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Abstract

This paper presents a methodological framework for assessing the quality of democracy in the European Union from a gender perspective. The methodology was developed in the context of a broader project that aims to derive a set of empirical indicators of democratic performance for the European Union, being undertaken within the EU funded project *Reconstituting Democracy in Europe* (RECON).

After describing the general background to the development of this methodology, the paper discusses a set of questions that needed to be addressed in the course of this research. These include: What do we exactly mean by 'gender democracy'? What are the purposes of this assessment? How can we move from abstract concepts such as "gender democracy" to observable indicators? Once a set of indicators has been derived, how should we use these in an assessment context?

In addressing these questions, the paper presents a variety of methodologies that have been adopted in established assessments of democratic performance, critically discussing their strengths and weaknesses as well as their applicability for an assessment of gender and democracy. This survey exercise exposes the complexities involved in the design and implementation of a methodology for a gender-sensitive assessment of democracy and the difficult choices encountered by the researchers at every step of the way.

Keywords

Democracy – Democratic Deliberation – European Union – Gender policy

1. Introduction

This paper¹ presents a methodological framework for assessing the quality of democracy in the European Union from a gender perspective. The methodology was developed in the context of a broader project that aims to derive a set of empirical indicators of democratic performance for the European Union, being undertaken within the EU funded project *Reconstituting Democracy in Europe* (RECON). The methodology presented here is therefore informed by the general theoretical framework underpinning this wider project. Nonetheless, in deriving a set of gender-sensitive indicators of democracy in the EU, special emphasis was given to the need to firmly anchor them in feminist thinking on democracy.

There is a near-total absence of gender-sensitive indicators in established assessments of democratic performance, so one of the most obvious values of the work presented here is its contribution towards redressing such deficiencies. However, besides their potential use in general democracy assessments alongside other democracy indicators, the indicators of gender democracy presented in this paper were developed so that they could be put to use in specific gender democracy assessments. Therefore, this paper also aims to make a contribution to empirical research on gender and democracy.

After describing the general background to the development of a methodological framework for assessing gender democracy, the paper discusses a set of questions that needed to be addressed in the course of this research. These include:

- 1) What do we exactly mean by 'gender democracy'?
- 2) What are the purposes of this assessment?
- 3) How can we move from abstract concepts such as "gender democracy" to observable indicators?
- 4) Once a set of indicators has been derived, how should we use these in an assessment context?

In addressing these questions, the paper presents a variety of methodologies that have been adopted in established assessments of democratic performance, critically discussing their strengths and weaknesses as well as their applicability for an assessment of gender and democracy. This survey exercise is particularly revealing, as it exposes the complexities involved in the design and implementation of a methodology for a gender-sensitive assessment of democracy and the difficult choices encountered by the researchers at every step of the way.

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the international workshop "Methods for Studying Gender and Political Participation" at the Department of Sociology, University of Crete (Rethymno, 30-31 May 2008). The authors would like to thank Drude Dalherup, Gayle Letherby, Brenda O'Neill, Yota Papageorgiou, Shulamit Reinharz, Janneke van der Ros, Serpil Sancar, Ana Espirito Santo and Alessandra Vincenti for their insightful comments and feedback on this paper.

2. Background and objectives

In recent years, democratic performance assessments have become a widespread practice around the globe. These assessments come in different forms, as they use methodological frameworks that vary considerably in relation to the purposes of the assessment, definitions of democracy, choice of indicators, and assessment methods. Yet, if there is one feature that is shared by these assessment methodologies, it is that consideration of the gender dimensions of democracy and democratic practice is virtually absent. As a rule, these methodologies define the concept of democracy in gender-neutral terms so that the need to include gender-sensitive indicators of democratic performance is often neglected. One gender-sensitive indicator of democratic performance widely deployed in these assessments is the ratio of women in political office vis-à-vis men. Yet, when used on its own, this is too crude a measure of gender democracy, since it leaves other important dimensions of this concept largely unexplored.

Despite this generalised ‘gender blindness’ of democracy assessments, little attempts have been made to redress such deficiencies. This stands in contrast with the amount of effort recently invested –by international organisations, national governments and supranational institutions – in developing gender equality indexes. Some examples include the UNDP gender development index (GDI) and gender empowerment measure (GEM)²; the World Economic Forum gender gap index³; Social Watch gender equity index⁴, Statistics Sweden gender equality index⁵, Equal Opportunities Commission (Great Britain) gender equality index⁶; and Statistics Norway gender equality index⁷, while a gender equality index for the European Union is currently under development⁸. These indexes typically comprise quantitative indicators (statistical data) measuring gender gaps in a variety of areas of social life (such as earnings and income, decision-making, employment, education and training, time use and care work, public attitudes and violence) with the purposes to raise public awareness of gender inequalities, to provide an evidential basis for policy making in this area, to monitor progress towards gender equality in a given polity and to empower women. In enhancing government accountability, gender equality indexes are often seen to have an important role in strengthening democracy (Breitenbach and Galligan 2006).

² UNDP, ‘Measuring inequality: Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)’, available at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/gdi_gem/ (accessed 15 September 2008).

³ World Economic Forum, ‘Global Gender Gap Index’, available at: <http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm> (accessed 15 September 2008).

⁴ Social Watch, ‘Gender Equity Index’, available at: <http://www.socialwatch.org/en/avancesyRetrocesos/IEG/tablas/SWGEL.htm> (accessed 15 September 2008).

⁵ Statistics Sweden, ‘Gender Equality Index’, available at: http://www.h.scb.se/SCB/BOR/SCBBOJU/JAM_HTM_EN/index.asp (accessed 15 September 2008).

⁶ Equal Opportunities Commission, ‘Gender Equality Index’, available at: <http://www.gender-agenda.co.uk/gei.aspx> (accessed 15 September 2008).

⁷ Statistics Norway, ‘Gender Equality Index’, available at: http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/00/02/10/likekom_en/ (accessed 15 September 2008).

⁸ European Group of Experts on Gender and Employment, ‘Towards an EU gender equality index’, available at: <http://www.mbs.ac.uk/research/europeanemployment/projects/gendersocial/documents/EU%20index%20final%20report%20December%202003.pdf> (accessed 15 September 2008).

However, there are no similar indexes aimed at assessing the extent to which democracy in a polity (or set of polities) is 'engendered'. One possible reason resides in the difficulties that are inherent in such a task; because democracy is a qualitative concept *par excellence* (Collier and Levitsky 1997), designing a gender democracy index calls for the development of different indicators to those typically contained in the gender equality indexes above mentioned. Unlike the concepts of 'equality' and 'inequality', which gender equality indexes often operationalise in terms of numerically quantifiable gender gaps, the concept of democracy does not easily lend itself to quantitative indicators. It is for this reason that indexes of democracy very seldom use quantitative indicators only, but rather a combination of both. Yet, the development of a methodology for the assessment of gender democracy that combines quantitative and qualitative indicators is a complex task, involving questions of feasibility, reliability and objectivity that need to be addressed at every step of the process – from concept definition and operationalisation of indicators, to data collection and assessment methods.

The observation that democracy assessments are gender-blind may call for the inclusion of gender-sensitive indicators alongside other democracy indicators, but it does not justify the development of a distinctive methodology for assessing gender democracy. Given the wide variety of established methodologies for assessing democratic performance available, there is a question of whether a new assessment methodology is really needed for these purposes. For example, the UNDP has recently published a framework for generating pro-poor and gender-sensitive indicators of democratic performance in developing countries (UNDP 2006), but instead of developing a new methodology, this framework is firmly based on the International IDEA democratic audit methodology⁹. One of the main advantages of drawing on an established methodology (such as the IDEA democracy assessment) is that it ensures reliability, as this methodology has already received widespread application both in new and developed democracies after being field-tested in a number of countries.

