Measuring and monitoring democratic health in Wales: A Delphi study

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CNNs

Convolutional Neural Networks

CSO

Civil society organisation

Democratic health

The state of a democracy, as evidenced through 6 core dimensions: electoral democracy, participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, egalitarian democracy, institutional responsiveness, and transparency and media freedom.

DQI

Deliberative Quality Index

EMS

Electoral Management Survey

ERS

Electoral Reform Society

ESS

European Social Survey

FOI

Freedom of Information

GONGO

Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisation

IRT

Item Response Theory

IWA

Institute of Welsh Affairs

MSs

Members of the Senedd

NGO

Non-Governmental Organisation

OECD

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

ONS

Office for National Statistics

PEI

Perceptions of Electoral Integrity

T-Index

Government Transparency Index

V-Dem

Varieties of Democracy

WCPP

Wales Centre for Public Policy

Introduction and background

1.1.   Global challenges in democratic health

Many modern democracies are experiencing a widening gap between citizens and the institutions designed to represent them (Valgarðsson et al, 2025). This has resulted in widespread dissatisfaction with political systems, declining trust in institutions, and escalating social and political divisions. Factors such as economic hardship, perceptions of corruption, inequality, and crises like the COVID-19 pandemic have all deepened these divides (Wike and Fetterolf, 2021). Recent research has shown that although representative democracy continues to enjoy broad support, dissatisfaction with how it functions has grown significantly in recent years. A median of 59% of people across 24 countries expressed dissatisfaction with democracy, citing that elected officials are increasingly out of touch and political parties are failing to represent their views effectively (Pew Research Center, 2024).

A key feature of this disenchantment is the erosion of trust in political institutions. According to a global survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), only 39% of citizens have trust in their national government, while just 30% believe political systems provide them with a voice (OECD, 2024). Governments are less trusted than businesses, with the Edelman Trust Barometer indicating that since 2007, the public trusts businesses more than government (Edelman, 2007), and, since 2020, businesses have been viewed as the only institutions that are both competent and ethical, in comparison to government, media, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Edelman, 2025a). From a wider perspective, Edelman attributes this rupture of trust to several long-term factors: declining confidence in establishment leaders since 2005; growing resentment toward austerity and increased political polarisation contributing to widening income-based trust gaps since 2012; and a fragmented, increasingly distrusted information environment since 2016 (Edelman, 2025b).

The growing disenchantment fosters resentment toward politics, with many people viewing it as a realm of corruption, inefficiency, and dishonesty (Hay, 2007). This attitude towards politics stems from a deep sense of alienation, as citizens feel disconnected from political institutions and actors that they believe do not adequately address their concerns (ibid). Media portrayals of scandals and conflicts also reinforce negative perceptions. Over time, politics has shifted its focus toward economic efficiency, often at the expense of democratic principles (Crouch, 2004). As a result, a growing sense of powerlessness fosters disengagement and sustains a self-perpetuating cycle of cynicism and political apathy (ibid).

Alienation poses significant challenges, as the gradual erosion of key democratic norms, such as mutual respect and tolerance for opposition, weakens the foundation of democratic systems. People in positions of political power have a strong influence on public discussion and how institutions work. Because of this, they have a special duty to protect democratic standards. One way to do this is by refusing to legitimise individuals or tactics that break democratic rules. If they fail or neglect to do this, society becomes more divided, and populist leaders can take advantage of these divisions to weaken democratic institutions (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). This creates an environment where alternative governance

models, including more authoritarian options, gain traction, further alienating citizens and deepening the disconnect from traditional political systems (Applebaum, 2020).

1.2. Welsh specificalities of democratic health

The democratic challenges highlighted above, including declining trust in institutions, limited political participation, and growing disengagement, are equally evident in Wales. Public dissatisfaction with political processes, concerns over institutional accountability, and a sense of disconnection from decision-making structures mirror broader global trends. However, Wales also faces a unique set of locally grounded challenges. These include low voter turnout in Welsh elections, limited awareness of government structures and devolved powers, political knowledge and civic literacy gaps, political alienation, and perceived powerlessness, all of which contribute to a nuanced democratic landscape (Valgardsson et al, 2023).

1.2.1. Low voter turnout

One of the most apparent indicators of limited political engagement in Wales is the persistently low voter turnout. In the 2021 Senedd election, turnout was 47% (Senedd Research, 2021), compared to 56% Welsh turnout in the 2024 UK general election (Senedd Research, 2024a). Participation in local government elections has been even lower, typically hovering around 38% (Electoral Commission, 2022). Voter participation in the 2025 local elections in England was comparatively low, standing at 34% (Electoral Commission, 2025). While these figures have drawn attention from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and researchers, they represent only the surface of broader concerns. The Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA) has referred to this pattern as a "civic virus," emphasising the ongoing challenges of fostering participation and strengthening democratic engagement in devolved institutions (Moore, 2023). A range of factors contribute to the low levels of political engagement in Wales, as discussed below.

1.2.2. Limited awareness of government structures and devolved powers

One prominent issue is a lack of awareness regarding the specific roles and powers of the Welsh Government, particularly in relation to which policy areas are devolved and which remain the responsibility of the UK Government Research by the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales highlights that many citizens are unaware of the scope and functions of devolved institutions. National conversations have revealed ongoing confusion around decision-making structures; for instance, a significant proportion of participants mistakenly believe that welfare benefits are devolved (Welsh Government, 2024a). This lack of clarity is compounded by the blurred boundaries between different tiers of government. At the local level, this is especially pronounced: according to a 2022 YouGov survey, 72% of respondents reported knowing very little about their community or town councils (Welsh Government, 2024b).

1.2.3.   Political knowledge and civic literacy gaps

The aforementioned lack of awareness is closely linked to a broader concern: limited political knowledge, which is widely recognised as a barrier to democratic engagement in Wales. Experts have highlighted an ongoing information gap, influenced by factors such as complex political terminology, low media literacy, and the absence of sustained civic education, particularly between election cycles (Moore, 2023). As a result, many individuals may feel uncertain when engaging with political issues or struggle to understand how decisions impact their daily lives. For instance, confusion about the roles of the Welsh Government and the Senedd remains common, particularly among young people, despite these institutions' growing visibility in recent years (Beaufort Research, 2020).

1.2.4.   Political alienation

Another barrier to civic engagement is political alienation. This is described in the literature as the "ivory tower problem," where politicians are perceived as disconnected from the everyday concerns of ordinary citizens (Moore, 2023). This sense of distance is widespread; for example, a 2017 survey commissioned by the Electoral Reform Society (ERS) revealed that many people in Wales experience a strong democratic disconnect, characterised by frustration, disillusionment, and mistrust towards politics (Blair, 2017). Around one-third of respondents in this survey associated politics with negative connotations, and many believed that the political system fails to represent the interests of ordinary people (ibid). Similarly, research commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2020, focusing on newly enfranchised and politically disengaged voters, found that a lack of trust in politicians, particularly the belief that voting makes no real difference, is a major deterrent to participation (Beaufort Research, 2020). This sentiment was prevalent across all age groups but was especially pronounced among older individuals (ibid). More recent research shows that levels of democratic wellbeing in Wales remain low and unchanged over time, with trust in both the UK and devolved governments continuing to fall behind the wider UK. Trust in the Welsh Government and Senedd Members has declined since 2023, and many people still feel unable to influence political decisions affecting Wales. Low trust extends to local councils as well, with over one-third of people in Wales reporting low confidence in their local authority (Carnegie UK, 2025).

1.2.5.   Perceived powerlessness

Finally, political efficacy, the belief that individual engagement can lead to meaningful change, remains low. Many people report uncertainty about how to express their concerns, share their views, or influence decisions within their communities. According to the National Survey for Wales, 70% of respondents feel they have little or no influence over local decision-making (Welsh Government, 2022b). Even when individuals feel confident in their ability to participate (internal efficacy), they often perceive their efforts as ineffective due to broader structural barriers (external political efficacy). The sense of disempowerment is echoed in the ERS survey (Blair, 2017), where the statement "When people like me get involved in politics, they can really change the way things are run" received the lowest average score: 5.8 out of 10. Without a belief that political participation can lead to tangible outcomes, even the most informed and interested citizens may opt to disengage.

1.3. Measuring democratic health in Wales

A healthy democracy is fundamental to a functioning and representative society, ensuring accountability, checks on power, the protection of rights, and a generally more stable society (Chatham House, 2024). However, to determine whether a country has a healthy democracy and to identify where to focus efforts to strengthen it, there must be a mechanism for measuring and monitoring democratic health. This mechanism should capture the full complexity of democracy and civic engagement, going beyond simplistic metrics like voter turnout.

Currently, there are international measures for democratic health related to the UK; however, these are not disaggregated to a national level, so they cannot reflect the specific context within Wales. As a result of this, the Welsh Government commissioned Alma Economics to consider the key findings and recommendations from previous research (Valgardsson et al, 2023) exploring how democratic health is defined, measured, and monitored around the world, with a specific focus on how this learning could be applied in Wales. Alma Economics' research study identified the options that could be taken forward to develop a specific set of measures and indicators to track, monitor, and assess different components of democracy in Wales.

1.4. About this report

This report contains the following sections:

- Chapter 2 covers the methodological approach for this research, highlighting the aim for each phase of the study and how it informed the next stage. In addition, this section outlines the sample sizes for each phase of the study and its limitations.
- Chapter 3 sets out the findings from each round of the Delphi study and how a short list of indicators was formed to track, monitor, and assess different components of democracy in Wales.
- Chapter 4 outlines the conclusions on a finalised set of indicators that achieved consensus in Round 3 of the Delphi study,
- Chapter 5 includes recommendations focusing on immediate next steps and measurements that can be taken forward to track, monitor, and assess different components of democracy in Wales.

In addition, the report is accompanied by the following Annexes in a separate attachment:

- Annex A contains a complete list of indicators to measure democratic health used globally, resulting from the literature review conducted in the first stage of this study.
- Annex B outlines the Quality Assessment Framework developed to determine the usability and relevance in a Welsh context of the indicators included in the Delphi study.
- Annex C summarises the performance of each indicator against the Quality Assessment Framework, as tested in Round 2 of the Delphi study.
- Annex D provides a detailed analytical overview of the final 6 shortlisted indicators, including data collection method, scales, and measurements, allowing for a

comprehensive understanding of the methodologies and metrics underpinning each indicator.

- Annex E outlines the research tools from this study, including the discussion guide for stakeholder workshops and the questionnaires used in the 3 Delphi rounds.

2. Methodology

2.1. Stage 1: Project scoping and evidence review

2.1.1. Defining democratic health: Desk-based review

Stage 1 involved a desk-based review of academic and grey literature (e.g. policy documents) to enhance understanding of the key issues, ground the development of research materials, and identify areas of focus. The review focused on existing evidence on how democratic health is currently measured in Wales, as well as on comparisons of the measures used internationally. To capture valid unpublished evidence about the Welsh context, a targeted call for evidence was undertaken, contacting both the Wales Governance Centre and the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP), who have undertaken previous work in this area, as well as advertising the call online through Alma Economics' social media channels.

As part of the scoping exercise, existing surveys and datasets, including the National Survey for Wales, Welsh Election Study, Local Government Candidate Survey, Wellbeing of Wales: national indicators, and reports on election results, were reviewed. A long list of indicators was created as a result of this, categorised according to the 6 dimensions of democratic health outlined in the WCPP report 'Defining, Measuring, and Monitoring Democratic Health in Wales' ([Valgardsson et al, 2023](#)), and further split into 2 groups: those indicators already collected in Wales, and indicators available elsewhere (in the UK or internationally) but not yet measured in Wales. The complete list of indicators considered can be found in Annex A, whereas the 6 dimensions of democratic health according to the WCPP report are outlined below:

- **electoral democracy**, which is a core aspect of democratic health, assessing the fairness, accessibility, and competitiveness of elections; it examines whether all citizens can vote freely, if elections are transparent and reflect the electorate's will, and whether elected officials are accountable and responsive.
- **participatory democracy**, which focuses on citizens' active engagement in decision-making beyond voting; it includes both formal political activities (e.g., contacting representatives, joining parties) and informal actions (e.g., protesting, petitioning).
- **deliberative democracy**, which centres on the quality of political discussion, valuing informed, respectful, and reasoned debate over mere participation; it seeks decisions based on shared values and public reasoning, aiming to strengthen democratic legitimacy through thoughtful consideration of diverse perspectives.
- **egalitarian democracy**, which emphasises equal access to political participation and representation; it assesses whether all citizens, including marginalised groups, can engage in political processes and whether diverse demographics are fairly represented in decision-making.
- **institutional responsiveness**, which measures how effectively political institutions respond to citizens' needs and concerns; it includes public consultation, incorporation of citizen input, and political efficacy, which is the belief that they can influence

decisions, therefore, indicating whether citizens feel heard and represented in policymaking.

- **transparency and media freedom**, which support democratic health by promoting transparency and accountability; it involves public access to official information, open policymaking, and protections for independent journalism, enabling scrutiny and informed debate that strengthen other democratic functions.

