4 PATHWAYS OF CHANGE

Thus far, we have considered a range of arguments put forward in scholarly literature by open government advocates. We have also looked at the statements of public officials as to why (and why not) open government might be a success. In chapter 2, we reviewed the recent history of public sector reform and found that it was typical for reformers to experience some early successes but for reforms to later run into various kinds of trouble. In sum, reforms encounter ideological conflicts or insurmountable problems with implementation. Inevitably, these problems lead to alternative ideas being proposed, but the important lessons may be either ignored or too difficult for new reformers to avoid repeating. In chapter 3, we considered various arguments from research in international relations about why national membership in international institutions might—or might not—matter for domestic reforms.

In this chapter, we examine whether the Open Government Partnership, as a transnational multistakeholder initiative, has any chance of bucking this historical trend. We develop our arguments on how the Open Government Partnership could potentially spark new changes that lead to genuine improvements in terms of better governance. In particular, we examine the *direct* and *indirect* pathways through which this change can happen. To do so, this chapter draws on both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the two theories of domestic policy change—a direct pathway and an indirect pathway. We test these further in chapter 5 through a focused, single-country case study.

In this chapter, however, we draw on evidence that is global in scope in order to critically assess the extent to which both direct and indirect

pathways may be operating in the case of the Open Government Partnership and to better understand how each works. As well as marshaling evidence of direct and indirect pathways from a multitude of different sources, we embed our arguments in the public administration and political science literature, where a similar stream of ideas has accumulated and grown over time. However, we present a new synthesis of the literature, considering direct and indirect pathways of change not just as two different and complementary sets of change mechanisms but as critical parts of governmental reform that are set into motion by new transnational multistakeholder initiatives, such as the Open Government Partnership.

In the rest of this chapter, we assemble evidence relevant to both the direct and indirect pathways. But first, some conceptual elucidation is needed. We look to a body of multidisciplinary literature on direct and indirect policy effects to show how indirect effects could also play a powerful role in transnational multistakeholder initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership. The building blocks of indirect pathways of policy change already exist in political science, but these building blocks need to be repurposed to explain how they can be applied to a transnational multistakeholder initiative.

EVIDENCE OF THE DIRECT PATHWAY OF CHANGE

In 2013 at the opening of the first Open Government Partnership Global Summit in London, UK Prime Minister David Cameron said:

> I think we'll have more members, more commitments, more enthusiasm, because this is absolutely an idea—not only whose time has come—but has the real transformative potential to help poor countries get richer and to help wealthier countries sustain their advances, and make sure, as I said, that wealth and power in countries is properly shared. (UK Cabinet Office, 2013)

Cameron spoke passionately about the potential that the Open Government Partnership had to foster a process of change, but his speech did not delve into *how* this change could happen. Of course, this was a time to beat the battle drums rather than to reflect and question his own and other leaders' underlying assumptions.

We would not be giving Cameron enough credit if we suggested that his speech and the mood of the first summit were only about beating drums. If we look closer, we can see some assumptions about the main idea of change and how this was reflected in the institutional design of the Open Government Partnership. In the same speech, Cameron stated that "the sustainability of the Open Government Partnership—well, it'll depend on all of us. It'll depend on the politicians making their promises and keeping their promises." When the UK, along with seven other countries, founded the Open Government Partnership, their vision for the organization was informed by an idea of how developing an accountable system of rules and processes for member countries would drive governmental change. These rules and processes—the eligibility criteria, biannual evaluation process, and constitution of the organizational leadership—are all part of the machinery for a pathway of change that we describe as having a *direct* path of causation.

The reasoning of the direct pathway goes something like this: We know from prior experience that if action A occurs, then result B is likely to occur. With this knowledge in mind, a direct pathway of change could be established with an institutional design that—if adhered to—will lead to the desired reform outcome. Thus, for the Open Government Partnership, a system is put in place to institutionalize action, the action is controlled with formal eligibility rules in the Partnership, and this will lead to the intended effect of compliance with commitments. In this direct pathway, the nature of policy impacts are highly intentional on the part of decision makers, and the types of actions needed to bring about the desired effects require a limited number of intervening variables. This direct pathway of change is shown in figure 4.1.

The logic of this pathway is straightforward, but political science scholars have often struggled with its underlying concept of causation, including philosophical disagreements over whether institutional designs and approaches can actually cause real policy changes. Many years ago, the scholars Elkins and Simeon (1979) explained this puzzle when developing their theory of policy influence. Political efficacy makes it possible for policies to have an influence, they argued. Political efficacy is embodied in specific commitments, rules, procedures, and regulations such that individuals who carry them out assume that these commitments have a causal power to
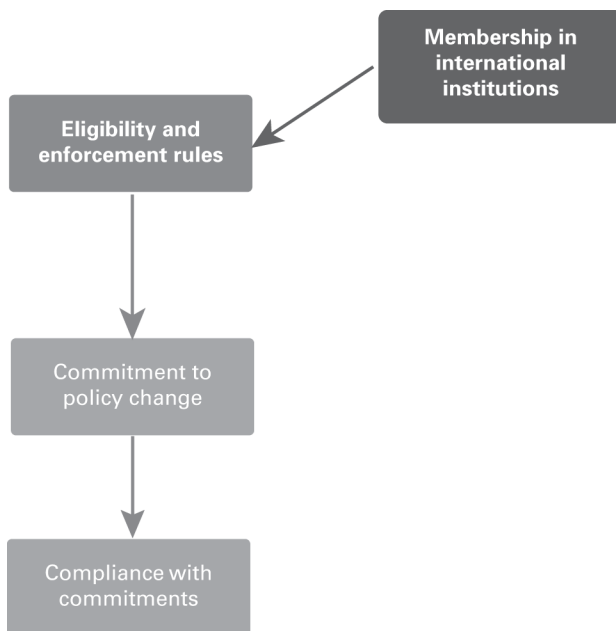
Figure 4.1
Direct pathway of change.

produce the desired effect of the commitments. Elkins and Simeon say that the individuals who carry out these commitments

> do not automatically engage in a particular action; the final action depends as well on the existence of relevant institutions or leadership. The assumption opens the possibility of action, and it disposes the members of the group sharing it to certain actions more than to others. (133)

This shared action, described by Elkins and Simeon, is reflected well in the National Action Plan cycle under the leadership of the Open Government Partnership. The institutional design of the Open Government Partnership is intended to dispose members to produce certain desired actions in the form of open government commitments. As we explained in the preceding chapters, the chief tools used by the Open Government Partnership for driving public sector reforms are the policy commitments—new laws and processes, inter-governmental collaborations, technologies, campaigns, and many other policy

ideas—that are developed in a National Action Plan. A carefully developed, formalized system for design, implementation, and evaluation supports these commitments. This system is designed to make the commitments ambitious and relevant to open government with the potential to transform the public sector.

This approach of the National Action Plan cycle has that implicit, direct causal logic. (If A, then B.) In concrete terms, this means that *if* a government implements the right decision-making procedures with a civil society consultation process, appoints a government ministry to oversee the implementation of the commitment, invests resources into its commitments, and endeavors to adhere to the milestones, then it will, to a certain extent, result in more transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and even other public goods, such as legitimacy, satisfaction, and even better democracy.

The direct pathway also represents a causal logic of the kind that epistemologists would call naïve realism. Naïve realism does not mean that the approach is naïve in the sense of facile or uninformed but rather that the idea rests upon a belief that the cause-effect relationships that make up reality are as simple and self-evident as we would expect them to be. In other words, the occurrence of B taking place after A right in front of our eyes is exactly as it appears to be—a causal relationship resulting from the formal membership mechanisms of the Open Government Partnership.

The Independent Reporting Mechanism and the National Action Plan cycle are, therefore, clear cases of the kinds of explicit institutional designs that are intended to produce specific policy outputs with broader governance outcomes. In other words, these mechanisms are part of an intended direct pathway of change.

The challenge is to understand and evaluate how this direct pathway works at a microlevel of actors and policies. These direct mechanisms are, of course, designed to create an impact, and the Open Government Partnership takes the importance of being transparent about its performance seriously. The National Action Plan cycle incentivizes governments to deliver on their commitments, and an open evaluation process helps to leverage external attention and pressure on this process as well as enable learning for the future.

However, as we will see below, this direct pathway of change has shown largely mixed results. We first evaluate the operation of a direct pathway of change before contrasting it with an alternative, indirect pathway of change that we suggest is a more useful analytical approach.

Independent Reporting Mechanism and National Action Plan Cycle

Given that the direct pathway of change is explicitly accounted for in the design of the Open Government Partnership, we can find out how well it performs by zooming in on the formal mechanisms of the Independent Reporting Mechanism and the design and implementation of commitments themselves. We can further analyze the official data on the performance of the commitments through the Open Government Partnership's own data in the Open Government Partnership Explorer. In the examination of the direct pathway, we also illustrate the performance of the National Action Plan by commenting on the opinions expressed by country stakeholders and Reporting Independent Mechanism researchers in the reports. We draw on material from Open Government Partnership progress reports, member self-evaluations, and news articles, as well as conversations with Open Government Partnership staff and civil society organizations that are engaged in the Independent Reporting Mechanism evaluation process.

Commitment compliance and performance

We begin our examination of the direct pathway by looking at reported data from the Open Government Partnership's Independent Reporting Mechanism. We also go further into depth on the types of commitments that have been proposed and their results. Does this consciously designed system of first creating a policy, then implementing, then evaluating it achieve what it is supposed to? Does the Open Government Partnership really benefit from this kind of commitment-based approach? We can address these questions by looking at the outcomes of the commitments through performance statistics created by the official evaluation process undertaken by the Open Government Partnership Independent Reporting Mechanism and the Open Government Partnership country researchers.

