

OPEN BUDGET INDEX SCORE
— OUT OF 100 —

81-100 Extensive

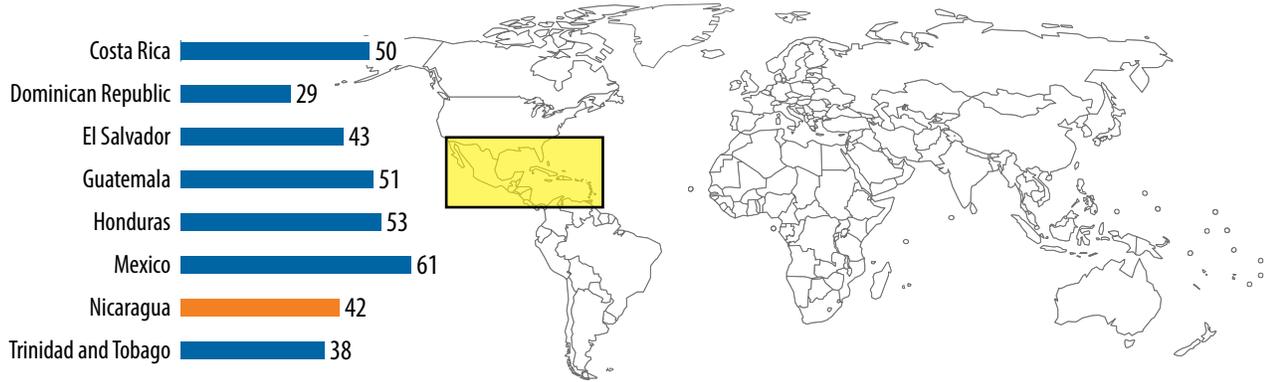
61-80 Substantial

41-60 Some

21-40 Minimal

0-20 Scant or None

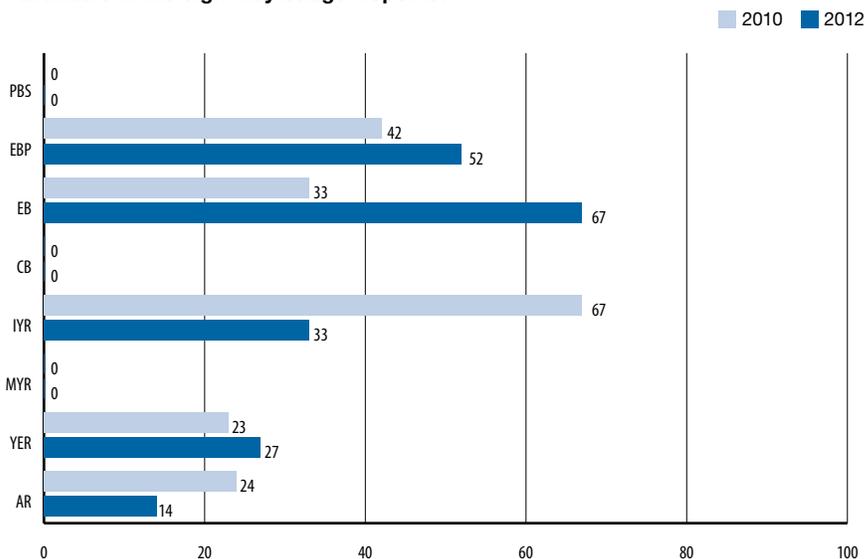
How does Nicaragua compare to its neighbors in Central America & the Caribbean?



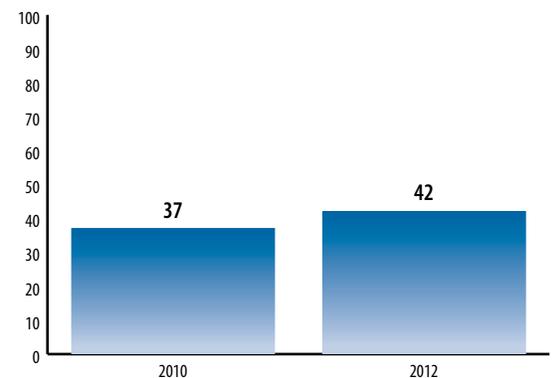
What are each of the eight key budget documents, and does the public have access to them?

