



## OPEN GOVERNMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*The concept of open government is a new phenomenon which has attracted a lot of attention in recent years. It includes free and open access to government information. Making government information available publicly has been termed a civil right by the United Nations. Open government has increased in importance and become an essential global agenda. This paper presents a brief introduction to open government; it covers its virtues and vices.*

**Key Words:** Open government, e-government, Collaborative Government, Digital democracy.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Open Government (OG) movement started in January 21, 2009 when President Barack Obama issued a Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government. On his first day in office, Obama committed his administration to an “unprecedented level of openness in government.” The George W. Bush presidency has been regarded as the least transparent and most secretive in the U.S. history. Obama developed and centered the concept of OG on three pillars of transparency, participation, and collaboration in government [1,2].

Transparency involves transparency of government operations and transparency of government-held data. It occurs through the support of society, government, and media. More transparency means improved governance and greater efficiency. Transparency increases public understanding of

government. Participation entails including citizens in the democratic processes. Allowing citizens to participate in policy-making is critical to any democracy. Governments can use social media to share ideas with citizens and involve them in the policy-making process. Collaboration (or accountability) aims at involving all stakeholders in government operations and decision making. It encourages joint effort in participating in the democratic process. The public works with the government in order to create new solutions to problems faced by the state and society. Collaboration improves the effectiveness of government.

Open government is an attribute of democracy. It is meant to encourage innovation and social interaction that will improve the lives of the citizens. It includes independent oversight and whistleblower protection. It is in contrast with the closed, highly hierarchical decision making. Openness of government is the extent to which citizens can influence government processes through access to government information and decision-making arenas [3].

## **2. TECHNOLOGY**

Making government more transparent is not new. What is new is the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to share information. Technology is a major external driver of OG. Technology has enabled mass participation and collaboration. The rise of Web 2.0 interactivity and social media facilitate social interaction. Without question, OG is technology-enabled and technology-driven. Government data is accessible online and in machine-readable formats through the use of ICT. Trust of the Internet is the trust in security and performance of the electronic resource. The Internet technology has connected open government to e-government. It is possible to achieve open government mandates by using social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Having government information in electronic form is important for democratization. Open government enhances transparency through the disclosure of open data. Open data involves not only delivering government data but also providing interfaces and ways to visualize the data [4]. For example, it has been observed that “the United States has thousands of different federal data systems, many housing incomplete or inaccurate data managed with outdated technology” [5]. Open data by itself has no value; it becomes valuable only when used.

## **3. CHALLENGES**

A number of challenges and shortcomings that have affected ongoing open government efforts have been discussed in research papers [6]. OG does not come easy and cheap. It has been criticized for being government-led. It means the government publishes data largely for its own purposes—what the government thinks the citizens need to know. It is not enough to release data. The data are not useful

without the right tools to interpret them. For example, Dashboard allows the public to visualize and analyze Medicare data with ease [7]. The proliferation of open data through executive agency sites can be overwhelming, confusing, and highly specialized.

Transparency cannot cure all that ails public policy. Good, open government requires placing certain limits on transparency. Some types of information require confidentiality and secrecy and government is not obligated to disclose them. Open government requires constant vigilance on privacy and information security.

In some developing nations, there is difficulty in obtaining Internet connections. They are slow in using computer technology to process information. The availability of government information is long delayed due to resource limitations [8]. Without sufficient funding and committed personnel, developing and sustaining open government is difficult.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The concept of open government is still in its early stages. It serves as a new model of cooperation on spreading democratic values. It has changed the default setting of government from being closed and secretive to becoming open, transparent and collaborative. It encourages people to participate in the political arena, especially disadvantaged segments of society. Government bodies worldwide have embarked on OG initiatives for making data available to the public.

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