



# Open Government and Citizen Participation: Perceptions between Civil Society Organizations and Government.

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*Abstract: The concepts of citizen participation and open government (OG) are increasingly being used by politicians, government officials, and civil society organizations (CSOs). However, there are differences about how the concepts are assumed and used by different social actors. The objective of this research is to analyze the perception of citizen participation and open government from the perspectives of two fundamental sectors: CSOs and government using the State of Jalisco, Mexico as a case study. The research question is: How are citizen participation and open government perceived in the State of Jalisco by civil society organizations and the government? This research presents statistical results of a survey given to members of civil society and public officials involved in OG actions. The results show a huge gap between the perceptions of government officials and CSOs; this affects the relationship between the two sectors, which can impede development and implementation of public policies.*

*Keywords: Open Government, Citizen Participation, Civil Society Organizations, Local Government, Jalisco*

## 1. Introduction

Citizen participation has become a pillar of open government (OG); several authors have referred to the concept of citizen participation, linking it with a new governance model that is configured as a strategy and is progressively being adopted by public administrations at different governmental levels (Gascó, 2014; Grimmelikhuijsen & Feeney, 2016; Jaeger & Bertot, 2010; Lee & Kwak, 2012; Meijer, Curtin & Hillebrandt, 2012;). However, there is a lack of studies that analyze citizen participation with an OG approach beyond reflective issues; the present study seeks to take an initial step in the analysis of this issue and presents a study of the perception of the participating citizen and OG, discussing empirical data.

This research aims to analyze and contrast the perceptions of citizen participation and OG from the two most relevant sectors in decision-making in the State of Jalisco: the government and civil society organizations (CSOs). In order to achieve this objective, the following research question was established: How are citizen participation and open government in the State of Jalisco perceived by civil society organizations and the government? The study collected data via a survey based on a systematic review of the literature of Criado, Ruvalcaba, and Valenzuela (2018); the survey was administered to public officials of the Jalisco government and the CSO sector.

Design of the investigation considered public officials from the Government of Jalisco of different units and areas. Selection of the officials was based on whether they assumed a role within the action plan presented by Jalisco under the Open Government Partnership's (OGP) pilot program for subnational governments. CSO selection considered the academic, private, and nongovernmental civil organizations that are linked to the Open Government Technical Secretariat of Jalisco (OGTSJ).

The research assumes that citizen participation and open government have been widely used, but scattered, concepts and that there are multiple perceptions of what they are. Consequently, the implementation of citizen participation policies associated with open government is usually very diverse in practice. It is particularly interesting to inquire into governments at the local level, since these governments are the ones that have the greatest links with citizens in everyday life. However, there is a lack of literature on the subject that shows data at this level of government.

The following section presents a literature review about citizen participation and OG; some approaches to concepts and ideas are discussed. In the third section, the methodological and analytical framework are presented, the dimensions and categories of the study are established, as well as the research methods. The fourth section shows the survey findings, using descriptive statistics that allow us to understand the perceptions of the two sectors analyzed. Finally, in the fifth section, conclusions are presented along with some reflections and future lines of research regarding citizen participation and OG.

## 2. Literature Review

Open governance has positioned citizen participation as a central pillar through which public administrations are linked to citizens and social sectors to gauge public activities. Several authors have referred to OG as a topic under development with little research (Lee & Kwak, 2012; Wijnhoven, et al. 2015). However, some studies have led to a more complex conceptualization where many normative studies converge to consider three pillars: transparency, participation, and collaboration (Gascó, 2014; Gómez, 2017; Lathrop & Ruma, 2010; Lee and Kwak, 2012; Meijer, et al. 2012; Petrušić, et al. 2016). After President Obama's memorandum, the three pillars have been referenced in several studies about open governance (Abu-Shanab, 2015; Lathrop & Ruma, 2010; Lee & Kwak, 2012; Meijer, et al. 2012; Petrušić, et al. 2016; Ruvalcaba-Gomez, et al. 2018).

Open governance is defined in this research as a new model of socio-political interaction that links the values and principles of transparency, citizen participation, democracy, open data, accountability, and collaboration, based on the potential use of new technologies, generating citizen empowerment, and public innovation within political-administrative action (Ruvalcaba-Gómez, 2019). As expressed, citizen participation is a focus in the definition of OG.