2.1.2. Stakeholder mapping

Throughout the scoping phase, a database of relevant individuals and groups was created from academia, public sector, political parties, NGOs, think tanks, and third-sector organisations to engage with throughout the research, both in the initial stakeholder workshops and to form the Expert Panel to participate in the Delphi study. Experts were identified within Wales, the wider UK, and internationally. For further information on this, see 'Recruitment and sampling' below.

2.1.3. Quality Assessment Framework

Based on the evidence review, a bespoke Quality Assessment Framework was created to evaluate measures, which was fit-for-purpose and tailored to the specific characteristics. To ensure the Framework was suitable to assess Welsh-specific indicators and indicators currently used outside of Wales, a list of assessment criteria per category was developed (one for measures currently existing in Wales and one for measures that could be introduced in Wales). The purpose of the Framework was to test out possible indicators to evaluate their usability and relevance in a Welsh context in Round 2 of the Delphi study. The full Quality Assessment Framework can be found in Annex B.

2.2. Stage 2: Stakeholder workshops

Stage 2 of this research then involved conducting 2 online workshops to draw on the stakeholders' knowledge and expertise to feed into the design of the Delphi study in Stage 3. These lasted up to 90 minutes and began with a brief presentation on current measures of democratic health based on the scoping phase, followed by a discussion on the long list of indicators identified in the scoping phase and the Quality Assessment Framework. Eight stakeholders fed into the design of the Delphi study through the workshops, focusing on the following aspects:

- **measures and indicators in each dimension and associated subcomponent of democratic health –** given the breadth of measures and indicators identified at the scoping stage, stakeholders were asked which should be prioritised and why, as well as whether additional ones should be introduced, and how these could be operationalised.
    - o following this, a revised long list of indicators was prepared to test with experts as part of the Delphi study.
- **assessment of measures and indicators –** the draft Quality Assessment Framework was presented to stakeholders, with a discussion held on whether

additional factors should be considered in assessing the measures and indicators of democratic health in Wales, or whether any factors should be removed.

- o no changes were suggested, and the initial design of the Quality Assessment Framework was confirmed (as presented in Annex B).

2.3.   Stage 3: Delphi study

To shortlist those indicators best placed to measure democratic health in a robust, practical and transparent fashion, a Delphi study (Chuenjitwongsa, 2017) was conducted to identify where there is consensus amongst a diverse panel of experts and where there is not. The Delphi study consisted of 3 consecutive questionnaires, all available in English and Welsh. Each questionnaire was available for completion for 2 to 4 weeks. The questionnaires were quality assured beforehand to ensure questions were designed to collect the required information, the language used was appropriate for the population of interest, and the estimated time given to participants to complete the questionnaire was proportionate and not overburdensome.

2.3.1.   Recruitment and sampling

To form the Expert Panel, key individuals identified in the stakeholder mapping exercise who matched the expert eligibility criteria outlined below were contacted, capitalising on the Welsh Government's and Alma Economics' network of contacts, as well as snowballing continuously. The selected individuals were chosen based on meeting at least 3 of the 4 criteria for engagement as an expert:

1. **relevance –** whether they have familiarity with Welsh democratic health or a comparable context.

2. **methodology –** whether they have applied/worked with similar measurements in the past (e.g., Freedom House, V-Dem, etc.).

3. **credibility –** at least 3 years of experience and an established professional reputation (e.g., published a peer-reviewed article on this topic) in one of the following areas: democratic governance, electoral systems or electoral observation, civic participation, human rights, or democratic reform.

    a. professions including academia, policy, civil society, electoral commissioning, etc.

4. **language –** English or Welsh-speaking.

Initial contact was made via email to named individuals (where possible), explaining the importance of this research and the Delphi participation requirements. Follow-ups were conducted if there was no reply, being mindful of school or bank holidays that might delay responses. Through this approach, an Expert Panel of 23 participants from Wales, the wider UK, and international settings was formed. Given the demanding nature of Delphi participation, the Expert Panel was encouraged to complete all rounds of the Delphi study, but participants were not penalised for missing a round and were allowed to complete

subsequent ones. This also allowed participants to complete each round anonymously, while ensuring everyone was fully informed about recent developments of the study. Before completing a new round, participants were provided with a summary of results from the previous round.

The first round of the Delphi study engaged 22 participants, of whom 12 had an academic or research background (3 working in Wales, 4 in England, 3 in Europe, and 2 in North America), 9 were working in the public sector in Wales (4 in policy and governance within the Government or Civil Service, 3 in policy and governance within a Regulatory or Oversight Body, 1 in research within a Regulatory or Oversight Body, and 1 in electoral reform within a Regulatory or Oversight Body), and 1 was working in an NGO, think tank, or third-sector organisation in England.

The second round of the Delphi study was split into 2 parts due to being highly technical. In Part A, 16 experts contributed, of whom 9 had an academic or research background (3 in Wales, 1 in England, 3 in Europe, and 2 in North America), 6 were working in the public sector in Wales (4 in policy and governance within the Government or Civil Service, 2 within a Regulatory or Oversight Body of whom 1 in electoral reform), and 1 was working in an NGO, think tank, or third-sector organisation in England. In Part B, 10 experts contributed, of whom 5 had an academic or research background (2 in Wales, 1 in England, 1 in Europe, and 1 in North America), 4 were working in the public sector in Wales (3 in policy and governance within the Government or Civil Service, and 1 in electoral reform within a Regulatory or Oversight Body), and 1 was working in an NGO, think tank, or third-sector organisation in England.

The third and last round of the Delphi study engaged 21 participants, of whom 7 had an academic or research background (2 working in Wales, 4 in Europe, and 1 in North America), 9 were working in the public sector in Wales (4 in policy and governance within the Government or Civil Service, 2 in a community or town council, 1 in elections within a Regulatory or Oversight Body, with the remaining 2 not specifying), 2 were working in an NGO, think tank, or third-sector organisation (1 in England and 1 in Wales), 1 was representing a political party, 1 was a retired expert, and 1 remaining participant did not specify their area of expertise.

2.3.2. Delphi questionnaire Round 1

Once the Expert Panel was confirmed, the first Delphi study questionnaire was launched. The first questionnaire asked a combination of open- and closed-ended questions to create an initial short list of indicators. Closed-ended questions enabled participants to select the indicators they considered most appropriate per dimension and associated subcomponent of democratic health. Open-ended questions gave space to share additional considerations, concerns, or even further suggestions of measures and indicators to be taken on board.

Descriptive statistics for all closed-ended questions were produced, alongside thematic analysis to determine key themes per open-ended question, looking for common viewpoints and highlighting any overarching areas of varying opinions. Based on the analysis, an initial short list of indicators for further consideration in the second round of the Delphi study was developed. A summary of findings from Round 1 was shared with the Expert Panel

alongside the Round 2 questionnaire, to ensure transparency and support further buy-in from participants.

2.3.3.   Delphi questionnaire Round 2

The second Delphi study then tested the level of consensus on the shortlisted indicators, with each one tested against the Quality Assessment Framework, applying the bespoke criteria designed for those indicators already measured in Wales and different ones for those used elsewhere. Using 5-point Likert scales, in line with industry standards (Akins et al, 2005; Vogel et al, 2019), participants were asked to express their agreement (1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly Disagree) to a number of statements per indicator, each statement capturing one quality criterion. For all indicators not currently available in Wales, respondents were given the option to answer from a Welsh or another country's perspective. Given the high number of indicators shortlisted in Round 1 and due to having to test each one against the quality assessment criteria to effectively whittle down the initial short list, the Round 2 questionnaire was highly technical and had to be split into 2 parts. This resulted in some attrition within this round, with Part 1 receiving more responses than Part 2.

Following this, an analysis was undertaken to shortlist the indicators that scored highly against the quality assessment criteria due to their effectiveness and suitability. Initially, for an indicator to be shortlisted, it needed to receive at least 70% agreement (Strongly Agree + Agree) across all criteria in line with best practice (Vogel et al, 2019). No indicator met this threshold, so a more flexible approach was adopted. Under this revised method, an indicator could be shortlisted if it met both of the following conditions:

- achieved at least 70% agreement on one or more of the quality assessment criteria.
- reached an average top 2 boxes (t2b) performance [footnote 1] <u>and</u> average net performance [footnote 2] across criteria of over 50% (approach further explained in 'Findings').

Following this approach, 6 indicators were shortlisted. Similarly to the previous round, the key findings were summarised in a document to circulate with the Panel alongside the Round 3 questionnaire, highlighting areas that did and did not receive consensus.

Footnotes

[1] The top 2 boxes (t2b) performance captures the proportion of respondents giving the 2 most positive ratings ("Strongly Agree" and "Agree"), indicating overall positive endorsement.

[2] Net performance accounts for both positive and negative responses by subtracting the proportion of negative ratings ("Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree") from positive ones ("Strongly agree" and "Agree").

2.3.4. Delphi questionnaire Round 3

The final round of the study requested feedback on a final set of 6 indicators shortlisted based on their performance in Round 2. The questionnaire consisted of 7 mandatory questions on experts' level of agreement with the final set of indicators, both individually and as a set, followed by optional questions that asked experts to provide recommendations on the optimal use and implementation of these indicators, particularly focusing on challenging areas per indicator that had been identified in Round 2 (i.e., individual quality assessment criteria where consensus had not been achieved per indicator in spite of the indicator's high performance in the Quality Assessment Framework).

Following this, an analysis was undertaken to identify which indicators attained a 70% approval rating, alongside experts' reflections on the final selection of indicators. The findings reflect both total and net agreement scores per indicator and across the set of 6 indicators.

2.4. Limitations

As with many Delphi studies, a key challenge involved maintaining participant engagement throughout the entire process. To mitigate the risk of low initial response rates and reduce sample attrition, several strategies were implemented, such as:

- **providing clear communication,** including transparency surrounding the expectations and time commitments for the research, as well as the benefits and importance of participation.
- **maintaining engagement** through providing regular updates (including sharing emerging findings) on the research to increase buy-in.
- **minimising the burden** on individuals by limiting the time commitment of participation at each round and not penalising participants for not completing all rounds.
- **implementing re-engagement strategies,** including re-contacting participants where possible.

The Delphi study required a broad range of expertise spanning both policy and statistics, as well as input from local and international experts to ensure methodological robustness. Round 2 of the study was particularly technical, as the Panel was tasked with assessing the quality of numerous proposed indicators. Consequently, this round was anticipated to present the greatest challenges to engagement. Efforts were made to enhance accessibility, for example, by allowing participants to respond within the Welsh context or another context they felt more comfortable with. However, despite these measures and the engagement strategies outlined above, response rates in Round 2 remained lower than in the previous round, with attrition also observed between Part 1 and Part 2 of the same round.

Therefore, to maximise participation in the final round (Round 3), all identified experts were invited to contribute, regardless of their involvement in earlier stages. The final Delphi questionnaire was built to allow for standalone engagement, as it tested the final short list, which had been developed in previous rounds. This inclusive approach also extended

invitations to key experts who had been identified previously but had not initially enrolled in the study. As a result, engagement increased, and a broader sample was achieved to more robustly test consensus on the shortlisted set of indicators. Accidentally, a non-expert response was also provided in Round 3, with the number of responses initially being 22[footnote 3]. Given that the Delphi questionnaires were designed to be completed by experts with pre-existing subject-matter knowledge, that response was removed from the sample, taking the final number of responses to 21.

Footnotes

[3] The participant did identify as a non-expert, but the lack of expertise was also evident through their responses, as they had provided the same ranking across all mandatory questions, without further contributing to any of the optional questions.

3. Findings

3.1. Findings from the Delphi study – Round 1

The first round of the Delphi study focused on the initial shortlisting of indicators identified through our desk-based review and refined during the expert workshops [footnote 4]. The questionnaire asked experts to rank the indicators within each dimension, from most to least appropriate for measuring democratic health in Wales, provide caveats for their rankings, and identify any key indicators that were missing from the list.

3.1.1. Analysis of findings from Round 1

This section presents the indicator rankings, alongside contextual comments and further suggestions made by the experts. Rankings are based on the combined share of first-, second-, and third-place mentions, which generally align with the average placement, but were preferred to avoid giving undue weight to indicators that cluster in the middle of the rankings. For an indicator to be shortlisted, they had to meet <u>one</u> of the following conditions:

- receiving more than 50% of combined first-, second-, and third-place mentions.

- having an average placement ranking on more than half the total number of indicators within their dimension.

  - for example, for a dimension that had 10 indicators, any indicator with an average rank of 5 or better would be shortlisted.

The following definitions apply to all performance measures presented in the tables below.

- share of first mentions: The percentage of experts who selected each indicator as the most appropriate for measuring democratic health in Wales within each dimension.

- share of first 3 mentions: The percentage of experts who selected each indicator as the first, second, or third most appropriate for measuring democratic health in Wales within each dimension.

- average placement (X [footnte 5]): The mean ranking position of the indicator.

  - note that this value varies by dimension, depending on the total number of indicators.

Footnotes

[4] The complete list of indicators identified through the desk-based review can be found in Annex A. The refined list resulting from the expert workshops can be found in Annex E (Delphi questionnaire Round 1 script).

[5] X refers to the count of indicators within each dimension.

Electoral democracy

The 4 highest-ranked shortlisted indicators pertained to meaningful voter choice, ease of voting, voter confidence, and maintaining a fair level playing field for candidates.