We start with some regression analysis to test the significance of predicted relationships of the kind that Open Government Partnership institutional

Table 4.1

Predicted effect of country processes on commitment success

Variables	Model 1 progress		Model 2 impact	
Joint implementation	−0.039	(0.124)	0.229	(0.241)
Accountability	−0.181	(0.304)	−0.235	(0.230)
Measurability	0.528***	(0.114)	0.426**	(0.135)
Goal clarity				
Goal: information	0.141	(0.172)	0.499	(0.415)
Goal: participation	−0.041	(0.144)	1.076**	(0.456)
Goal: accountability	−0.112	(0.136)	0.384	(0.358)
Goal: technology	0.244	(0.161)	0.964**	(0.377)
N	1077		921	
Wald chi2	24.36***		67.37***	
R2	0.026		0.061	

Ordinal logistic regression estimates. The coefficients are log odds representing the change in probability from a unit increase of the independent variable—standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variables are measured as follows: Progress is rated by the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher on a scale of 0–3 where 0 is not even started, 1 is no or limited completion, 2 is substantial completion, and 3 is full completion. Impact is rated by the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher on a scale of 0–3, where 0 is no impact, 1 is minor impact, 2 is moderate impact, and 3 is transformative impact. Independent variables are all dichotomous (0 or 1), measured as follows: Joint implementation is a variable indicating whether or not the commitment was developed through a collaborative decision-making process between the government and civil society. Accountability is a variable indicating whether the commitment was given a named, responsible official as the person ultimately in charge. Measurability indicates whether the commitment was designed with explicit and clear milestones against which to measure progress toward completion. Finally, goal clarity is measured as a dichotomous variable for four possible goals on which the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher can decide if the commitment is clear or not.
Source: Adapted from Ingrams (2017b).
* $p < 0.05$ confidence level.
** $p < 0.01$ confidence level.
***$p < 0.001$ confidence level

designers expected to show positive results. Table 4.1 presents the results of two models of different commitment-level outcomes in terms of implementation and potential impact as assessed by country researchers. Each coefficient shows the direction of change in these outcomes associated with different official policy inputs into the design of these commitments. We used regression analysis with a sample of all (approximately one thousand) commitments from all Open Government Partnership countries between

the years 2011 and 2016 to estimate whether the presence of these design characteristics leads to more success. Each of the independent variables shown in the table (joint implementation, accountability, measurability, and goal clarity) are dichotomous (zero or one), taken from the evaluation scores determined by the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher for each of those countries where the commitments are recorded.

Table 4.1 shows that the processes carefully designed by the Open Government Partnership to procure good results—such as having an official joint implementation process among government ministries, adopting an accountability process with civil society, and designing commitments with measurable and clear goals—do often lead to success. Success, in this case, is measured as whether or not a commitment is substantially or entirely completed within the stipulated timeframe (model 1) or as the potential impact the commitment can have (model 2). But this applies only to the characteristics of *measurability* and *goal clarity*, which are associated with better-performing commitments. This means that ideas, such as using joint implementation and going through the accountability procedures with civil society, do not necessarily lead to better-performing commitments. Despite the hard efforts that national and subnational governments put into using joint implementation and accountability procedures, these things actually appear to make no difference to the performance of the commitments.

The track record of the National Action Plan cycle

We can get a further idea of the performance of the direct pathway by looking at summary statistics from the National Action Plan cycle. Table 4.2 shows frequencies and percentages for the number of completed commitments, number of repeated commitments, patterns or trends in completed commitments, and the distribution of quality characteristics (level of completion and potential impact) across commitments. An impressive 4,094 commitments have been evaluated by the Open Government Partnership Independent Reporting Mechanism as of January 2020. Further, 70 percent of these commitments were found by the Independent Reporting Mechanism researchers to be relevant; that is, they met at least one of the value areas of open government (transparency, participation, technology, and accountability).

Table 4.2

Open Government Partnership commitment statistics (2011−2019)

Commitment characteristics	
Number of country members	78
Withdrawn countries	4
Number of commitments	4,094
Commitment level of completion*	
Not started	14%
Limited	38%
Substantial	29%
Complete	19%
Commitment potential impact**	
Transformative	13%
Moderate	40%
Minor	42%
None	5%
Relevance to open government	
Relevant	70%
Not relevant	30%
* Not including unclear or withdrawn, not determined (ND), etc. ** Not including not available (NA), ND, etc.	

However, only a very small percentage (19 percent) of these commitments were ever completed or were intrinsically transformative (13 percent).

The direct pathway as a positive performance trend

In the analysis above, we examined the direct effects using cross-sectional data. This type of data, however, does not allow us to look at another important design in the direct pathways of the Open Government Partnership approach, which is the fostering of positive learning cycles through the commitment design and evaluation process. According to the Independent Reporting Mechanism theory of change, if this positive cycle is working well, there should be an observable improvement in the performance of commitments over time.
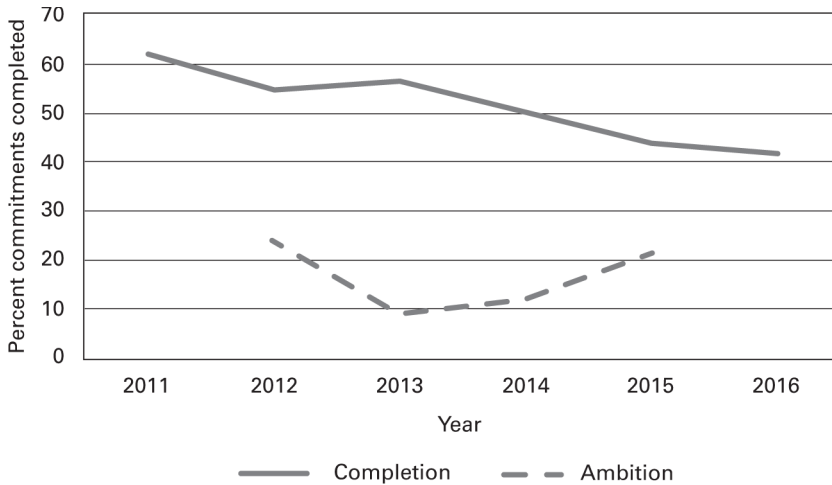
Figure 4.2
Performance of commitments over time.

Figure 4.2 shows trend lines with available data for all commitments between 2011 and 2016 for the commitments' average completion level and ambition rating across all Open Government Partnership members.[1] What would we expect to see if the commitment cycle was improving the open government performance of countries? We should hope to see the virtuous learning cycle that would show a linear progression over the years moving from the left in an upward direction, showing that a greater rate of commitments is being completed over time and/or that the ambition of the commitments is steady or progressing, which would indicate that the countries are learning. In contrast, what we see is that the years seem to be moving downward slightly in terms of the completion level, while ambition levels show no clear sign of improvement.

Stars to Flops and Everything Between

The analyses above suggest that the direct pathway of change has had limited success. Country-level and commitment-level statistical analysis of this kind is insightful because it can give us a broad insight into expected impacts. However, to understand whether and how the National Action Plan commitment process has worked within specific policy fields within countries,

we need to pay greater attention to the commitments themselves and the policy contexts in which they are implemented. Thus, we continue the study below by describing how individual commitments perform, and we venture some explanations for why they often fail to have much impact. To get a sense of what the commitments do and how they perform according to the official procedures, we also need to go beyond the numbers to examine what the commitments set out to achieve and how their stipulated objectives did or did not come to fruition.

The main finding of our analysis below is that commitments are a mixed bag of high- and low-performing initiatives. There are some positive stories, but the overall narrative of direct impact created by these commitments is one that reformers with high expectations would find very disillusioning. Although the direct approach appears to work in some cases, it is also frequently unreliable. If we zoom in on specific cases of Open Government Partnership commitments, we see that countries experienced highly varied levels of success—many commitments do extraordinarily well, but some also fail miserably. The most common commitment, for instance, is one that does so-so. It does not completely fall short of what it set out to do, but it also does not make any notable change. In the analysis below, we review both successful and unsuccessful experiences of specific commitments, shedding light on the variability of a direct pathway of change and some of the barriers leading to its occasional failure.

We start our in-depth analysis of commitments by using the Open Government Partnership Explorer data to select a small number of cases to discuss, going beyond numerical indicators. In these selections, we aim to illustrate the diversity of commitment success stories both individually, in terms of how smoothly they were implemented, and organizationally, in terms of their geographical spread and the assortment of policy areas where they are used.

Figure 4.3 shows four broad categories of commitments. Our goal here is not to exhaustively categorize all commitments but rather to identify key archetypes in order to limit the number we analyze according to a range of different success levels. Not every single official-published commitment fits neatly into this matrix, and we only select cases that are distinctly classifiable,

Level of relevance and transformativeness

	High	Low
High	Stars	Low-hanging fruit
Low	Pipe dreams	Flops

Level of completion

Figure 4.3
Matrix of four types of commitment.

while many others fall somewhere between these four major categories. As all commitments are assessed by the Independent Reporting Mechanism country researcher for their levels of completion (not started, limited, substantial, or complete), relevance, and potential transformativeness, we can categorize commitments as falling within the four cells of the matrix as follows:[2]

Stars are the commitments that do very well. Stars have the hallmarks of prototypical commitments in the way that the Open Government Partnership system is intended. That is, they are designed in such a way that they are relevant to Open Government Partnership values, they are potentially transformative, and at least substantially completed on time.

Pipe dreams are barely completed to any satisfactory degree, but they do impress in terms of their relevance and moderate or major potential for transformativeness.

Low-hanging fruit has a high degree of completion according to their original plan. While they may have minor impacts, they may not be

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particularly relevant or likely to lead to substantial public sector trans-
formation. This lopsidedness comes from the fact that their objectives
are not ambitious, and their plan is easy to adhere to.