A study by Wirtz, Piehler, Thomas, and Daiser (2016) explores the challenges to successful implementation of open government. Using the factor analysis technique, they identify several obstacles that are grouped in the following categories: legal barriers, hierarchical organizational structure of authorities, bureaucratic decision-making culture, and organizational transparency. In this sense, citizen participation is related to the bureaucratic decision-making culture, because the new democratization mechanisms for citizen participation represent transformations in government decision-making processes.

Public participation implies involvement by citizens, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and other social sectors within political-institutional power. This involvement often has the objective of consulting, managing, or providing feedback. "Participation" is defined as taking part in something. In the public sphere, this means the partial involvement of an individual or collective actor in an organizational action that brings together more than one actor or person. However, it also connotes the action of sharing something with someone or at minimum, sharing news (Merino, 1995). In this way, it follows that participation is a social activity of political connotation that implies organization.

Today, citizen participation is not exhausted in simple electoral processes to legitimize the government. Citizens now question the idea of materializing democracy through the exercise of the vote to elect a person or group of people as depositories of temporary public power. Citizens today assume participatory processes as a tool that reconfigures democracy through an act that expresses individual will. It is important to mention that citizen participation is influencing the way in which governments make decisions and assume political power. In this regard, Rayner (2016) mentions that there is rhetoric of participation in the state, allowing connection of democratic values with new practices that encourage direct democracy. In this way, governments find a new form of legitimation.

On the other hand, participation has also been considered as a threat to the "status quo" because of the reach and empowerment of citizens. Regarding this, Villoria and Izquierdo (2015) mention that in liberal democracies integrated into globalized models and economies, it is very difficult for participation to expand beyond the limits where the functioning of the political system begins to be put at risk.

The new technological tools and the democratization of the internet have furthered the way in which citizens can be part of the construction of public decisions. The internet has become a means of interaction that constitutes a great organizational platform in today's society. This implies a new social and technical paradigm that constitutes, in reality, the material basis of our lives and our forms of relationship (Castells, 1996, 2005).

After a massive use of information and communications technology, particularly through the internet, participation found a new way to converge and link citizens with their governments, giving rise to the concept of e-participation. The new digital citizen participation, “2.0 participation” or “electronic participation” (e-participation), is increasingly studied worldwide (Aström, et al., 2012; Bonsón, Royo, & Ratkai, 2015; Conradie & Choenni, 2014; Criado & Ruvalcaba-Gomez, 2018; Dawes & Helbig, 2010; Gulati, et al., 2014; Jho & Song, 2015; Medaglia, 2012; Ruvalcaba-Gomez, 2016; Sæbø, et al., 2008; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil -García, 2012; Sussha & Grönlund, 2014), but still presents unexplored opportunities derived from the democratization of new social technologies.

Citizen participation, mainly in the form of e-participation, is increasingly adopted by governments and CSOs to generate spaces for convergence and dialogue, leading to its consolidation as one of the central pillars of OG. Today there is a tendency on the part of governments to encourage the entitlement of citizens to constantly participate in the formation of public policy, as well as to facilitate public administrations to strengthen information and experiences from society.

It is important to note that one of the main milestones that influenced the resurgence of the OG idea is the creation of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) (Clarke & Francoli, 2014). The OGP is an international multilateral organization that was born in 2011 at the United Nations and has added 79 member countries to this project. This organization has the objective of promoting public policy commitments and represents a cutting-edge organization that internationally promotes OG practices. Consequently, there has been an international trend that has been successful in recent years to place OG at the forefront of the global public agenda, especially in relation to innovation in transparency, participation, and collaboration between governments and public administrations with the society.

### 3. Methodological and Analytical Framework

This research seeks to analyze the perceptions of citizen participation and OG in two sectors: government and CSOs. The investigation focuses on the state of Jalisco, Mexico. The research question is: How are citizen participation and open government perceived in the state of Jalisco by organized civil society and the government? The study uses an online administered survey as a collection technique. A total of 125 validated surveys were collected, of which 51 correspond to CSOs and 74 to the Government of Jalisco. The survey was conducted between October 3 to November 1, 2017.

