

[Template]

[Democratic System Card Template]

To edit and use this, click “File” → “Make a copy” (or “Download”).

A [Democratic System Card](#) is a structured evaluation and description tool that helps assess whether a democratic system has the qualities needed to handle different levels of decision-making power. Think of it as a comprehensive health check for democratic processes and systems. The template for a democratic system card is a series of questions grouped by the dimensions in the [Democracy Levels Framework](#) (Ovadya et al, 2025).

This has been designed to have the content copyable and pastable as [markdown](#), supporting rapid iteration with standard AI tools.

Table of Contents:

[Context](#)

[Process Quality](#)

[Representation](#)

[Informedness](#)

[Deliberation](#)

[Substantiveness](#)

[Robustness](#)

[Legibility](#)

[Delegation](#)

[Integration](#)

[Ability to bind](#)

[Commitment](#)

[Trust](#)

[Awareness](#)

[Participation](#)

[Accountability](#)

[Buy-in](#)

Context

Describe the process or a system at a high level. (Can reference a process card for more details. Can call out what is unspecified.)

- (Put answers here)

What are other systems that this process depends on or interacts with, which impact its success? (E.g., sortition data, or user or citizen authentication systems)

-

Process Quality

Representation

*Describe: the extent to which **key decisions are representative of the constituent population.***

-

*Evaluate: to what extent: **(1)** is there sufficient representation at critical parts of the process, including **(a)** proposing decisions, and **(b)** making ultimate decisions?; **(2)** are there barriers leading to bias in representation?*

-

Informedness

*Describe: the extent to which **critical information is taken into account for decision-making.***

-

*Evaluate: to what extent: **(1)** is critical context incorporated into decision-making about tradeoffs and consequences of different decisions? **(2)** is this sourced from **(a)** domain expertise, **(b)** the existing authorities, who may have extensive context, **(c)** a broad diversity of constituents, **(d)** the most impacted stakeholders, and **(e)** the powerful stakeholders, whose incentives are critical to having the decision "stick"?*

-

Deliberation

*Describe: the extent to which **decisions are considered and deliberative (rather than superficial and reactive).***

-

Evaluate: to what extent are those involved: **(1)** able to (and supported to) move from shallower to deeper goals and values? **(2)** able to (and supported to) collaborate where necessary? **(3)** able to address issues within the available time?

-

Substantiveness

Describe: the extent to which **decisions are substantive (e.g., actionable, consequential) rather than nonsubstantive (e.g., vague, simplistic, inconsequential).**

-

Evaluate: to what extent: **(1)** is the decision directly actionable and implementable? **(2)** does the decision meaningfully address the issues? **(3)** does the decision grapple with the necessary levels of complexity? **(4)** is uncertainty appropriately managed and accounted for? **(5)** are risks to implementability accounted for?

-

Robustness

Describe: the extent to which **the process is robust to suboptimal conditions or adversarial or strategic behavior.**

-

Evaluate: to what extent is the process or system vulnerable to: **(1)** suboptimal conditions or broken assumptions? (e.g., low turnout, larger power asymmetries) **(2)** strategic behavior and manipulation? **(3)** false claims? (e.g., of manipulation)

-

Legibility

Describe: the extent to which **the processes and decisions are accessible, understandable, and verifiable.**

-

Evaluate: to what extent is information **(a)** accessible, **(b)** understandable, **(c)** verifiable about the: **(1)** processes/systems used to make decisions? **(2)** the execution of these processes? **(3)** decisions being made **(4)** reasons and inputs feeding into decisions?

-

Delegation

Integration

Describe: the extent to which **the authority integrates the democratic process into its operations.**

-

Evaluate: to what extent is the authority structuring its internal communications and operations to effectively: **(1)** provide critical context to the democratic process / system? **(2)** integrate democratic process outputs in its actions? **(3)** trigger democratic processes when/if required?

