

Democracy Audit Feasibility Study

A Report Prepared for the Joyce Foundation

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The Joyce Foundation contracted with the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law to examine the feasibility of creating and implementing a “democracy audit” of the states. A democracy audit is an analytical tool for assessing the health of our democracy and the relative success of each state in creating a political process that fosters democratic values. An audit consists of a comprehensive survey of the rules, structures, procedures, and practices established in each state in light of the basic principles or features of democratic governance. It thus serves not only as a baseline for measuring democratic practices, but also as a vehicle for identifying strengths or deficiencies in state procedures or institutions. It can thus be used as a guideline for identifying potential reforms and crafting future policy initiatives.

To determine the feasibility of such a project, a number of meetings were held during the fall of 2004 with small groups of political science and legal scholars, “activist” experts, practitioners, and leading advocates of democratic reform. Democracy audits that have been completed or are currently underway in Sweden, Canada, and Australia were also examined for ideas on concepts, structure, and content. The working groups agreed that a democracy audit, if properly structured and conducted, would be both feasible and useful for a variety of purposes. Without prior consultation, the participants reached a consensus on the functions of an audit and its basic format. They also offered valuable suggestions on the structure and variables to be considered in an audit.

A democracy audit project is both feasible and desirable. This report sets forth our findings as to the basic design of an audit and its constituent elements. It presents model modules and some of the variables to be considered in developing specific components of an audit. It also identifies the next steps to be taken in implementing an audit.

Introduction

A robust democracy—understood as a system of democratic governance that promotes citizen engagement—is formed from many components. Such a system needs electoral, campaign finance, and ethics rules that promote full participation, equal access to office, and meaningful competition, as well as the integrity of the political process. It

requires governmental structures that ensure fair representation, protect the expression of majority and minority views, and promote transparency and accountability in government. It needs media organizations that allow diverse and controversial perspectives to reach the public. Finally, it works best in a civil society that is inclusive, promotes opportunity for all, and encourages citizen participation in associational activities.

This basic conception of democratic governance should guide the composition of a democracy audit. The audit should focus on the wide array of information and data on the laws, procedures, institutional arrangements, and state characteristics relevant to these broad principles. It should also build a comparative compendium of political behavior and political outcomes in each state. Such compilations will allow a comparison and ranking of states, and serve to identify best practices, as well as major deficiencies, on a case-by-case basis.

An audit's capacity for assessing the health of democratic governance in particular states is limited by certain methodological considerations. An audit will necessarily emphasize the rules, procedures, and institutional structures in a state, since these aspects of state governance are crucial to democratic practices and are relatively easy to define and catalogue for purposes of comparison. For example, it is possible to distinguish various voter registration rules or ballot access provisions on the basis of democratic values. But these variables can provide only a partial picture of the status of democratic governance. Measures of political behavior are also needed. Indeed, most analysts agree that political behavior and outcomes are the best indicators of the health of a democracy. However, some measures of political behavior, such as those that might define the responsiveness of legislative actions to popular concerns, are difficult to determine or quantify in any widely accepted way. Others are matters of debate in the academic and advocacy communities. For example, opinions differ as to the value to democratic governance of term limits or elected judges. Furthermore, although the rules or structures of a state's political system are related to behavior, they are not necessarily causative, which raises a methodological concern about the findings of a democracy audit. Consequently, a democracy audit will not provide the type of rigorous analysis that is the norm in scholarly research; it must necessarily include some subjective components, as well as some subjective measures, that are likely to be matters of some debate.

These concerns, however, can be tempered in a properly designed and conducted study. Clear definition of the variables to be included in the assessment and an analytical justification for any ranking scheme is a first step. An avoidance of causal inferences or linkages where not supported by scholarly research is a second safeguard. Selection of variables and ranking criteria on the basis of academic research, where available, or broad perspectives shared by a group of experts that are not skewed towards a particular advocacy position is a third. Providing readers or users with a context for understanding the information in an audit is a fourth. Finally, any proposed audit structure should be vetted with the leaders of relevant state or local organizations and academic specialists to ensure its accuracy and credibility.

