OPEN GOVERNMENT

OPEN GOVERNMENT
IMPACT & OUTCOMES

Mapping the Landscape of Ongoing Research

World Bank Open Government Global Solutions Group

March 2016

WORLD BANK GROUP
Governance

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the findings of a mapping exercise commissioned by the World Bank and designed to map the general landscape of research focused on the impact and outcomes associated with open government. It was conceptualized and overseen by the recently created Open Government Research Consortium, which is comprised of the Bank's Open Government Global Solutions Group, the Open Government Partnership, New York University's Govlab, Global Integrity, and Results for Development (R4D). While developed in close collaboration with all Consortium members, the report does not purport to represent the views of these organizations.

The purpose of this report is to inform the research strategy of the Bank, as well as of the Consortium, on open government and its impact. The findings should also be useful for open government stakeholders interested in further understanding the current "state of play" in this quickly evolving field. Based on information from 20 respondent organizations from across the academic-practitioner spectrum, the report maps a selection of open government interventions currently under study, as well as the outcomes and impact associated with each. Looking ahead, and with this landscape in mind, the Bank can contribute to understanding of open government in several ways.

First, research on the impact of open government remains relatively nascent. Given the vast opportunity for research in this area, **the Bank could focus on narrow questions that build upon its own expertise and added value**. Specifically, research on access to information laws, and social accountability would be particularly welcome.

Second, the majority of current research projects focus on outputs and outcomes, not impact. The research identified **an opportunity for the Bank to leverage its convening power to help connect the causal chain from intervention to outcomes and impact**. This causal chain might be illustrated by a relatively abstract theory of change and/or a set of loosely connected hypotheses about open government and its impact.

Third, research on ICTs and "open data" is well-represented. Investments in this area are large. But a large portion of this research focuses on testing ICT tools rather than measuring impact or outcomes. **The Bank could help to hone a focus on the benefit (or not) of these tools to society, building on its 2016 World Development Report**.

Fourth, this landscape reveals a relatively large amount of experimental research on open government. But for practitioners, including the Bank's clients, the usefulness of such research is not always self-evident. **The Bank could contribute to experimental research by bridging what is academically interesting and what is practically useful**.

Finally, the significance of the Open Government Partnership is reflected in the number of research projects that connect to it either directly or indirectly. **Respondents recommended that the Bank could consider how to leverage its relationships with govern-**

ments and its loan portfolio to enhance understanding of the ways that OGP reforms lead to concrete change on the ground in contextually specific ways.

In sum, the Bank, as well as the Consortium, can play an important role in helping to advance this nascent field of research. Ultimately, as understanding of open government improves, the Bank's investments can become a catalytic vehicle for more systemic change that can contribute to shared prosperity and the elimination of extreme poverty.

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes findings of a recent World Bank-funded mapping exercise designed to map the general landscape of research focused on the outcomes and impact associated with open government reforms and interventions. It was conceptualized and overseen by the recently created Open Government Research Consortium, which is comprised of the Bank's Open Government Global Solutions Group, the Open Government Partnership, New York University's Govlab, Global Integrity, and Results for Development (R4D).

The purpose of the exercise is twofold. First, the report will help inform the development of the Bank's open government research strategy, which will be delivered by the Governance Global Practice's Open Government Global Solutions Group. The landscape provided here will serve this new strategy by identifying gaps in the research activities and the Bank's comparative advantage in filling some of these gaps. Ultimately, research should improve the quality of investments by the Bank and other development partners. Second, the report serves to take stock of current research, and seeks to help open government stakeholders – both researchers and practitioners - maximize synergies and complementarity for enhanced results.

The parameters of this exercise were defined by both substantive and formal limitations. Research on "open government", by some measures, could conceivably draw in much of the field of political science and economics. Indeed, the notorious ambiguity around this "buzzword" or "fuzzword" term has the potential to create more confusion than clarity[1]. In order to narrow the scope, this report builds upon definitions of open government as proposed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development[2], the US Gov-

---

1   See Cornwall, A. (2010) 'Introductory Overview: Buzzwords and Fuzzwords: Deconstructing Development Discourse', in A. Cornwall and D. Eade (eds).

2   See Gavelin, Karin; Simon Burall; and Richard Wilson (2009). "Open Government: Beyond Static Measures." A paper produced by Involve for the OECD.

ernment[3], and a variety of practitioners and academics[4].

In short, open government includes three concepts: (1) transparency (2) citizen engagement and participation and (3) responsiveness[5] (see Box I). Transparency includes government efforts to expose its inner workings to public scrutiny, but may also include citizen-driven efforts to expose information about government performance. Citizen engagement and participation includes efforts by both government and civil society to enhance and expand the interface between governments and citizens. Responsiveness includes government-led reforms or institutions that have the force of law and/or the potential to impose consequences for government entities and officials who fail to comply. These categories are not mutually exclusive, and open government, in the fullest sense, clearly requires all three.

BOX I
Types of Initiatives and Reforms Designed to Support Open Government[6]

Transparency	Citizen Engagement and Participation	Responsiveness
Access to information laws	Social accountability mechanisms	Accountability institutions
Open data portals	Beneficiary feedback mechanisms	Ombuds offices
Open contracting	Citizen consultations	Supreme audit institutions
Budget transparency portals	Public expenditure tracking surveys	Grievance redress mechanisms

Limiting the Scope

First, this report only examines research on the *outcomes* and *impact* of open government reforms and interventions. The debate about what constitutes "outputs", "outcomes" or "impact" in the results chain of open government is far from settled. However, for the purposes of this landscape, a distinction among these terms is important.

Open government "outputs" include measures of efficacy, and the extent to which the

---

3   According to the White House Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government, open government implies three principles: transparency or readily available and online information about a government's operations and decisions, participation or increased opportunities to participate in policy making, and collaboration or the use of innovative tools and methods to cooperate across all levels of Government as well as with outside actors. See https://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment.

4   See Rosie McGee and Duncan Edwards, "Introduction: Opening Governance – Change, Continuity and Conceptual Ambiguity", IDS bulletin Volume 47 | Number 1 | January 2016, available at http://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/ids-series-titles/ids-bulletin. See also , Nathaniel Heller, A Working Definition of "Open Government", Global Integrity, available at https://www.globalintegrity.org/2012/05/working-definition-opengov/

5   While we acknowledge that at times the term open government also refers to broader domains that aim at promoting government efficiency (e.g. design thinking, behavioral science), our analysis is limited to approaches that use transparency, citizen engagement, responsiveness and accountability to – among other things – improve policies and services.

