JeDEM 17 (2): 31-64, 2025
ISSN 2075-9517
http://www.jedem.org
Date of submission: 25.09.2024
Date of acceptance: 23.04.2025
Article DOI: 10.29379/jedem.v17i2.963

Public participation and transparency: Does open governance promote inclusion and accountability?

Roberto Cruz Romero

ORCID Nr: 0000-0001-5740-7037
German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW), Berlin, Germany
cruzromero@dzhw.eu
Leipzig University, Leipzig, Germany
roberto.cruz_romero@uni-leipzig.de

Abstract: Openness has become a standard in public service delivery and open governance. The Open Government Partnership (OGP) focuses on dimensions of transparency, accountability, and efficiency. This study evaluates the inherent dimensions of transparency and public participation by assessing the OGP open data on policy commitments in the areas of fiscal openness, public service delivery, and inclusion from the perspective of a transparency-based policy framework. The study offers a longitudinal-comparative approach, qualitatively analysing the role of transparency and public participation within the number of commitments, the level of completion, and the performance reported in each action plan submitted to the OGP. The analysis centres on five cases, highlighting different stages and engagement levels regarding OGP policies. The findings highlight underlying tendencies in multi-level governance models, emphasising governments' goals and (self-)reporting biases. The study offers a critical perspective for potential lines of action to improve inclusion and accountability within an open governance paradigm.

Keywords: Accountability, Inclusion, Open government, Participation, Transparency

Acknowledgement: Thanks to the reviewers for valuable and insightful feedback contributing to the development of the manuscript. Many thanks to the colleagues at Leipzig, DZHW, and in the transparency research community. Their comments, suggestions, and support contributed to the conclusion of this research.

Los amigos del barrio pueden desaparecer,
pero los dinosaurios van a desaparecer
[Neighbourhood friends may disappear,
but dinosaurs will disappear]
- Carlos Alberto García[1]

1. Introduction

Transparency and accountability go beyond a mere absence of corruption; the focus on the former's effect on participatory governance structures affects the latter's effectiveness. This dynamic is accentuated through the uneven material conditions between and within those countries with higher incomes and long-established democratic systems, and those with particularly opposite characteristics (Gundlach and Paldam, 2009). This developmental diversity reflects the effect that structural historical developments may also have (Acemoglu et al., 2001; Paldam, 2002). For this reason, this research is concerned with isolating the associative dynamics and pointing out the potential impact of transparency, firstly as a significant determinant of institutional solidity and, secondly, as a potential explanatory factor for inclusion and participation within said institutional governance conditions.

To this end, I look at structures of supranational governance, where declarative norms meet some form of operational functions. The reason for this outlook lies in the role of international organisations in influencing the governance contexts of regions and countries (Abbott, 2008; Acharya, 2017; Fioretos, 2011) through accords, treaties, or other forms of contracted conditions. Such influence can be appraised as positive if accompanied by knowledge transfer and support for local expertise or, on the contrary, be taken as negative based on secrecy, favouritism and inclined to maintaining to uneven and dependent power structures (Burger and Owens, 2010; Chikoto, 2015; O'Dwyer and Boomsma, 2015). In the field of transparency, several entities have appeared during the past twenty years addressing issues of openness and participation; the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) came to life in 2003, and the Open Budget Initiative's (OBI) Open Budget Survey (OBS) was first published in 2006. The Open Government Partnership (OGP), an international organisation founded in the context of a United Nations Summit, was created in 2011 seeking to further extend the supranational dedication to foster transparent decision-making and promote civic participation (OGP, 2019).[2]

[1] "Los Dinosaurios", performed by Charly García in the album *Clics Modernos*. (1983, November 5). Universal Music Argentina S.A.

[2] In addition to offering a structure for policy design and commitment, the EITI, OBI, and OGP also support evaluation processes through independent organisations and offer consultation on topics of transparency and, amongst others, open data and civic co-creation and evaluation processes. Hence, their scope of action goes beyond policy record-keeping; it is also important to highlight the voluntary adherence mechanism, which overturns the symbolic gesture of States belonging to them (although it is foreseeable that, in some cases, it will indeed be the case).

The variety of organisations speaks of an ample policy scope from which to assess transparency, with special attention to fiscal responsibility, resource management, and good governance. This diversity of aims exemplifies the level of influence such organisations may have on different political systems with distinct economic and institutional arrangements. However, empirical evidence shows a variety of conditions that differ from region to region and even within regions (Alt et al., 2006; Bassanini and Scarpetta, 2001; Chong et al., 2020; Potrafke, 2015), which co-determine the singularity of each case in relation to transparency policies. These views often contradict the ideals of universalistic governance models that some of these supranational institutions propagate.

This research then focuses, from a general level, on the gap in the institutional-focused scholarship that investigates the empirical relation between transparency[3] and participatory democracy. As will be discussed, some academic works do address this gap in different areas of administrative governance (budgeting and fiscal information, for example). Nonetheless, this research attends to the precise need of understanding the effect of transparency in relation to democratic participation and the institutional outlook enabling it. A particular focus will be placed on governance qualities that are undercut by corruption and, contrastingly, could be reinforced and bolstered by transparency (i.e., the dimension of public service provision). To further assess these relations and channels, one of the novelties proposed in this research is to address transparency from a measurable source, as an institutional unit, registered and evolving through time (Schnell and Jo, 2019). Thus, using data from the OGP on both general and specific levels (Action Plans and commitments (public services) categories), this research seeks to shed light on the explanatory vacuum that is found in the commonly established relation between transparency and accountability.

By exploring this analytically driven relation between transparency and accountability (e.g., Fox, 2007; Mabillard and Zumofen, 2017), the research looks to bridge the gap and offer new and updated insights into the correlation between participation, accountability, and transparency, linking these with factors related to good governance models. Thus, the question guiding this research includes numerous sources of conceptual interplay that have been under-explored in the literature. Underpinning these elements, I part from the initial assumption that transparency policies are related to increased participation and that, in that relation, open governance, accountability, and transparency interact to some degree – these points will be discussed respectively. Notwithstanding, I speak explicitly of open governance (instead of open government) since *governance* refers to a broad structure of systemic relations and dynamics that co-determine government actions. These are characterised by an active involvement of civil society and relevant accountability stakeholders. In that sense, I propose to *primarily* investigate *how and to what extent, does open governance promotes inclusion and accountability, and, secondly, if perceived quality (and transparency) in service provision affects such relation.*

[3] Transparency here has been used deliberately as higher-level proxy of the actual variable and operative concept that the research will investigate; that is, transparency-oriented policies stemming from each country's commitments to the OGP. This sum of outputs is what, for analytical terms, will continue to be referred to as transparency.

1.1. Open government partnership: Between transparency and accountability

The OGP has become a pivotal institution in the fields of public administration, multi-system governance, and civil society inclusion, as it focuses on the tangible consequences of policy design and implementation revolving around openness. It has evolved since its creation in 2011, and it now has 77 active member States and a considerable number of local (city) members.[4] This research will only focus on the national-level members. Moreover, the organisation establishes a reference point for transparency research, since the policies submitted by each member State can be traceable in time and terms of their scope, execution, and impact. A further dimension focuses on developing openness and good governance frameworks across structurally and contextually different democratic systems, given that it seeks to "increase the availability of information about governmental activities … [and] support civic participation" (OGP, 2011). These represent pillars of healthy democratic systems and are therefore also relevant to the institutionalism literature in general.

The institutional approach is also supported by the idea that "[t]ransparency is becoming an unofficial mandate by the public and is often a legal mandate" (Ball, 2009, p.293) or, as Bovens also puts it, as a "virtue" in democratic systems (Bovens, 2010, pp. 958–60). The OGP itself points this out when referring to the outcomes of transparency in terms of financial benefit, in that "[g]reater policy transparency and frequent and accurate disclosure of macro-economic data is positively correlated with foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows and credit ratings" (OGP, 2019, p.33). As will be seen, institutions carry a particular weight on policy design and implementation (Glaeser et al., 2004; Kong, 2005; Sumanjeet, 2015), and thus it becomes relevant to carefully assess the contextual surroundings of historical, political, and economic development (Acemoglu et al., 2001; Fioretos, 2011; Hanrieder, 2014). It is important, hence, to analytically highlight the difference between the mere adherence to the organisation and the formal implementation of the corresponding policies; this divide is indicative of the deeply contextual processes affecting the uptake and implementation of transparency and accountability initiatives. For example, there are anecdotal cases of member States within the OGP that have been formally accepted and have been included as acting members of the institution, yet have not enacted any policies. Again, maintaining a discursive tendency towards openness, whilst not really engaging in it. That is one factor that Schnell and Jo (2019) point out as they analyse the various dynamics OGP membership has on institutional arrangements, since the authors point out the "*de jure*" actions and the "*de facto*" measures (2019, p. 945). This division implies an inherent symbolism pertaining to the enactment of such policies; some countries will subscribe to them through declarative charters and disregard the operationalisation of the policy.

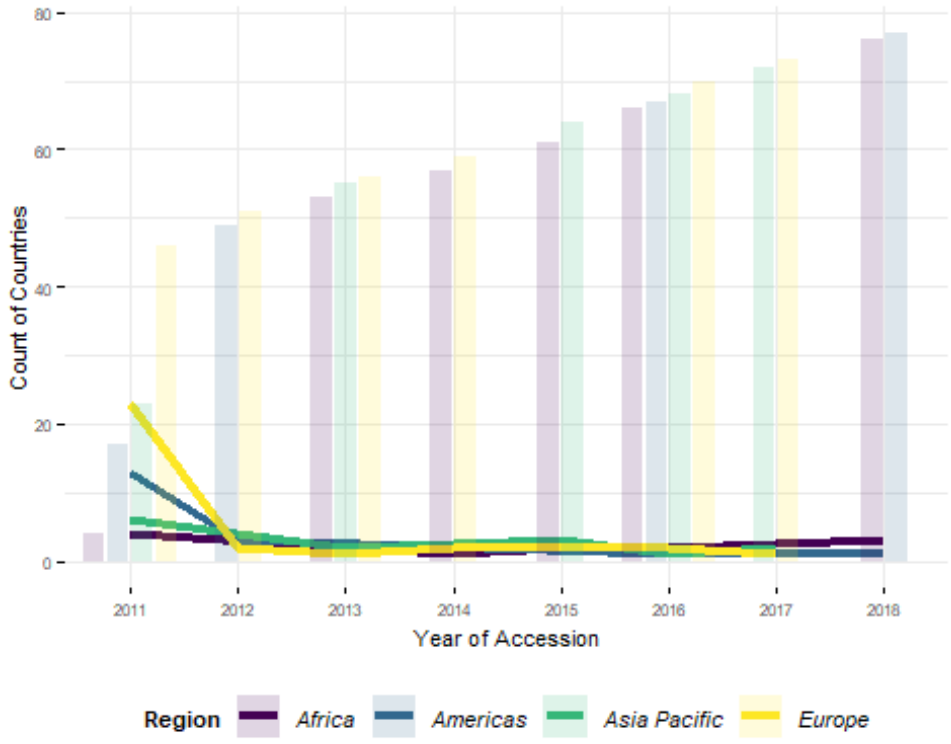
Similarly, national policy cycles reflect the latter disconnection, specifically regarding the outputs and outcomes within the existing institutional framework. That is why, as Fraundorfer argues, some warn against the OGP, given that the organisation "represents a smokescreen serving the governments to show off with trumpeting speeches and boasting statements about their serious commitment to open government" (2017, p.622). This perspective thus explains why opaque

[4] As per the March 2025 count in the OGP's website, 77 national members and 152 local members. See: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/data-dashboard/.

governments (and their institutions) would choose a symbolic overcoat of openness and accountability in front of the international community, whilst internally maintaining the *status quo*. I stress the critical reading of the OGP in general, and the particular commitments made to it as ideal scenarios that, considering the contextual factors, demand a cautious approach.