However, the decision on whether to adopt a well-established methodology (and if so, which one) or else to develop a methodology tailor-made to the task at hand will very much depend on the purposes that a gender democracy assessment is aimed to serve. Given this, the first question that needs to be addressed in designing a gender democracy assessment methodology is: 'what do we want such an assessment for?' This is an important question, since choices regarding operationalisation, methods and implementation will be largely shaped by it.

Beetham (2004) distinguishes democracy assessments according to their purposes. A first type comprises assessments whose main purpose is scientific. The aim of these assessments is to stimulate research that explores the relationships between levels of democratisation and other socioeconomic, political and/or cultural variables with a view to identifying empirical correlations, generalisations and/or causal links between them. As these typically involve large-N comparative case-studies, these assessments are characterised by the use of quantitative data. The gender and politics scholarship contains numerous studies of this kind. What is distinctive about these studies is that the task of assessing democratic performance does not constitute an end in itself but is rather the point of departure for a larger research programme. For

⁹ A fuller description of the IDEA democracy assessment methodology is provided in sections 4 and 5.

example, Inglehart and Norris (2003) have explored the relationship between women's presence in legislative office (a proxy for gender democracy) and other proxies for socioeconomic and cultural factors, such as educational attainment and public perceptions of women as political leaders.¹⁰ They have also explored the relationship between gender democracy and broader democratization trends, using democracy measures such as those provided by Freedom House.¹¹

A second type of democracy assessments are those which assign overall scores of a country's democratic performance with the goal of creating a world *league table*. Examples include the Freedom House and the Economist Democracy Index. The main purposes of these assessments are to serve as a guide for development assistance, to put pressure on governments to enact reforms and to track progress towards democratisation over time. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the purposes of this type of assessment and those described above are not mutually exclusive, since some assessments issue league tables which are then put to use in comparative analyses. One example is the Demos Everyday Democracy Index¹², which explores the link between democracy scores and other measures of economic development, social trust, politics, diversity and equality.

A third type of democracy assessments are those whose primary purpose is to 'make a contribution to a country's process of democratisation' (Beetham 2004). The most prominent example is the International IDEA democracy audit. In addition to this overall purpose, the IDEA democracy audit aims to: a) raise public awareness about what democracy involves and to promote a public debate about what standards of democratic performance that citizens should expect, b) provide systematic evidence to substantiate citizen's concerns about the functioning of democracy and to set these concerns in perspective by identifying strengths and weaknesses, c) contribute to public debate about ongoing public reform and to help identify priorities and d) to provide an instrument for assessing how these reforms are working out in practice (*ibid*). In order to meet these objectives, the IDEA democracy assessment is a highly participatory exercise. Some characteristic features of this methodology include a preference for qualitative assessment methods, high context-sensitivity, and a resistance to the quantification of results.

These examples illustrate how assessment methodologies are largely determined by the purposes that they aim to serve. In order to avoid unnecessary duplication of past efforts, one possible strategy for developing a gender democracy assessment is to draw on an established methodology that closely matches its purposes. As already stated, our primary aim in developing a gender democracy assessment is to provide a more comprehensive picture of the gender dimensions of democratic performance than those provided in established mainstream democracy assessments and in gender equality indexes. This task entails going beyond female numerical presence in public office and taking into consideration a range of aspects of gender democracy which have been overlooked. Yet, in addition to these overall objectives, one key aim of this exercise is to conduct a comparative research programme that investigates the factors

¹⁰ For similar studies, see also Kenworthy and Malami (1999), Reynolds (1999),

¹¹ A fuller description of the Freedom House democracy assessment is provided in section 5

¹² Demos, 'The Everyday Democracy Index', available at: http://www.demos.co.uk/files/EDI_all%20chapters.pdf (accessed 15 September 2008).

that facilitate and obstruct the process of ‘engendering’ democracies in the European Union multi-level system.

Since a primary aim of assessing gender democracy in the EU is to use the results for comparative research¹³, Beetham’s categorisation of democracy assessments according to their purposes suggests a choice of quantitative over qualitative approaches. However, there is a question over the adequacy of quantitative methodologies for meeting the other overall objectives of our gender democracy assessment exercise described above, i.e., to provide a comprehensive picture that goes beyond female numerical presence. In this regard, qualitative approaches have important strengths that can work to offset the limitations of quantification. The question of how to develop a gender democracy assessment methodology that strikes a balance between these two different approaches while at the same time meeting its principal objectives is discussed in section five below.

3. Defining Gender Democracy

Democracy is a concept that is highly contested, and therefore a concept that is not easy to define. Although there have been endless disputes over its meaning, democracy assessments tend to define the concept of democracy in procedural terms – i.e., as a political system characterised by the presence of a set of rules and institutional arrangements for arriving at collective decisions. Procedural definitions of democracy can be traced back to the influence of Schumpeter’s seminal work, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, in which democracy is defined ‘as an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote’ (Schumpeter 1947: 269). This definition was further refined by Huntington, for whom democracy is a political system where ‘the most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote’ (Huntington 1991: 7). Procedural definitions of democracy were operationalised by Robert Dahl (1971) and since then, they have been extensively used in democracy assessments. Making a distinction between democracy as an ideal system and a set of institutional arrangements that imperfectly approximates that ideal (a system which he calls *polyarchy*) Dahl provides an operational definition of polyarchy in terms of eight institutional requirements that need to be in place (Dahl 1971: 5).¹⁴

The main advantage of procedural definitions of democracy is that they are easy to operationalise. However, democracy assessments relying on procedural definitions have been criticised for rendering those assessments a simple exercise of ‘ticking boxes’. The main criticism is that the mere presence of certain institutions and practices in a polity does not guarantee its democratic nature. For example,

¹³ However, while creating a ‘league table’, providing an evidence-base for policy makers or contributing to public debate do not figure among the primary aims of this gender democracy assessment, this does not mean it might not serve these purposes. The point made here is, rather, that such purposes should be considered as ‘secondary’ only.

¹⁴ These requirements are: 1) Freedom to form and to join organisations; 2) Freedom of expression; 3) Right to vote; 4) Eligibility for public office; 5) Right of political leaders to compete for votes and support; 6) Alternative sources of information, 7) Free and fair elections and 8) Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference.

democracy assessments based on procedural definitions of democracy allow for the possibility that a political system from which women are to a large extent excluded nonetheless receives a high score on democratic performance. In trying to redress these deficiencies, the International IDEA assessment methodology (Beetham et al. 2002) emphasises the need to start from a substantial, rather than a procedural, definition of democracy – that is, a ‘thicker’ definition which characterises democracy in terms of a set of normative principles against which institutional rules and practices should be judged. The International IDEA methodological framework defines democracy as a form of rule based on 1) public control over public decision-making and decision makers and 2) equality between citizens in the exercise of that control (*ibid*). While it recognises that democratic norms are realised in practice through a set of institutions, it insists that those institutions cannot be labelled as ‘democratic’ unless they embody, or serve to realise, those democratic principles.

It should be noted, however, that the fact that an assessment methodology is informed by a definition of democracy in terms of public control with political equality does not automatically entail that it will be gender-sensitive. The question here is how the principle of political equality is conceptualised. Indeed, the assumption that this democratic principle can be realised through formal rights of participation and representation which are equally granted to all the adult population – irrespective of gender – constitutes one of the central feminist criticisms of liberal democracy.¹⁵ This understanding of political equality, according to critics, presupposes an abstract idea of the individual which, being blind to gender differences, has effectively led to women’s exclusion from democratic structures (Phillips 1991). At any rate, the question of how political equality should be understood is a contentious matter, even among feminists – while there is broad feminist consensus that women’s overt exclusion from democratic structures of representation and participation represents a ‘gender democracy deficit’ which needs to be redressed¹⁶, there is no similar consensus over the question of how an ‘engendered’ democracy should look like. Thus, while identifying a democratic system where the principle of political equality has been obviously contravened may be a straightforward matter, defining an ideal democratic system in which this democratic principle has been fully realised is a more problematic task.