-

Ability to bind

Describe: the extent to which **the authority is able to technically and legally bind itself to democratic decisions.**

-

Evaluate: to what extent can the unilateral authority bind itself to acting in accordance with the democratic decision: **(1)** technically? **(2)** legally? (e.g., has developed the needed technical and/or legal infrastructure for binding)

-

Commitment

Describe: the extent to which **the authority commits to acting in accordance with the democratic decision.**

-

*Evaluate: to what extent has the unilateral authority committed to acting in accordance with the democratic decision: **(1)** internally? **(2)** privately? **(3)** publicly? (regardless of their ability to bind)*

-

Trust

Awareness

*Describe: the extent to which **the relevant public is aware of the democratic process.***

-

*Evaluate: to what extent is the relevant public aware: **(1)** that the democratic system exists? **(2)** how it works? **(3)** what it is being used for? **(4)** how they can be involved?*

-

Participation

*Describe: the extent to which **the relevant public is willing to participate in the process.***

-

*Evaluate: to what extent is the relevant public: **(1)** willing to participate? **(2)** able to participate? **(3)** appropriately compensated for participating? **(4)** actually participating?*

-

Accountability

*Describe: the extent to which **there are external watchdogs and accountability structures monitoring the execution of the democratic process and the implementation of its outputs.***

-

*Evaluate: to what extent are: **(1)** there well-understood lines of oversight and accountability? **(2)** sufficiently influential/powerful organizations focused on holding authorities to their promised levels of democratic involvement? **(3)** authorities and democratic systems responsive to such accountability mechanisms?*

-

Buy-in

*Describe: the extent to which **the relevant public and key stakeholders buy-in to the process and its legitimacy.***

-

*Evaluate: to what extent are the relevant public and key stakeholders accepting of the legitimacy of: **(1)** the system/process? **(2)** of the decision?*

-

Example

Example Democratic System Card: (Hypothetical) UK Citizen Assembly

A [Democratic System Card](#) is a structured evaluation and description tool that helps assess whether a democratic system has the qualities needed to handle different levels of decision-making power. Think of it as a comprehensive health check for democratic processes and systems. The template for a democratic system card is a series of questions grouped by the dimensions in the [Democracy Levels Framework](#) ([Ovadya 2025](#)).

Context

Process Quality

[Representation](#)

[Informedness](#)

[Deliberation](#)

[Substantiveness](#)

[Robustness](#)

[Legibility](#)

Delegation

[Integration](#)

[Ability to bind](#)

[Commitment](#)

Trust

[Awareness](#)

[Participation](#)

[Accountability](#)

[Buy-in](#)

Context

Describe the process or a system at a high level. (Can reference a process card for more details. Can call out what is unspecified.)

- A Citizens' Assembly of 100 UK citizens chosen via sortition along geography, age, gender, education, and home ownership covariates such that they roughly match the population.

- They meet for six full-day meetings and four evening meetings, totaling 60 hours of deliberation.
- They go through a learning journey on AI and its place in the UK via materials and testimony from experts, stakeholders, and the unilateral authority.
- They deliberate on the topic of: *How should the UK address the risks of AI persuasion?*
- They collectively agree on key recommendations, creating a roadmap for enacting this plan.
- The UK Government commits to publicly responding to the key recommendations.

What are other systems that this process depends on or interacts with, which impact its success? (E.g., sortition data, or user or citizen authentication systems)

- The organizers require access to relevant data to carry out the sortition effectively and in a representative manner.
- A wider communications campaign also complements the process to support recruitment, awareness raising, and opportunities for wider input. The process generally relies on a wider engagement program that supports the constituent population to contribute and participate in the process beyond the membership of the citizens' assembly, such as through contributing their values, views, desired outcomes and concerns in a structured and representative manner.

Process Quality

Representation

*Describe: the extent to which **key decisions are representative of the constituent population.***

- Members are selected via sortition to be a demographically proportional representation of the UK public by age, gender, geography, education and home ownership.

*Evaluate: to what extent: **(1)** is there sufficient representation at critical parts of the process, including **(a)** proposing decisions, and **(b)** making ultimate decisions?; **(2)** are there barriers leading to bias in representation?*

- Assembly members are fully involved in making final recommendations. However, the agenda-setting and scoping are initially structured by the organizing team, introducing some limits to representation at the scoping stage. As the process progresses, assembly members gain more agency in proposing new decision options and directions but their efficacy is ultimately constrained by conditions imposed by the UK government.

- Some recruitment processes may miss people from some demographics or not adequately control for groups beyond stratification covariates. Some groups typically engage less with political processes due to a myriad of factors, so additional work is necessary to guarantee the necessary engagement from this public. Only 100 people are chosen, so many subgroups and their intersections miss out on membership. The assembly members make the key decisions (which are reflective of the views of the assembly and not necessarily the constituent population). Some of these gaps are addressed in information provision but not all.