Flops are simply poor performers in every respect. Despite the fact that these
commitments show little potential to have a real impact on society (and
should thus be comparatively simple to implement), they nevertheless
also fail to make progress toward their original stipulated goal.

This schema tells us a lot about how Open Government Partnership
commitments might impact the open government quest for transforming
government. But we need to know more about what these different kinds of
commitments really look like in practice, how they come about, and what
this can tell us about the direct effects that the Open Government Partner-
ship aims to put into practice. In this section, we explore these points further.

Stars

Some commitments do genuinely reach an impressive level of ambition and
a strong potential to change the public sector for the better. Such commit-
ments can come to fruition with enough wise planning, material resources,
and political commitment. In these star commitments, the Open Govern-
ment Partnership membership formula works precisely as it is intended. In
their design and implementation, the commitments may restore the hope of
true believers and seem to show that the initiative can indeed deliver direct
impacts.

Star commitments often seem to depend on a certain degree of luck (or
rather, avoidance of bad luck) along the path of implementation. Random
or routine changes in government administration can seriously knock Open
Government Partnership commitments out of place because they are typi-
cally not legally binding on the new leadership incumbents in government.
Star commitments not only rely on a stable environment but also may rely on
reaching a certain fortuitous amount of political support and resources. Such
policy-window successes normally occur when many actors come together
to do something new that is collectively in their self-interest.

One good case of such policy-window successes in open government
commitments is the transparency reforms being undertaken by many

former Soviet countries as they seek to step out from under the shadow of former regimes and embrace greater public openness about regime secrets.

Ukraine, for example, completed a commitment to open the archives of the USSR internal affairs and secret service from 1917 to 1991. Although in many other post-Soviet countries this process of opening up was accomplished much sooner after independence and was an integral part of democratization reforms (Ninua, 2016), new demands were placed on the Ukrainian government by protesters during the Euromaidan protests in 2014, highlighting the ability of open government commitments to respond to political changes in society. The Law on Access to Archives of Repressive Bodies of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of 1917–1991 requires relevant agencies in possession of sensitive Soviet-era information to send the information to a central repository and sets out the procedures for access and the exemptions. This is a transformative change for Ukrainian citizens, particularly journalists. In addition to important requirements set out in the law, the process of implementation was impressive, too, as the passage of the law was accomplished in a matter of days, exceeding the expectations of the government itself. Further, the process of devising and designing the law was exemplary, too, having been codrafted and sponsored by civil society (Ninua, 2016). The Ukraine Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher found that the law had a major impact on opening government.[3]

Georgia is another good example of a former Soviet country that has used the Open Government Partnership platform to create space for new and sometimes bold political opportunities. Georgia completed a commitment to make government surveillance statistics transparent to the public. The Supreme Court was given the responsibility to ensure that the statistics, going back to 2014, were published in a complete and timely manner. The data, which "includes the number of motions on phone tapping submitted by prosecutors to the courts and the number of motions granted by the courts," provided a basis for civil society to develop a surveillance awareness campaign called This Affects You Too (Gogidze, 2018, 49). The implementation of the commitment was open to amendments during the transition.

The commitment also showed an admirable level of responsiveness to civil society in the way that Open Government Partnership commitments are supposed to. Lobbying from civil society organizations successfully led to the surveillance data adding geographic and crime type levels (Iakobidze, 2017). While the statistics were initially only released by the Supreme Court in response to publicly salient cases, in 2015, all data was released, and annual reports were produced. Independent and professional analyses have taken place as a result of the availability of the data, which has drawn attention to the rise in surveillance by the government over the last few years and the publication of new recommendations for the government (Iakobidze, 2017). The Open Government Partnership reported that Georgia is one of the very few states in the world to publish such statistics and that the commitment is also remarkable for moving outside of the open government focus on the executive to the judicial branch of government (Open Government Partnership, 2016a).

In a different context altogether, the United Kingdom has also taken major steps to address corruption through Open Government Partnership commitments, even though it is often considered among the least corrupt countries in the world. A coalition of ten nongovernmental organizations, called the Bond Group, released a report lamenting the lack of awareness of open government in the UK government and a particular lack of work in fostering participation and collaboration to address the challenge of corruption (Bond Anti-Corruption Group, 2018). The UK launched a commitment to tackle corruption both domestically and through its international development work, led by the Home Office and the Bond Group, by integrating anticorruption work across the government into one strategy. By the end of the action plan time period, the program was complete. The Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher stated that this would have a potentially transformative impact. Subsequently, the impact on openness in the UK was major.

Another type of star commitment is policies that evidence good planning and vision in their design stages, even before implementation. These are often inspired by executive leadership visions that aim high in terms

of transformation and that can also be carried out through a clever implementation strategy. In Albania, the government wrote and passed a law on whistleblower protection. To support the reporting of corruption cases, the government also created an online reporting portal. A draft law was already in place by the time of writing the Open Government Partnership action plan, but, in addition to passing the law, a civil society consultation process was used to improve the draft before passage. The Albanian Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher gave this commitment top marks in all respects—it was fully complete within its stipulated timeframe and was relevant and transformative for the public sector. The law was, among other Albanian reforms, credited for positive steps toward better governance (Volintiru & Olivas Osuna, 2018). However, even this impressive achievement did begin to suffer setbacks. The outcome of reported cases of corruption was not reported by the government, and the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher reported that in its second year of existence, the number of complaints submitted on the portal had halved in number, suggesting that its initial promise had not endured.

On other occasions, star commitments can be driven or supported by the adoption of powerful new technologies that make it possible to transform a particular governmental process. Though it is rare, if not impossible, that a technology can guarantee such a transformation without appropriate reforms to accompany the technology in terms of providing legal, ethical, and political measures. For example, Croatia implemented an online citizen consultation process, including setting up an interactive website, integrating interagency open data of working groups and committees for new laws and regulations, training officials on its use, and publishing annual reports on the performance of the consultation process. The commitment was part of a broader e-government reform that won the Open Government Partnership award for improving services in Europe (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2015). This commitment was supported by recent legislation on transparency and participation, including the 2009 Public Consultation Code and the 2013 Access to Information Act (Open Government Partnership, 2013a). The Croatian Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher found a lot to be impressed by in terms of concrete outputs, reporting that:

In the two months after the launch of the central portal (through 30 June 2015, the end of the first year of implementation), 1,645 comments on draft laws, other regulations and acts were submitted. In this short period, 84 public consultations were started on the portal, by 17 different government bodies. In the first 60 days over 1,600 users registered, 867 of which are individuals, 419 companies, 126 trades, 80 associations, 33 institutions, 36 cooperatives and another 100 representatives of other legal entities. (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2015)

Further, over thirty training sessions were carried out for more than 180 officials from all government bodies (Mendeš, 2016). But star commitments may sometimes be less star-like when we look behind the numbers to the more qualitative impacts of the commitments on society. In fact, in the case of the Public Consultation Code and Access to Information Act in Croatia, the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher still questioned its success. Despite resounding performance in meeting virtually all the milestones within the plan, the researcher stated that "based on the evidence, it does not seem that these milestones, even if fully implemented (as a majority of them are) would really transform the status quo." A Norwegian think tank, Chr. Michelsen Institute, found that the impact of the commitment was dampened by low public awareness and political attention on bigger economic challenges (Montero & Taxell, 2015).

Pipe dreams

Pipe dream commitments had high potential impact but very little actual success in becoming implemented. On the surface, these commitments embody the spirit of the Open Government Partnership view of transformative change in the public sector. They look good on paper, but in practice, they have no real chance of succeeding. Sometimes, as in the case of so-called openwashing, reformers may deliberately create these lofty commitments with the idea that good intentions are sufficient to get public recognition for open government reforms. Ultimately, they may reason, no one will really notice in the end whether the plans are realized or not.

One example is North Macedonia, which launched a commitment that aimed to consolidate its actual participation in the open government

commitment design process by creating a permanent government–civil society advisory council composed of central administrative agencies and representatives from civil society. This was a kind of metacommitment that aimed to design processes that would generate useful commitments in the future. The North Macedonian Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher who evaluated this commitment opined that this was a transformative idea. However, the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher also noted that the said council had actually worsened the quality of open government in the country. The involvement of civil society worsened because there was wide disapproval of the process for selecting civil society representatives for the council. There was also no evidence that any government members had been appointed to the council or that the council had taken shape in any functional way. A major lack of political will was identified by the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher as a reason for the failure. The democracy-promotion organization, Freedom House, gave North Macedonia its first raise in its civil society score in over ten years. However, the Freedom House description of civil society efforts also notes that reforms have failed to truly transform the quality of dialogue and cooperation between the government and civil society, saying, "Critics stress that the resulting debates are usually brief, and that not all relevant civil society groups are invited to participate" (Freedom House, 2015).

Why does this type of problem occur? There are a variety of possible reasons. The tendency of multilateral organizations to create window-dressing behavior is one reason. In this case, the pipe dream is actually less of a dream and more of a ploy, as the commitment is not designed with any real intention of changing the status quo but rather to look impressive and to win credit and legitimacy from political supporters and the international community. Window-dressing strategies are typically designed to cover up for a lack of action or even act in a fashion contrary to the overt messaging strategy. This window-dressing may be designed to appease civil society or the public for reforms that have no chance of actually happening.

On the other hand, overambitious commitments may not be window-dressing (deceit), but there may be a sincere effort to reform. The shortcomings may be simply a result of a lack of capacity. That is, the commitment

shows a poor match between policymaking capacity and the scale of the ambition or unrealistic goals that evidence a lack of planning. Alternatively, the policymaking capacity is potentially sufficient, but unexpected exigencies occur along the implementation path. Some astonishingly bold commitments fall into this category. For example, Mongolia set out to adopt a disclosure system for financial assets of public servants (Zagdragchaa & Tserenjav, 2017), while Trinidad and Tobago set out to "establish a mechanism that allows adequate representation of Civil Society organizations in order to provide feedback to public policy decision making on a regular basis" (Drayton, 2017, 15).