6   These categories are rough; some interventions could easily fall into more than one.

reform or initiative worked as intended. Outputs are largely within the control of the government or civil society organization implementing the open government reform or intervention. For example, an access to information law (the "reform") might result in the creation of a website and standard procedures for the public to utilize (the "output"); a participatory budgeting initiative might lead a government or civil society group to schedule a number of meetings among the public and elected officials; or, a reform that creates a grievance redress mechanism might lead to the establishment of a hotline. While these effects are important, they are not included in this landscape because they do not reach far enough along the results chain of open government.
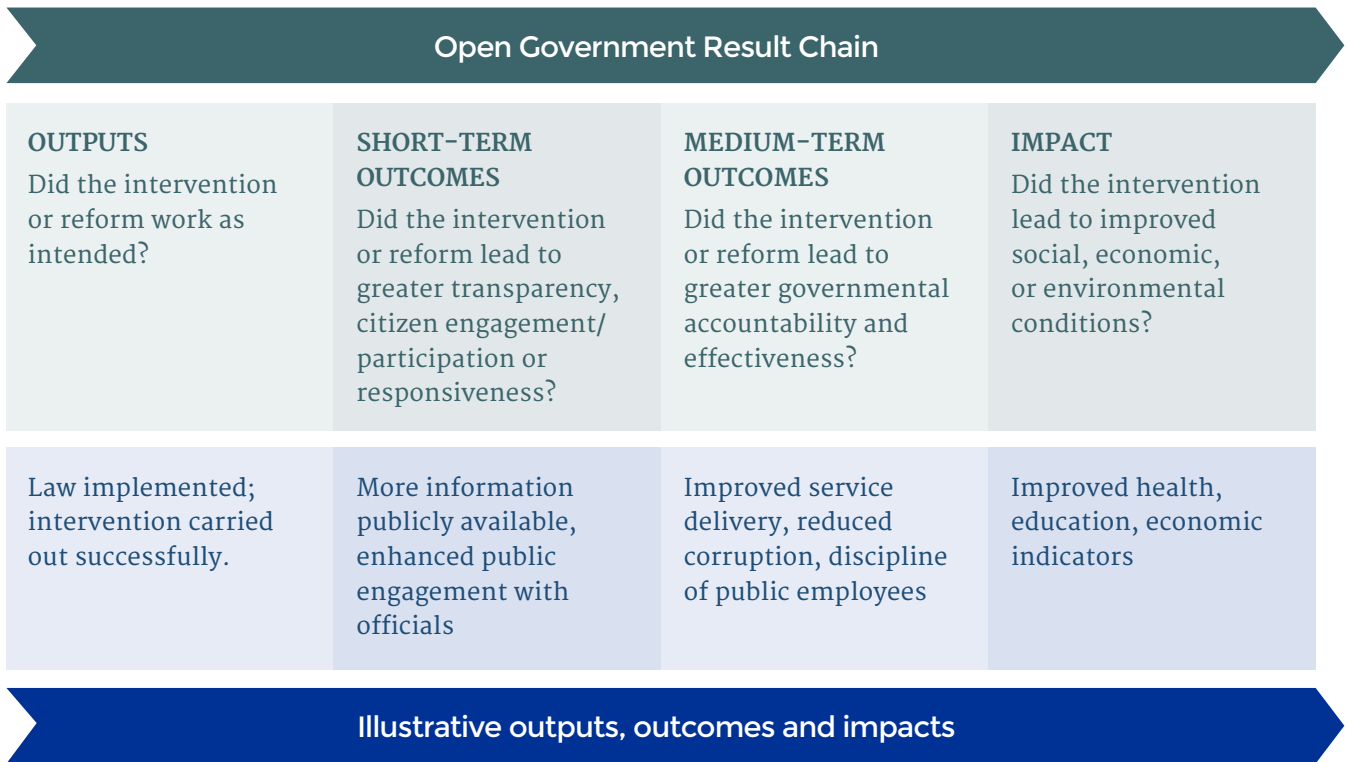
For the purpose of this landscape, "outcomes" include both short- and medium term effects of a particular reform or intervention[7]. These effects are somewhat, but not entirely, within the control of the government or civil society organization implementing the reform or intervention. In the short term, open government outcomes include the degree to which outputs actually lead to greater transparency, citizen engagement, and government responsiveness. For example, access to information laws that actually lead to greater transparency and public scrutiny, participatory budgeting initiatives that actually lead to greater citizen engagement in the budgeting process, and grievance redress mechanisms that actually respond to citizens all constitute outcomes.

In the medium term, open government outcomes include the degree to which an intervention or reform leads to greater governmental accountability and effectiveness. Accountability and effectiveness is reflected in the degree to which governmental behavior substantively changes in response to greater transparency, citizen engagement, or responsiveness reforms and initiatives. This governmental behavior change may include for example, improvements in public services; reduced corruption; and hiring, firing or discipline of public employees.

In some cases, greater accountability may lead to social, economic or environmental change. For the purposes of this landscape, this report refers to these long-term effects (both positive and negative) as "impact"[8]. Assessing the impact of open government is far more elusive than measuring outputs or outcomes. Governance interventions can be highly context dependent. Likewise, the causal chain from governance interventions to social, environmental or economic impact can be very long indeed.

---

7   See Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management (2002), available at http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/2754804.pdf

8   See Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management (2002), available at http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/2754804.pdf

Open Government Result Chain			
OUTPUTS Did the intervention or reform work as intended?	**SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES** Did the intervention or reform lead to greater transparency, citizen engagement/ participation or responsiveness?	**MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES** Did the intervention or reform lead to greater governmental accountability and effectiveness?	**IMPACT** Did the intervention lead to improved social, economic, or environmental conditions?
Law implemented; intervention carried out successfully.	More information publicly available, enhanced public engagement with officials	Improved service delivery, reduced corruption, discipline of public employees	Improved health, education, economic indicators
Illustrative outputs, outcomes and impacts			

This "outcomes" and "impact" limitation admittedly excludes some extremely valuable research on open government which examines how interventions work, when they work, why they work, and what can be done to improve them[9]. Explanatory and descriptive research was still included in this report if, in the course of answering "how and why", research also has the potential to reveal demonstrable outcomes or impact, or the lack thereof. Research that examines whether an intervention worked as intended ("efficacy"), as well as "proof of concept" research has been excluded. Clearly, such descriptive, explanatory and exploratory projects are critical to the advancement of our understanding of open government, especially at this early stage in its conceptual development. The exclusion of these projects from this particular mapping exercise illustrates the limited purpose at hand and should not be

---

9   See, e.g., see Stephen Kosack and Archon Fung, Does Transparency Improve Governance? Annual Review of Political Science Vol. 17: 65-87 (May 2014) available at http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-polis-ci-032210-144356 and Helene Grandvoinnet, Ghazia Aslam, and Shomikho Raha, Opening the Black Box: The Contextual Drivers of Social Accountability, World Bank, (2015), available at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/21686/9781464804816.pdf?sequence=4

interpreted as undermining the value of such research to the broader field.

Second, research projects included here are current and ongoing, with at least some results forthcoming. This limitation excludes projects that are part of a strategic plan but have not yet acquired at least some dedicated funding. Similarly, because this review is forward-looking, it will not serve as a literature review for existing evidence on the impact of open government. This "currency" limitation also prevents this landscape from becoming a retrospective literature review, many of which already exist[10]. Of course, the field of open government is rapidly changing, and today's mapping represents a snapshot of a point in time that builds on the experience of the past.

Third, projects must also be of considerable size and scope, larger than a single researcher looking at a single context. Projects must be international in nature. This limitation tends to exclude smaller, less well-funded research institutions that are doing important work on open government. In particular, this limitation tends to exclude organizations from the global south. By no means does this limitation indicate a judgment on the quality or importance of these more singular projects. On the contrary, this limitation is merely a pragmatic one that seeks to create reasonable boundaries for the exercise and help the

---

10   Literature reviews and syntheses abound. See, e.g., on transparency, open data and ICTs: Tiago Peixoto and Jonathan Fox, When Does ICT-Enabled Citizen Voice Lead to Government Responsiveness? 2016 World Development Report Background Paper, World Bank (2015), available at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/23650/WDR16-BP-When-Does-ICT-Enabled-Citizen-Voice-Peixoto-Fox.pdf and Becky Carter, "Transparency and Accountability: a GSDRC Help Desk Research Report", Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, 2014, available at http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq1067.pdf. On the role of context, see Stephen Kosack and Archon Fung, Does Transparency Improve Governance? Annual Review of Political Science Vol. 17: 65-87 (May 2014) available at http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-polisci-032210-144356 and Helene Grandvoinnet, Ghazia Aslam, and Shomikho Raha, Opening the Black Box: The Contextual Drivers of Social Accountability, World Bank, (2015), available at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/21686/9781464804816.pdf?sequence=4 ; On social accountability, see Jonathan Fox, What Does the Evidence Really Say? World Development, Volume 72, (August 2015); On social accountability and family planning, see Victoria Boydell, Social Accountability: What are the Lessons for Improving Family Planning and Reproductive Health Programs? The Evidence Project (2014). On empowerment, accountability and education, see Westhorp, G., Walker, D.W., Rogers, P., Overbeeke, N., Ball, D., and Brice, G. (2014) Enhancing community accountability, empowerment and education outcomes in low and middle-income countries: A realist review. EPPI –Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London; On accountability and health, see GOAL Uganda, Concepts, theories, methodologies and evidence on social accountability for health services (2014) and Lodenstein E1, Dieleman M, Gerretsen B, Broerse JE, A realist synthesis of the effect of social accountability interventions on health service providers' and policymakers' responsiveness; On the impact of participation induced by government, see Ghazala Mansuri and Vijayendra Rao, Localizing Development Does Participation Work? available at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/11859/9780821382561.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y ; On transparency and accountability initiatives, see Rosemary McGee and John Gaventa, Synthesis Report: Review Of Impact And Effectiveness Of Transparency And Accountability Initiatives, Tranparency and Accountability Initiative, (2013), available at http://www.transparency-initiative.org/reports/synthesis-report-impact-and-effectiveness-of-transparency-and-accountability-initiatives; On fiscal transparency, see Paolo de Renzio and Joachim Wehner, The Impacts of Fiscal Openness: A Review of the Evidence, Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (2015), available at http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/resourcesfiles/files/20150704112.pdf; On social audits, see Atzimba Baltazar and Maylí Sepúlveda, Literature Review & Conceptual Discussion of Social Audits, Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency, (2015) available at http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/wp-content/themes/enfold/includes/gift_embedded/en/resource_all_open.php?IdToOpen=20151120139, On multi-stakeholder initiatives, see Brandon Brockmeyer and Jonathan Fox, Assessing the Evidence: The Effectiveness and Impact of Public Governance-Oriented Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives, Transparency and Accountability Initiative (2015) available at http://transparencyinitiative.theideabureau.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Assessing-the-Evidence-MSIs.pdf

Bank and other larger institutions identify their unique added value.

