

A knowledge product of



POLICY BRIEF

Assessing Governance in Pakistan

The Chandler Good Government Index,
Its Measures and the Missing Dimensions

Contents

Introduction:	3
Does the CGGI accurately reflect the health of governance?	4
Is CGGI methodology robust enough?	5
A curious case of Pakistan’ s persistent low CGGI ranking:	6
Lessons from CGGI and building a more comprehensive governance assessment:.....	9
About Accountability Lab Pakistan:	11

Introduction:

The Chandler Good Government Index (CGGI), launched by the Chandler Institute of Governance in 2021, has quickly emerged as one of the most prominent global efforts to measure government effectiveness. Unlike traditional governance frameworks that emphasize democracy, rights and political accountability, the CGGI evaluates countries primarily through the lens of state capability, institutional effectiveness and governance outcomes. Beginning with 104 countries in its inaugural edition and expanding to 133 countries by 2026, the latest edition published in May 2026. The index has steadily increased both its geographical coverage and influence in global governance debates.

Pakistan has consistently ranked in the bottom of the index since its inception, although its position has fluctuated across editions (90/104 in 2021¹, 94/104 in 2022², 91/104³ in 2023, 101/113⁴ in 2024, 109/120 in 2025⁵ and 119/133 in 2026⁶). The persistence of this relatively weak standing suggests that Pakistan's governance challenges, as understood by the CGGI, are structural rather than episodic. More importantly, the rankings provide an opportunity to examine not only Pakistan's governance performance but also the broader conception of governance upon which such assessments are based.

CGGI covers countries through 35 indicators organized into seven pillars and index seeks to measure government effectiveness through leadership, laws and policies, institutions, financial stewardship, market attractiveness, international standing, and outcomes for citizens. Unlike many traditional governance frameworks, it prioritizes state capability and governance delivery rather than democratic processes or ideological orientation.

The CGGI reflects a state-capability approach to governance, emphasizing the ability of governments to formulate policies, manage institutions and deliver outcomes. While this focus brings much needed attention to implementation and institutional performance, it also raises questions about the place of democratic participation, rights and accountability within governance assessment.

These questions are particularly relevant for Pakistan. The country's relatively weak standing appears to be driven largely by indicators relating to rule of law, institutional effectiveness, economic performance, financial stewardship, and international reputation. At the same time, the ranking invites a broader discussion about whether certain governance strengths, including infrastructure connectivity, banking penetration, telecommunications reach, disaster response capabilities, and social resilience, are adequately reflected within existing frameworks.

This analysis does not seek to reject or discredit the CGGI. Rather, it examines both what the index measures and what it leaves out, with three objectives: first, to assess whether the CGGI's indicators adequately capture the health of governance; second, to evaluate the strengths and limitations of its methodology; and third, to identify lessons that may inform future governance assessment efforts in Pakistan.

¹ <https://chandlergovernmentindex.com/wp-content/uploads/CGGI-Report.pdf>

² <https://chandlergovernmentindex.com/wp-content/uploads/CGGI-2022-Report.pdf>

³ <https://chandlergovernmentindex.com/wp-content/uploads/2023-Chandler-Good-Government-Index-Report.pdf>

⁴ <https://chandlergovernmentindex.com/wp-content/uploads/2024-Chandler-Good-Government-Index-Report.pdf>

⁵ <https://chandlergovernmentindex.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025-Chandler-Good-Government-Index-Report.pdf>

⁶ <https://chandlergovernmentindex.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/2026-Chandler-Good-Government-Index-Executive-Summary.pdf>

Does the CGGI accurately reflect the health of governance?

The central question is whether the CGGI's indicators adequately capture the broader concept of governance. Governance is widely understood to involve both state capability and public accountability. Effective governments must be able to formulate policy, manage institutions, provide services, and maintain stability, but governance is also commonly associated with democratic participation, transparency, rights, and legitimacy.

The CGGI excels at measuring the first set of concerns. Its seven pillars collectively assess leadership, institutions, laws and policies, financial stewardship, market attractiveness, international standing, and social outcomes. In doing so, it captures an important dimension of governance that is often overlooked in public discourse i.e. the practical ability of governments to govern. For countries such as Pakistan, where implementation failures frequently undermine otherwise sound policies, this focus on institutional performance is a valuable contribution.

