where people must deal with agencies such as the police and the army;
- (2) *the redress of wrongs*, where people must engage with bureaucracy and the courts;
- (3) *the provision of documentation*, such as voter identity cards, ration cards and so on, which are central to establishing citizenship and hence rights;
- (4) *regulation*, where the state's function is to permit or to proscribe either individual or collective activity such as changes to dwellings, zoning and so on, for the common good; and
- (5) *the provision of welfare and development*, including services such as health, education, water and electricity that are essential for people's well-being.

We can add to or subtract from this list, as deSouza says. The search questions, of course, should lead assessors to analyse all these areas of state responsibility in a democracy, but the point is to go further and to measure the 'costs' for citizens in domains where they have to enter

into a transaction with the state to get what is a just entitlement that the state either has promised or is duty bound to provide. But what actually happens when people make a claim on the state (e.g. for a pension or medical care in a government hospital, or filing a police complaint) or when the state engages with them (e.g. investigating or charging people for possible criminal or terrorist activity, or enrolling them for military service)? Would people rather internalize a cost than make a claim on the state? What frustrations lie in store? Will public servants demand a bribe or public services take a damagingly long time to provide a legitimate entitlement? Even in so-called 'developed democracies', the idea of measuring transaction costs remains relevant (see e.g. Thakur 2007).

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Peter deSouza therefore suggests that democracies can be assessed more deeply by measuring the transaction costs to the citizen. A set of transaction costs could be aggregated; an index of such costs may perhaps be assembled using people's perceptions of the ease or difficulty of getting legitimate claims attended to. The concept could take into account the citizen's frustration with the state or could be developed to allow for interstate comparison. The literature on 'transaction costs' in public choice economics could perhaps be imported into our debates on democracy measurement. In Peter deSouza's view, transaction costs are a better measure of democracy than those that focus on institutions, such as those of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) and Freedom House; these, he says, 'have no place for citizen experiences since they are made often from some Archimedean vantage point that is too sanitised and perhaps too elite'.

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The innovative application of the International IDEA assessment methodology in Mongolia, South Asia and Australia, among other countries, has moved in the direction of measuring citizens' experiences of democracy in addition to formal institutional performance. 'Focused audits' on the experience of migrants in Australia and case studies on 'inconvenient facts' such as the perpetuation of social exclusion through elementary education in India (undertaken as part of the South Asian assessment) are exemplary in this regard. This has had the effect of increasing stakeholder involvement and ownership in the assessment exercise; and it has also focused national and local attention on the findings and proved useful in jump-starting debates about reform. It is hoped that the assessment methodology will continue to generate this widespread engagement with the processes of democracy.

## The lessons are clear

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Consideration of the many different experiences with democracy assessment examined in this part of the guide demonstrates a clear set of interrelated lessons that ought to be of significance to future democracy assessments around the world.

- ▶ First, it is important to recognize the diversity of the democratic stories that emerge from specific assessments while continuing to work within the democracy assessment framework.
- ▶ Second, assessment teams need to work creatively with available funding and capacity on the ground in ways that allow a democracy assessment to move forward.
- ▶ Third, teams should develop systems for national coordination of the assessment even though different responsibilities may be carried out by a diverse set of stakeholders.
- ▶ Fourth, coordination does not stop with the assessment itself but must be translated into the overall ‘house language’ of the process and presented in ways that get the democratic message across to the full range of potential audiences.
- ▶ Fifth, the message can be broadcast through a variety of different forms of dissemination, as the experiences in this section of the guide have shown.

Above all, democracy is about people being in control of the decisions and decision makers that affect their lives. Thus, any democracy assessment must both *engage* the public and engage *with* the public in ways that capture their imagination for a better life and their aspirations for what a high-quality democracy can deliver.