



**Wales Centre for Public Policy**  
**Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru**

# **Defining, Measuring, and Monitoring Democratic Health in Wales**

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# Summary

- This report provides a comprehensive analysis of democratic health, focusing on global perspectives and their implications for Wales. It acknowledges that concerns about democratic health are prevalent worldwide.
- In Wales, the challenges to democratic health have historically revolved around low electoral registration, low voter turnout, and a general lack of political awareness among the population. More recently, there are growing fears of "democratic backsliding", where democratic standards gradually decline over time.
- The report identifies criteria for a healthy democracy, including widespread citizen engagement and participation; fair elections, and strong civil rights; reasoned and constructive political deliberation; political, social, and economic equality; responsive governance; and open access to accurate information.
- Potential sources of measurement of these criteria include official statistics, public opinion surveys, and expert analysis, as well as more specific indicators.
- There are various projects that provide quantitative measures of democratic health, although no existing work focuses specifically on Wales.
- The report identifies potential ways to monitor democratic health in Wales, such as incorporating measures into existing surveys, commissioning expert analysis, and developing bespoke measurement tools.
- One option is to include Wales in existing expert-coded international projects. Alternatively, the Welsh Government can develop its own assessment framework based on international indicators and methodologies.
- While existing surveys like the Wellbeing of Wales national indicators and the Welsh Election Study can provide valuable data, it is important to consistently include these measures in future surveys to monitor democratic health over time.

# Introduction

This report synthesises how democratic health is defined, measured and monitored around the world, with a specific focus on how this learning could be applied in Wales. It responds to the Programme for Government commitment to reduce the ‘democratic deficit.’

Concerns over democratic health are a global phenomenon, often triggered by crises or events that result in public pressure for reform. In Wales (and the wider UK), however, issues with democratic health have long been about low electoral registration and turnout and a general lack of political awareness and understanding among the population. More recently, there have also been fears that the UK is engaged in ‘democratic backsliding,’ a gradual process where states become less democratic over time (Russell, Renwick and James, 2022).

A recent Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA) roundtable noted that a majority of people in Wales “don’t feel able to influence decisions about their locality, and that this amounts to a major crisis for our democracy” (Moore, 2023: 6). The roundtable concluded that there was a need for a set of metrics that monitor a range of behaviours and attitudes. Our report aims to improve understanding of the benchmarks for a healthy democracy, to provide the insight needed to increase engagement in democratic processes and improve the democratic health of Wales.

Democracy is underpinned by some essential principles, such as citizens’ free and equal participation in political decisions, access to quality information across society, and reasoned deliberation. It is important to be able to understand and monitor how these goals are being met. Yet practices of democracy have had to change in response to shifts in society, providing a tricky moving target. In established democracies like Wales, understandings of who should vote, and how responsive governments should be to parliaments and the public have evolved over many years. In healthy democracies, periodic elections are now supplemented by a rich ecosystem of other institutions - opportunities to engage in debate and policy consultation, as well as involvement through mechanisms provided by civil society organisations that bring like-minded people together to work for change. Measuring and monitoring democratic health is not easy but it is essential because despite continued support for democratic ideals worldwide, democratic institutions are also under threat (Levistky and Ziblatt 2018). Healthy democracy is precious as citizens can peacefully resolve disputes and respond to challenges, allowing society to prosper.

# Research questions

This report covers three research questions:

- 1 What could a healthy democracy look like in Wales?
- 2 How can data best be collected and reported to measure Wales' democratic health?
- 3 How can Wales' democratic health best be monitored?

## What does healthy democracy look like?

Democracy is one of the original 'essentially contested concepts' (Gallie, 1955): it means different things to different people. The word means 'rule of the people,' but there are different views on what this should look like in the real world.

