Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature

A democratic parliament has the ability to reflect diversity not only in terms of political preferences, but also with regard to the different groups and segments of society. Democratic parliaments should represent the political will of voters as expressed in the elections, and the proportion of votes cast must be transformed into seats distributed in the legislature. Parliaments need to reflect the social diversity of the population in terms of gender, language, religion, ethnicity, or other significant characteristics. A parliament that is unrepresentative of its society will leave some social groups and communities feeling disadvantaged in the political process or even excluded from it altogether, with consequences in terms of the quality of public life or the stability of the political system and society in general.¹

The representative nature of the parliament is determined by multiple factors, including the election system, regulations and administration, as well as existing parliamentary practices for the inclusion of different social groups in its work. Free and fair parliamentary proceedings, non-partisan delimitation of election districts, reasonable election thresholds, clarity of party registration rules and accessibility of election information are factors that contribute to the overall diversity of political opinion in the national legislature. Democratic parliaments are also responsible for promoting the representation of women, youth, minority or other disadvantaged groups or communities in the composition of parliament, by introducing temporary special measures if needed.

The assessment of the indicator on the composition of legislature comprises the following dimensions:

- 7.2.1 Representing diversity of political opinion
- 7.2.2 Gender
- 7.2.3 Youth
- 7.2.4 Other under-represented groups

Dimension 7.2.1 Representing diversity of political opinion

Indicator: 7.2 Composition of legislature
Sub-target: 7 Representative parliament
Target: 16.7 Responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative parliament

About the dimension

This dimension outlines the provisions by which the legal framework ensures the diversity of political opinions in national parliaments. The electoral system, the delimitation of electoral district boundaries and the procedures for registering political parties and independent candidates, as well as the powers attributed to different political groups and independent members in parliament determine the diversity of political opinion in the legislative process (indicator 7.1 Free and fair elections (electoral law) covers different aspects of representative parliaments, as well as other dimensions that address the powers of elected parties and members).

The electoral system (the rules defining the way votes are cast and counted) is fundamental in reflecting the overall preferences of voters in the allocation of parliamentary seats, and in ensuring proper representation.

The delimitation/redistricting of electoral district boundaries has a profound effect on the composition of the parliament. While delimitation/redistricting practices vary across countries, some universal principles are generally guaranteed in national laws. For example, the populations of constituencies are as equal as possible, and electoral district boundaries are drawn in a non-partisan manner and are not aimed at achieving a particular political outcome. The electoral boundary delimitation must avoid discrimination on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity, language, religion, or related status which could affect the composition of the legislative body. The delimitation of electoral districts has to be an inclusive and transparent process that is based on consultations of the political spectrum and other stakeholders.

National legislation must also guarantee clear and transparent procedures for registering political parties. Fairness of the registration process ensures equal treatment for all candidates and parties. Reasonable and transparent eligibility criteria, uniform procedures and feasible deadlines are also important for avoiding arbitrary decisions and ensuring the predictability and fairness of the process. Ambiguous and unduly restrictive procedures that could prevent political stakeholders from participating should be avoided.

Countries that have proportional electoral systems should establish a reasonable electoral threshold to ensure diverse political representation in the parliament.

On the basis of a global comparative analysis of parliamentary practices and models in parliamentary development, an aspiring goal for parliaments in the domain of representing diversity of political opinion would encompass the following:

The constitutional framework establishes an electoral system that ensures that the votes cast in elections are fairly translated into the seats won by the political parties and candidates, thus facilitating broad representation of political stakeholders in the parliament.

The guiding procedures for the delimitation of electoral boundaries are clearly defined in the national legislation. The practice of boundary delimitation excludes manipulations and discrimination against voters on grounds of race, colour, language, ethnicity, religion, or related status. Electoral boundaries are drawn in
**Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature**

a manner that enables electoral districts to grant voters an equally weighted vote in the election of representatives.

The national legislation defines clear and transparent procedures for registering political parties and candidates for the elections. The law sets out reasonable eligibility criteria, consistent procedures and feasible deadlines.

The legal framework maintains a reasonable electoral threshold for political stakeholders to gain seats in the parliament, thus facilitating diverse political representation in the legislative institution.

**Assessment**

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

The evidence for assessment of this dimension might include:
- Specific articles of the constitution establishing an electoral system that allows different political opinions to be represented in parliament
- Specific articles of national legislation on the delimitation/redistricting of boundaries of electoral districts
- Specific articles of election law on party/candidate registration
- Specific articles of constitution or laws on election thresholds
- ODIHR election observation reports

If relevant, additional comments or examples that support the assessment (such as references to external national, regional or international surveys and reports) can be provided.