Table 1: Electoral Dimension - Initial indicator ranking, July to August 2025

Indicator	Share of first mentions	Share of first 3 mentions	Average placement (10)	Shortlisted
Electoral competitiveness: Do voters have meaningful choices between candidates?	23%	55%	3.8	Yes
Electoral integrity: Overall, thinking about voting in election(s), how would you rate the ease of participating? Even if you have never voted, please think about how easy or difficult you think it would be.	23%	50%	4.1	Yes
Electoral integrity: How confident, if at all, are you that you know how to go about voting in an election?/How confident, if at all, are you that you know how to go about registering to vote?	18%	45%	4.5	Yes
Electoral competitiveness: Did the electoral process allow for a fair playing field for all candidates, including equitable access to media and campaign financing?	5%	36%	4	Yes
Electoral integrity: Do losing parties and candidates accept the result of this national election? Were there effective procedures for citizens to make complaints about the electoral process?	5%	36%	5.6	No
Electoral integrity: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement? "I believe the votes are counted accurately at elections in Great Britain."	9%	23%	5.7	No
Electoral integrity: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you	5%	18%	6.6	No

with the system of registering to vote in Great Britain?				
Electoral competitiveness: How are campaign finance rules enforced, and do they allow for a fair contest?	5%	18%	6.4	No
Electoral competitiveness: Thinking about the funding of political parties and campaigners, how open and transparent do you think information on this is?	9%	9%	7.1	No
Electoral integrity: Overall, thinking about voting in election(s), how would you rate the security of voting? Even if you have never voted, please think about how secure or not you think it would be.	-	9%	7	No

In the open-text responses, electoral competitiveness indicators were frequently highlighted as core measures of democratic health. In contrast, indicators relating to ease of participation were sometimes ranked lower, despite their generally strong overall performance. The lower ranking of these indicators also appeared to reflect anticipated developments, such as the introduction of automatic voter registration in Wales, mentioned by 2 experts.

Three experts expressed a preference for expert-judgment data over public polling, citing concerns that polling results may be influenced by bias or knowledge gaps within the wider population. Seven experts, mainly from academic backgrounds, also noted overlap between certain indicators, such as ease of voting and confidence in voting, and suggested grouping them under broader thematic categories.

When asked for further suggestions, 2 experts recommended revisiting indicators related to civil rights protections and freedom of association, including the ability to form political parties and stand in elections. These were considered earlier in the study but excluded from the Delphi study, as democracy in Wales was viewed as well-established. One expert proposed including indicators of electoral system fairness, with potential comparisons between proportional and majoritarian models. Other individual suggestions included incorporating measures such as party vote shares, public campaign funding, the frequency of election result challenges, and the proportion of blank or spoiled ballots to complement perception-based indicators.

Participatory democracy

The 3 highest-ranked indicators that were shortlisted were voter turnout in elections, contact with local councillors and Members of the Senedd (MSs), and attempts to influence

decisions at the local level. The national wellbeing indicator on active global citizenship in Wales was also included in the short list, even though it was not amongst the highest-ranked ones, due to some participants expressing a lack of clarity on what it entailed. It would be further tested in Round 2, alongside more information about what it entails.

Table 2: Participatory Dimension - Initial indicator ranking, July to August 2025

Indicator	Share of first mentions	Share of first 3 mentions	Average placement (10)	Shortlisted
Turnout in elections (official statistics): Turnout of votes in General, Senedd, and Local elections.	59%	68%	3.2	Yes
Engagement with formal politics: Have you contacted your local councillor in the past 12 months, for example, with an enquiry, complaint, or problem? (taken from National Survey for Wales)/Have you contacted your Members of the Senedd (MSs) in the past 12 months, for example, with an enquiry, complaint, or problem?	14%	45%	4.4	Yes
Engagement with formal politics: Have you ever attempted to influence a decision or decisions made by the council?	9%	41%	4.2	Yes
Turnout in [Senedd/Local] elections (attitude): As you may know, on [latest Senedd election date] there were elections. We often find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they were sick, did not have the time, or were just not interested. How about you - did you manage to vote?/In the Welsh local council elections in [latest election date], a lot of people didn't manage to vote. How about you – did you manage to vote in the Welsh local council elections?	-	36%	5.1	No

Engagement with informal politics: Active global citizenship in Wales.	5%	27%	6.1	Yes (see below)
Political interest and knowledge: Assessment of knowledge regarding devolved politics in Wales and UK politics at Westminster, measured on a 0-10 scale.	-	27%	6.6	No
Political interest and knowledge (Senedd Elections): Thinking about the election(s) on [latest Senedd election date], overall, how much, if anything, did you feel you knew about the election(s) in your area?/To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "I had enough information on candidates to be able to make an informed decision."	-	18%	5.7	No
Political interest and knowledge: To what extent do you have a good understanding of what your local councillor does for your local community?	-	14%	5.8	No
Political interest and knowledge (Senedd Elections): Thinking about the election(s) on [latest Senedd election date], overall, how much, if anything, did you feel you knew about the election(s) in your area?/To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "I had enough information on candidates to be able to make an informed decision."	9%	14%	6.5	No
Political interest and knowledge: How much do you think UK politics has an impact or makes a difference to your everyday life?	5%	9%	7.4	No

Although voter turnout was ranked the highest, 5 experts emphasised that it should not be treated as a standalone indicator of participatory democracy. While acknowledging its value, many felt it should be complemented by measures capturing other forms of civic engagement. Several experts also argued that the current set of indicators reflects a narrow understanding of participation, focusing too heavily on elections and formal mechanisms. They suggested that participatory democracy should also encompass informal engagement, civic activity between elections, and citizen involvement in decision-making processes. As a result, a few experts questioned the rankings' validity, noting that they combine different dimensions of participation.

Experts also expressed caution about relying too heavily on public opinion and self-reported data, which can be affected by social desirability bias, misreporting (for example, individuals claiming they voted when they did not), and varying levels of relevance across population groups.

Two experts valued indicators that measure citizens' knowledge of governance and their ability to engage with political institutions, viewing these as fundamental to trust and meaningful participation. However, another 2 questioned whether detailed political knowledge is essential, warning that such measures could introduce social or class biases.

Lastly, 3 respondents expressed uncertainty about the indicator on engagement with informal politics, noting they were unfamiliar with the national wellbeing indicator on active global citizenship in Wales. In light of this, the national wellbeing indicator on active global citizenship in Wales was included on the short list for further testing in the second round of the Delphi study, accompanied by clearer information on its scope and definition.

Experts also offered several targeted suggestions to strengthen and refine the proposed indicators. Three recommended broadening the scope of political participation measures, with one specifically proposing to add a multiple-response question to capture the range of informal political activities citizens engage in over the course of a year. An indicator measuring engagement with informal politics had been considered earlier in the study but was excluded due to concerns about questionnaire length and its limited compatibility with constructing a composite indicator of democracy in Wales. In particular, capturing the experts' feedback on informal political participation would have required them reviewing a lengthy multiple-choice question with many response options, which raised concerns about overall questionnaire length. In addition, the wide range of forms that informal participation could take made it difficult to translate this measure into a single component of a composite indicator of democracy in Wales. Two further recommendations focused on assessing citizens' knowledge and understanding of the different levels of government and their functions.

Other individual suggestions included:

- conducting a qualitative exploration of barriers to democratic engagement to identify challenges not captured by quantitative measures.

- expanding participatory measures to better reflect involvement in decision-making processes, as emphasised in frameworks such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.
- including measures of awareness and use of participatory democratic mechanisms, such as referendums, plebiscites, participatory budgeting, and public consultations.

Deliberative democracy

The 3 highest-ranked indicators were the use of justifications for policy positions, engagement with counterarguments, and fair representation of these positions in debates in the Welsh Parliament.

Table 3: Deliberative Dimension - Initial indicator ranking, July to August 2025

Indicator	Share of first mentions	Share of first 3 mentions	Average placement (6)	Shortlisted
Use of reasoned justifications among politicians in debate (Welsh Parliament): Do politicians provide clear, well-reasoned justifications for their policy positions during debates?	73%	95%	1.5	Yes
Respect for counterarguments and opponents among politicians (Welsh Parliament): Do politicians acknowledge and engage with counterarguments or alternative perspectives presented during debates?	14%	73%	2.6	Yes
Respect for counterarguments and opponents among politicians (Welsh Parliament): Are opposing views fairly represented, or are they distorted or misrepresented to undermine them?	5%	68%	3.2	Yes
Respect for counterarguments and opponents among politicians (Welsh Parliament): Do politicians respond to opposing views in a respectful manner, avoiding interruption, hostility, or ad hominem attacks?	9%	41%	3.9	No

Use of justifications for decisions among politicians that appeal to common good (Welsh Parliament): Do politicians justify their decisions with reference to the common good?	-	18%	4.2	No
Quality of deliberation in the public sphere: How many welfare programmes are means-tested, and how many benefit all (or virtually all) members of the polity?	-	5%	5.5	No

Four experts raised concerns about the conceptual overlap between indicators within the deliberative dimension, noting that many of the measures appeared highly correlated, capturing similar ideas and therefore reducing the value of distinguishing between them. Another 4 pointed out that the welfare programme indicator was not closely aligned with any element of deliberative democracy. Two respondents also argued that while public justification is an important aspect of democracy, it may not necessarily reflect the quality or legitimacy of the deliberative process, since justifications can sometimes mask political motives or avoid genuine dialogue. One participant additionally commented that the term "common good" was unclear and potentially too vague to serve as the basis of a meaningful assessment.

Experts also made several suggestions for strengthening the indicators. Four recommended adding measures of practical deliberation to capture citizen involvement in decision-making beyond elections, such as through citizens' assemblies or public consultations. These suggestions pertain to actual deliberation, which, while remaining thematically relevant due to concerning the deliberative "supply" of participation, are nevertheless more closely related to the participatory aspect of democracy. More individual suggestions not further actioned included incorporating of additional V-Dem metrics, including range of consultation (indicator under the V-Dem codebook (v15): v2dlconslt), engaged society (indicator under the V-Dem codebook (v 15): v2dlengage), frequency of hate speech by major political parties (indicator under the V-Dem codebook (v15): v2smpolhate), and use of social media to spread misleading or false information (indicator under the V-Dem codebook (v15): v2smpardom). Additionally, 2 more suggested assessing both the extent and the quality of media coverage of political debate. Other individual recommendations included adding measures of political polarisation and assessing the responsibility of political and party leaders in their public discourse.

For this dimension, experts were further invited to share their views on whether the indicators on justifications and counterarguments could be expanded to cover the local government as well. Respondents acknowledged some limitations, particularly around data availability and accessibility, as local government meetings would need to be recorded and publicly available to allow for systematic analysis. Specific ideas included using

georeferenced data from Google Trends and social media, analysed using text-based methods, to gauge public perceptions of discourse quality; examining standards committees for instances where standards were not upheld, while noting that this might only highlight negative examples; and exploring the use of AI tools to monitor council debates.

Egalitarian democracy

The 2 highest-ranked indicators were the socio-demographic characteristics of candidates and the demographic characteristics of elected candidates.

Table 4: Egalitarian Dimension - Initial indicator ranking, July to August 2025

Indicator	Share of first mentions	Share of first 3 mentions	Average placement (3)	Shortlisted
Equality of political engagement & balanced demographic representation in candidates: Socio-demographic characteristics of candidates.	59%	95%	1.4	Yes
Equality of political engagement & balanced demographic representation in government and legislators: Demographic characteristics of elected candidates.	27%	86%	1.9	Yes
Alignment of policies with various social groups: People are asked to rank their views on a range of issues, including whether the government should cut taxes and significantly reduce spending on health and social services, prioritise environmental protection over economic growth, abolish the Senedd, and return to pre-devolution arrangements, or protect the UK's sovereignty (using a scale from 0 to 10). They are then asked to place Welsh Labour, the Welsh Conservative Party, and Plaid Cymru on the same scale for each issue.	14%	18%	2.6	No

Several experts provided positive feedback, highlighting the clarity and comprehensiveness of the indicators in this dimension. However, 3 found the question regarding the alignment

of policies with different social groups unclear, leading them to focus on the other 2 indicators instead.

Suggestions in this area mirrored those from the participatory dimension, focusing on broadening the definition of equality in participation to capture engagement beyond standing for election or holding office. Two experts recommended including self-reported indicators alongside official statistics, such as perceived ability to join a political party, perceived equal access to political participation, and perceptions of representation. Another 2 suggested collecting data on differences in voter registration and turnout rates by gender, national origin, sexual orientation, and other characteristics. Finally, one participant proposed adding questions to assess social and demographic siloing in political discussion, for example, whether individuals tend to discuss political issues mainly with others from similar or different backgrounds, as a way to capture potential echo-chamber effects.

Institutional responsiveness

The 3 highest-ranked and shortlisted indicators were citizens' satisfaction with the way that democracy works in the UK and Wales specifically, citizens' satisfaction with local councils acting on the concerns of local residents, and citizens' belief that they can influence decisions affecting their local areas. In addition, in response to a particular recommendation echoed by several participants (see below), the "government grievance" indicator from the Edelman Trust Barometer (p. 59) was newly introduced in the short list.