The participants in our process, cognizant of these methodological issues and other complexities inherent in the conduct of an audit, concluded that these concerns were not so great as to diminish the value of the enterprise. Instead, they agreed that, even given some limitations, an audit would be a valuable and worthwhile pursuit that would serve a number of purposes of benefit to scholars, advocacy organizations, practitioners, and legislators.

Purposes of a Democracy Audit

An audit would serve multiple purposes. The principal purposes of an audit are:

1. **Data Collection:** An audit would provide an opportunity to collect information from disparate sources and compile the findings of a broad range of research projects conducted to date. It would also fill an important information gap by conducting analyses of state rules and structures. On many aspects of state elections and governance, remarkably little research has been done to determine the current state of the law.
2. **Public Education and Information Sharing:** Information collected under the auspices of the audit would be used to educate the public on the procedures and practice of democracy nationwide and in each state. This information would also be made available for further academic analysis or for advocacy efforts. It will also illustrate the array of existing options—both good and bad—for addressing issues of democratic governance. Public officials and advocates will thus be able to obtain new ideas from the experiences of their counterparts in other states.
3. **Advocacy for Reform:** The evaluative component of the audit will allow for a comparative assessment of how well the states are performing in developing the framework for democratic systems and fulfilling democratic principles. The “report card” component for each state will provide a tool for generating public interest and urging improvement in rules and structures. In identifying areas in need of reform and best practices, the audit will also serve as a vehicle for encouraging advocacy efforts.
4. **Development of Collaborative Structures:** The democracy audit would also function as a vehicle for promoting constructive interaction among scholars, practitioners, and advocates at both the national and state levels. Such interaction is likely to spur new avenues of research, greater dissemination of information, and enhanced advocacy efforts. Involving state-level organizations in the planning and execution of the audit, as well as the public outreach and reform efforts associated with the audit, will produce the “buy-in” needed to ensure that the audit will be useful and used effectively.

Format of a Democracy Audit

The ultimate objective of an audit is to prepare a comprehensive survey of the major aspects of the mechanics and practice of democracy at the state level. This end is best achieved if the audit takes the form of a series of reports on specific subjects, rather than one comprehensive survey.

A serial approach offers a number of advantages. First, it is more practical. It divides the task into manageable components that can be completed in a timely manner. A single, comprehensive survey would require significantly more time and resources to complete than a component report. Second, a series allows an audit to build over time; all of the issues and standards do not have to be identified and resolved in advance. It also allows those involved in the process to improve their understanding over time and thus adjust and deepen the concepts underlying the audit based on the knowledge gained from completing particular reports. Third, a series offers a more inclusive and expansive approach, since it facilitates the involvement of different national and state groups, each of which may participate in their particular area of expertise. Finally, a series offers a better communications and marketing approach. Instead of one major release that occurs well after the project is announced, a number of releases and discussions can be held over a sequential period of time. This facilitates the branding process and multiplies the communications opportunities associated with the project. Each report can be disseminated nationally, the findings for each state disseminated at the state and local level, and then the findings released again as part of a comprehensive report combining the findings of the entire series. A serial approach will also make it easier to update particular reports and release progress reports on specific topics.

Each of the reports in a democracy audit would be devoted to a particular aspect of democracy and be based on a general format to be used in every report. The most straightforward approach is to divide the reports by subject area. For example, one report could be devoted to voter eligibility and registration requirements, another to the mechanics of voting, another to campaign financing, etc. This will provide a concise and clear topic for each report, which will make identification of the relevant partners and other aspects of implementation that much easier.

There is broad agreement that there is no analytically defensible means of ranking states on the basis of an overall democracy “grade.” The variables to be evaluated are too diverse, and no common metric can be devised that makes them sufficiently commensurable to be weighed on a single scale. Instead, the variables or measures associated with each topic would be assessed with a grade or ranking provided for each variable. The audit could thus use a “report card” format that provides multiple grades on a variety of variables. However, these grades should be based on a clear set of standards to be developed by those conducting each report. They should not be based on relative assessments of a state’s performance in comparison to other states.