A capacity miscalculation often underlies the ability side of the commitment planning process. The South Korean government committed to proactively publicly disclose all documents that have been signed by officials at a director-general level or higher (Government of South Korea, 2014, 10). This disclosure would amount to an estimated ten million documents in the first year of the commitment's implementation. In addition to this plan, the government wanted to establish a civil society watch group that would monitor implementation, ensuring that all levels of government are disclosing the requisite information in the right forms. The information would be created in a searchable form categorized into ten major policy areas (health, food, safety, child-rearing, finance, education, consumer protection, leisure, job, and housing). The watch group would be selected through an online contest. While the potential impact of the program was said to be moderate, the actual outcome was that the results never fully materialized, and the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher scored the commitment as only marginal in its effect on open government.

The South Korean case highlights the miscalculation of a future administrative burden. However, because open government places expectations on the role of citizens as information consumers or political participants, the miscalculation of citizen capacity can also bring down a commitment with grand ambitions. For example, Indonesia aimed to draw in the public to help develop conservation efforts in mangrove forests. It also aimed to introduce a waste management system in a traditional market. More broadly, Indonesia also aimed to "enhance public understanding on protecting the environment

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and also to encourage public participation in environmental policy related decision making" (Open Government Partnership, 2014b, 83). However, virtually nothing happened. The World Bank notes that a major barrier to the conservation of mangrove regions in Indonesia is that the human settlements in those areas are extremely poor (World Bank, 2015). The World Bank framework for financial aid to Indonesia notes that "poor governance and corruption continued to be a major break on the country's prospects from infrastructure development and the delivery of services to environmental degradation" (World Bank, 2015).

It is very difficult to say with certainty whether a pipe dream commitment is a result of a lack of sincerity, a lack of capacity, or, most likely, a result of a political and administrative process where both elements combine in complex ways. Some commitments look too good to be true, and we might suspect a lack of genuine belief among their sponsors that they could ever become a reality. This is especially so if the commitment has strong political appeal to stakeholders, such as citizens, but the chance of holding the government accountable for the commitment is low.

For example, Ghana sought to implement a new system of auditing reports that would be supported by an audit report implementation committee joined by agency representatives, civil society representatives, and independent professionals (Open Government Partnership, 2013b). This choice of committee design was meant to cut off conflicts of interests between agency representatives and the composition of the committee in order to fully comply with the goals of the Financial Administration Act and to ultimately amend the act itself to establish such a committee moving forward. The Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher opined that the plan could have had a real impact on government and stated:

> The government did not begin any of the milestones. In addition, this commitment did not target the appropriate legal documents. It should have targeted the Audit Service Act in order to allow implementation of these changes. The amendments to the Audit Service Act necessary to complete the commitment were not made, hence the commitment was not started. (Adamtey 2016, 24)

Indeed, Ghana's capacity for implementing financial auditing practices may be particularly weak. Historically, the basic auditing procedures, though present in law, have not been used in practice (Development Gateway, Inc., & Opening Contracting Partnership, 2017).

Other commitments seem to falter due to insufficient political or public support for their motivating ideas. This seems to be the case for one Dutch commitment, called Change Attitudes and Procedures Through Smarter Working and Public Servant, designed to change the internal culture of the government. However, it did not have an immediate appeal for citizens or civil society. The idea behind this commitment was that achieving transparency in government relies on a cultural shift and, therefore, public servants should be trained on how to integrate transparency into government in such a way that adds value to government and society. In addition to a program of awareness-raising and training, the initiative aimed to set up a network of "do tanks" that would develop open government models and spread them in society. The initiative was started in 2013, but two years later, the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher opined that progress had been limited, and the impact on opening government was practically zero. According to the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher, "Promised research on how to create more public value, did not take place, nor could the IRM researcher find evidence of enhanced social impact through these programmes." The researcher went on to surmise that:

> Though many activities took place that suggest significant progress on this commitment, a closer look on what actually happened, shows that there were no specific efforts to "open up to the outer world." At the end of the implementation period, it became clear that this commitment—while focused on promoting transparency—was not relevant to OGP values because the conferences and networks were mainly being used to address public administration issues such as reorganization and professionalization that did not have any ties to improving public service using open government solutions as their main goal. (Raat, 2016, 31)

Unfortunately, many of the pipe-dream commitments that run into capacity problems are ambitious technology reform commitments that are

undermined by flaws in the technology. For example, the UK Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher stated that the UK sought to do the following:

> Work with governments and civil society organizations internationally to create an online space to share experiences of embedding high quality standards into information with a view to building an accreditation scheme to enable citizens and organizations to assess their progress. (Worthy, 2015, 33)

The aim was to help both the UK government and outside states set better healthcare information standards by publishing an index of health resources and inviting collaborations with other countries. However, the commitment never got off the ground. According to the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher, "Commitment was officially withdrawn due to administrative and legal changes within the NHS and concerns over privacy issues" (Worthy, 2015, 11).

Pipe dreams can sometimes be very well designed, but the ultimate inability they have to move forward can occur in small parts of particular milestones. These commitments can sometimes commit the error of believing that "if you build it, they will come." For example, North Macedonia sought to implement local-level participatory policymaking by using mandatory consultations with citizens on budgeting and planning processes. This was potentially path-breaking as, according to the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher, "traditionally, local governments in North Macedonia did not cooperate with CSOs and citizens on policy" (Korunovska, 2017, 68). As part of the initiative, civil society organizations would be proactively encouraged to participate in the consultation process. The Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher viewed the commitment as having good potential. It was designed with specific milestones, was relevant to several open government values, and included access to information, civic participation, and public accountability. The researcher also assessed the commitment as potentially having a decent impact. However, the plans were very slow to start. The midterm assessment found that the work had not even started, and at the end of the two years, some discussion had been made among government organizations at the local level, but these steps had

not been translated into any concrete action. According to the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher:

> Some efforts were made in the last year to build the capacity of civil servants to organize and implement Community Forums independently as part of the exit phase of the program. Approximately 100 civil servants from 29 municipalities were trained in 2016. The Community Forums program closed in March 2017, without making the consultations mandatory. They were not included in the new OGP action plan, and the sustainability of this positive initiative is uncertain at the moment. In this sense, no mechanism was established to allow for public accountability in the last two years. (Korunovska, 2017, 69)

Low-hanging fruit

We can understand low-hanging fruit commitments as precisely the opposite of what we have above described as pipe dreams. Low-hanging fruit demonstrates low ambition but is generally completed at much higher rates. These commitments generally involve lower costs—whether in terms of funding, capacity, political opposition, or the extent of administrative changes required. But for this very reason, these are often the most appealing for governments to include in National Action Plans, given their greater likelihoods of implementation success.

In one example, Albania undertook a commitment to "promote and engage local authorities in the Open Government Partnership values" (Government of Albania, 2015, 6). The wording for the commitment specifically states that the commitment was proposed by Albanian civil society organizations. The Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher scored the specificity of this commitment as "zero" and also recorded the relevance to the Open Government Partnership values and the potential impact as negligible. The results of the initiative were a partial success. Several civil society organizations, such as the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), Mjaft! Movement, and Infocip, worked with local government organizations to raise awareness of open government. However, the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher also opined that none of these efforts were truly "systematic" in scope or carried out in a coordinated way. A Transparency and Accountability Initiative report found that Albania leverages values,

such as transparency and accountability, to win support from the European Union even though that is not a part of their Open Government Partnership commitments (Moses, 2016). The same report notes that civil society in Albania only sees "sporadic" opportunities to promote Open Government Partnership values and that a primary political motivating factor for this commitment was that the government advisor on Open Government Partnership planning was appointed as the Minister of Local Government.

In other cases, low-hanging fruit commitments are easy to implement and require less investment in the design phases because they have already proven success elsewhere or because they follow naturally from other policies or programs that have already been set in motion. For example, Malta launched a commitment to make its beaches cleaner, and Costa Rica had a commitment to "conduct a feasibility study on the modernization of the postal service" (Government of Malta, 2012, 6; Government of Costa Rica, 2013, 13). Both of these may be valuable for citizens and may even be implemented using methods emphasizing transparency, accountability, and public participation, but they do not go beyond what would be considered the normal existing responsibilities of government.

One such commitment that piggy-backed on an initiative that had already started was the Document Management Policy in Brazil. The Brazilian government embarked on a program to train public officials in how to implement its new digitization strategy, the Document Management Policy, in the federal government. Undoubtedly, training is a normal part of adopting any new major program in government, so it is unlikely that Brazil only did this because of its membership in Open Government Partnership. Such a clear reach for low-hanging fruit may seem surprising from an Open Government Partnership founding member, which, one assumes, would be leading with exemplary commitments. In addition to training the officials around the work of the policy, the government planned to increase the frequency of technical meetings between central sectorial and sectional agencies. The Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher believed that this had no relevance to Open Government Partnership values and only minor potential impact. However, it was fully implemented within time. According to comments in the plan submitted by São Paulo for a subnational action plan:

The Training Program "Open Government Agents," which trained more than 14,000 people through workshops and activities that took place in a decentralized way in several districts of São Paulo, aiming to reach the most faraway neighborhoods which concentrates the majority of the city's population and urban problems. Since 2015, this program hired 46 open government agents/educators and received several awards, drawing international attention thanks to its innovative and inclusive training model (Open Government Partnership, 2016b, 2).

Thus, some low-hanging fruit might be old policies that were virtually guaranteed to be completed because they already existed in a previous form of some sort.