**Assessment criterion No. 1: Legal framework on the electoral system**

The constitutional and legal framework establishing the electoral system ensures the diversity of political opinions in national parliament. The votes cast in elections are fairly translated into the seats won by the political parties and candidates, thus securing a broad representation of political actors in the parliament.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

**Assessment criterion No. 2: Legal framework on the delimitation/redistricting of electoral districts**

The delimitation/redistricting of electoral districts is regulated by legislation, and arbitrary decisions are excluded. Boundary delimitation is an open, transparent and non-partisan process. In counties with a single district, a representation based on the entirety of the country as one jurisdiction/district is regulated by legislation, which ensures accessibility avenues for citizens living in rural or remote areas to allow effective two-way access between citizens and government and holistic representation.
Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature

### Assessment criterion No. 3: Legal framework on party/candidate registration

There are clear and detailed procedures for party/candidate registration. The law sets out clear eligibility criteria, uniform procedures and reasonable deadlines. Political parties/candidates have access to necessary information required for party/candidate registration.

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**Evidence for this assessment criterion:**

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### Assessment criterion No. 4: Legal framework on election thresholds

The electoral threshold established by the law enables diverse political representation of the legislative institution.

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**Evidence for this assessment criterion:**

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### Assessment criterion No. 5: Diverse political representation in parliament

There is evidence of the representation of diverse political parties in the parliament. No parties or candidates are arbitrarily prevented from participating in the elections or are deprived of their seats in the legislature.

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**Evidence for this assessment criterion:**

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**Recommendations for change**
Sources for further reading

- Venice Commission, *Report on thresholds and other features of electoral systems which bar parties from access to parliament*, (Strasbourg: 2010).
**Dimension 7.2.2 Gender**

Indicator: 7.2 Composition of legislature  
Sub-target: 7 Representative parliament  
Target: 16.7 Responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative parliament

**About the dimension**

Democratic parliaments are required to reflect society as a whole, and equal representation of women in parliament is essential to ensure inclusive decision-making and the systematic integration of women’s perspectives in legislative and policy work. While the number of women in parliaments worldwide has increased since the mid-twentieth century, gender balance in most parliaments is still far from being achieved. This dimension examines the legal framework and mechanisms to achieve gender parity in the composition of parliament and the means to make progress towards it.

Equal access to parliament positions, without discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, ethnicity, race, disability or other grounds, is determined by a country’s legal framework. The constitution and the electoral legislative framework should guarantee equal opportunities for the political participation of women as candidates, and an electoral environment that is free from barriers and violence. The type of electoral system can also be a determining factor for gender balance in parliament, with research demonstrating that proportional representation systems, particularly in combination with a closed-list system, are more conducive to the election of women than majority electoral systems.3

Parliament can take the lead in legislating for temporary special measures (TSMs) such as candidate quotas or reserved seats to promote gender balance. Quotas for women MPs, when designed to include aspirational targets and sanctions for non-compliance and when supported by resources, political will, and commitment from parliamentary leadership, are proven to promote gender balance. Quotas can be voluntary or legislated, and their design and clear objectives are essential to achieving an impact. They should be tailored to a country’s electoral system. TSMs are intended to be withdrawn once they have achieved a sustainable political and societal change. Additional legislation and measures can incentivize political parties to increase women’s representation in leadership structures and set voluntary party quotas.

Parliamentary political parties can improve the gender balance of parliament by including quotas of women on party lists or women-only shortlists in constituency-based systems, and by ensuring that women are selected for ‘winnable’ seats. Both parties and MPs can promote the representation of women and persons of different SOGIE4 in parliament and hierarchies, and advocate against cultural and attitudinal barriers preventing women, persons of all SOGIE and marginalized groups in society from playing an active role in public life.

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On the basis of a global comparative analysis of parliamentary practices and models in parliamentary development, an aspiring goal for parliaments in the domain of gender balance in the composition of the legislature would encompass the following:

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2 As of 1 January 2021, the global share of women in national parliaments is 25.5 per cent, and with progress at the current rate, it would take another 50 years before gender parity is achieved in parliaments worldwide. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Women in parliament in 2020: The year in review* (IPU: 2021).

3 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Gender-sensitive parliaments: A global review of good practice* (IPU: 2011).

4 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

5 In 2020, parliaments with quotas elected 11.8 per cent more women to single and lower chambers, and 7.4 per cent more women to upper chambers. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Women in parliament in 2020: The year in review* (IPU: 2021).