Any data measures incorporated into an audit should be based on a time series, rather than measures obtained in a particular year. For example, information on voting

behavior or campaign finance patterns should include data from a number of elections in order to minimize the effects of aberrations that might occur in a given year. Time series measurements will provide more accurate and robust findings, and thus enhance the credibility of audit findings.

There are certain features of a state's political system that cannot be assimilated into a report card format, but should be discussed in every audit report. First, a number of the academic experts noted that each report should begin with a brief state political profile that includes a discussion of a state's political culture—whether it has a strong two party system, a tradition of high voting participation, a professional legislature, etc.—in order to provide some contextual background for the information included in the report. Second, there are some practices, such as term limits or ballot initiatives, which remain controversial. Even within the academic and activist communities there is disagreement as to whether these practices promote or detract from democratic governance. The role of such practices in particular states could be discussed in the report. Finally, certain rules or structures that could make a major difference, such as choice voting in multi-member districts, are not found in any state so they cannot be included as a standard for assessment. But such ideas, as well as the best practices found in states, could be discussed in the concluding section of an audit report. In this way, each report would promote information sharing and provide ideas that might form the basis of future reform advocacy efforts.

An audit should be based on a replicable and replicated process. The first series of reports should be crafted in a way that provides a baseline for further analysis in later years. Once the methodology has been developed and tested, and initial data collected, a second round of reports would be far simpler and less resource-intensive to prepare. In the best-case scenario, the state democracy audit would be conducted on a regular basis and become a tool for measuring progress over time. Ideally, it would eventually be conducted under the auspices of an academic institution or nonprofit organization that would serve as a permanent sponsor and repository for audit reports and information.

Thus, each component report of a democracy audit would adhere to a common format. This would include:

1. An overview of the state's political system and political culture;
2. A discussion of relevant political structures, rules or procedures, and measures of political behavior with information for each of the states;
3. A grading or ranking of the states on the variables contained in the study;
4. A discussion of unique political features found in some states and best practices, such as same day voter registration laws or public financing of state elections;

5. Where appropriate, a discussion of select reform alternatives that are not currently practiced at the state level, but which may make a meaningful contribution to the practice of democracy.

Basic Implementation

Given the multiple purposes to be served by a democracy audit and the scope of the work needed to produce the analysis, it seems fairly clear that each report would be conducted by multi-disciplinary teams, rather than by a single institution or individual. Each of these teams would operate under the central administration or supervision of a principal project director, who would be responsible for the democracy audit project as a whole. This approach will provide greater accountability and consistency in the conduct of the audit, as compared to a process in which separate teams operate more or less independently of one another.

The principal project director would be responsible for the selection of team members and the appointment of one of the members of each team to serve as the principal investigator for an audit report. The principal investigator would be the individual with primary responsibility for the drafting and final contents of an audit report.

Each team should consist of experts in the field relevant to a particular report's topic. The team should include at least one academic expert and at least one person with practical experience in the field: an election lawyer, government administrator, or representative of an advocacy group. This approach will help to balance the competing interests and considerations entailed in an audit. It will also help to ensure that the evaluation is as invulnerable as possible to charges that it is purely subjective or overly partisan. It will promote a combination of sound methodology with a product calculated to produce an analysis that will be useful to reform efforts.

Each team will be responsible for working with other individuals or organizations to identify the information or data sets that are already available as a result of previous research or compilation efforts, as well as the information or data that still needs to be collected. The audit team will be responsible for carrying out any new research or information gathering that is needed. The team should be encouraged to involve state-level research or advocacy organizations in this process. Such an approach will expand the number of stakeholders in the project, reduce the research demands imposed on the audit team, and provide grassroots organizations with an activity that can be used to engage members and increase their knowledge. In addition, early involvement of grassroots organizations in the audit process will pave the way for future state-level reform actions based on the audit.

Further, the audit process will benefit by incorporating some measure of outside review. Once a team has agreed upon a design and list of variables to be included in its study, and again after drafting its findings, it should submit its product to a select group of experts, practitioners, and advocacy or grassroots organization leaders for review.