In Ancient Greece, free men literally ruled the city-state together via large meetings and rotating responsibilities. Although similar arrangements survive to this day in two Swiss cantons and some towns in New England in the US (Budge, 1996; Bryan, 2004), modern nation-states and most political communities are too large and complex for this to be feasible. This is one reason why the norm for democracy became that citizens should 'rule' through voting for representatives to run their government (Manin, 1997). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some 'minimalist' theorists of democracy suggested that democracy was *only* about free, fair, competitive elections (see Schumpeter, 1942; Przeworski, 1999), whereas more 'liberal' democratic theorists emphasised that various civic rights and freedoms were also essential to democracy (Dahl, 1971; 2006).

In the 1970s and 1980s, several authors outlined the societal and civic value of widespread citizen participation in politics (Pateman, 1970; Mansbridge, 1983), that had started to emerge with the generation coming of age in that time (Jennings, 1987), and proponents of more 'direct' democracy started seeking inspiration from classic theories of popular rule (Budge, 1996).

Democratic theorists then highlighted the value of informed, reasoned and respectful *deliberation* between citizens as being the essence of democracy (Habermas, 1985; Bohman, 1996). Deliberative democracy became incredibly popular as an academic theory in the 1990s, although some theorists highlighted that participation and the inclusion of diverse (especially marginalized) social groups were also essential to democracy (Young, 1990; Phillips, 1995). Although differences of opinion persist, deliberative democracy has recently become more integrated with other democratic

theories; highlighting deliberation as an important democratic value that reinforces other democratic values (Bohman, 1998; Elstub and Gagnon, 2015).

Various researchers have argued for a pluralistic approach to defining democracy including examples of different democratic 'goods' or 'principles' to exemplify good democratic health (Saward, 2003; Smith, 2009). For Smith (2009: 11), these are inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgement and transparency.

Similarly, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) research project bases its work on five separate democratic ideals: electoral, liberal, deliberative, egalitarian and participatory democracy (Coppedge et al., 2011; 2016). The approach of the 'democratic audits', take a similar but hierarchical approach (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)) as they define political equality and popular rule as the core of democracy, supplemented by 'mediating values' such as participation, representation, accountability, transparency and responsiveness which in their conception 'give effect to these principles' in the real world (Beetham et al., 2008).

This analysis of how democracy is defined and understood over time allows us to synthesise the key criteria which form a healthy democracy. These are:

- 1) Free and fair elections and strong civil rights;
- 2) Widespread citizen engagement, awareness and participation; including a strong, active and dense civil society;
- 3) Reasoned and constructive political deliberation;
- 4) Political, social and economic equality, including balanced representation in government and legislators;
- 5) Responsive government, reflecting citizens' wants and needs; and,
- 6) Open access to accurate information, through transparent government and a strong, independent media.

These criteria can in principle be applied to any political community, although in practice they have most often been applied to modern nation-states. In the Welsh context, these principles apply to Welsh society as a whole, and the devolved national political system, but also to the many local governments operating across different communities in Wales.

When deciding the distribution of political authority within political communities, the 'principle of subsidiarity' is often cited, especially in the European Union and federalist nation-states: this principle states that lower levels of governments (local, regional and autonomous national governments) should by default have authority over tasks and issues in their territory, unless it can be demonstrated that a higher

level can handle them more effectively (Føllesdal, 1998; Goodin et al., 2007). Although the UK is not a symmetrically devolved federation, as an established devolved nation with clear competencies, the principle of subsidiarity applies also in Wales and its constituent local governments. The ambition for healthy Welsh democracy, therefore, is one where these six key democratic criteria are observed to a great extent in the politics of issues and tasks for which Wales and its constituent local governments have authority. A healthy democracy in Wales would also help contribute to, and facilitate the achievement of, the seven wellbeing goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

## What are the challenges and how is democratic health maintained?

Despite continuing strong and stable support for democratic ideals worldwide, support for its practices have faltered (e.g., Stoker, 2017). There is a decline in trust in government and a rise in polarisation and populism across many of the world's oldest democracies which may threaten their very fabric (Hetherington 2015; Dalton, 2017; Jennings et al 2017). For many, the healthy scepticism that keeps government in check has boiled over into disaffection with the democratic process itself, and alienation from the political system. The worry is that the reasoned opposition and debate that is essential for the democratic process of teasing out collective affairs has more recently been replaced by intensely polarised identities, hateful rhetoric, and corrosive cynicism.