The research design considers public officials of the Government of Jalisco who had a substantive involvement within the Jalisco Action Plan for the OGP. CSO selection considered the academic, private, and nongovernmental civil organizations that are linked to OGTSJ and the OGP pilot program.

The members of the OGTSJ were responsible for disseminating the survey within their organizations. The survey was distributed by digital media and supported by the Google Drive application; survey responses were sent exclusively to the researcher of this study. The same survey established some

control questions (e.g., dependence and position of the information), which were used to control the surveys.

The research shows the results of the survey as descriptive statistics that allow us to visualize the general results of the study. Some perceptions and realities of OG are presented with the results grouped into two dimensions: a) open government and b) citizen participation. An analytical strategy relates the two dimensions of the study to the questions of the survey and the elements analyzed (see Table 1).

*Table 1: Analytical Strategy*

<b>Study dimension</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Categories / variables</b>
<b>Open Government</b>	What level of development of the following topics do you think is the Jalisco government?	-Access to information -Citizen participation -Accountability -Use of new technologies and innovation (on a scale of 1 to 7)
	How important do you think the Open Government is in the Jalisco Government?	Level of importance (on a scale of 1 to 7)
	What is your personal perception about the success of the implementation of Open Government actions in Jalisco?	Level of success (on a scale of 1 to 7)
<b>Citizen Participation</b>	What is your personal perception about the success of the implementation of citizen participation actions in Jalisco?	Level of success (on a scale of 1 to 7)
	From the following options, what level of public participation do you consider to be in the public sector in Jalisco?	-Inform -Consult -Involve -Collaborate -Empower -There is no consultation, no participation

	<p>What do you think are the three most effective tools that the Jalisco government uses to promote citizen participation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Citizen service offices</li> <li>-Institutional website</li> <li>-Specific participation portal</li> <li>-Social networks</li> <li>-Public forums</li> <li>-Neighborhood meetings</li> <li>-Wikis</li> <li>-Telephone line</li> <li>-Email</li> <li>-Blogs</li> </ul>
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## 4. Findings

The results of the study describe the findings of the survey through descriptive statistics. This allows visualization of the general results of the study through two dimensions: open government and citizen participation.

### 4.1. Open Government

Based on the four values established by the OGP, respondents were questioned regarding their perception of the level of development of: access to information, citizen participation, accountability, and use of new technologies and innovation. Similarly, to determine the values, respondents established the level of development of the concepts on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 not associated and 7 fully associated).

The CSO sector gave the following assessments regarding the level of development: access to information (3.98), citizen participation (3.27), accountability (3.04), and use of new technologies and innovation (4.08). The Jalisco government gave the following assessments: access to information (5.89), citizen participation (5.14), accountability (5.84), and use of new technologies and innovation (5.78). As you can see, the values have a high discrepancy. Table 2 shows this contrast of development perceptions (average, standard deviation "S.D.," and differences).

Table 2: Level of development in OGP values

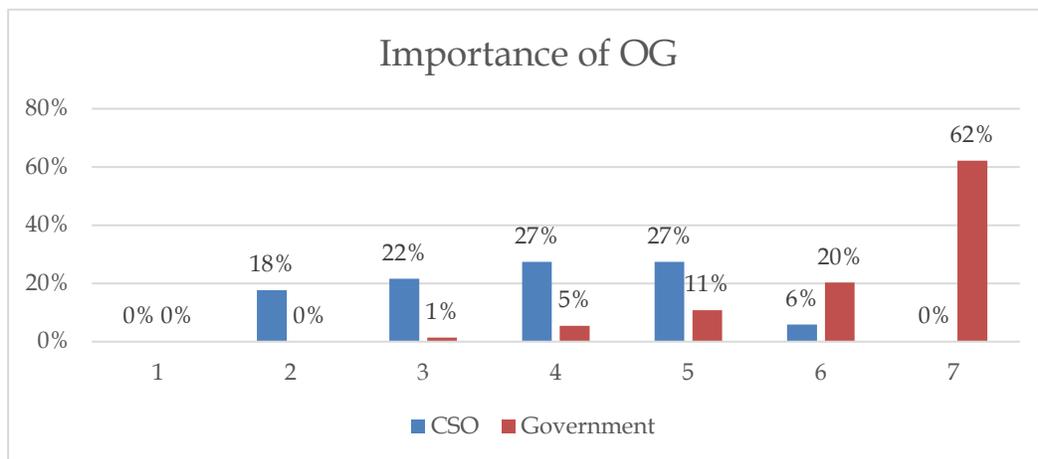
CSO			Government		
S.D.	Average	OGP Values	Average	S.D.	Difference
1.49	3.98	Access to information	5.89	1.38	1.91
1.25	3.27	Citizen participation	5.14	1.44	1.86
1.39	3.04	Accountability	5.84	1.37	2.80
1.45	4.08	Use of new technologies and innovation	5.78	1.37	1.71

