



Open Government: Key Issues in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze key issues of open government in South Africa. This country is one of the main initiators of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). Qualitative approaches and bibliometric analysis methods are used in this study. Data are sourced from the Google Scholar database collected using Publish or Perish (keywords: South African transparency, South African participation, and South African public collaboration). The keywords are based on the main principles of open government. Data selection and completion using Mendelay, while obtaining a bibliometric map using VOSviewer. This study found 161 relevant South African open government articles, 618 total link strengths, 331 occurrences, and 113 topics. The dominant topics include public participation, transparency, local government, accountability, governance, participation, and regulation. While the latest and potential topics are social dialogues, public procurement, budgeting, integrated reporting, fiscal transparency, community participation, and legislation. South Africa has made 26 open government commitments and is currently focusing on three main commitments: open data, transformative fiscal transparency, and beneficial ownership transparency. The commitment to open data and transformative fiscal transparency has the potential to yield huge results in creating a more open South Africa.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis key issues open government in South Africa. Negara ini merupakan salah satu inisiator utama Open Government Partnership (OGP). Pendekatan kualitatif dan metode analisis bibliometrik digunakan pada penelitian ini. Data bersumber dari database Google Scholar yang dihimpun menggunakan Publish or Perish (kata kunci: transparansi Afrika Selatan, partisipasi Afrika Selatan, dan kolaborasi publik Afrika Selatan). Kata kunci tersebut berdasarkan pada prinsip-prinsip utama open government. Seleksi dan melengkapi data menggunakan Mendelay, sedangkan untuk memperoleh peta bibliometrik menggunakan VOSviewer. Penelitian ini menemukan 161 artikel open government Afrika Selatan relevan, 618 total link strength, 331 occurrences, dan 113 topik. Topik-topik yang mendominasi diantaranya yakni public participation, transparency, local government, accountability, governance, participation, dan regulation. Sedangkan topik-topik terkini dan potensial yakni social dialogues, public procurement, budgeting, integrated reporting, fiscal transparency, community participation, dan legislation. Afrika Selatan telah membuat dua puluh enam komitmen open government mereka dan saat ini fokus terhadap tiga komitmen utama: open data, transformative fiscal transparency, dan beneficial ownership transparency. Komitmen open data dan transformative fiscal transparency memiliki potensi hasil yang besar untuk menciptakan Afrika Selatan lebih terbuka.

INTRODUCTION

Many people in various countries around the world have considered open government as a powerful tool for administrative reform and government transformation in the last decade (Afandi, Erdayani, Afandi, et al., 2024). The origin of open government can be traced back to the Greek Athenian codification of law, but the Swedish Visigothic Code is considered the beginning of the modern open government initiative that pays attention to citizens' rights to information (Moon, 2020). Open government is a trend in public management reform that aims to create transparent and collaborative government structures that are different from market-oriented and bureaucratic principles (Afandi, 2024; Ingrams, 2020). Although the term open government is not new, various social contexts and developments in information and communication technologies have contributed to the way open government is conceptualized (Tai, 2021; Wirtz et al., 2019).

The definition of open government can be traced back to the Obama administration, which focused on the intensive use of information and communication technology to facilitate government transparency, citizen participation, and public collaboration (Afandi, Erdayani, & Afandi, 2024; Ingrams et al., 2020; Prastya et al., 2021). Open government has become an interesting agenda promoted by many governments since the 2000s. Open government can be said to be as important as New Public Management in the 1980s (Moon, 2020). Currently, open government initiatives have been widely introduced not only in Western democracies but also in developing countries such as in Asia and Africa (Afandi, Erdayani, et al., 2023).

Open government has become an important strategy for administrative reform that has prompted many countries around the world to design and implement initiatives related to access to information, transparency, participation, and collaboration (Afandi, Afandi, Erdayani, et al., 2023; Gil-Garcia et al., 2020). Many governments have expanded open government; for example, Obama announced the Open Government Directive in 2009 and took a leading role in establishing the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a multinational effort to promote open government worldwide (Afandi, Afandi, & Anugerah, 2023; Moon, 2020; Schmidhuber & Hilgers, 2021).

The Open Government Partnership is based on the idea that open government is more accessible, more responsive, and more accountable to citizens, and that improving the relationship between citizens and government has long-term and exponential benefits for all. OGP is a broad partnership that includes members at the national and local levels (Erdayani et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2021). Currently, 77 countries and 106 local governments representing more than two billion people are members of OGP. Collectively, more than 4,000 commitments have been made globally.