In response, governments, businesses, and charities are already looking for ways to strengthen democracy. Many of the most successful initiatives that have shown how people can gain greater control of collective decisions have taken place in devolved regions. Examples include 'participatory budgeting' projects, which began in Porto Alegre and other Brazilian municipalities before spreading around the world (Ryan, 2021); other participatory innovations such as the Oregon 'citizen initiative review' process (Gastil and Knobloch, 2020) and citizen assemblies in British Columbia (Cutler et al., 2008); as well as Constitutional Assemblies in Ireland and various similar projects across the UK, Europe and beyond (see e.g. Davidson and Elstub, 2014; Elstub and Escobar, 2019; Stoker and Evans, 2022). These processes offer us a potential antidote to democracy's ills. There is evidence that these processes can have transformational positive outcomes. For example, participatory budgeting in Brazil was strongly associated with decreases in infant mortality rates (Touchton and Wampler, 2014). Through these participatory processes, ordinary citizens were able to explain to state officials that what they really needed was paving on roads that would allow people from the poor parts of the neighbourhoods to access the centre, and its jobs, commerce and culture. Or similarly, in Ireland, by allowing deliberation



to happen in a citizen's assembly - a safe venue away from the heat and noise of entrenched public debate - light was shone on how citizens' views had changed, allowing for campaigns that led to affirmation of new majorities on topics like reform of marriage and abortion. More recently, devolved Italian governments such as Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Sicily, and Sardinia have led the way in introducing regional participation laws providing legal frameworks and independent authorities to select and support civil society projects that engage a wide variety of groups with the aim of buttressing democracy.

Nevertheless, in many contexts, democratic innovations aimed at improving democratic health have failed to realise their goals, for example where they only engage a small number of citizens, or where government cannot manage the demands that arise from these processes (See Ryan, 2021). We have competing visions of what healthy democracy looks like but we have clear ideas of what it is not. To understand what works and when, it is essential to appreciate exactly what the state of democratic health is in a region/country and to be able to intelligently plan interventions that bolster and improve democratic health – and to monitor their potential impact. There is now a large body of academic work that the Welsh Government can draw on, analysing and interpreting the enduring success of the oldest institutions of democracy as well as those of new initiatives aimed at reinvigorating the health of democracy.

## How can we measure democratic health?

Given the criteria for defining democratic health outlined above, there are various ways to measure the health of democracy in Wales, but the most common sources of measures are **official statistics, public opinion surveys and expert analysis**.

Several projects already base their measures of democratic health on many of these indicators, although none incorporate all of them. Probably the most prominent of these is **the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project** (Coppedge et al., 2022), an international research project based at the University of Gothenburg which annually publishes updated measures for the state of democracy in every nation-state in the world since 1789.

V-Dem measures the extent to which five different democratic ideals are met in a country: electoral, liberal, deliberative, egalitarian, and participatory democracy. They provide an overall index measure for each ideal which is itself composed of various indicators that capture an ideal's different elements. The measures are based on

external expert coding<sup>1</sup> according to a predetermined coding scheme, and statistical analyses based on the patterns of coding by different experts (Varieties of Democracy, 2023).

Other measures of democracy abound. The measures most used before the advent of V-Dem were **Polity IV / Polity 5** (Marshall et al., 2018) and the Political Rights measure provided by **Freedom House** (Freedom House, 2023b). **Polity** has (or had, before V-Dem) the advantage of covering a long time period, from 1800-2018 (Polity5, 2023), but is based on a relatively minimalist conception of democracy – focusing on relatively clear criteria such as whether competitive elections take place, but less on factors such as how groups are systematically excluded from participation through informal means. Such a narrow focus may distinguish democracy from non-democracy but is not very suitable for discriminating between the health of democracy within democratic regimes. In 2018, 32 countries received the highest possible score on the measure, and the United States received that mark throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see also Coppedge et al., 2011).