The data corresponding to the level of development between the CSO sector and the government sector have a very significant discrepancy. The differences in valuations range from 1.71 to 2.80 on a scale of 1 to 7; this speaks of a wide gap between perceptions. In this sense there may be different reasons. On the one hand, it might be that the Jalisco government tends to overestimate its development on the issues and that the CSOs have a critical posture to the performance of the state government. On the other hand, it might be that within each sector, they perceive different realities of the results that reflect the actions on these issues. In any case, this reveals the lack of dialogue and coordination between the sectors on these issues.

In the category of level of importance, it was asked about the importance of OG by the Government of Jalisco. It is interesting to know the perceptions of the relevance with which OG is adopted by both the CSOs and the government. Respondents established the level of importance of the concepts on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 not associated and 7 fully associated.

The data indicated that 94% of the CSO sector are between levels 2 (18%), 3 (22%), 4 (27%), and 5 (27%), which indicates a level of medium-low importance. However, the Government of Jalisco indicated high levels with level 7 (62%) and level 6 (20%). The data show a wide gap in the perception of the importance given to OG by the Government of Jalisco. Graph 1 shows the data regarding the level of importance of OG by CSO members and the public managers of the Government of Jalisco.

Figure 1: Level of Importance of open government, CSOs vs. Government

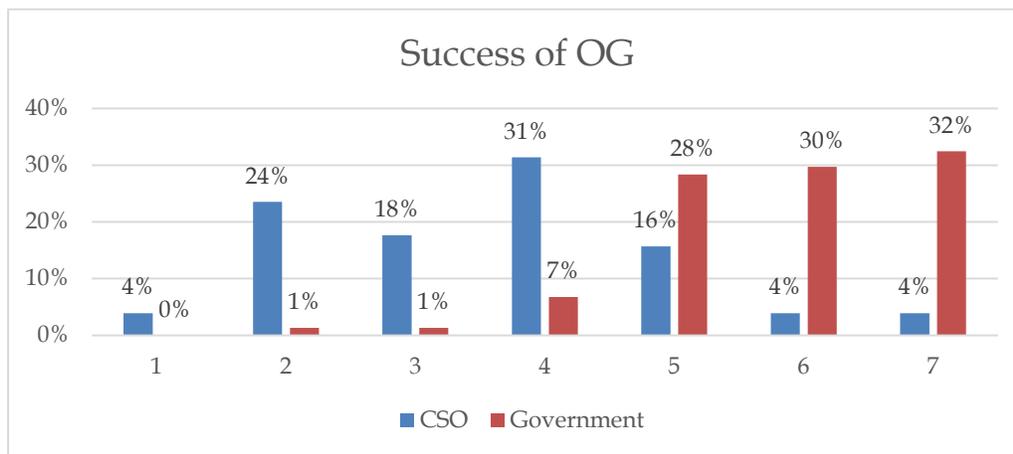


The data regarding the importance of OG show a very wide gap between the perception of the CSO sector and the Jalisco government. The public managers of the Government of Jalisco consider that OG has a quite high importance, while the members of CSOs indicate a value with a medium-low level of importance. This has a practical implication at a time of evaluating the progress and performance of OG; resistance and criticism can be reflected in the policies promoted by the government, as well as its internal evaluations, and usually results in the distancing between the sectors.

