

INDEPENDENT REPORTING MECHANISM

CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN LATIN AMERICAN OGP COMMITMENTS



J. Preston Whitt
Research Associate
OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism



INDEPENDENT REPORTING MECHANISM

CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN LATIN AMERICAN OGP COMMITMENTS



ABSTRACT	1
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC IMPACT	5
3 PUBLIC IMPACT AND COMPLETION	7
4 EXPANSION AND IMPROVEMENT OF PARTICIPATION.....	9
5 PARTICIPATION AND TECHNOLOGY	13
6 CONCLUSIONS	15





ABSTRACT

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) is a key means by which all stakeholders can track OGP progress in participating countries. The IRM produces independent progress reports on action plan commitments for each country participating in OGP. Using a sample of 88 “civic participation” commitments from Latin America, this discussion paper investigates several questions:

1. How much additional influence do citizens have to observe, inform, shape, and engage in decision-making as a result of OGP commitments?
2. Were participation commitments with higher levels of potential public impact actually completed?
3. Did the commitments improve or deepen existing participatory processes or did they open participation in policy spaces that were previously closed?
4. Did participation commitments have a higher or lower potential impact if they used technology?

The results show that the majority of commitments had some form of two-way communication, but a minority of commitments had a direct means of public influence. Additionally, an increasing level of potential public impact is not correlated to completion or incompleteness. The findings also show that most commitments focused on improving already existing participatory areas. Finally, while the data is inconclusive, technology-oriented commitments often seem to have a significant potential impact.

The paper’s goal is to provide some useful points of departure for OGP stakeholders to support governments and civil societies, to advocate for and to design commitments, and to carry out a future research agenda on participation within the OGP.





1 | INTRODUCTION

The OGP is a voluntary, multistakeholder, international initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.

In pursuit of these goals, OGP provides an international forum for dialogue and sharing among governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector, all of which contribute to a common pursuit of open government. OGP stakeholders include participating governments as well as civil society and private sector entities that support the principles and mission of OGP.

The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) is a key means by which all stakeholders can track OGP progress in participating countries. The IRM produces independent progress reports for each country participating in OGP. In addition to assessing governments on the development and implementation of OGP action plans and on their progress in fulfilling open government principles, the progress reports make technical recommendations for improvements. These reports are intended to stimulate dialogue and promote accountability between member governments and citizens. Further information on the IRM, indicators, and the IRM process can be found at: www.opengovpartnership.org/independent-reporting-mechanism.

One of the key values of OGP is the concept of “civic participation” (hereafter “participation”), defined below in Box 1. While definitions of the term may vary, the officially adopted OGP definition implies, at a minimum, varying degrees of openness and sharing of decision-making between government and civil society in official government policy decisions. With regard to the OGP’s definition of civic participation, several elements are worth noting:

- Participation must be in government decision-making. It does not include participation in the market or autonomous civil society activity.
- Participation commitments may include efforts to improve the enabling environment for participation (such as freedom of assembly and freedom of association).
- The IRM makes no prejudgment about the level of potential public impact that participation should have.

Some civil society stakeholders have expressed concerns about the lack of “real participation” in OGP action plans.¹ That is, there is concern among some OGP stakeholders that action plans state that commitments are relevant to civic participation, but that these commitments may be subject to risks like:

- “Open-washing,” a term borrowed from the open data field that describes projects that may be represented or seen to be open, but in reality they are still restricted in access or in a non-ideal format.²
- “Tactical interventions,” which are initiatives with intentions to improve or involve participation, but assume that changes like providing more information or decentralizing government are inherently sufficient without further, more “strategic” steps to empower citizens.³ This idea also has been called “naïve interventions.”⁴

¹ This concern from Indonesian civil society is representative. Nout van der Vaart, “Indonesian Civil Society Urges Government to Facilitate Real Participation for OGP,” OGP Civil Society Hub, 4 February 2014, <http://bit.ly/1yCeHNS>.

² Christian Villum, “‘Open-washing’ – The Difference between Opening Your Data and Simply Making Them Available,” Open Knowledge Foundation Blog, 10 March 2014, <http://bit.ly/1h91Zc5>.

³ Jonathan Fox, “Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?,” (Global Partnership for Social Accountability Working Paper No. 1, September 2014), <http://bit.ly/1BPSFFk>.

⁴ Tiago Peixoto, “Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?,” DemocracySpot, blog, 13 May 2014, <http://bit.ly/1hSrME>.

Several examples of existing OGP commitments show that these concerns are not entirely unfounded. Examples that could be considered open-washing or tactical interventions include commitments to:

- Post online blogs asking, “How is the Government Doing?” with commenting enabled, but where the comments are not read, responded to, or used to affect government practice in any demonstrable way.
- Launch or update ‘one-stop-shop’ portals so that citizens can find online public services more easily.
- Train civil servants on the use of social media.

Thus, this paper seeks to respond to these concerns by analyzing the existing IRM data on civic participation commitments, using the specific measures available to the IRM. This analysis does not claim to be exhaustive, but rather to demonstrate some interesting, observable trends and to promote further uptake and analysis by other OGP stakeholders. A number of questions guide this analysis:

- How much additional influence do citizens have to observe, inform, shape, and engage in decision-making as a result of OGP commitments?
- Do countries follow through with participation commitments?

OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP’S DEFINITION OF ‘CIVIC PARTICIPATION

The IRM uses a specific working definition of ‘civic participation’ to evaluate the relevance of commitments made as part of OGP national action plans.⁵ As part of its mandate, the IRM evaluates each commitment within the national context for its relevance to the OGP values (as contained in the OGP Articles of Governance) and the OGP Declaration, which all countries sign. The definition of civic participation offered here is a synthesis of these sources. More information can be found in the IRM Procedures Manual.⁶

Commitments around civic participation may pertain to formal public participation or to broader civic participation. They generally should seek to “consult,” “involve,” “collaborate,” or “empower,” as explained by the International Association for Public Participation’s [Public Participation Spectrum](#).

Commitments addressing civic participation:

- Must open decision making to all interested members of the public; such forums are usually “top-down” in that they are created by the government (or actors empowered by the government) to inform decision making throughout the policy cycle;
- Can include elements of access to information to ensure meaningful input from interested members of the public into decisions;
- Often include the right to have one’s voice heard, but do not necessarily include the right to be a formal part of a decision making process.

Alternately, commitments may address the broader operating environment that enables participation in civic space. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Reforms increasing freedoms of assembly, expression, petition, press, or association;
- Reforms on association, including trade union laws or NGO laws;
- Reforms improving the transparency and process of formal democratic processes such as citizen proposals, elections, or petitions.

The following commitments are examples of commitments that would not be marked as clearly relevant to civic participation:

- Commitments that assume participation will increase due to publication of information without specifying the mechanism for such participation (although this commitment would be marked as “access to information”);
- Commitments on decentralization that do not specify the mechanisms for enhanced public participation;
- Commitments that define participation as interagency cooperation without a mechanism for public participation.

Commitments that limit participation to government-selected organizations also would not be marked as clearly relevant to participation.

⁵ This definition comes from the IRM Procedures Manual and is the result of a negotiated process with the Criteria and Standards Subcommittee of the OGP Steering Committee.

⁶ The IRM Procedures Manual is available publicly at <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/about-irm>.

- Do participation commitments open new policy areas to civic participation, or do they focus on improving existing participatory spaces?
- Does technology deepen or lessen the potential impact of these commitments?

This document examines participation commitments evaluated by the IRM, specifically in Latin America.⁷ The limitations and benefits of this subset are discussed more in the 'About the Dataset' section. Over the coming months, the IRM staff intends to expand this set to include all OGP countries.

ABOUT THE DATASET

This paper is based on the larger IRM data release, explained in detail in the IRM Data Guide.⁸ The IRM Technical Paper 1 analyzed all 43 reports in the database.⁹ Of the full data set, IRM national researchers coded 104 commitments from Latin America as relevant to "civic participation." Upon closer review, the IRM decided that 16 were mislabeled, and they were removed, leaving 88 participation commitments or actions.

Table 1 shows the percentages of participation commitments by each of the ten Latin American countries. It shows the number of commitments from that country's action plan that the IRM national researcher, with the guidance of the IRM staff, coded as relevant to civic participation. It also shows the corresponding percentage of that country's total commitments.

Table 1 | Commitments Relevant to 'Civic Participation' by Country

COUNTRY	# PART. COMM.	% TOTAL COMM.
Brazil	8	25%
Chile	6	32%
Colombia	20	71%
Dominican Republic	11	46%
El Salvador	6	29%
Honduras	4	20%
Mexico	8	22%
Paraguay	4	27%
Peru	14	29%
Uruguay	7	37%
Grand Total	88	AVG 34%

⁷ A first draft of this report was prepared for presentation at the Democracy and Technology Expert Meeting, hosted by the Instituto de Tecnologia e Sociedade on 29 August 2014 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The final version was prepared for presentation at the OGP Americas Regional Conference, 17-19 November 2014, in San José, Costa Rica. Thank you to J. Foti, M. Hassan, and R. McGee for comments and input.

⁸ Observations from Cohort 1 countries (Brazil and Mexico) contained data for the following variables relevant to this paper's analysis: Specificity, Relevance to OGP Values, and Level of Completion. The Cohort 2 observations also contained data for an additional relevant variable: Ambition, which includes Newness and Potential Impact. The data guide explaining the question design and answer options for each variable is available at <http://bit.ly/1uGWU1R>.

⁹ Open Government Partnership Independent Reporting Mechanism, OGP by the Numbers: What the IRM Data Tells Us About OGP Results, by Joseph Foti (Technical Paper 1, Washington, D.C., 24 September 2014, <http://bit.ly/1x7r53D>).

The table shows that, on average, 34% of Latin American action plan commitments involved participation, with the Colombian action plan containing the highest percent of participation commitments. Note that, since this coding is based on the IRM's definition of civic participation and not necessarily on the OGP value that the government specifies in its action plan, these 88 commitments do not include commitments that imply participation will happen automatically due to access to information alone.

Two other standard variables are important to this study's analyses: level of completion and potential impact. IRM researchers code these variables in their IRM reports for each commitment based on their research, analysis, interviews, and experience as an expert in governance. Chart 1 shows the distribution of the 72¹⁰ commitments' potential impact. Researchers assigned values (none, minor, moderate, or transformative) to the impact the commitment could have if it were completely implemented.