The difficulties in articulating a concept of political equality are nicely illustrated by the different ways in which a related concept – that of ‘parity’ – has been understood. Anne Phillips uses the term parity to indicate ‘a rough equality between the proportion of women and men elected’ (1995: 59). From this perspective, the main

¹⁵ These include, amongst others: the right to vote and stand for election, the right to sign a petition the right of free association, etc.

¹⁶ This is one of the main claims underlying feminist demands for political equality. According to the scholarship these gender democratic deficits have come about in two ways. First, because formal democratic processes in liberal democracies take abstract individual interests and majority rule as the primary material for political decision-making, social groups who are either in numerical minority or have been marginalised due to a history of structural disadvantage (e.g., women) are rendered invisible. Second, because in liberal democratic practice political decisions are not in need of justification beyond the rationale of the voting procedure itself, the experiences and interests of dominant groups in society (e.g., men) become universalised and established as a norm, resulting in a phenomenon which Iris Young (1990: 58-59) termed ‘cultural imperialism’ – a situation in which the dominant group(s) in society project their own experiences, interests and perspectives as representative of humanity, while those of marginalised groups are silenced or at best forced to be articulate in the languages of the dominant groups (Young 2000: 141-142).

institutional requirements to achieve parity take the form of affirmative action strategies, such as gender quotas. A similar, though somehow ‘thicker’, conception of is provided by Vogel-Polsky, who defines parity democracy in terms of a power-sharing between women and men rather than simply in terms of equal presence (Vogel-Polsky 2000).¹⁷ The main institutional mechanisms to achieve parity understood as such would include not only quotas, but a variety of other affirmative action strategies aimed at empowering women. Despite their differences, a feature that both Phillips’ and Vogel-Polsky’s conceptions of parity democracy have in common is that they are based on a ‘thin’ understanding of equality that leaves out more subtle issues of inclusion, group recognition and equal respect in political deliberation and decision-making. In contrast to these views, Nancy Fraser defines ‘participatory parity’ in substantive terms, as an ideal of justice requiring social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life (Fraser 1998: 28-29). What is distinctive about Fraser’s formulation of parity participation is its normative character; as it establishes a link between the concept of democracy with an ideal of justice that has long been neglected both by theorists of justice and of democracy (Fraser 2005: 74). The link between justice and democracy is further explored in her more recent work, where Fraser emphasises the importance of the political, arguing that this constitutes the realm where struggles over justice claims of redistribution and recognition are carried out. In her view, the political constitutes the arena where questions of who is included and excluded from the circle of those entitled to justice claims are decided, as well as establishing the rules and procedures for resolving contests in relation to those claims (*ibid*). Thus, when women are deprived of the possibility of participating as peers vis-à-vis men in the political realm, this represents a distinctive type of injustice which, though related to economic and cultural injustice, cannot be simply reduced to either of them.

However, while the concepts of ‘equality’ or ‘equity’ are essential for defining ‘gender democracy’, the latter is a broader concept which encompasses other elements that should be taken into account. Thus, in defining gender democracy it is essential that in addition to the norm of equality, the principle of public control – and associated norms, such as accountability – is not lost. An additional challenge in defining gender democracy for assessment purposes is that the definition should both capture the multi-dimensional nature of gender democracy and be operationalisable in principle. However, the conditions of meaningfulness of operationality seem to be mutually contradictory.¹⁸

Summing up, for the purposes of developing an assessment methodology, there are four basic requisites that a definition of gender democracy should fulfil. These are:

1. That it is informed by a substantive, rather than procedural, conception democracy;
2. That that it enables an articulation of the principle of political equality which takes into account issues of inclusion, recognition and equal respect;

¹⁷ This definition draws on the concept of parity democracy as introduced by the Council of Europe in the mid-1990s.

¹⁸ Thus a ‘thick’ definition of gender democracy will be too abstract to render it operational for assessment purposes, while a ‘thin’ definition will be easy to operationalise but will not encapsulate the meaning of the concept in all its richness.

3. That it is not single-focused on either the principles of political equality or popular control, but rather gives equal weight to both;
4. That it can be rendered operational in principle.

In this context, deliberative democracy offers an ideal framework for the formulation of a definition of gender democracy that fulfils these provisos. According to deliberative democracy theory, what makes a political decision democratically legitimate is not that it has majoritarian support, but rather that it has been critically examined by 'qualified and affected members of the community' through a reason-giving practice. In other words, a legitimate decision is one that can be consented to after withstanding scrutiny by those that are bound by it (Habermas 1998). Yet, for deliberation to be democratic, the requirement of rationality, while essential, is not sufficient since, in order to conform to the democratic principles of political equality and popular control, deliberation must be public and it must also be inclusive (Young 2000: 21-26). This entails, first, that deliberative practices must be open, that is, that they are conducted publicly and in full view of all affected members of the community. Second, it entails that deliberative practices must include, on equal terms, all affected members of the community. And third, it entails that decisions must be justified to all affected members and are accepted by all in a free and non-coercive debate. (Gutmann and Thompson 2004: 3-7; Eriksen and Fossum 2002: 402). Thus, according to deliberative democracy, a political decision is to be considered 'democratic' if it fulfils the principles of inclusion, political equality, publicity and reasonableness (Young 2000: 21-26).

Models of deliberative democracy are also particularly suited for exploring democratic performance in a multi-level polity like the European Union, since it has a number of strengths when compared to other approaches. First, it is contended that deliberative models of democracy are able to break the conceptual link between democracy and the nation-state. While other models of democracy (e.g., aggregative models) take the nation-state as a template, equating democracy with its core institutions and procedures and with an idea of sovereignty as territorially-bounded and sustained by national identities (Eriksen and Fossum 2000: 6) deliberative models, by contrast, do not tie the concept of democracy to a particular territory, or to a values-based community based on a common ethnicity or nationality, but regard the existence of diversity and difference as being conducive to democracy rather than an obstacle to it.¹⁹ Second, deliberative democracy does not tie the concept of democracy and democratic legitimacy to a particular organisational form (e.g., majoritarian parliamentarianism) or procedure (aggregation of interests through voting), both of which are commonly found in liberal nation states but are much less in evidence at the supranational level of EU governance. Third, deliberative models of democracy distance themselves from arguments proposing that EU legitimacy does not derive from its democratic nature, but rather from its efficiency in solving common problems that member states can no longer deal with on their own (Majone 1998; Moravcsik 1998). This view is criticised by the defenders of deliberative democracy on the grounds that it is premised on a 'consequentialist notion of legitimation' (Eriksen and Fossum 2004: 439). In their view, democracy cannot be defined in terms of 'output' efficiency alone, because this is an insufficient condition to call a government

¹⁹ Here we exclude civic-republican versions of deliberative democracy, which rely on the idea of a *res publica* based on common values.

democratic: even a technocracy or a benign dictatorship might succeed in aligning policy outputs with citizens preferences (Lord 2007).

Although deliberative democracy provides a valuable tool for developing a methodology for assessing gender democracy, one problem is the lack of operationalisation of its main criteria. The reason is that deliberative democracy remains primarily a theoretical model, with very few concrete articulations or practical features linking its principles with the institutions and the procedures required to realise those principles in practice. Yet, some empirical research has begun to provide answers to questions such as the role played by political institutions in forging democratic deliberation, the contextual factors that are conducive to deliberative politics and the impact of democratic deliberation on the quality of policy processes and outcomes (Batchiger and Steiner 2005). Most of this research has mainly focused on domestic settings, especially legislatures (Steiner et al. 2004), though there are a few studies available that focus on other political arenas, such as international governance (Johnstone 2003; Nanz and Steffek 2005) and the European Union (Joerges and Neyer 1997; Magnette 2004; de la Porte and Nanz 2004; Naurin 2007). In general, empirical deliberative democracy treats the main assumptions of this theory as hypotheses to be tested in the real world of politics, yet there are a few studies which use the normative criteria of deliberative democracy as a 'yardstick' against which the democratic quality of political decision-making in a given political system can be assessed (Nanz and Steffek 2005; Stie 2007).²⁰ In the next two sections, we explore how this research can be applied to the design of a framework for assessing gender democracy in the EU.