Perhaps the hard work of crafting, deliberating, politicking, and voting on a new law has already been completed, and now the next step is simply making a new addendum to the law or merely overseeing the process of *implementing* the law. Some low-hanging fruit commitments are the result of a government's overlapping membership in similar open government initiatives, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative or projects that governments had committed to through bilateral trade or aid deals with other countries. For example, Denmark provided assistance to Myanmar in the development of "inclusive democratic processes, good governance, and respect for human rights." Ultimately, the Danish government saw this as being a step toward Myanmar potentially becoming a member of the Open Government Partnership. The goals of the commitment were highly specific and targeted at Myanmar Open Government Partnership membership. Further, there were several goals that had already been concretized in a policy paper from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Danish Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher said that, all considered, this had the potential to make minor impacts to open government in Myanmar. Ultimately, the goal of Myanmar becoming a member of the Open Government Partnership was not achieved. According to the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher, nothing really changed as a result of this commitment, but the work with Myanmar was and continues to be a long-term objective for Denmark (Danida, n.d.).

By virtue of their involvement in other initiatives, governments can pass off such projects as an Open Government Partnership commitment. In other cases, the commitments are not preexisting in the exact form, but the

replication of an older policy or program is so similar that the chances of successfully completing the project within a predictable set of costs are very high. The key characteristic of these commitments is that they are relatively easy to complete. For the very same reason, they are unlikely to pose any tough tests or costs of the kind that we would expect from a transformative commitment. Transformative open government commitments must, almost by definition, incur some cost or require considerable action from the government unless—as in very rare cases—they reach pareto optimal outcomes.

Another way that low-hanging fruit commitments come about is not by copying or duplicating existing efforts per se but by doing small things that are genuinely new but that really have little relevance to making government more open. For example, Norway created an electronic mailbox where citizens could offer suggestions on how to simplify the delivery of everyday services. The tool, relying on an open process of sourcing public input, was surely in the spirit of open government. But, according to the Norwegian government, the idea for this commitment had come from the prior administration, and the current administration was merely carrying it out. The mailbox system is part of the default digital communication system for a range of public services (European Union, 2016). However, it may come as no surprise to learn that the Norwegian Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher evaluated the commitment as having no relevance to Open Government Partnership values or potential impact. Furthermore, the commitment was poorly worded in its goals, and as a result, the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher also opined that it was difficult to tell whether or not the commitment had been fully implemented after two years. The researcher also had "not found evidence of any formal processes through which this document has been considered" (Government of Norway, 2015, n.p).

Similarly, the Ukrainian government launched a national e-government awareness-raising and training for local government. Again, the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher found this to have unclear relevance to Open Government Partnership values and potential for only minor impact, and by the end of the implementation timeline, the impact on open government had barely been noticed. But the commitment was completed on schedule. In fact, quite a large volume of outputs was generated: 303 trainings of 5,393

local council members. However, the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher also said that open government was not notably improved as a result. It seemed that such awareness-raising, while tangentially related to the goals of open government, was simply a normal part of rolling out a new government program.

Flops

Flops are those commitments that combine both the weaknesses of pipe dreams and low-hanging fruit but with none of the strengths of the stars. Such commitments have low completion rates coupled with low ambition and open government relevance. Designers of such commitments devised poor ideas that would not have contributed to opening government anyway and, further, were so poorly conceived that they did not even progress past the implementation phase.

For example, Mongolia launched a commitment to developing a web portal to be used for smart services across a wide range of public services. It was unclear exactly what this was or how it would be achieved. How smart services could be rendered on a website or how multiple services could be integrated was never made clear by the designers of the commitment. According to the Mongolia Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher, the commitment was never started. Furthermore, there was no relevance to open government, as the idea was based on a service provision using smart technology, which is normally used to improve the efficiency or effectiveness of public services rather than improve the openness of the government. As the Independent Reporting Mechanism researcher stated, the commitment was simply "not relevant to open government since they did not aim to make more or better information available to the public, improve opportunities for the public to influence decision making, or improve channels for citizens to hold government officials to account" (Open Government Partnership, 2017e).

When Open Government Partnership commitments miss the point of openness in terms of transparency, participation, or accountability, we can be sure that they are not meeting the basic set of goals and expectations in the commitment development and implementation mechanisms of the organization. This is bad enough, but we know that a commitment is a *flop* if

the commitment both sets out on the wrong foot and then continues to fail to even make progress toward being realized. Often these two things—relevance and completion—are intimately related in practice. Lack of relevance may produce a sense of purposelessness, which may then translate into a lack of action. How big can such flops really be? And why do flops occur at all?

One possibility is that there is a problem with the leadership behind the commitment. Leaders who are responsible for designing commitments may renege on their responsibilities because they are afraid of creating policies that may expose them to uncomfortable public attention in the future. Examples of such commitments are those that are poorly worded or that, like the emperor's new clothes, spin an idea of something when, in fact, there is nothing there. In other cases, the poor design of commitments may result from a simple lack of understanding rather than any deliberate attempt to sabotage the commitment design and implementation process. *Openness* can be interpreted very broadly, and leaders may miss the point of transparency, participation, and accountability. Such misunderstanding or misconception often occurs because of undue attention paid to technology. New information and communications technology trends may be misinterpreted for openness or for the kind of legitimate openness envisaged by open government advocates. Leadership incompetence can also occur in the implementation phase of a commitment. Like any policymaking process, a series of events can go wrong, leading to miscommunication and to commitments becoming rushed or poorly planned.

Flops reveal just how susceptible to problems the direct model of open government change is. Unfortunately, it can be even worse, as the case of *malicious* flops shows. Of flops, we might say that they were a waste of time, but with malicious flops, we see that the consequences can go completely in the opposite direction, undermining government transparency, participation, and accountability. In one notorious case, the Philippines' commitment to "involve citizens in the war on drugs," the government tried to involve citizens in a program for reporting suspected members of drug cartels, that Amnesty International (2017) said risked enabling vigilante killings. This People's Watch (Masa Masid) was citizen participation for a purpose that would undermine human safety, human rights, and the rule of law. Or, in the words of a researcher at Human Rights Watch, "If the Duterte

administration makes good use of MASA MASID . . . a lot more people are going to die" (Williams, 2018).

Our working definition of a flop is one that is irrelevant, lacking in influence, and furthermore shows poor completion progress in practice. Masa Masid is of a more worrying and fortunately rare type of flop—irrelevant, harmful, and so poor in its design and aims that it was legally defunded in the Philippines and the Philippines Open Government Steering Committee had to submit an updated and redacted version of their action plan with the commitment removed.

In some respects, flops can be a puzzle for open government advocates. They tend to lead analysts to look beyond the Open Government Partnership system itself to external explanations for why this happened. Poor quality policies in strong governance countries present puzzling cases because there is a discrepancy between the country's reputation for good governance and the lack of ambition or follow-through shown in the commitment. Possible characteristics of such commitments are that they resulted from a lack of seriousness given to the action plan, suffered opposition from civil society, or were created by governments that were new to the Open Government Partnership and did not fully understand the goals. Alternately, in other countries, they may reflect underlying weak governance structures, resource constraints, and frequently limited policy implementation across the board—rather than being exceptional to open government processes.

Summary of the Direct Pathway of Change

We review our key findings with respect to a potential direct pathway of impact in the case of the Open Government Partnership below:

- Country evidence of the Independent Reporting Mechanism approach to policy design shows mixed results. Regression analysis shows that some policy design approaches work, but others seem to have no impact. However, while individual policy design practices have little impact, it is still likely that having policy design discipline is better than having no policy design discipline at all.
- According to the Independent Reporting Mechanism data, less than half of Open Government Partnership policy commitments since 2011 have

been at least substantially completed, and 82 percent of all commitments have had a moderate or minor potential impact. This is a low rate of success. There is a small proportion of commitments making a difference, but these few are dwarfed by a majority of commitments that fall flat.

- There is no evidence of a linear improvement in policy commitment performance in the Open Government Partnership over time. Over the three stages of the National Action Plan policy cycle in which the majority of Open Government Partnership countries have now participated, performance has remained flat or declined. This is likely due, in part, to the entry of new members with preexisting low levels of open government. There is also evidence that countries are increasingly conforming to an average performance rate.

- On closer inspection, Open Government Partnership policy commitments are a mixed bag. Like any organization, the Open Government Partnership does suffer a small percentage of policy commitments that are flops or failures because they both miss the point of open government and are also poorly designed. A small percentage are stars. Star commitments come about when innovative public officials seize the opportunity of a policy window to match an existing policy problem with an open government solution to transform government. Most commitments could be considered low-hanging fruit or pipe dreams. The former are cases, such as open data initiatives, where new technologies are used to do something slightly different but without any notable change to the actual performance of government or quality of life for citizens. The latter are initiatives that are ambitious but ultimately unfeasible, possibly motivated by the hope of attracting public praise and external funding.

EVIDENCE OF THE INDIRECT PATHWAY OF CHANGE

As we have seen in our assessment of commitments, the results of the direct pathway of change are often disappointingly ambiguous in the case of the Open Government Partnership. It is difficult to see clear patterns of success. For every star, there is also a flop, along with many commitments that fall somewhere in between these archetypal categories.

One possible way of understanding these findings is simply that transnational multistakeholder reform genuinely leads to little in the way of consistent impact. However, another possibility is that such a focus on rational design and direct causation serves to distract attention from less direct effects that remain outside of this immediate and expected range. Direct pathways of change alone may not be the complete picture.

Indeed, scholars of policy change more generally have often made similar arguments in other settings. Beginning in the 1980s, institutional approaches in the social sciences have turned the attention of scholars to increasingly more complex, indirect causal effects relating to policy, political, and institutional forces (Pierson, 1993). This has opened the way for greater acceptance of less visible or directly measurable phenomena, such as human values and norms, as part of the broader interactions of institutions (Hall & Taylor, 1996). For instance, the policy theorist Paul Sabatier (1991, 147) argues that theories of policy change need to go beyond just the immediate concerns of design and planning to also incorporate "knowledge of specific institutions" and "attention to policy communities and substantive policy information." Policy impacts should also be understood as interactions of political actors, their institutional environments, and policy subsystems composed of coalitions, their resources, and strategies.

