The present volume seeks to provide a similar audit for the central political institutions and processes in this country. Unlike the earlier volume, there is not the same degree of international agreement on the standards governing, for example, parliamentary procedure, executive accountability, electoral process, popular representation, and so on, as there is in the field of civil and political rights. What counts as 'democratic' is less definitive, and more open to legitimate variation in practice between different countries. Yet the relative lack of agreement on standards can be overstated. We are convinced that it is possible to arrive at a defensible and widely acceptable account of democratic principles, and of the audit criteria to be derived from them, even though the institutional arrangements through which these criteria are met may vary from one country to another.

In 1993, we published a consultative paper on democratic principles and criteria for this audit which deals more fully with certain of these issues (DA Paper No. 1). The criteria which we have developed for the UK Democratic Audit are not inscribed in stone and they have already undergone a considerable process of evolution since 1993 as we have discussed them in seminars, both domestically and internationally, debated them with correspondents, and tried to use them in practice. (In addition, we have developed in association with this volume a 'do-it-yourself' Audit Pack, which can be used by groups of citizens in any country to conduct an impressionistic audit of their own level of democracy.) We welcome any feedback from readers about the content or methodology of our own audit and its criteria.

We think that any debate about these criteria will itself be a contribution to the democratic process. This isn't merely an abstract good. Core decisions and policies impact directly and indirectly on the lives of all citizens of the UK; and as the UK is a unitary state, they generally do so without checks or intervention from intermediary bodies, or by regional or local government. These decisions and policies directly determine or at least affect how the state apparatus treats ordinary citizens on issues of vital importance to their daily lives – from pension levels and immigration rules, tax demands and employment prospects, criminal laws and regional disparities, education standards and housing conditions, to the protection of their everyday environment, risks from radiation and pollution, the safety of drugs and food and the very quality of the air they breathe. We have found evidence in research for this volume that suggests that democratic practice in government is likely to provide 'good' and effective government; and hard evidence that its absence contributes to poor and damaging government. The resulting policy mistakes have literally led to disasters, such as the BSE crisis, which affect people's daily lives for the worse, and cost some people their lives. Finally, only democratic government can provide the proper framework for the society of self-confident citizens which is the unspoken aim of public policy in this country.

The basic principles of democracy

The idea of democracy has different, if overlapping, meanings for different people in different places, and at different times. This is because the word 'democracy', which was originally a term of disparagement, has become one of the most generalised

words of approval in the political lexicon during the twentieth century. As a resul it has tended to become synonymous with whatever the particular user happens t approve of – whether individual freedom or social equality, majority rule or minorit rights, popular participation or elite competition, as the case may be. One way o avoiding these differences, and the underlying tendency to empty the concept of an specific content, is to define democracy descriptively, in terms of the institutiona procedures and practices of those countries which are commonly called 'democrati

legislatures, judiciaries, constitutions, procedures such as multi-party election universal suffrage, the separation of powers, the rule of law, and so on. Yet ther are major problems with such a purely descriptive or institutional definition. Firs no reason can be advanced as to why we should call these institutions 'democrati rather than, say, 'liberal', 'pluralist', 'polyarchic', or whatever other term we choos What is it that makes these institutions distinctively *democratic*? Secondly, any definitio of democracy in terms of the institutions of government alone makes it impossibl to understand why we should also want to call the arrangements of association in civil society – clubs, work groups, economic institutions, and so on – democrati or undemocratic, as the case might be. Is there no common thread that links thes different usages? Finally, and most importantly from the standpoint of a democrati audit, unless we have some point of reference for our concept of democracy whic is independent of the institutions and practices of democracy themselves, it will b impossible to assess how democratic they actually are in practice, or how they migh become more so. By what criteria might such an assessment be made?

Our solution to these problems is to define democracy in terms of the two basi principles which underlie the implicit contract that representative democracy make between the state and people. The appeal of democracy comes from the idea tha ordinary people 'rule' – the original Greek, *δημοκρατία*, literally means 'peopl power'. In a modern democracy people cannot rule directly, and many people wil probably not wish to do so. Instead, the idea of the people's power is realised throug a representative system in which they have the final say. If that system is to remai broadly faithful to the implicit contract between state and people, it must satisfy ou two basic principles – the first is that of *popular control* over the political processes o decision-making within their society; the second is that of *political equality* in th exercise of that control. The two principles are of course most fully realised in smal groups or associations where everyone has in effect an equal right to speak and t vote on policy in person. In larger associations, and especially at the level of a whol society, practical considerations of time and space necessitate that collective decision be taken by representatives, or designated agents, acting on behalf of the rest. Her democracy is realised in the first instance not as direct popular control over decision making, but as control over the decision-makers who act in the people's stead. Hov effective that control is, and how equally distributed it is between different citizens are key criteria for how democratic a system of representative government is Democracy thus entails a certain kind of *relationship*, on the one hand between govern ment and citizens, and on the other, between citizens themselves.