4. Deriving gender democracy indicators

In the previous section, the concept of gender democracy was informed by the four normative criteria of deliberative democracy, as spelled out by Young: inclusion, political equality, reasonableness and publicity (2000: 23-25). However, in order to use the criteria of deliberative democracy as a yardstick against which assessments of gender democracy in the EU can be made, these need to be operationalised in a set of observable indicators. In carrying out this task, we were guided by the following conditions.

1. *Coherence*: In order to ensure a tight conceptual connection between the definition of gender democracy, the normative criteria against which assessments are made and the observable indicators derived from those criteria, the indicators should be firmly grounded in feminist theory and research on democracy. This entails that the formulation of gender democracy should also take into consideration feminist variations of deliberative democracy.
2. *Universality*: Since one of the core purposes of this gender democracy assessment is to undertake comparative analyses across countries, governance

²⁰ Evidence of the presence of deliberative modes of interaction among political actors does not automatically render these processes democratic, since democratic deliberation requires not only that participants adhere to the logic of arguing but also that the principles of public control and political equality are observed: "If deliberation is non-inclusive and if citizens do not have the chance to affect the formulation of a policy, deliberative governance can at best be deliberation for the people, but can hardly suffice the criterion of being deliberation by the people" (Neyer 2006: 782).

levels (supranational, national, subnational) and policy issues, the indicators of gender democracy must have wide applicability.

3. *Reliability and objectivity*: The indicators must in principle be able to produce assessments which are both reliable and objective, in order to ensure their comparability. For this purpose, their formulation must be as clear and unambiguous as possible.
4. *Feasibility*: It is essential that for each indicator, data can be collected or produced for all the assessments carried out. This requires the development of common data collection and assessment methods and sufficient levels of knowledge and ability on the part of assessors to put those methods into use (for a more detailed discussion of feasibility issues see section five below)

Inclusion

According to Young, the criterion of inclusion dictates that all the people affected by a decision must be included in the process of political deliberation and decision-making. When coupled with norms of political equality, the criterion of inclusion allows for maximum expression of interest, opinions and perspectives relevant to the problems or issues for which a public seeks solutions.

In modern polities, inclusion is commonly achieved through political representation, since the actual presence of all affected by decision-making processes (direct democracy) is unfeasible. Although the concept of political representation traditionally refers to parliamentary representation via elected representatives generally selected by political parties, there are other modes of representation, such as interest representation through civil society groups mediating between society and the political system, and bureaucratic representation through civil servants in the public administration. Despite the centrality of the representative function in modern liberal democracies there are, however, a variety of mechanisms for citizens' participation (such as voting in elections, joining a political party or contributing to a civil society group) which any assessment of democratic inclusion should also take into account.

Feminist democratic theory has emphasised the importance of inclusion as one of the main normative principles that an 'engendered' democracy must fulfil. In operationalising this principle, the empirical literature on gender and politics deploys a wide variety of indicators. Though the most common measurement of inclusion is the proportion of women's representatives in parliament – descriptive representation – in more recent years increasing attention has been directed to the inclusion of women's interests, concerns and perspectives in political deliberation and decision-making –substantive representation (Thomas 1994; Swers 2002; Childs 2006). Another recent trend in the empirical scholarship on gender and democracy is signalled by a departure from an exclusive focus on women's parliamentary representation and a growing interest in other sites of women's political representation, such as women's policy agencies in government bureaucracies (Stetson and Mazur 1995; Outshoorn and Kantola 2007). Apart from research on the inclusion of women and women's interests in political representation processes, there is also a wealth of empirical studies on patterns of women's inclusion and exclusion in processes of political participation. These studies look at a variety of arenas: while some focus on women's presence, role and status in political parties others focus on women's movements and their interaction with the state in policy-making processes. In addition, research on gendered patterns of inclusion and exclusion in political participation also explore

gender differences in electoral behaviour such as gender gaps in voter turn-out at elections, and gender gaps in political party engagement (Liebert 1999; Nelsen and Guth 2000; Banducci 2005). The indicators of inclusion are drawn from a consideration of the issues discussed above.

Table 1: Indicators of Inclusion

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>To what extent is there a balanced representation of women and men in deliberative and decision-making arenas?</i> 2. <i>To what extent is there a balanced participation of women and men at elections?</i> 3. <i>What is the extent of women's membership in political parties and non-governmental organisation compared to men's?</i> 4. <i>How accessible are formal political institutions to women's civil society organisations seeking to influence decision-making?</i> 5. <i>To what extent are women's interests and perspectives included in political deliberation and decision-making?</i> |
|---|

Political equality

This principle dictates that participants in deliberation and decision-making processes should be included on equal terms – that is, all have equal rights and effective opportunities to express their interests and concerns in a free debate, where no participant is in a position to coerce or threaten others into accepting certain proposals or outcomes.

In liberal representative democracies, the main mechanism of inclusion is the holding of free legislative elections whereby all the adult population (irrespective of gender) have an equal right to periodically elect their representatives. However, one of the main feminist concerns about representative democracy (in both its deliberative and aggregative versions) is that the inclusion of women is a necessary yet not a sufficient condition of gender democracy: because women have been historically oppressed, the realisation of gender democracy in practice calls for special measures to redress asymmetrical gender power relations in order to ensure that they are provided not only with equal rights, but also with effective opportunities, of political representation and participation. Redressing these inequalities requires the provision of formal and informal measures for achieving a greater gender balance in the composition of legislatures, such as constitutional electoral quotas, voluntary party quotas, awareness campaigns, training programmes and so on. Another measure for promoting equal participation in political deliberation and decision-making is to adapt political institutions to the needs of women with regards to meeting times, holidays and family responsibilities²¹. In addition, consideration should be given to the suggestion that in a society where the male norm has become universalised, it is extremely difficult for women to articulate their interests and perspectives. According to Mansbridge (1999) in such contexts, women's interests are likely to remain uncrystallised unless they are able to 'retreat' to dedicated deliberative spaces where their interests and perspectives can be articulated. Institutionally, this can be achieved by the creation of deliberative arenas such as parliamentary committees on women's

²¹ For example, the Scottish parliament has committed to working family friendly hours and breaking for recess at times that coincide with school holidays.

rights or women’s policy agencies in government bureaucracies. Fifth, while women’s non-governmental organisations have been central actors in advancing gender justice and democracy, their effective role as mediators between women citizens and the state depends on the extent to which these organisations are actively supported through public funds. Public support for women’s NGOs enables and empowers those organisations to represent women’s interests, concerns and perspectives in decision-making processes in a manner that is comparable in sophistication to powerful middle class and business interests. However, we also need to take into consideration patterns of inclusion and exclusion in this regard. Given the widespread tendency to universalise white middle class women’s interests and to efface differences among women (as widely reported and analysed in the feminist literature) we thus need to examine the extent to which the diversity of women’s voices are given equal support.

One of the main problems in measuring political equality from a gender perspective is that prejudice and privilege are difficult to detect in a democracy assessment, as the gender power imbalance may be hidden under a veil of ‘reasonableness’. We will return to this point shortly.