In the realm of domestic transparency reforms, scholars have also more recently noted the limits of direct approaches to reform impacts. Fox (2015) discusses the limits of narrow "tactical" reforms, often emphasizing what he calls "low-dose" interventions, in contrast with "strategic" approaches emphasizing broader coordinated efforts across larger numbers of actors and over longer periods of time. Michener (2019, 139) similarly emphasizes that the most likely impacts of transparency reforms will be "indirect, diffuse, and gradual."

Another important example of this shift in understanding policy change, and one that extends to transnational settings, is the work on democratization by Levitsky and Way (2006). Their ideas challenge the traditional democratization narrative of conditionality, external pressure, and assistance programs, arguing instead for the less visible institutional consequences and processes brought about by cross-border flows of information, network ties, and other types of linkages. Although their focus is regime-level democratization rather

than public sector reforms, we suggest that a similar process of change is at work in the case of the Open Government Partnership, albeit with a different set of mechanisms.

We will elaborate on these mechanisms further in this chapter, but it suffices to say that these mechanisms are the product of the Open Government Partnership's multistakeholder model of institutional design. Prior scholarship has also shown the strength of multistakeholderism as a tool for policy change. International relations scholars in a variety of different institutional settings, such as internet governance (e.g., Mueller, 2010) and global health and sustainability (e.g., Bernstein & Hoffman, 2018; Duncan, 2015; Hale, 2020; Rushton & Williams, 2011), have similarly suggested that new forms of multistakeholder governance, soft law institutions, and civil society collaboration can also introduce new pathways for policy change.

The experience of the Open Government Partnership highlights the importance and relevance of alternatives to a direct pathway of change. The existence and influence of these indirect pathways have not yet been adequately understood or articulated by scholars, particularly in settings relevant to open government reform and multistakeholder governance. We suggest that in such settings emphasizing iterative and participatory institutional design features, indirect pathways of change may be both more dynamic institutionally and also more difficult to measure or control through a strictly top-down form of management. Such effects, in this case, could be brought about *both* by new participatory governance practices and by processes developing because of national membership in an international institution. Crucially, these processes can occur even though they are not intended elements of direct pathways of change emphasizing policy commitment and compliance.

One of the main advantages of the direct pathway and its self-evident causal logic is that it is *highly manageable*, and institutional architectures for producing desired policy effects can be intentionally designed. While the direct pathway relies on a clear institutional design of inputs and outputs, the indirect pathway relies on some of the messier by-products that are created in multistakeholder processes. The indirect approach does not imply a random or chaotic process, but it does certainly introduce the possibility

of institutional reforms that move in directions not initially conceived or predicted by policy designers.

It is important to note that just because the indirect pathway to public sector reform can occur through Open Government Partnership participation, it may not necessarily do so without some preconditions in place. Just as a direct pathway requires sound commitments and sound compliance to operate, the indirect pathway requires meaningful participation and iteration, and these strongly depend on the political will and engagement of critical actors in participating countries.

In figure 4.4—an indirect pathway—iterative and participatory processes are not designed as a compliance mechanism that produces the desired change (as they are in the direct pathway) but are still a powerful catalyst for different kinds of byproducts, such as the creation of new norms and policy models, resources and opportunities, and linkages and coalitions.

In the rest of this chapter, we both explain these mechanisms in more detail and explore broader evidence of country-level and global governance
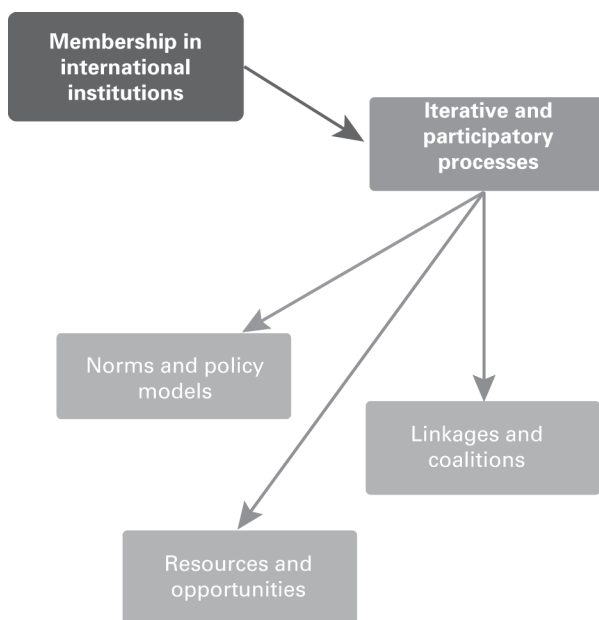

Figure 4.4
The indirect pathway of change.

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impacts of Open Government Partnership membership via the indirect pathway. Compared to the analysis of the direct pathway of change, examining the indirect pathway forces us to cast the research net much wider to examine processes that are activated outside of the immediate sphere of National Action Plan commitment planning and Open Government Partnership governance systems.

The analysis looks at three key characteristics of governance impacts: (1) norms and policy models, (2) resources and opportunities, and (3) linkages and coalitions. Changes in these characteristics are extensively examined by drawing on diverse sources of primarily qualitative data, such as the Open Government Partnership country action plans, policy reports by relevant global organizations, country news articles, and civil society blogs.

New Norms and Policy Models

The first type of indirect effect of multistakeholder partnerships that we examine is the emergence of new norms and policy models. In the international context, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) define a norm as a standard of appropriate behavior. Such norms may not be entirely new in the sense of never having been seen or heard of before but rather may spread from an initially marginal position to complement or even displace earlier norms.

The Open Government Partnership's direct pathway of mechanisms discussed above is consciously designed and planned. While critical for public sector reform success, norms are not easily established this way. Rather, they are complex phenomena and far less controllable. Yet we can still connect the growth and uptake of new norms to the values and models espoused by the Open Government Partnership through an indirect pathway. Although further evidence is necessary to definitely evidence a claim that without the Open Government Partnership these norms necessarily would not have existed and gained in importance, we can still trace the seed of influence from the Open Government Partnership. By tracing key developments over time, we can see how the norms that gathered power and meaning were the same norms that the Open Government Partnership helped set in motion in domestic open government policy reforms and that were catalyzed in their development and spread by key Open Government Partnership processes.

Three Cases: Open Data, Open Contracting, and Beneficial Ownership
Open data

The open data movement has long existed independently of the Open Government Partnership and would likely have made influential inroads into national government technology innovation even in the absence of the Open Government Partnership. However, the role of the Open Government Partnership as a catalyst for the open data norm in governments is important, as the Open Government Partnership and its associated processes helped to raise awareness, motivate actions on open data at national and local levels around the world, and served as a platform that helped launch other associated organizations.

The Open Government Partnership's biannual global summits also shed light on this influence. There were many normative discussions at these summits that set the tone for discussion of the same topics in other high-level policymaking fora. The 2013 Global Summit in London was a key moment in the global open data movement, for example. The United Kingdom—as hosts of the summit—used the opportunity to promote their open data success story and to make domestic as well as international commitments. The country had recently made huge strides forward in its publication of government information and had become the highest-ranked country in the world for open data according to the Global Open Data Index (2014).

The influence of the Open Government Partnership on open data can be seen in table 4.3, showing the Global Open Data Index up to its most recent survey in 2016. Open Government Partnership countries dominate these rankings, while non-Open Government Partnership countries only make the top twenty in a few sporadic cases.[4] This is not to assume clear causal relationships between the Open Government Partnership and the growth of transparency norms in open data initiatives but to recognize that the development of global policy norms is influenced by a complex interplay of actors and organizations in a similar sphere. The Open Government Partnership has been a major, central actor in this sphere articulating the normative power of data transparency, spurring countries to do more with their open data initiatives, and providing a global policy platform to leverage open data initiatives.

Table 4.3
The Global Open Data Index top 20 countries (2013–2016)

Rank	2013	2014	2015	2016
1	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	Taiwan*	Taiwan
2	Denmark	Denmark	United Kingdom	Australia
3	United States	France	Denmark	United Kingdom
4	Norway	Finland	Colombia	France
5	Netherlands	Australia	Finland	Finland
6	Slovenia	New Zealand	Australia	Canada
7	Finland	Norway	Uruguay	Norway
8	Sweden	United States	United States	Brazil
9	Australia	Germany	Netherlands	New Zealand
10	New Zealand	India	Norway	Northern Ireland
11	Germany	Taiwan	France	United States
12	Canada	Columbia	Brazil	Denmark
13	Switzerland	Uruguay	Romania	Mexico
14	France	Czech Republic	Mexico	Colombia
15	Romania	Sweden	Bulgaria	Latvia
16	Portugal	Romania	Canada	Japan
17	Iceland	Netherlands	Spain	Argentina
18	Moldova	Iceland	India	Singapore
19	Bulgaria	Japan	Italy	Uruguay
20	Italy	Chile	Czech Republic	Netherlands

Note: Open Government Partnership member countries shaded gray
* Due to the sovereignty dispute between Taiwan and China, Taiwan has not been permitted to join the Open Government Partnership.

Open contracting

The growth of another global norm can be seen in the case of open contracting. The 2019 *Open Government Partnership Global Report* states that "open contracting continues to gain momentum, and is on the way to becoming a global norm" (2019a, 146). Government contracting with the private sector has always been an important focus on government transparency regulations, but the rise of public-private partnerships in the 1990s and 2000s and the

contiguous growth of the so-called hollow state, which is a weakened state infrastructure that is dependent on the private sector for services and vulnerable to capture, has left a vacuum in domestic public policy that the Open Government Partnership has stepped into with notable success.