6 Sexual orientation, gender identity and (gender) expression.
The legal framework including the constitution and electoral laws support equal representation of women and men in parliament. Restrictions on candidate eligibility are not based on gender or on other factors such as religion, ethnicity, race or disability. The electoral system promotes gender-balanced representation by gender in parliament. Violence against women candidates in elections is addressed in legal and policy measures.

Temporary special legal and policy measures are in place to strengthen the representation of women in parliament. Where quotas exist, they are well-designed, with aspirational targets and sanctions for non-compliance, and there are institutional bodies to supervise their implementation. These quotas are supported by measures to generate political and public support.

Mechanisms exist within parliament to advocate for and support measures to ensure gender-balanced representation, such as gender equality committees or cross-party caucuses. Such mechanisms have clear and permanent mandates, are well-resourced and engage with civil society and other stakeholders on a regular basis. Mechanisms against violence and harassment of women MPs are in place.

The parliamentary secretariat is clear in its support of women entering parliament. It provides women MPs with dedicated induction programmes and ongoing professional development to address common challenges faced by women MPs, and provides gender-sensitivity and mainstreaming training for all MPs. The parliamentary secretariat communicates with the public about the positive role of women in parliament, and organizes events and produces materials targeting potential women candidates, particularly from vulnerable and minority groups.

**Assessment**

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

The evidence for assessment of this dimension might include:

- Numbers of women and men holding seats in parliament (currently and in the recent past)
- Articles in the constitution highlighting the importance of equal opportunities for women’s political participation
- Specific articles in national electoral laws or other legislation that aim to promote a gender balance, such as TSMs in parliament
- Parliamentary committee reports indicating recommendations for the amendment and/or review of legislation that may create barriers for the political participation of women
- Laws legislating special measures such as quotas to promote gender balance in parliament
- A parliamentary strategic plan, department plans, service statements or other documents highlighting specific support for women MPs
- Parliamentary communication documents promoting women MPs’ work, including the parliamentary website
- Terms of reference of gender equality committees or cross-party caucuses

If relevant, additional comments or examples that support the assessment (such as references to external national, regional or international surveys and reports) can be provided.

**Assessment criterion No. 1: Progress in achieving gender balance in parliament**
Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature

Considerable progress in improving women’s representation in the parliament and in leadership positions is recorded over time, and is assessed against international data and against national and/or regional targets where they exist.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 2: Legal framework encourages gender representative parliament

The legal framework does not create barriers for the participation of women. The constitution, electoral laws, political party laws, campaign financing laws and other legislation ensure that women are supported when running as candidates for election, and also provide for sanctions in the event of non-compliance (for example, the creation of barriers to women’s representation).

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 3: Measures to increase women’s representation

There are well-designed measures aiming for aspirational targets of woman representation set by parliament. Those measures might include gender-sensitive policies and special and temporary measures, such as legislated gender quotas in case of a significant imbalance between male and female MPs. Measures are aligned with the electoral system and are accompanied by sanctions for non-compliance or disciplinary actions, as well as introduced and communicated effectively to the entire institution and the public.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 4: Addressing the issue of violence against and abuse of women candidates

Parliament has passed or amended legislation related to issues of gender-based violence against and abuse of candidates, which is consistently implemented in practice.
Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 5: Political participation of persons of different SOGIE and marginalized groups

There is evidence that the legal framework does not create barriers for the participation of persons of different SOGIE and any marginalized groups in society in public life. This includes provisions related to issues of violence against and abuse of candidates based on sexual orientation or expression.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Recommendations for change

Sources for further reading

- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Stockholm University, *Atlas of electoral gender quotas* (Stockholm: 2013).
**Dimension: 7.2.3 Youth**

Indicator: 7.2 Composition of legislature  
Sub-target: 7 Representative parliament  
Target: 16.7 Responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative parliament

**About the dimension**

This dimension outlines the degree to which youth is represented in the composition of parliament. According to IPU data, “only 2.6 per cent of the world’s parliamentarians are under age 30.” Young women’s political representation is even less - only 1 per cent. The political participation of youth in the formal political process remains a challenge, and young women, in particular, are the least represented in leadership positions.

The global targets for youth participation in national parliaments set by the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians based on youth proportions in the global population, which are to be implemented by 2035 are as follows:

- 15 per cent of young parliamentarians under 30  
- 35 per cent of young parliamentarians under 40  
- 45 per cent of young parliamentarians under 45

While building the capacity of youth through the development of their civic knowledge and skills enables them to be active citizens, an enabling legal framework, free of restrictive barriers, is important for increasing the formal political participation of youth.