Informedness

*Describe: the extent to which **those making decisions understand the information critical to making that decision.***

- Assembly members are taken on a learning journey, including engagement with diverse information, hearing from a variety of experts in AI development, industrial policy, AI governance, and public service innovation, the views of key stakeholders, and the lived experiences of the other assembly members.

*Evaluate: to what extent: **(1)** do participants gain critical context about tradeoffs and consequences of different decisions? **(2)** is this sourced from **(a)** experts, **(b)** the existing authorities, who may have extensive context, **(c)** a broad diversity of constituents, **(d)** the most impacted stakeholders, and **(e)** the powerful stakeholders, whose incentives are critical to having the decision "stick"?*

- Extended time allows for an in-depth learning journey that provides a baseline understanding of context and the trade-offs between considerations.
- Opportunities for unilateral authority and stakeholder feedback on draft recommendations facilitate understanding of impacts and trade-offs.
- Current practices may not accommodate diverse learning styles and participants' differing ability to digest large amounts of written or oral information resulting in some uneven understanding of the issue. Capabilities such as scenario mapping and impact forecasting are technically and practically constrained by time.

Deliberation

*Describe: the extent to which **decisions are considered and deliberative (rather than superficial and reactive).***

- Citizens spend 60 hours deliberating with each other, the process is managed by independent facilitators, and the process makes use of mixed breakout groups, plenary sessions and other discussion formats.

*Evaluate: to what extent are those involved: **(1)** able to (and supported to) move from shallower to deeper goals and values? **(2)** able to (and supported to) collaborate where necessary? **(3)** able to address issues within the available time?*

- Independent facilitation provides structured formats for assembly members to develop their views and reconcile them with the views of others through conversation and group work.
- The 60 hours of deliberation provides sufficient time for addressing core issues within the remit, although some assembly members always report feeling pressed for time when tackling particularly complex aspects of AI governance. Facilitators helped manage the workflow to ensure all critical decision-making steps were met, key issues received adequate attention and the process concluded with results.

Substantiveness

*Describe: the extent to which **decisions are substantive (e.g., actionable, consequential) rather than nonsubstantive (e.g., vague, simplistic, inconsequential).***

- A carefully facilitated process ensures that recommendations respond to the remit and consider the key problems presented to the assembly, with purposeful attention paid to the systems that their recommendations will be interacting with to optimally design for implementability.

*Evaluate: to what extent: **(1)** is the decision directly actionable and implementable? **(2)** does the decision meaningfully address the issues? **(3)** does the decision grapple with the necessary levels of complexity? **(4)** is uncertainty appropriately managed and accounted for? **(5)** are risks to implementability accounted for?*

- Final recommendations respond directly to the remit and address values-laden social trade-offs. The outputs are clear in their intent and demonstrate an understanding of relevant uncertainty. The facilitation process ensured that final recommendations were concrete and actionable rather than settling for superficial agreement.
- Throughout the process, experts and policymakers provided input, helping assembly members account for potential implementation challenges and barriers.
- The final outputs are limited in their thoroughness due to practical constraints and so require interpretation during implementation by policymakers.

Robustness

*Describe: the extent to which **the process is robust to suboptimal conditions or adversarial or strategic behavior.***

- The sortition process is exposed to some manipulation risks due to demographic reporting and quota settings but informational processes and group decision-making were robust due to clear rules and standards.

*Evaluate: to what extent is the process or system vulnerable to: **(1)** suboptimal conditions or broken assumptions? (e.g., low turnout, larger power asymmetries) **(2)** strategic behavior and manipulation? **(3)** false claims? (e.g., of manipulation)*

- Low turnout would have broken participant recruitment. Recruitment processes were subject to possible manipulation strategies due to the selection process. Transparency, governance integrity, and diverse stakeholder buy-in defeat false claims.

Legibility

*Describe: the extent to which **the processes and decisions are accessible, understandable, and verifiable.***

- Recommendations are made public. Templated outputs generally require explanatory reasoning. The process is open to observers and scrutineers. Open public communications pre-output pre-empt partisan distrust.

*Evaluate: to what extent is information **(a)** accessible, **(b)** understandable, **(c)** verifiable about the: **(1)** processes/systems used to make decisions? **(2)** the execution of these processes? **(3)** decisions being made **(4)** reasons and inputs feeding into decisions?*

- All results were made public and data was opened to outside review. However, due to the detailed nature of the work and sheer volume of the data used, not every in-depth element was legible to all outside parties. All captured datapoints were made accessible through a searchable database. Identifiable participant voting records are not made public.