Analysis by the Open Government Partnership has shown that open contracting has had a greater impact on countries that are members of the Open Government Partnership compared to countries that are not. In 2016, at the Open Government Partnership Global Summit, Colombia, France, Mexico, the UK, and Ukraine together founded a coalition of open contracting countries named the Contracting 5. These five founding member countries pledged to uphold the open contracting data standard and have grown to over forty national and subnational governmental members. The work of the Open Government Partnership and the Contracting 5 has also led to a proliferation of similar transnational multistakeholder initiatives that aim to advance open contracting, such as the Open Contracting Partnership and the Financial Transparency Coalition.

Certainly, open contracting has other supporters beyond the Open Government Partnership, so—like open data—not all of its success can be put down to the Open Government Partnership's influence. In 2015, the year before the launch of the Contracting 5 at the Open Government Partnership Summit, the group of the world's biggest twenty national economies, known as the Group of 20, published "Anti-Corruption Open Data Principles" and "Principles for Promoting Integrity in Public Procurement." This was a key impetus for the work of the Open Government Partnership in this area.

However, the Open Government Partnership was a central catalyst for the spread of the norm, and its national and subnational model of participation was even copied by new organizations that emerged to work on open contracting. What is significant about this cumulation of global attention to the norm of open contracting is the way that the Open Government Partnership efforts spread both policy reforms and a structure of close relationships of its member governments with civil society organizations such as the Financial Transparency Coalition. Of all the country governments that are signed up for the Open Contracting Data Standard, just two—Zambia and Uganda—are not also Open Government Partnership members, suggesting

that Open Government Partnership membership is an important factor in leading countries to augment their commitment to new norms such as open contracting. Further, according to the most recent data available from the Open Data Barometer, only one country in the world—Kazakhstan—that publishes open data either on public contracts or on beneficial ownership is a non-Open Government Partnership member (Open Data Barometer, 2017).

Beneficial ownership

Beneficial ownership, which is about understanding who ultimately controls a legal entity, has been a legal concept employed in market trading regulations since the early twentieth century (Feldman & Teberg, 1965). Until recently, however, beneficial ownership was a concept that was rarely discussed in popular news media as an important government reform topic. Several Open Government Partnership countries, including Ukraine and Australia, introduced beneficial ownership registries in 2016—a time when beneficial ownership was beginning to become more prevalent as a priority in public policy. Denmark and Slovakia, both Open Government Partnership member countries, were among the earliest countries to adopt beneficial ownership registers (Open Government Partnership, 2019a). In 2018, the Open Government Partnership, together with the Beneficial Ownership Transparency Network, launched new disclosure principles and "A Guide to Implementing Beneficial Ownership Transparency" (Treisman, 2019). The summit in Ottawa saw the UK government and NGO OpenOwnership launch the Beneficial Ownership Leadership Group, which aims to "drive a global policy shift towards free, open beneficial ownership data and set ambitious best practice" (Treisman, 2019).

A recent report from the Open Government Partnership found that, while beneficial ownership has grown as a global norm, the rise has been comparatively stronger in Open Government Partnership member countries compared to nonmember countries, suggesting that Open Government Partnership membership has had an influence (Open Government Partnership, 2019a). The influence of the Open Government Partnership has also been accelerated by its collaboration with other transnational multistakeholder organizations, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency

Initiative (EITI). A report in 2019 found that member countries were "accelerating or going beyond the EITI standard" in beneficial ownership progress (Open Government Partnership, 2019a, 5).

But perhaps the clearest indication of the beneficial ownership norm taking root is the rates of use of new beneficial ownership country registries and concrete proof that the norm actually leads to consequences for illegal companies. Many Open Government Partnership member countries have made full or partial commitments to OpenOwnership principles even beyond membership, suggesting that the Partnership has acted here as a platform to catalyze the development of other global norms beyond specific country commitments alone. Adoption of formal legal instruments by government—often through commitments—provides a way for complainants, advocates, and other governments to exert more leverage in the adoption and implementation of beneficial ownership. The ability of other issue advocates to use the formal commitment process as a platform then lets them build up their programs/norms in ways that ultimately go beyond the Partnership.

One former Steering Committee member said, "From a campaigners' perspective, OGP offers 'action forcing events' every two years (the country action plans) that can help galvanize political support behind key open government issues. If those issues are replicable, or need in fact to be replicated across countries to succeed (e.g., beneficial ownership), OGP can provide this multiplier effect" (Tisné, 2014b).

Participatory processes

Beyond the spread of the open data, open contracting, and beneficial ownership norms across countries, there is another interesting feature of these new norms—the way that a procedural norm of public participation defines both their conception and implementation.

The norm of participatory government is by no means a new idea, but it is one that has received a notable boost from the Open Government Partnership's model of civil society parity in decision making and implementation. The 2019 *Open Government Partnership Global Report* notes how public participation movements have become part of the growing awareness of country transparency initiatives. According to Fraundorfer (2018), "The

OGP national processes have also created channels of trust and confidence between government and civil society actors" (150). Further, the processes led to a "'virtuous cycle' and contributed to social change promoting new forms of democratic interaction between government and citizens" (151). This account also underlines the need for compliance and commitment from the government in order for the indirect pathway to continue functioning. Previous research on the Open Government Partnership, both across countries (Wilson, 2020) and in Norway (Wilson, 2021), has also emphasized the socialization of norms of participation, even if not always successful.

In Ukraine, separately from its work through the Open Government Partnership, the Ukrainian government and Transparency International brought machine learning tools used to analyze large quantities of data on public contracts to the service of a public participation platform. Ukrainian citizens could not use an open data platform to monitor public contracts, but they could flag concerns and submit their own claims of contracting violations. This was, evidently, a powerful way to build on the Open Government Partnership's values of participation and open contracting, as nearly one million citizen submissions have been recorded so far (Open Government Partnership 2019a, 156).

There is also evidence that these normative changes in the processes of governing collaboratively led to culture shifts in the public sector. In Serbia, one civil society representative said of their eight years of participation in the Open Government Partnership, "Looking back, I can say that the government, or at least some of the public institutions, have drastically changed their position and today recognize the benefits of cooperation with the civil sector" (Selakovic, 2018). The Philippines even saw the spread of the civil society consultation model of the Open Government Partnership to other arenas through its Dagyaw program of virtual town hall meetings. The program was initially launched as part of Executive Order 9 in 2016 and mandated a civic engagement effort in multiple policy areas at the cabinet level.

Open Government Partnership members have also replicated the norm of participation in other contexts beyond specific commitments. According to Inés Pousadela, a research specialist at CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, "Today an unprecedented number of actors in both

the government and civil society of Argentina are willing to put open government principles into practice, and the structures are in place to help them do so. There is no going back to a past in which civil society actors had to prove over and over why they should have a say. The ethos of co-creation is here to stay" (Pousadela, 2019, para. 9). Such comments frequently characterize reports from country representatives, referring to the shift to the participatory model of policymaking as a solidification of a "culture of co-creation" (Corrigan & Gruzd, 2018, 6) and a "structure" (Rivoir & Landinelli, 2017, 3) of democratic deliberation.

The subnational open government model

One of the major new policy models promoted by the Open Government Partnership was local level open government. In 2016, the Open Government Partnership launched the Subnational Government Pilot Program with fifteen pioneer subgovernment programs and a larger peer learners network called the Learners' Tier. The idea for local, provincial, or state governments to become members of the Open Government Partnership had been discussed for several years before the first pilots were launched. The pilots were notable for being largely based in the founding countries of the Open Government Partnership, such as Austin in the United States, São Paulo in Brazil, Scotland in the UK, and Bojonegoro in Indonesia. Other subnational pilots, such as Madrid in Spain and Elgeyo Marakwet in Kenya, show that the Open Government Partnership policy model had gained enough trust and evidence of its effectiveness to be introduced to later Open Government Partnership country joiners. The subnational government model evolved into what today is referred to as OGP Local.

Martin Tisné, who at that time was a member of the Open Government Partnership Steering Committee, said in 2015 that the nascent efforts to replicate the Open Government Partnership model at the subnational level were analogous to the TEDx evolution of TED Talks. This may be somewhat of a simplification of a much more complex phenomenon than TED Talks, but the comparison is apt in many respects. It is clear that these pilots were important new iterations of the Open Government Partnership policy model in at least three important respects.

First, they were genuinely experimental in terms of the governance and political design of the pilots. Some subnational members were cities, such as Austin, while others were federal regions or countries within larger states, such as Bojonegoro. Second, the subnational members often emerged in the midst of complicated political situations where the subnational governments were willing to try a new policy model despite the political risks. This is particularly true in the case of Scotland, which had held a referendum on independence from the UK just two years before joining the Open Government Partnership. It is also true in the case of Kigoma-Ujiji, a historically and economically important city in Tanzania that joined in 2016, just a year before the national government of Tanzania decided to controversially withdraw from the Open Government Partnership after several years of failing to deliver on its National Action Plan commitments. Third, the model of subnational open government plans was expected to evolve of its own accord with ties to the original ideas of the Open Government Partnership but able to flourish independently.

What is most interesting in terms of indirect pathways of change is the way that subnational replications of the Open Government Partnership model have also been carried out independent of the official apparatus of the Open Government Partnership—ostensibly through initiatives of national-level decision makers who saw value in taking their experience of open government public sector reform further. Evidence of the nascent, independent growth of urban and regional open government initiatives is indeed starting to emerge in cases where the Open Government Partnership offered a model and an inspiration but was not itself directly involved.

