

Liberia Local Governance Toolkit: Methodology White Paper

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Background on Global Integrity Sub-National Assessments and the Local Integrity Initiative

Global Integrity is a leading information provider tracking governance and corruption trends around the world. Its core product is the annual *Global Integrity Report*, a compilation of in-depth qualitative and quantitative country assessments prepared by local in-country journalists, researchers, and academics. Global Integrity's innovative Integrity Indicators assess more than 300 indicators of openness, governance, and anti-corruption mechanisms in each country, reinforced by a blind peer review process and anchored by unique scoring criteria and references.

Beginning in 2007, Global Integrity began to generate assessments of sub-national governance and anti-corruption within countries, again working with local teams of expert researchers and country-specific sub-national Integrity Indicators. We dubbed this our [Local Integrity Initiative](#). Global Integrity sought to meet a demand in the development community for actionable data at the sub-national level to inform policy choices and priorities at the county, state, provincial, or regional level within a country. Like its Integrity Indicators approach at the national level, Global Integrity's new assessments of sub-national governance apply a series of rigorous quantitative indicators to states, counties, or provinces within a country to assess the strengths and weaknesses of sub-national anti-corruption and good governance mechanisms.

The sub-national Integrity Indicators, like their national counterparts, are based on a simple yet powerful concept. Rather than trying to measure actual corruption, considered virtually impossible by experts, Global Integrity quantitatively assesses the *opposite* of corruption, that is, the access that citizens and businesses have to a country's provincial, regional or state government; their ability to monitor its behavior; and their ability to seek redress and advocate for improved governance. The sub-national Integrity Indicators break down that "access" into a number of categories and questions, ranging from inquiries into electoral practices and media freedom to budget transparency and conflicts of interest regulations. We unpack those concepts by looking not only at what laws or institutions are "on the books" but also by assessing institutional staffing levels, budget, political independence, and citizen access to the most important anti-corruption mechanisms at the regional, county, or provincial level. The extensive data yielded by the sub-national Integrity Indicators informs and empowers citizens, activists, donors, businesses, and governments in each country.

One of the goals of our [Local Integrity Initiative](#) is to leverage actionable data of sub-national governance towards evidence-based advocacy and outreach campaigns. Working with local civil society groups and NGOs on the ground to gather the data that comprise each country's unique sub-national scorecards, we seek to support those same groups as they then advocate for better anti-corruption/good governance institutions and practices at the sub-national level of government. In short, our sub-national work extends our traditional research and analysis into country-specific, sub-national outreach and practical reforms.

Transparency, both in terms of our methodology and findings, is what characterizes the Global Integrity approach and enhances the robustness and credibility of our findings. As we continue to improve our methodology and learn from our fieldwork experiences, we welcome and value critical feedback (email us at info@globalintegrity.org).

The Sub-National Fieldwork Process

Global Integrity staff in Washington both identifies and manages our teams of local, in-country researchers who are responsible for collecting the raw reporting and data to score the Global Integrity sub-national Integrity Indicators. Headquarters staff recruits, contracts, and pays in-country team members; develops and shares the methodology with in-country experts; reviews all data and reporting for completeness and accuracy; manages the peer review process (see below for details); and produces analysis of the resultant information. An obvious but notable point is that Global Integrity *qua* Global Integrity does not "assign" sub-national scores in any category, sub-category, or Integrity Indicator. Instead, all of our data and reporting is home-grown, bottom-up information generated and peer reviewed by in-country local experts. Global Integrity staff simply manages the fieldwork process and provides overarching guidance and logistical support.

Liberia Local Governance Toolkit

From June 2007 to June 2008, Global Integrity, in partnership with the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL), conducted field research in the following 15 Liberian counties:

Bomi, Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado, Nimba, River Cess, River Gee, and Sinoe.

Our collective goals were to 1) generate credible data assessing the existence and effectiveness of key governance and anti-corruption mechanisms at the county-level in Liberia, and 2) design and implement an evidence-based outreach and advocacy campaign around the resultant data. We call the first phase of the project our Liberia Local Governance Toolkit, which comprises 15 distinct county-level scorecards.