Indeed, by examining a limited selection of research institutions selected and the projects, this report does not purport to capture the breadth and depth of all research underway. Given these limitations, no firm conclusions regarding trends or categories should be drawn. Nevertheless, this report does provide some valuable insights into current open government research and identifies promising areas for further exploration and analysis by the Open Government Research Consortium.

BOX II: Parameters that Limited the Scope of the Landscape

What was included?	What was not included?	Why?
Research projects examining transparency, citizen engagement and participation, and responsiveness reforms and interventions.	Research projects examining big data, innovation, e-government, digitization, design thinking, behavioral science or government efficiency that did not depend upon a significant element of public scrutiny.	Practical need to mitigate against drawing in too many projects that stray from the core, generally agreed definition of open government.
Research focused on open government impact and outcomes.	Research focused on learning, innovation, "proof of concept", efficiency or efficacy of open government interventions and reforms.	General consensus within World Bank Governance Global Practice that not enough is being done to measure impact and outcomes. Impact and outcome measurement are a key interest of World Bank clients and partners.
Current, ongoing research with at least some conclusions yet to be finalized or published.	Research that is planned, but unfunded. Research that is complete.	Desire to anticipate forthcoming results and avoid duplicating existing efforts. Desire to understand and complement the current interests of open government researchers.
Research projects with an international focus, beyond one specific context.	Research projects that focus on a singular context.	Practical limitation designed to keep landscape manageable.

RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND ENTITIES

With these limitations in mind, this report draws upon input and documentation from of a mix of academic research institutions, research networks, think tanks, NGOs, development partners, and multi-stakeholder initiatives. Overall, institutions surveyed fell into four rough categories that generally shift from primarily academic to primarily practitioner-led: university based institutions and networks, think tanks and other research institutions, multi-stakeholder initiatives, and NGOs.

BOX III: Research Institutions and Entities

Type of institution: University-based research institutions and networks	
Institutions included	**Methodology**
Massachusetts Institute of Technology Jameel Abdul Lateef Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL)	Experimental
Columbia University Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP)	Experimental
Massachusetts Institute of Technology GovLab (MIT GovLab)	Experimental
Princeton University Innovations for Successful Societies (ISS)	Case studies
Institute for Development Studies (IDS)	Varied
Manchester University Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID)	Qualitative
American University Accountability Research Center (ARC)	Action research
New York University GovLab (NYU GovLab), including the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Opening Governance and Open Data Impact	Action research
Type of institution: Think tanks and other research institutions	
The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)	Experimental
Innovations for Poverty Action	Experimental
Open Data Research Network (ODRN)	Varied
Center for Global Development (CGD)	Varied
Type of institution: Multi-stakeholder initiatives	
Open Government Partnership (OGP)	Varied
Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA)	Varied
Making All Voices Count (MAVC)	Varied
Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT)	Varied
Type of institution: NGOs	
Results for Development	Experimental
Carter Center	Varied
Global Integrity	Case studies
mySociety	Varied

The methodological contributions of these entities to the field of open government range from experimental to action research and case study-based research. Broadly speaking, methodological contributions fell into three sometimes overlapping categories: experimental research centers (J-PAL, EGAP, MIT GovLab, IPA, 3ie); research centers focused on action research meant to test more open, collaborative ways of making decisions and solving public problems (NYU GovLab, MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Opening Governance, Open Data Research Network); and research centers primarily focused on the "how" and "why" of open government, but with an important dimension that examines the effect of open government, often delivered via case studies (ISS, ESID, Global Integrity). These categories are clearly not rigid; some entities, for example, use experimental methods to test open data interventions, and all seek some explanation of "how" and "why".

University-based research institutions and networks

Among the university-based research institutions and networks, several have dedicated substantial resources to the measurement of transparency and accountability interventions using randomized control trials and quasi-experimental designs.

Among the best known is The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab ("J-PAL"), which convenes roughly 130 affiliated members, primarily economists, to "reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence"[11]. J-PAL supports a dedicated research stream called the "Governance Initiative"[12]. Since 2010, the Governance Initiative has supported 35 evaluations examining the causes and consequences of poor governance and how policy can improve public service delivery. The Governance Initiative typically issues two calls for proposals per year and selects, on average, 8-10 selected projects per call[13]. A subset of these projects includes pilots, which helps researchers ensure that a study is feasible before submitting research proposals for full projects which are higher cost. J-PAL also maintains a focus on quality (in terms of methodological design), not quantity. Decisions to fund projects are driven by quality of research design and relevance of evaluation questions to key open questions.

Substantively, the Governance Initiative's work flows from periodic "Governance Reviews"[14] that examine the current state of evidence, and suggest salient research questions for J-PAL affiliated researchers who wish to propose a randomized control trial for J-PAL Governance Initiative funding. The current Governance Review (2013-2016) includes two broad research questions[15], each of which includes several sub-questions.

11   See https://www.povertyactionlab.org/about-j-pal

12   https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GI

13   See https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GI/Evaluations

14   See Benjamin A. Olken and Rohini Pande, Governance Review Paper, October 2013, available at https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GI/reviewpaper

15   J-PAL has indicated that a third research question will be added in the forthcoming 2016 Governance Review. This third

The first of these broader questions is germane to the study of open government impact: "How can citizens exercise greater control over politicians and policy through elections and participatory institutions?"

J-PAL has chosen to stimulate organic growth of evidence in the field of governance. Provided research proposals are relevant to the two broad research topics identified in the Governance Review paper, a wide range of research questions are eligible for funding from the Governance Initiative. Moreover, the network funds only randomized evaluations. The Governance Review paper recognizes that empirical evidence on causes and consequences of poor governance may be challenging to isolate or measure. While advances in data collection and novel research design can help to fill this gap, some questions may not be answerable through trials[16].

Despite the organic growth, research has tended to accumulate more heavily in studies related to information flows and participation, especially voter information interventions; incentives for bureaucrats; and the role of technology and e-governance programs in reducing corruption[17]. Looking ahead, J-PAL has ongoing studies that examine politician report cards, longitudinal work on community score cards, public participation in regulation creation, and SMS-based encouragement to vote, among many others[18].

Like J-PAL, Columbia University's **"Evidence in Governance and Politics" ("EGAP")** focuses on experiments. EGAP is a network of roughly 100 scholars and practitioners "united by a focus on experimental research, dedicated to generating and disseminating rigorous evidence on topics of governance, politics, and institutions"[19]. Whereas J-PAL convenes a network primarily composed of economists, EGAP convenes a network primarily composed of political scientists. These researchers' study of politics includes many dimensions related to open government, such as corruption and natural resource governance in particular. Since these affiliated researchers all have individual research interests, the evidence generated by the EGAP network also grows organically.

However, unlike J-PAL's organic approach, EGAP also focuses studies on specific areas of inquiry that the network calls "Metaketa", with an intention to create comparability across studies. "Metaketa" means "integrated research for knowledge accumulation". For example, EGAP's current "Information and Accountability" Metaketa[20] convenes a team of researchers seek to answer the question "What is the role of information in promoting

---

area of inquiry will examine state capacity and the "Personnel Economics of the State", with material drawn from Finan, Olken, and Pande's forthcoming chapter in the "Handbook for Field Experiments". http://www.nber.org/papers/w21825

16   See page 15 of https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GI/reviewpaper

17   See https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GI/Evaluations for a list of all funded studies, and https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluations?f[0]=field_research_initiative%3Agovernance%20initiative for more detailed summaries of funded studies.