The alignment of the minimum voting age with the minimum age of eligibility to run for office is a considerable factor for formal youth participation. In the case of bicameral parliaments, it is also beneficial to equalize the eligibility age for both chambers. The age of eligibility to stand for public office is a key impediment to youth representation in parliament. In 69 per cent of countries in 2020, the voting age was lower than the legal age to hold parliamentary office.

The introduction of voluntary political party quotas, the strengthening of party youth wings/organizations, the promotion of young women to run for office and the creation of a level playing field for youth (for example, by regulating/capping electoral campaign spending) can be other means of promoting youth political participation. Some countries have also introduced a variety of mandatory quota systems, such as legislated candidate quotas or reserved seats.

Another important aspect of youth political empowerment is support for young MPs, especially young women MPs and the promotion of their work. This can be achieved through different means. In some cases parliaments form caucuses dedicated to youth issues or caucuses of young MPs, while in other cases they develop networks of young parliamentarians. Many parliaments have committees that work on youth issues.

Please also see dimension 5.1.5: Youth engagement.

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7 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Youth participation in national parliaments* (2021).  
8 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Youth participation in national parliaments* (2021).
Indicators for democratic parliaments, based on SDG targets 16.6 and 16.7

Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature

Constitutional or legal provisions stipulate a reasonable minimum voting age that is aligned with the minimum age of eligibility to run for political office.

Parliament has policies and actions in place to ensure that young parliamentarians are provided with the opportunity to represent their constituency and to be promoted to leadership roles/parliamentary positions, with a particular focus on young women MPs.

Parliament has established bodies mandated to address youth issues, whether these are committees, caucuses or networks of young parliamentarians.

Parliament has developed a support package for young MPs to enable them to work effectively while considering work-life balance.

Training and mentoring support are available to young MPs. Contributions of young MPs in parliamentary work are promoted in parliamentary communications. Young MPs are welcome to contribute to the modernization of parliamentary operations.

Assessment

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

The evidence for assessment of this dimension might include:

- Specific articles of the constitution on the minimum voting age and the minimum age of eligibility to run for office
- Parliament’s policies, structure or other documents addressing the engagement of young MPs and the support provided to them
- The number of MPs under the age of 45
- Evidence of parliamentary communication promoting young parliamentarians’ work

If relevant, additional comments or examples that support the assessment (such as references to external national, regional or international surveys and reports) can be provided.

Assessment criterion No. 1: Alignment of ages for voting and eligibility for political office

There is evidence in constitutional or legal provisions of the alignment of the age for voting with eligibility to run for political office.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 2: Policies and actions ensuring the representation of young MPs
Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature

There is evidence that the parliament’s policies and actions ensure the engagement of young parliamentarians in decision-making and their promotion to leadership roles. Such policies include a special focus on young women parliamentarians.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 3: Bodies addressing youth issues

There are established bodies that address youth issues, such as parliamentary committees and/or other bodies, including youth caucuses and networks of young parliamentarians.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 3: Enabling environment for young MPs

There is evidence that parliament has developed a support package for young MPs to enable them to work considering work-life balance. This package may include, among others, childcare facilities, a flexible work schedule and remote working possibilities.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 4: Supporting the work and promotion of young MPs

There is evidence of training and mentoring support available to young MPs. The contribution of young MPs in parliamentary work is promoted in parliamentary communications. Young MPs are invited to contribute to the modernization of parliamentary operations.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:
Evidence for this assessment criterion:

**Assessment criterion No. 5: Practice**

There is evidence of both regulatory and institutional commitments to expanding youth representation in parliament. There is a progress over time (e.g. in the last 3 convocations) in the number and proportion of seats held by MPs who are under the age of 45, as well as MPs belonging to age groups under 30, 40 and 45 years.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

**Recommendations for change**
Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature

Dimension 7.2.4 Other under-represented groups

Indicator: 7.2 Composition of legislature
Sub-target: 7 Representative parliament
Target: 16.7 Responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative parliament

About the dimension

One of the criteria for democratic parliament is that it should reflect the diversity of the population in terms of gender, language, religion, ethnicity or other characteristics. Representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in politics and the decision-making process is an essential component of representative parliaments. Vulnerable groups in society often face marginalization and are disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, and limited access to quality education and healthcare. Fair representation of minority and indigenous peoples in the parliament is important for overcoming these challenges and ensuring overall equality.