The US-based non-profit organization **Freedom House** has provided measures of the state of civil liberties and political rights in most countries of the world since 1972. As the names suggest, the measures are based on a *liberal* conception of democracy, focusing on electoral competition and citizens' rights but not on participation, deliberation or other democratic goods. Their political rights measures (most commonly used as their measure of democracy) takes seven values and in 2023, 47 countries received the 'most free' value of one on that index, meaning that it is also a limited tool for measuring different extents of democratic health among established democracies (although since 2013, they have also provided more granular data for subindices) (Freedom House, 2023a). Freedom House asks expert analysts to code countries on each measure but internal staff also play a role in deliberating and deciding on the final scores given, and some evidence has suggested that those scores may be biased in favour of geo-political allies of the United States (Steiner, 2016).

**The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index** has since 2006 provided annual measures of the health of democracy in most countries and territories of the world (167 in 2022) across various measures (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023). These measures cover more aspects of democracy than Freedom House or Polity IV, touching on public participation, political culture and representation as well as electoral and liberal aspects. These consist of 60 indicators grouped into five

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., the V-Dem coordinators do not code the measures themselves but have a pool of almost 4,000 experts from different countries who they ask to code variables for particular countries.

categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. The scores derive from survey data as well as coding of various (mostly binary) attributes, but the process behind assigning the latter scores and the framework underlying the precise choice of indicators is unclear.

Other measures of democratic health tend to either focus on more specific aspects of democracy or on a smaller range of countries and periods. **The Electoral Integrity Project (EIP)** conducts an expert survey about the rules and conduct of elections in countries, thus focusing specifically on the electoral dimension of democracy (Garnett et al., 2022). Conversely, the **Discourse Quality Index (DQI)** measures the quality of political deliberation within a democracy, focusing on the deliberative dimension (Steiner et al., 2004). This has mostly been done for parliamentary debates in a few countries and is rather labour-intensive, although recent approaches using machine learning and large language models are promising (Beste and Wyss, 2019).

In addition, several other projects use the measures provided by the above projects (and survey sources) but aggregate or present them in different ways. As mentioned above, the IDEA project provides various indicators of democratic health in countries around the world, based on the core principles of political equality and popular rule, in their **Global State of Democracy Indices**, but these are primarily based on a different aggregation of indicators provided by the V-Dem project (International IDEA, 2023). Similarly, **The Quality of Government Institute** provides a massive collection of measures of democratic health from secondary sources such as the V-Dem and Freedom House projects (The QoG Institute, 2023).

All the projects above provide quantitative measures of democratic health: although only some of them are based on data that lends itself easily to numeration. Most of them use expert coding procedures which are ultimately qualitative assessments. More explicitly qualitative ‘measures’ of democratic health have been provided by various qualitative case studies and comparative studies of democracy, especially when studying particular projects for participatory innovations in democracy (see Smith, 2009; Elstub and Escobar, 2019; Ryan, 2021).

One such resource is **Participedia**: an online repository for case studies of over 2,400 projects for democratic innovation in 158 countries (Smith et al., 2015; Participedia, 2023). The **Healthier Democracies** project also provides examples of participatory innovation projects, as well as the **Participatory Governance Index (PGI)** which is a framework for assessing the quality of the system for democratic engagement in a political community (Healthier Democracies, 2023a; 2023b). The PGI provides criteria for assessing the health of four dimensions of participatory

engagement. These include: *engagement structures* referring to the presence and accessibility of formal channels for inclusive citizen participation in governance, the encouragement of cross-sector collaboration, and the use of information technology for citizen engagement; *engagement opportunities* denoting the availability and diversity of avenues for meaningful citizen participation on impactful issues; *commitments to engagement* demonstrating the extent to which such opportunities are effectively communicated, legally formalised, budgeted for, staffed, and included in strategic government goals and outcome monitoring, and *community building* exploring the extent to which these opportunities encourage civic education, social/political organization, and the provision of physical or digital locations for citizen interaction and initiative formation.