Such a review would be particularly helpful in developing commentary on nuances in rules or procedures, or the potential effects of particular reforms in specific states. More important, it will provide a means of identifying any divergences between the laws as written and actual practices in states or localities. In other words, it will provide a means of ensuring that states are judged on their practice and implementation of law, not just the statutes they have on the books.

Each team will therefore be responsible for completing the basic tasks involved in an audit. These include:

1. Developing a final set of criteria or principles that will guide deliberations;
2. Developing a final set of variables or data to be included in the report;
3. Construction of the ranking scheme for assessing the variables or data with respect to their contribution to democratic practice;
4. Identification of individuals or organizations that should be consulted for purposes of vetting the report's design prior to the commencement of the study and findings prior to completion of the report;
5. Identification of available sources of information and data, and determination of research that has not yet been conducted that will need to be completed for purposes of the audit;
6. Liaison efforts with other specialists or organizations to incorporate information gathered by other entities into the audit, as well as the recruitment of specialists or organizations to assist in gathering information that needs to be collected;
7. Completion of the audit report;
8. Oversight of a back-end planning process to promote national and state partnerships on particular reform issues and initiate thoughtful advocacy efforts;
9. Participation in communication and outreach efforts designed to disseminate report findings.

Basic Design

As noted above, the democracy audit would be carried out best through a series of reports that will build a profile of the democratic characteristics of each state. Each of these reports should be focused on particular aspects of democratic procedures and governance, but all should operate out of a common set of principles.

This section sets forth a basic design for the contents of an audit. It does not presume to offer a final decision on the contents or variables to be considered, nor does it

present a final determination on its constituent parts. It does, however, reflect the results of the discussions held during the course of the feasibility study, and thus offers what should be taken as a starting point for carrying out an audit.

Specifically, this section outlines democratic principles that should guide the audit and offers basic structures for the initial reports to be undertaken.

Principles and Characteristics of Democratic Governance

- Democratic government is based on the consent of the governed. A well functioning democracy requires a citizenry that is informed about government and public policies, participates and is engaged in the political process, and trusts government to act in behalf of the public interest. To facilitate democratic government, the rules, procedures and structures of government must:
 - Recognize the basic notions of political equality as embodied in the principle of one person, one vote;
 - Promote freedom of speech and political expression;
 - Establish an open political process with low barriers to access for candidates and other participants;
 - Allow diverse communities of interest to have voice in the political process;
 - Foster a competitive elections process that offers meaningful choices to voters;
 - Ensure public access to information and encourage government dissemination of information to the public;
 - Ensure that every vote is properly counted and promote public confidence in the legitimacy of election results;
 - Provide safeguards against fraud and corruption, and procedures to ensure the integrity of the political process.
- Democratic government is responsible and accountable to the public. Democratic government fosters deliberation on matters of public interest, is conducive to the formation of majority coalitions, and is responsive to public concerns. To realize these ends, the laws and institutions must incorporate:
 - Adequate safeguards for the expression and protection of minority viewpoints;
 - Rules that ensure the transparency of government actions;

- Means for citizens to monitor government activity and hold officials accountable for their actions;
- Protections against fraudulent or corrupt actions by those responsible for government decisions.
- Democracy is most effective when it is characterized by robust public debate and a well informed citizenry. To facilitate the free expression of views and a marketplace of ideas, the structures and practices of mass media must:
 - Ensure the public access to diverse and controversial viewpoints;
 - Provide meaningful opportunities for the delivery of competing political messages;
 - Deliver news and opinions about government and public policies to all members of the public, irrespective of where they live or their economic status.

Components of the Audit

The rules that govern elections, the machinery of elections, and the extent to which individuals participate in the electoral process are the most important aspects of any assessment of democracy in the states. These rules establish the structure of the electoral process, define who is eligible to participate in elections, and affect the scope of competition and voter participation. They are also a focal point of current reform efforts, given the controversies associated with voting in recent elections. Accordingly, they should be the first issues examined in a democracy audit.

The next sets of issues to be examined are those related to the financing of campaigns and the functions of media organizations. These issues are a priority because they affect both the conduct of elections and the accountability and legitimacy of democratic governance. Indeed, after voting and elections, the top priority would be to develop a model module for assessing campaign finance, lobbying, and ethics laws.