The Lund Recommendations advise states to “guarantee the right of persons belonging to national minorities to take part in the conduct of public affairs, including through the rights to vote and stand for office without discrimination”.  

Adequate representation of minority and indigenous peoples in the composition of the legislature is a challenge across countries. The electoral systems and rules have a major impact on both the nature and the extent of minority presence in the national legislature.

Different mechanisms for promoting minority participation are applied across different countries. In some systems that impose restrictions on the formation of political groups on the basis of ethnic, religious or linguistic identity, measures to mainstream political parties and improve their ability to ensure representation of minorities and indigenous groups are important. Special electoral measures for ensuring parliamentary presence of minorities and indigenous peoples are often used. These special measures vary in their nature and sometimes voluntary internal party quotas are used.

Political representation of minority groups can be also affected by the boundaries of electoral districts, access to election proceedings and information in the languages of minority groups, the independent administration of elections, and fair regulations on the formation of political groups.

Parliamentary rules are another important instrument for ensuring the effective representation of minority and indigenous peoples by elected representatives. Parliament might be required to use more than one language in parliamentary proceedings or introduce other supporting practices to secure the effective engagement of these representatives in legislative work.

Parliaments frequently have specialized bodies that address minority/indigenous matters. In some cases, they may be a parliamentary body with a broader human rights mandate that includes minority/indigenous matters. Other important mechanisms for promoting the effective representation of minority and indigenous peoples’

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9 OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life & Explanatory Note (OSCE, 1999), 8.
10 Dr. Oleh Protsyk, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), The representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliament (Mexico: IPU and UNDP, 2010).
Effective in the legislature include specialized committees, councils, caucuses, cross-party groups or any other formal or informal platforms within the parliament.

| Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature |

**On the basis of a global comparative analysis of parliamentary practices and models in parliamentary development, an aspiring goal for parliaments in the domain of other contextually relevant groups (for example, minorities and indigenous peoples) would encompass the following:**

**The constitutional framework guarantees the right of persons belonging to minorities or indigenous peoples to take part in the conduct of public affairs, including through the rights to vote and stand for office without discrimination.**

**Legal framework establishes special measures that promote the political representation of minority and indigenous groups in the composition of the legislature.**

The electoral system facilitates minority representation and influence. Where there are different demographics or electoral systems, other elements may increase the representation of minorities, such as:

- The territorial concentration of minorities in the form of single member districts
- The existence of a proportional representation system, that is, where a political party’s share in the national vote is reflected in its share of the legislative seats
- The establishment of some form of preference voting, in which voters rank candidates in order of choice, which may also promote inter-communal cooperation.
- The establishment of lower numerical thresholds for representation in the legislature

The geographical boundaries of electoral districts facilitate the equitable representation of national minorities.

Parliamentary rules provide opportunities for minority and indigenous representatives to engage effectively in parliamentary work, including through access to information in their own language, and the establishment of caucuses, formal or informal groups.

**Assessment**

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

The evidence for assessment of this dimension might include:

- Specific articles of the constitution guaranteeing the political rights of minority and indigenous peoples and prohibiting discrimination
- Specific articles of law on special measures targeting minority and indigenous peoples
- Evidence of parliamentary committee, caucus, council or minority and indigenous group representatives
- Statistical data on minority and indigenous representatives in the sitting parliament

If relevant, additional comments or examples that support the assessment (such as references to external national, regional or international surveys and reports) can be provided.

**Assessment criterion No. 1: Constitutional provisions**

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Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature

There is evidence that the constitutional framework guarantees the right of persons belonging to minorities or indigenous peoples to take part in the conduct of public affairs, including through the rights to vote and stand for office without discrimination.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 2: Special measures

There are special measures that promote the political representation of minority and indigenous groups in the composition of the legislature, or measures that encourage political parties to establish voluntary quotas for minority and indigenous groups in their own structures.

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Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 3: Legal framework

There is evidence that the geographical boundaries of electoral districts are delimited in a manner that facilitates the equitable representation of national minorities, or that the electoral system facilitates minority representation in other ways. Access to election proceedings and information in minority languages and the independent administration of elections are guaranteed in law and in practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-existent</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Assessment criterion No. 4: Parliamentary practice

Parliament provides opportunities for minority and indigenous representatives to engage effectively in parliamentary work, including through access to information in their own language, and the establishment of caucuses or formal or informal groups.
Indicator 7.2 – Composition of legislature

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
</table>

Evidence for this assessment criterion:

Recommendations for change

Sources for further reading