The index is particularly useful because it mirrors how governance is often experienced by citizens, businesses, and international observers. Public infrastructure, service quality, regulatory predictability, safety, economic opportunity, and administrative responsiveness strongly shape perceptions of governance. Many of the CGGI's indicators attempt to capture these practical manifestations of state performance.

However, the framework is less convincing as a comprehensive measure of governance because it gives limited attention to democratic conditions. The framework contains no direct measures of electoral integrity, political competition, media freedom, civic space, freedom of expression and association, protection of human rights defenders, or the extent to which citizens can participate meaningfully in public life. These freedoms may not directly determine government capability, but they shape the accountability environment within which governments operate and citizens experience governance. As a result, governance systems that deliver stability, economic growth, and administrative efficiency may score well even when political freedoms are constrained. Countries with more competitive democratic processes but weaker institutions may receive lower rankings despite stronger democratic credentials.

This distinction becomes especially important when evaluating societies that are undergoing political transitions or remain shaped by historical constraints. Countries emerging from conflict, navigating democratization, or struggling with unresolved territorial disputes often face governance challenges that are not fully captured by capability-focused indicators. Highly centralized systems may appear stronger on measures of stability and performance, while transitional societies may appear weaker despite making significant progress relative to their own historical circumstances.

A second limitation concerns the treatment of governance as a national phenomenon. The CGGI evaluates countries as single units, which is understandable for global comparison but overlooks substantial regional and local variation. In federal and socially diverse countries such as Pakistan, governance outcomes differ markedly across provinces, districts, and communities. Citizens in Gilgit-Baltistan, Balochistan, southern Punjab, and the newly merged districts often experience very different levels of service delivery, infrastructure, security, and institutional responsiveness as compared to those living in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad.

National rankings therefore risk masking both governance successes and governance deficits. Areas that have made significant progress may disappear within national averages, while severe governance challenges affecting specific regions or marginalized groups such as women, persons with disabilities and religious & ethnic minorities may be diluted by stronger performance elsewhere. A governance framework that seeks to capture citizen experience fully may therefore need to look beyond national aggregates.

Nevertheless, the CGGI captures the capacity of governments to govern effectively, which is an important and often neglected dimension of governance. The question is whether that dimension alone is sufficient to represent the full health of governance in a society. A more complete assessment would likely need to balance state capability with democratic accountability, rights, participation, and the uneven realities of governance across regions and communities.

Is CGGI methodology robust enough?

The CGGI distinguishes itself from many governance assessments by relying primarily on secondary data rather than conducting its own global perception surveys. The 2026 edition covers 133 countries, uses 35 indicators grouped under seven pillars, and draws upon 69 different data sources. These sources include internationally recognized institutions such as the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Forum (WEF), Transparency International (TI), United Nations agencies and several other public, private and non-governmental organizations. This approach allows the CGGI to aggregate a large amount of information while avoiding the considerable costs associated with primary data collection.

One of the major strengths of the CGGI is precisely this breadth of information. Rather than relying on a single survey instrument or a narrow set of indicators, it attempts to capture multiple dimensions of governance through a diverse range of datasets. Many of the underlying sources are widely used in international policy discussions and are generally regarded as credible. The methodology is also relatively transparent compared to many other governance indices, with the index openly publishing its indicators, data sources and pillar structure.

The index further benefits from its focus on outcomes and capabilities rather than political narratives. Many governance assessments are heavily influenced by political events, media coverage and expert perceptions. The CGGI's attempt to measure governance through institutional capabilities, fiscal management, regulatory quality and service delivery outcomes provides a useful counterbalance to more perception-driven approaches. In this regard, the index succeeds in shifting attention towards the practical dimensions of governance.

At the same time, the methodology raises several important concerns. The first relates to its heavy dependence on secondary datasets. While the CGGI does not directly collect perception data, many of the underlying datasets on which it relies are themselves perception-based or partially perception-based. Consequently, the index may not eliminate subjective bias so much as aggregate and redistribute it across multiple indicators. Any limitations, assumptions or biases embedded within the original sources inevitably become part of the final index.

This challenge is particularly relevant because not all data sources employed by the CGGI carry equal weight in terms of credibility and recognition. While many indicators originate from globally recognized institutions such as the WB, IMF and WEF, others are derived from foundations, think tanks, advocacy organizations and specialized research institutions whose methodologies are less familiar to broader audiences. The inclusion of such sources does not necessarily invalidate the index, but it does raise questions regarding consistency, comparability and methodological rigor across indicators.