Thereafter, the next stage of the audit should be devoted to the rules, procedures, and functions of governing institutions. These include the features that promote the responsiveness and full expression of views in the legislature, the procedures for ensuring the transparency and accountability of government institutions, and methods of promoting public involvement in government decision-making. These aspects of democratic governance were not included in the initial consultations undertaken as part of the feasibility study, in part because the Brennan Center recently completed a 50-state survey of legislative processes. Should the decision be made to go forward with this project, steps should be taken to consult experts in these areas who can help to identify additional work that needs to be done to adapt the Center's research for the audit's purposes.

A number of participants in the feasibility study noted that a comprehensive democracy audit should also include an analysis of the characteristics of civil society that are related to the proper functioning of democracy. Some observers cast these characteristics as measures of social inclusion, and noted that democracy audits in Scandinavian countries have included such measures as means of assessing the quality of democratic life. These measures would include such variables as literacy rates, poverty rates, income and social class indicators, party membership and party registration, the number of local voluntary associations in a state, and the scope of citizen participation in voluntary organizations, among others. Whether a democracy audit should include a component devoted to civil society is one of the open questions yet to be decided.

Examples of Audit Modules

As part of the feasibility study, meetings were held with experts in the fields of elections and media. Beyond determining the feasibility and desirability of an audit, these sessions were also used to develop frameworks and identify the major variables that would be used to measure democratic performance in these areas. Accordingly, the sessions were used to develop models of the initial components of an audit.

Outlines of these models follow below. The issue areas presented here focus on (a) voting and elections and (b) media, because these are the areas that were the focus of concentrated discussions in our feasibility meetings. The contents of these models have thus been discussed and subjected to an initial review by specialists in the field. They offer templates for thinking about the contents of an audit module. They also offer frameworks that could be implemented immediately to begin the process of implementing and refining a democracy audit.

The inclusion of these examples should not be taken as a decision to exclude other modules or areas of study, such as campaign finance, lobbying, and ethics laws and practices. However, before other modules can be presented, further discussion of the content and variables of these modules is needed. Such discussions constitute one of the essential next steps in the democracy audit process.

Model Modules on Voting and Electoral Participation

I. Voter Enfranchisement

A. Voter Registration Rules

- Who is eligible to register to vote in a state?
 - What rules are applied to students seeking to register to vote?
 - What rules are applied to individuals with felony convictions?
 - Does the state automatically restore the voter registration of individuals with felony convictions upon the restoration of their voting rights?

- Does the state allow registration of minors who will be of voting age after the registration deadline?
- Does the state permit registration of individuals who become citizens after the registration deadline?
- Are noncitizens permitted to register and vote in any local elections?
- What are the identification requirements to register to vote?
- What, if any, partisan enrollment options are available on voter registration forms?
- Does a state register voters off of provisional ballots?

B. Facilitating Registration

- What is the deadline for voter registration? (Does the state permit election day registration?)
- Does the state require governmental agencies to provide eligible voters with registration forms and assistance with registration?
 - What governmental agencies are covered by the requirement?
- Does the state make voter registration forms available in public areas and on the Internet?
- Are materials in languages other than English readily available, where demographically appropriate, for purposes of voter registration?
- What means, if any, does the state employ to facilitate voter registration drives?
- What restrictions, if any, does the state place on individuals seeking to register voters?

C. Registration List Information and Maintenance

- Does the state maintain a centralized computerized voter registration list?
- Who may obtain a voter registration list?
- Is a fee charged for voter registration lists?
- What, if any, partisan enrollment information is available on the voter registration list?

- Is a state's computerized voter registration database linked to other governmental databases for purposes of validating the identity of potential registrants or voters or of revising registration lists?
- What procedures are used to maintain registration lists and minimize the risk of either failing to add or improperly eliminating eligible voters?
- Under what circumstances are voters purged from registration lists?
 - How often are voter registration lists purged?
 - How many voters are purged each time?
 - What type of notice does a voter receive before being purged?
 - Does the state have an established procedure for restoring a voter to the rolls when necessary?