This study focuses on open government in South Africa. This country is one of the eight OGP initiator countries. Among these countries, South Africa has the fewest number of open government commitments, with 26 commitments, while the United States has 148, Brazil has 130, the Philippines has 75, Indonesia has 149, the United Kingdom has 110, Mexico has 87, and Norway has 70. This study aims to analyze key issues of open government in South Africa.

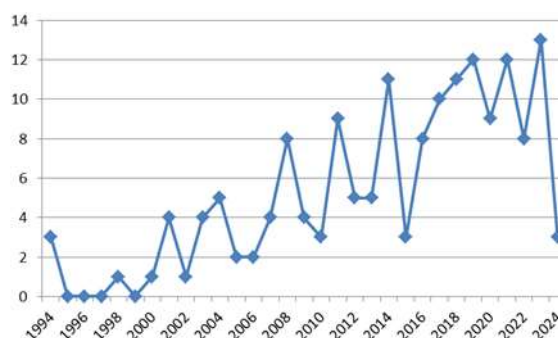
METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a bibliometric analysis method. Bibliometric analysis is a method for analyzing scientific literature in a particular field of knowledge or topic

(Donthu et al., 2021; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). This method is used to identify trends/highlight critical insights generated from scientific literature (Afandi, Afandi, & Erdayani, 2023; Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019; Kulsum et al., 2022). The data used were obtained from the Google Scholar database through Publish or Perish with three keywords, namely “South African transparency,” “South African participation,” and “South African public collaboration.” These keywords are based on the main principles of open government. The data obtained were then stored in RIS format, selected using Mendeley, including completing author keywords, and analyzed using VOSviewer to obtain a bibliometric map.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There are one hundred and sixty-one relevant articles in the past three decades. The first article was published in 1994, while the latest article was in 2024 (see Figure 1). No publications were found in the 1995-1997 time period. One article was published in 1998, 2000, and 2002; two articles in 2005 and 2006; three articles in 1994, 2010, 2015, and 2024; four articles in 2001, 2003, 2007, and 2009; five articles in 2004, 2012, and 2013; eight articles in 2008, 2016, and 2022; nine articles in 2011 and 2020; ten articles in 2017; eleven articles in 2014 and 2018; twelve articles in 2019 and 2021; and thirteen articles in 2023. This shows that interest in South African open government studies is fluctuating. Continuous increases only occur in the period 2016-2019; even in 2024 there is a very sharp decline.



Graph 1. Publication trends

Network visualization (see Figure 1) displays the relationships between topics (Irfan et al., 2023). This visualization is formed from article keywords. No duplicate items are displayed in this visualization. Identical items that appear in multiple articles are counted as a single item. This visualization represents items with labels and circles. The size of the labels and circles is determined by their respective weights. The more frequently an item appears, the larger the labels and circles produced (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019). The lines between items represent links, while the location of each item indicates the closeness of the relationship (Ham et al., 2019; Lnenicka & Saxena, 2021).

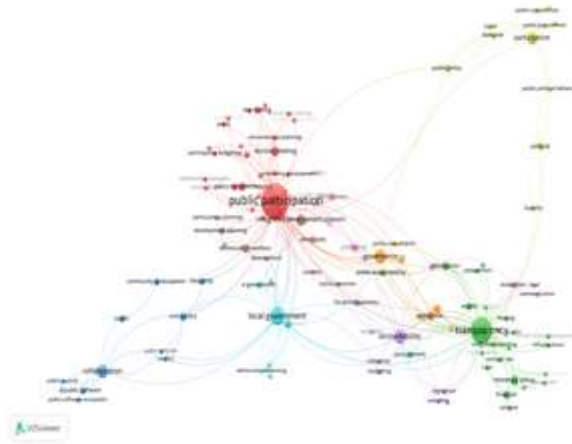


Figure 1. Network visualization

There are 618 total link strengths and 331 occurrences. Total link strength shows the total link strength of an item, while occurrences show the total occurrence of an item in all articles (Safarov, 2019). Public participation (total link strength 105 and occurrences 80), transparency (total link strength 73 and occurrences 41), local government (total link strength 36 and occurrences 27), accountability (total link strength 25 and occurrences 10), governance (total link strength 20 and occurrences 9), integrated development planning (total link strength 12 and occurrences 6), collaboration (total link strength 10 and occurrences 8), participation (total link strength 10 and occurrences 7), public (total link strength 21 and occurrences 7), and regulation (total link strength 10 and occurrences 4), are the list of topics that dominate. These topics are the main focus of the South African open government study.