This discussion shows that the science of measuring democracy is in constant evolution. It is essential such that democratic measurement can keep up with the evolving and expanding understanding of what healthy democracy is in our society, but also to take advantage of technological and methodological advances in social science. These theoretical and methodological advances allow a greater alignment between measurement, ideals of democratic health, and the reality of experience of those living in societies that aspire to healthy democracy. An ever-greater engagement with these processes can allow Welsh government and society to better contribute to shaping and developing these measures to help achieve the goal of maintaining and delivering democratic health in Wales.

## How can we monitor democratic health in Wales?

There is a recognised need for more official statistics and other forms of measurement in Wales to understand what democratic health looks like for politicians, stakeholders, and the public. Monitoring requires regular and reliable measurement – “what gets measured is what matters – so we must measure the health of our democracy” (Heydecker, Ormston and Wallace, 2022: 19). As reviewed above, several international projects provide measures of democratic health in most countries of the world, with V-Dem being the most comprehensive and useful of these sources. Unfortunately, while all these sources include the United Kingdom, none of them include any measures for Wales specifically.

Table 1 below provides examples of potential indicators for each criteria, and the source(s) most likely to be used for each to enable users to make an informed choices about what measures to use and develop. The table lists some examples of existing measures for some of the criteria of a healthy democracy in the Welsh context but others would need to be developed to produce a more rounded picture. Even where measures already exist, alternative measures of the same criteria may be needed to ensure a high level of measurement validity.

The **Wellbeing of Wales** national indicators include at least three measures relevant to democratic health, collected as part of the National Survey for Wales: survey measures of what proportion of Welsh adults feel able to influence local decisions, what proportion feel that they belong to their area, and what proportion of citizens volunteer (Welsh Government, 2023b). The Wellbeing of Wales indicators can be used to assess aspects of criteria 2 - widespread citizen engagement, awareness, and participation.

The **Welsh Election Study (WES)** includes a wider variety of measures of citizens' attitudes and behaviours and over a longer period of time, albeit less frequently.<sup>2</sup> The project has overseen representative surveys of adult citizens in Wales after every devolved election (and some UK general elections and referendums) since 1997, and most of these surveys have included measures of citizens' interest in politics, turnout in elections, and trust in the Welsh and UK governments and legislatures. In addition, the most recent surveys conducted in 2011, 2016 and 2019 include measures of citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy works in the country; whether they would participate in politics in other ways than voting; and their political knowledge and efficacy (The Welsh Election Study, 2023).

These surveys provide an opportunity to measure and monitor various elements of democratic health related to the ideals of participatory democracy and popular rule; especially as they pertain to criteria 2 in Table 1, as well as criteria 4 - political social and economic equality, and trust-based aspects of criteria 5 - responsive government, reflecting citizens' wants and needs. To enable that, these measures (and perhaps others, e.g., citizens satisfaction with government and public services in Wales) should be consistently included in future WES surveys and ideally in the more frequently fielded Wellbeing of Wales national indicator surveys as well.

Descriptive representation and political equality can also be regularly monitored by comparing the demographic profile of candidates and elected representatives with that of the public, using official statistics and candidate surveys. **The Local Government Candidates Survey** (Welsh Government, 2023a) already collects this information at the local level relating to aspects of criteria 4, but that can be extended to the Senedd level.

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<sup>2</sup> Two of the national indicators have been collected roughly every year since 2012 and the third one since 2016, whereas the WES surveys have been conducted after most elections in Wales since 1997.