Document	Description of Document	Publication Status
PBS	Pre-Budget Statement: Provides information that links government policies and budgets and typically sets forth the broad parameters that will define the budget proposal that is presented to the legislature.	Produced for Internal Use
EBP	Executive's Budget Proposal: Presents the government plans to raise revenues through taxes and other sources and spend these monies to support its priorities, thus transforming policy goals into action.	Published
EB	Enacted Budget: The legal instrument authorizing the executive to raise revenues, make expenditures, and incur debt.	Published
CB	Citizens Budget: A nontechnical presentation to enable broad public understanding of a government's plans for raising revenues and spending public funds in order to achieve policy goals.	Not Produced
IYR	In-Year Reports: Periodic (monthly or quarterly) measures of the trends in actual revenues, expenditures, and debt, which allow for comparisons with the budget figures and adjustments.	Published
MYR	Mid-Year Review: An overview of the budget's effects at the midpoint of a budget year and discusses any changes in economic assumptions that affect approved budget policies.	Not Produced
YER	Year-End Report: Information comparing the actual budget execution relative to the Enacted Budget.	Published
AR	Audit Report: Independent evaluation of the government's accounts by the country's supreme audit institution. It typically assesses whether the executive has raised revenues and spent monies in line with the authorized budget, and whether the government's accounts of its revenues and expenses are accurate and provide a reliable picture of the fiscal situation.	Published

From Zero to 100: Has Nicaragua increased the amount of information it makes available in the eight key budget reports?



OBI scores over two Surveys



Open Budget Index

The **Open Budget Survey** assesses whether the central government in each country surveyed makes eight key budget documents available to the public, as well as whether the data contained in these documents is comprehensive, timely, and useful. The Survey uses internationally accepted criteria to assess each country's budget transparency developed by multilateral organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic

Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI).

The scores on 95 of the 125 Open Budget Survey questions are used to calculate objective scores and rankings of each surveyed country's relative transparency.

Nicaragua's score is 42 out of 100, which is slightly lower than the average score of 43 for all the 100 countries surveyed and is lower than the scores of its neighbors Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. Nicaragua's score indicates that the government provides the public with only some information on the national government's budget and financial activities during the course of the budget year. This makes it challenging for citizens to hold the government accountable for its management of the public's money.

Nicaragua's OBI 2012 score of 42 has increased five points from its score of 37 on the OBI 2010.

The Open Budget Index is composed of subscores for each of the eight key budget documents assessed in the Survey. These subscores represent the average of the scores received on a set of questions in the Survey that measure the public availability of and amount of information in the documents. The subscores are comparable across all of the countries included in the Survey.

Recommendations

Nicaragua's score on the Open Budget Index has increased since the last round of the Open Budget Survey, which is an encouraging development and for which the government is congratulated. However, with a score of 42 out of 100 on the Open Budget Index 2012, the government of Nicaragua has the potential to greatly expand budget transparency by introducing a number of short-term and medium-term measures, some of which can be achieved at almost no cost to the government.

The International Budget Partnership recommends that Nicaragua undertake the following steps to improve budget transparency:

- Publish the Pre-Budget Statement, which is currently produced for internal use (detailed guidance on the contents of this document can be found in this guidebook: <http://bit.ly/QGzHv8>). As per the Open Budget Survey 2012, 47 countries publish a Pre-Budget Statement, including Nicaragua's neighbors Guatemala, Honduras, and

Mexico. Links to the budget documents published by these countries can be accessed from the IBP's website: <http://bit.ly/P8NPOV>.

- Produce and publish a Citizens Budget and Mid-Year Review. Detailed guidance on the contents of these documents can be found in these guidebooks: <http://bit.ly/QGzHv8> and <http://bit.ly/QGzFmJ>. As per the Open Budget Survey 2012, 26 countries publish a Citizens Budget, including its neighbors El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico; 29 countries publish a Mid-Year Review, including its neighbor Honduras. Links to the budget documents published by these countries can be accessed from the IBP's website: <http://bit.ly/P8NPOV>.