In this regard, Figure 1 shows two dimensions of analytical relevance that I will later problematise; viz., year of accession to the organisation and geographic distribution of the OGP member States. The plot further details the longitudinal dimension of yearly accessions and the cumulative counts (also per region), to characterise the organisation's growth and establishment over time. This visualisation considers two further elements to discuss: a) the initial institutional push that the OGP experiences from its introduction in 2011, and b) the geographic origins of (new) member States that incorporate as the organisation consolidates over time. Regarding the former, the initial signatories of the OGP Declaration were fast and willing to adhere to the USA's interests and, with it, get some recognition. As will be seen, this has played out differently for some of the initial signatories. Then, regarding the geographic dimension, it can be seen how the less represented regions in the final sample adhere to the organisation later, following a catching-up pattern with the already (by then) established organisation. This behaviour has led to the current over-representation of European countries regarding other States in a near-peripheral positioning.

Figure 1: Timeline of OGP member states' accession (by geographic distribution)



This research then acknowledges the distinction of discourse and praxis at the conceptual level, but seeks to highlight it at the empirical stage, in order to assess the fullest picture attainable; that is, of countries who have discursively and tangibly committed to transparency in order to create

more favourable conditions for civic action and deliberation, as well as deepening the inclusion and deliberation efforts towards civil society.

1.1. The independent reporting mechanism: A safeguard for accountability?

The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) is an entity that functions independently of any member State's structure. These entities (usually made of individual country-experts) are assigned and respond to a steering body of the OGP, the Independent Experts Panel (IEP). As of recent, the IRM implemented a change in its assessment procedures, avoiding the long, technical, and mainly descriptive reports on action plan execution. The new process is said to follow more closely the co-creation process of each action plan, as well as contribute more engaging and experience-based reports. These changes are based on a renewed focus on more closely accompanying the policy processes. It could be argued that this shift may have originated from an interest in disincentive the growing gap between discourse and praxis mentioned before. For example, this turn may be intended to follow the action plan cycles in a more involved manner, reviewing the stages on the go, offering feedback and opportunities to focus on "learning, reflection, and accountability".[5]

The fact that one of the renewed missions of the IRM is focused on *learning* is telling of a deficit of transfer capabilities in the previous policy process. Until the reporting change (which took place in 2021, ten years after the founding of OGP), the IRM's tasks were limited to a purely evaluative report, designed to provide the OGP with a direct accountability channel to the members' commitments. This approach proved useful for governments and administrative entities regarding their overall balance vis-a-vis the OGP, as no overview of the co-creation process (if any) was had until its end, and commitments were assessed on their nominal targets. As it will be shown and discussed based on the examples selected, some member States proved to be champions in advancing open governance policies, whilst maintaining other more doubtful approaches to openness and transparency.

Similarly, the IRM's new approach proves problematic from the perspective it seeks to advance, viz., the reflection and accountability. Admittedly, it could well attain a reflection level with which to influence and foster critical appraisals of the role both public administrations and civil society have in relation to co-creating, implementing, and co-assessing policies. Yet, it may seem as if the IRM now acts in a more diffuse environment, immersed in a liminality between its supranational mandate and its national duty. A broader critique can stem from the fact that country experts (as mentioned, the IRM evaluators for each member State) are intertwined in the local and global arrangement of policy actors. They need to acutely know and be aware of systemic dynamics in both national and supranational dimensions, arguably leading to a limited assessment. These experts are led by the IRM Procedures Manual (OGP, 2017) - a document detailing the minutiae for IRM evaluations on the broad spectrum of topics observed, both in processes and commitment performance. The Manual's guiding principles are: "Coverage and balance, independence, fairness and context, assumptions, inclusiveness, impartiality, non-interference, and openness" (p. 4). Based on these, the IRM seeks to provide an overall context that provides both the OGP and the respective

[5] For more details, see https://www.opengovpartnership.org/irm-guidance-overview/

members with a perspective that can "stimulate dialogue and promote accountability between member governments and citizens" (p. 3). The latter is particularly relevant, as it highlights the intersection, I seek to problematise, i.e., the role that open governance policies play in relation to participation and accountability.

This research focuses tangentially on the role of IRM's assessment reporting, in that it provides the data foundations with which to more comprehensively characterise the issue at hand. Yet, I also seek to present a comparative perspective, considering IRM reporting and member States' self-reporting criteria and declarative policy. This is particularly relevant given that little research exists on the OGP, fewer still in relation to the IRM and its role in evaluator and data creator. Moreover, it is the intersection of entities and topic relevance that I seek to highlight; that is, the OGP's focus on public participation, inclusion, and public services – three distinct and characteristically difficult topics to address.

2. Data and methods

I propose to qualitatively assess openly available data from the OGP on policy commitments in the areas of fiscal openness, public service delivery, and inclusion from the perspective of a transparency-based policy framework. The dataset on open governance from the OGP contains systematised information from two aggregated subsets, showing a more comprehensive outlook of the open governance framework to which the partner countries have pledged allegiance. The two aggregated datasets include data for a) action plans (AP) and commitments, and b) the processes determining the former. Further, these are determined by an independent evaluation, offering a contrast and balance for self-reporting at the political level. The independent assessment is carried out by the IRM, which is based locally, employing area expertise and following up and evaluating co-creation processes and implementation phases.

The IRM data, nonetheless, is not free from biases and faults. As it will be shown, large shares of the assessment reports are inconclusive and lacking contextualised and complete data. For instance, before the cases analysed here, many data fields do not contain information due to review processes or just plain lack any data (see Figures 4 and 5 below). The latter leaves room for critical consideration regarding the role of IRM experts in effectively assessing one AP before the next one commences, and the meaning of this review process for the overall AP cycle. The advantageous aspect of the data at hand is that it is harmonised for all cases in equal categories and scales. However, the details are found with a thorough reading of the results and a critical overview of the policy contexts in which the APs develop. This approach attempts to do just that, whilst complementing other analytical efforts regarding e-Government and Digital Government that touch upon similar features and empirical approaches (Sohaib et al., 2024; Sonnenfeld et al., 2024; Srivastava et al., 2024; Tai et al., 2024; Thorpe and Pokhrel, 2024).[6]

[6] For a broader outlook on Digital Government (and Governance) literature, see the Digital Government Reference Library (DGRL) (Scholl, 2024).

Hence, the OGP open data offers a broad perspective into adoption, implementation, and evaluation.[7] Figure 2 offers a visual overview of the state of active OGP member States' AP implementation. Yet, as it can be seen from the plot, the representation in the organisation is still driven mainly by what could be inferred as centre-periphery dynamics. For example, most of Latin America (except those cases whose political stance differs greatly from the liberal script) is an active member, whereas Europe shows a varied composition, without strict east-west or north-south divides. The regions with drastic under-representation in the OGP are Africa, the Middle East, and (South-East) Asia. From a critical institutionalist perspective, these representation patterns fit the "liberal international order" arrangement (Simmons and Goemans, 2021, p. 389), in which the OGP may act as a driver of (neo)colonial gaps based on compliance constraints. However, little evidence is found in this regard and, on the contrary, OGP membership has been shown to be easily overridden by sufficiently unwilling governments (e.g., El Salvador or Trinidad and Tobago).

This contribution, nonetheless, is based on data for six case studies, qualitatively analysing the implementation history (since its accession into the OGP), the commitment log, and the IRM reporting on a general level. The cases are Chile, Costa Rica, Germany, the Philippines, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom (UK). This selection is based on a mix of convenience and analytical criteria. On one hand, I have first-hand knowledge of two of the cases (Chile and Costa Rica) and, on the other hand, I am familiarised with the policy contexts in two others (Germany and the UK). Furthermore, the Philippines is a counterbalance, in that it is a forerunner in terms of OGP policies, having also joined the organisation in its foundational moment. Similarly, Nigeria is a standout case in Africa due to its geopolitical relevance and its resource-rich economy. Plus, as noted, the African continent is severely under-represented; thus, the Nigerian case also serves as a counterbalance. Another factor that complements these criteria is the geographic variation, offering examples from the so-called Global North and Global South alike – Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia are represented. As will be discussed, these cases are also exemplary in their differing advancement levels, particularly in relation to their relationship to the institution.

Moreover, as I mentioned, the analytical setting here is interlaced with dimensions of fiscal openness, public service delivery, and participation. These elements are deeply interwoven in open governance, and they are recognised factors hindering or enabling transparency (e.g., Afiyah, 2024; Okon, 2024; Moses et al., 2023). Thus, it is within the OGP framework that these areas coalesce and set forth policy and analysis opportunities regarding the scope and breadth of the respective commitments. The areas of transparency, accountability, and participation will be taken from the available dataset (as coded in different performance indicators by the IRM) and compared to assess one of the central relationships for this approach, namely, that of public service delivery and the transparency and accountability mechanisms available. The IRM data offers relevant insights into each of these dimensions and, crucially, the participatory channels in each of them; for instance, characterising the participatory opportunities in public service provision structures. Again, this brings together the inclusion (civil society as an intervening actor), accountability (open and participatory design and assessment mechanisms), and transparency dimensions.