Table 5: Institutional responsiveness - Initial indicator ranking, July to August 2025

Indicator	Share of first mentions	Share of first 3 mentions	Average placement (7)	Shortlisted
Citizens' satisfaction with government and the political system: On the whole, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that democracy works in: a) the UK as a whole; b) Wales?	27%	55%	3.6	Yes
Citizens' satisfaction with government and the political system: To what extent do you think your local council(s) act(s) on the concerns of local residents?	5%	55%	3.6	Yes
Citizens' belief in their ability to influence politics: To what extent do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?	18%	50%	3.7	Yes
Citizens' satisfaction with government and the political system: How much do you agree or disagree that the people who win elections and are in charge of the country care about people like you?	9%	41%	4.1	No
Citizens' satisfaction with government and the political system: How satisfied are you with how the Welsh Government is doing its job?	23%	36%	4.1	No
Government consultation with citizens and civil society: To what extent do you agree or disagree that your local councillor works closely with your local community?	5%	36%	4.6	No
Policy congruence with public opinion: To what extent do recent government policies reflect the preferences of the Welsh public?	14%	27%	4.6	No

(newly introduced) **Citizens' trust in the government:** In thinking about why you do or do not trust government in general, please specify where you think it falls on the scale between the 2 sets of opposing descriptions (Set A: between 'Serves the interests of only certain groups of people' and 'Serves the interests of everyone equally and fairly'; Set B: between 'Overall, its actions are hurting my quality of life' and 'Overall, its actions are improving my quality of life').	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Yes (see below)

Two experts found the indicators in this dimension difficult to rank, noting that they were of roughly equal importance and that there was some overlap between categories. Additionally, they reported issues with scope and wording. Specific comments included that the "influence on local area" question does not distinguish between local and national government, the "government consultation" indicator does not fully align with its underlying question, and the measure on how closely councillors work with communities may be unrealistic for most respondents to answer accurately.

Three participants recommended including trust-related indicators in this dimension, covering institutions such as parliament, government, political parties, politicians, and executive agencies. In response, the short list also included the "government grievance" indicator from the Edelman Trust Barometer (p. 59).

Other individual suggestions included incorporating metrics on sense of belonging within local communities and on the perceived fairness and transparency of decision-making processes, particularly focusing on whether citizens feel heard and represented.

Transparency and media freedom

The 4 highest-ranked indicators covered whether decision-makers can be held accountable for major policy and spending decisions, formal anti-corruption or public integrity strategies, the extent to which media outlets are free to report critically on the government without fear of censorship or retaliation, and responsiveness and success rates of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

Table 6: Transparency and media freedom - Initial indicator ranking, July to August 2025

Indicator	Share of first mentions	Share of first 3 mentions	Average placement (10)	Shortlisted
Government transparency: Can decision-makers be identified and held accountable for major policy and spending decisions?	27%	59%	3.1	Yes
Government transparency: Is there a formal anti-corruption or public integrity strategy in place, and does it include measurable objectives with regular monitoring?	18%	45%	5.0	Yes
Media freedom: To what extent are media outlets free to report critically on the government without fear of censorship or retaliation?	23%	41%	4.5	Yes
Government transparency: Freedom of Information (FOI) responsiveness and success rates.	9%	23%	4.7	Yes
Government transparency: Are internal audit bodies and ethics units adequately resourced and empowered to act on integrity breaches?	-	36%	5.2	No
Media freedom: Is media ownership sufficiently diverse to ensure access to a wide range of political opinions and perspectives?	5%	23%	5.7	No
Media freedom: Is there systematic bias in media coverage against opposition parties or candidates, particularly around election periods?	-	23%	6.4	No
Media freedom: Are journalists protected from harassment, and is political censorship of content rare or absent?/Do journalists refrain from covering sensitive topics due to fear of legal, political, or economic consequences, even without direct coercion?	-	23%	6.3	No

Government transparency: Overall, how well-informed do you think your local council(s) keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides?	9%	18%	5.4	No
Public perceptions: How many times per week do you notice the Senedd getting mentioned in media (mainstream and social) in Wales and the UK?	9%	9%	8.6	No

Three participants found the indicators in this dimension challenging to rank, noting that they are best understood as part of a broader suite rather than as standalone measures. One participant also highlighted overlaps between indicators related to media freedom.

Suggestions for refinement included adding indicators to assess whether government-held information is easily accessible and understandable to citizens, alongside existing transparency measures. Another recommendation was to focus on the quality of information, as current indicators tend to emphasise the volume or existence of information rather than its usefulness or effectiveness in meeting public needs. A further suggestion highlighted the importance of considering the reliability of local media sources alongside national outlets.

General reflections

Following the ranking of indicators within each dimension, participants were optionally invited to provide overall reflections on the 6 dimensions. Most responses expressed a generally positive view that the proposed dimensions effectively capture democracy in Wales. Two negative responses were recorded, although these referred to the indicators within a dimension rather than the dimension itself. Regarding the participatory dimension, one expert noted that it was somewhat narrowly framed, with some indicators focusing primarily on elections or on measures of interest and knowledge, rather than capturing actual participation in democratic processes. The same participant found that the deliberative indicators were limited to formal political debate within institutions, overlooking the broader involvement of citizens in decision-making. Two participants highlighted the absence of liberal democracy indicators, either as a distinct dimension or incorporated within the electoral dimension. Such indicators could include elements like judicial independence, the rule of law, official compliance with legislation, and public trust in legal institutions. Respondents referenced existing models, such as V-Dem, and reports underscoring the importance of this dimension, cautioning that liberal rights may be vulnerable even in established democracies such as Wales. One respondent noted that exploring subgroup perspectives would help capture a fuller picture of democratic experience in Wales.

Regarding the prioritisation of the 6 dimensions for tracking, monitoring, and assessing democratic components, certain dimensions were consistently emphasised. Electoral and participatory democracy were often highlighted as core, "headline" measures, with some

noting that if these dimensions are in good condition, the others become more useful for identifying variance and drawing comparative insights. Deliberative and egalitarian democracy were also regarded as particularly important. Institutional responsiveness was singled out in 2 cases as the most critical indicator, reflecting the capacity of democratic systems to translate citizen input into action. Opinions on transparency and media freedom were divided; some participants saw it as essential for accountability, while others considered it less critical relative to the other dimensions.

Several respondents emphasised that the 6 dimensions should be treated as complementary, each contributing a unique perspective to understanding democratic health in Wales. Their interdependence was repeatedly stressed, with the consensus that no single dimension alone can capture the full picture. One participant suggested producing a composite measure of the 6 dimensions to provide an integrated assessment.

Reflections on data collection methods

Experts were also prompted to provide input on technical considerations related to the use of polling, official statistics, and expert analysis in assessing democratic health.

Participants were asked how polling could be made more inclusive to better capture the perspectives of individuals who do not typically participate in politics, such as those not registered to vote and members of marginalised communities. Suggestions included the following approaches:

- targeted outreach and sampling, through conducting polling in-person or through voluntary and community groups to oversample seldom-heard populations.
- deliberative polling (e.g., James S. Fishkin's model), combining random sampling with informed, structured deliberation, helping to amplify less organised or marginal voices on complex/divisive issues.
- online panel surveys, which are valued for cost efficiency and reach, though also recognised as having limitations for digitally excluded and marginalised populations.
  - researchers should be transparent about these limitations and use gold standard approaches (random sampling, face-to-face) selectively for specific groups.
- incentives, as payment for participation, could improve response rates, though noting that cost and data quality issues may arise as a result of this.
- using social media platforms and apps to reach hard-to-engage groups, though noting that these approaches may be resource-intensive.
- random selection from the population as the ideal approach, but harder to achieve due to declining and biased response rates.
- weighting, though noting that this approach is not always successful.

Experts were also asked to recommend procedures for improving the accuracy, consistency, and timeliness of administrative indicators. Their suggestions included:

- aligning efforts on measuring and monitoring Democratic Health in Wales with the Welsh Government's Equality Data Unit to ensure consistency.

- creating a centralised data repository accessible to public bodies, government, and NGOs in Wales.
- using multiple administrative data sources (e.g., electoral registers, ONS data) for improved robustness.

Finally, experts were asked about safeguards that could reduce bias and improve comparability over time when using expert coding to assess democratic indicators. Suggestions included:

- careful expert selection and diversity, through assembling diverse teams that encompass a range of political leanings and backgrounds, including acknowledged academics and experienced practitioners, embracing the reality that experts do hold biases too.
- concrete and specific question design, through developing expert survey questions that are clear, narrowly focused, and concrete.
  - in particular, it was mentioned that each question should address one well-defined concept to minimise ambiguity, while loaded or vague terms can be avoided by providing concrete examples and well-anchored response categories.
- accounting for differences in expert ratings by recognising that experts vary in grading strictness.
  - considering that some experts are stricter, others more lenient, and with political orientations potentially affecting ratings, it was suggested that data collection should capture enough data to model these individual tendencies.
- leveraging methodological innovations from V-Dem, including:
  - Anchoring Vignettes: Providing concrete scenarios that help calibrate experts' interpretation of scale points, aligning their ratings more consistently.
  - Item Response Theory (IRT) Models [footnote 6]: Statistical models that incorporate anchoring vignette responses to adjust for differences in how experts use scales (strict versus lax grading) and to evaluate the informativeness of each expert's responses. This helps place all expert ratings onto a single common scale, enabling more reliable aggregation.

3.2. Findings from Delphi study – Round 2

The second round of the Delphi study focused on evaluating the indicators shortlisted in Round 1 against the Quality Assessment Framework (see Annex B). Experts were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the quality assessment criteria for each indicator's representativeness, quality, and feasibility, and to provide contextual insights through open-ended questions within each examined dimension of democracy.

Footnotes
[6] Item Response Theory (IRT) models help combine expert-coded data more accurately than simple averages by accounting for differences in experts' reliability and interpretation.

3.2.1. Analysis of findings from Round 2

This section presents the performance of each indicator against the Quality Assessment Framework, by dimension, along with the rationale for shortlisting.

Initially, an indicator needed to achieve at least 70% agreement (strongly agree + agree) across all criteria to be shortlisted. However, no indicator met this threshold. We therefore adopted a more flexible approach. Under this revised method, an indicator could be shortlisted if it met <u>both</u> of the following conditions:

- achieved at least 70% agreement on one or more of the quality assessment criteria.
- reached an average top 2 boxes (t2b) performance and average net performance (explained below) across criteria of over 50%.

This section summarises the indicators shortlisted per dimension, outlining average t2b performance (strongly agree + agree), average net performance [(strongly agree + agree) minus (disagree + strongly disagree)], and the count of criteria where each indicator achieved 70% or more agreement, alongside further comments shared by the experts. The detailed performance of each individual indicator against the quality assessment criteria can be found in Annex C. The following definitions apply to all performance measures presented in the tables below:

- Average Performance: Refers to the mean proportion of agreement, that is, the combined percentage of respondents selecting "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" across all quality assessment criteria.

- Average Net Performance: Represents the average proportion of agreement ("Strongly Agree" and "Agree") minus the average proportion of disagreement ("Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree") across the quality assessment criteria.

- Criteria Achieving Consensus (Count)**:** Refers to the total number of quality assessment criteria for which the indicator achieved consensus (≥70% agreement).

Electoral democracy

Within this dimension, one indicator (not currently measured in Wales) was selected:

1. Electoral competitiveness: Do voters have meaningful choices between candidates?

This indicator achieved consensus (70+% agreement) on the following quality aspects:

- being relevant to assessing the current state of democracy in Wales at the national level.
- being relevant to assessing the current state of democracy in Wales the local level.
- its feasibility for conducting a quality assessment.
- its feasibility for consistent tracking over time.

Overall, the main concerns for most indicators within this dimension were related to bias. One expert highlighted the difficulty of defining and measuring certain indicators, such as

fair access and a level playing field, particularly at the local level (e.g., media coverage). Additionally, 2 experts expressed concern that opinions on national politics could influence responses about local or devolved elections.

Table 7: Electoral Dimension - Shortlisted indicators performance, September 2025

Indicator	Average performance	Average net performance	Criteria achieving consensus (count)	Shortlisted
Electoral competitiveness: Do voters have meaningful choices between candidates?	71%	68%	4	Yes
Electoral integrity: How confident, if at all, are you that you know how to go about registering to vote?	56%	49%	2	No
Electoral competitiveness: Did the electoral process allow for a fair playing field for all candidates, including equitable access to media and campaign financing?	56%	32%	2	No
Electoral integrity: How confident, if at all, are you that you know how to go about voting in an election?	52%	42%	2	No
Electoral integrity: Overall, thinking about voting in election(s), how would you rate the ease of participating?	43%	35%	1	No

Participatory democracy

Within this dimension, the following 2 indicators (both already measured in Wales) were selected:

1. Turnout in elections (official statistics): Turnout of votes in General, Senedd, and Local elections.

This indicator achieved consensus (70+% agreement) on the following quality aspects:

- being collected regularly.
- its data being publicly available.
- being easy to access the data.
- being collected consistently over time.
- having more than 2 data points available.
- reflecting a sample representative of the population in Wales.
- using appropriate data collection methods.