Delegation

Integration

*Describe: the extent to which **the authority integrates the democratic process into its operations.***

- The UK government specifically focused the remit on areas where they had the capability to integrate this process directly into existing and future decision-making around the development of an action plan.

*Evaluate: to what extent is the authority structuring its internal communications and operations to effectively: **(1)** provide critical context to the democratic process / system? **(2)** integrate democratic process outputs in its actions? **(3)** trigger democratic processes when/if required?*

- The decisions themselves cannot be automatically implemented due to their long-term strategic nature, which also leaves them open to adjustment by the unilateral authority.
- Departmental staff were directly involved in the process through observation and feedback phases, enriching their understanding of the intent of final recommendations and their overall ability to infer preferences when faced with implementation gaps.

Ability to bind

*Describe: the extent to which **the authority is able to technically and legally bind itself to democratic decisions.***

- The UK Government cannot unilaterally enact legislation unless it has a sufficient and reliable majority in the Houses of Parliament.

*Evaluate: to what extent can the unilateral authority bind itself to acting in accordance with the democratic decision: **(1)** technically? **(2)** legally? (e.g., has developed the needed technical and/or legal infrastructure for binding)*

- Technical feasibility isn't relevant. It is not legally possible for the UK Government to bind MPs to a decision.

Commitment

*Describe: the extent to which **the unilateral authority commits to acting in accordance with the democratic decision.***

- The UK government pre-committed to publicly responding to the final recommendations and implementing them to the maximum extent possible (conditional on acceptance of the recommendation in principle).

Evaluate: to what extent has the unilateral authority committed to acting in accordance with the democratic decision: (1) internally? (2) privately? (3) publicly? (regardless of their ability to bind)

- There is a verbal commitment to enact the recommendation to the maximum extent possible, although the state to which this is true is largely up to the unilateral authority and will not be clear for a number of years.

Trust

Awareness

*Describe: the extent to which **the relevant public is aware of the democratic process.***

- The UK public was made aware of the process through a public communications campaign that complemented the process.

Evaluate: to what extent is the relevant public aware: (1) that the democratic system exists? (2) how it works? (3) what it is being used for? (4) how they can be involved?

- The public has a low level of awareness. There is some coverage in specialised media and a broader public communications campaign including advertising pathways to be included, but there is generally little public engagement with government policy-making on this topic.
- Public communications clearly explain that the assembly would inform UK policy on AI persuasion risks, though detailed understanding of what exactly this process would look like or how exactly the recommendations would influence policy development was limited among the general public.

Participation

*Describe: the extent to which **the relevant public is willing to participate in the process.***

- Response rates to recruitment invitations are in line with global averages but lower than the most successful examples in neighbouring Ireland.

Evaluate: to what extent is the relevant public: (1) willing to participate? (2) able to participate? (3) appropriately compensated for participating? (4) actually participating?

- There was a sufficient pool of the public eager to participate. They were generously reimbursed for their time.

Accountability

*Describe: the extent to which **there are external watchdogs and accountability structures monitoring the execution of the democratic process and the implementation of its outputs.***

- An independent governance body is established to oversee the process and hold the UK government to account by reporting on recommendation implementation progress.

*Evaluate: to what extent are: **(1)** there well-understood lines of oversight and accountability? **(2)** sufficiently influential/powerful organizations focused on holding authorities to their promised levels of democratic involvement? **(3)** authorities and democratic systems responsive to such accountability mechanisms?*

- The independent governance body had limited powers to mandate accountability but its public profile commanded responsive actions where needed.

Buy-in

*Describe: the extent to which **the relevant public and key stakeholders buy-in to the process and its legitimacy.***

- Key industry stakeholders, civil servants responsible for implementing recommendations, and political leaders are included in the process planning stage to establish commitments before outputs are generated.

*Evaluate: to what extent are the relevant public and key stakeholders accepting of the legitimacy of: **(1)** the system/process? **(2)** of the decision?*

- Their involvement in the process implicates them in building legitimacy. When compared to existing policy-making and political decision-making processes the process is viewed as considered and reasonable because of its resistance to shallow public opinion and electoral incentives.