Table 2: Indicators of political equality

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>What is the extent of provisions aimed at attaining a gender-balance representation in deliberation and decision-making?</i> 2. <i>What is the extent of gender-friendly provisions in place aiming to facilitate the work of women representatives in deliberation and decision-making?</i> 3. <i>Are there institutionalised deliberative sites for discussing women’s interests prior to decision-making on gender-sensitive issues?</i> 4. <i>How far does the state support women’s organisations seeking to influence decision-making?</i>

Publicity

The principle of publicity dictates that interaction among participants must form a public in which people hold one another accountable. This entails that, when participants are speaking, they are answerable to a plurality of others with a diversity of views, experiences and interests. This principle also requires that participants in a public debate explain their particular experiences, interests, proposals, in ways that others can understand, as well as putting forward reasons for their claims in ways that others recognize could be accepted, even if they disagree with those claims and reasons. In other words, participants ‘speak with the reflective idea that third parties might be listening’ (Young 2000: 25). In encouraging participants to articulate their positions clearly, offering reasons and justifications for their views, publicity promotes public participation in political deliberation, facilitating public opinion-formation, public scrutiny and accountability. It also encourages participants to replace the language of private interests with the language of public reason.

Empirical studies of democratic deliberation often operationalise publicity in terms of the visibility of the formal processes of decision-making. Visibility is measured in terms of the degree of availability and accessibility of relevant information and documents to all relevant actors and stakeholders at all stages of the policy process. In representative democracies, the requirement of publicity is important because in these

political systems, decision-making power is the prerogative of elected representatives rather than the general public. In this context, a measure of publicity is the degree to which different positions are communicated in competitive politics, in a way that is easily understandable, so that the public can get an overview of the choices and alternatives available. However, with the development of new forms of governance, non-elected and 'informal' representatives (government officials and civil society organisations and networks) are acquiring increasing power and influence in political decision-making. In such cases, the principle of publicity requires additional accountability procedures beyond those provided by competitive elections.

The issue of accountability becomes especially pertinent in relation to the representation of women's political interests as this is an area where, arguably, non-elected representatives (such as femocrats in women policy agencies, women's organisations and informal advocacy networks) are acquiring an increasingly influential role in political deliberation and decision-making. The question is how and to what extent these agencies, organisations and informal networks can substitute for the democratic accountability of decision-makers whose mandate is derived, either directly or indirectly, from the people. There are a variety of mechanisms for rendering women's policy agencies accountable for upholding gender equality commitments such as parliamentary scrutiny and control and consistent monitoring by women's non-governmental organisations and supra-national bodies. The requirement of accountability should also be applied to women's NGOs by rendering information about the objectives, mission, activities and governance structure of the organisation widely available to the public.

Table 3: Indicators of publicity

1. *To what extent do women's organisations and the public have access to policy proposals on gender-sensitive issues?*
2. *How far do political parties articulate their positions and proposals on gender justice and equality?*
3. *Are there open sessions, live broadcasts or minutes available after sessions on gender-sensitive issues?*
4. *To what extent do women's organisations seeking influence in political decision-making make their aims, objectives, strategies and activities widely available to the public?*
5. *How extensive is the range of mechanisms aimed at rendering decision-makers accountable for upholding gender equality commitments?*

Reasonableness

The principle of reasonableness dictates that participants come to a discussion with an open mind. They express a willingness to listen to other participants, treating them and their views with respect. They do not assert their own interests above all others or insist that their views cannot be subject to revision. On the contrary, in the context of disagreement or dissent, they show a disposition to understand other participants' interests and opinions through a process of argumentation (asking questions, providing reasons, etc.) and are ready to change their initial interests if these are shown to be incorrect or inappropriate (McLaverty and Halpin 2008, 197-214). Although deliberation will not necessarily end in agreement, participants enter the

discussion with the aim of reaching consensus; yet with an understanding that these agreements and decisions should be in principle open to challenge.

The deliberative principle of reasonableness is probably the most controversial among feminist scholars, including those who are generally supportive of deliberative democracy. Therefore, these criticisms need to be taken into account when deriving gender-sensitive indicators from this principle. One challenge facing feminist researchers in operationalising reasonableness is that lack of recognition and respect for women's voices may be quite difficult to detect, as prejudice and privilege often have very subtle manifestations that are easily concealed under a veil of rationality. As feminist critics of deliberative democracy have pointed out (Sanders 1997; Fraser 1997; Young 2001) nonverbal communication, or tone of voice, are 'invisible' factors that defeat the principle of equality even in contexts where there is formal compliance with institutional mechanisms and procedures aimed at realising this principle in practice. Formal equal access and opportunities to deliberative settings is not enough; as Sanders notes (1997: 349):

Deliberation requires not only equality in resources and the guarantee of equal opportunity to articulate persuasive arguments but also equality in 'epistemological authority', in the capacity to evoke acknowledgement of one's arguments.

In other words, women's voices may be easily discredited on seemingly democratic grounds. However, since the indicators of gender democracy need to point to observable phenomena they will fail to capture non-observable features of political deliberation and decision-making which may, in very subtle ways, hamper the democratic principle of political equality. This means that our indicators measuring recognition and respect of women's interests will only detect a violation of the deliberative principle of reasonableness when there are explicit negative statements about women's groups and their demands, or when their arguments are openly ignored or degraded.

A second challenge for assessing reasonableness is that the indicators must allow for the possibility that, when oppressed groups are aware of unequal power relations in a male-dominated politics, they may take confrontational attitudes before seeking consensus in the pursuit of 'the public good'. For this purpose, we construct an indicator that taps into the content of justifications that representatives of gender interests provide for their demands in the course of political deliberation. This indicator aims to assess whether appeals are made in terms of narrow group interests, in terms of the public good, or both.

A third challenge is that assessments of reasonableness will heavily depend on how assessors interpret the instances of political deliberation under evaluation. Nonetheless, the subjective nature of this exercise can be partly eased by establishing clear codes and by deploying more than one coder, so that the results of this exercise can be compared between coders, and disagreements discussed (this issue is further discussed in section five below)

Table 4: Indicators of reasonableness

1. *To what extent do participants in deliberation show respect for the groups affected by the decision?*
2. *How far are arguments provided by representatives of women's interests acknowledged and considered in the course of deliberation?*
3. *How far are demands from representatives of women's interests justified in terms of the 'public good'?*

5. Methods

The previous sections both defined and operationalised the concept of gender democracy, deriving a set of observable indicators from feminist theorising on democracy. However, those indicators are not alone sufficient for assessing the quality of democracy in a polity from a gender perspective, as we still need to specify how data for these indicators is to be collected, how standards for what counts as a good or bad level of attainment of gender democracy are to be set, how judgements against such standards are to be translated into specific measures of gender democracy, and how these measures are to be aggregated into single scores. This section thus deals with the question of how to use the indicators of gender democracy in an assessment context. This is first and foremost a question about methods. In dealing with these questions, we proceed comparatively, providing illustrations of a variety of methods that are currently used in a variety of established democracy assessments and discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each vis-à-vis the objectives and purposes of our gender democracy assessment as described in section two.

Democracy assessments come in many shapes and forms. These vary not only in the choice of democracy indicators, but also in data collection and, especially, in the assessment methods being used. The majority of them, however, make extensive use of qualitative indicators – i.e., requiring qualitative judgements on the part of the assessors – while the amount of quantitative indicators used is, by comparison, much smaller.²² Another common feature of most democracy assessments is that the choice of indicators is dictated not only by definitions of democracy but also by the range of data that is readily available. This means that democracy assessments very rarely engage in primary research; instead, they make ample use of secondary data sources, comprising, for example, administrative data and published statistics (including public opinion surveys) which can be gathered from parliamentary bodies, government agencies or non-governmental organisations.²³

²² One exception is Tatus Vanhanen's democracy index, which focuses exclusively on quantitative indicators, such as electoral participation figures and the strongest party's percentage of the vote (Vanhanen 1997, 2000).