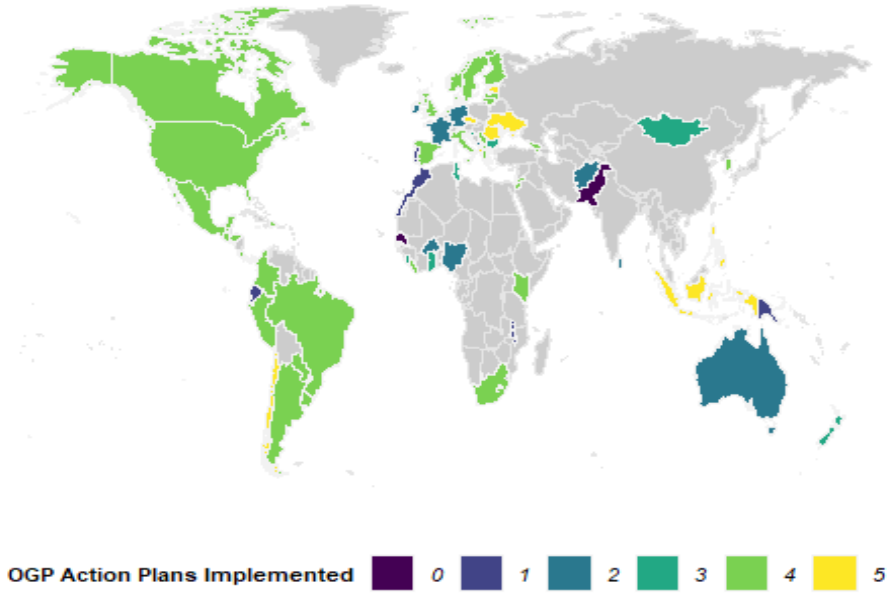
[7] See https://www.opengovpartnership.org/data-dashboard/ for detailed information on all cases.

The approach will be qualitatively informed by a narrative framing of each of the cases' OGP adherence history, their commitment log, and their implementation cycles. The duration of this policy cycle (i.e., each AP) is two years, during which an intermediate assessment is carried out by the IRM (progress report).[8] After the implementation period, the member State notifies the OGP and then mandates the IRM for an end-of-period assessment, which encompasses the broad evaluative approach mentioned previously. Thus, I will approach the data from a broad institutionalist framework, highlighting the interactions of an independent evaluation and an official account. Specifically, the data used is the OGP's open dataset snapshot from April 2024, complemented by the Commitments Data Guide 3.0 and version 4 of the IRM Procedures Manual, dated September 2017. Hence, the timeframe for the analysis encompasses the period 2011-2023.

Most of the variables assessed by the IRM are coded categorically, i.e., discrete categories with qualitative appraisals of specific dimensions, such as completion or success levels. This is particularly useful to my approach, as these classifications inherently provide some contextual information on the dimensions they characterise. Some variables are coded numerically, providing an overall aggregated score of particular elements in the scope of the evaluation. However, these numerically coded items are placeholders for qualitative categories, as they reflect a scale classification that gives numeric scores to the "strength of their commitments" (OGP, n.d.). These scoring typologies are the base of the IRM evaluations in a set of five main indicator groups: viz. Anticorruption, civic space, open policymaking, access to information (in public services and the legal framework), and fiscal openness. The latter two are the most relevant for this contribution, as I argue that these are the areas that can show a stronger association with increased participation and demands for accountability.

[8] A recent modification on the AP length and delivery evaluation states that "Countries can decide to develop a two-year or a four-year action plan" (OGP, 2022). See: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/ogp-participation-co-creation-standards/

Figure 2: Geographic distribution of OGP member states, by last completed AP (2011-2023)



2.1. Cases overview

Regarding the elements of comparison on the various levels of policy, economy, and democratic consolidation, I will focus on the six cases based on a mix of criteria. As mentioned, the decision derives mainly from a convenience standpoint, yet similarity and diverging outcomes are the overarching dimensions that will guide the analysis (see Babbie 2010, chapter 11 for a broad discussion on historical comparative research). From the perspective of transparency, public service provision, and participation, these two dimensions (similarity and divergence) offer a comprehensive lens through which to analyse and critically reflect on the extent of the idea of good governance and the indicators to measure it. In this sense, I focus on the data at hand in order to reach a broad perspective of the phenomenon of open governance development. As Babbie states, the effectiveness of such comparisons "lies in replication: In the case of historical research, that means corroboration. If several sources point to the same set of 'facts', your confidence in them might reasonably increase" (Babbie, 2010, p.356). The data from the OGP (but precisely, the IRM) offers a valuable insight into time-series behaviours that are usually not found in aggregated indices, nor in compounded scores. Thus, the micro-data offers the possibility to challenge the supra-institutional openness narrative from its empirical grounding.

For instance, diverse baseline states regarding democratic consolidation, dependence on specific markets and market dynamics, diverse but coinciding service provision schemes, and a recent decline in civic spaces in which the population can actively make their voices heard and act upon specific demands. Table 1 offers a systematised view of these dimensions and sets the tone for a more critical engagement with the OGP framework of governance through principal orientation. In this regard, it is useful to keep in mind the voluntary association basis on which the OGP functions, and on which the IRM makes its assessments and suggestions. From the framework of a multi-stakeholder initiative (MSI) (see Mena and Palazzo, 2012), this dynamic entangles input and

output legitimacy from the perspective of official and civil society actors. That is to say, the diverging paths taken by each country according to their initial states are evidence of different motivations and expectations both in narrative, as well as in practical terms of policy implementation. Legitimacy, as the expected outcome, both internally and internationally, determines how these expectations aggregate and serve the purpose of framing an open governance agenda regarding resource management, civic liberties or, crucially for my approach, service provision.

*Table 1: OGP case studies systematic characterisation**

	Comparative Dimensions			
	Baseline	**Economic Dependence**	**Public Service Provision**	**Civic Characterisation**
Chile	~40 years of democratic regime after almost 17 years of military dictatorship. Presidential system.	Mining, manufacturing, and agricultural products.	Privatised, with public warranties.	Social outbreak in 2019 due to growing inequality and poor service provision. Since then, 2 constitutional assemblies have taken place.
Costa Rica	~70 years of democratic regime. Unitary presidential system. No standing army.	Tourism, manufacturing, and services.	Public, with private provision.	Low political participation and civic engagement, growing inequality, and deteriorating service provision.
Germany	~70 years of democratic regime. Federal government with coalition building. NATO member.	Services, heavy industry, and chemical products.	Public, with private provision.	Increased influence of right-wing parties and movements, ageing population, and deteriorating trust in institutions.
Nigeria	~20 years of democratic regime. Federal government with presidential	Oil production, agricultural products, and	Public, with private provision.	High levels of institutional dissatisfaction, low political participation, and

	Comparative Dimensions			
	Baseline	**Economic Dependence**	**Public Service Provision**	**Civic Characterisation**
	authority. Standing army.	services.		an expanding (young) population.
Philippines	~40 years of democratic regime. Unitary presidential system. Standing army; strategic USA Asia-Pacific army base.	Services, industry, and agricultural products.	Public, with private provision.	Institutionalised repression of social dissidence, increasing political apathy, and high unemployment rates.
United Kingdom	Constitutional monarchy with parliamentary government. NATO member.	Finance, industry, and retail.	Public, with private provision.	Political instability after Brexit (2016-2020), increased adoption of populist rhetoric by governing parties, and deteriorating service provision.

* Sources: Author's own based on data from V-DEM Institute's Democracy Reports and World Bank Country Data

3. Empirical insights

The distribution of OGP membership across geographical lines moves in line with a Western-style script of liberal governance (see Bukovansky, 2006; Garsten and Jacobsson, 2011). That is, the adhesion to supra-national entities like the OGP is tied to premises of efficiency and corruption control, which are expected to reach problematic levels in areas where democratic consolidation has faced structural or contextual hurdles. Put otherwise, areas of lower socio-economic development are usually linked with poor political governance, high corruption perception levels, and low civic engagement in social organisations. The latter then snowballs into a collective conundrum, where political participation is deemed of little use and the engagement of civil society groups in public spaces disregarded as substitutive for a lack of state capacities (on the role of open data, see Angelico, 2023; on the broader issue of development and non-State actors, see Acemoglu et al., 2020).

Yet, these premises misrepresent historical dimensions that are constitutive of a broader development narrative (see Ellis and Fender, 2006 for an operationalisation of transparency in an econometric setting; Kay, 2005 for a broader discussion of institutional approaches; and Nawaz, 2015 for an approach that incorporates different types of institutional development). Open governance is closely related to accountability and participation and, thus, also represents another dimension that is intertwined with development discourses characterised by the role of politicians. This, in turn, eclipses the main dimension I emphasise in this research, which is the role that civil society actors (individual or collective) play vis-à-vis institutional governance structures. Naturally, these dimensions are empirically linked in the data at hand, as participation spaces are accounted for only if they comply with the administrative and political institutional mechanisms. Nonetheless, these premises, along with the case selection presented previously, are indicative that some of the development narratives do not fully match the expectations. To introduce these aspects, Table 2 offers an initial perspective into the main characteristics of the five case studies in their OGP journey. Again, it is worth noting that the table, as well as the subsequent plots and tables, are limited to the data available in the OGP open dataset from April 2024.

*Table 2: OGP case studies (2011-2023)**

	Date Joined	Founders	Last AP	LastAP Commit.	Total AP Commit.	Letters	Procedural Review
Chile	2011	0	5	8	62	1	0
Costa Rica	2012	0	4	8	66	1	0
Germany	2016	0	2	14	29	0	0
Nigeria	2016	0	2	16	30	0	0
Philippines	2011	1	5	11	66	1	0
United Kingdom	2011	1	4	8	97	4	1

* All five are active members of the OGP. Columns Founder and Procedural Review are coded dichotomously, 1 - yes, 0 - no. The column Letters refers to the number of official letters sent to the country by the OGP to notify them of process deficiencies. The column Procedural Review indicates whether the member is under scrutiny due to repeated lack of commitment to advances.

As mentioned before, this contribution intends to isolate and to critically characterise the institutional conditions that give way to the administrative (material) and political (symbolic) adoption of transparency policies. I briefly introduced and discussed some premises often linked to development and democratic consolidation models (corruption perception, civil society involvement,

and public service quality and efficiency). Yet, these dimensions are crosscut by structural and historical elements that are often overlooked or even dismissed as empirically nuanced. Colonial history, for example, and industrial complexity are two of said dimensions, tightly linked by political relations of centre-periphery. These, in turn, have developed into consolidated monetary and governance structures that replicate the corresponding dominant script, in this case, the liberal democracy. In my examples, this dimension appears on a meta-level, as two countries fit the central, liberal democratic script, being forerunners for this paradigm (Germany and the UK). Similarly, three countries are peripheral States, former colonies, following the dictates of the liberal script (Chile, Costa Rica, Nigeria, and the Philippines).