Selecting Liberia

Liberia presented an interesting case in sub-national governance because of the current anti-corruption reform momentum in the country. With so much effort being spent by the Liberian government and the international community on reforming (and decentralizing) the country's unitary governance institutions, both Global Integrity and CENTAL felt the time was ripe for raising awareness around the need to focus on strengthening the country's sub-national governance mechanisms, not solely those in Monrovia. Thus, the Liberian case presented a unique window of opportunity when the project began in mid-2007.

Perhaps the most important criterion that affects whether a country is selected for fieldwork is whether Global Integrity is able to recruit a sufficiently qualified research team in the country. We cannot, and do not, carry out national or sub-national assessments where we lack confidence in our team. CENTAL was selected as our local research partner for the Liberia Local Governance Initiative due to its long track record of success on governance reform issues and its independence.

Generous financial support for this project was provided by the Center for International Private Enterprise ([CIPE](#)), with additional support from the [World Bank](#).

Composition of Country Teams

Global Integrity relies on the skills of expert local researchers to produce its assessments of sub-national governance. Our local partners in any country are recognized experts from think tanks, universities, public policy research centers, NGOs, and media organizations who have attained expertise in the nuances of governance and corruption issues.

In Liberia Global Integrity worked with the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL) to compile the data for the Liberian Local Governance Toolkit. Research teams in the field consisted of:

- A lead researcher who compiled the initial scores for the sub-national Integrity Indicators. Because no single person can adequately cover all the relevant sub-national political units in a given country, the lead researcher was complemented by a small team of research assistants who assisted in collecting data and compiling the scores. However, the lead researcher was ultimately responsible for the quality of the final data.
- Typically three to five peer reviewers (a mix of other in-country experts and out-of-country experts) who blindly review the raw data to provide unvarnished corrections, comments, and criticisms. Peer review comments on all data are published transparently alongside the original data, offering readers an alternative perspective and context.

The teams are coordinated from Washington via the Internet and phone. Until the public release of the sub-national assessments, the researchers and peer reviewers are unaware of each other. This is done to maintain the independence of the individual responses and avoid a peer-influenced consensus. All work is carried out by field teams via Global Integrity's custom-built Web-based data entry platform — Multi-user Access to Global Integrity Content, or "MAGIC."

The Liberian County Assessments

For the Liberia Local Governance Toolkit, Global Integrity and CENTAL generated sub-national Integrity Scorecards for each of the country's 15 counties.

Details on the sub-national Integrity Scorecards

The sub-national Integrity Scorecard for each county assesses three things:

1. The existence of public integrity mechanisms, including laws and institutions, that promote public accountability and limit corruption.
2. The effectiveness of those mechanisms.
3. The access that citizens have to those mechanisms.

More specifically, indicators of *existence* assess the laws, regulations, and agencies/entities (or equivalently functioning mechanisms) that are in place at the sub-national level. Indicators of *effectiveness* assess such aspects of public integrity as those same mechanisms' protection from political interference; appointments that support the independence of an agency; professional, full-time staffing and funding; independently initiated investigations; and regular imposition of penalties. Indicators of *citizen access* assess the availability of public reports to citizens, or publicly available information, within a reasonable time period and at a reasonable cost.

The sub-national Integrity Indicators are an instrument designed to provide an assessment of anti-corruption safeguards at the sub-national level in a particular country. They are uniquely designed and implemented for each Local Integrity Initiative project undertaken. Some sub-national Integrity Indicators are replicated from Global Integrity's master national-level Integrity Indicators. However, not all of those indicators are applicable at the sub-national level in a given country; hence new indicators are developed for each project to take into account country-specific concerns in each country covered under our Local Integrity Initiative.

The final sub-national Integrity Indicators for a country are used to score the institutional framework that exists at the sub-national level to promote public integrity and accountability and prevent abuses of power; in the Liberian case, in each of the 15 counties.