Regarding this indicator, several participants agreed that it is useful and easy to measure, but felt it is not sufficient on its own to capture the full picture of democratic engagement in Wales. One expert also cautioned that turnout figures can be difficult to interpret, as they often reflect factors beyond democratic participation itself, such as regional identity or reactions to specific political events. In addition, comparisons across countries may be complicated by inaccuracies in electoral registers.

One expert suggested considering more granular indicators of informal participation, such as involvement in CSOs, protest activity, letter writing, or political discussions. Existing data from the Comparative National Elections Project, the World Values Survey, and the European Social Survey were cited as useful sources in this regard. It was also proposed that turnout be examined both as a percentage of registered voters and as a percentage of all eligible voters, with the latter potentially offering an additional perspective of participation levels.

2. Engagement with formal politics: "Have you contacted your local councillor in the past 12 months, for example, with an enquiry, complaint, or problem?"

This indicator achieved consensus (70+% agreement) on the following quality aspects:

- being collected regularly.
- being disaggregated by relevant characteristics.
- having more than 2 data points available.
- reflecting a sample representative of the population in Wales.
- using appropriate data collection methods.
- its data being publicly available.
- being easy to access the data.

This indicator was broadly welcomed, with 2 experts acknowledging that it reflects a tangible behaviour, thereby reducing potential bias. However, one expert noted that self-reported data may still be affected by recall errors or social desirability bias, whereas a "no" response could be ambiguous. Others emphasised the importance of ensuring national representativeness, observing that measuring this indicator at the local level would require a very large sample to produce reliable results.

Table 8: Participatory Dimension - Shortlisted indicators performance, September 2025

Indicator	Average performance	Average net performance	Criteria achieving consensus (count)	Shortlisted
Turnout in elections (official statistics): Turnout of votes in General, Senedd, and Local elections.	72%	69%	7	Yes
Engagement with formal politics: Have you contacted your local councillor in the past 12 months, for example, with an enquiry, complaint, or problem?	67%	61%	7	Yes
Engagement with formal politics: Have you contacted your Members of the Senedd (MSs) in the past 12 months, for example, with an enquiry, complaint, or problem?	54%	44%	2	No
Engagement with informal politics: Active global citizenship in Wales.	51%	40%	0	No
Engagement with formal politics: Have you ever attempted to influence a decision or decisions made by the council?	42%	34%	0	No

Reflecting generally on the indicators included in the participatory dimension, one participant expressed scepticism about including Active Global Citizenship as an indicator, arguing that the concept is not clearly linked to democratic health. Another participant noted that the current definition of participation is rather narrow, focusing primarily on conventional forms of engagement and potentially missing broader aspects of civic involvement. A further concern was raised regarding the reliability of certain data sources, which may rely on focus groups or expert surveys and may not provide representative samples.

Deliberative democracy

Within this dimension, no indicators were selected. Many experts noted limited knowledge on this dimension and the data collection processes of each indicator, and feeling they lacked the expertise to provide confident assessments led to neutral responses. Some also highlighted that measuring the objectivity of public debate is inherently subjective and susceptible to various biases, and that aggregating expert ratings through averages or medians may not fully eliminate these, even though established methodologies such as V-Dem help mitigate them. In addition, one expert suggested that developing a Discourse Quality Index for Wales would be feasible, though it would require specialised expertise and resources. Another recommended expanding existing measures to capture citizens' opportunities to influence decision-making beyond formal mechanisms, such as surveys or consultations.

Table 9: Deliberative Dimension - Shortlisted indicators performance, September 2025

Indicator	Average performance	Average net performance	Criteria achieving consensus (count)	Shortlisted
Use of reasoned justifications among politicians in debate (Welsh Parliament): Do politicians provide clear, well-reasoned justifications for their policy positions during debates?	58%	42%	1	No
Respect for counterarguments and opponents among politicians (Welsh Parliament): Do politicians acknowledge and engage with counterarguments or alternative perspectives presented during debates?	43%	37%	1	No
Respect for counterarguments and opponents among politicians (Welsh Parliament): Are opposing views fairly represented, or are they distorted or misrepresented to undermine them?	40%	35%	1	No

Egalitarian democracy

Within this dimension, 1 of the 2 indicators was selected (and is already measured in Wales):

1. Equality of political engagement & balanced demographic representation in government and legislators: Demographic characteristics of elected candidates.

This indicator achieved consensus (70+% agreement) on the following quality aspects:

- being disaggregated by relevant characteristics.

- having no known sources of bias.

- its data being publicly available.

- being easy to access the data.

On the shortlisted indicator (equality of political representation of elected candidates), a key concern was the representativeness and granularity of the available sample, particularly in ensuring sufficient depth for meaningful subgroup analysis. Participants also highlighted the importance of understanding barriers to candidacy, noting that this information is useful for interpreting the indicator and identifying potential participation gaps.

On the non-shortlisted indicator (equality of political representation of candidates), one expert observed that, while the overall numbers for the Senedd are relatively small and member profiles can therefore be reviewed manually, this approach may not fully capture all relevant attributes. In particular, characteristics that are not publicly disclosed could be overlooked, even though they might be obtainable through a structured survey.

Table 10: Egalitarian Dimension - Shortlisted indicators performance, September 2025

Indicator	Average performance	Average net performance	Criteria achieving consensus (count)	Shortlisted
Equality of political engagement & balanced demographic representation in government and legislators: Demographic characteristics of elected candidates.	68%	67%	4	Yes
Equality of political engagement & balanced demographic representation in candidates: Socio-demographic characteristics of candidates.	44%	42%	2	No

Institutional responsiveness

Within this dimension, one indicator (already measured in Wales) was selected:

1. Citizens' satisfaction with government and the political system: "On the whole, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that democracy works in: a) the UK as a whole; b) Wales?".

This indicator achieved consensus (70+% agreement) on the following quality aspects:

- using appropriate data collection methods.

- being disaggregated by relevant characteristics.

- the level of disaggregation being sufficient.

- its data being publicly available.

Despite general agreement, an expert raised a concern about the shortlisted indicator (satisfaction with how democracy is working), observing that this item may conflate satisfaction with democracy as a system with satisfaction with the performance of the current government.

Table 11: Institutional Responsiveness - Shortlisted indicators performance, September 2025

Indicator	Average performance	Average net performance	Criteria achieving consensus (count)	Shortlisted
Citizens' satisfaction with government and the political system: On the whole, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that democracy works in: a) the UK as a whole; b) Wales?	60%	53%	4	Yes
Citizens' satisfaction with government and the political system: To what extent do you think your local council(s) act(s) on the concerns of local residents?	60%	51%	0	No
Citizens' trust in the government: In thinking about why you do or do not trust government in general?	53%	48%	6	No

Citizens' belief in their ability to influence politics: To what extent do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?	53%	48%	5	No

Reflecting generally on the indicators included in this dimension, one expert also found it unclear how responses to this question distinguish between trust or satisfaction with the national government versus the local government. Another expert noted that questions relating to the National Resident Survey are difficult to evaluate due to limited access to the underlying data.

Transparency and media freedom

Within this dimension, one indicator (not currently measured in Wales) was selected:

1. Government transparency: Can decision-makers be identified and held accountable for major policy and spending decisions?

This indicator achieved consensus (70+% agreement) on the following quality aspects:

- being relevant to assessing the current state of democracy in Wales at the national level.

- being relevant to assessing the current state of democracy in Wales at the local level.

- its feasibility for consistent tracking over time.

Table 12: Transparency and Media Freedom - Shortlisted indicators performance, September 2025

Indicator	Average performance	Average net performance	Criteria achieving consensus (count)	Shortlisted
Government transparency: Can decision-makers be identified and held accountable for major policy and spending decisions?	59%	55%	3	Yes
Media freedom: To what extent are media outlets free to report critically on the government without fear of censorship or retaliation?	59%	47%	4	No

Government transparency: Is there a formal anti-corruption or public integrity strategy in place, and does it include measurable objectives with regular monitoring?	53%	43%	2	No
Government transparency: Freedom of Information (FOI) responsiveness and success rates.	50%	31%	2	No

Regarding the indicators focused on corruption (Can decision-makers be identified and held accountable for major policy and spending decisions; Is there a formal anti-corruption or public integrity strategy in place, and does it include measurable objectives with regular monitoring), one expert noted that corruption is inherently difficult to study due to being a hidden activity. They noted that the T-Index's methodology for measuring transparency, based on which of these 2 indicators was adapted, relies mostly on business leaders and is thus likely to be representative of the population and capture low-level corruption.

3.3. Findings from Delphi study – Round 3

The final round of our Delphi study focused on gathering feedback on the final short list of 6 indicators proposed to measure and monitor democratic health in Wales. Building on the findings from the first 2 rounds, this round aimed to confirm consensus on which indicators are most relevant, feasible, and reliable for use in the Welsh context.

3.3.1. Analysis of findings from Round 3

Experts were asked to rate their agreement with each indicator and explain their ranking. They were also invited to provide recommendations and offer input on areas where the indicator did not meet the quality assessment criteria in the previous round. Finally, they were asked to rate their agreement on whether the complete set of the 6 shortlisted indicators together provides a good set of measurements for democratic health in Wales.

This section presents the performance and key insights per indicator, followed by concluding remarks and a summary of overall agreement across the set.
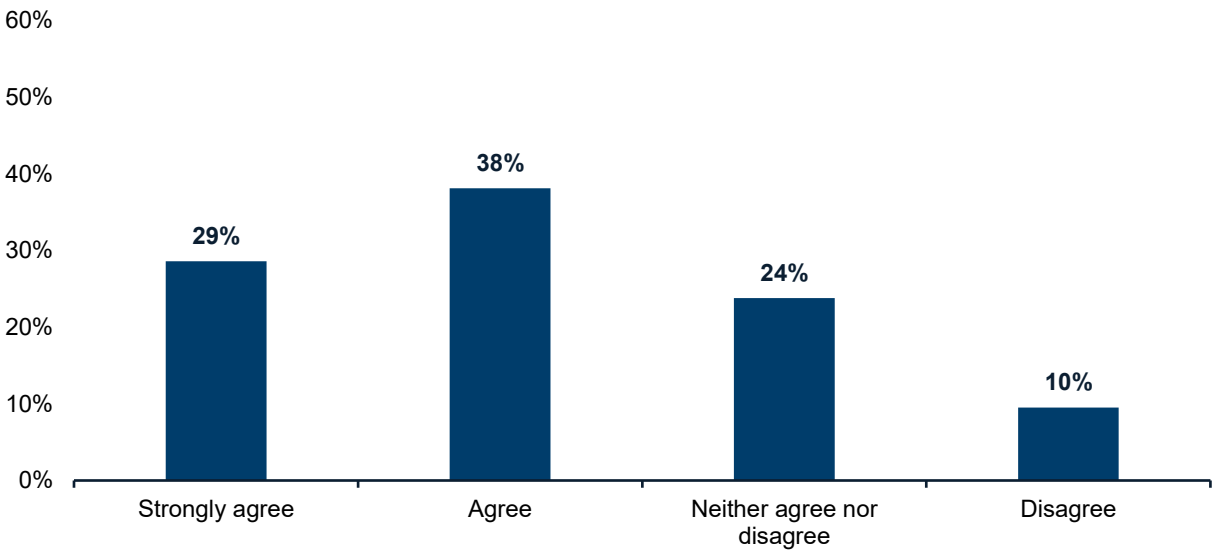
Indicator 1: Do voters have meaningful choices between candidates?

This indicator captures electoral competitiveness by relying on expert assessments of whether elections provided voters with meaningful alternatives. V-Dem assesses this using its Elections multiparty variable, while the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity project similarly evaluates whether voters were offered a real choice at the ballot box.

In total, 67% (14) of respondents expressed agreement that this indicator is suitable for measuring and monitoring democratic health in Wales. Of these, 29% (6) strongly agreed,

and 38% (8) agreed, while 24% (5) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 10% (2) disagreed [footnote7].

Figure 1: Expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 1, October 2025

Description of figure 1: bar chart showing expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 1 where 29% (6) strongly agreed, 38% (8) agreed, 24% (5) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 10% (2) disagreed.

Source: Delphi expert survey, Round 3 (n=21)

When asked to explain their rating, some experts who agreed with the indicator provided additional positive feedback. For instance, one expert highlighted the importance of meaningful voter choice as a cornerstone of representative democracy. Another noted that presenting voters with genuine alternatives strengthens trust in the political process and encourages engagement. Another expert highlighted that assessing the degree of choice and competition over time, both nationally and locally, provides valuable insights into the overall health of democracy and helps ensure elections remain relevant and representative to the electorate.

