

United States

Overview



Transparency:

68 /100

(Open Budget Index score)



Public Participation:

22 /100



Budget Oversight:

83 /100

About the survey

Government budget decisions – what taxes to levy, what services to provide, and how much debt to take on – have important consequences for all people in society. When governments provide information and meaningful channels for the public to engage in these decisions, we can better ensure public money is spent on public interests.

The Open Budget Survey (OBS) is the world’s only independent, comparative and fact-based research instrument that uses internationally accepted criteria to assess public access to central government budget information; formal opportunities for the public to participate in the national budget process; and the role of budget oversight institutions, such as legislatures and national audit offices, in the budget process.

The survey helps local civil society assess and confer with their government on the reporting and use of public funds. This 8th edition of the OBS covers 120 countries.

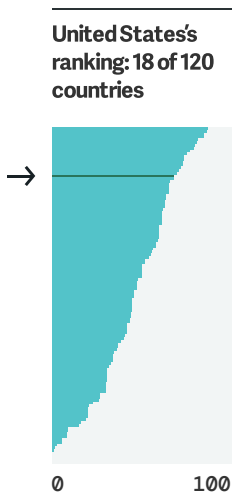
Visit www.internationalbudget.org/open-budget-survey for more information, including the full OBS methodology, the 2021 Global and Regional Reports, findings for all surveyed countries, and the Data Explorer.

Transparency

This part of the OBS measures public access to information on how the central government raises and spends public resources. It assesses the **online availability, timeliness, and comprehensiveness** of eight key budget documents using 109 equally weighted indicators and scores each country on a scale of 0 to 100. **A transparency score of 61 or above indicates a country is likely publishing enough material to support informed public debate on the budget.**

United States has a transparency score of **68** (out of 100).

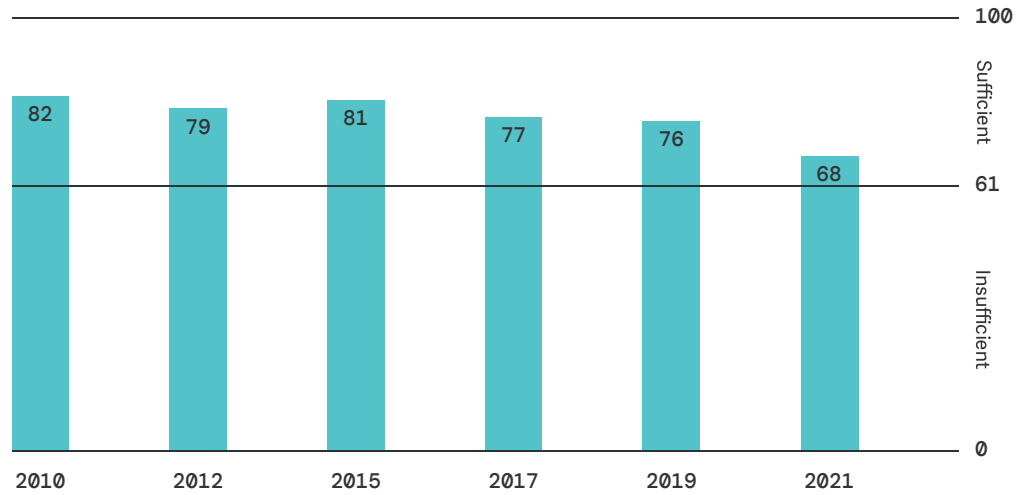
Transparency in United States compared to others



Global Average	45
OECD Average	66
South Africa	86
Sweden	85
New Zealand	85
Mexico	82
Norway	81
Brazil	80
Italy	75
United Kingdom	74
Germany	73
France	72
United States	68
Portugal	60
Spain	54
Canada	31

0 Insufficient 61 Sufficient 100

How has the transparency score for United States changed over time?



Public availability of budget documents in United States

KEY

- Available to the Public
- Published Late, or Not Published Online, or Produced for Internal Use Only
- ⊘ Not Produced

Document	2010	2012	2015	2017	2019	2021
Pre-Budget Statement	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Executive's Budget Proposal	●	●	●	●	●	●
Enacted Budget	●	●	●	●	●	●
Citizens Budget	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
In-Year Reports	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mid-Year Review	●	●	●	●	●	⊘
Year-End Report	●	●	●	●	●	●
Audit Report	●	●	●	●	●	●

How comprehensive is the content of the key budget documents that United States makes available to the public?