From this perspective, relevant analytical details emerge regarding the role of institutional structures in fostering, enabling, and further deepening the open governance agenda. For instance, in these six cases, there are two founding members of the OGP (the Philippines and the UK), which follow similar AP implementation patterns. The Philippines, on one side, implements currently its sixth AP, whilst the UK, on the other side, implements currently its fourth. The overall number of commitments is larger for the UK, whilst in its current plan Philippines do account for more policy commitments. One premise for this difference may exist in the mentioned structural conditions that determine institutional development in both countries (see Table 3). As said, one is the centre and the other the periphery in the broader global system. One possesses a dynamic and complex economic structure, whilst the other catches up in industrial and technological sectors.[9] Thus, the expectation would lead to believing that the UK, in this direct comparison, had an advantageous starting point, with more consolidated institutions and, thus (presumably), less need for transformational arrangements. On the contrary, the Philippines may have focused its institutional efforts on a push towards transformational policies. The same can be said, for instance, of Nigeria in relation to Chile, or of Costa Rica in relation to Germany. These structural determinants are commonly missed in the overall characterisation that entities such as OGP have.

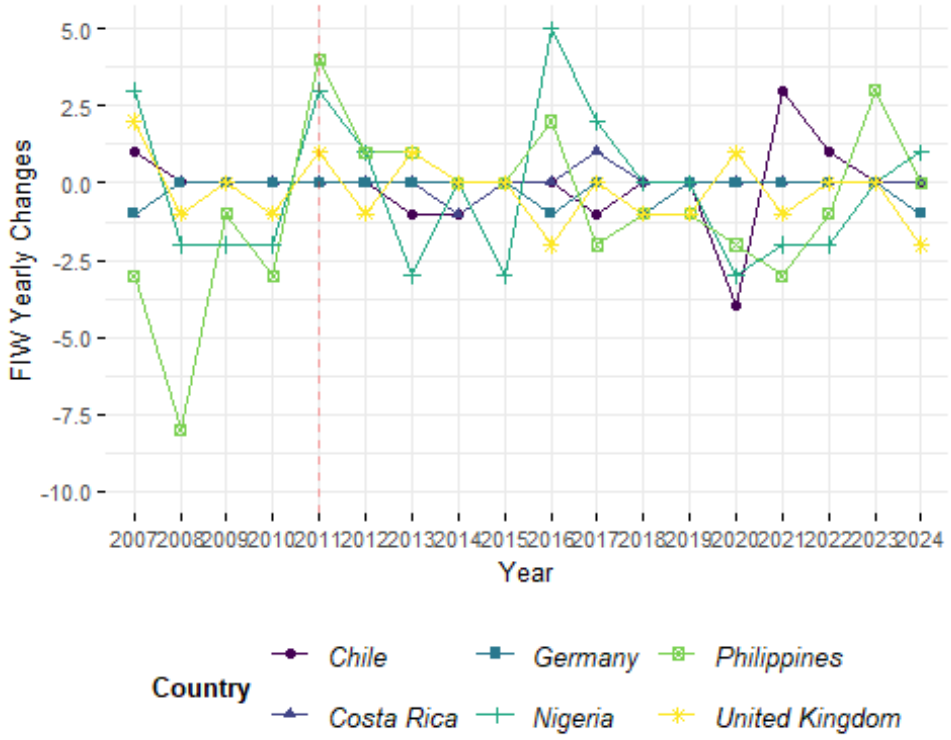
On that matter, Figure 3 shows data from the Freedom in the World (FIW) index, compiled and published by Freedom House.[10] The plot condenses the differences in each year's total score for the index (which comprises and 60-40 combined score of elements characterising civil liberties and political rights, respectively). In sum, this plot also evidences the total change these six country cases have experienced in relation to their freedom score, starting with the first such measure (2006) and to the latest (2024) (Freedom House, 2024). In line with the overall trends identified in the index's report, the six cases also share a declining trend, in aggregated terms, despite some positive changes. In general, there is no country in this small sample that has a better standing now compared to what they had in 2006, eighteen editions ago. Crucially, the country with the largest loss of aggregated score is the Philippines, with a general loss of 14 points. However, more rele-

[9] The Philippines, nonetheless, is a major hub for outsourced back-office services from major service companies, as well as having a strong manufacturing industry.

[10] Further discussions on the structure and axiological weight of this index run parallel to the perspective I take in this contribution. However, for matters of space and clarity, I will not delve into the conceptual and analytical implications of the index' empirical foundations.

vant to the discussion, the second and third countries with higher losses are the UK and Germany, with 5- and 4-point decreases, respectively.[11]

Figure 3: Yearly changes in the freedom in the World Index for selected cases (2007-2024)



The figure shows how the behaviour has been fluctuating across the time series. The figure also signals the creation of the OGP (2011), where, coincidentally, both the Philippines and the UK, as founding members, see a positive shift. Again, this index is but a stark approximation to dimensions of democratic governance, as well as the close relation to OGP's framework, is indicative of issues of (self-)reporting and international assessments replicating the path-dependent institutional development criteria. So, once a policy aligned with the interests of the supra-national entity (in this case, also a case of an MSI framework) is implemented, the expectation is realised, but the extent to which that expectation is continued over time is only dependent on factual evidence. This phenomenon involves clashing views regarding endogenous and exogenous factors, such as institutional capacity and economic ties.

[11] The Costa Rican case is also emblematic of a generalised institutional stability that follows an arguably independent trajectory from the OGP commitments. This is evident in the stability reported in the FIW index, whereby the country only reports a one-point decrease in eighteen years. Chile, similarly, reports a two-point decrease in the same period, yet with a more intensely changing score in recent years. This behaviour is attributable to the social outbreak experienced during the last presidency of Sebastián Piñera, during which a state of emergency was declared in major cities. The positive change is later attributable to a *democratic restoration* led by current president, Gabriel Boric.

Returning to the information in Table 1, there are two columns that critically contribute to the assessment of baseline standards and institutional pathways. Firstly, the column *Letters* shows the number of official *communiqués* from the OGP to the member states' governing transparency bodies. As can be seen, all countries but Germany have been *warned* in some way or other by the OGP regarding deficient process implementations, as well as insufficient commitment achievements. As mentioned, the German case is also a reflection of apparent institutional stability; yet, Germany also has the fewest APs implemented and the fewest commitments put in place. The case of UK, nonetheless, is the one that stands out as it is a founding member of the organisation, but since the conservative government of ex-Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the OGP agenda has been weakened to the point that the government has been notified multiple times (four since 2021) about its non-compliance with its commitments. Moreover, the UK was briefly on a list with six other countries that are under *procedural review* (last column in the table).[12] This allocation was amended in late 2022 when, already having submitted their fifth AP (which is excluded from the dataset for this analysis), the UK government reassured their commitment to the open governance structure.[13]

Procedural Review refers to the stage where OGP members have willingly or negligently refused to make any progress on their AP commitments. This stage is, in general, a previous step from inactivity and, lastly, withdrawal from the OGP. The fact that a member State that is also a founding member finds itself in such a position is telling of the interests of the political class in (not) advancing the open governance policies. As Green puts it, the UK's last AP (2021-2023) "was a unique opportunity for the UK government to work with civil society to develop a clear roadmap to increase accountability and transparency. Instead, the government has chosen to water down and remove key commitments" (2022). Similarly, Wang and Shepherd also found that only a small fraction of the OGP commitments related to access to information in the UK were effectively translated into accessible, granular data (2020).

3.1. Open governance commitments

Following on the latter idea, the OGP members have moved beyond the initial hype of policy commitments to a supra-national entity. Naturally, this follows a common trend, whereby member States reduce the number of commitments in their APs as time progresses. This is shown evidently in Table 3, where the number of commitments has steadily decreased along each AP cohort (as well as the average number of commitments, i.e., commitments per country, per AP). Interestingly, the total number of commitments for the five cases I explore accounts for only 8% of the total for all active members' commitments; Costa Rica, Philippines, and the UK make up over 70% of these.

12 Greece, Kyrgyz Republic, Norway, Seychelles, South Africa, and Sri Lanka.

13 See the letter "Update on Process [Response to Contrary to Process Letter]" dated November 2022: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/united-kingdom-update-on-process-response-to-contrary-to-process-letter-november-2022/.

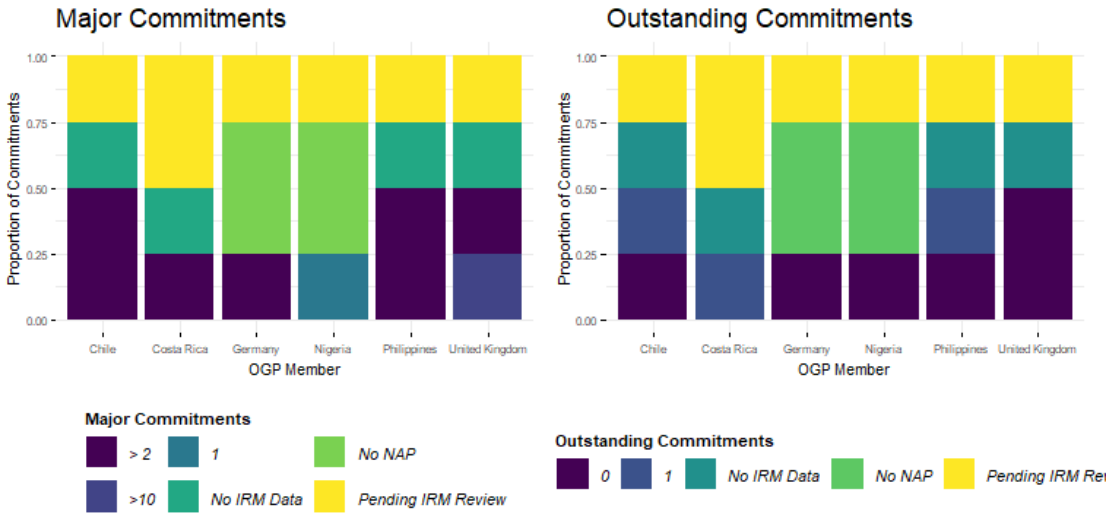
Table 3: Number of commitments per action plan (for all member States and selected case studies, 2011-2023)

	Action Plan				
Members	**AP1**	**AP2**	**AP3**	**AP4**	**AP5**
All	1367	1055	966	525	49
(Average)*	18	14	13	7	1
Selected Case Studies	117	79	71	42	11
(Average)*	23	16	14	8	2

* Average commitments per member

Figure 4, on the other hand, shows a side-by-side comparison of one of the assessment dimensions that the IRM points out in their reports. This relates to the number of commitments that are categorised as Major and as Outstanding. Now, to receive this category, policy commitments must fulfil criteria that "attempt to move beyond measuring outputs and deliverables to looking at how the government practice has changed as a result of the commitment's implementation" (OGP 2017, 66). Thus, the IRM criteria look at areas of policy impact where, within the two-year period of AP implementation, a commitment may have indeed opened the government. As seen in the figure, the cases I present are characterised by the lack of transformational commitments. For instance, the IRM Procedures Manual (2017) describes a *major* commitment as one that brings open governance forward but remains limited "in scope or scale" (p. 66). Whilst an *outstanding* commitment is said to have "transformed 'business as usual' in the relevant policy area" (p. 66). As seen, only the UK has more than ten major commitments, but none are outstanding. Put otherwise, this means that despite advancing specific areas of open governance, the scope and extent to which these are affected remains low and circumstantial. Interestingly, for most of the commitments, there is no assessment, i.e., the IRM did not fully comply with their mandate and is pending a thorough review of the policy implementations.