**Table 1: Measures of democracy available in Wales**

Criteria of a Healthy Democracy	Measure	Sources of measurement	Availability
<b>1. Free and Fair elections and strong civil rights</b>	Integrity of elections	Expert Analysis	Not available for Wales. Measured internationally by V-Dem, Freedom House and the Electoral Integrity Project
	Competitiveness of elections	Expert Analysis / Official Statistics	Not available for Wales. Measured by V-Dem and Freedom House
	Civil rights protections	Expert Analysis	Not available for Wales. Measured by V-Dem and Freedom House
<b>2. Widespread citizen engagement, awareness, and participation</b>	Turnout in elections	Official Statistics	Available
	Other types of citizen engagement with <i>formal</i> politics (e.g. writing to representatives)	Public Opinion Survey	In Welsh Election Study 2016
	Alternative forms of citizen engagement with politics (e.g. protest participation)	Public Opinion Survey	In Welsh Election Study 2016 and some Wellbeing of Wales measures
	Citizens' political interest and knowledge	Public Opinion Survey	In most/all Welsh Election Study
<b>3. Reasoned and constructive political deliberation</b>	Use of reasoned justifications among politicians in debate.	Expert Analysis	Not available – could be developed using updates of Deliberative Quality Index or Argument Mining
	Use of justifications for decisions among politicians that appeal to common good (rather than partisan group or personal benefits)	Expert Analysis	Not available – could be developed using updates of Deliberative Quality Index or Argument Mining
	Respect for counterarguments and opponents among politicians	Expert Analysis	Not available – could be developed using updates of Deliberative Quality Index or Argument Mining

	Quality of deliberation in the public sphere	Expert Analysis	Not available – could be developed using updates of Deliberative Quality Index or Argument Mining
<b>4. Political, social, and economic equality</b>	Equality of political engagement	Public Opinion Survey/Official Statistics	Some available in Welsh Election Study and Local Government Candidate Survey
	Equality of access to politics	Public Opinion Survey/Official Statistics/Expert Analysis	Potential indicators in Welsh Election Study
	Policy congruence with different social groups	Public Opinion Survey/Expert Analysis	Not available – could be developed using Large Language Models or survey measures
	Balanced demographic representation in government and legislators	Official Statistics	Available
<b>5. Responsive government, reflecting citizens' wants and needs</b>	Citizens' satisfaction with government and the political system	Public Opinion Survey	Available in Welsh Election Study since 2011
	Citizens' trust in politicians, governments, and institutions	Public Opinion Survey	Available in Welsh Election Study
	Policy congruence with public opinion	Public Opinion Survey, Expert Analysis	Not available – would require combination of survey and text analysis
	Citizens' belief in their ability to influence politics	Public Opinion Survey	Some WoW indicators, e.g. influence/belonging
	Government consultation with citizens and civil society	Expert Analysis	Not available – would require collecting new official data or survey
<b>6. Open access to accurate information through transparent government and a strong, independent media</b>	Government transparency	Expert Analysis, Public Opinion Survey	Not available – Indicator toolkits available from e.g. OECD
	Media freedom	Expert Analysis, Public Opinion Survey	Not available for Wales. Measured by V-Dem and Freedom House

Political equality can also be measured by following the equality of formal participation through monitoring voter turnout rates by demographic groups. This can be measured indirectly through surveys, but more reliably by recording actual turnout rates by gender and age groups, as has been done in elections in Iceland since 2014 (Hagstofa Íslands, 2016). There, this information is recorded by election workers when voters turn up to the polling station to vote.

More bespoke solutions for monitoring democracy in Wales may also be available that could provide good value for money in the long term. These would require commissioning further research and development of data collection tools in the first instance. We have established that surveys/elite surveys will be an important part of any set of indicators. It would be possible to review which specific questions or instruments could be added to existing surveys most efficiently. We recommend that this would require input from stakeholders on which aspects of a healthy democracy are most important, to ascertain the ones to prioritise for Wales.