- Increase the comprehensiveness of the Executive's Budget Proposal, specifically by focusing on providing information on the following areas:
 - greater detail of previous year expenditures (see questions 19-21 of the Open Budget Questionnaire);
 - greater detail of anticipated revenues at least two years beyond the budget year and actual revenues for the previous year (see questions 10, 27-28, and 31 of the Open Budget Questionnaire);
 - total outstanding debt for the budget year and debt composition, such as interest rates on the debt, maturity profile of the debt, currency denomination of the debt, or whether it is domestic or external debt (see questions 11 and 13 of the Open Budget Questionnaire);
 - different macroeconomic assumptions used in developing the budget (see question 15 of the Open Budget Questionnaire);
 - linking the budget to the government's stated policy goals, nonfinancial information, and quality of performance indicators (see questions 16-17, 51, and 53-54 of the Open Budget Questionnaire);
 - extra-budgetary funds, quasi-fiscal activities, financial and non-financial assets, expenditure arrears, contingent and future liabilities, donor assistance, tax expenditures, earmarked revenues and percentage of the budget devoted to secret expenditures (see questions 35 and 38-47 of the Open Budget Questionnaire); and
 - a detailed timetable and dates on the budget formulation process (see questions 57-58 of the Open Budget Questionnaire).
- Improve the comprehensiveness of In-Year Reports by comparing

actual year-to-date expenditures and revenue with either the original estimate for that period or the same period in the previous year as specified in the enacted budget (see questions 66 and 69 of the Open Budget Questionnaire).

- Increase the comprehensiveness of the Year-End Report by auditing outcomes; by improving the explanations of the differences between original expenditure estimates, original revenue estimates, and original nonfinancial information; and by including explanations of the differences between original macroeconomic forecast, original performance information, and enacted levels of funds intended to benefit the poor in the country and their actual outcomes, along with actual outcomes for extra-budgetary funds (see questions 78-79 and 81-86 of the Open Budget Questionnaire).
- Improve the quality of the Audit Reports by publishing reports on the total expenditures incurred by the national government through its budget within six months of the end of the budget year, along with an executive summary; by publishing audit reports on extra-budgetary funds; by publishing reports listing actions taken by the executive to address audit recommendations; and by providing legislators with detailed Audit Reports related to the security sector and other secret programs (see questions 87-89, 91, 95-96, and 108 of the Open Budget Questionnaire).

Strength of Legislatures and Supreme Audit Institutions in Budget Oversight

The Open Budget Survey examines the extent of effective oversight provided by legislatures and supreme audit institutions (SAIs). These institutions play a critical role — often enshrined in national constitutions — in planning and overseeing the implementation of national budgets.

The Open Budget Survey assesses whether legislatures provide effective budget oversight by measuring performance on 11 indicators,

including: consultations with the executive prior to the tabling in the legislature of the draft budget, research capacity, formal debate on overall budget policy, time available to discuss and approve the budget, legal authority to amend the budget proposal, approval of shifts in expenditure budget and excess revenues collected, supplemental budget powers, authority to approve use of contingency funds, and scrutiny of audit reports.

The Open Budget Survey assesses whether supreme audit institutions are empowered to provide effective budget oversight by using the following four indicators: authority to remove the head of the supreme audit institution, legal power to audit public finances, financial resources available, and availability of skilled audit personnel.

Recommendations

The International Budget Partnership recommends that Nicaragua undertake the following actions to improve budget oversight:

- The legislature should have a formal pre-budget policy debate prior to the tabling of the Executive’s Budget Proposal, and it should scrutinize all audit reports; the executive should consult with members of the legislature as part of its process of determining budget priorities and should be required to seek approval from the legislature prior to shifting funds between line items or spending supplemental budgets (see questions 59, 98, 103, and 106-107 of the Open Budget Questionnaire).
- Empower the supreme audit institution by the following actions: the funding level of the SAI should be broadly consistent with the resources the SAI needs to fulfill its mandate, and the SAI should have skilled staff designated to undertake audits of the central government agencies that handle the security sector (see questions 93-94 of the Open Budget Questionnaire).