Figure 4: Proportion of IRM commitment assessment for transformational policies (2011-2023)



3.2. Public service delivery and participation

This section seeks to broadly contextualise and characterise how, despite the many commitments and circumstantial policy elements determining OGP adhesion, more precise elements of participation and accountability offer a more telling image. In this regard, Table 4 offers a summary of the variables I explore in this section. These variables are subdivided into the areas of interest, viz., *participation*, *transparency*, *public service delivery*, and *accountability*. This information is taken from both the OGP Collective Goals Method and the IRM's Procedures Manual.

Table 4: Variables with IRM-based scores

Variable	**Description***
Participation	
Freedom of Assembly	Protection of the individual right to peacefully assemble, collectively express, and petition the government for redress of grievances.
Freedom of Association	Protection of the individual right to join others for a legal common cause without interference.
Transparency	
Transparency	Any efforts explicitly aimed at promoting accessibility to the public of fiscal data and fiscal information, including open

Variable	Description*
	data, data portals, mobile phone apps, plain language guides such as Citizen Budgets, including all activities that try to encourage or facilitate participation (e.g. open data, portals, citizens budgets, etc.) but that stop short of actual public participation.
Participation	Direct engagement between the public/external parties and official entities and officials at any stage of the budget or fiscal policy cycles.
Oversight	All activities of the legislature in approving, monitoring and reviewing the budget and fiscal reports, all activities of the Supreme Audit Institution, and also of any independent fiscal institutions that provide oversight, and any activities of the Ombudsman in reviewing/enforcing public access to fiscal information.
Public Service Delivery	
Right to Information	Institutions and activities related to the drafting, implementation, servicing, oversight, and enforcement of freedom of information/access to information/ right to information laws. Note that general transparency/information disclosure activities do not meet the requirements of this tag. This tag should be applied when there is an explicit reference to a freedom of information law.
Water and Sanitation	Water & Sanitation: Cover the water/ sanitation sector.
Health	Health & Nutrition: Cover public and private health and nutrition.
Education	Education: Covers the primary, secondary, and tertiary education sector.
Accountability	
General Consultations and	Lobbying: Policies and actions affecting lobbying, i.e. any direct or indirect communication with a public official that is

Variable	Description*
Lawmaking	made, managed or directed to influence public decision-making. Public Participation: Forums (formal or informal), mechanisms, and processes that allow citizens to consult, comment or provide feedback on the actions of government, either through organised discussions with government agents and CSOs or through online interfaces that allow for public feedback on policy, public service delivery, etc. Legislature: Affects the legislative branch.
Open Rules and Regulations	Efforts explicitly aimed at releasing new information about the rulemaking process (e.g. gazettes or registers of rulemaking, publication of draft laws and policies) or giving the public a greater say in the rulemaking process (e.g. enabling commenting on draft laws or rules, creating mechanisms for the public to lodge petitions or activate judicial review of laws, policies, or rules). Rulemaking is defined as the process of creating administrative laws, rules, or regulations. Commitments involving legislation only receive this tag if the contents of the legislation explicitly aim to improve the rulemaking process.
* See OGP Collective Goals Method (https://drive.google.com/open?id=1GzhlPZOfjHduztDfsaxCNQuUfwDvCwYT). Moreover, **Participation**, as a meta-category, is different from the lower-level variable. The first one incorporates sub-variables related to freedom of assembly and association; the second one relates to the right to participate in official settings.	
Source: Author's own, based on the OGP's Collective Goals Method and the IRM's Procedure Manual	

As can be seen, the variables are broad in scope, particularly those regarding transparency and accountability. Moreover, from a methodological perspective, I must note that these dimensions are arranged according to two data sources: a) the IRM assessment, and b) a third-party scoring dataset harmonised to the IRM's approach. Third-party scores are independent studies that the IRM then takes and harmonises, for instance, the Open Budget Survey (see Renzio and Masud, 2011), but also other key secondary data sources such as the World Justice Report, Freedom House, Open Data Barometer, and the V-Dem Project.[14] The scores from these datasets are then normalised to meet their scoring scale to make them comparable. In this regard, the IRM uses a *numerical categorical system* on a 0 to 4 scale. This points scale measures two main dimensions: *ambitiousness* and *completeness*. A full score (4), for instance, would reflect a commitment that is both ambitious and completed during the AP implementation cycle, as well as having "significantly opened government" (OGP, n.d., 1). Consequently, all other scores indicate a partial implementation that is (or

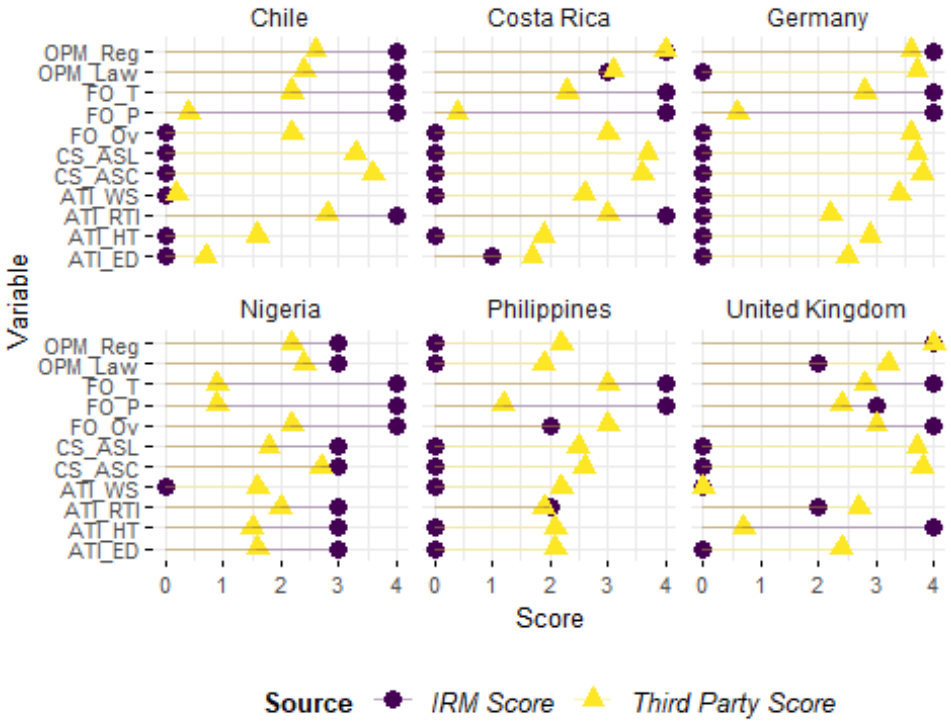
[14] See the Collective Goals Method document for further details on the coding and scoring: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1GzhlPZOfjHduztDfsaxCNQuUfwDvCwYT

was) neither completed nor ambitious enough. A score of 0 means no commitment was made in the respective dimension. To my ends, the scores allow for an indicative perspective that evidences the dissimilarity between the reported, the assessment, and other specialised evaluations.

In this regard, Figure 5 shows a comparative plot of the data for these eleven variables.[15] The plot is divided by country and, crucially, signals the main data sources (IRM's assessment and IRM's normalised third-party sources). Again, several important elements stand out, aligning with the discussion on institutional standards and structural determinants. For instance, Germany's IRM scores are zero in all but three variables (lobbying and legislature, transparency, and participation). Interestingly, this case shows how transparency and participation may contrast with any level of accountability. Admittedly, as it was seen, Germany has the fewest commitments from the fewest APs. Contrastingly, the third-party scores for the same variables are all high-scoring compared to the other cases. This dynamic shows a significant gap between the expert assessment and the systematic analysis of specific dimensions of governance. The latter can go to broad analytical depths, whereas the former has to rely on a limited set of indicators and other expert opinions in fields where there may not be any information. Again, the case of Germany is paradigmatic since it is indicative of a higher baseline, but also of a degrading esteem of open governance, similar to Tai et al.'s (2024) findings on the perceived impact of open government when general distrust is particularly high.

[15] As they appear in order in the plot: Open Policymaking - Lobbying and Legislature, Open Policymaking - Regulations, Fiscal Openness - Transparency, Fiscal Openness - Participation, Fiscal Openness - Accountability, Civil Society - Freedom of Assembly, Civil Society - Freedom of Association, Access to Information - Water and Sanitation, Access to Information - Right to Information, Access to Information - Health, and Access to Information - Education.

Figure 5: Comparison of the IRM scores and the IRM-normalised third-party scores (2011-2023)



On the contrary (yet also in a similar degrading path), the UK shows an inverse behaviour, in which the IRM scores appear to overestimate specific governance dimensions. For instance, and also paradigmatic of the UK example is the score difference in the dimension of health, given that the National Health Service (NHS) is one of the pillars of British social policy. However, the difference is dramatic, covering almost the full scale – this means that the IRM over-reports the significance of the commitments done in relation to the data and participatory dimensions of health provision, for the accountability score appears overestimated. The UK is the country with the most commitments presented in the four APs implemented – it is also the only country in this sample (and in general, accompanied by six other cases) that is in a procedural review to assess its further adhesion to the organisation. The gaps shown in Figure 5 are indicative of an evaluative mismatch that may reflect the country's increasing lack of interest in pursuing its open governance policies.

Chile also presents a scenario where the overestimation of IRM's assessments of transparency, participation, accountability, the right to information and, in general, the regulation framework is indicative of poor management of the open governance agenda. As briefly mentioned, the Chilean case is characterised by a dramatic development of civil unrest, followed by a heavy and militarised crackdown on demonstrations, and finally a democratic process that led to a political shift. However, during these events, the country found itself deliberating on a new constitution, which led to a referendum vote determined by a volatile socio-political context that saw the new text be rejected (Dulci and Sadivia, 2021; Escudero, 2021). In this context, and carrying out policies from a previous government, the Chilean administration seemed to have reduced its efforts in pushing the open governance agenda. Similar to Costa Rica, the IRM assessment of Chile overestimates the access to the information framework.