D. Statistical Measures

- What percentage of a state's adult voting-age population is registered to vote?
- What percentage of a state's voting-eligible population is registered to vote?

II. Voter Choice

A. Ballot Access

- What requirements must candidates meet to obtain a place on the ballot?
 - What qualifications are imposed on individuals who gather petition signatures?
 - Is there an alternative to a petition filing requirement for gaining access to the ballot?
 - What are the filing fees, if any, established for candidates?
- What are the requirements for a write-in candidacy?
- What are the requirements for gaining official party status and a line on the state ballot?
- Are cross-endorsements permitted?

B. Electoral Districting

- Who is responsible for electoral redistricting?
- What criteria are used to guide redistricting decisions?
- What checks, if any, are imposed on redistricting proposals?

- How many legal challenges have been filed on the issue of redistricting?
 - How many of these challenges have been successful?

C. Candidate Selection

- Does the state require the use of primaries for the purpose of selecting candidates?
- If so, are the primaries open or closed?

D. Initiative, Referendum, or Recall

- Does the state provide for the initiative or referendum?
- What are the requirements for placing a measure on the ballot?
- What restrictions, if any, are placed on the use of initiative or referendum?
- What requirements or review procedures are placed on the wording of ballot measures?
- Can the legislature amend or repeal a voter-approved initiative?

E. Statistical Measures

- The number and percentage of partisan districts in the state legislature or the number and percentage of potentially competitive electoral districts in the state legislature?
- The number and percentage of contested races in the state legislature?
- The number and percentage of competitive race in the state legislature?
- The incumbent reelection rate?
- The number and percentage of competitive races, and incumbent reelection rates, when controlled for any term limit restrictions?
- Number of statewide ballot measures and success rates in recent elections, with distinctions for legislative-initiated measures and citizen-initiated measures.

III. Voter Participation

A. Voter Information

- Does the state provide adequate dissemination of sample ballots to the public in advance of the formal voting period?
- Does the state provide funding for voter guides?
- Does the state make sample ballots and voter information available on the Internet?
- Does the state make voter information materials available in languages other than English?
- Do the contests for the major state offices feature candidate debates?

B. Voting Practices

- What are the rules governing absentee balloting?
- Does the state allow early voting, either by mail or in person?
- Does state law allow for replacement ballots?
- What procedures does the state have regarding write-in candidates?
- What are the conditions set for counting provisional ballots?

C. Statistical Measures (in primaries and general elections, presidential and nonpresidential years)

- What percentage of registered voters cast ballots?
- What percentage of the voting eligible population cast ballots?
- What percentage of the voting age population cast ballots?

IV. Election Administration and Tabulation

A. Administration

- Who is responsible for the administration of elections?
- Are local election officials elected or appointed?

- Is the selection of local election officials based on partisan or nonpartisan considerations?
- Do local election officials have permanent professional staff to assist in the administration of elections?

B. Voting Technology

- Are there state-level standards for certifying voting technology?
- Does the state have a formal certification process for decisions on electronic voting technology?
- Is the voting technology used in the state accessible to all potential voters?

C. Poll Workers and Observers

- How are poll workers selected in the state?
- How much poll worker training does the state or locality provide?
- Are bilingual poll workers available, where appropriate?
- Who is allowed to be an election observer?
 - Are nongovernmental organizations or citizens treated equally as compared to candidates or party committees?
- Can candidates or organizations get information on election day to determine who has not turned out to vote?

D. Recounts

- What procedures are used to determine the need for a recount?
- Who is permitted to ask for a recount?
- How are recounts financed?

E. Tabulation and Verification

- Does the state have procedures to ensure the accurate aggregation of results?
- Does the state have procedures for independent verification of votes cast via electronic means?

- Does the state have established procedures for investigating claims of voter fraud?

F. Statistical Measures

- Number of polling locations and average number of registered voters and voters per location.
- Number of poll workers and average per location.
- Number of complaints filed? Number of reports of broken voting machines?
- Number of legal challenges against state voting administration procedures? Number of successful challenges?

