

Tuesday, August 07, 2007

[The Open Budget Index | Georgia, Azerbaijan and the World](#)

The [Open Budget Index](#), a project of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, released the first-ever independent and non-governmental Budget Transparency Ratings in October 2006. The index endeavors to provide the practical information needed to analyze the transparency and accessibility of a government's budgetary processes—and thus better equip citizens and legislators in lobbying for governmental accountability and targeted, effective policymaking. The 122 multiple-choice question questionnaire, conducted by local experts in 59 participating countries across the world, is available on the Open Budget Index's website, as is the data from each country's answers. The survey's questions target generally accepted public financial management and practices and the availability of certain budgetary documents governments should release to the public over the course of the budgetary year. The Open Budget Index did not evaluate the actual quality of the information provided by the government.

While one might presume that public access to governmental budgetary records and processes is a given in highly developed Western nations, the findings of this study refute this assumption: only six of the 59 countries were found to adequately provide all of the general budgetary documents (the winners were France, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa, the UK and the US). Over a third of the surveyed countries- 39%- shared only "minimal" or "scant" information with their citizenry. The study emphasized that the extent of a country's budget transparency is very much influenced by the willingness of the government to share, and that a lack of capacity is not a legitimate excuse or constraint.

Georgia and Azerbaijan were part of the surveyed lot, and both were found to provide only minimal information to citizens. Their scores were nearly identical, with Georgia barely edging out Azerbaijan's score of 30% with 33%. Russia fell in a higher category, providing "some" information to citizens with a score of 48%. The findings were presented in a somewhat confusing way, however- when you looked at the individual country summaries, it appeared as though Georgia was far more forthcoming- 6 out of 7 of their budget documents were coded as "Available to the Public," whereas Azerbaijan had only one budgetary document open to the public, two were not even produced, and four were produced but for internal use only. Azerbaijan's legislature does not provide public hearings on the budget at all, whereas Georgia makes an attempt but only opens a limited amount of hearings to the public. What may have bumped up Azerbaijan's score disproportionately was the executive's budget proposal, as the study scored it a 48 out of a possible 100%, with Georgia attaining only 28 out of a possible 100%.

Fortunately the website includes all of the aggregate scores so one can explore the methodology and results of the survey's findings. You can check it out [here](#).