The Costa Rican case shows a mix of dynamics that cannot be put in a pattern. For instance, it seems that the IRM reporting underestimates the levels of open data from public services, though it more or less agrees with the level of the regulatory framework in this regard. Yet, it is dramatically evident how little coincidence there is regarding participation. External scores rate this dimension rather poorly, whereas the IRM seems to overestimate it to the fullest. This difference may be generated by different processes running in parallel and with distinct objectives. Admittedly, the participation variable seen here is more closely related to budget and fiscal matters. However, Costa Rican public institutions may offer other spaces to interact with civil society (e.g., the chamber of Parliament or the outreach office of the Judiciary). Nonetheless, Costa Rica is also a receiver of an OGP Letter, indicating a lack of advancement into what should be a new AP. The current administration seems to disregard open governance and has frozen the advancement of OGP policies altogether.

The IRM data is furthermore confusing. A notable trend that cuts across all five cases is the non-existent score in the dimensions of civil freedoms (assembly and association, notably, apart from Nigeria). The IRM assessment in this regard is highly skewed, reflecting no commitment from any of the five countries in matters of civil liberties. Yet, no conclusive evidence is available, as most process data for these case studies in relation to elements of participation is coded as *Pending IRM Review*. Again, this phenomenon may speak of little disconnection between the IRM assessment and the countries' self-reporting practices. Thus, replicating frameworks that attempt to display better performances in key indicators than those that could be effectively measured (or proxied).

Table 4, additionally, presents a correlation matrix of the IRM-normalised external scores. Since these indicators are continuous, the harmonisation makes them also continuous (i.e., numeric) and, thus, with intermediate values. The IRM scores, on the other hand, represent categories and thus are strictly integers, which cannot be fully correlated.[16] The results in the table evidence the contradicting data shown previously; transparency appears to be positively correlated with open educational data, firstly, and oversight and accountability, secondly. Regarding public services, these are correlated rather than mixed with the other variables – education, for instance, showing a high correlation with accountability. This dynamic follows a basic premise that, on one hand, demands for a better education push civil society actors to engage in more demands for openness and transparency and, on the other hand, more knowledge about the education administration leads to more demands for oversight. This dynamic calls for detailed analysis in a broader setting.

[16] A Chi-squared test of independence results in insignificant *p*-values, meaning thus that there is not relationship between the variables (transparency as baseline).

*Table 5: Correlation matrix of IRM normalised third-party scores (2011-2023)**

	FO_T	FO_P	FO_Ov	OPM_Reg	CS_ASL	CS_ASC	OPM_Law	ATI_WS	ATI_HT	ATI_ED	ATI_RTI
FO_T	-	0.29 (0.579)	0.74 (0.096)	0.42 (0.413)	0.65 (0.166)	0.38 (0.454)	0.25 (0.64)	0.12 (0.814)	0.23 (0.656)	0.49 (0.326)	0.12 (0.819)
FO_P	0.29 (0.579)	-	0.15 (0.781)	0.22 (0.672)	0.04 (0.935)	0.03 (0.953)	0.05 (0.929)	-0.51 (0.306)	-0.66 (0.152)	0.54 (0.267)	-0.09 (0.866)
FO_Ov	0.74 (0.096)	0.15 (0.781)	-	0.6 (0.203)	0.58 (0.226)	0.39 (0.438)	0.65 (0.164)	0.62 (0.19)	0.53 (0.281)	0.83 (0.041)	-0.07 (0.896)
OPM_Reg	0.42 (0.413)	0.22 (0.672)	0.6 (0.203)	-	0.87 (0.025)	0.84 (0.038)	0.86 (0.029)	0.09 (0.867)	-0.08 (0.881)	0.44 (0.383)	0.67 (0.149)
CS_ASL	0.65 (0.166)	0.04 (0.935)	0.58 (0.226)	0.87 (0.025)	-	0.93 (0.007)	0.74 (0.094)	0.01 (0.98)	0.08 (0.88)	0.22 (0.677)	0.72 (0.106)
CS_ASC	0.38 (0.454)	0.03 (0.953)	0.39 (0.438)	0.84 (0.038)	0.93 (0.007)	-	0.82 (0.045)	-0.12 (0.815)	-0.03 (0.959)	0.1 (0.844)	0.74 (0.095)
OPM_Law	0.25 (0.64)	0.05 (0.929)	0.65 (0.164)	0.86 (0.029)	0.74 (0.094)	0.82 (0.045)	-	0.29 (0.573)	0.21 (0.688)	0.5 (0.314)	0.38 (0.46)
ATI_WS	0.12 (0.814)	-0.51 (0.306)	0.62 (0.19)	0.09 (0.867)	0.01 (0.98)	-0.12 (0.815)	0.29 (0.573)	-	0.88 (0.022)	0.43 (0.399)	-0.36 (0.484)

	FO_T	FO_P	FO_Ov	OPM_Reg	CS_ASL	CS_ASC	OPM_Law	ATI_WS	ATI_HT	ATI_ED	ATI_RTI
ATI_HT	0.23 (0.656)	-0.66 (0.152)	0.53 (0.281)	-0.08 (0.881)	0.08 (0.88)	-0.03 (0.959)	0.21 (0.688)	0.88 (0.022)	-	0.2 (0.709)	-0.36 (0.487)
ATI_ED	0.49 (0.326)	0.54 (0.267)	0.83 (0.041)	0.44 (0.383)	0.22 (0.677)	0.1 (0.844)	0.5 (0.314)	0.43 (0.399)	0.2 (0.709)	-	-0.35 (0.492)
ATI_RTI	0.12 (0.819)	-0.09 (0.866)	-0.07 (0.896)	0.67 (0.149)	0.72 (0.106)	0.74 (0.095)	0.38 (0.46)	-0.36 (0.484)	-0.36 (0.487)	-0.35 (0.492)	-

*Correlations calculated with the aggregated and normalised third-party scores (p-values in parentheses)

3.1. The analytical relevance of governance scores

Carrying on with the focus on the quantitative scores assigned by third-party entities, this section encapsulates an approach based on the whole dataset.[17] The approach followed here is based on a dimension reduction better known statistically as Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Although limited in overall explanatory power, the PCA approach is a valuable tool when assessing data limited by inherent differences in generalising dimensions (see Lever et al., 2017). In the cases I presented thus far, these differences can be attributed to overarching structural conditions that the data sources do not necessarily consider (or even just bluntly omit – empirical discussions on the role of historical structures for development are found in (Acemoglu et al., 2001; 2005). These conditions are mostly overseen or omitted by strictly quantitative measurements, more so when even that information is lacking altogether.

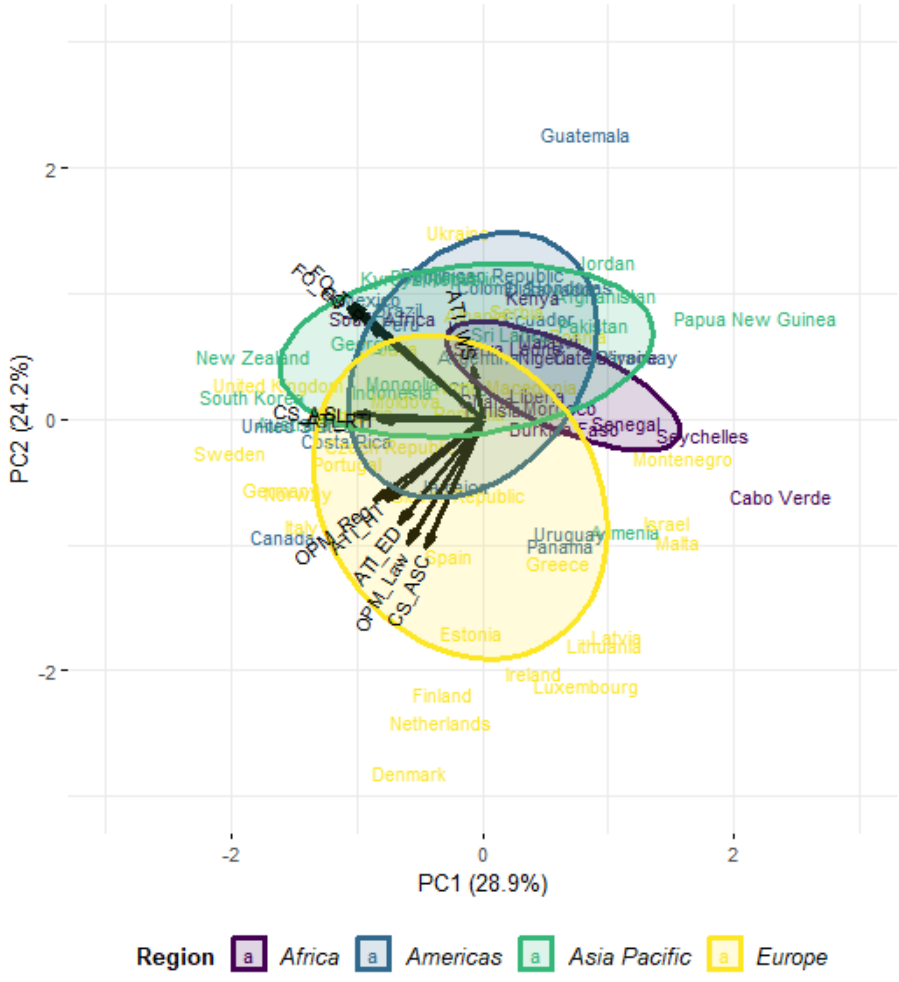
Moreover, an analytical attempt at reducing the dimensions that separate the variables offers a linking perspective, in that it more clearly shows the distance between cases and what it means for the foundational premises implied in the data. For instance, taking the IRM-normalised data for all the active OGP member States (n=77), I estimate a PCA for the eleven dimensions shown in Figure 5.[18] The first two components account for the largest share of variance explained (~70%). The values are grouped by their regional category and displayed according to their position in the bidimensional placement regarding the two main components.

[17] This is due to the fact of robustness, as few cases skew the analysis and offer non-reliable results.

[18] *No Data* fields are contained in the data. Following an analytical premise of assessment completion and empirical soundness, I take these NA values as equivalent to zero scores (0).

Figure 6 exemplifies the visual representation of the analysis. The reading and interpretation of it can be summarised in what it effectively represents: two dimensions that reduce distances between cases in relation to the distance of the dimensions decomposed along the axes. Hence, the x-axis, displaying the first principal component (PC1), can be read as the overall level of transparency and openness (crucially, the score on the axis is indicative of the difference between the cases on the left regarding those on the right). On the flip side, the second principal component (PC2) shown on the y-axis is indicative of the difference between the freedom of information variables (FO_T and FO_P) and both the accountability and services variables.[19] Moreover, the x-axis is also evidence of the lack of a framework for civil society participation in relation to the rest of the transparency and accountability variables (see the diverging direction of the CS_ASL and ATI_RTI regarding the rest). Thus, the placement of the cases relies on the intersection of both characteristics and the relative distance to another in relation to each dimension.