An important category to understand the progress and recognition in the implementation of OG was to question the level of success of the implementation of OG by the Government of Jalisco. In this way, people who are part of CSOs and the Government of Jalisco determined the level of success, using the same 1 to 7 scale. Although the measurement of success can be subjective, the data approximates the perceptions of the sectors.

As can be seen in Graph 2, CSOs showed a medium-low level of success in general, where 73% of its responses are at levels 2 (24%), 3 (18%), 4 (31%). In contrast, Jalisco government officials indicated a high level of success overall, where 90% of their responses indicated levels 5 (28%), 6 (30%), and 7 (32%). The data reveal a wide gap between the perception of success of CSO members and the public officials of the Government of Jalisco.

Figure 2: Level of Success of Open Government, CSOs vs. Government

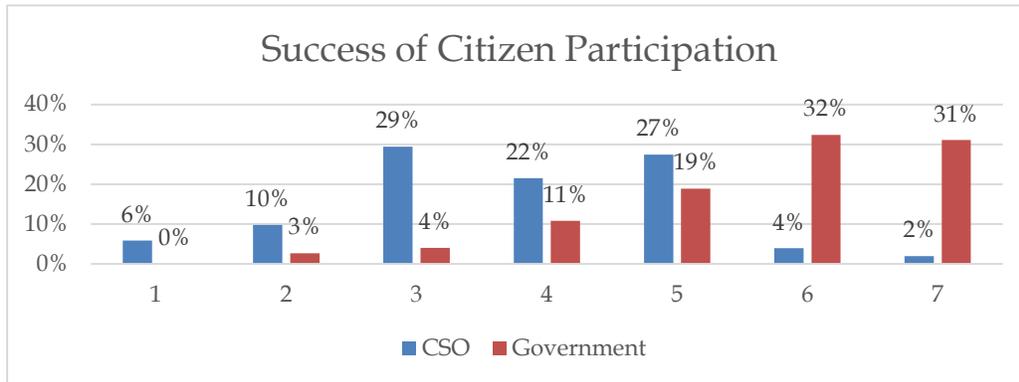


The variable "success" is extremely complicated to measure due to the subjective character it represents. This research seeks to make an approximation of the perceptions of success by the public officials of the Government of Jalisco and members of CSOs. This variable reflects the assessment made by the two sectors consulted, which are determinants in the OG model. The wide gap between the two sectors analyzed is alarming, which suggests creating and reinforcing spaces for dialogue between the government sector and CSOs.

#### 4.2. Citizen Participation

Citizen participation is a fundamental pillar of OG, so it was asked about the perception of the level of success of implementing citizen participation actions. In this case, CSO responses are at average levels of the scale. The data shows that 70% of the answers are at levels 3 (29%), 4 (22%), and 5 (27%). On the other hand, the public servants of the Government of Jalisco indicated high levels in the success of the implementation of citizen participation, 63% of them indicated 6 (32%) and 7 (31%) (see Graph 3).

Figure 3: Perception of the Success of Citizen Participation Actions, CSOs vs. Government



Discrepancy between CSOs and government in relation to the success of the implementation of citizen participation mechanisms is quite significant. In this sense, it is important that the government establish clear and relevant citizen participation mechanisms, and it is important that the CSOs be involved in co-creating and implementing participation policies.

The “IAP2’s Public Participation Spectrum” establishes a scale to know the level of citizen participation in public affairs; the scale is progressive in relation to the impact of citizen participation in public decision making. The levels of participation established by the spectrum are: 1) There is no consultation or participation; 2) Inform: the government offers information on its actions; 3) Consult: civil society is able to give its opinion and be heard by government bodies; 4) Involve: there is a feedback dialogue between civil society and government; 5) Collaborate: there is a permanent dialogue in all phases of public policies, such as problem definition, design, implementation and evaluation; and 6) Empower: the government delivers the power of public policy development to civil society.