A second concern relates to comparability across countries. Governance indicators often assume that data generated in different political, social and institutional contexts can be directly compared. However, countries differ significantly in terms of statistical capacity, institutional transparency, media freedom, research ecosystems and state accessibility. Countries with stronger data systems and greater engagement with international institutions are often represented by richer datasets, while fragile or developing countries may be evaluated

through more limited information. As a result, some rankings may reflect differences in measurement capacity as much as differences in governance performance.

The treatment of political and historical context presents another methodological challenge. The CGGI largely evaluates countries based on present-day outcomes and capabilities. This approach facilitates cross-country comparison but leaves limited room for understanding the constraints under which governments operate.

A related concern emerges from the treatment of historical rankings. A comparison of the annual reports and the current country profile pages reveals discrepancies in Pakistan's historical rankings⁷. Pakistan's overall ranking in the 2021 report is listed as 90th, whereas the current country profile reports 96th. Similar discrepancies appear for 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. While these differences may result from retrospective revisions, recalibrations or methodological adjustments, the index provides limited explanation regarding the nature and rationale of such revisions.

Another methodological question concerns the weighting of indicators. The CGGI treats governance as a composite concept consisting of multiple dimensions. However, the relative importance assigned to different indicators inevitably reflects normative choices. For example, indicators relating to international reputation, passport strength or market attractiveness can substantially influence rankings even though reasonable observers may disagree on the extent to which these factors should determine governance quality. Different weighting structures could produce significantly different country rankings while relying on the same underlying data.

Finally, the methodology's reliance on national-level indicators creates limitations in large and diverse countries. Governance outcomes are rarely uniform across entire countries. Pakistan, India, Nigeria, Brazil and Indonesia all contain significant regional disparities in service delivery, institutional effectiveness and citizen experience. A separate pillar measuring regional inequalities and subnational governance outcomes would have strengthened the index's ability to reflect how governance is actually experienced across different territories and populations.

However, these limitations do not undermine the value of the CGGI. Rather, they highlight the broader challenge facing all governance measurement exercises as governance is a complex, multidimensional and context-dependent phenomenon that resists simple quantification.

A curious case of Pakistan's persistent low CGGI ranking

Pakistan has remained consistently in the lower bottom of the CGGI. Its best relative position was in 2021 and 2023, while 2022 and 2025 were particularly weak years. The 2026 ranking, 119 out of 133, appears slightly better than 2025 in relative terms, but Pakistan still remains among the bottom 15 countries.

⁷ <https://chandlergovernmentindex.com/countries/pakistan/>

Table 1: Pakistan's CGGI trajectory

Year	Countries covered	Pakistan overall rank	Position in index
2021	104	90	Bottom 15
2022	104	94	Bottom 8
2023	104	91	Bottom 14
2024	113	101	Bottom 13
2025	120	109	Bottom 12
2026	133	119	Bottom 15

At first glance, Pakistan's performance appears to show a steady deterioration. Pakistan's overall ranking declined from 90th in 2021 to 119th in 2026. However, a closer examination of the pillar-level rankings suggests a more nuanced picture. The decline is neither uniform across all governance dimensions nor entirely explained by domestic developments alone.

Table 2: Pakistan's pillar-wise performance

Year	Overall	Leadership	Robust Laws	Strong Institutions	Financial Stewardship	Attractive Market place	Global Influence	Helping People Rise
2021	90	77	84	94	89	83	66	101
2022	94	77	84	92	88	85	83	98
2023	91	78	79	89	86	76	92	96
2024	101	75	82	99	102	97	94	108
2025	109	88	93	106	107	86	102	115
2026	119	119	109	118	123	92	98	122

The first notable observation is that Pakistan's strongest relative pillar throughout the period remains Global Influence and Reputation. In 2021, Pakistan ranked 66th in this pillar, making it its best-performing governance dimension. While this ranking deteriorated to 98th by 2026, the magnitude of the decline appears difficult to reconcile with major developments in Pakistan's international standing during this period.