Conversely, experts who disagreed with the indicator cautioned that due to the subjective nature of its assessment, it could introduce bias, echoing concerns about its interpretation raised in Round 2. One expert noted that the term 'meaningful' can be ambiguous, suggesting that candidates must differ significantly, whereas in reality they may share more common ground than disagreement. This, they suggested, risks framing democracy as a site of conflict rather than compromise. A few experts also raised concerns about blurred categories within the indicator, questioning whether it clearly distinguishes between voters' party choices and individual candidate choices. They noted that under certain voting

Footnotes
[7] Some percentages add up to 101% due to having been rounded up to no decimals.

systems, such as those based on party lists, voters may have limited or no real choice over specific candidates, only over parties.
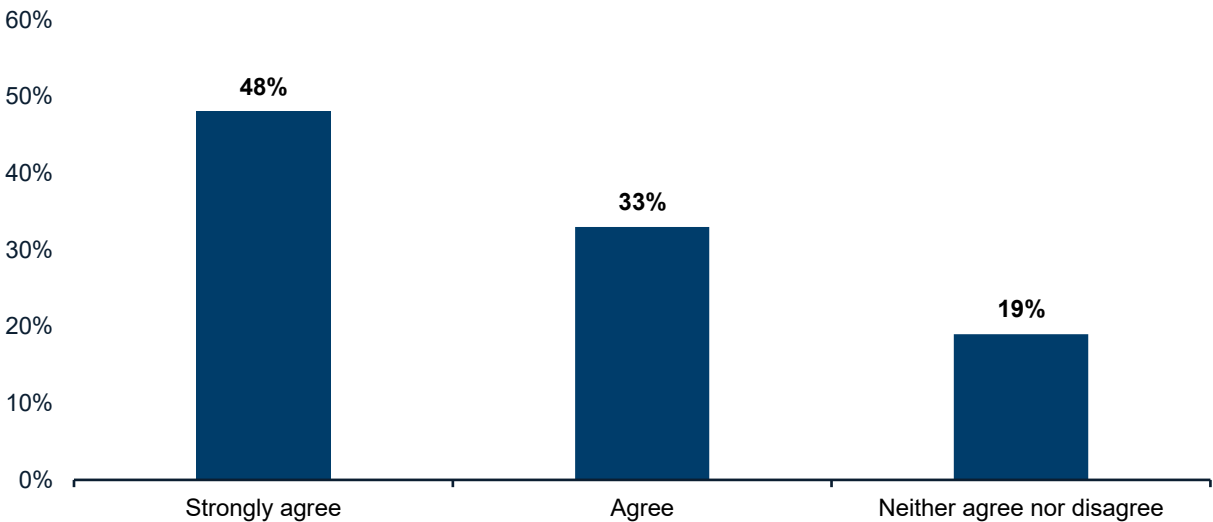
On suggestions to mitigate bias, a few experts suggested introducing clearer, more objective criteria to help mitigate potential bias in assessing this indicator. One expert recommended formulating concrete response categories, with each level linked to specific, real-world examples to ensure consistency and transparency in interpretation and grading. Another noted that a good starting point would be to include objective measures, such as the number of candidates or parties contesting elections, as this provides a factual basis for comparison. However, they cautioned that once qualitative judgments are made about the similarity or distinctiveness of candidate or party policies, there is a greater risk of perceived bias. Another expert also highlighted that established methods are already used in this indicator, citing the Item Response Theory (IRT) model [footnote 8] employed within V-Dem, which helps mitigate bias and enhance the reliability of cross-contextual assessments.

Indicator 2: Voter turnout in General, Senedd, and Local elections

This indicator uses official statistics to measure political participation by tracking voter turnout in General, Senedd, and Local elections, all of which have available data.

In total, 81% (17) of respondents expressed agreement that this indicator is suitable for measuring and monitoring democratic health in Wales. Of these, 48% (10) strongly agreed, and 33% (7) agreed, while 19% (4) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 2: Expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 2, October 2025

Footnotes

[8] Item Response Theory (IRT) models help combine expert-coded data more accurately than simple averages by accounting for differences in experts' reliability and interpretation.

Description of figure 2: bar chart showing expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 2 where 48% (10) strongly agreed, 33% (7) agreed, 19% (4) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Source: Delphi expert survey, Round 3 (n=21)

When asked to elaborate, experts highlighted several advantages of using voter turnout as an indicator of democratic health. Some noted that turnout is readily available and provides a clear quantitative measure of participatory democracy, showing whether citizens are actively exercising their democratic rights. One expert observed that low turnout can indicate voter disengagement, lack of trust, or dissatisfaction with the political process, while high turnout reflects broader citizen engagement and legitimacy of elected representatives. Another expert emphasised that assessing turnout over time, across different elections, and by specific groups or geographic areas can help identify patterns and inform policies to increase political participation. Only one caution was raised by an expert, who noted that while the measure is valuable, it should not be the sole indicator of participation, as it reflects outcomes rather than predicting engagement.

When asked how potential bias, such as in data interpretation or collection, could be addressed for voter turnout measures, several experts said they did not see a significant risk of bias, since the measure relies on official statistics that are generally not susceptible to manipulation. One respondent also noted that Returning Officers have a duty to increase voter registration, which ensures broader participation, though this can also widen disparities in turnout.
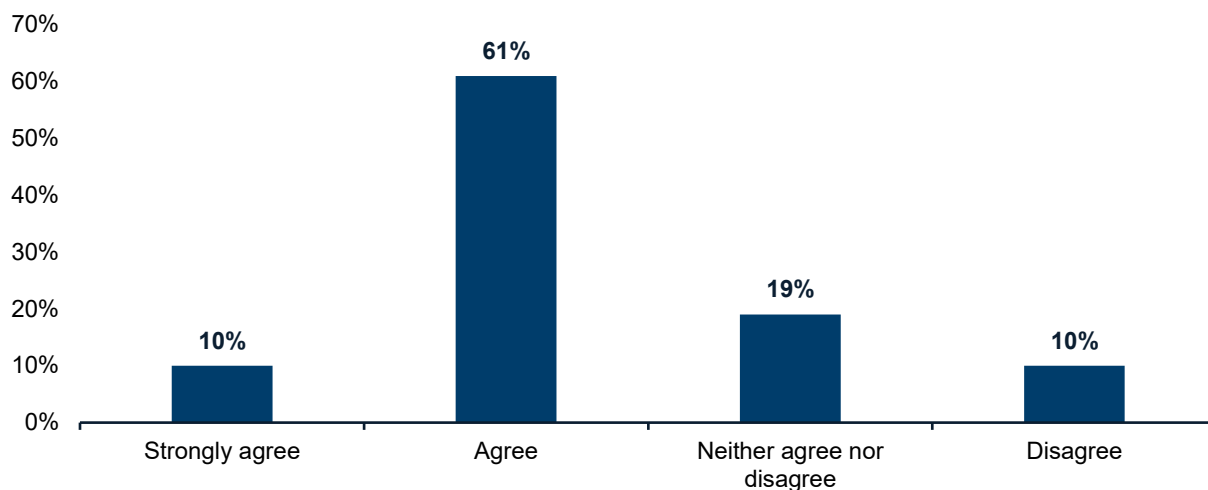
When asked about the potential for disaggregation, experts highlighted that the indicator needs to capture key characteristics. Several experts highlighted the importance of disaggregating voter turnout data to better understand participation patterns across different demographic groups. For example, one suggested that geographic disaggregation within Wales, such as by local authority or constituency, could provide additional insights, noting that local authorities offer a more consistent benchmark, given potential changes to Senedd constituencies. Another expert suggested capturing demographic information, such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, income, and socio-economic background, to identify groups less likely to vote and to explore reasons for disengagement. Considering protected characteristics when analysing turnout data was also recommended to inform more targeted policies aimed at increasing participation. However, one expert cautioned about the limitations: turnout data cannot be disaggregated by personal characteristics due to the secret ballot. While survey data can provide such information, it may be subject to biases, such as social desirability bias.

Indicator 3: "Have you contacted your local councillor in the past 12 months, for example, with an enquiry, complaint, or problem?"

This indicator measures whether people actively interact with elected representatives, via a survey question included in the National Survey for Wales.

In total, 71% (15) of respondents expressed agreement that this indicator is suitable for measuring and monitoring democratic health in Wales. Of these, 10% (2) strongly agreed, and 61% (13) agreed, while 19% (4) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 10% (2) disagreed.

Figure 3: Expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 3, October 2025

Description of figure 3: bar chart showing expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 3 where 10% (2) strongly agreed, 61% (13) agreed, 19% (4) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 10% (2) disagreed.

Source: Delphi expert survey, Round 3 (n=21)

Experts reflected on this moderate level of agreement. One observed that, although engagement with local councillors is not an ideal standalone measure, it still offers useful insight into citizens' understanding of their representatives' roles and the trust they place in them. Another reported that contacting a councillor, even if often driven by a specific problem, demonstrates active citizenship and a willingness to engage with local governance. Another expert noted that such interactions are often linked to service delivery, offering a practical perspective on citizens' involvement in democratic processes and their relationship with elected representatives.

On the other hand, several experts highlighted some limitations of this indicator. One noted that, as with all survey questions, it is susceptible to self-selection and self-reporting. The same expert also flagged that it does not capture the quality of engagement: for instance, a citizen may contact a councillor but be dissatisfied with the response. Another expert pointed out that the indicator focuses solely on local councillors and excludes other elected representatives, such as MSs, Members of Parliament (MPs), or community and town councillors, and that respondents may not always distinguish between them. A further concern expressed was that, while the indicator provides a sufficient measure of democratic health, its effective sample is limited, since only a small proportion of the public contacts a councillor. Additionally, a few experts suggested that other forms of political participation might be more relevant today: one proposed participation in CSOs as a preferable indicator, while another emphasised that citizens may try to influence decisions through other channels without contacting their councillor.

Experts highlighted that to be meaningful, engagement with local councillors should be tracked over time rather than as a single point. Collecting data ideally annually, or at least over a full electoral cycle of up to 5 years, would allow trends to be observed, providing a clearer picture of changes in citizen involvement and trust in local representatives.
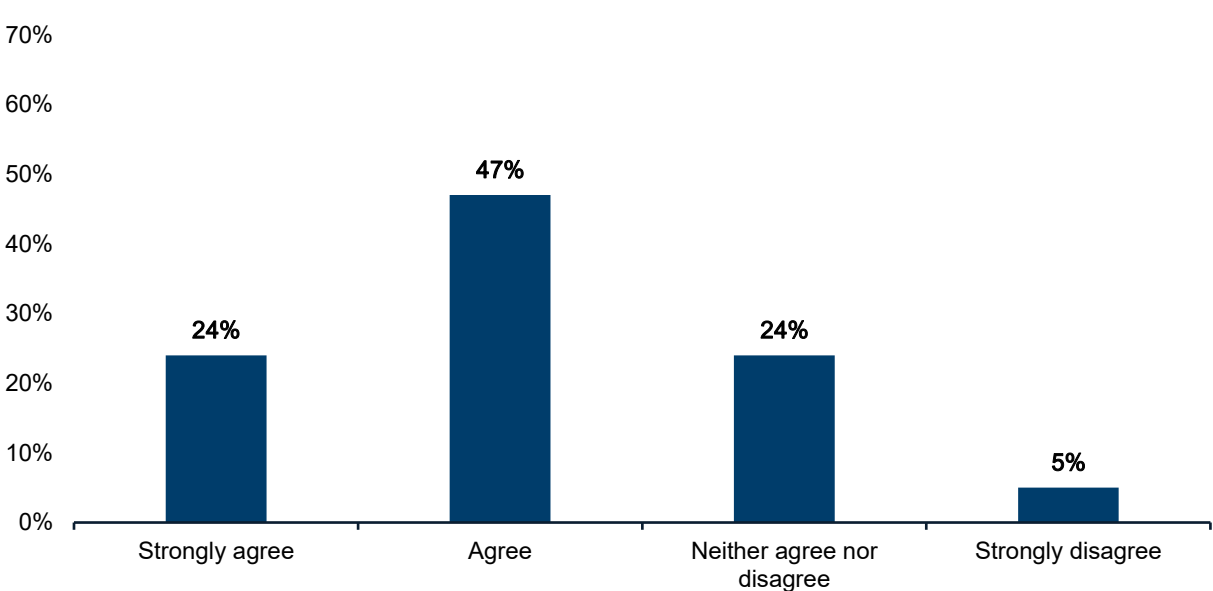
Additionally, a few experts noted that disaggregating the data by geographical area or certain protected characteristics would be valuable, as would distinguishing the types of contact citizens have had with councillors.

Indicator 4: Demographic characteristics of elected candidates

This indicator examines whether elected officials reflect the diversity of society in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, ethnicity, and disability (i.e., typical representation). For Senedd candidates, data are drawn from official reports (Welsh Parliament elections, 2021), while for local candidates, data are gathered from the Local Government Candidates Survey.

In total, 71% (15) of respondents expressed agreement that this indicator is suitable for measuring and monitoring democratic health in Wales. Of these, 24% (5) strongly agreed, and 47% (10) agreed, while 24% (5) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 5% (1) strongly disagreed.

Figure 4: Expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 4, October 2025

Description of figure 4: bar chart showing expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 4 where 24% (5) strongly agreed, 47% (10) agreed, 24% (5) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 5% (1) strongly disagreed.

Source: Delphi expert survey, Round 3 (n=21)

When explaining their rationale for agreement, some experts highlighted the importance of examining the demographic characteristics of elected candidates, noting that this provides insight into representation and helps ensure equitable, bias-free policies. However, others disagreed, arguing that descriptive representation is not a prerequisite for democracy, as citizens are free to elect whomever they choose.