Alternatively, a bespoke Welsh tracker survey of **attitudes to democracy and representation in Wales** standardising against international benchmarks, would allow a cleaner set of integrated measures, and visibility for democratic health, strongly signalling its importance. A bespoke survey for democratic health in Wales would benefit from being able to integrate more clearly with local sensibilities. It may include the most recent developed survey items on trust, mistrust and distrust, measures to understand political grievance and resentment, as well as novel measures of participation, readiness to change political behaviour, and efficacy. More innovative measures might include trialling a **Welsh Democratic Observatory** using citizen science methods to capture community-based innovation and civic opportunities. This would place citizens in the role of an expert assessor of democracy, engaging them periodically to follow a clear set of instructions to record evidence for healthy democracy in their local area, and is a method that would encompass involvement and collaboration, as two of the five ways of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Moreover, in order to take advantage of the affordances of the abundance of data in online sources and cutting-edge techniques in data science, the Welsh Government could look to implement argument mining and mapping to measure criteria related to reasoned deliberation and policy congruence. These measures are nascent but have shown a lot of promise in accurately classifying and predicting when reasoned debate turns to antidemocratic behaviour. Any of these approaches should improve benchmarks for understanding a healthy democracy and regularly assessing democratic health, with which Wales can work towards strengthening its democratic processes and ensuring the wellbeing of its citizens.



Another option would be to ask one of these research projects / organizations, likely V-Dem, to include Wales in their coverage and thus provide annual expert coded measures of democratic health in Wales. This would require some consultation and analysis of costs. Alternatively, the Welsh Government could follow the approach taken by V-Dem, and to an extent by the other sources reviewed above (both in terms of the indicators included and the methodology), and commission expert analysis of these elements in Wales annually. In addition to V-Dem, expert evaluations of the participatory health of democracy in Wales could be commissioned using the PGI framework; evaluations of deliberative quality using the DQI methodology, and/or evaluations of electoral integrity using the EIP criteria.

Each of those options require expert subjective judgment. Such expert coded measures would provide an important foundation for measuring and monitoring various elements of democratic health over time, especially those that are difficult, and perhaps impossible, to capture with objective data. However, data such as official statistics and representative surveys of citizens collected across a wider range of individuals are also needed to measure and monitor the criteria of a healthy democracy. This approach provides robustness by combining an intelligent mix of data collection strategies.

## Conclusion

Democracy represents an ideal to strive for rather than a steady state, and as societies change and adapt to global and local challenges, democratic institutions adapt with them to ensure that the principles of democracy remain strong and healthily embedded in society. Wales can learn from the experience of other small nation-states, such as Iceland, and regional governments, such as those in Italy, who have encouraged a range of democratic activities and measures in the recent past, rather than relying on any single model.

This report highlights the importance of addressing concerns regarding democratic health, with a specific focus on Wales. There are growing fears of "democratic backsliding" around the world, further emphasising the need to understand and monitor democratic health in Wales to avoid the fate of areas of the world where democratic norms are under serious threat. It outlines potential measures of democratic health that would allow Welsh Government to focus its efforts on ways to increase participation and engagement and reduce the 'democratic deficit.'

The Welsh Government's interest in understanding what a healthy democracy could look like in Wales and how to measure and monitor democratic health is refreshing in this context. A healthy democracy encompasses various principles, such as citizen

participation, access to quality information, and reasoned deliberation. The report explores different perspectives on democracy, highlighting the need for a variety of different democratic goods to be identified and measured in context and over time. It draws upon existing projects and frameworks, to identify indicators that can be used to measure democratic health in Wales.

We recommend incorporating measures into existing surveys, such as the Welsh Election Study and the Wellbeing of Wales national indicators, to gather data on citizen attitudes, behaviours, and satisfaction with democracy. We suggest utilising a range of sources, from combining and augmenting knowledge using expert analysis, survey methods and official statistics, as well as experimenting with bespoke methods using large language models or citizen science. These sources and tools, if intelligently designed, can provide actionable insights into when to intervene to improve citizen engagement, political deliberation, policy congruence, responsive governance, and access to information. While existing projects provide measures of democratic health on a global scale, there is a need for specific measures tailored to Wales.

By understanding the benchmarks for a healthy democracy and regularly assessing democratic health, Wales can address the existing challenges and work towards strengthening its democratic institutions. The recommendations provided in the report serve as a valuable starting point for policymakers and stakeholders in their efforts to promote a healthy and thriving democracy in Wales.

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