The two basic principles are both embodied in the familiar institutions and pro cedures of western democracies, and it is in the terms of these same principles tha

these institutions and procedures can be described as 'democratic'. By their very nature, they cannot be applied as absolutes, only as measures. That is to say that they can provide us with the criteria against which we can measure how far they are realised in practice by any democracy's institutions and procedures. Democracy is thus always a matter of 'more or less' – it is neither an all-or-nothing affair nor is it capable of final attainment. To put the matter another way, the principles by which we can recognise the arrangements of democracy as *democratic* also indicate the direction in which the two basic principles might be more fully realised. They serve together as instruments for recognising or identifying what is democratic, and as critical standards for assessing how democratic existing arrangements may be.

It is important to locate the democratic idea and these two principles in their proper context: that is, in the sphere of the *political*, where the collectively binding rules and policies for any society, group or association are determined, and where the resolution of disagreement about these rules and policies should take place. Situating democracy in this sphere of the political excludes immediately one misconception about democracy, recurrent in the British culture, that it means the greatest possible individual choice or individual freedom. Democracy certainly entails a variety of individual rights and freedoms – of speech, expression and association, the suffrage and so on. These are important in their own right if people are to possess autonomy and live fulfilling lives. But their point of reference is the process of collective decision-making, which is necessarily prior to their being granted and realised, because it provides the preconditions and boundaries for individual choice and action. Democratic politics, like any politics, presupposes that we are primarily social creatures, living lives that are interdependent, and therefore requiring common rules and policies, as well as procedures for collective action. Thus democracy belongs to the sphere of political decision-making for any association or collectivity, not just at the level of society, the nation-state or association of states. Any system of collective decision-making can be defined as 'democratic' to the extent that it is subject to control by all members of the relevant association considered as equals. Popular control and political equality remain the key democratic principles.

How can we be so sure that these two principles are indeed the basic principles of democracy? It is partly because, whenever and wherever democracy has become a serious issue of political practice and public debate, it is the ideas of popular rule and equal citizenship that have provided its inspiration. Political struggles waged under the banner of democracy have always been struggles to subject government to greater popular control, to restrain arbitrary rule, to make politics more inclusive, and to ensure greater equality between citizens. And if we examine what opponents of democracy throughout the ages have objected to, it has been precisely the idea that ordinary people might be qualified to pass judgement on matters of government, or that everyone should be given equal consideration in public policy, and equal opportunity to influence it. Of course, democracy does not mean always giving the majority what it wants, regardless of the conditions for informed decision, or the impact of any decision on the rights of others. What it means is that the conditions for popular control over government and for political equality should be secured on an ongoing basis.

Popular control and political equality constitute simple but powerful principles which can be used both to assess how democratic a system of collective decision-making is, and as ideals to be realised in practical institutional form. On their own, however, they may be too general to provide us directly with the criteria to audit the democratic character of a representative system of government, without the help of intermediate principles which give greater specificity to the core ideas. Among these mediating principles which enable us to recognise the relation between government and governed as 'democratic' are the following:

- the *authorisation* by the people of key public officials, typically through an electoral process in which there is significant choice between candidates and the corresponding power of removal from office on a regular basis. The idea of authorisation also includes direct popular involvement in and approval of a basic constitution, and revisions to it (through a referendum, for example);
- the idea of the *accountability* of government to the people, both directly to the public and to individuals, and also indirectly, through mediating institutions which ensure the legal, financial and political accountability of all government officials for their policies and actions undertaken in the people's name;
- the idea of the *responsiveness* of government to a full range of public opinion in the formulation and implementation of law and policy, through systematic processes of consultation and dialogue.