Chart 1 | Potential Impact of Participation Commitments

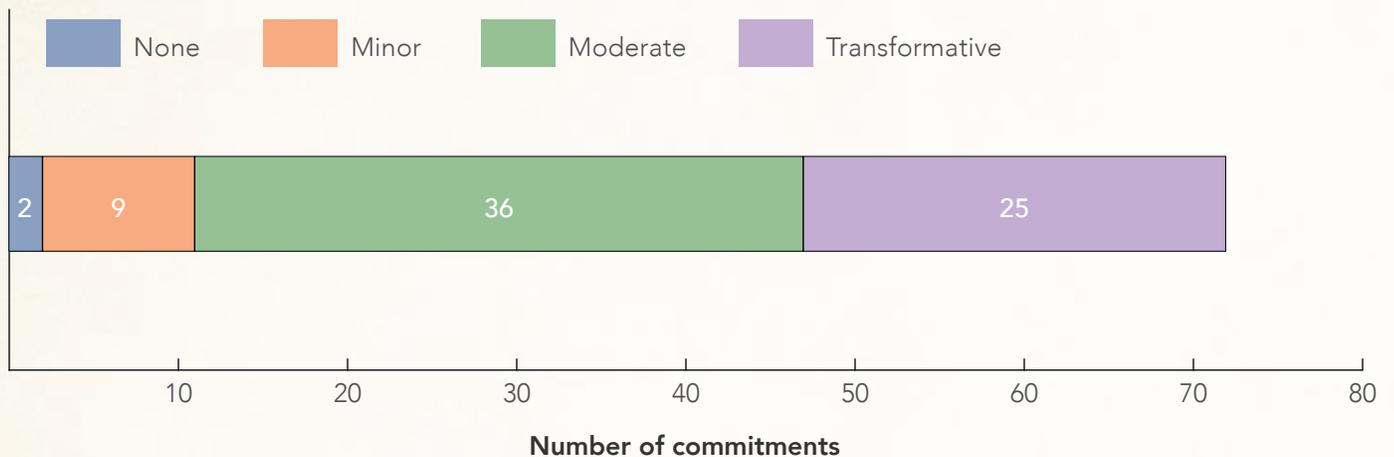
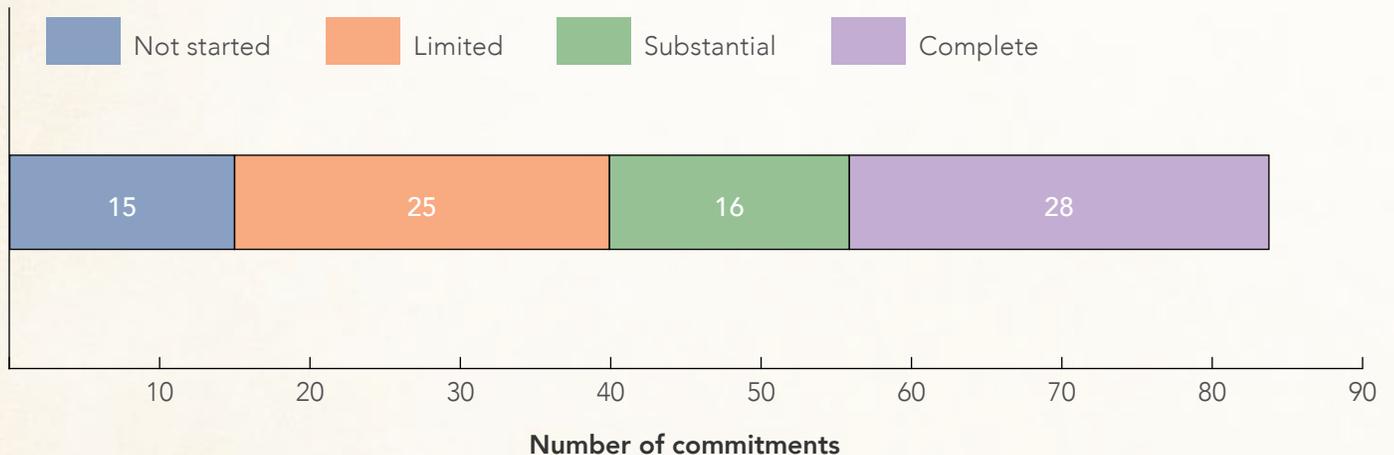


Chart 2 shows the distribution of level of completion of the 88 commitments after the first year of implementation (not started, limited, substantial, or complete). Four commitments coded as not applicable (NA) or withdrawn were excluded from Chart 2, as well as Questions 2 and 3 (below). Again, see the IRM Data Guide or the IRM Technical Paper 1 for more details on the IRM methodology.

Chart 2 | Rate of Completion of Participation Commitments



¹⁰ There are only 72 observations for this variable. The Cohort 1 reports, including Brazil and Mexico, did not code for 'Potential Impact'.