On additional suggestions, one expert cautioned that differences in the number of elected representatives at various levels, such as between community councillors and MSs, could
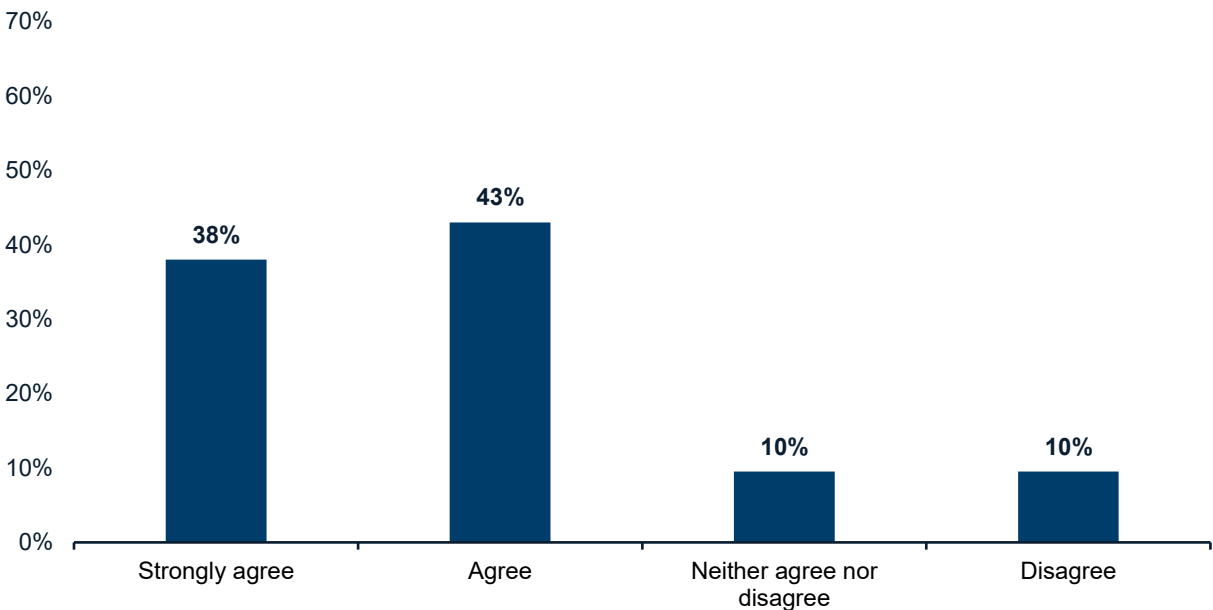
introduce "noise" into the data and affect interpretation. Another expert recommended aligning demographic data collection with the Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion guidance for political parties to ensure consistency across the Senedd and local government levels. A further expert suggested implementing Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, which requires political parties to publish information on the diversity of their candidates, to provide more consistent data. Regarding the frequency of collection, experts generally agreed that data should be gathered in line with the electoral cycle.

Indicator 5: "On the whole, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that democracy works in: a) the UK as a whole; b) Wales?"

This indicator measures satisfaction with democracy in the UK and Wales, via a survey question included in the Welsh Election Study (2019).

In total, 81% (17) of respondents expressed agreement that this indicator is suitable for measuring and monitoring democratic health in Wales. Of these, 38% (8) strongly agreed, and 43% (9) agreed, while 10% (2) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 10% (2) disagreed.

Figure 5: Expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 5, October 2025

Description of figure 5: bar chart showing expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 5 where 38% (8) strongly agreed, 43% (9) agreed, 10% (2) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 10% (2) disagreed.

Source: Delphi expert survey, Round 3 (n=21)

Experts broadly agreed that measuring satisfaction is an important indicator of democratic health, particularly when combined with other measures, such as trust in the Senedd and the Welsh Government. One expert noted that it can help gauge citizens' confidence in democratic institutions and identify any potential disengagement. However, a few experts cautioned that satisfaction levels may conflate perceptions of government performance with broader democratic satisfaction, thereby introducing potential bias.
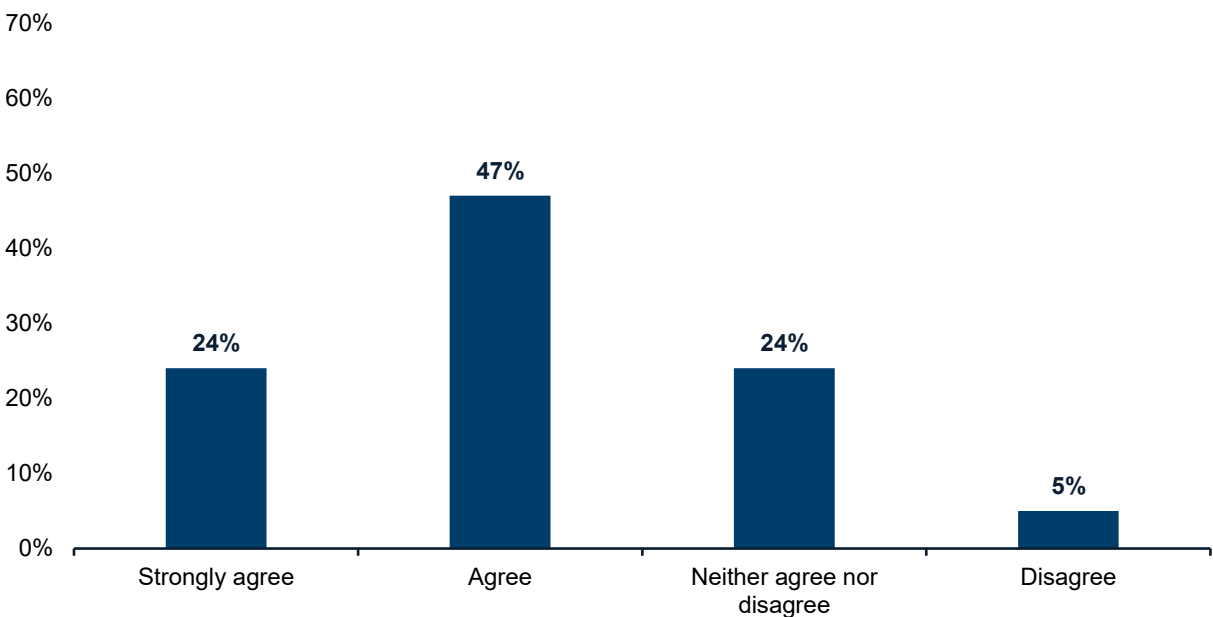
Sharing their views on potential bias in this indicator, one expert acknowledged that some degree of bias is inevitable in attitudinal measures, but emphasised that this is not necessarily problematic if the data is interpreted carefully. They highlighted the importance of collecting demographic information and, where possible, linking responses to voting behaviour to better understand how political preferences shape perceptions of democracy. Other experts noted that differences in political understanding among respondents could also affect the accuracy of results. Regarding data collection frequency, one expert noted that responses may fluctuate over time due to changing political contexts or public debates, underscoring the importance of collecting data regularly to track trends consistently across government terms.

Indicator 6: Can decision-makers be identified and held accountable for major policy and spending decisions?

This indicator relies on expert judgment to assess whether major policy and spending decision-makers are publicly identifiable. It is based on the T-Index Methodology for measuring transparency, which evaluates the public availability of spending information.

In total, 71% (15) of respondents expressed agreement that this indicator is suitable for measuring and monitoring democratic health in Wales. Of these, 24% (5) strongly agreed, and 47% (10) agreed, while 24% (5) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 5% (1) disagreed.

Figure 6: Expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 6, October 2025

Description of figure 6: bar chart showing expert consensus on the inclusion of Indicator 6 where 24% (5) strongly agreed, 47% (10) agreed, 24% (5) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 5% (1) disagreed.

Source: Delphi expert survey, Round 3 (n=21)

Positive connotations highlighted that this indicator could provide a useful assessment of democratic health when considered alongside a broader set of measures. Even when one
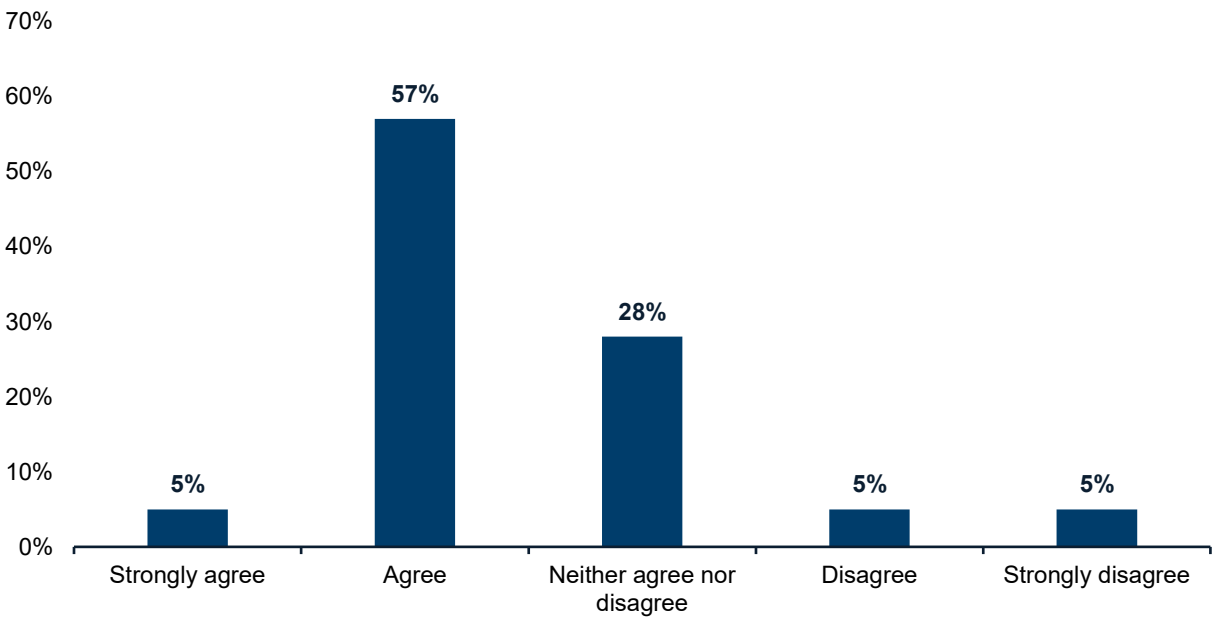
expert was uncertain about the exact methodology, they agreed it was the strongest option amongst the 6 indicators included in the final short list.

On the other hand, several experts raised concerns about this indicator, noting that in practice, individual Ministers or local government cabinet members are responsible for major policy decisions and related spending, so aggregating accountability could dilute this principle. They also highlighted that decision-making and accountability in Wales are complex, involving multiple layers of government and devolution that are not uniform or consistent with those in other parts of the UK. One expert suggested that the indicator effectively contains 2 distinct elements: (i) whether decision-makers can be identified, which measures transparency, and (ii) whether decision-makers can be held accountable, which relates to the rule of law.

Overall performance and concluding remarks

The majority of experts (62%, 13 experts) agreed that the 6 indicators provide a good set of measurements for democratic health in Wales. Of these, 5% (1) strongly agreed, and 57% (12) agreed, while 28% (6) neither agreed nor disagreed, 5% (1) disagreed, and 5% (1) strongly disagreed.

Figure 7: Expert consensus on the final list of indicators, October 2025

Description of figure 7: bar chart showing expert consensus on the final list of indicators where 5% (1) strongly agreed, 57% (12) agreed, 28% (6) neither agreed nor disagreed, 5% (1) disagreed, and 5% (1) strongly disagreed.

Source: Delphi expert survey, Round 3 (n=21)

Among the few experts who provided comments on their agreement or disagreement, one raised concerns that certain indicators (Indicators 1 and 3) are ineffective or problematic. One expert noted that the indicators omit important "liberal" aspects, such as checks and balances and the rule of law, which are critical because contemporary threats to democracy

often come from governments that concentrate too much power. Another expert who agreed with the selection also recommended including measures of alternative forms of participation, political trust, and potentially an expert-coded assessment of the integrity of electoral processes.

Overall, the indicators received generally positive evaluations from experts. All indicators exceeded the 70% agreement threshold, apart from indicator 1, which achieved borderline consensus (67% agreement). Each indicator achieved a net agreement score of over 50%, and on average, the indicators recorded 74% total agreement and 67% net agreement.

Table 13: Agreement and net agreement with indicators, October 2025

Indicator	Total agreement	Net agreement
Indicator 1 – Electoral Democracy	67%	57%
Indicator 2 – Participatory Democracy A	81%	81%
Indicator 3 – Participatory Democracy B	71%	61%
Indicator 4 – Egalitarian Democracy	71%	66%
Indicator 5 – Institutional Responsiveness	81%	72%
Indicator 6 – Transparency and Media Freedom	71%	66%
Indicator average performance	*74%*	*67%*
Complete set of 6 indicators	62%	52%

[Note 1] Total agreement refers to the sum of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses for each indicator.

[Note 2] Net agreement refers to the total of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses minus the total of "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" responses for each indicator.

[Note 3] Average indicator performance refers to the overall average indicator's agreement or net agreement scores.