After working with CENTAL to develop the Integrity Indicators and scoring criteria most applicable to the Liberian county context, the sub-national Integrity Indicators for the Liberia Local Governance Toolkit were organized into five main categories and 15 sub-categories. They are:

1. Sub-National Civil Society, Public Information and Media

1.1 Sub-National Civil Society Organizations

1.2 Sub-National Media

1.3 Sub-National Public Access to Information

2. Sub-National Government Accountability

2.1 Sub-National Executive Accountability

2.2 Sub-National Judicial Accountability

2.3 Sub-National Budget Processes

3. Sub-National Administration and Civil Service

3.1 Sub-National Civil Service Regulations

3.2 Sub-National Whistle-blowing Measures

3.3 Sub-National Procurement

3.4 Sub-National Property Rights

4. Sub-National Oversight and Regulation

4.1 Sub-National Supreme Audit Institution

4.2 Sub-National Business Licensing and Regulation

5. Sub-National Anti-Corruption and Rule of Law

5.1 Sub-National Anti-Corruption Law

5.2 Sub-National Rule of Law

5.3 Sub-National Law Enforcement

Generating a sub-national Integrity Scorecard

Each sub-national Integrity Indicator is scored directly by the lead local researcher and his/her team of research assistance and substantiated as far as possible by relevant references and additional comments. The data are relayed from the field to Global Integrity via MAGIC. There are two general types of indicators: "in law" and "in practice." All indicators, regardless of type, are scored on the same ordinal scale of 0 to 100 with zero being the worst possible score and 100 perfect.

"In law" indicators provide an objective assessment of whether certain legal codes, fundamental rights, government institutions, and regulations exist. These "de jure" indicators are scored with a simple "yes" or "no" with "yes" receiving a 100 score and "no" receiving a zero.

"In practice" indicators address *de facto* issues such as implementation, effectiveness enforcement, and citizen access. As these usually require a more nuanced assessment, these "in practice" indicators are scored along an ordinal scale of zero to 100 with possible scores at 0, 25, 50, 75 and 100.

The lead researcher and his/her team of researchers are required to provide a reference to substantiate each of their scores. This may be an interview conducted with a knowledgeable individual, a website link to a relevant report, or the name of a specific law or institution, depending on the particular indicator. Researchers are also offered the opportunity to include additional comments to support their score and reference for a particular indicator. These are particularly useful in capturing the nuances of complex situations, especially the "Yes, but..." phenomena which is often the reality in undertaking this type of research.

Personality, language, and culture can all affect the interpretation of a particular indicator and the score assigned to it. To minimize this effect and maximize inter-coder reliability, Global Integrity deploys a master codebook for scoring the sub-national Integrity Indicators. The Codebook anchors every single indicator and sub-indicator to a predefined set of criteria. In essence, the scoring criteria guide the lead researcher by suggesting, "If you see X on the ground, score this indicator in the following way." For binary yes/no "in law" indicators, scoring criteria are provided for both "yes (100)" and "no (0)" responses. For "in practice" indicators, scoring criteria are defined for each of the 100, 50, and 0 scores with 25 and 75 deliberately left undefined to serve as in between scoring options. Scoring criteria for each indicator can be accessed via any of our online Integrity Scorecards by "hovering" one's mouse over a given indicator's scoring scale.

In summary, a given indicator or sub-indicator has the following elements:

1. Indicator question, provided by Global Integrity
2. Indicator scoring criteria, provided by Global Integrity
3. Indicator score (either yes (100)/no (0) or ordinal scale of 0 - 100 with steps at 25, 50, and 75), assigned by the lead researcher based on:
 - a. *References, provided by the lead researcher and his/her research team*
 - b. *Comments (optional), provided by the lead researcher and his/her research team*
4. Peer review comments (optional), as provided through a blind peer review process (see more on the peer review process below)

Example of a sub-national Integrity Indicator

49b: In practice, sub-national [judicial] appeals are resolved within a reasonable time period.

100 Criteria:

Appeals are acted upon quickly. While some backlog is expected and inevitable, appeals are acknowledged promptly and cases move steadily towards resolution.

50 Criteria:

Appeals are generally acted upon quickly but with some exceptions. Some appeals may not be acknowledged, and simple cases may take years to resolve.