KEY	
● 61-100 / 100	
● 41-60 / 100	
● 1-40 / 100	

Key budget document	Document purpose and contents	Fiscal year assessed	Document content score
Pre-Budget Statement	Discloses the broad parameters of fiscal policies in advance of the Executive's Budget Proposal; outlines the government's economic forecast, anticipated revenue, expenditures, and debt.	NA	Not Produced
Executive's Budget Proposal	Submitted by the executive to the legislature for approval; details the sources of revenue, the allocations to ministries, proposed policy changes, and other information important for understanding the country's fiscal situation.	2021	95
Enacted Budget	The budget that has been approved by the legislature.	2021	28
Citizens Budget	A simpler and less technical version of the government's Executive's Budget Proposal or the Enacted Budget, designed to convey key information to the public.	na	Not Produced
In-Year Reports	Include information on actual revenues collected, actual expenditures made, and debt incurred at different intervals; issued quarterly or monthly.	2020 & 2021	96
Mid-Year Review	A comprehensive update on the implementation of the budget as of the middle of the fiscal year; includes a review of economic assumptions and an updated forecast of budget outcomes.	2021	Not Produced
Year-End Report	Describes the situation of the government's accounts at the end of the fiscal year and, ideally, an evaluation of the progress made toward achieving the budget's policy goals.	2019	48
Audit Report	Issued by the supreme audit institution, this document examines the soundness and completeness of the government's year-end accounts.	2019	91

United States's transparency score of **68** in the OBS 2021 is lower than its score in 2019.

What changed in OBS 2021?

United States has decreased the availability of budget information by:

- Failing to produce a document that meets the criteria of a Mid-Year Review, particularly one that includes revised revenue, expenditure, and deficit estimates for the full fiscal year, and updated economic assumptions for the year. The US Mid-Session Review typically provides this information, but did not in 2020 because of the pandemic and the uncertainty it created.

Recommendations

United States should prioritize the following actions to improve budget transparency:

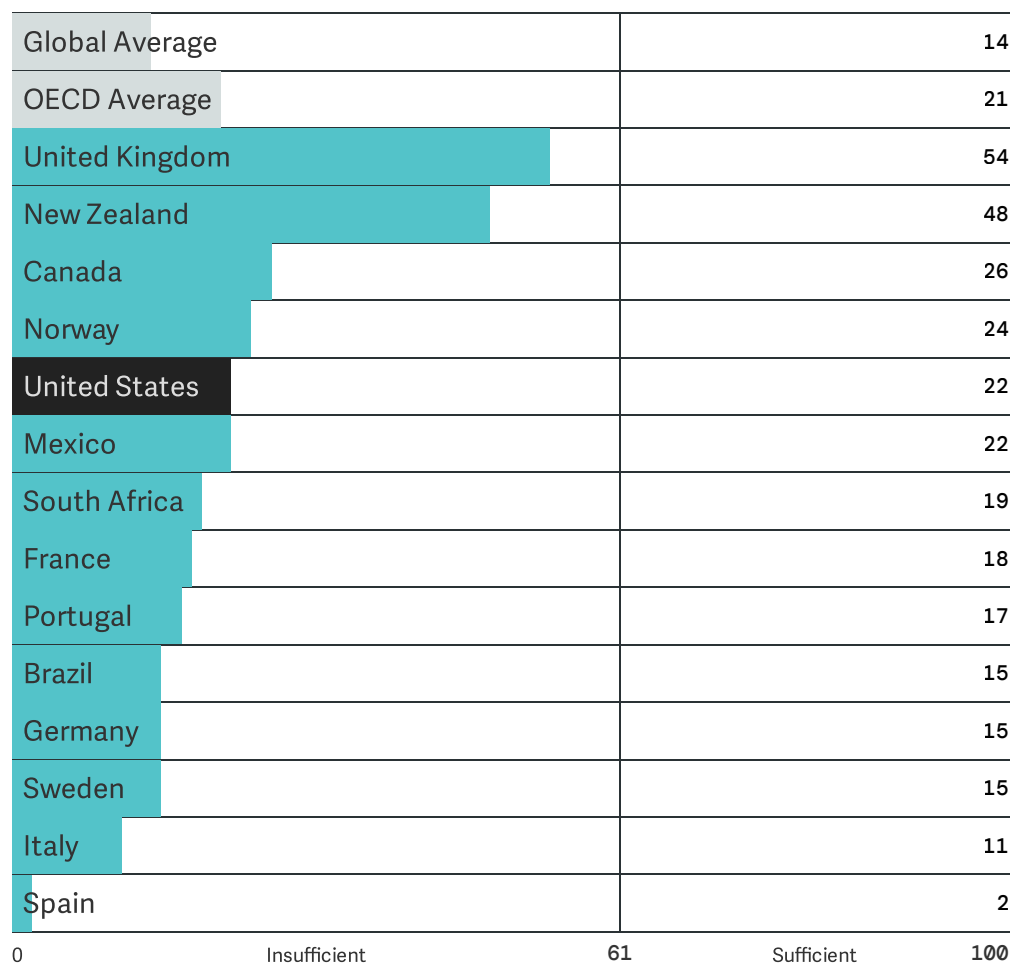
- Produce and publish a Citizens Budget online in a timely manner.
- Include in the Year-End Report comparisons between planned expenditures and revenues and actual outcomes.
- Improve the comprehensiveness of the Enacted Budget.
- Ensure that even during emergency situations budget documents such as the Mid-Year Review are published online in a timely manner. While uncertainty can be high during emergencies, the lack of key budget information only adds to the uncertainty.