Figure 6: PCA biplot of IRM-normalised third-party scores (2011-2023)



[19] The water services dimension is diametrically opposed to the rest, showing the contention that this field contains. Presumably, the difference this indicator presents in relation to the rest may be related to the management of the resource and the socio-economic conditions that characterise it (e.g., privatisation and for-profit exploitation, as well as water treatment). For a specific case study, see Boldbaatar et al. (2019).

The plot shows supporting evidence for my previously discussed premise, in that the cases distribution follows the geographic classification overlaid on the visualisation. This classification is determined by the political-economic characteristics discussed previously, as the proxy measurements for the variables analysed replicate economic development prejudices (see Sovacool and Andrews, 2015; Sovacool et al., 2016; Marino et al., 2016; Nawaz, 2015 for different approaches to a critique of growth theories). Similarly, regarding the alleged transparency and open governance claims made by each of the cases represented in the OGP, the distribution also evidences clear gaps between the practical and narrative actions. As Schnell and Jo had put it, this relates to the gap between the *de jure* and the *de facto* layers of transparency (2019), which affect the policy translation of institutional operations in this area.

The alleged commitment of some of these extreme cases to the open governance principles may be rightfully questioned. Firstly, relating to those on the rightmost side of the plot are there due to their systematic disregard for openness and social participation mechanisms. In other words, these are cases where neither information nor accountability is upheld as governing actions (see Cruz Romero, 2023, for an extensive discussion of these two dimensions as constitutive of transparency frameworks). For the case of Denmark (the Netherlands, Finland, Luxembourg, and Ireland, for that matter), a somewhat more problematic dynamic can be inferred. For instance, these are all cases of archetypical liberal-democratic societies, where the rule of law is the basis of public administration actions. Yet, the question then is directly linked to the content and extent of the legal frameworks in each of these. Arguably, these characteristics refer to a higher baseline for the weight of information, however, the role of civic participation (and accountability achieved through such means) is telling of a broader social dimension. Admittedly, the argument could be that fewer issues with information transparency led to fewer demands for accountability mechanisms. Nonetheless, a large corpus of scholarly work shows that this characterisation of accountability, corruption, and demands for more transparency are not so linear (to note a few, see Albassam 2015; Andreula and Chong 2016; De Simone et al., 2017; Harrison and Sayogo 2014; Nunes et al., 2023). Hence, future work could dissect these *contradicting* cases more carefully.

4. Implications for the institutional consolidation of transparency

Institutional perspectives of development insist on the determinants of path-dependency and critical junctures on the trajectory of consolidation of administrative structures (Bjurulf and Elgström, 2004; Erkkilä, 2020; Joshi, 2013). Yet, as discussed above, these preconditions are initially established in non-democratic settings and persist over time and across different critical contexts. Thus, the nature of the OGP vis-à-vis the so-called international rules-based order is attached and dependent on the tide of geopolitical currents dominated by the (neo)liberal actors therein (Garsten and De Montoya, 2008) and the conditions first noted (Acharya, 2017) determining these. From this perspective and taking into consideration the role of supra-national political-economic interdependencies, the OGP has managed to position itself as a (if not *the*) reference organisation in terms of openness, transparency, and accountability.

The international focus on transparency governance shifted (or developed) into a framework for deepening neoliberal reforms aimed at providing maximum assurance for investment and extractive industries. The EITI is a prime example of the extent of the security demanded by business and investment sectors, in that it argues that the "incidence of corruption caused by a lack of transparency in revenue management in many resource-rich countries has made them highly indebted poor countries with a low per capita income, with slow progress in human rights development and recurring social and political instability" (Faruque, 2006, p. 67). Hence, the transparency narrative cannot be anything other than positive for both public and private sectors – the State, then, must create and foster the conditions for private investment, resource extraction, and efficient service delivery.

Hence, as Joshi points out in relation to the link between transparency and to service provision, the core of a "related set of claims is that transparency and accountability lead to increased responsiveness on the part of providers, in the form of improved access and quality of services, and consequently to better developmental outcomes. (…) Yet there is no clear reason why all these assumptions will hold true in a specific case" (2013, p. 541). Thus, beyond the normative prescriptions of the likes of the OGP, there are still few empirical foundations with which to assess the role of transparency initiatives in the overall transformation of service provision and, more relevant, service quality.

The implications for institutional transparency are thus grim; the relevance of civic participation is relegated to official instances, creating political scenarios of opacity and secrecy. The development towards this direction has been clear, but recent, meaning that its undoing might not be as insurmountable as it may appear. Civil society still has options to reclaim its role within co-creation and implementation initiatives. The OGP could have the potential to become a key player in this regard, but the empirical elements discussed thus far, along with transnationally stringent political conditions, the realisation of that potential is far from reality. Hence, *ceteris paribus,* good governance can only remain a mirage of false pretensions and underlying inequalities. In a radical sense, deepened transparency frameworks (both civic and institutional) could help transform that.

5. Concluding remarks

As stated initially, the goal of this research was to identify the extent to which open governance influences inclusion and accountability within the frame of the transparency policy framework. As the exploratory approach has shown, there are several mismatches at the data level with which the OGP, through its mandated evaluation entity – the IRM, conducts its mission of supporting open governance agendas. Thus, the analytical exploration reveals a complex and nuanced landscape. While the OGP represents a significant step towards fostering greater openness and responsiveness in governance, the evidence suggests that the interplay between these elements does not always lead to straightforward outcomes. Indeed, the findings shown above suggest that the relationship between transparency, public participation, and accountability is multifaceted and context-dependent, yielding mixed results across different contexts and initiatives.

The five cases presented are evidence of this context-dependency. Whereas institutional stability determined the initial moves for some (Germany and the UK), later political shocks moved the agenda of open governance to the background (Chile, the UK, and Germany). The role of institutional development is indeed paramount; however, the role of structural transparency's determinants remains under-explored and under-problematised, leading to false assessments of a country's administrative capacity (e.g., see Roelofs, 2023). Furthermore, the data offered by OGP and IRM present opportunities for further analyses, looking in detail at specific events that caused turns in a country's open governance trajectory. In my contribution, looking into the five cases discussed, I presented some insights and evidence for a mixed and multi-dimensional analysis. Countries act differently depending on their political reality. Yet, there are inconsistencies regarding the empirical foundations of the data at hand, which raises some questions about the dimensions of transparency and accountability studied by the IRM and the external entities.

Additionally, in terms of linking inclusion in public service delivery (and the participation for better data from these) and accountability, the data shows inconsistent patterns, also institutionally and contextually dependent on the specific elements in each case. The NHS in the UK, the Judiciary in Costa Rica, or the Constitutional Assembly in Chile. However, no clear line of association can be drawn empirically. Only on the conceptual level can the premise of more accountability based on more transparency seem to hold – there is at least a minimum statistical grounding for that (Table 4). These dynamics can only help to clarify and strengthen the argument made previously, that international governance bodies sometimes mistake the causes and consequences of certain administrative maladies and replicate scripts that hold problematic premises at their core. This contribution can help shed light on a more critical approach to the role of international organisations and their pursuit of openness and efficiency, pointing towards the relevance of context and relations.

Despite the inherent challenges and inconsistencies, it is evident that the OGP has contributed to advancing principles of transparency, public participation, and accountability on a global scale. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the limitations and shortcomings that persist within the partnership, including issues of implementation, inclusivity, and effectiveness. Moving forward, future research and policy efforts should seek to address these complexities and uncertainties, with a focus on fostering a more robust understanding of how best to harness the potential of transparency, public participation, and accountability to promote open and effective governance. Only through continued inquiry and innovation on the nature and extent of the OGP's (and its member States') actions can we seek to better contextualise and understand the extent of the promise of openness and transparency in promoting democratic governance and enhancing citizen trust and engagement.

References

Abbott, K. W. (2008). *Enriching rational choice institutionalism for the study of international law*. University of Illinois Law Review, 2008, 5.

Acemoglu, D., Cheema, A., Khwaja, A. I., & Robinson, J. A. (2020). *Trust in state and nonstate actors: Evidence from dispute resolution in Pakistan*. Journal of Political Economy, 128(8), 3090–3147. https://doi.org/10.1086/707765

Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. (2001). *The colonial origins of comparative development: An empirical investigation.* The American Economic Review, 91(5), 1369–1401.

Acemoglu, D., Robinson, J. A., & Johnson, S. (2005). Institutions as the fundamental cause of long-run growth. In P. Aghion & S. Durlauf (Eds.), *Handbook of Economic Growth* (1st ed., Vol. 1A, pp. 374–484). North Holland. https://www.sciencedirect.com/handbook/handbook-of-economic-growth

Acharya, A. (2017). *After liberal hegemony: The advent of a multiplex world order**. Ethics & International Affairs, 31(3), 271–285. https://doi.org/10.1017/S089267941700020X

Afiyah, S. (2024). *The Impact of E-Government Services, Citizen Participation, and Transparency on Public Trust in Government*. Global International Journal of Innovative Research, 2(6), 1246–1261. https.//doi.org/10.59613/global.v2i6.200.

Albassam, B. A. (2015). *The influence of budget transparency on quality of governance*. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 7(1), 227–238. https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2016.v7n1p227

Alt, J. E., Lassen, D. D., & Rose, S. (2006). *The causes of fiscal transparency: Evidence from the U.S. states*. IMF Staff Papers, 53, 30–57.

Andreula, N., & Chong, A. (2016). *Do good institutions improve fiscal transparency?* Economics of Governance, 17(3), 241–263. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10101-015-0175-8

Babbie, E. R. (2010). *The practice of social research* (12th ed.). Wadsworth Inc Fulfillment.