²³ However, there have been adaptations of established assessment methodologies that incorporate primary research in conducting their assessments. One example is the UNECA African Governance Report (2005), which measured progress towards good governance in Africa. While this assessment draws on the International IDEA methodology, it goes further by conducting an expert survey and a national survey as part of the assessment research (Tungwarara 2006)

However, there have been adaptations of established assessment methodologies that incorporate primary research in conducting their assessments. One example is the UNECA African Governance Report (2005), which aims to measure progress towards good governance in Africa. While this assessment draws on the International IDEA methodology, the research-based assessment goes beyond a desk-study exercise, incorporating both an elite survey and a national survey as part of the research-based assessment (Tungwarara 2006). Another exception is the 'discourse quality index', pioneered by Steenbergen et al. (2003, 2004), which aims to measure of the quality of democratic deliberation. In contrast to the indicators commonly used in democratic assessments, this methodology also requires assessors to engage in primary research in order to analyse political debates conducted in deliberative arenas. As we will see, given the scarcity of secondary data, a comprehensive assessment of gender democracy requires a combination of both primary and secondary research.

Once the data has been gathered, it is assessed against a set of performance standards and – in some cases – these assessments are coded into a numerical equivalent with the use of a rating scale. At this step of the process, the different assessment methodologies widely diverge. For example, the Freedom House Survey²⁴, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index²⁵, the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index²⁶ and the DEMOS Everyday Democracy Index (EDI)²⁷ use a quantification approach whereby both quantitative data and qualitative judgements are assigned a numerical score. In providing simple numerical indices, this type of assessments have the advantage of facilitating comparative analyses, not only across countries but also across cases. Another advantage of quantitative approaches often cited in the literature is that they make possible the ranking of countries according to democracy levels (e.g., 'league tables'). Although the purposes of such tables is rarely spelled out (Beetham 2004: 2), it is claimed that they can act as a stimulus for countries to improve their democratic performance/efforts as well as serving as a tool to monitor progress in this regard, especially when such assessments are carried out periodically.

By contrast, other assessment methodologies are characterised by their use of qualitative methods. These methodologies reject quantification approaches on the grounds that these can lead to oversimplification or even distortion, so they provide discursive assessments with respect to a set of democracy indicators rather than numerical measures (Beetham 2004: 11). A prominent assessment methodology belonging to this category is the International IDEA Democratic Audit²⁸. In rejecting quantification, this approach recognises: a) that the standards by which to judge what counts as a good or bad level of attainment in relation to the different democracy indicators are far from being universal and, therefore, that such standards should be decided by the citizens of the country being assessed rather than being dictated by outside experts; b) that even when there is an agreement on standards, how these are

²⁴ Freedomhouse, available at: www.freedomhouse.org (accessed 15 September 2008).

²⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, 'Bertelsmann Transformation Index', available at: www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de (accessed 15 September 2008).

²⁶ Economist, 'Democracy Index', available at: www.economist.com/markets/rankings (accessed 15 September 2008).

²⁷ DEMOS, 'Everyday Democracy Index', available at: www.everydaydemocracy.co.uk

²⁸ IDEA, 'Democratic Audit', available at: www.idea.int/ideas_work/14_political_state.htm (accessed 15 September 2008).

interpreted is highly contestable and, therefore, that assessments need to form part of an internal political debate c) that there are trade-offs between different democratic criteria and, depending on the context, some may be of more concern than others; therefore, aggregating assessments of different aspects of democracy into a single numerical score is to be resisted.

The main advantage of this methodological approach is that it produces a qualitative and discursive report that is much more nuanced regarding the strengths and weaknesses of a democratic system than a simple global comparison based on numerical measures. In other words, these qualitative reports are able to capture the complexities of democracy that quantitative methodologies merely obscure or glossed over (Tungwarara 2006). Despite their advantages, though, qualitative assessment methodologies are not ideal for comparative purposes, since they too focused on individual countries, allowing assessors from each of them to decide on the standards to be used and on how these are to be interpreted.

In assessing gender democracy, the use of qualitative methods seems to be a most adequate choice, as there are very few indicators that render themselves easy to quantification. One prominent example is gender balance in legislative seat-holding which, as already mentioned, is one of the most commonly used indicators in both democracy and gender equality indexes. For this indicator, conducting an assessment seems relatively straightforward. First, the data necessary for assessing gender balance is readily available – i.e., proportion of women in parliament. Second, setting the standards of attainment is rather uncontroversial since ‘gender balance’ can be numerically operationalised as $\geq 60/40$, from which a rating scale assigning a numerical score to each assessment can be easily derived.

Our gender democracy assessment contains three indicators of this type. All of them are formulated in a question format, followed by instructions regarding data sources and a three point-rating scale corresponding to three possible scenarios. An illustration of how this indicator looks like is provided in Table one.

Table 5: Criterion 1: Inclusion

<p>All the people affected by a decision must be included in the process of political deliberation and decision-making, through mechanisms of political representation and participation.</p> <p>1.1 To what extent is there a balanced representation of women and men in deliberative arenas?</p> <p><i>Consider the proportion of female representatives in legislatures (lower or upper houses, depending on the debate being analysed). This indicator can also be used for assessments focused in non-parliamentary deliberative arenas</i></p> <p>3. 40 – 60 per cent</p> <p>2. 30 – 40 per cent</p> <p>1. 20 – 30 per cent</p> <p>0. < 20 per cent</p>
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As already stated, however, the extent to which there is a balanced representation of women and men in deliberative arenas does not sufficiently encompass all the features that determine the quality of democracy of a polity from a gender perspective. Thus, if we aim to go beyond the proportion of women in parliament as the only measure by which gender democracy is assessed, additional indicators requiring qualitative judgements need to be included.

A question that arises in this context is how such qualitative judgements can be quantified without incurring in shallow oversimplification. This is especially the case in relation to indicators containing concepts that are highly contested, such as, for example, 'equal opportunities'. It is also the case for those indicators of political equality drawing attention to institutional provisions aimed at redressing existing inequalities - especially when those provisions are controversial, even among the feminist community (Holst, 2008 forthcoming). For example, one of the indicators of political equality derived in the previous section relates to the provisions in place designed to correct gender imbalances in legislative representation. Here, the task of gathering the data that is needed to make an assessment is relatively unproblematic, as this requires a simple desk-study in which assessors gather information about different kinds of quota provisions available, public awareness campaigns, training and development programmes, etc. However, setting the standards against which an assessment can be made is far from being self-evident: Should legislative quotas be rated higher than voluntary party quotas? And how should different types of quota provisions be rated in relation to training programmes for women politicians? Assigning a score to these different provisions is problematic because the question of standards, being a contentious issue, needs to be settled first.

One possible strategy would be to refrain from fixing performance standards in advance, leaving this task to the assessors themselves. In order to do this, a rating scale (e.g., '0' to '3') can be assigned to the assessors' *judgements* on the provisions available, rather than deciding *a priori* how such provisions should be rated in the first place. Given the subjective nature of these judgements, the question is to what extent this compromises the objectivity of the assessments and therefore their comparability across cases. Yet, this strategy has the advantage of allowing assessors to take contextual factors into consideration. For example, a country with a high proportion of female legislators (e.g., Sweden) may have a lower range of provisions to attain gender balance than other countries because these are not needed. By the same token, a country may have a high number of provisions but these may be found to be insufficient to redress inequalities in numerical presence. Thus, in spelling out the terms in which these qualitative assessments are made, we opted for the judgments 'sufficient, insufficient and very limited/non-existent' rather than the judgments 'high, moderate and low', as the former are better able to capture such contextual factors.²⁹

Since these qualitative assessments may not be as 'objective' as assessments based on quantitative data, it is important that they meet the following requirements:

1. That assessors are provided clear guidelines of what needs to be considered in forming the basis for their evaluations, including (where appropriate), suggestions regarding data sources;
2. That the formulation of the assessments corresponding to each rate is as unambiguous as possible;

²⁹ Here we draw on the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, which provides a good example of how to spell out assessments that are highly context-sensitive. The authors would like to thank Johannes Pollack for bringing us attention to this issue.