In a system of representative government these three concepts are what give substance to the idea of popular control. They cannot be effective, however, without guaranteed rights for citizens to information, to the freedoms of expression, association, and so on, or without the active participation of citizens, individually and collectively, in the political process. Popular participation is what gives life to the institutional arrangements of authorisation, accountability and responsiveness.

The other key democratic principle of political equality is threaded through all the above, requiring a distinctive relationship between citizens at the same time as one between them and their government. This is one of equality in the enjoyment of citizen rights, in the value of their votes, in the effective opportunity to stand for office, regardless of the social group to which a person belongs, in access to and redress from government, and so on. One of the indicators of political equality is to be found in the degree of *representativeness* of political institutions and of public bodies of all kinds, and in the degree to which they reflect the diversity and pluralism of society, not only in respect of political opinions, but of social composition and identities. Equality is thus not incompatible with diversity. In fact, it requires it to be reflected in the representativeness of public bodies.

These, then, are the mediating principles that give substance to the core ideas of popular control and political equality in a representative democracy: popular authorisation, public accountability, governmental responsiveness, the representativeness of public bodies, reflecting and promoting equality of citizenship. Together these principles give us our main criteria for assessing the quality of democracy in the different aspects of a country's democratic processes and institutions.

The different components of representative democracy

Given these core ideas and principles, how should we divide up the different aspects or components of democracy for audit and assessment? We distinguish four different components that are crucial for any functioning democracy:

1 The electoral process, which is the key site for the popular authorisation and control of government, carrying with it the sanction of removal from office. The democratic criteria here can be summed up in the concept of 'free and fair elections', though this is a somewhat imperfect characterisation.
2 The continuous and open accountability of government institutions and public officials to the electorate, both directly and indirectly through Parliament, the courts, the Ombudsman, tribunals, public audit and other means; and the responsiveness of government to public opinion. We call this 'open, accountable and responsive government'.
3 The guarantee of civil and political rights and freedoms, enabling citizens to associate freely with others, to express divergent or unpopular views, to create an informed public opinion, and to find their own solutions to collective problems.
4 Those elements in people's lives, habits and culture which combine to make up a 'democratic society': richness of associational life, the accountability of economic institutions, social inclusion, attitudes of mind, self-confidence, and a culture of tolerance and civic responsibility.

Together these four aspects or components of democracy can be represented as a pyramid, in which each element is necessary to the whole.

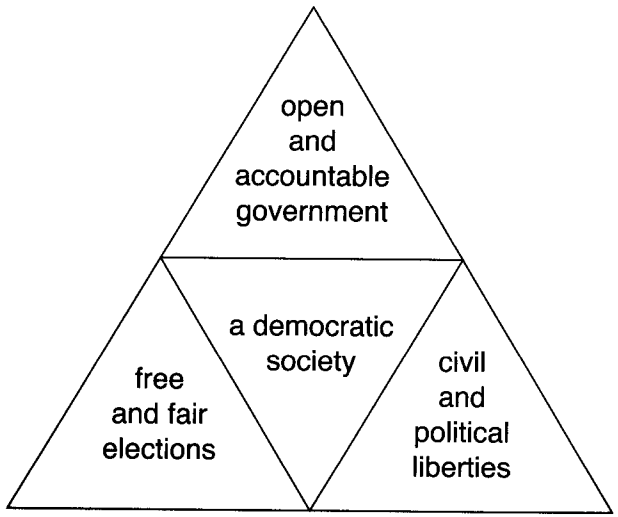

Figure 1.1 The democratic pyramid

For each of the four areas, we have formulated specific indices, the Audit's democratic criteria, for assessing how far the different aspects of this or any other country's governing institutions, practices and life measure up to our basic principles. These are our auditing tools. We have set out these Democratic Audit criteria (**DACs**) in the form of questions posed in relative terms (how much? how far? to what extent?), according to the assumption, already argued, that democracy is a matter of 'more or less' rather than a perfect state of being which may be attained. Some of the questions are much 'bigger' than others, and could well be broken down into a subset of further questions. The exact balance between them must be a matter of judgement and emphasis (see DA Paper No. 1).

