



Indicators for Democratic Parliaments

Indicator 1.9: Representative role of members of parliament

About this indicator

The representative role is a core function of parliament and of MPs. This indicator focuses on two key aspects of that representative role: the interaction between MPs and the people they represent, and the role of the opposition. The common thread is that parliament should be the place where opinions across society, in all their diversity, are expressed. Democracy is an inclusive process in which all citizens – men and women – representing all political and social forces in the country can participate.

This indicator comprises the following dimensions:

- Dimension 1.9.1: Interaction with the electorate
- Dimension 1.9.2: Opposition

For indicators and dimensions relating to parliament's overall representativeness, see also *Indicator 7.1: Electoral integrity*, *Indicator 7.2: Composition of parliament* and *Dimension 7.3.3: Gender and age balance in parliamentary bodies*.

The Indicators for Democratic Parliaments are a multi-partner initiative coordinated by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in partnership with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Directorio Legislativo Foundation, Inter Pares / International IDEA, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD).

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Dimension 1.9.1: Interaction with the electorate

This dimension is part of:

- Indicator 1.9: Representative role of members of parliament
- Target 1: Effective parliament

About this dimension

This dimension concerns the interaction between MPs and the people they represent. The primary responsibility of an MP is to represent all constituents, including those who did not vote for them or did not vote at all.

This representative role concerns all MPs, regardless of differences in the political or electoral system. It applies equally to MPs in countries where there are no individual constituencies or where there are multi-member constituencies, as well as to MPs in upper chambers in bicameral or federal systems, who represent subnational territorial units. The number of constituents that an MP represents necessarily influences the way in which MPs carry out their representative role.

The parliamentary calendar should provide reasonable opportunities for MPs to interact with their constituents. This might mean, for example, that plenary sittings and committee meetings take place on certain days of the week, allowing MPs to meet with their electorate on other days.

It is also important for there to be a range of procedural opportunities for MPs to raise issues on behalf of the electorate, including in plenary debates and in committee. Such procedural opportunities include, for example, speaking in debates, asking written or oral questions, drafting laws, and requesting information from the executive. Issues raised by MPs should be given due consideration.

Parliament's institutional capacities play a significant role in helping MPs fulfil their representative role. Parliaments may, for example, provide access to resources such as constituency offices, staff, travel allowances, constituency relations funds and other forms of support.

Some parliaments require MPs to report back to parliament and to the public about their constituency work.

Aspiring goal

Based on a global comparative analysis, an aspiring goal for parliaments in the area of "interaction with the electorate" is as follows:

The legal framework recognizes representation as a core function of MPs and clearly sets out the duties and expectations of their representative role.

All MPs have reasonable opportunities to raise issues of concern to their constituents in parliament, including in debates and in committee and plenary work.

The organization of the parliamentary calendar facilitates the representative role of MPs. MPs have sufficient time available to interact with their electorate.

Parliament provides MPs with adequate resources to support engagement with their constituents. These resources are allocated in an equitable, non-partisan manner.

Assessment

This dimension is assessed against several criteria, each of which should be evaluated separately. For each criterion, select one of the six descriptive grades (Non-existent, Rudimentary, Basic, Good, Very good and Excellent) that corresponds best to your parliament, and provide details of the evidence on which the assessment is based.

The evidence for assessment of this dimension could include the following:

- Provisions of the legal framework and/or parliament's rules of procedure establishing that representation is a core function of MPs
- Provisions of parliament's rules of procedure providing all MPs with the opportunity to raise issues of concern to their constituents in parliament
- Provisions of parliament's rules of procedure relating to the resources available to MPs to effectively perform their representative function
- Parliamentary records of debates in the plenary and committees

Where relevant, provide additional comments or examples that support the assessment.

Assessment criterion 1: Legal framework

The legal framework clearly sets out the duties and expectations concerning the representative role of MPs.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Assessment criterion 2: Opportunities to raise issues in parliament

Parliament's rules of procedure provide all MPs with reasonable opportunities to raise issues of concern to their constituents in parliament, including in debates and in committee and plenary work.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Assessment criterion 3: Parliamentary calendar

The organization of the parliamentary calendar facilitates the representative role of MPs. MPs have sufficient time available to interact with their electorate.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion 4: Resources

Parliament provides MPs with adequate resources to support engagement with their constituents. These resources are allocated in an equitable, non-partisan manner.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Recommendations for change

Use this space to note down recommendations and ideas for strengthening rules and practice in this area.