2 | PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC IMPACT

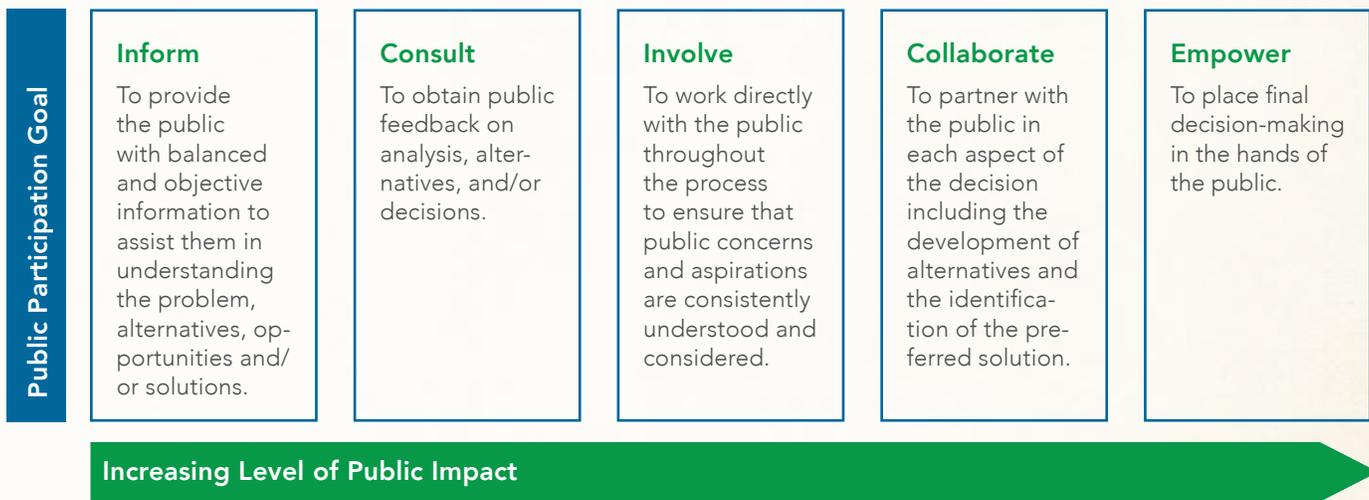
Question 1: Just how participatory are OGP participation commitments?

Answer 1: The majority of commitments promised some form of two-way communication, but a minority included explicit means of public influence over decision making.

Some OGP stakeholders have expressed concerns that OGP requirements on participation can encourage “box ticking.” Governments may commit to improving participation, but the reforms themselves may not significantly empower citizens.

One way of tackling this question is to identify the potential level of public impact on a decision-making process covered by participation. The IRM staff used the International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) “Spectrum of Public Participation” to assign a value to each of the Latin American participation commitments. Table 2 shows and describes the various values (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower).¹¹

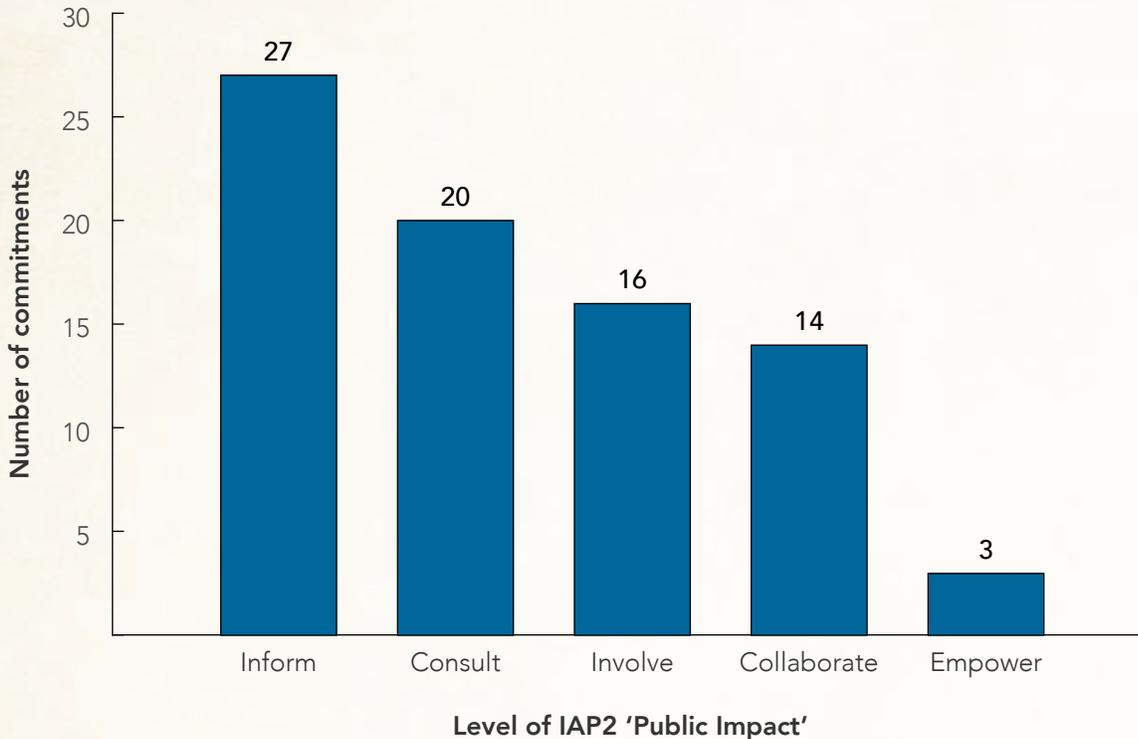
Table 2 | IAP2 Spectrum of Public Impact and Public Participation Goals



¹¹ The IRM method makes no judgment about a commitment’s value on this spectrum or general ‘potential impact,’ which is a separate variable coded by each IRM researcher. See Open Government Partnership, IRM Data Release v2.0 Data Guide (Data Guide), <http://bit.ly/1tYcEBc>.