0 Criteria:

Most appeals are not resolved in a timely fashion. Appeals may go unacknowledged for months or years and simple cases may never be resolved.

Generating Scorecards

For the purpose of producing the scorecards for each sub-national unit (in the Liberian case, each county), a simple aggregation method is used. Original indicator and sub-indicator values are assigned by the lead researcher (those scores are adjusted following the peer review process; see more below). Each indicator score is then averaged within its parent subcategory, which produces a subcategory score. The subcategory score is in turn averaged with the other subcategory scores in a parent category. Category scores are then averaged to produce a county score.

Because some aspects of governance and anti-corruption mechanisms are harder to measure definitively, some categories require a more complex matrix of questions (indicators) than others. Thus, the categories are equally valued, even if some categories are derived from a more lengthy series of questions than others. Similarly, the subcategories are equally valued within their parent category.

In other words, each score (sub-indicators, indicators, and so on) is equally weighted with its peers addressing the same topic. However, indicators from different categories are not necessarily equally weighted.

The Integrity Scorecard: A powerful tool for analysis

The resultant data presented in a sub-national Integrity Scorecard are a powerful and unique way to succinctly assess the strengths and weaknesses of an integrity framework at the sub-national level of government (i.e., the existence and effectiveness of the mechanisms in place to prevent abuses of power). The data can be used to prioritize governance challenges and allocate available resources in a more efficient manner, perhaps to strengthen the independence of the judiciary or tighten up transparency around political financing rather than focus on civil service reform. Sub-national Integrity Scorecards are also a valuable tool for grassroots advocates seeking to target their advocacy programs at key problem areas.

The Peer Review Process

The importance of the peer review process cannot be overstated. Since Global Integrity utilizes an "expert assessment" approach to compile the sub-national Integrity Indicators, it is crucial that we employ quality control mechanisms to ensure that our data are as accurate and as balanced as possible. Individually contracted and carefully vetted "peer reviewers," selected for their independence and expertise in particular countries, are asked to blindly review the draft sub-national Integrity Indicators using MAGIC. The blind peer review process ensures that peer reviewers are unrestrained in their commentary, which most likely adds to frankness when commenting on the draft data. Peer review comments are used by Global Integrity staff to interpret, and in some cases adjust, scores that peer reviewers identify as containing errors, bias, or out-of-date information. Score adjustments follow certain rules and generally require repetition (i.e., similar comments from several peer reviewers) or solid referencing of a factual dispute.

For the sub-national Integrity Indicators, peer reviewers were asked to consider the following issues:

- Is the particular Indicator or Sub-indicator scored by the lead researcher and his/her research team factually accurate?
- Are there any significant events or developments that were not addressed?
- Does the Indicator or Sub-indicator offer a fair and balanced view of the anti-corruption environment?
- Is the scoring consistent within the entire set or sub-set of Integrity Indicators?
- Is the scoring controversial or widely accepted? Is controversial scoring sufficiently sourced?
- Are the sources used reliable and reputable?

The final, published scorecard does not assign personal attribution to specific peer review comments although all of the peer review comments themselves are published alongside their respective indicators. This helps ensure that peer reviewers are unrestrained in their commentary.

For the Liberia sub-national scorecards, Global Integrity retained the services of two local peer reviewers for the 15 county assessments.

Final Indicator Scores

Global Integrity takes full and final responsibility for the scores contained in the sub-national Integrity Scorecard for each county. These scores are generated following an elaborate and collaborative review process that includes balancing information from several (sometimes conflicting) sources while being guided by the master scoring codebook.

Following the peer review process, Global Integrity staff identifies specific data points where peer reviewers have flagged problematic results. The staff then engages the entire local research team in a discussion of the issue in question and ultimately decides on appropriate changes, when necessary, to the original data based on the country team's feedback.

While Global Integrity makes every attempt to produce 100% accurate information, we welcome all feedback on the veracity and accuracy of our data. Please email Global Integrity with specific comments on indicator scores that you may not agree with, particularly with regard to factual errors.