When questioned about the level of public participation one has in the public sector in Jalisco and offering the six levels of participation of the abovementioned scale, we obtained a significant dispersion. As shown in Table 3, the majority of CSOs (65%) considered that the level of citizen participation with the public sector in Jalisco is informative, while Jalisco government officials showed a dispersion to define the level of participation, officials indicated in 28% that the level of participation was to inform, 18% indicated the level to consult, 19% indicated the level to involve, and 27% indicated that the level of participation became collaborative. The gap between consideration is significant and has practical implications when seeking to include society in citizen participation mechanisms by governments.

Table 3: Level of Citizen Participation

<b>CSO</b>		<b>Government</b>	
<i>Average</i>	<i>Levels of participation</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Difference</i>
4%	There is no participation	1%	+3
65%	Inform	28%	+37
14%	Consult	18%	-2
10%	Involve	19%	-9
6%	Collaborate	27%	-21
2%	Empower	7%	-5

Finally, in order to get closer to knowing the most efficient tools in the Jalisco government, both the government and CSOs were asked what they thought are the three most effective tools that the Jalisco government uses to promote the citizen participation. This question allows us to focus the tools around their effectiveness implemented in the Government of Jalisco. The data indicate that both sectors consider “social networks” very efficient (58% government and 59% CSOs). However, the government showed as more efficient the “institutional website” with 62%. It is worth noting that “wikis,” “blogs,” “telephone line,” and “email” were considered among the least effective tools, which reveals a tendency to use mechanisms and tools.

## 5. Conclusion

The research sheds light on some practical implications in relation to the results. The tables and descriptive figures reflect a large gap between the perceptions of the government sector and CSOs on the issue of citizen participation and open government. This represents a diversity in the aspirations and objectives of each sector.

This analysis concludes with some aspects that offer an overview of how this new model of socio-political interaction is being addressed in the public management of subnational governments. The data provides evidence about the adoption of a new perspective of public governance from two sectors that have historically expressed different visions of the action to govern. The data reveal that citizen participation and OG are in an emerging phase in terms of their conception and implementation between both sectors. Therefore, the results confirm a reality in which perceptions are assumed in a heterogeneous way, although it is possible to speak of some perceptions already consolidated within OG and citizen participation.

The perceived importance and success of OG are two categories that can be compared as study variables, and draws attention in order to understand the level of adoption and consolidation of this type of public policy. The findings of this study confirm that the government sector weighs both variables better and with a wide gap with respect to CSOs’ perception. However, in general, a high

importance of the subject is assumed, while success is not perceived in the same measure, but is less. This leads us to conclude that the process of consolidating OG's policies is at an early stage, in which the path of government openness or citizen participation is being explored beyond traditional limits. The course is quite clear. It is worth noting the effort to test the variable "success" in this study, since it is very relevant and functions as a transversal axis in both dimensions. In this sense, it is revealed that OG and citizen participation require strategic planning in order to achieve a translation of rhetoric into public-value policy actions.

Another of the key aspects refers to the tools implemented in terms of citizen participation in the Jalisco government. It was possible to obtain data indicating the most effective tools in this area; at this point a moderately homogeneous relationship was found between the two sectors consulted. The efficiency highlights "social networks," "citizen service offices," and the "institutional website." There is a gap between the perception of government officials, who consider the website to be very effective, while CSOs consider "public forums" and "citizen service offices" more efficient.

With these results, it is possible to infer that a process of transformation is under development both inside and outside the public administrations in terms of citizen participation and OG. This is presented gradually and is heterogeneous among the different sectors, depending on technological, environmental, political, and socio-cultural factors. In other words, face-to-face (analog-based) and digital tools (with a 2.0 logic) coexist that produce the need to combine efforts and conveniently design their implementation in local communities.

The aspirations of both sectors are very inconsistent regarding the objectives of public policies. There is a positive opinion by the government sector on the performance of the policies while CSOs have a neutral or negative perception of the performance of the participation and OG policies. When there is an asymmetry in these dimensions, it implies dissatisfaction on the part of civil society, which will become critical of government management and will normally seek to manifest the dissatisfaction of citizens. In this sense, the dispersion of perceptions shown in the study on citizen participation and OG may imply a factor that destabilizes government and society. The role assumed by CSOs today is decisive in promoting transformations in the policies of participation and institutional openness.

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