Chart 3 (below) shows the numerical distribution from Table 2. It ranks the 88 commitments by potential level of public impact. The eight unclear values are not included.

Chart 3 | Distribution of Commitments Across the IAP2 Spectrum



This graph can be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, 47 out of 80 commitments fell on side of the spectrum with the least potential public impact (rated either 'Inform' or 'Consult'). Only 3 commitments fell in the category with the highest potential public impact (rated 'Empower'). On the other hand, well over half of the commitments, 53 out of 80, involved at least a two-way flow of information.

An area for further investigation with a larger data set is, "To what extent is participation being improved in transformative areas of public policy?" In other words, are commitments with high degrees of public involvement in decision-making actually changing the status quo of important policy areas? See Chart 1 above for descriptive statistics on this subject.

47 out of 80 commitments fell on side of the spectrum with the least potential public impact... On the other hand, well over half of the commitments, 53 out of 80, involved at least a two-way flow of information.

3 | PUBLIC IMPACT AND COMPLETION

Question 2: Do participation commitments with greater potential ‘public impact’ get completed?

Answer 2: Greater potential public impact is not correlated with completion or incompleteness.

This question looked at the potential results of commitments.

Currently, the OGP Articles of Governance encourage participating governments to make ambitious commitments, defined as commitments that bring new levels of specific action or oversight to a policy area and have high levels of potential impact. At the same time, governments are encouraged through IRM reporting to actually achieve their stated action plan goals. Although the IAP2’s public impact spectrum is not necessarily analogous to the IRM’s ‘potential impact’ variable,¹² understanding if a relationship exists between public (or potential) impact and completion is important. This understanding can help avoid perverse incentives whereby governments value completion over a meaningful progress.

If commitments with lower levels of potential public impact, according to the IAP2 Spectrum, are easier to complete, then the IRM data should display a negative correlation between the level of potential public impact and the level of completion. However, while there is a negative relationship, it is very small and not statistically significant.¹³ This indicates that there is no clear relationship between how much a commitment potentially empowers citizens and how likely that commitment is to be completed. The Conclusions section discusses this further.

...there is no clear relationship between how much a commitment potentially empowers citizens and how likely that commitment is to be completed.

¹² The Limitations subsection of this paper’s Conclusion elaborates on this point.

¹³ The Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient, the statistic used to measure correlations between two ordinal variables, is only weakly negative: $r_s = -0.05$.

4 | EXPANSION AND IMPROVEMENT OF PARTICIPATION

Question 3: Did participation commitments open new participatory spaces or deepen existing participation?

Answer 3: Most commitments focused on improving already existing participatory areas.

In examining the significance of OGP participation commitments, it is interesting to know the degree to which action plans bring participation to a policy area that previously was not participatory. The degree to which commitments focus on improving existing participatory spaces or mechanisms is also interesting. For a better understanding of the number of commitments that fit into either category, the author labeled commitments based on whether they aim to ‘open participatory space’ or ‘improve existing spaces.’

For example, in a country where environmental decision-making is not participatory, a commitment to provide four weeks of public comment on proposed land leases would be marked as “opening new” participatory space. But in a country where environmental issues involving land leases have involved participatory mechanisms for many years, a commitment would be considered to “improve existing” participatory spaces in the policy area. The categories are not mutually exclusive; commitments can open more participatory space and improve existing participation at the same time. Note that in most cases the appropriate value was apparent from the text and supplementary information for the commitment as written in the action plan. Where necessary, however, the author carried out additional verification.

Table 3 shows the values for each of these two possibilities. Most of the commitments built on already existing participatory spaces.

Table 3 | Percentages of Improve Existing Spaces vs. Opening New Space

		IMPROVE EXISTING SPACES FOR PARTICIPATION		
		Yes	No	TOTAL
OPEN NEW PARTICIPATORY SPACE	Yes	19 (23%)	17 (20%)	36 (43%)
	No	48 (57%)	–	48 (57%)
	TOTAL	67 (80%)	17 (20%)	84 (100%)¹⁴

¹⁴ Four cases were excluded because their values for these variables were unclear.

This table shows that of the 84 commitments, only 43% opened space for participation on new governance issues, while 80% of them sought to improve existing participation spaces. Removing activities relevant to both (23%), 20% of the commitments only opened new space, and 57% were only about improving existing spaces.

Importantly, neither of the terms should be interpreted to reflect a value judgment on a commitment’s ‘ambition.’ That is a separate, standard variable coded by each IRM researcher for each specific country case. Moreover, it should not be assumed that existing spaces are sufficiently participatory and need no further improvements. Even so, OGP stakeholders will need to decide whether OGP should continue to focus on improvement of current performance or should prioritize opening previously closed policy space.

