

World Governance Survey: a new approach to assessing governance

By Julius Court and Goran Hyden

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has stated that ‘good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development’.¹ If governance matters, so does the need for more reliable and valid data on key governance processes. The United Nations University (UNU) has begun to address this need with a World Governance Survey (WGS). A pilot phase was carried out in early 2001 and a larger round of country assessments is planned for 2003.²

In the pilot phase, governance assessments were undertaken in 16 developing and transitional societies, representing 51 per cent of the world’s population (see table). In each country, a national coordinator selected a panel of experts to complete the assessment. The panel comprised persons with extensive experience of the governance realm, including parliamentarians, researchers, lawyers and civil servants; around 35 people were interviewed per country.

The project identified 30 indicators based on widely held ‘principles’ of good governance: participation, fairness, decency, accountability, transparency and efficiency. Respondents were asked to rank each answer on a scale from 1 to 5; the higher the score, the better. In addition, respondents were invited to provide qualitative comments.

The table shows the median indicator rating for each country for the 10 indicators that relate particularly to accountability and transparency. It also shows the total governance score for each country. The total governance scores have a very robust correlation (0.77) with the country scores in Kaufmann *et al.*’s aggregate governance indicators, indicating the validity of the results.³

Selected governance indicators for transition societies, 2001

	Freedom of expression	Government open to public input	Accountability of legislators	Accountability of civil servants	Transparency in the civil service	Respect for property rights	Equal application of regulations	Access to justice	Transparency in judicial process	Accountability of judicial officials	Total country governance score (min. = 30, max. = 150)
Togo	2	1	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	62.5
Pakistan	3	2	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	65.0
Russia	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	73.0
Kyrgyzstan	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	75.0
Philippines	4	2	2	2	2	3	1	2	3	3	75.0
Indonesia	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	80.0
China	3	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	3	82.0
Peru	3	3	2	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	82.0
Argentina	4	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	83.0
Bulgaria	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	83.0
Mongolia	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	86.0
Tanzania	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	91.0
Jordan	3	3	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	97.5
India	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	98.0
Chile	4	3	2	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	99.0
Thailand	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	100.0
Average	3.31	2.50	2.19	2.38	2.38	3.00	2.69	2.50	2.56	2.56	83.25

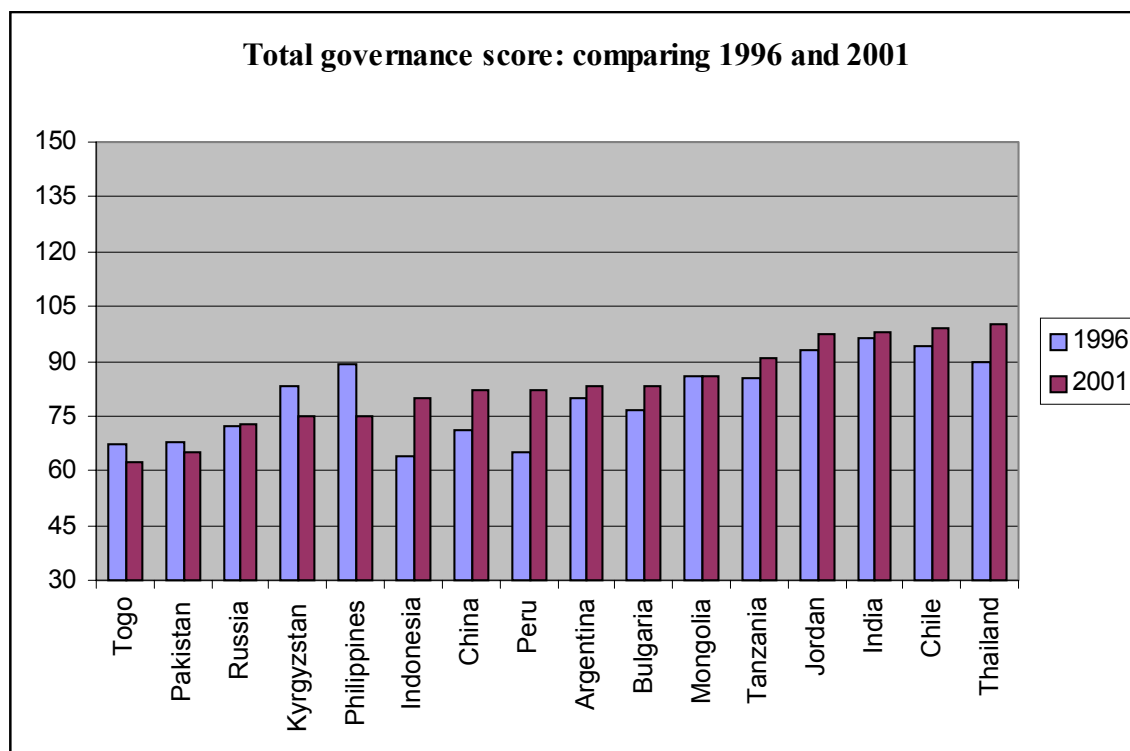
One widespread finding was the low score for the accountability of legislators. This indicator received the lowest average rating. In their qualitative comments, local experts commented that many legislators run for office because of financial advantages, and that legislators tend to be more accountable to their parties than to the public. Qualitative comments suggest that the particularly low rating given to Togo reflects dissatisfaction with the way elections have been administered and with the lack of effectiveness of the national assembly after a long period of autocratic rule. The particularly low rating given to Pakistan was a reflection of its military rulers, a point strongly emphasised in comments.