Nicaragua is one of the worst performers on budget oversight and engagement in the Central America & Caribbean region

Country	Legislative Strength	SAI Strength	Public Engagement
Costa Rica	Strong	Strong	Weak
Dominican Republic	Moderate	Strong	Weak
El Salvador	Moderate	Strong	Weak
Guatemala	Moderate	Strong	Weak
Honduras	Strong	Strong	Weak
Mexico	Moderate	Strong	Weak
Nicaragua	Moderate	Moderate	Weak
Trinidad and Tobago	Strong	Moderate	Weak

Strong: average score above 66 of 100; **Moderate:** average score between 34 and 66; **Weak:** average score below 34

Opportunities for Public Participation

Research and advocacy experience of civil society over the past 15 years has demonstrated that transparency by itself is insufficient for improving governance. Transparency along with opportunities for public participation in budgeting can maximize the positive outcomes associated with open budgeting. Therefore, the Open Budget Survey assesses opportunities available to the public to participate in national budget decision-making processes. Such opportunities can be provided throughout the budget cycle by the executive, legislature, and supreme audit institution.

Based on these indicators, the Open Budget Survey 2012 finds that opportunities for public participation in the budget process in Nicaragua are limited.

Nicaragua has much room to improve public participation

Requirement	Finding
Process Followed Before Consultation	
Formal requirement for public participation (Q114)	Does not exist
Articulation of purposes for public participation (Q115)	Does not exist
Communication by the SAI of audit findings beyond publication of audit reports (Q124)	Does not exist
Process of Consultation	
Mechanisms developed by the executive for participation during budget planning (Q116)	Does not exist
Public hearings in the legislature on macroeconomic budget framework (Q119)	Does not exist
Public hearings in the legislature on individual agency budgets (Q120)	Does not exist
Opportunities in the legislature for testimonials by the public during budget hearings (Q121)	Does not exist
Mechanisms developed by the executive for participation during budget execution (Q117)	Does not exist
Mechanisms developed by the SAI for participation in audit agenda (Q123)	Exists but is weak
Process Followed After Consultation	
Feedback by the executive on use of inputs provided by the public (Q118)	Does not exist
Release by the legislature of reports on budget hearings (Q122)	Does not exist
Feedback by the SAI on use of inputs provided by the public (Q125)	Does not exist

Recommendations

The International Budget Partnership recommends that Nicaragua expand public engagement in budgeting after considering the Open Budget Survey indicators on which the country performs poorly (see table below and questions 114-125 in the Open Budget Questionnaire).

Description of Survey, Methodology, Reliability, and Researcher Contact Information

The Open Budget Survey is a fact-based research instrument that uses easily observable phenomena to assess what occurs in practice. The research conclusions are typically supported by citations and comments, including reference to a budget document, a law, or other public document; a public statement by a government official; or comments from a face-to-face interview with a government official or other knowledgeable party. The Survey is compiled from a questionnaire completed for each country by independent budget experts who are not associated with the national government. Each country's questionnaire is then independently reviewed by two anonymous experts who also have no association with government. In addition, the IBP invites national governments to comment on the draft results from the Survey and considers these comments before finalizing the Survey results. The entire research process for 2012 took over 18 months between July 2011 and December 2012 and involved approximately 400 experts.

The Open Budget Survey provides a reliable source of data on national budget transparency practices for governments, develop-

ment practitioners, the media, and citizens. Current users of the Survey results include the Open Government Partnership, Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative, INTOSAI, the World Bank in its Worldwide Governance Indicators, and a number of bilateral aid agencies and international and regional multilateral bodies. The publication of the Open Budget Survey 2012 has reinforced the Survey's preeminent position as a global data repository on budget transparency, participation, and accountability.

Research to complete this country's Open Budget Survey was undertaken by Claudia García Rocha and Adelmo Sandino, Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Públicas (IEEPP), Reparto Lomas de San Juan, Casa 152. Del Gimnasio Hércules 4c. al Sur y 1 c. al Este. Managua, Nicaragua, claudiagr@ieepp.org; asandino@ieepp.org.

Despite repeated efforts, the IBP was unable to get comments on the draft Open Budget Questionnaire results from the Nicaraguan government.