A logical next question is whether “improving” commitments are more prevalent because they are easier to achieve. If commitments to open new space were significantly more difficult, then this division would be expected, and space-opening commitments would have lower percentages of completion. While each case is obviously specific to a unique country context, the results of this analysis should provide an empirical side to discussions about the appropriate intended effect of a commitment.

To analyze this relationship, Table 4 breaks apart commitments that would only open new space, only improve existing spaces, or both.¹⁵ It shows the respective percentage of the total participation commitments, as well as the percent of those commitments that were substantially or totally completed.¹⁶ Chart 4 shows the same completion information in a bar graph with the values for completion disaggregated. Some small rounding errors may be present.

OGP stakeholders will need to decide whether OGP should continue to focus on improvement of current performance or should prioritize opening previously closed policy space.

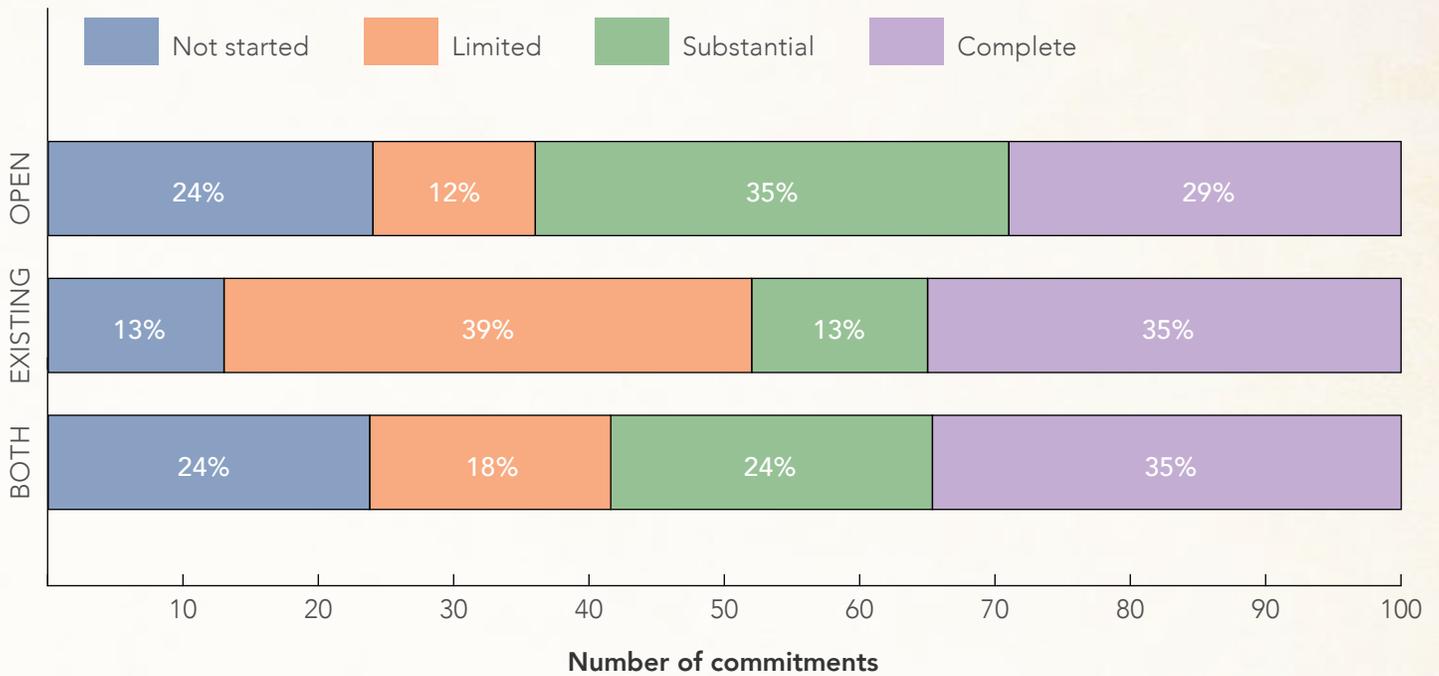
Table 4 | Participation Commitments Substantially or Totally Completed, by Intended Effect

	# OF COMMITMENTS	% OF TOTAL PARTICIPATION COMMITMENTS	% SUBSTANTIALLY OR TOTALLY COMPLETED
OPEN NEW SPACE	17	20%	65%
IMPROVE EXISTING SPACE	48	57%	48%
BOTH	19	23%	59%

¹⁵ These numbers differ from the numbers in Chart 2. All observations whose levels of completion were not clear (indicated as NA or withdrawn) were removed from analysis. Similarly to Table 2, the four values that were ‘Unclear’ for Scope or Existing also were removed.

¹⁶ Here, the data for Actual Completion were recoded into two groups. Substantial or Complete are one group, and Limited and Not Started are the other. Withdrawn and NA responses were removed.