3. That there are at least two assessors per country/case study with expertise on the areas being evaluated³⁰;
4. That assessments are sufficiently justified in a qualitative report (see below). The following table provides an illustration of how this type of indicators looks like.

Table 6: Criterion 2: Political Equality

<p>Participants in political deliberation and decision-making are included on equal terms. All have equal rights and effective opportunities to express their interests and concerns in a free debate, where no participant is in a position to coerce or threaten others into accepting certain proposals or outcomes.</p> <p>2.1 What is the extent of provisions aimed at attaining gender balance in political representation and decision-making?</p> <p><i>Consider quota provisions (constitutional, legislative, voluntary) training programmes, awareness-raising campaigns.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. There are sufficient provisions for attaining gender-balanced representation in decision-making 2. There are a number of provisions, however these are insufficient 1. Provisions are limited in scope 0. Provisions are non-existent.

The choice of assessment methods is also problematic in relation to the indicators of reasonableness, as these have a number of distinctive features. While the majority of indicators under the criteria inclusion, political equality and publicity measure the extent and range of institutional arrangements for realising the principles of gender democracy in practice, the indicators of reasonableness are designed to measure the quality of deliberative practices. Hence, for these indicators, the data that forms the basis of assessment is not a statistical figure or a set of institutional rules or provisions (secondary data), but primary data that needs to be produced prior to the assessment, through the analyses of political debates conducted in a deliberative setting. Thus, in addition to questions of assessment methods, this cluster of indicators also raises questions of data collection methods that need to be addressed.

In developing a methodology for evaluating the quality of political deliberation from a gender perspective, we draw on the discourse quality index pioneered by Steenbergen et al. (Steenbergen et al. 2003, Bächtiger et al. 2005). The aim of this index is to provide a quantitative measure of the quality of discourse in political deliberation. For these purposes, we select debates on an agreed-upon topic³¹ for all the countries assessed. Once the debates have been selected, the assessment exercise proceeds as follows. First, the debate(s) under analysis is broken into smaller speech units and their relevant parts are identified. 'Relevant parts' may include speech

³⁰ Conducting expert surveys are another way of ensuring objectivity, as long as assessors are well-informed. However, appointing a panel of experts (with a minimum of two) is a preferable option as it allows for the discussion of different views and the development of a common interpretation. A panel of experts also helps to identify oversights and reduce subjective perceptions.

³¹ For comparative purposes, it is important that all countries are assessed in relation to the same (or at least a closely similar) topic. It is true that the level of political consensus on such chosen topics can be highly context-dependent and that this can once again compromise the objectivity of the measurement. Nonetheless, these context-bound differences can be used as the basis for further investigation.

interruptions as well as speeches that contain statements about a particular decision³². Once the relevant speech units have been identified, each of them is coded in relation to the different indicators of the quality of deliberation which were derived from the criterion of reasonableness. In order to keep consistency across all the indicators of gender democracy, we operationalise the indicators of reasonableness in a question pro-forma and formulate four-level assessments (tailored to the questions), each of which is assigned a score according to a four-point scale. This provides assessors with the codes to be used in analysing a particular debate for its deliberative quality. In order to safeguard objectivity and also to ensure consistency across the entire assessment, there should be two coders for each debate analysed (see footnote 28). Table three provides an illustration of how one of the indicators of reasonableness is formulated, and of how the assessments are coded. It is possible that not all the relevant speeches identified in one debate can be coded for all the indicators of reasonableness, since a debate may not contain any speech which can be coded for one or more indicators. Given this, it is desirable that for each polity assessed, more than one debate on the same topic is selected.

Table 7: Criterion 4: Reasonableness

Participants come to a discussion with an open mind, expressing a willingness to listen to other participants, treating them and their views with respect. They do not assert their own interests above all others. In the context of disagreement or dissent, they show a disposition to understand other participants' interests and opinions through a process of argumentation.

4.3 Are arguments provided by representatives of women's interests acknowledged and considered in the course of deliberation?

3. Arguments are acknowledged and explicitly valued
2. Arguments are acknowledged but no positive or negative statements are given about them
1. Arguments are ignored
0. Arguments are degraded

Once a numerical score has been assigned to all the indicators under the four criteria of gender democracy, the question is how these individual measures should be aggregated. One possible option is to aggregate the scores for each gender democracy criterion and then combine them all into a single 'gender democracy index'. This is the strategy followed by the majority of democracy assessments that follow a quantitative methodology, including the Freedom House Survey, the Economist Democracy Index and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index. This strategy, however, has been heavily criticised for failing to take into consideration: a) that each criteria measures different aspects of democracy, which may offset one another when added together into a single score and b) that the prioritisation of some democracy norms over others is context-related (Beetham 2004). Mindful of these criticisms, we opted for an alternative strategy which consists in aggregating measures into separate overall scores for each of the gender democracy criteria, but refrained from combining all these measures into a single gender democracy score. This effectively results in the production of four separate indexes of gender democracy; i.e., an inclusion index, a political equality index, a publicity index and a recognition index. In order to avoid weighting, the indicators under each criterion were designed to have roughly

³² Irrelevant parts, on the contrary, include clarifying questions or remarks unrelated to the debate.

equivalent conceptual significance, so that the aggregation of scores under each criterion can be carried out by a simple calculation of their arithmetic means.

[A full list of gender democracy indicators and assessment scales is provided in appendix 1].

Nonetheless, the difficulties in assigning numerical scores to qualitative judgements – especially when there is an obvious contestation over meanings and/or attainment standards – may explain why gender-sensitive democracy assessments available to date (though scant) have shown a marked preference towards qualitative over quantitative assessment methods. Two examples include the UNDP framework for selecting pro-poor and gender-sensitive indicators of democratic governance in developing countries (UNDP 2006), and the gender equality audit prepared for the Australian Democratic Audit (Madison and Partridge 2007), both of which follow the International IDEA democracy assessment methodology. Despite their advantages, one of the main drawbacks of these assessments is that they do not readily lend themselves to comparative study. While these are particularly suited for individual-country assessments that aim to identify strengths and weaknesses of democratic institutions and practices from a gender perspective, they are not ideal if one of the aims of the assessment exercise is to use the results for comparative research.

One possible way of meeting the challenge of achieving assessment results that are comparable as well as meaningful would be to complement quantitative measures – i.e., numerical scores assigned to the qualitative assessments of the different aspects of gender democracy – with detailed qualitative reports that contain a more in-depth evaluation and analysis of the case under study. These reports can put ‘qualitative flesh’ onto ‘quantitative bones’ by providing a description of the nuances inherent to qualitative assessments of gender democracy in different contexts, as well as clarifying where the main strengths and weakness in relation to gender democracy performance lie for each polity assessed. This qualitative report would also provide the space where assessors justify their judgments of gender democracy, especially in relation to those indicator-questions requiring more subjective assessments, such as those illustrated in Table six above. For comparability purposes, it would be essential that all reports shared the same format. Hence, it is suggested that the structure of these reports closely follows the normative criteria and indicators of gender democracy spelled out in this methodology paper. In order to depict the broader political context in which assessments are conducted, reports could include an introductory section where the general historical background and institutional/political context in relation to the development of gender democracy in the polity under study is described. This introductory section will be followed by four main sections corresponding to each of the normative criteria of gender democracy, where assessors present deeper analyses in relation to each of the assessment questions. The report could conclude with an overview of the strengths and weaknesses in relation to the four criteria of gender democracy.³³

³³ The report on democracy and gender equality prepared for Australian democratic audit (Madison & Partridge 2007) provides an illustrative example of how such qualitative reports would look like. Note, however, that this report aims to answer a different question (the extent to which Australian has promoted gender equality) and therefore follows a very different format. The report provides the historical background and institutional/political context in relation to the development of gender equality policy in the country, examining the strengths and weaknesses in the provision of gender equality arrangements with respect to 4 key areas: the legislative framework intended to eliminate discrimination against women, descriptive representation, substantive representation (women policy agencies) and opportunities of women’s civil society participation to influence policy-making.