Unlike countries affected by sanctions, armed conflict, diplomatic isolation, state collapse or major international crises, Pakistan experienced no comparable event between 2021 and 2026, apart from periodic tensions with India, that would readily explain such a sharp deterioration in its Global Influence and Reputation ranking. If anything, Pakistan maintained stable relations across major geopolitical blocs, strengthened ties with Gulf states, China and the United States, and remained actively engaged in multilateral forums. This raises questions about whether the underlying indicators adequately capture actual changes in international standing or are disproportionately influenced by relative movements among countries.

A similar pattern emerges in Leadership and Foresight. Between 2021 and 2024, Pakistan's ranking remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 75th and 78th positions. However, the pillar collapsed dramatically to 88th in 2025 and further to 119th in 2026. Such a sharp deterioration within a short period is difficult to attribute solely to changes in governance quality. While political instability undoubtedly affected policy continuity during this

period, the scale of the decline suggests that the underlying indicators may be particularly sensitive to perceptions of political uncertainty and policy coherence.

The most consistent area of weakness is Financial Stewardship. Pakistan's ranking deteriorated gradually from 89th in 2021 to 123rd in 2026. Unlike some of the other pillars, this trend aligns closely with observable realities. Repeated IMF programmes, persistent fiscal deficits, rising debt servicing costs, exchange-rate pressures, inflationary shocks and weak revenue mobilisation have dominated Pakistan's economic management over the past several years. The deterioration in this pillar therefore appears broadly consistent with underlying economic conditions.

Strong Institutions presents a similar story. Pakistan improved modestly between 2021 and 2023, moving from 94th to 89th position, before experiencing a sustained decline to 118th by 2026. This trend reflects longstanding concerns regarding institutional effectiveness, implementation capacity, bureaucratic coordination and regulatory consistency. The period also coincided with increasing political polarization and a growing perception of regime hybridity, which may have affected institutional cohesion and predictability. Importantly, however, the decline appears to reflect concerns about institutional performance rather than democratic credentials per se, as the CGGI is designed to assess governance capability irrespective of political system.

The Attractive Marketplace pillar exhibits a more complex trajectory. Pakistan improved substantially from 83rd position in 2021 to 76th in 2023 before slipping to 97th in 2024 and recovering somewhat to 86th in 2025 and 92nd in 2026. This pattern broadly mirrors Pakistan's economic cycle, where periods of relative macroeconomic stability were followed by balance-of-payments pressures, investment uncertainty and economic slowdown. Notably, this remains one of Pakistan's better-performing pillars despite the country's well-documented economic challenges.

Helping People Rise has consistently been Pakistan's weakest area. Beginning at 101st position in 2021 and declining to 122nd by 2026, the pillar suggests persistent shortcomings in translating governance inputs into citizen outcomes. This finding is particularly significant because it indicates that even where institutional or policy improvements may have occurred, they have not translated into measurable improvements in human development, inclusion and citizen wellbeing at the pace observed in other countries.

Overall, the pillar rankings suggest that Pakistan's low standing in the CGGI is not driven by a single governance failure, rather it reflects cumulative weaknesses across fiscal management, institutional effectiveness, human development outcomes and, increasingly, perceptions regarding leadership and strategic direction. At the same time, the data also indicate that some declines appear disproportionately large when compared with observable changes in the country's actual governance environment, particularly in the areas of global influence and leadership.

A second issue that warrants attention is the inconsistency between rankings reported in the annual reports and those presented on the CGGI country profile webpage⁸. For example, Pakistan's overall ranking in the 2021 report is listed as 90th, whereas the country profile currently reports 96th. Similar discrepancies appear for 2022 (94 versus 96), 2023 (91 versus 94), 2024 (101 versus 106) and 2025 (109 versus 111). Only the 2026 ranking remains identical across both sources at 119th. These differences may result from retrospective revisions, methodological adjustments or data updates incorporated into the online database. However, the absence of a clear explanation raises questions regarding reproducibility and comparability over time.

⁸ <https://chandlergovernmentindex.com/countries/pakistan/>

While the CGGI offers useful insights into governance capability, its limited attention to rights, freedoms, inclusion, regional disparities and citizen experience suggests the need for a complementary assessment better aligned with Pakistan's realities. Such an exercise could retain the CGGI's emphasis on measurable performance while incorporating dimensions that are central to how governance is experienced across diverse communities and regions.