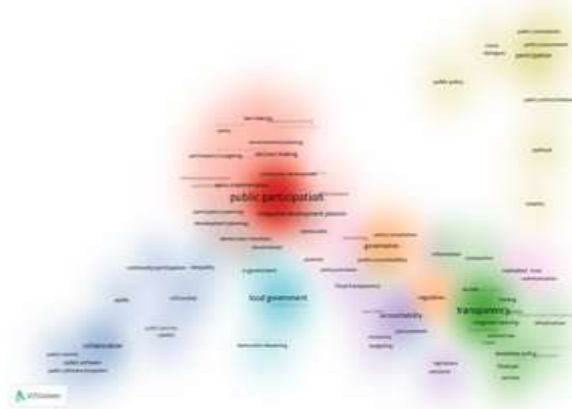


Figure 2. Density visualization

There are one hundred and thirteen topics in the South African open government study. These topics are divided into ten clusters with varying numbers. These topic clusters are formed based on connecting lines between topics (see Figure 1), so that each topic in the same cluster is very closely related. The topics in the first cluster are: public participation, decision-making, policy implementation, law-making, policy-making, socio-economic, administrative processes, constitution-making, environmental planning, infrastructure projects, parliament, participatory budgeting, policy, political consciousness, political will, reforms, representative elites, sustainability, basic service, community development, democratic governance, democratic

participation, environmental governance, justice, legislation, political opportunity, and service delivery planning.

The topics in the second cluster are: transparency, information, monetary policy, financial, access, comparative, tax, public accountability, assessment, beneficial ownership, credibility, infrastructure, infrastructure transparency initiative, public rights, services, audit, contract law, e-governance, funding, gender, integrated reporting, monetary, and trade. The topics in the third cluster are: collaboration, civil society, inequality, conflict, public services, public software, community participation, public, public access, public records, and public software ecosystem. The topics in the fourth cluster are: participation, public policy, political, dialogues, social, public political behavior, stability, public consultation, public perceptions, public procurement, and public-private partnerships. The topics in the fifth cluster are: accountability, fiscal transparency, budgeting, executive, inclusivity, legislature, relationships, open data, and policy processes.

The topics in the sixth cluster are: local government, service delivery, e-government, procurement, democratic deepening, local participation, public-private contracts, and participatory conflict resolution. The topics in the seventh cluster are: governance, regulation, access information, law, policy consultation, political parties, and supervisory authorities. The topics in the eighth cluster are: integrated development planning, democratic transition, development planning, decentralized, local authority, and participatory planning. The topics in the ninth cluster are: promoting, evaluation, fiscal, communication, trust, and social systems control. The topics in the tenth cluster are: democratic, effectiveness, protests, planning, and politics.

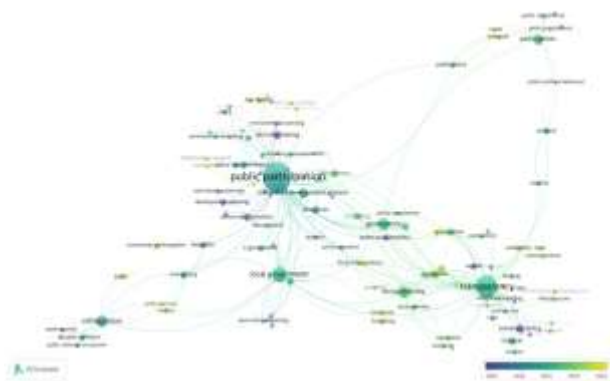


Figure 3. Overlay visualization

The visualization above is identical to the network visualization (see Figure 1), except for the color of the items. In this visualization, the colors range from blue (lowest score), green (middle score), to yellow (highest score). The darker the color of an item, the more it is left behind, while the brighter the color indicates that the item is getting attention. Topics that are getting attention include social dialogues, public procurement, budgeting, integrated reporting, fiscal transparency, community participation, infrastructure projects, and legislation. These topics are current hot issues and allow for potential future research.

South Africa is currently focused on implementing three of its commitments: open data, transformative fiscal transparency, and beneficial ownership transparency. Since 2012, South Africa has had 26 open government commitments: environmental management portal feasibility study, enhanced involvement of civil society in the budget process, development of a citizen participation guideline, guidelines for corruption-related sanctions, national anti-corruption

forum and anti-corruption hotline, Know your service rights and responsibilities, service delivery improvement forums, accountability management framework, implement a know your service rights and responsibilities campaign, schools connectivity, development of an online crowdsourcing tool that will allow the public to submit data on protected areas and conservation areas, develop an integrated and publicly accessible portal of environmental management information, mainstream citizen participation in the public sector, service delivery improvement forums, develop and implement an accountability management framework for public servants, implement the G20 high-level principles on beneficial ownership transparency, implement a register of legal persons and arrangements, OGP awareness-raising campaign, department of public service and administration, institutionalization of community advice offices as part of the wider justice network, environmental management information portal, back to basics program, open budgeting, citizen-based monitoring, beneficial ownership transparency, transformative fiscal transparency, and open data.