Chart 4 | Participation Commitments Substantially or Totally Completed, by Intended Effect



These two figures offer insights. A higher percentage of commitments involving opening new space (64%) were completed (substantially or totally) than the commitments only to improve existing spaces (48%). At the disaggregated level:

- Commitments to open new space most commonly were ‘substantially’ completed.
- Commitments to improve existing spaces most commonly had ‘limited’ completion.
- Commitments that did both had most commonly ‘complete’ implementation.

The numbers in the previous graphs are too low to conclude with certainty that one type of intended effect is easier to achieve than the other. Still, the observations do not support the prediction that commitments to improve existing participatory spaces have higher levels of completion. In fact, the opposite appears true. Commitments that open new participatory mechanisms beyond the existing frontiers were more likely to be achieved than commitments to improve already existing participatory spaces.

The Conclusions section addresses possible limitations and explanations for this finding.

Commitments that open new participatory mechanisms beyond the existing frontiers were more likely to be achieved than commitments to improve already existing participatory spaces.

5 | PARTICIPATION AND TECHNOLOGY

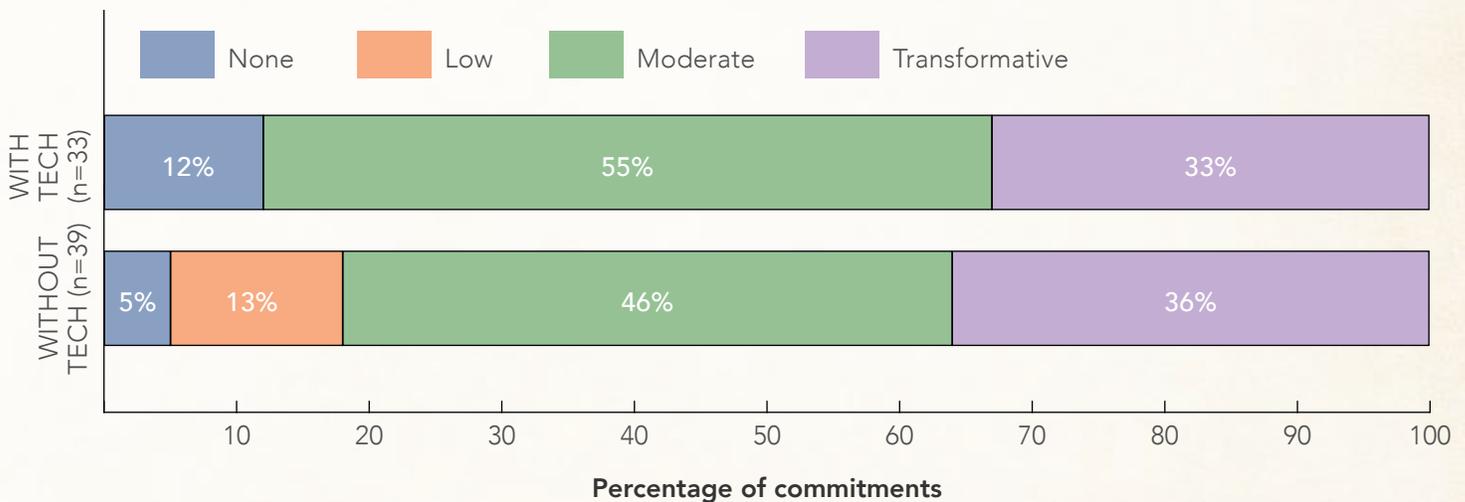
Question 4: Do participation commitments involving technology have more or less potential impact?

Answer 4: While the data is inconclusive, technology-oriented commitments often seem to have a significant potential impact.

Many articles, campaigns, and initiatives promote the combination of new communication technologies with efforts to increase participation in government. They cite various benefits, from the potential for technological “leapfrogging” to the improved efficiency of technological streamlining, and they suggest that technology can help to overcome distance and improve accessibility in civic life.¹⁷ At the same time, critics argue that there can sometimes be too heavy a focus on the technological aspect of a project instead of the participation. For example, some IRM reports questioned the use of high-tech participation where cheaper and easier-to-implement solutions could have had a greater impact.¹⁸ One example of a relatively “naïve” form of civic participation are OGP action plan commitments to give government departments accounts on social media.

To test this critique, participation commitments also tagged as relevant to the open government value of ‘technology and innovation for transparency and accountability’¹⁹ can be compared to participation commitments not tagged as involving technology. The comparison would show any differences in their potential impacts. Chart 5 (below) graphs this distribution. The top bar shows the potential impact percentages of the 33 commitments involving technology, and the lower bar shows the potential impact percentages for the 39 commitments without a specified technological component. The bar colors (blue, red, green, purple) represent each level of potential impact (none, low, moderate, transformative).

Chart 5 | Graph of Potential Impact of Commitments Compared by Tech or No Tech



¹⁷ Zaigham Mahmood, E-Government Implementation and Practice in Developing Countries (Hershey: IGI Global, 2013).

¹⁸ See e.g. Open Government Partnership Independent Reporting Mechanism, Colombia Progress Report 2012-2013, <http://bit.ly/1k2lQut>.

¹⁹ The IRM method does not specify what is technology and innovation in a specific case. As a result, technology-relevant commitments could include anything from anti-corruption hotlines to virtual public consultations.