18   See https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GI/Evaluations for a list of ongoing funded studies.

19   See http://egap.org/about-us/mission-activities

20   See http://egap.org/content/information-and-accountability-metaketa

political accountability in developing countries?" The most recent call for proposals supported seven research projects examining how information about candidate performance affects voter participation and voter choice. The broader "Information and Accountability" Metaketa launched in 2013 and will continue through 2017. EGAP expects to expand the Metaketa to convene researchers around similar questions later in 2016.

EGAP's ongoing research projects examine freedom of information laws, "meet the candidate" sessions, public disclosure of legislator performance, disclosure of underused or misused budgets, community score cards, community monitoring of traditional leaders, and ICT-based monitoring of sanitation.

Unlike membership-based networks EGAP and J-PAL, the **GovLab at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology ("MIT GovLab")** depends upon the strengths and interests within the university's political science department. GovLab collaborates with social enterprises, funders, and governments on research that seeks to "build and test theories about how innovative programs and interventions affect political behavior and make governments more accountable to citizens".[21] Methodologically, projects tend to include a mix of experimental and qualitative elements matched to the identified governance problem.

MIT's GovLab supports a portfolio of studies that do not easily fit into subcategories. GovLab's eight current projects include studies of voter participation, service provision and online participation, among other topics.

Several university-based institutions examine the impact of open government more indirectly, as part of research agendas that seek to improve understanding of how open government works in practice.

The **Institute for Development Studies at Sussex University ("IDS")** is an influential development research, teaching and learning institution that has traditionally played a large role in research on open government. IDS supports a governance "cluster" that studies ways to "ensure citizens are represented and governed fairly in a world of changing state authorities". IDS focuses its work on taxation, the politics of public policy, non-state actors, decentralization and local governance.

Over the next five years, IDS will lead a consortium studying empowerment, accountability and open government. The program will seek to answer "under what conditions does social and political action lead to empowerment of underrepresented people?"; "what kinds of action lead to accountable states and institutions?"; "how can we understand, measure the impact of such interventions?"; and "what are the best ways for external actors to support empowerment and accountability, if at all?" The program will employ both quantitative and action research methods. The action research components will help practitioners test some of the methods that have emerged in the discourse about

---

21   See http://www.mitgovlab.org/

"problem driven iterative adaptation"[22].

Action research also plays an important role in helping to design, test, and refine open government interventions that rely on open data and its impact. For example, **New York University's GovLab** seeks to "strengthen the ability of institutions – including but not limited to governments – and people to work more openly, collaboratively, effectively and legitimately to make better decisions and solve public problems."[23] NYU GovLab's 19 current research projects are centered on four questions: "How to open up government data for solving problems" "How to enable data sharing from public sector to private sector", "How and when to target specific people in the crowd" and "How to take innovative public interest projects from idea to implementation" Projects examine a mix of interventions in the developed and developing world.

While the primary motivation of these projects is to solve practical problems and demonstrate the efficacy of governance innovations, primarily through action research, many of the projects also yield important insights into the impact of open government. For example, NYU GovLab supports the **Open Data Impact** project, which has published a series of 25 case studies designed to demonstrate how open data is "improving government, empowering citizens, creating opportunity, and solving public problems"[24]. Studies examine the use of open data to address crises, battle corruption, improve services and contribute to economic development.

NYU GovLab also serves as the convener of the **MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Opening Governance**. The network of 16 core members works to "develop the blueprints for more effective and legitimate democratic institutions to the end of improving people's lives"[25]. The network uses action research to design and tests the advances in technology and collaboration that are designed to "improve real world decision-making in the public interest". Theory-building and case study research complements action research in order to better demonstrate how governance can be improved. As such, the research network does not narrowly focus on impact, but also on the efficacy of innovations.

Like NYU GovLab, the soon-to-be-launched **Accountability Research Center at American University ("ARC")** also supports action research, but without the focus on open data. ARC focuses on balanced, researcher/practitioner partnerships that test new strategies for improving accountability in the developing world. While ARC's research agenda is yet to be fully formed by its practitioner and academic partners, one critical element will be the examination of vertically integrated accountability strategies that link local monitoring and policy level campaigning.

---

22 See Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock "Doing Problem Driven Work" CID Working Paper No. 307 December 2015, available at http://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/files/bsc/files/doing_problem_driven_work_wp_307.pdf

23 See http://thegovlab.org/about/

24 See http://odimpact.org/

25   http://www.opening-governance.org/the-opportunity

Rounding out the academic landscape are two institutions focused primarily on case studies that tend to include important insights into the impact and outcomes associated with open government. **Princeton University's Innovations for Successful Societies ("ISS")** focuses on "implementation challenges that undermine the pursuit of more effective and accountable government, especially in new democracies or post-conflict settings"[26]. Since 2008, ISS has completed 159 case studies in 60 countries, making it one of the largest institutions focusing on studies of this kind.

Rather than focus on a specific "intervention", ISS case studies focus on the reformer and the choices that he or she made along the path to success. Often, this success depended upon an embrace of open government. For example, past case studies have highlighted ways to set national priorities, engineer rapid improvements in delivery of citizen services, reduce corruption in public works, protect common pool resources, or design and manage community-driven development. In these cases and others, the studies focus not only on the steps government reformers took but also the impact of the reforms. Syntheses studies are underway to draw broader conclusions about the impact of open government reforms highlighted in each case study.

ISS prefers to select case study topics on a demand-driven basis from governments themselves. Princeton political science faculty and graduate students draw from this demand to cluster case studies around broader themes. Looking ahead, these themes will include public management issues in the context of an epidemic like Ebola, cabinet offices in unity governments, national anti-corruption strategy, and land registries and management.

Like ISS, many other, smaller programs tend to demonstrate how open government themes can become interwoven into broader research agendas. For example, the **Effective States and Inclusive Development** program at Manchester University pursues research in 16 countries to answer the question "What kind of politics can help secure inclusive development and how can these be promoted?"[27] For example, one of ESID's research streams focuses on public sector reforms that include social accountability and supreme audit institutions. The program uses causal process tracing with a structured-focused comparison to examine how these reforms interact with each other and, indirectly, the open government impacts that may accrue.

Think tanks and other research institutions

Think tanks and large, research-focused NGOs often help bridge the practitioner, academic and donor worlds. These institutions can play an important role in helping to develop policy-relevant research questions and programs that deepen understanding of open government and its impact.

---

26   See https://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/research

27   See http://www.effective-states.org/what-is-esid/

For example, the **International Initiative for Impact Evaluation ("3ie")** plays an important role in developing and synthesizing evidence of effectiveness in development programs. 3ie has a dual character as both a large, research-based NGO and as a donor that advances evidence-based policymaking.

Substantively, 3ie does not have a specific focus on governance, and does not define sector-specific strategies. Rather, most of the themes and subjects of 3ie's calls for proposals are selected based upon criteria developed by development partners. Nonetheless, 3ie does help to set the research agenda for funding calls through in-house research to develop "evidence gap maps"[28] and by commissioning systematic reviews of existing evidence.

In order to deliver its research grants, 3ie organizes research streams into several funding "windows". While none of these windows are specifically designed to address questions of open government, there are individual calls for proposals that often generate relevant evidence. For example, a recently launched research window will support 18 projects related to four Sustainable Development Goals ("SDGs"). Among the goals to be examined is SDG 16, which directly relates to open government. Relevant research questions have largely been drawn from J-PAL's governance review.

3ie adds value to these funding calls by administering open, transparent grant competitions, which are not restricted to a membership network. Procedurally, this added layer of review between bilateral donors and research partners seeks to contribute a higher quality of grantmaking scrutiny. The organization also places a high premium on the participation of host-country researchers and seeks to build in-country capacity and quality. This country-level capacity also helps 3ie and its grantees guarantee policy relevance.

Innovations for Poverty Action ("IPA") is a research nonprofit with offices in 18 countries, that seeks to "design and implement randomized evaluations to measure the effectiveness of programs and policies aimed at helping the poor"[29]. Like 3ie, IPA supports impact evaluations in the developing world, but also serves as an operational counterpart for academic institutions.

In the field of governance, IPA focuses on evaluations of interventions aimed at "promoting democracy, reducing corruption, and improving the performance of political leaders"[30]. The organization includes more than 1000 research staff and 400 partners. Currently, staff and partners support 13 projects related to open government. are framed by the governance research agenda described in the J-PAL governance review.