Free and fair elections

People are the starting point of representative democracy. It is the people who elect a Parliament and a government to represent them. It is thus appropriate that the starting point for a democratic audit should be with an examination of the electoral process. The first five Democratic Audit criteria examine the reach, inclusiveness, independence, integrity and impartiality of elections in Britain, as well as how equally the electoral process treats citizens, how much effective choice it offers them, how far governments actually fulfil the electoral choices made, and how many people in practice exercise the right to vote. A further criterion concerns the right of the electorate in a democracy to vote directly on any measures of change in the governing or constitutional arrangements which significantly alter the relationship between people and government (as, for example, in the 1975 referendum over remaining in the (then) European Community, the 1997 referendums over devolution to Scotland and Wales and the promise of a referendum on changes to the electoral system for Westminster elections).

DAC1. How far is appointment to legislative and governmental office determined by popular election, on the basis of open competition, universal suffrage and secret ballot; and how far is there equal effective opportunity to stand for public office, regardless of which social group a person belongs to?

DAC2. How independent of government and party control and external influences are elections and procedures of voter registration, how accessible are they to voters, and how free are they from all kinds of abuse?

DAC3. How effective a range of choice and information does the electoral and party system allow the voters, and how far is there fair and equal access for all parties and candidates to the media and other means of communication with them?

DAC4. To what extent do the votes of all electors carry equal weight, and how closely does the composition of Parliament and the programme of government reflect the choices actually made by the electorate?

DAC5. What proportion of the electorate actually votes, and how far are the election results accepted by the main political forces in the country?

DAC6. How far is there systematic opportunity for the electorate to vote directly on measures of basic constitutional change?

Open, accountable and responsive government

Once elected, a government should remain continuously accountable to the people and to the people's representatives. The powers at its disposal to take decisions and make policies are 'public' powers – that is, they are granted by the public to their representatives and should be exercised in accordance with rules which ensure that the public are informed and consulted about their use and which prevent their arbitrary abuse. Accountability is only possible if the public is fully informed about the government's actions and procedures for the systematic and equal consultation of public opinion are in place. This section begins with a question (**DAC7**) about open government, and continues with a series of questions on different aspects of governmental accountability: of non-elected officials to those elected, of the executive to Parliament, and of MPs to the public (**DAC8–10**). The criteria then concern the key issues of the rule of law, the legal accountability of governments and their officials, and the independence of the judiciary (**DAC11–12**); address the direct accountability of government to citizens through procedures for individual redress (**DAC13**); bring the principle of equality to bear upon the internal working of public bodies (**DAC14**); and focus on the procedures for consultation and accessibility necessary to accountable and responsive government (**DAC15–16**). Finally, we apply the principles of openness, accountability and responsiveness to the different levels of government, both above and below the state, and especially to local government, whose vitality is so important to a country's democratic life (**DAC17–18**).

DAC7. How accessible to the public is information about what the government does, and about the effects of its policies, and how independent is it of the government's own information machine?

DAC8. How effective and open to scrutiny is the control exercised by elected politicians over non-elected executive officials, both military and civilian?

DAC9. How extensive are the powers of Parliament to oversee legislation and public expenditure, to scrutinise the executive and hold it accountable, and to secure redress when necessary; and how effectively are they exercised in practice?

DAC10. How publicly accountable are political parties and elected representatives for party and private interests, including sources of income that might affect the conduct of government and public duties and the process of election to public office?

DAC11. How far is the executive subject to the rule of law and transparent rules governing the use of its powers? How far are the courts able to ensure that the executive obeys the rule of law; and how effective are their procedures for ensuring that all public institutions and officials are subject to the rule of law in the performance of their functions?

DAC12. How independent is the judiciary from the executive, and from all forms of interference; and how far is the administration of law subject to effective public scrutiny?

DAC13. How readily can a citizen gain access to the courts, Ombudsman or tribunals for redress in the event of maladministration or the failure of government or public bodies to meet their legal responsibilities; and how effective are the means of redress available?

DAC14. How far are appointments and promotions within public institutions subject to equal opportunities procedures, and how far do conditions of service protect employees' civil rights?

DAC15. How systematic and open to public scrutiny are the procedures for government consultation of public opinion and of relevant interests in the formation and implementation of policy and legislation?

DAC16. How accessible are elected politicians to approach by their electors, and how effectively do they represent constituents' interests?

DAC17. How far do the arrangements for government both above and below the level of the central state meet the above criteria of openness, accountability and responsiveness?

DAC18. To what extent does government below the centre have the powers to carry out its responsibilities in accordance with the wishes of regional or local electorates, and without interference from the centre?