6. Implementation

The gender democracy assessment methodology will be tested in a supranational polity – the European Union – and in up to eight national polities, seven of which are current EU member states (Ireland, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and one EU candidate country (Croatia). After this wave of pilot assessments is completed, a second wave of assessments is planned in another eight EU member states.

Although the methodology framework presented in this paper can in principle be applied to a variety of sites of political deliberation and decision-making, we decided that both first and second wave assessments should focus on parliamentary institutions and debates. This decision was made for strategic reasons; the application of the methodology to other political institutions in addition to legislatures would have brought the assessments to a level of complexity such that their feasibility and comparability would have been seriously compromised.

It needs to be acknowledged, however, that the focus on legislatures brings some limitations to the overall assessment exercise, as it entails that relevant sites of political deliberation and decision-making, such as government ministries and independent public agencies, are not taken into consideration. Yet, if the application of this assessment methodology needs to be restricted for the strategic reasons mentioned above, then the decision to focus on legislatures has the advantage of providing an ideal ‘window’ from which to assess the quality of gender democracy of any given polity. The reasons for this are twofold: First, while it is the case that in contemporary liberal democracies decision-making power is becoming more and more diffused between the legislative and executive branches, parliaments continue to be at the heart of any system of representative democracy, since they are the only political institutions which can lay a claim to represent the people and to embody popular sovereignty. Second, a focus on parliaments is particularly suitable for a gender democracy assessment methodology that devotes special attention to the quality of deliberation from a gender perspective. This is because parliaments have been shown to be more favourable to a more deliberative mode of political decision-making than other political institutions of the liberal democratic state (Steiner et al. 2004; Habermas 2005).

The selection of parliamentary debates to be analysed was made according the following criteria:

- 1) That these debates are conducted in a parliamentary setting; either in a parliamentary committee or in plenary session;
- 2) That the issues concerning these debates encompass ‘women’s interests’ – i.e., issues that are advocated by women’s movements.
- 3) That the topics of these debates are as similar as possible across the polities assessed, with a view to ensure reliability of results and to facilitate comparative analyses.

Summing up, the methodological framework for assessing gender democracy in the EU presented in this paper has the potential to make a significant contribution to the field of research on gender and democracy, as well as to general democracy evaluation studies. In addition, it is hoped that the results of the assessment studies

undertaken in different polities, together with the comparative analysis of those results, will act to empower women and also to contribute to the process of engendering democracy in the EU. As we have seen, despite its limitations, this assessment methodology offers a number of advantages over other democracy assessment methodologies. First, it derives its indicators of gender democracy performance both from democratic theory and from feminist theory. Second the assessments of gender democracy are mainly based on qualitative judgements undertaken by experts, thus making room for interpretation according to context. Third, the methodology allows for the quantification of these assessments, thus making room for a comparative analysis of results.

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Appendix 1 – Indicators and measuring scales

Inclusion

1. To what extent is there a balanced representation of women and men in deliberative arenas?
 3. 40-60 per cent
 2. 30-39 per cent
 1. 20-29 per cent
 0. ≤ 20 per cent
2. To what extent is there a balanced participation of women and men at elections?
 2. There is no significant gender gap in voter-turn out at elections (less than 5 points)
 1. There is a gap between 5-9 points
 0. There is a gender gap of 10 per cent points or higher
3. How accessible are formal political institutions to women's civil society organisations seeking to influence decision-making?
 3. Women's organisations have the right to speak and submit documentation
 2. Women's organisations have the right to submit documentation only
 1. Women's organisations have right of access as observers only
 0. Women's organisations have no right of access
4. To what extent are women's interests and perspectives included in political deliberation?
 2. Full inclusion: The interests and perspectives voiced by women's organisations are incorporated to the deliberative agenda
 1. Partial inclusion: Only some interests and perspectives voiced by women's organisations are incorporated to the deliberative agenda
 0. No inclusion: The interests and perspectives voiced by women's organisations are not incorporated to the deliberative agenda.
5. What is the extent of women's membership in political parties and non-governmental organisation compared to men's?

Political equality

6. What is the extent of provisions aimed at attaining a gender-balance representation in deliberation and decision-making?
 3. There are sufficient provisions for attaining a gender-balance representation in deliberation and decision-making
 2. There are a number of provisions, however these are insufficient

1. Provisions are very limited in scope
 0. Provisions are non-existing
7. What is the extent of gender-friendly provisions in place aiming to facilitate the work of women representatives in deliberation and decision-making?
3. There are sufficient provisions in place aimed at facilitating the participation of female representatives in deliberative arenas
 2. There are a number of provisions, however these are insufficient
 1. Provisions are very limited in scope
 0. Provisions are non-existent
8. Are there institutionalised deliberative sites for discussing women's interests prior to decision-making on gender-sensitive issues?
2. There are formally assigned deliberative sites to discuss women's interests prior decision-making (e.g., committee on women's rights and gender equality)
 1. There are only informal deliberative sites to discuss women's interests prior decision-making.
 0. There are neither formal nor informal deliberative sites to discuss women's interests prior decision-making
9. How far does the state support women's organisations seeking to influence decision-making?
2. There is a sufficient level of state support for women's organisations seeking to influence decision-making
 1. The level of state support for women's organisations seeking to influence political decision-making is partial or insufficient
 0. The level of state support for women's organisations seeking to influence political decision-making is a very limited or non-existent

Publicity and Accountability

10. Do women's organisations and the public have access to policy proposals?
2. Women's organisations and the public have access to both background documents and policy documents
 1. Women's organisations and the public have access to background documents only
 0. Women's organisations have no access to policy documentation
11. How far do political parties/groups clearly articulate their positions and proposals on gender equality and justice in party manifestos?
3. Gender equality positions/proposals are mainstreamed throughout
 2. There is a specific section on positions/proposals on gender equality

1. Positions/proposals on gender equality are subsumed under other aims
 0. Positions/proposals on gender equality are absent
12. Are there are open sessions, live broadcasts or minutes available after sessions on gender-sensitive issues
2. At least two of the above are available
 1. Only one of the above available is available
 0. None of the above is available
13. To what extent do women's organisations seeking influence in political decision-making make their aims, objectives, strategies and activities widely available to the public?
3. Exhaustive information about these organisations is available on their websites
 2. There is information available on the websites, but this is only partial
 1. Information is only available upon request
 0. Information is not made available
14. Are there mechanisms for rendering decision-makers accountable for upholding gender equality commitments?
3. There are sufficient mechanisms in place for rendering decision-makers accountable for upholding gender equality commitments
 2. There are a number of mechanisms in place, however these are insufficient
 1. Mechanisms are very limited in scope
 0. Mechanisms are non-existent

Recognition and equal respect

15. To what extent do participants in deliberation show respect for the groups affected by the decision?
2. Participants show recognition for the groups affected by the decision
 1. Participants show neutrality towards the groups affected by the decision
 0. Participants show no respect towards groups affected by the decision (e.g., negative remarks)
16. How far are arguments provided by representatives of women's interests are acknowledged and considered in the course of deliberation?
2. Arguments are acknowledged and explicitly valued
 1. Arguments are ignored or degraded
 0. Arguments are acknowledged but no positive or negative statements are given about them

17. How far are demands from representatives of women's interests justified in terms of the 'public good'?
 2. There is an explicit reference to the public good and this is conceived in terms of the difference principle
 1. There is an explicit reference to the public good, but this is conceived in utilitarian terms
 0. There is either no explicit reference to the public good

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