The **Open Data Research Network ("ODRN")**[31] has served as one of the largest contributors of research on open data as it relates to better governace. The network, coordinated by the

---

28   See http://www.3ieimpact.org/evaluation/evidence-gap-maps/

29   See http://www.poverty-action.org/about/what-we-do

30   http://www.poverty-action.org/program-area/governance/about

31   See http://www.opendataresearch.org/

Web Foundation and the International Development Research Centre, seeks to host projects focused on open data, connect researchers, and collect and disseminate related news. The network has completed 27 studies as part of its "Exploring the Emerging Impacts of Open Data in Developing Countries" project; a second phase is anticipated. Projects are focused in Africa, Asia and Latin America and seek to develop some comparability among different approaches.

Many other organizations have dimensions of research and programming related to Open Government, but without large, dedicated research streams on the subject. For example, the **Center for Global Development** ("CGD") is one of the larger think tanks that studies international development, with a focus on "how policies and actions of the rich and powerful affect poor people in the developing world." While it has no programs focused specifically on open government or its impact, many of its programs have open government themes. CGD also focuses research on the impact of open contracting and procurement.

Similarly, the **U4 Anti-Corruption Center** delivers applied research that touches upon several themes related to open government, including citizen engagement, supreme audit institutions and ombuds offices.

Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives

Multi-stakeholder initiatives ("MSIs") are voluntary partnerships between governments, civil

society, and the private sector that seek to encourage socially and environmentally responsible private sector behavior[32]. In recent years, MSIs have emerged as important mechanisms for advancing open government by mobilizing political support and civil society engagement. But the often global nature of MSIs also positions them to encourage peer learning and knowledge sharing. As a result, MSIs frequently include important research elements.

Among MSIs, the **Open Government Partnership ("OGP")** is one of the highest-profile institutions working to advance open government. Operationally, OGP seeks to secure "concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance"[33]. OGP's main research question is "why do OGP reforms happen when they happen and how can OGP amplify these circumstances?" In particular, OGP seeks to understand how high level political leaders, government reformers and civil society advocates can use the OGP platform to overcome the political obstacles to open government, rather than the more technocratic tools or products that might accelerate reform.

OGP includes two mechanisms that provide insight into the impact of its work. Through

---

32   Brandon Brockmeyer and Jonathan Fox, Assessing the Evidence: The Effectiveness and Impact of Public Governance-Oriented Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives, Transparency and Accountability Initiative (2015) available at http://transparencyinitiative.theideabureau.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Assessing-the-Evidence-MSIs.pdf

33   See http://www.opengovpartnership.org/about

the Independent Reporting Mechanism ("IRM"), OGP can measure the degree to which OGP commitments have been implemented[34]. Although current IRM reports do not measure the impact of commitments, they do provide some data on the ways that commitments translate into practice. For example, when a participating OGP member commits to legislate an access to information policy, the IRM measures the degree to which that legislation is in place, not necessarily the effect the legislation has had on citizen participation, corruption, improvements in services, or social, economic, or environmental wellbeing. Nonetheless, OGP encourages researchers to use IRM data to explore the ways that open government commitments have performed.

In addition to regular IRM reports, the OGP secretariat also commissions research on topics that the IRM does not cover through its mandate. This research examines the variation in performance among OGP countries and whether/how OGP reforms have contributed to improving the effectiveness, efficiency, or responsiveness of government. For example, a new project, in partnership with the Brookings Institute, will assess the evidence for and against the effectiveness of each of open government "inputs" in terms of public service "outputs. This retrospective, synthesis review will also identify the opportunities for future research, offering an important complement to this mapping project.

Like OGP, The **Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency ("GIFT")** is a multi-stakeholder initiative that also focuses on reforms that make governments more open. GIFT seeks to "institutionalize global norms and significant, continuous improvements on fiscal transparency, participation and accountability."[35] GIFT directly contributes to OGP, for example, by convening Fiscal Openness Working Group, which provides peer-learning, sharing of experiences and technical assistance to members.

This relationship with OGP and its partners positions GIFT to identify and investigate practitioner-driven issues related to fiscal transparency. Among these issues is the impact of fiscal transparency makes[36]. GIFT's research agenda examines impact by evaluating the degree to which contries' OGP commitments to fiscal transparency have been implemented and the ways that public participation have strengthened implementation.

Just as OGP and GIFT encourage reforms within government, two additional multi-stakeholder initiatives focus on the ways that civil society can advance open government. The **Global Partnership for Social Accountability ("GPSA")** convenes 48 governments and roughly 260 civil society organizations to support solutions to governance challenges. The GPSA provides grants to civil society organizations engaged in social accountability at the country level, and also operates a knowledge platform that serves as a "global space for facilitating the advancement of knowledge and learning on social account-

---

34   See http://www.opengovpartnership.org/irm/irm-reports

35   See http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/about/

36   See GIFT research agenda at http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/Workplan.pdf

ability"[37]. Through this platform, GPSA has partnered with researchers, including MIT GovLab[38], to study particular projects and particular aspects of what GPSA calls "constructive" and "strategic" social accountability. GPSA's portfolio of 23 grants also offers an opportunity to learn through regular program monitoring and evaluation.

Much like GPSA, **Making All Voices Count ("MAVC")** supports civil society efforts to advance accountable governance, but with an added emphasis on new technology. MAVC seeks to "harness the transformative potential of unusual partnerships and innovative applications of communication technologies to contribute to fundamental change in the relationship citizens have with the state"[39]. Like GPSA, MAVC includes a large research and learning component, which prioritizes research and learning in five themes: government responsiveness, exclusion and inclusion, citizen engagement via technology, scale, and conceptual development. Over the next 3 years, MAVC plans to support more than 70 research and learning grants of varying sizes[40].

Civil Society Organizations

At the far end of the academic-practitioner spectrum, civil society groups also play an important role in driving research on open government. But, by and large, these organizations lack the capacity to undertake their own in-house research on impact. Rather, CSOs tend to depend on partnerships with researchers for such studies. Some respondents lamented that these partnerships too frequently favor the researcher's interests over the CSO's interests. Others supported impact assessments as an advocacy tool meant to persuade development partners and governments of the need for greater investment in open government.

Among CSO respondents with strong research components, **Results for Development ("R4D")** indicated the strongest interest in impact evaluation. As its name may imply, R4D seeks to "unlock solutions to tough development challenges that prevent people in low- and middle-income countries from realizing their full potential"[41]. R4D's work focuses on five themes, including governance. Work on each theme is designed to bridge the academic and practitioner worlds. Within its governance theme, R4D seeks to invest in action research that fills evidence gaps, stimulate "co-creation" of solutions by government and civil society, and facilitate peer learning[42].

Looking ahead, R4D seeks to demonstrate the "return on investment" of open government interventions and reforms. In particular, R4D examines the causal chain by which

---

37   See https://www.thegpsa.org/sa/about/what-we-do

38   See http://www.mitgovlab.org/projects/womens-participation-and-local-governance/

39   See http://www.makingallvoicescount.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/RE-strategy.pdf

40   See http://www.makingallvoicescount.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/RE-strategy.pdf

41   See http://r4d.org/about-us

42   See https://docs.google.com/document/d/1H5ExV4elsxjIm1KqX9Sb-mNzfr0A59eWpZzE8mKh6MY/edit

open government leads to better service delivery and better health and education out-comes. This approach is most visible in R4D's large "Transparency for Development" ("T4D") project, which it is currently implementing in partnership with Harvard's Kennedy School[43]. The T4D project examines the impact of a co-designed participatory monitoring intervention on service delivery and health outcomes. Unlike many other evaluations, this study directly examines the impact of the intervention on health outcomes.

Among the many CSOs focused on technology and open government, **mySociety** advances a research program most directly focused on impact. MySociety's overall goal is "invent and popularize digital tools that enable citizens to exert power over institutions and decision-makers"[44]. But towards this end, mySociety supports a dedicated research stream designed to test the impact of its popular civic tech platforms such as "FixMyStreet"[45]. These research projects focus on the user experience, the digital features that impact that experience, and the cultural, social and institutional environment in which the technology and individual user operates. Current projects measure the impact of online parliamentary monitoring sites, the effect of different website designs on citizen engagement, and the effect of civic tech on political behavior.