Civil and political rights and liberties

All the features of democracy considered above are anchored in a framework of citizen rights, which are necessary if the people are to play their active roles in political life as the counterpart to those of government. The first of the Audit's criteria in this section on safeguarding civil and political rights raises a very broad question indeed (**DAC19**), and answering it occupied most of the first volume already published. The next three criteria explore the implications of various kinds of social and economic inequality for the exercise of civil and political rights (**DAC20**); and take the existence of strong pressure groups for the defence of such rights (and their freedom from interference) and well-developed rights education as significant

indicators of how seriously a society takes the defence of basic rights (**DAC21–22**). Finally, we address the contentious issue of the rights of aliens, acknowledging the right of a democratic country to determine who should be admitted to live in the country, though only on non-arbitrary criteria, and assuming that residence over time itself generates legitimate claims to citizenship (**DAC23**).

DAC19. How clearly does the law define the civil and political rights and liberties of the citizen, and how effectively are they safeguarded?

DAC20. How equal are citizens in the enjoyment of their civil and political rights and liberties, regardless of social, economic or other status?

DAC21. How well developed are voluntary associations for the advancement and monitoring of citizens' rights, and how free from harassment are they?

DAC22. How effective are procedures for informing citizens of their rights, and for educating future citizens in the exercise of them?

DAC23. How free from arbitrary discrimination are the criteria for admission of refugees or immigrants to live within the country, and how readily can those so admitted obtain equal rights of citizenship?

A democratic society

The final set of criteria is premised on the assumption that the quality and vitality of a country's democracy will be revealed in the character of its civil society as well as its political institutions. As already suggested, there is considerable difference of opinion about the precise characteristics needed for a democratic society, and these are also subject to variation according to time and place. However, the idea that there should be some minimum agreement on the political nation, and tolerance of difference within it (**DAC24–25**), is quite standard. So too is the emphasis on a flourishing associational life, whose activities are also democratically accountable; and on a diversity of media of communication, which are accessible to different opinions and sections of society (**DAC26–28**). Finally, there is the important issue of social and economic inclusion, and the significance of education in equipping future citizens for a variety of social and political roles (**DAC29**), and the connected, more general question of the confidence of citizens in their own capacity to influence the collective decisions that matter for their lives (**DAC30**). The ultimate goal of democracy is a society of self-confident citizens.

DAC24. How far is there agreement on nationhood within the established state boundaries, and to what extent does support for political parties cross regional, linguistic, religious or ethnic lines?

DAC25. How tolerant are people of divergent beliefs, cultures, ethnic backgrounds, life-styles, etc., and how free are the latter from discrimination or disadvantage?

DAC26. How strong and independent of government control are the associations of civil society, and how accountable are they to their own members?

DAC27. How publicly accountable are economic institutions for their activities, and how effective is their legal regulation in the public interest?

DAC 28. How pluralistic are the media of communication in terms of ownership and accessibility to different opinions and sections of society; and how effectively do they operate as a balanced forum for political debate?

DAC29. How far are all citizens able to participate in economic, social and cultural, as well as political, life; and how effective is the education to equip them for doing so?

DAC30. To what extent do people have confidence in the ability of the political system to solve the main problems confronting society, and in their own ability to influence it?

Comparison with other indices of democracy

How do these criteria we have developed for democratic audit compare with the indices of democracy employed by other political scientists? The ones most frequently used stem from the work of Robert Dahl, the well-known American theorist (1971). Dahl produced, on the one hand, a list of political rights and freedoms; and, on the other, a list of electoral conditions for 'competition and inclusiveness' – that is, allowing all citizens a choice between various parties at election time with no significant exclusions. There would be something very odd indeed if there were no significant overlap between our criteria and such widely-used indices of democracy among the political science profession.

However, there are also a number of significant differences. First, our criteria extend beyond the areas of civil and political rights and electoral democracy, to include the two further areas of the accountability of government and a democratic society. To take accountability alone, the sheer range of issues – all very broad in their own terms – that we have had to consider to make an effective audit of this area shows what a serious omission this is. Second, we take the principle of political equality much more seriously than the standard political science indicators. They are usually content to take the inclusiveness of the suffrage – i.e. the proportion of the adult population eligible to vote – as the only criterion for political equality. For us the principle must be operative throughout the political process. Third, we do not believe that the quality of a country's democracy can be adequately assessed simply by aggregating a number of indices into a single score line, as political scientists tend to (Bollen 1991; Hadenius 1992; and others).