4.   Conclusions

The Delphi study resulted in a set of 6 indicators considered effective and relevant for measuring and monitoring democratic health in Wales. These indicators represent 5 of the 6 core dimensions of democratic health, with deliberative democracy being the only dimension not included in the short list, mainly due to the specialised methods and the subjective nature of the measurements required to capture indicators of deliberation.

The shortlisted indicators are:

1. **Electoral Democracy:** Do voters have meaningful choices between candidates? This indicator is not currently available in Wales. It requires expert analysis to assess whether voters had genuine options to choose from in an election. V-Dem measures this through its 'Elections multiparty' variable, while Perceptions of Electoral Integrity evaluates whether voters were offered a real choice at the ballot box.

2. **Participatory Democracy:** Voter turnout in General, Senedd, and Local elections. This indicator is currently available in Wales. It measures the share of eligible voters who actually cast a ballot, based on official records of general elections, Senedd elections, and local elections.

3. **Participatory Democracy:** "Have you contacted your local councillor in the past 12 months, for example, with an enquiry, complaint, or problem?". This indicator is currently available in Wales. Data points available for this indicator were collected through the National Survey for Wales between 2018 and 2022.

4. **Egalitarian Democracy:** Equality of political engagement & balanced demographic representation in government and legislators: demographic characteristics of elected candidates. This indicator is currently collected in Wales. Data points available for this indicator are collected via the Local Government Candidates Survey (subject to response rates) and the Senedd Elected Candidates Register (though not self-reported but inferred from expert reporting).

5. **Institutional Responsiveness:** "On the whole, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that democracy works in: a) the UK as a whole; b) Wales?". This indicator is currently available in Wales, collected in waves as part of the Welsh Election Study.

6. **Transparency and Media Freedom:** Can decision-makers be identified and held accountable for major policy and spending decisions? This indicator is not currently available in Wales. The approach applies the T-Index methodology for assessing transparency, drawing specifically on the Corruption Perceptions Index. The measure is based on 14 expert-coded questions.

A detailed analytical overview of each shortlisted indicator can be found in Annex D.

4.1   Concluding remarks

Through 3 rounds of expert engagement, the Delphi study successfully developed a set of 6 indicators to measure and monitor democratic health in Wales. This concluding section draws together the findings across the 3 stages of the Delphi study, highlighting the interconnections between indicators, the wider understanding of democracy that emerged

from expert deliberation, key methodological issues, and relevant government developments.

The research revealed expert consensus around a focused set of 6 indicators spanning 5 of the 6 democratic dimensions originally proposed: electoral democracy, participatory democracy (2 indicators), egalitarian democracy, institutional responsiveness, and transparency and media freedom. Notably, no indicators from the deliberative democracy dimension met the shortlisting criteria, largely reflecting experts' concerns about the subjectivity inherent in assessing deliberative quality and their lack of confidence in the available expert-coded measurement approaches for all indicators in this dimension. The shortlisted set as a whole commanded 62% consensus among experts.

Throughout the study, experts raised several considerations regarding data collection and methodological robustness. For indicators based on expert judgement, they emphasised the importance of clear conceptual definitions, transparent coding frameworks, and, where feasible, the use of techniques such as IRT to account for variation in experts' scoring and to avoid overreliance on any single respondent's assessment. For indicators derived from official statistics, experts highlighted their reliability and comparability over time, but also noted that such sources may overlook informal or emerging forms of democratic engagement and can be constrained by existing classifications and reporting practices. For survey-based indicators, experts pointed to risks of social desirability bias, misreporting, and differences in relevance across groups, stressing the need for careful question wording and disaggregation by key demographic and geographic variables.

4.1.1. Contextualising the 6 shortlisted indicators: Perspectives and recent developments in Wales

Following the identification of the 6 final indicators, this section situates each measure within its wider empirical and policy context. It summarises the main points raised by experts on limitations and interpretation, also noting recent developments in Wales that are likely to shape their future use and relevance.

Indicator 1: Do voters have meaningful choices between candidates?

This indicator assesses whether elections offer voters genuine alternatives, considered a core principle of representative democracy. When meaningful choice exists, voters are better able to express their preferences, hold elected officials to account, and maintain trust and engagement in the political process. Experts also emphasised that examining competitiveness over time, both nationally and locally, offers valuable insight into the wider health of democracy.

Electoral competitiveness is measured through expert assessments that evaluate whether elections are genuinely multiparty, whether voters have real alternatives on the ballot, and whether political parties can form and operate freely without undue restrictions. More information on how electoral competitiveness is measured globally is provided in Annex D.

Western democracies typically score highly on this indicator, and Wales is considered to perform strongly in comparative terms (Nord et al, 2025). However, the upcoming Senedd

reform ([Welsh Government, 2024c](#)) could change the landscape. From 2026, the number of Members of the Senedd will increase from 60 to 96 (ibid). Additionally, the [recent reform of the Senedd's voting system](#), moving to a closed list proportional system from 2026, will have a direct bearing: voters will now select a party, and seats will be allocated according to party lists, meaning their ability to choose specific candidates is reduced. This reform aims for greater proportionality but may concentrate choice at the party level, raising questions about individual representation and competition among candidates ([Senedd Research, 2024b](#)).

Indicator 2: Voter turnout in General, Senedd, and Local elections

This indicator measures the proportion of eligible voters who participate in general, national, and local elections. This is often viewed as a basic sign of public engagement in formal democratic processes. While turnout is widely monitored across established democracies, experts in the study noted it offers only a partial perspective on democratic health and advised that it should not be interpreted in isolation from other forms of civic activity.

Turnout at the 2021 Senedd election was 47%, the highest recorded for a Senedd contest ([Senedd Research, 2021](#)), yet it still meant that a majority of eligible voters did not vote, while turnout in the 2022 local elections fell to 38.7%, around 4 percentage points lower than in 2017 ([Electoral Commission, 2022](#)). In response, the Welsh Government has brought forward the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024 ([Law Wales, 2025](#)), which includes provisions that provide Welsh ministers with powers to pilot changes to how votes are cast in devolved elections, and is explicitly framed as an attempt to increase turnout and engagement. A central element is the introduction of automatic voter registration, under which Electoral Registration Officers would add eligible electors to the register and notify them, with a window to object or request anonymous registration. In 2025, automatic voter registration is being piloted in 4 Welsh local authorities, using local data to add eligible voters to the register without requiring them to apply, with an optout window and no inclusion on the open register ([Welsh Government, 2025a](#)). The Electoral Commission will evaluate these pilots before any further legislation is brough forward to apply automatic registration to Senedd, Welsh local government elections, and devolved referendums, but not to UK general or Police and Crime Commissioner elections ([Senedd Research, 2024c](#)).

Indicator 3: "Have you contacted your local councillor in the past 12 months, for example, with an enquiry, complaint, or problem?"

This indicator signals engagement with formal local politics. Experts noted future development should capture a broader spectrum of political participation, including more informal or digital forms of engagement that are increasingly relevant, especially post-pandemic. Experts saw value in this indicator as a straightforward signal of engagement with formal local politics, but noted several caveats. It is affected by self-selection and self-reporting and only covers contact with local councillors rather than other representatives or more informal and digital forms of participation, which can be equally important.

Data points available for this indicator were collected through the National Survey for Wales between 2018 and 2022 (2018 to 2019, 2020 to 2021, 2021 to 2022). No great variance had been recorded between these 3 periods, with 16% responding that they had contacted their local councillor in 2018 to 2019, 17% in 2020 to 2021, and the percentage of people responding that they had contacted their local councillor slightly decreasing to 15% in 2021 to 2022 (Welsh Government, 2025b).

Indicator 4: Equality of political engagement and balanced demographic representation in government and legislators: Demographic characteristics of elected candidates

This indicator assesses the extent to which elected representatives reflect the demographic profile of the population and is used here as a proxy for equality of political engagement and balanced representation in government and legislatures. In interpreting results for Wales, it is important to recognise the limitations of the underlying data. For local government, information on candidates' characteristics is drawn from the Local Candidates Survey, which has relatively low response rates and may therefore not fully capture the diversity of those standing for election. For Senedd elections, available data on candidates is largely restricted to gender and ethnicity, providing only a partial picture of representativeness and omitting other relevant characteristics, such as disability, socioeconomic background, or sexual orientation. It should also be noted that available data on Senedd elected candidates' characteristics are not self-reported but inferred from expert reporting.

This indicator is framed within the Welsh Government's wider aim to ensure people from all backgrounds can participate in public life and see themselves reflected in leadership positions, as set out in its National Equality Objectives. The Welsh Government has recently issued new guidance to political parties, now expected to develop and publish diversity and inclusion strategies, review diversity data on their candidates and elected members, and use this evidence to address underrepresentation throughout the candidate journey, from recruitment and selection to support and safeguarding (Welsh Government, 2025c).

Indicator 5: "On the whole, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that democracy works in: a) the UK as a whole; b) Wales?"

Citizen satisfaction reflects broad perceptions of system performance, but can be shaped by recent events and party-political leanings. It provides a useful headline view, yet may fluctuate with government partisanship or individual policy controversies, as seen in recent research tracking sentiment in Wales. Recent evidence shows that democratic wellbeing scores remain low and largely unchanged, with relatively high levels of low trust in the UK and Welsh Governments, in Members of the Senedd, and in local councils, whereas very small proportions of people report feeling able to influence decisions (Carnegie UK, 2025). This indicator is currently collected in waves as part of the Welsh Election Study (2019 being the most recent wave),with the Study due to run again in 2026.

Indicator 6: Can decision-makers be identified and held accountable for major policy and spending decisions?

This indicator evaluates whether citizens can clearly identify who is responsible for key policy and financial decisions, and whether there is sufficient transparency to hold those decision-makers accountable. Accountability is a central principle of democratic governance: when information about public spending, policy choices, and institutional oversight is accessible, citizens are better able to scrutinise government actions, challenge misuse of power, and ensure decisions serve the public interest. The assessment draws on the T-Index transparency methodology, which measures how openly governments publish critical information online and how easily it can be accessed, based on 14 expert-coded questions (fully outlined in Annex D).

In practice, this means looking at whether decision-making processes, financial allocations, and institutional oversight are visible and understandable to the public, and whether citizens have the tools to hold officials responsible for their actions. Countries with strong performance on this indicator demonstrate robust systems for disclosure, oversight, and accountability, fostering trust in democratic institutions.

5. Recommendations

The indicators shortlisted under electoral democracy and transparency and media freedom are subject to expert analysis, and neither of them is currently available in Wales. Annex D outlines the key frameworks and methods developed for measuring these 2 indicators elsewhere, which can serve as guidance for introducing these in Wales. In terms of implementing indicators that require expert analysis, the Expert Panel also provided very useful suggestions in Round 1 of the Delphi study, particularly when asked about safeguards that could reduce bias and improve comparability over time when using expert coding to assess democratic indicators (see 'Findings from Delphi study – Round 1').

The remaining 4 indicators, though currently collected in Wales, do not come without challenges. In fact, Round 2 of the Delphi study proved that there is no perfect indicator for measuring and monitoring any of the components of democratic health, as no indicator reached the threshold of at least 70% agreement (strongly agree + agree) across all the quality assessment criteria, in spite of the extensive list of indicators tested against the Quality Assessment Framework in Round 2. Therefore, in Round 3 of the Delphi study, experts were asked how underperforming areas of each indicator can be strengthened. Useful feedback was shared in terms of mitigating bias, improving data disaggregation and frequency of data collection, and enhancing tracking over time, alongside other important suggestions (see 'Findings from Delphi study – Round 3'). Therefore, even though 4 of the 6 shortlisted indicators are already collected in Wales, it is advised that the expert input captured during this study is still considered to determine whether there is room for making the existing indicators more effective in measuring and monitoring democratic health.

Finally, it is understood that establishing 2 new indicators can be resource-intensive and time-demanding. To allow for measuring and monitoring democratic health in Wales in the meantime, 2 alternative indicators capturing similar aspects have been identified. However, these 2 alternatives come with caveats, as these indicators scored less favourably in Round 2 and, therefore, may not fully meet the set criteria.

Therefore, the research team have identified an alternative indicator for each indicator not currently available in Wales. The electoral competitiveness indicator measuring meaningful choices between candidates could be replaced with another indicator from the same electoral democracy dimension, albeit capturing electoral integrity and not competitiveness: "How confident, if at all, are you that you know how to go about registering to vote?" (currently measured in Wales through the Public Attitudes Survey). However, there was no alternative from within the transparency and media freedom dimension to replace the government transparency indicator on accountability for major policy and spending decisions, so the second alternative is drawn from the institutional responsiveness dimension, capturing citizens' satisfaction with government and the political system: "To what extent do you think your local council(s) act(s) on the concerns of local residents?" (currently measured in Wales through the National Resident Survey). Taking on board these 2 replacements further reduces the dimensions represented within the final set of 6 indicators from 5 to 4. Thus, the 2 alternatives are only suggested as a temporary solution until the 2 expert analysis indicators are ready to be measured for Wales.

To further facilitate measurements in the long and short term, the research team provided the Welsh Government with 2 composite indicators: one for the final set of 6 indicators as shortlisted through the Delphi study, and another for the temporary set of 6 indicators that include the 4 shortlisted that are already collected in Wales and the 2 alternatives for the remaining 2 shortlisted for which measurements are not yet available in Wales.

6.   References

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