MySociety employs a mix of methods to test its interventions, including quantitative survey methods to assess demographics and public attitudes; randomized control trials ("RCTs") to understand how the presentation of information can make citizens more likely to engage with institutions and decision-makers; and in-depth interviews to examine the motivations, frustrations, and operations of both citizens and governments.

Global Integrity's ("GI") mission is to support progress toward more open and account-able governance in countries and communities around the world. GI's strategy—focused on "data, learning, and action for open governance"— is informed by three key insights about the nature of governance reform: first, that governance reform is inherently political; second, that effective reforms are necessarily led by domestic champions; and third, that "cookie-cutter" approaches to governance reform are seldom effective.

Based on these insights GI works: to generate high quality data and evidence on open governance processes and impacts that can effectively inform action; to support domestic champions of open governance as they iterate, learn and adapt towards effective reforms; and, to ensure that global conversations about governance are informed by evidence of how things play out in practice. Thematically, GI focuses on four areas: data, learning, and citizen engagement; multi-stakeholder governance initiatives; open fiscal governance; and money in politics.

Finally, the **Carter Center** is included in this mapping as one of the premier organiza-

---

43   See http://t4d.ash.harvard.edu/

44   See https://www.mysociety.org/research/research-strategy/

45   See https://www.mysociety.org/research/research-strategy/

tions working on access to information laws. Although primarily an operational organization, the Carter Center includes research in its projects as funding and academic interest permits. In particular, the Carter Center currently undertakes research on the ways that access to information laws empower women.

OPEN GOVERNMENT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Type of Intervention tested	Organization	Methodology	Countries	Transparency			Participation			Responsiveness		Accountability					Social, Economic, Environmental change			
				Increased knowledge of rights	Transparency	Budget transparency	Voter turnout	Evidence-based electoral decisionmaking	Enhanced engagement other than voting	Answerability	More inclusive decision-making	Hiring and firing	Equitable service delivery	Improved Public Services	Reduced corruption	Other local gov't and service provider accountability	Improved Health Outcomes	Regulatory compliance	Trust in government	Increased efficiency of government
TRANSPARENCY INTERVENTIONS: COMMUNITY-BASED INFORMATION PROVISION																				
"Meet the candidate" sessions	EGAP Metaketa	RCT	Uganda				✓	✓												
Disclosure of legislator performance	EGAP Metaketa	RCT	Benin					✓	✓			✓								
Report card of politician performance	J-PAL	RCT	India				✓	✓			✓					✓				
Information on resource allocations	IPA	RCT	Uganda	✓					✓											
Information on resource allocations	Global Integrity	Participatory assessment, action research	Mexico	✓		✓			✓											
Information on resource allocations	EGAP	RCT											✓		✓	✓				
TRANSPARENCY INTERVENTIONS: ICT-BASED INFORMATION PROVISION																				
Open budget portal	ODImpact	Case studies	Brazil		✓				✓			✓			✓					
Facebook posts about parliamentary performance	MIT/mySociety	RCT	Kenya						✓											
Disclosure of underused or misused budgets	EGAP - Metaketa	RCT	Uganda					✓	✓											
Public disclosure of contracting data	CGD	Mixed methods	Various		✓															✓
Public disclosure of vote tallies	ODImpact	Case studies	Indonesia						✓										✓	
Open Data	NYU GovLab	Action research	Various																✓	
Open Data	MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Opening Governance	Experimental Action Research	Various	Selection of projects ongoing																
Open Data	Open data research network	Case studies	Various	Selection of projects ongoing																

OPEN GOVERNMENT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION INTERVENTIONS: COMMUNITY-BASED MOBILIZATION AND MONITORING, PRIMARILY LOW TECH

Type of Intervention tested	Organization	Methodology	Countries	Transparency			Participation			Responsiveness		Accountability					Social, Economic, Environmental change			
				Increased knowledge of rights	Transparency	Budget transparency	Voter turnout	Evidence-based electoral decisionmaking	Enhanced engagement other than voting	Answerability	More inclusive decision-making	Hiring and firing	Equitable service delivery	Improved Public Services	Reduced corruption	Other local gov't and service provider accountability	Improved Health Outcomes	Regulatory compliance	Trust in government	Increased efficiency of government
Community Score Cards, Interface Meeting, Action Planning	R4D	RCT, surveys, interviews	Indonesia, Tanzania						✓	✓				✓			✓			
Community Scorecards of elected official performance	EGAP	RCT	Uganda					✓												
Community Scorecards in health centers (Bjorkman/Svensson replication)	IPA/3ie/GOAL	RCT	Uganda						✓					✓		✓	✓			
Community monitoring of traditional leaders	EGAP	RCT	Malawi				Gated registration													
Community driven development	IPA	RCT	Philippines										✓							
Civic engagement skills (Bangladesh)	MIT/GPSA	RCT	Bangladesh						✓		✓		✓	✓		✓				
Civic engagement skills (Philippines)	MIT	RCT	Philippines						✓		✓			✓		✓				
Public participation in fiscal monitoring	GIFT	Mixed methods	Various			✓														
Public participation in regulation creation	J-PAL	RCT	Vietnam						✓			✓						✓		
Civic engagement	MAVC	Mixed methods	Various					Selection of projects ongoing												
Vertical integration of social accountability mechanisms	AU ARC	Action research	Various					Selection of projects ongoing												
Mix of empwoerment and accountability interventions	IDS	Mixed methods	Various					Selection of projects ongoing												
Social audit of traditional leaders	EGAP	RCT							✓						✓	✓				

OPEN GOVERNMENT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Type of Intervention tested	Organization	Methodology	Countries	Transparency: Increased knowledge of rights	Transparency	Budget transparency	Participation: Voter turnout	Evidence-based electoral decisionmaking	Enhanced engagement other than voting	Responsiveness: Answerability	More inclusive decision-making	Accountability: Hiring and firing	Equitable service delivery	Improved Public Services	Reduced corruption	Other local gov't and service provider accountability	Social/Econ/Environ: Improved Health Outcomes	Regulatory compliance	Trust in government	Increased efficiency of government
CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION INTERVENTIONS: PRIMARILY ICT-BASED MOBILIZATION AND MONITORING																				
SMS encouragement to vote	J-PAL	RCT	India					✓	✓											
Citizen-driven ICT complaints mechanism	MIT	Mixed methods	Guatemala						✓	✓			✓	✓						
ICT townhalls	MIT	Quantitative	USA						✓		✓									
Parliamentary monitoring, publication, and engagement via Facebook for youth	MIT/mySociety	RCT	Kenya		✓															
ICT monitoring of solid waste collection	EGAP	RCT	Uganda						✓					✓		✓				
Online complaints mechanism	mySociety	Quantitative data	Various						✓		✓		✓	✓		✓				
Civic tech	MAVC	Mixed methods	Various	Selection of projects ongoing																
RESPONSIVENESS/LEGAL REFORM INTERVENTIONS ("TEETH")																				
FOI Law	EGAP	RCT	UK		✓				✓	✓										
FOI Law	MIT/MySociety	RCT	Uruguay						✓	✓									✓	
FOI Law	Carter Center	Mixed methods	Liberia, Guatemala						✓											
Land registries	ISS	Case studies	Various		✓									✓	✓					
Anti-corruption law and strategy	ISS	Case studies	Various												✓					
Mix of public sector reforms focused on open government	ESID	Mixed methods	Various										✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
OGP reforms related to fiscal transparency	GIFT	Mixed methods	Various		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓									
OGP reforms	OGP	Case studies	Various	Selection of projects ongoing																
OGP reforms	OGP/Brookings	Literature review	Various	Selection of projects ongoing																
OGP reforms	Global Integrity	Case studies	Various	Selection of projects ongoing																
"Focus on the reformer"	ISS	Case studies	Various	Selection of projects ongoing																
SDG-related governance reforms	3ie	RCT	Various	Selection of projects ongoing																

THEMES THAT FRAME OPEN GOVERNMENT WORK AND THE TYPES OF IMPACT AND OUTCOMES EXAMINED

Overall, what can we say about current research projects examining the impact and outcomes of open government? Given the conceptual ambiguity of "open government", the development of a cohesive, inclusive typology of interventions poses challenges. For the purposes of this exercise, the typology above relies upon an inductive approach that classifies research according to the type of open government intervention studied. This approach has the advantage of succinctly capturing the basic frame of each project along the two primary parameters of this project: "open government outcome" and "impact"/ "outcomes". Nonetheless, it is worth noting that some respondents observed that the impact depended more upon strategy, political will, and context rather than an "intervention". These other variables, while less easily testable, should clearly feature in any measurement of impact. Some researchers have already begun to contribute to understanding about their function[46].