Chart 5 shows commitments involving both participation and technology have marginally higher levels of potential impact than commitments involving participation without a clear technological aspect. Eighty-eight percent of commitments involving technology had a moderate or transformative potential impact, while 82% of participation without technology had the same level of potential impact. Although this difference is small, **the data in this sample show little evidence that technology or its absence is significantly associated with the potential impact of participation commitments.**

The data in this sample show little evidence that technology or its absence is significantly associated with the potential impact of participation commitments.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE IRM TECHNICAL PAPER 1

First, this paper found over **half of the commitments analyzed promised very little public impact**. At the same time, one could interpret this finding positively, because well over **half of the commitments involved at least a two-way flow of information between citizens and government**. However, when comparing this statistic to the findings in the IRM Technical Paper 1, it becomes clear that civic involvement remains a problematic area. Consider, for example, the OGP requirements around how governments should consult with civil society during the development and implementation of action plans:

“Slightly less than 75% of governments had face-to-face meetings with any stakeholders. On a positive side, this means that many of the OGP governments met a core requirement of OGP. Yet nine of 35 governments had no face-to-face engagement. Given the “tick box” nature of the IRM’s assessment, a greater number of governments had inadequate or overly managed engagement with civil society and the private sector. This is notable because, first, it is a fundamental aspect of OGP that should not be taken lightly. Second, the standard for IRM researchers to code this variable in the affirmative is so low that governments need only hold one face-to-face meeting. No standards govern the quality of this meeting, how commitments should be considered, or how proposals should be integrated into action plans.”²⁰

Thus, this paper’s findings on specific participation commitments, together with the larger finding on OGP’s participatory processes, show that civic participation is a major area of possible improvement.

Second, this paper found that **commitments that have higher public impacts are not necessarily completed less**. There is a negative relationship between public impact and level of completion, but it is very small and not statistically significant. Similarly, **commitments to expand participation to new policy areas, arguably more difficult to achieve than commitments to improve existing participatory spaces, had higher levels of completion. But the number of commitments analyzed was too low to conclude that one type of intended effect is easier to achieve than the other**. Although public impact and potential impact are different variables, this finding largely parallels the IRM Technical Paper 1, which found no evidence of a relationship between the potential impact, newness, and completion of a commitment. As that paper pointed out, “This is promising for OGP. It suggests that more difficult or ambitious commitments are still being implemented. The variation between countries must be explained by other factors.”²¹

Finally, the paper found that **IRM researchers tend to code participation commitments that involve technology as having marginally higher potential impacts than participation commitments without a clear technological aspect**. Eighty-eight percent of commitments involving technology had a moderate or transformative potential impact, while 82% of participation commitments without technology had the same level of potential impact. Although this difference is small, a possibly more interesting observation arises when comparing this level of potential impact to the level across all commitments. The IRM Technical Paper 1 found that on average action plans had 37% of their commitments coded as moderate or transformative potential impact.²² This stark difference demonstrates that civic participation is a policy area with great potential impact for open government reform, whether or not it involves participation.

²⁰ IRM Technical Paper 1, 26, <http://bit.ly/1x7r53D>.

²¹ Ibid, 31, <http://bit.ly/1x7r53D>.

²² Ibid, 16, <http://bit.ly/1x7r53D>.

ACTION ITEMS

The findings in this paper are exploratory, and there are limits to how reliable and generalizable these results are. A few next steps for research can help to overcome these limits:

- Expansion of analysis to a larger data set (for all OGP countries).
- Qualitative investigation into “high public impact” participation commitments. The relatively low numbers of these commitments may hide the significance and interesting stories behind some of the more participatory commitments.
- Repeated analysis using end-of-term reports will help to see better the ultimate fate of participation commitments. (The data set used here covers only the first year.)

This paper asked questions about the quality of public participation commitments in OGP. It demonstrated that there is significant room for growth around these commitments. The following steps can help to improve the quality of public participation:

1. As OGP strengthens support to governments and civil society, **OGP’s international stakeholders and OGP staff** should begin considering ways to stimulate greater innovation and to improve current ‘box ticking’ compliance with OGP requirements. They should also continue clearly communicating expectations and innovations around civic participation commitments to OGP participating governments.
2. **Reformers and activists using OGP at the national level** can use this paper to help frame campaigns to include higher quality participation commitments. Reformers may argue that, based on the evidence, more ambitious commitments are often completed, and that technology can contribute, but is not necessary.
3. **Researchers may investigate** (a) when and how civil society actually use different types of participatory opportunities; (b) whether participation commitments have produced real changes in specific country contexts; and (c) how participation addresses or affects particular sectors like budgets or extractives.

Finally, the IRM encourages all interested potential partners with ideas or proposals for research using the IRM results to contact the IRM at irm@opengovpartnership.org or the author of this paper at preston.whitt@opengovpartnership.org.

The database used for this analysis is a subset of the larger IRM open data release. This subset is available for public download at: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1sQf1DDr86L3cRy_90Cgmbib7y3UplAhZ2mZgXlwDmgg/edit?usp=sharing.



Independent Reporting Mechanism
Open Government Partnership
c/o OpenGovHub
1110 Vermont Ave, NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005

Open
Government
Partnership