Sources and further reading

- David Beetham, [Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: A guide to good practice](#) (2006).

Dimension 1.9.2: Opposition

This dimension is part of:

- Indicator 1.9: Representative role of members of parliament
- Target 1: Effective parliament

About this dimension

This dimension covers the various means by which the opposition may perform its functions in a democratic parliament. Parliament is the institution that embodies society in the diversity of its composition and its opinions, and the opposition in parliament is a necessary and indispensable component of democracy.

The primary function of the opposition is to offer a credible alternative to the majority in power. Moreover, by overseeing and scrutinizing the actions of the executive, it works to ensure transparency, integrity and efficiency in the conduct of public affairs and to prevent abuses by the authorities and individuals, thereby ensuring the defence of the public interest.

The opposition plays a key role in both parliamentary and presidential systems. In parliamentary systems, where the opposition represents the “government in waiting”, its role is to hold the sitting executive to account, and to propose an alternative policy and legislative agenda. The distinction between the ruling executive and the opposition in parliament may be less clear in presidential systems, particularly when the president of the country is from a different political party than the party with the most seats in parliament.

To be able to function effectively, the opposition needs the right to raise or debate issues of concern. This includes having the opportunity to initiate legislation or motions for debate, having reasonable debating opportunities, being able to put questions to the executive and to propose amendments to laws, and having equitable representation on committees and in other parliamentary bodies.

Furthermore, the opposition, including its leader(s), needs access to adequate resources to effectively perform its oversight function and develop an alternative policy agenda.

Aspiring goal

Based on a global comparative analysis, an aspiring goal for parliaments in the area of “opposition” is as follows:

The legal framework recognizes the special role of the opposition in parliament.

The legal framework and parliament’s rules of procedure provide the opposition with specific rights in parliament, such as the ability to scrutinize and question the government, to initiate legislation or motions for debate, to participate equally in debates and votes, to propose amendments to laws, and to be equitably represented on committees and in other parliamentary bodies.

The opposition, including its leader(s), has access to adequate resources and facilities to effectively perform its role. In systems where the opposition comprises several parties, resources are allocated in a manner proportional to their representation.

Assessment

This dimension is assessed against several criteria, each of which should be evaluated separately. For each criterion, select one of the six descriptive grades (Non-existent, Rudimentary, Basic, Good, Very good and Excellent) that best reflects the situation in your parliament, and provide details of the evidence on which this assessment is based.

The evidence for assessment of this dimension could include the following:

- Provisions of the legal framework and/or parliament's rules of procedure recognizing the special role of the opposition and/or guaranteeing equal treatment for all MPs
- Proposals for laws or amendments to existing laws that might affect the status and role of the opposition
- Provisions of parliament's rules of procedure providing the opposition with opportunities to contribute to parliamentary work
- Provisions relating to the resources available to the opposition
- Parliamentary records of debates in the plenary and committees
- Reports from the media and civil society organizations

Where relevant, provide additional comments or examples that support the assessment.

Assessment criterion 1: Legal framework

The legal framework recognizes the special role of the opposition in parliament.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Assessment criterion 2: Opposition rights

The legal framework and/or parliament's rules of procedure provide the opposition with specific rights in parliament, such as to scrutinize and question the government, to initiate legislation or motions for debate, to participate equally in debate and votes, to propose amendments to laws, and to be represented equitably on committees and in other parliamentary bodies.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

Assessment criterion 3: Opposition resources

The opposition, including its leader(s), has access to adequate resources and facilities to effectively perform its role. In systems where the opposition comprises several parties, resources are allocated in a manner proportional to their representation.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence for this assessment criterion:					

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Assessment criterion 4: Practice

In practice, the above provisions are implemented consistently and without discrimination.

Non-existent <input type="checkbox"/>	Rudimentary <input type="checkbox"/>	Basic <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Very good <input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>
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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Sources and further reading

- David Beetham, [Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: A guide to good practice](#) (2006).
- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), [Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislators](#), revised edition (2018).
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), [Guidelines on the rights and duties of the opposition in parliament](#) (1999).