With these limitations in mind, the table above maps interventions to the three generally agreed dimensions of open government: transparency, citizen engagement and participation and responsiveness. The table subdivides the "transparency" and "citizen engagement and participation" dimensions into ICT-based and non-ICT based interventions in order to illustrate just how interwoven technology and open government have become.

Next, based on materials and interviews with the respondent organizations, the table has been populated with the types of outcomes and impact that ongoing research projects examine. To some degree, the effects that a project examines defy succinct description. In other cases, the ongoing nature of projects makes it difficult to pin down the impact examined, making the exercise highly interpretive.

Nevertheless, with this rough, simplified typology in place, some observations can be made about the current trajectory of open government research. The range of interventions and effects currently studied help to frame current discourse about open government. Looking ahead, this information can help the Bank predict the areas in which its investments will best complement existing research streams and begin to fill the many remaining research gaps.

---

46   See, e.g., Stephen Kosack and Archon Fung, Does Transparency Improve Governance? Annual Review of Political Science Vol. 17: 65–87 (May 2014) available at http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-polisci-032210-144356 and Helene Grandvoinnet, Ghazia Aslam, and Shomikho Raha, Opening the Black Box: The Contextual Drivers of Social Accountability, World Bank, (2015), available at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/21686/9781464804816.pdf?sequence=4

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WORLD BANK TO ENGAGE IN OPEN GOVERNMENT RESEARCH

1: Research on the impact of open government remains "open"

The Bank should focus on a narrow set of questions that build upon its experience and added value.

The diversity of research projects examined here illustrates the wide range of research interests and unanswered questions related to open government. While some convergence appears around studies examining improved service delivery and enhanced citizen engagement, the wide spread of interests is clear. As noted in the introduction, this report maps research prospectively – it is not meant to serve as a literature review. Accordingly, it is conceivable that a broader map that synthesizes both past and future research could reveal a narrowing of the research landscape or other patterns. Nonetheless, the breadth of projects included in the current map demonstrates that the opportunity to carve out a strategic niche remains large.

BOX IV: Impact and Outcomes

Types of Impact Assessed	Number of studies
Transparency	
Fiscal and Budget Transparency	2
Citizen engagement and participation	
Voter turnout	2
Evidence-based electoral decision-making	7
Enhanced engagement other than voting	18
Responsiveness	
Answerability	4
More inclusive decision-making processes	5
Accountability	
Hiring and firing of civil servants	3
Increased equity in service delivery	4
Increased quality in service delivery	11
Reduced corruption	4
Other local government and service provider accountability	7
Social, Economic, Environmental change	
Improved Health Outcomes	2
Better regulatory compliance	1
Enhanced trust in government	4
Increased efficiency of government	1

Moreover, interviews with respondent organizations revealed a variety of perspectives on the current "state of play" in the evidence related to open government impact. On the experimental side, J-PAL has identified many important open questions in the field of governance. The research focus has been narrowed only inasmuch as funded research must relate to the key topics of political participation, reducing corruption and leakages, and state capacity (third section forthcoming in the next revision of the Governance Review paper). This approach permits a "thousand flowers to bloom", guided only by the broad range of dozens of questions included in the biannual J-PAL Governance Review. EGAP takes a different view. While recognizing the relative novelty of the field, EGAP also seeks to focus research investment on narrower aspects of open government, as represented by the current "Metaketa" on information and accountability, and the current set of projects focused on information and electoral decision-making.

The Bank is not an academic institution, but, rather, seeks to advance the interest of its client governments and populations. Accordingly, the Bank is better positioned to support research that advances these interests. By focusing its research investments in narrowly defined areas rather than the broader field of open government, the Bank can begin to identify tangible solutions that can be incorporated into its operations.

Respondent organizations identified at least two research areas that exemplify opportunities for the Bank to advance understanding about the impact of open government. These build upon existing strengths and could be directly relevant for Bank projects.

First, several respondents noted the **absence of research on impact and outcomes associated with access to information laws in the developing world**. Not only does access to information serve as a precursor to many other elements of open government, it also figures prominently in World Bank-supported reforms and OGP commitments. Yet little research activity appeared in the mapping. Although the Carter Center and mySociety have projects underway, these are very limited in scope.

Second, respondent organizations highlighted that the Bank has served as an **incubator and critical supporter for the exponential growth of social accountability approaches**. The Bank's history in this subject, including its current investment in both the GPSA and the Strategic Framework for Mainstreaming Citizen Engagement, position the Bank to substantially advance understanding of social accountability in the context of open government. Respondents also recognized that the Bank has already undertaken a synthesis of research on social accountability impact[47] that sets up the next phase of research on "strategic" social accountability and its "vertical integration". Even though the mapping demonstrates a high degree of researcher interest in social accountability, it does yet indicate a responsiveness to the newest developments and ideas in the field as represented in the Bank's latest synthesis.

---

47   See Jonathan Fox, What Does the Evidence Really Say? World Development, Volume 72, (August 2015).

While these two areas featured prominently in respondent interviews, there are likely other areas of Bank expertise that could merit similar attention in future open government research. One way to identify these areas would be to draw upon the data emerging from the Bank's new Strategic Framework for Citizen Engagement. Through this framework, Bank project managers report quarterly on citizen engagement in Bank-supported activities. These reports could illustrate the areas in which the Bank has the most experience and investment.

2: The majority of research projects focus on outputs or outcomes, not impact

The Bank should invest in connecting the causal chain from outputs to outcomes to impact, possibly through a well-articulated theory of change for open government.

One of the most obvious conclusions that can be drawn from this mapping exercise is that very few projects examine impact in the strict sense of the term. Some interventions, including those classified as transparency interventions, examine the ways that these interventions lead to more transparency. The majority of research – independent of the transparency, participation or responsiveness mechanism involved – examines the relationship between these mechanisms and enhanced citizen engagement. Fewer projects examine the effect of these mechanisms on more accountable government, in terms of service delivery, reduced corruption, or hiring and firing. But hardly any projects examine the causal pathway between these interventions and social, economic or environmental changes. This tendency is at least partially a natural result of the difficulty of constructing a robust causal chain between these mechanisms and impact. In other cases, some planned and ongoing research eludes classification because it is formative in nature; the type of impact studies depends on the course of the formative or action research.

Of the studies that do examine impact, in the strict sense, two focus on community score cards and health outcomes. A replication of the well-known "Power to the People" study of community scorecards in Uganda is currently underway[48]. A second study of community scorecards is being undertaken by R4D in Tanzania and Indonesia. These studies are unique because they link an intervention designed to improve information and participation with improved accountability, improved service delivery and, most importantly, improved health outcomes. Accordingly, these studies serve as important examples of a plausible theory of change for at least one aspect and one mechanism of open government.

But are there others? It is worth exploring the degree to which other interventions, besides community score cards, can also strengthen the links in the causal chain of open government. Along these lines, some respondents suggested that the Bank could play a role in convening stakeholders and elaborating a theory of change for the way that open government leads to social, environmental and economic impact[49]. **A well-articulated**

---

48   See http://www.3ieimpact.org/media/filer_public/2014/05/09/donato_revised_replication_plan.pdf

49   DFID has undertaken a similar exercise to identify causal pathways for "empowerment and accountability".

theory of change could help guide the articulation of research questions that test underlying assumptions. The exercise of developing this theory of change could be useful in helping to connect researchers to each other and other networks, such as GovLab's Network of Innovators talent bank[50].

However, a theory of change that seeks to illustrate the instrumental value of open government could unwittingly undermine arguments about its intrinsic value. While an exercise to define the instrumental value of open government might serve as a persuasive tool within the Bank and with client governments, the Bank should carefully consider the messages its strategy sends. Open government stakeholders will want to see the Bank demonstrate leadership that recognizes the intrinsic value of openness as much as its instrumentality.

3: Research on ICTs and "open data" is well-represented

The Bank should encourage research on ICTs and open government data that helps demonstrate what is effective and what is not.

