

Mapping Political Context: World Governance Assessment - Resources - Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/details.asp?id=5531&title=world-governance-assessment>

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The **World Governance Assessment (WGA)** was initiated in 1999 by a team led by Julius Court of ODI, with three main objectives:

- To generate systematic data to enhance understanding of the relationship between governance and development at a country level;
- To provide policymakers and NGOs with insights into how governance can be improved; and
- To help develop the capacity to undertake governance assessment in countries.

The WGA was developed to address certain deficiencies in existing understandings of, and indicators for, governance. The designers argued that the dominant role of international development agencies in the field of governance has brought a preoccupation with 'getting politics right', and that most approaches to mapping political context and governance reflect the programmatic priorities of the agencies that designed the frameworks for assessment or mapping - usually based upon what works in Western democracies. The field has been hampered by repeated attempts to find 'catch-all' definitions of governance. The WGA hopes to bring a new perspective to governance assessment by avoiding such pitfalls.

How does the World Governance Assessment work?

The WGA conceives of six arenas of governance. These are: civil society; political society; government; bureaucracy; economic society; and the judiciary. The assessment is based on a survey of Well Informed Persons (WIPs) in each country, which collects views on 36 indicators spread equally across six 'principles' of governance. These principles are:

- **Participation:** The degree of involvement and ownership of affected stakeholders.
- **Decency:** The degree to which the formation and stewardship of rules are undertaken without humiliation or harm of the people.
- **Fairness:** The degree to which rules apply equally to every one in society regardless of status.
- **Accountability:** The degree to which public officials, elected as well as appointed, are responsible for their actions and responsive to public demands.
- **Transparency:** The degree to which decisions made by public officials are clear and open to scrutiny by citizens or their representatives.
- **Efficiency:** The degree to which rules facilitate speedy and timely decision making.

Principles and arenas of the World Governance Assessment

Principle/arena	Participation	Fairness	Decency	Accountability	Transparency	Efficiency
Civil society	Freedom of association	Society free from discrimination	Freedom of expression	Respect for governing rules	Freedom of the media	Input in policymaking
Political society	Legislature representative of society	Policy reflective of public preferences	Peaceful competition for political power	Legislators accountable to public	Transparency of political Parties	Legislative function affecting policy
Government	Intra-governmental consultation	Adequate standard of living for citizens	Personal security of citizens	Security forces subordinated to civilian government	Government provides accurate information	Best use of available resources
	Higher civil		Civil servants	Civil servants	Clear	

The WGA uses a specific indicator for each point on a matrix (see table) linking the two sets of dimensions: the principles of governance and the arenas of governance.

A (locally resident) country coordinator is selected to implement the survey in each country. Respondents are selected by these

Bureaucracy	servants part of policymaking	equal access to public services	respectful towards citizens	accountable for their actions	decision making process	merit-based system for recruitment
Economic society	Consultation with the private sector	Regulations equally applied to all firms	Governments' respect for property rights	Regulating private sector in the public interest	Transparency in formulating economic policy	Obtaining licenses free from corruption
Judiciary	Non-formal processes of conflict resolution	Equal access to justice for all citizens	International human rights incorporated in national legal practice	Judicial officers held accountable	Clarity in administering justice	Efficiency of the judicial system

Source: Hyden et al (2003a).

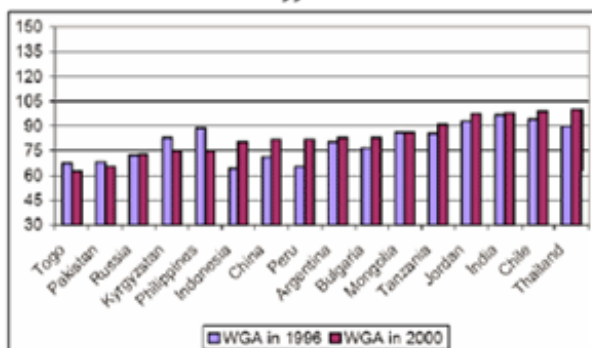
coordinators with the aim of achieving a full cross-section of persons representing different perspectives on governance. Respondents should also have significant experience of public life. It is recommended that at least 100 respondents are consulted, with 10 from each

of the following groups: parliamentarians, civil servants, government officials, business persons, academics, NGOs, media, legal/judicial, religious and international organisations.

The WGA publishes a dataset showing the full breakdown of scores by indicator for each country as well as the aggregate ratings (see figure for the average ratings for all 16 countries in 1996 and 2000). The country reports incorporate additional comments and qualitative data in order to provide a richer assessment of the country context. After the pilot phase of the project (which included 16 countries), a second phase was initiated in 2005 with a refined survey and a more rigorous approach, this time covering 10 countries, but with around 100 respondents per country.

The findings from completed country assessments are useful for those who want to understand institutional contexts but seek to avoid comparing one country against the ideals privileged by others. There are several countries that achieved a high score in the pilot assessment, but which are not liberal democracies in the Western mould (e.g. Jordan). This lends credence to the claim that WGA is an approach to assessing governance which is less skewed by Western perspectives on what constitutes good governance.

WGA Governance Scores in 1996 and 2000



Source: Court et al (2002)

Elements of the World Governance Assessment

Conceptual approach and indicators

- The WGA - and in particular its identification of six arenas and principles of governance - is an extremely useful and robust framework for the analysis of governance. CSOs seeking to map political context in their own arenas, could proceed by making assessments in terms of the WGA's six principles.

Data

- The readily accessible datasets and country reports produced by the WGA project can be of use to CSOs seeking to understand their own political contexts. Easy and comprehensive access to the data and the low cost of conducting surveys makes this a comparatively accessible tool.
- By collecting data on 36 indicators, the WGA provides a more detailed picture than many alternative approaches.

Analysis, presentation and recommendations

- The type of information provided by the WGA allows assessment of the relative strengths and weaknesses of governance in individual countries. It also enables cross-country comparison.
- The WGA attempts to use governance as an analytical tool, not as a device for programming specific 'governance interventions'. The information is detailed enough to be useful in guiding more specific investigations or steps in programme development, but the deliberate

avoidance of any explicit programmatic focus means direct recommendations are not given.

- The WGA might help local or regional CSOs to situate their actions in the context of wider constraints and opportunities at the national level. It might also help organisations to find institutional parallels in other countries from which to learn lessons.

This tool first appeared in the ODI Toolkit, *Mapping Political Context, A Toolkit for Civil Society Organisations*.