Lessons from CGGI and building a more comprehensive governance assessment:

Perhaps the most important lesson from the CGGI is the value of looking beyond purely political narratives. Governance discussions in Pakistan often revolve around elections, constitutional disputes, changes in government, civil-military relations and partisan contestation. These issues matter, but they can draw attention away from the everyday functioning of institutions. Questions of implementation, institutional effectiveness, service delivery, fiscal management and policy continuity deserve equal attention. The CGGI's focus on governance capability highlights an important point: the quality of government is closely tied to how effectively institutions perform and deliver for citizens.

A second lesson concerns the importance of measurable indicators. One of the strengths of the CGGI is its attempt to move governance discussions from opinion and anecdote toward evidence and comparative assessment. While no governance index can be entirely objective, the use of clearly defined indicators provides a basis for tracking performance over time and identifying areas of relative strength and weakness.

A third lesson concerns whose governance experience is being measured. National and institutional indicators often obscure the experiences of women, religious and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, transgender persons and residents of remote regions. Similarly, the ability of citizens to exercise fundamental freedoms, participate in public life, organize collectively and hold institutions accountable is an important governance outcome in its own right. A Pakistan-specific assessment should therefore consider the experiences of citizens and communities alongside the performance of state institutions. Future assessments may also benefit from incorporating regional and subnational dimensions to better capture the uneven distribution of governance outcomes across Pakistan.

The CGGI also illustrates the importance of methodological robustness and transparency. Uniformity of sources in terms of credibility and methodological quality is essential.

These lessons point toward several design considerations for a future indigenous assessment. Such an assessment should retain the CGGI's emphasis on measurable indicators, institutional effectiveness and governance delivery while expanding the framework to include dimensions that are either absent or underrepresented in the CGGI. If a Pakistan-specific governance assessment were to be developed, it might retain the CGGI's emphasis on governance capability while organizing additional indicators around a small number of dimensions that better reflect Pakistan's governance realities.

A Pakistan-specific governance framework may therefore be organised around six broad dimensions:

- 1. State capability and public service delivery:** Capturing public service access, administrative effectiveness, fiscal management, disaster response and implementation capacity.
- 2. Rule of law, accountability and institutional integrity:** Covering judicial effectiveness, accountability institutions, corruption control, transparency and oversight mechanisms.

3. Rights, freedoms, inclusion and democratic participation: Including electoral integrity, civic space, media freedom, political participation, human rights protections and the inclusion of women and marginalised groups.

4. Infrastructure, connectivity and economic inclusion: Covering road networks, digital connectivity, financial inclusion, telecommunications access, market integration and other areas where Pakistan has made significant progress but which receive limited attention in conventional governance indices.

5. Regional equity and subnational governance: Assessing disparities across provinces, districts and population groups in access to services, opportunities and state institutions.

6. Future readiness and resilience: Capturing climate adaptation, water governance, renewable energy transition, digital governance and preparedness for emerging economic and environmental challenges.

An indigenous governance assessment for Pakistan should build on the strengths of existing international frameworks while reflecting the country's own institutional, social and regional realities. The purpose should be to develop a broader and more context-sensitive way of understanding governance, supported by reliable and comparable evidence. Such an assessment can help examine how effectively institutions function, how public services reach different communities and how governance outcomes vary across provinces, districts and population groups. Its value would ultimately lie in providing a clearer picture of governance in Pakistan and creating a useful basis for identifying areas that require greater attention and improvement.

About Accountability Lab Pakistan:

Accountability Lab Pakistan (ALP) is an Islamabad-based local think-and-do tank focused on making governance work for people by supporting active citizens, responsible leaders, and accountable institutions. Our approach reimagines how accountability can be built and sustained, envisioning a governance ecosystem where resources are used effectively, decision-making is inclusive and evidence based, and public institutions respond to citizen needs.

Distinct from traditional approaches, ALP positions accountability as a cross-cutting value embedded across governance systems. This includes work spanning public sector reform, civic engagement, human rights, service delivery, and institutional strengthening. Through knowledge production, leadership development, innovation and institutional reforms, ALP contributes to shaping more transparent, responsive, and resilient governance structures.

ALP's work is anchored in strengthening the relationship between citizens and the state by advancing institutional effectiveness, public trust, and inclusive governance. By integrating research, practice, and coalition-building, the Lab supports reform processes and contributes to a more accountable and responsive governance ecosystem in Pakistan.