A second finding was that civil servants are generally seen not to be accountable and that the operations of civil services are seen to lack transparency. India was an exception: qualitative comments confirmed the reputation of the civil service as the backbone of government in India. Local experts also held Thailand's civil service in high regard.

The ratings and comments suggest that transactions between government and the private sector are marked by cronyism and bribery. This was highlighted as the number one problem in India. Russia and Indonesia were also rated poorly in this regard. In contrast, comments and ratings from Chile suggest that transactions between government and private sector there are relatively free from corruption.

Local experts were also critical of the quality of justice systems, observing that the rich have easier access to justice and that judges can be bribed. Court cases were seen to be processed slowly and it was felt that many poor and illiterate people fear the courts. However, there has been much judicial reform in the pilot countries. Local experts in India felt there had been a very positive impact from the reform of community justice institutions such as *Lok Adalats* (People's Courts), which allow the resolution of conflicts that are not, or cannot be, taken to court. Local experts in Chile felt that recent reforms would improve the administration of justice in the future.

Overall, there was significant variation in the total governance scores (see final column of the table). Experts in Thailand and Chile rated their countries as highest in the sample (100 and 99 out of a maximum of 150), whereas Togo and Pakistan were rated lowest (just over 60, compared to a minimum possible score of 30).



The local experts were also asked to compare the present situation with what they perceived it to have been five years previously (see figure). Assessments of Indonesia and Peru indicated particularly impressive improvements in governance, following the ouster of autocratic regimes. The Philippines' governance was seen to have declined the most, partly because the assessment took place at the time the senate was considering whether to impeach former President Joseph Estrada.

There is an urgent need for more reliable, relevant and timely cross-country data on governance issues in order to facilitate appropriate policy-making. Developing such information will be of immense local and international policy relevance. It is hoped that the WGS is a move in this direction. Indicators of political participation, democracy and human rights should eventually join the UN Millennium Development Goals and become part of the Human Development Index.

The project website contains the findings and data as well as a questionnaire:
www.unu.edu/p&g/wgs

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¹ Kofi Annan, *Partnerships for Global Community: Annual Report on the Work of the Organisation* (UN, 1998).

² The World Governance Survey was directed by Julius Court (ODI) and Goran Hyden (University of Florida). Ken Mease (University of Florida) was Senior Advisor. The project was carried out in partnership with local institutions in assessment countries, with generous support from UNU and UNDP.

³ Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay and Pablo Zoido-Lobaton, 'Governance Matters II: Updated Indicators for 2000/01', World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 2772, 2002.