In recent years, enthusiasm has grown for the role of technology in improving governance. The broad interest of the role of technology in governance is reflected in the launch of the "data revolution" in the context of the SDGs, the 2016 World Development Report, and in the number of NGOs, entrepreneurs and researchers focused on the use and benefit of "open data".

On the civil society side, practitioners increasingly deploy ICTs to inform citizens and encourage new ways of engaging governments. Many governments have similarly embraced the concept of "open data" to give more citizens increasing access to information. But like the concept of "open government", the concept of "open data" suffers from a high degree of ambiguity. At times, "open government" and "open data" are conflated; other times "open data", "big data", and simple digitization become confused.

This mapping exercise is primarily concerned with the impact of "open government data", that is, data produced by government that can be freely used, re-used and redistributed by anyone – "subject only, at most, to the requirement to attribute and share-alike"[51]. Respondents tended to stress the need to maintain some definitional strictness to this concept, especially as it relates to new research.

Fully half of the transparency and participation research projects currently being carried out by respondent organizations include this "open government data" dimension. Proj-

---

See http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/mis_spc/Appendix_3_ToC_Examples.pdf

50   See http://govlabacademy.org/

51   Adapted from the Open Knowledge Foundation, opengovernmentdata.org

ects included both government- and civil society-driven interventions and reforms. This large investment in "civic tech" illustrates the high level of interest among researchers, but could also possibly reflect the interests of donors. Three foundations, whose endowments come largely from success in the technology sector, provided the vast majority of the funding streams for these research projects. Given the relatively large investments by others, the Bank should carefully consider its added value when investing in this space.

Even within this relatively crowded space, the Bank can contribute to the field in three ways. First, the Bank can help the field of ICTs move beyond investing in evaluating the efficacy of what one respondent called "shiny tech tools", and instead **create a more systematic evaluation of what works in civic tech.** Along these lines, the Bank can build upon recent work that seeks to synthesize existing work and suggest new hypotheses about the effectiveness of ICTs for open government (e.g., Peixoto and Fox, 2015, McGee and Edwards 2016).

Second, the current inventory of projects reveals that most research projects experiment with either ICT-based participatory mechanisms or traditional, face-to-face participatory mechanisms. But in the real world, people tend to use a mix of both to communicate with each other and their governments. **Research that examines the complementarity of traditional and ICT methods might reveal new insights about their potential**.

Third, the mapping reveals **little investment in the impact of ICTs and open government on traditionally marginalized groups**. In the broader development community, concern remains about the degree to which ICTs and open data may reinforce existing power structures that favor the elite[52]. Only MIT's GovLab has projects directly related to this theme. Given the Bank's large investments in "inclusive governance", research that explores this topic may be particularly welcome.

4: Mapping reveals a relatively large amount of experimental research on open government

The Bank can contribute to experimental research by bridging what is academically interesting and what is practically useful.

Currently, 20 experimental projects examine the impact of open government interventions and reforms. The majority of these projects study the impact of interventions on citizen engagement, service delivery and accountability.

Respondents from academic – including largely experimental – and practitioner organizations indicated that experimental research too frequently fails to result in changes in government policy or practice. To some degree, this disconnection could illustrate the

---

52   See Rosie McGee and Duncan Edwards, "Introduction: Opening Governance – Change, Continuity and Conceptual Ambiguity", IDS bulletin Volume 47 | Number 1 | January 2016, available at http://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/ids-series-titles/ids-bulletin

tension between research that is publishable and research that is tailored to a specific governance problem. Some respondents lamented that experiments sometimes focus on nuances of human or political behavior that, while relevant for academic discourse, are not replicable or immediately useful to practitioners or policy makers.

Primary methodology	Number of studies
Experimental research	20
Action research	3
Case studies	8
Other	8

The Bank can help by **focusing research on experiments that have clear policy relevance**, perhaps through a more demand-driven approach that matches governments and practitioners with researchers. This approach would benefit practitioners in particular, who can find themselves beholden to the research interests of researchers, rather than driven by the needs of the people they serve. In some cases, for example, action research might help to define the problem, refine possible solutions, and offer replicable models for experimental research.

Even when experiments are tailored to a particular policy context and demonstrate potential benefits if scaled, governments often lack the incentives or political will to act upon the results. Respondents recognized the Bank's key added value in helping to build political support at the country level for evidence-based policy change.

Finally, respondents from across the methodological spectrum were also quick to recognize that some of the most important questions about open governance are not best answered by experimental methods[53]. Organizations agreed that **the Bank should invest in a mix of methodological approaches to measure the impact of open government**. Already, some clear patterns emerge in the research that employs RCTs: RCTs are clustered around the measurement of transparency and participation interventions. Only one study measures the impact of government reforms or "responsiveness" interventions[54]. This configuration might be explained, at least in part, by the difficulty of randomization of such interventions. But more fundamentally, the success of many reform processes will not hinge upon a "tactic" or intervention, but, rather, because of a multi-pronged strategy, often led by a reform-minded leader. The mapping reveals the ways that RCTs have largely been used to test tactics while case studies and action research study reform strategies. Both are important. The Bank can help by supporting research that reveals the interdependence of strategy and tactics through a mix of research methods.

---

53   Along these same lines, see Jennifer Leavy, How Useful are RCTs in Evaluating Transparency and Accountability Projects? available at http://www.makingallvoicescount.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/RCTs-in-evaluating-TA-initiatives.pdf; as well as recent blog posts by Ricardo Hausmann at https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/evidence-based-policy-problems-by-ricardo-hausmann-2016-02#qozqbgbhk5MfsIPd.99, Chris Blattman at https://chrisblattman.com/2016/02/25/13667/ and Ruth Devine at http://tracking.feedpress.it/link/9129/2778739

54   MIT and mySociety are currently examining the impact of access to information laws on society's trust in government in Uruguay. See http://www.mitgovlab.org/projects/interaction-and-attitudes/

5: Many research projects examine reforms catalyzed by the Open Government Partnership

The Bank should help to finance open government reforms and evaluate of their impact.

Many of the organizations contacted, especially those studying government responsiveness, indicated that their research was connected to OGP commitments in some way. Global Integrity, ISS, GIFT, and OGP all reported some research on the implementation and impact of OGP commitments. This convergence should come as no surprise: OGP plays a critical convening role at the global level for open government work of all kinds.

Several respondents indicated that the Bank might play an important role in **helping to operationalize and evaluate the impact of OGP-related reforms** because of its role in financing them. When an OGP commitment is made, the Bank might lend its expertise to help ensure that Bank loans and projects support the commitment and incorporate the best available evidence for the commitment's operationalization. But the Bank can also help by **aligning or incorporating rigorous evaluations with the loans and grants that support open government reforms**. Respondents indicated that the Bank's in-country relationships with government uniquely position it to support such evaluations. These evaluations can help provide depth to OGP's "Independent Reporting Mechanism" reports that focus on whether a reform is in place, but do not necessarily examine the reform's impact on the ground. Such research could also help illustrate the added value of OGP itself.

When undertaking such evaluations, the Bank has the additional advantage of being able to identify a baseline from which to compare the impact of reform. Often, the impact of open government reforms is difficult to measure precisely because data prior to the reform is "closed". But the Bank has demonstrated that its relationship with government positions it to help open up pre-reform data about services and functions. This type of data can help demonstrate the change that reforms stimulate.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the past 20 years, enthusiasm and interest in "open government" has grown quickly, and yet understanding of its impact has not kept pace. For open government to deliver on its promise, it must begin to accumulate better, more relevant evidence of what works, how it works, and why. The Bank can play an important role here by demonstrating the way that open government contributes to its twin goals, while taking a stand on the intrinsic value of openness.

The organizations profiled here illustrate the wide range of talent and interests devoted to helping to fill in the many missing pieces in the open government landscape. By complementing the work of these organizations with its own unique contribution, the World Bank can also play an important role in helping to advance this field. Its financial resources, technical knowledge, and convening power equip it to carve out specific niches of research that complement the broader field. Moreover, the Bank's institutional position can help ensure that research directly informs policy and practice through its political leadership and loan portfolio. This portfolio provides an operational testing ground for reforms and interventions linked to broader open government theories and concepts. Ultimately, as understanding of open government improves, the Bank's investments can become a vehicle for more systemic change that contribute to shared prosperity and an end to poverty.