Ball, C. (2009). *What is transparency?* Public Integrity, 11(4), 293–308. https://doi.org/10.2753/PIN1099-9922110400

Bassanini, A., & Scarpetta, S. (2001). *The driving forces of economic growth: Panel data evidence for the OECD countries* (33; OECD Economic Studies, p. 49). Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Bjurulf, B., & Elgström, O. (2004). *Negotiating transparency: The role of institutions*. JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 42(2), 249–269. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2004.00487.x

Boldbaatar, D., Kunz, N. C., & Werker, E. (2019). *Improved resource governance through transparency: Evidence from Mongolia*. Extractive Industries and Society - An International Journal, 6(3), 775–787. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2018.12.007

Bovens, M. (2010). *Two concepts of accountability: Accountability as a virtue and as a mechanism*. West European Politics, 33(5), 946–967. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2010.486119

Bukovansky, M. (2006*). The hollowness of anti-corruption discourse*. Review of International Political Economy, 13(2), 181–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290600625413

Burger, R., & Owens, T. (2010). *Promoting transparency in the NGO sector: Examining the availability and reliability of self-reported data*. World Development, 38(9), 1263–1277. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2009.12.018

Chikoto, G. (2015). *Steering international ngos through time: The influence of temporal structuring in government accountability requirements.* Nonprofit Policy Forum, 6(1), 59–90. https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2014-0016

Chong, S. P. C., Tee, C. M., & Cheng, S. V. (2020*). Political institutions and the control of corruption: A cross-country evidence.* Journal of Financial Crime, 28(1), 26–48. https://doi.org/10.1108/JFC-05-2020-0094

Cruz Romero, R. (2023). Defining Transparency: A Functional Approach. *JeDEM - eJournal of eDemocracy and Open Government*, 15(1), 219–242. https://doi.org/10.29379/jedem.v15i1.714

de Renzio, P., & Masud, H. (2011). *Measuring and promoting budget transparency: The open budget index as a research and advocacy tool: Measuring and promoting budget transparency*. Governance-an International Journal of Policy and Administration, 24(3), 607–616. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2011.01539.x

De Simone, E., Gaeta, G. L., & Mourão, P. R. (2017). *The impact of fiscal transparency on corruption: An empirical analysis based on longitudinal data.* The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy, 17(4). https://doi.org/10.1515/bejeap-2017-0021

Dulci, T. M. S., & Sadivia, V. A. (2021). *El estallido social en chile: ¿rumbo a un nuevo constitucionalismo?* Revista Katálysis, 24(1), 43–52. https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-0259.2021.e73555

Erkkilä, T. (2020). *Transparency in public administration*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, May 2020, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1404

Escudero, M. C. (2021). *Expectativas ciudadanas frente a una asamblea constituyente: La experiencia chilena.* Revista de Ciencias Sociales Ambos Mundos, 2, 79. https://doi.org/10.14198/ambos.21034

Faruque, A. A. (2006*). Transparency in extractive revenues in developing countries and economies in transition: A review of emerging best practices*. Journal of Energy & Natural Resources Law, 24(1), 66–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/02646811.2006.11433426

Fioretos, O. (2011). *Historical institutionalism in international relations*. International Organization, 65(2), 367–399.

Fox, J. (2007). *Government transparency and policymaking*. Public Choice, 131(1–2), 23–44. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-006-9103-3

Fraundorfer, M. (2017). *The open government partnership: Mere smokescreen or new paradigm?* Globalizations, 14(4), 611–626. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2016.1236463

Garsten, C., & De Montoya, M. L. (Eds.). (2008). *Transparency in a new global order: Unveiling organizational visions.* Edward Elgar.

Garsten, C., & Jacobsson, K. (2011). *Transparency and legibility in international institutions: The UN Global Compact and post-political global ethics*. Social Anthropology, 19(4), 378–393. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2011.00171.x

Glaeser, E. L., La Porta, R., Lopez-de-Silanes, F., & Shleifer, A. (2004). *Do institutions cause growth?* Journal of Economic Growth, 9(3), 271–303. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JOEG.0000038933.16398.ed

Green, C. (2022, February 2*). UK Government backslides on commitments to open government in new National Action Plan*. https://www.involve.org.uk/news-opinion/news/uk-government-backslides-commitments-open-government-new-national-action-plan

Gundlach, E., & Paldam, M. (2009*). The transition of corruption: From poverty to honesty*. Economics Letters, 103(3), 146–148. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2009.03.002

Hanrieder, T. (2014). *Gradual change in international organisations: Agency theory and historical institutionalism*. Politics, 34(4), 324–333. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12050

Harrison, T. M., & Sayogo, D. S. (2014). *Transparency, participation, and accountability practices in open government: A comparative study*. Government Information Quarterly, 31(4, SI), 513–525. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2014.08.002

Joshi, A. (2013*). Do they work? Assessing the impact of transparency and accountability initiatives in service delivery*. Development Policy Review, 31(s1), 29–48. https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12018

Kay, A. (2005). *A critique of the use of path dependency in policy studies*. Public Administration, 83(3), 553–571. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-3298.2005.00462.x

Kong, T. (2005). *Political institutions and economic growth* (R. Garnaut & L. Song, Eds.; pp. 53–86). ANU Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jbkcr.12

Lever, J., Krzywinski, M., & Altman, N. (2017). *Principal component analysis*. Nature Methods, 14(7), 641–642. https://doi.org/10.1038/nmeth.4346

Mabillard, V., & Zumofen, R. (2017). *The complex relationship between transparency and accountability: A synthesis and contribution to existing frameworks*. Public Policy and Administration, 32(2), 110–129. https://doi.org/10.1177/0952076716653651.

Marino, P. de B. L. P., Soares, R. A., Luca, M. M. M. D., Vasconcelos, A. C. de, Marino, P. de B. L. P., Soares, R. A., Luca, M. M. M. D., & Vasconcelos, A. C. de. (2016). *Global Governance Indicators: How they relate to the socioeconomic indicators of the BRICS countries.* Revista de Administração Pública, 50(5), 721–744. https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7612144359

Mena, S., & Palazzo, G. (2012). *Input and output legitimacy of multi-stakeholder initiatives.* Business Ethics Quarterly, 22(3), 527–556. https://doi.org/10.5840/beq201222333

Moses, O., Ehalaiye, D., Sorola, M., & Lassou, P. (2023). *Extractive sector governance: Does a nexus of accountability render local extractive industries transparency initiatives ineffective?* Meditari Accountancy Research, 32(1), 176–206. https://doi.org/10.1108/MEDAR-08-2021-1426.

Nawaz, S. (2015). *Growth effects of institutions: A disaggregated analysis*. Economic Modelling, 45, 118–126. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econmod.2014.11.017

Nunes, C., Gomes, P., & Santana, J. (2023). *Transparency, accountability, and governance: A literature review in the context of public hospitals*. RAP: Brazilian Journal of Public Administration, 57, e2022. https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-761220220238x

O'Dwyer, B., & Boomsma, R. (2015). *The co-construction of NGO accountability: Aligning imposed and felt accountability in NGO-funder accountability relationships.* Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 28(1), 36–68. https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-10-2013-1488

OGP. (n.d.). *Collective goals method*. https://drive.google.com/open?id=1GzhlpZOfjHduztDfsaxCNQuUfwDvCwYT

OGP. (2011). *Open government declaration*. https://www.opengovpartnership.org/process/joining-ogp/open-government-declaration/

OGP. (2017). *IRM procedures manual*. https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/IRM-Procedures-Manual-v4_Sept2017.docx

OGP. (2019). *Democracy beyond the ballot box: Open government partnership global report.*

OGP. (2022). *OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards*. https://www.opengovpartnership.org/ogp-participation-co-creation-standards/

Okon, S. U. (2024). *Enhancing Transparency and Accountability in Public Service through Open Data Initiatives: Insights from Estonia and Policy Recommendations for the United States*. Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting, 24(9), 328–349. https://doi.org/ 10.9734/ajeba/2024/v24i91496.

Paldam, M. (2002). *The cross-country pattern of corruption: Economics, culture and the seesaw dynamics.* European Journal of Political Economy, 18(2), 215–240. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0176-2680(02)00078-2

Potrafke, N. (2015). *The evidence on globalisation*. The World Economy, 38(3), 509–552. https://doi.org/10.1111/twec.12174

Roelofs, P. (2023). *Good governance in Nigeria: Rethinking accountability and transparency in the twenty-first century.* Cambridge University Press.

Schnell, S., & Jo, S. (2019*). Which countries have more open governments? Assessing structural determinants of openness.* The American Review of Public Administration, 49(8), 944–956. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074019854445

Scholl, H. J. (2024, December 18). *The Digital Government Reference Library*. Krems, Austria: Center for E-Governance (CEG), Danube University. Retrieved April 1, 2025, from https://faculty.washington.edu/jscholl/dgrl/

Simmons, B. A., & Goemans, H. E. (2021). *Built on Borders: Tensions with the Institution Liberalism (Thought It) Left Behind*. International Organization, 75(2), 387–410. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000600.

Sohaib, O., Arman, A., Begum, V., & Arshi, T. (2024). *Applying fuzzy logic to balanced scorecard for the performance evaluation of government e-services.* Journal of Science and Technology Policy Management (ahead of print), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTPM-06-2023-0096

Sonnenfeld, A., Stevenson, J., & Waddington, H. S. (2024). *Does citizen engagement improve development outcomes? A realist-informed systematic review of participation and accountability mechanisms.* Journal of Development Effectiveness, 16(1), 27–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/19439342.2022.2153380.

Sovacool, B. K., & Andrews, N. (2015). *Does transparency matter? Evaluating the governance impacts of the extractive industries transparency initiative (EITI) in Azerbaijan and Liberia.* Resources Policy, 45, 183–192. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2015.04.003

Sovacool, B. K., Walter, G., van de Graaf, T., & Andrews, N. (2016*). Energy governance, transnational rules, and the resource curse: Exploring the effectiveness of the extractive industries transparency initiative (EITI)*. World Development, 83, 179–192. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2016.01.021

Srivastava, S. K., Srivastava ,Praveen Ranjan, & and Zhang, J. Z. (2024*). E-Government and Corruption: Is Accountability a Bridge?* Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce, 34(1), 46–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/10919392.2024.2303943.

Sumanjeet. (2015). *Institutions, transparency, and economic growth*. Emerging Economy Studies, 1(2), 188–210. https://doi.org/10.1177/2394901515599272

Tai, K.-T., Awasthi, P., & Lee, I. P. (2024). *Open government data and self-efficacy: The empirical evidence of micro foundation via survey experiments*. Government Information Quarterly. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2024.101975.

Thorpe, S., & Pokhrel, B. (2024). A review of digital government challenges in developing nations. (T. X. Bui, Ed.) Proceedings of the 57th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-57). Honolulu, HI, USA: University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Wang, V., & Shepherd, D. (2020). *Exploring the extent of openness of open government data – A critique of open government datasets in the UK.* Government Information Quarterly, 37(1), 101405. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2019.101405

Author Contributions

RCR: Methodology; validation; data curation, writing and review; review; statistical/data analysis; researcher.

About the Author

Roberto Cruz Romero

Roberto Cruz Romero is a PhD Candidate at the Graduate School of Global and Area Studies (GSGAS) at Leipzig University. He is also a researcher at the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) in Berlin. He has a background in political science, as well as in public policy and good governance. His research interests focus on the intersection of institutional development, democratic governance, comparative analyses and mixed methods approaches. He has extensive experience in policy consulting and evaluation with national and international institutions in Costa Rica and Germany.