Model Media Module

A democracy audit should include an assessment of the structure and role of media. Although the regulatory framework for broadcast and other media is primarily a function of federal law, the structure and content of state and local media has a direct effect on the quality of democracy within a state. Broadcast and other types of public communication are the principal means by which information is made available to the citizenry; it is thus essential to an informed electorate. However, there are wide variations in the amount and quality of information offered to local communities. In fact, recent analyses suggest that the media in some states now offer relatively little coverage of state or local politics. Studies have also linked the level of ownership concentration and competition to the variety of content made available to the public and exposure to alternative views. Voter participation may also be effected, since turnout rates in communities of color have been linked to the availability of ethnic or minority-targeted news sources. The character and diversity of state media also has important implications for Federal Communications Commission policy questions and licensing renewals.

A media analysis is more complicated than some other aspects of a democracy audit. Media structures are not based on state-by-state laws in the same way that voter registration rules or campaign finance systems are. Analysis is also complicated by the fact that media markets are not aligned with political jurisdictions and many markets extend across state borders. Further, media effects are a function of the quality of information available to the electorate and the consumption practices of citizens. However, statistical data on the amount of political coverage or the extent to which citizens are exposed to alternative views are not readily available. Research tools, such as content analysis or survey research, can be used to measure these aspects of media content and use, but they are labor and resource intensive, and require sophisticated research techniques. If the resources are not available for complete state-by-state analyses, one solution may be to select a few localities or markets within a state for research purposes and present the results as examples of the coverage found within a state.

A media component could include the following variables or issues.

I. Media in a Democratic Society

A. Structural Issues

- What is the extent of local media in the state? How many local television, radio, and newspapers are found in the state?
- What is the scope of journalistic resources in a state? Size of staffs, news budgets, etc.
- What is the level of competition in the state? How concentrated is the ownership of media outlets in the state?
- What is the extent of cable penetration in the state?
- What percentage of the population and what percentage of various demographic groups have access to digital technology?
- Are there minority owned media outlets in the state, where demographically appropriate?
- What is the extent of ethnic or minority targeted media in the state?
- How well are the demographics of the community represented in newsrooms?
- Are broadcast and print available in languages other than English, where demographically appropriate?
- Are WI-FI networks or low power radio available?
- Does the state have a public affairs station similar to CSPAN?
- Is there a news bureau at the state capitol? If so, have many media organizations have staff located there?

B. Legal Issues

- Does the state have a freedom of information act or similar measure to provide journalists with access to information?
- Does the state have right of publicity laws?
- What government documents are in the public domain?

- Does the state provide subsidies for public or community programming? If so, what types of subsidies are provided? Do the subsidies benefit producers or distributors?

C. Content or Use Issues

- What is the level of political coverage in the state? To what extent do local news outlets cover state or local elections? State or local policy issues?
- Are political debates broadcast during election season? If so, for which offices?
- Do citizens believe that they are exposed to diverse views? Are they satisfied with the current news offerings?
- Number of challenges to license renewals in the state? Number of successful challenges?

Next Steps

Given the interest in a democracy audit and the prospective advantages of such an enterprise, the next steps needed to implement such a project should be undertaken. These include:

1. Securing the financing for a pilot project that would be devoted to the first components of the audit. This project, which would examine issues related to voting and election administration, would serve as a model for future components and be used to refine the process of conducting an audit. The pilot project would include the selection of a project director or coordinating institution, the selection of teams to carry out the analyses needed to complete each of the four parts of the electoral component identified above, and the funding needed to conduct and produce the reports.
2. Secure the financing for another series of outreach meetings. These meetings would focus on the next components of the democracy audit. Specifically, these sessions would focus on the components and variables to be included in the audit of (a) campaign finance, lobbying, and ethics laws, and (b) procedures and practices in state governance.
3. Complete the models and variables for other components of the audit, including a determination as to whether the characteristics of civil society should be included in a democracy audit of the states and whether such a component is feasible.
4. Develop a communications plan, which includes consideration of the particular advocacy efforts that might stem from a democracy audit.