First, an open data commitment. Open government data in South Africa has shown promise in reconnecting citizens with governance processes and stimulating innovation around social challenges. However, use of government data remains limited, with low awareness of what data is (or could be) available and how it can improve engagement with public bodies. The government will expand training and capacity building of citizens and local data intermediaries to use government data for community engagement and social innovation, particularly in peri-urban areas and rural municipalities. At the same time, engagement will be deepened with data champions in target municipalities and provincial and national government line departments to improve data management practices and facilitate responsible sharing and collaborative use of administrative data.

This commitment has the potential to increase the awareness and capacity of citizens, local data intermediaries, and government data advocates to access, share, and use public data individually and collaboratively, in ways that are relevant to local contexts and decision-making. This commitment has the potential to increase citizen participation by creating new opportunities and capabilities for data sharing and reuse by citizens and data intermediaries. This commitment also overlaps with a number of other OGP commitments, particularly those related to fiscal transparency.

Second, the commitment to transformative fiscal transparency. South Africa continues to champion fiscal transparency, but there are fundamental problems in linking transparency to meaningful and potentially transformative public participation. The link between transparency and accountability is weak, especially at the subnational level. The link between transparency and accessibility and inclusion is also weak. Therefore, transformative and inclusive fiscal transparency for traditionally marginalized groups and communities across South Africa is urgently needed.

Transparency for greater engagement, accountability, and effective and proactive management of public finances in a manner that ensures better access to relevant information by marginalized groups and thereby enables them to hold government to account. This commitment has the potential to increase openness in government and enable better citizen participation, especially by marginalized groups. The National Treasury and civil society coalitions continue to manage Vulekamali and Municipal Money, both public portals for national, provincial, and local government data. Budget information on both portals is published in an easily accessible and user-friendly manner, enabling citizens to track the use of public funds by cities and municipalities.

Third, beneficial ownership transparency commitment. South Africa's OGP process has achieved its first beneficial ownership transparency commitment. Several milestones have been achieved in response to this commitment. Beneficial ownership transparency is critical to South Africa's open governance and to stemming the tide of corruption, money laundering, and illicit financial flows. In its previous action plan, South Africa committed to implementing the G20 high-level principles on beneficial ownership transparency, established an Inter-Departmental Committee to monitor implementation, and developed an implementation plan.

There is evidence that an Inter-Departmental Committee has been established to also seek to amend the Financial Intelligence Centre Act 2001, the Companies Act; the Trusts Act; and the Not-for-Profit Organisations Act in an attempt to comply with the G20 high-level principles on Beneficial Ownership Transparency and the requirements of the Financial Action Task Force. However, the current literature on South Africa's OGP commitment to beneficial ownership transparency does not outline specific activities or policy objectives to be achieved.

Table 1. South Africa Commitments

No	Commitments	Potential Policy
1	Open data	Meningkatkan kesadaran dan kapasitas warga negara untuk menggunakan data publik dalam pengambilan keputusan local.
2	Transformative fiscal transparency	Meningkatkan keterbukaan pemerintahan dan partisipasi masyarakat yang lebih baik (masyarakat dapat melacak penggunaan dana publik oleh kota dan munisipalitas).
3	Beneficial ownership transparency	Tidak memuat program dan tujuan yang spesifik.

CONCLUSION

In the last three decades, there have been one hundred and sixty-one articles on South African open government. The first publication was detected in 1994, while the fewest publications were in 1998, 2000, and 2002. No publications were found in 1995-1997 while the most articles were published in 2023 with 13 articles. There are 618 total link strengths, 331 occurrences, and 113 topics in the South African open government study. These topics are divided into ten clusters with varying numbers in each cluster. The dominant topics include public participation, transparency, local government, accountability, governance, integrated development planning, collaboration, participation, and regulation. Meanwhile, the latest and potential topics include social dialogues, public procurement, budgeting, integrated reporting, fiscal transparency, community participation, infrastructure projects, and legislation. South Africa has made twenty-six open government commitments and is currently focusing on three main commitments which include open data, transformative fiscal transparency, and beneficial ownership transparency. Of the three commitments, open data and transformative fiscal transparency have the potential for great results in creating a more open South Africa. Meanwhile, the beneficial ownership transparency commitment does not contain specific programs and objectives. This finding is a recommendation for stakeholders to strengthen their beneficial ownership transparency commitments, including a strategic offer to consider the results of potential studies by researchers to strengthen open government practices in South Africa.

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