Public Participation

The OBS assesses the formal opportunities offered to the public for meaningful participation in the different stages of the budget process. It examines the practices of the central government's executive, the legislature, and the supreme audit institution (SAI) using 18 equally weighted indicators, aligned with the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency's [Principles of Public Participation in Fiscal Policies](#), and scores each country on a scale from 0 to 100.

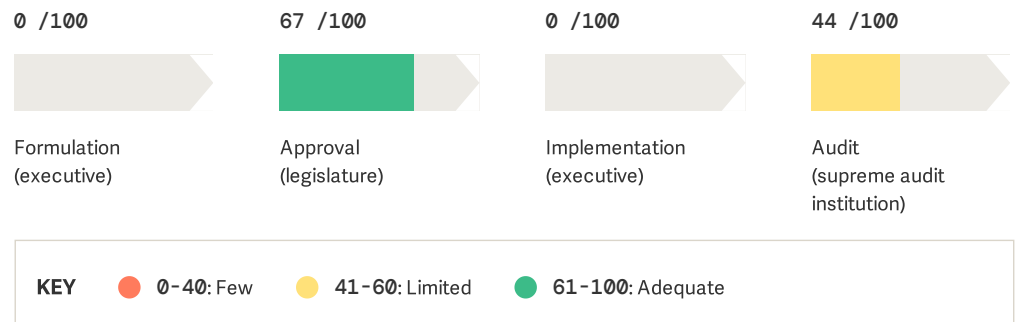
United States has a public participation score of **22** (out of 100).

Public participation in United States compared to others



For more information, see [here](#) for innovative public participation practices around the world.

Extent of opportunities for public participation in the budget process



Recommendations

To further strengthen public participation in the budget process, the US Office of Management and Budget should prioritize the following actions:

- Pilot mechanisms to engage the public during budget formulation and to monitor budget implementation.
- Actively engage with vulnerable and underrepresented communities, directly or through civil society organizations representing them.

The US Government Accountability Office should prioritize the following actions to improve public participation in the budget process:

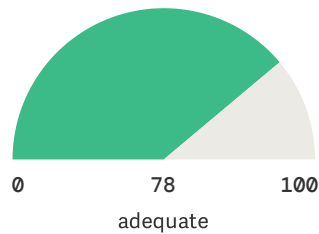
- Establish formal mechanisms for the public to contribute to relevant audit investigations.

Budget Oversight

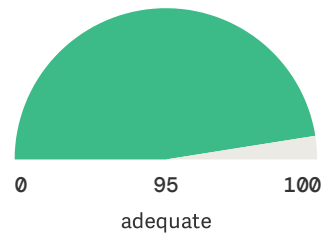
The OBS examines the role that legislatures and supreme audit institutions (SAIs) play in the budget process and the extent to which they provide oversight; each country is scored on a scale from 0 to 100 based on 18 equally weighted indicators. In addition, the survey collects supplementary information on independent fiscal institutions (see Box).

The legislature and supreme audit institution in the United States, together, provide adequate oversight during the budget process, with a composite oversight score of **83** (out of 100). Taken individually, the extent of each institution's oversight is shown below:

Legislative oversight



Audit oversight



KEY ● 0-40: Few ● 41-60: Limited ● 61-100: Adequate

Recommendations

The US Congress provides adequate oversight during the planning and implementation stages of the budget cycle. To further improve oversight, the following actions are recommended:

- Congress should approve annual appropriations before the start of the budget year.
- A congressional committee should examine the Audit Report and publish a report with its findings online.

The emerging practice of establishing independent fiscal institutions

United States's independent fiscal institution (IFI) is the Congressional Budget Office. Its independence is set in law, and it reports to the legislature. It publishes its own macroeconomic and fiscal forecasts, and its own cost estimates of all new policy proposals.

The indicators on IFIs are not scored in the Open Budget Survey.

Methodology

- Only documents published and events, activities, or developments that took place through 31 December 2020 were assessed in the OBS 2021.
- The survey is based on a questionnaire completed in each country by an independent budget expert:
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- To further strengthen the research, each country's draft questionnaire is also reviewed by an anonymous independent expert.