In Argentina, for example, the Open Government Partnership motivated the development of subnational models that were not explicitly part of the Open Government Partnership (or its subnational program), as shown in the "Foro Nacional sobre políticas de Gobierno Abierto: Argentina Abierta" of Argentina. Here, an open government model of participatory governance was developed at a regional level that was explicitly founded on the Open Government Partnership model but scaled down to the municipal level and applied to areas of policymaking that had no formal connection with Open Government Partnership processes. Events so far to bring together

policy actors from different sectors to address public policy challenges have been organized jointly with government and civil society organizations, attracted thousands of participants, and taken place in major Argentinian cities, including Cordova, Mendoza, and La Plata, in addition to the capital, Buenos Aires (Borrmann, 2019). As a result, the emergence of local open government initiatives is growing.

In Nigeria and Indonesia, several states and subnational entities have also undertaken similar efforts. In Mexico, by 2017, twenty-seven out of thirty-two states had developed their own open government action plans in an independent program that we detail further in chapter 5 (Open Government Partnership, 2018b).

Resources and Opportunities

In addition to new norms and policy models, multistakeholder partnerships can also create new resources and opportunities for reformers, both inside and outside of government. These resources can include new sources of power, influence, networks, or material support, while opportunities can include new venues or channels of access to decision makers.

Prominent theoretical approaches to social movements emphasize both the importance of material resources (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) and of political opportunities (Kitschelt, 1986)—perspectives that we apply not only to the abilities of civil society groups to effect change but also to reformers inside of government. More internationally focused research has extended these ideas to highlight how transnational decision-making venues (Newman and Posner, 2016; Farrell & Newman, 2018) and transnational networks (Avant & Westerwinter, 2016) can offer reformers opportunities and resources of their own.

More recent observers of the Open Government Partnership (Global Integrity, 2016) have also noted that it can bring new substantive material, such as financial or technical assistance, and immaterial resources, such as networks, political attention, and values that can be used to leverage open government policy positions at national and local levels. In these ways, the Open Government Partnership can make available to reformers new resources and opportunities that were previously scarce. We review several forms of this dynamic here and offer examples.

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Open Government Partnership member countries bring together government agencies and civil society organizations to design and implement new commitments. These commitments sometimes meet the promises they have made in the outputs they deliver within a specified time period. But what can be forgotten is the indirect way that these collaborations set networks in place that last much longer than their official commitment project plan. The ongoing interaction of the networks also opens up new resources for their members of both material and symbolic kinds. These resources generate very valuable activities from an open government perspective, though the activities can move far beyond the initial scope of the commitment in the National Action Plan. An early Open Government Partnership Steering Committee member, Juan Pardinas, once called this a "social network for reformers."[5]

Alvaro Herrero, then Undersecretary of Strategic Management and Institutional Quality in the Argentinian government, launched the subnational participation of Buenos Aires with the following telling statement about the role of opportunities and resources afforded new public sector actors in open government:

> Agents of change also need a story to tell. They need a framework in which to leverage the different things they want to achieve, bringing them together in a cohesive narrative. I am talking of symbolic resources. And OGP provides that. (Herrero, 2017, para. 5)

An interesting example of these enduring network resources is the President's Task Force for Twenty-First-Century Policing, which the United States launched in its third National Action Plan in 2015. The task force brought together a selection of police departments from across the United States to begin sharing best practices in the use of technologies, such as body cameras and open data, to improve the transparency of police actions. At the end of its term, the commitment failed to reach its goal of finding two hundred police departments to join the open data portal (but it had managed to get to 135) (Government of the United States, 2016). However, among the police departments that did join, the network became a vital resource for sharing ideas and training for the implementation of new open data technologies,

such as the data management software IA Pro that was promoted through the network (Ingrams, 2017b). These skills and resources were heavily relied on by police departments facing rising calls to tackle police discrimination in 2018 and 2019. Participation also provided much-needed symbolic value to the police departments that could try to reassure citizens that they were taking concrete steps to address the crisis of secrecy and distrust in the police.

In another example, the nongovernmental organization (NGO), the Access Initiative, used the Open Government Partnership as a platform to advance regional principles on access to environmental information, which it was able to do through advocacy of its ideas across the broad geographical representation of Open Government Partnership countries (Excell, 2012). In an even more remarkable case, in Slovakia, when the Open Government Partnership office responsible for managing and implementing Open Government Partnership commitments fell out of favor with the government, it was able to survive and marshal new open data tools for holding the government accountable by relying on the support of a network of open data NGOs (Schneider, 2015).

Symbolic and political resources

The Open Government Partnership has also brought symbolic and political resources to reformers in many settings. This can be seen in the added prestige, status, and legal support that NGOs, citizens, and other governmental bodies can leverage once their government is a card-carrying member of the Open Government Partnership, pledged to uphold its values. This can give open government advocates a platform to demand that governments better walk the talk.

One important early case in this light is the so-called secrecy bill in South Africa, where civil society groups used Open Government Partnership as "external leverage" in their fight to block the bill and were ultimately successful (Heller, 2011). Political commentators in South Africa were vociferous in their claim that the secrecy bill was inconsistent with Open Government Partnership membership because it introduced penalties for whistleblowers and applied a vague concept of national interest and security to access to information exemptions (Calland, 2011). From that point, the bill went

through a politically tumultuous process, being delayed (in part in response to international pressure and the domestic activist campaign against it), eventually approved by Parliament in 2013, and then ultimately rejected by President Zuma (Makinana, 2013). Ultimately, it was never passed, meaning that the campaign that was galvanized in support of what the South African government *should* stand for as an Open Government Partnership member was successful. According to one observer, this was made possible because the Open Government Partnership provides domestic civil society actors with a vehicle "by which to critique government inaction or reward improvements" (Eaves, 2012, para. 6).

A similar case was also reported in Argentina where a domestic Open Government Partnership coalition used their role and their country's membership in Open Government Partnership as leverage on a related but non-Open Government Partnership issue of filling a long-vacant position of the national ombudsman (Bio, 2019).

In other cases, domestic civil society gained structural power through the explicit or implicit threat of exit from Open Government Partnership collaboration. Such exit would threaten the legitimacy of government efforts and their ability to claim symbolic credit internationally. For example, in Peru, some civil society organizations withdrew from the multistakeholder body with the government after an initially agreed commitment about access to information was withdrawn from the final plan (Cameron, 2015). Similarly, civil society organizations in Croatia threatened to withdraw from the collaboration over a government stance toward a new law on how participatory decision making should work (Guillán Montero & Taxell, 2015). In the United States, civil society organizations threatened to scupper the entire action plan development process over their perceived take on the government approach to "participatory theater" (Howard & Wonderlich, 2017). In the next chapter, we also analyze in detail the developments in Mexico whereby civil society groups actually followed through on their threats to withdraw from domestic Open Government Partnership collaboration.

In addition to being a boon to civil society, the symbolic resources of the Open Government Partnership have influenced the capacity of government agencies to implement public sector reforms. In another example from

Argentina, the agency responsible for leading Open Government Partnership participation, the Ministry of Modernization (MoM), received a reputation boost as a result of its impressive work helping the country climb international rankings in the Global Open Data Index and Transparency International's Anti-Corruption Index. From that time on, "responses from interviews conducted during the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Developments's peer-driven fact-finding missions, and the results of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Surveys, show that ministries, provinces and institutions from other branches of power clearly recognise the MoM's leadership in the area of open government and reveal a general willingness to co-operate with the Ministry" (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019).

It is worth noting that, while the leveraging of symbolic resources through Open Government Partnership membership has resulted in many positive impacts on public sector reforms, these same resources can also be a tool for harmful kinds of political behaviors. This underlines the politically complex, even messy, nature of indirect pathways of change.

For example, a report from Global Integrity written by Guerzovich and Moses (2016) stated that, in the Philippines, "the Aquino administration has taken advantage of OGP awards and recognition to entice more people, inside and outside the government, to support its political agenda. This includes the administration's strong emphasis on a new good governance framework, for which OGP's investments in enticing high-level political support, including awards, became both a sign of Aquino's reform credentials and a means of sustaining a political agenda over time by bringing more reformers into government" (10) and that the close relationships between civil society and government bureaucrats led to a revolving door of job opportunities between civil society and the government.

New funding sources

Sometimes membership in the Open Government Partnership offers members and participants new ways to access funding, whether for projects involved in specific commitments or even beyond. Participating in the Open Government Partnership is one way that countries can demonstrate their

deservedness of foreign aid and international financing and plug into the kinds of political reform agendas that donors are often interested in. The Open Government Partnership has received broad support from the international development ministries of many countries and from major private foundations (Open Government Partnership, 2018a). This has meant that, for many countries, Open Government Partnership participation and political and economic development have been closely related. In 2016, the director of the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information in Georgia, Giorgi Kldiashvili, said of Georgia's efforts to join the Open Government Partnership:

> [We] had support from US Agency for Development. We had a great project with the UNDP to support parliament in being involved [with] the Open Government Partnership. We supported in drafting the action plan, mobilizing civil society, picking up commitments and then consulting and working with the parliament [to have] it adopted. (Open Government Partnership, 2017a)

This kind of collaboration, sparked by actions that originally took place as formal Open Government Partnership commitments, has become a familiar pattern. It has even been further institutionalized with the creation of a World Bank trust fund in collaboration between the World Bank and the Open Government Partnership itself.

Developing new sources of funding for member countries is not an explicit goal of the Open Government Partnership nor something that member countries include in their action plans, and so it is not an intended, direct form of impact. But more indirectly, by participating in a high-profile global partnership, countries may gain greater access to networks of aid organizations, philanthropic organizations, and government development agencies. While in many cases, these funds were already being made available to the same countries, the influence of the open government agenda for major international donors can open up new sources of funding for members, including those that are made available from the Open Government Partnership itself for cross-country technical support (Open Government Partnership, 2014b).

While funding for specific open government projects has grown, so has funding for the assessment of these initiatives and for research addressing their impact and potential. This has been accompanied by an increase in published articles in the broader academic sphere related to open government in areas such as open data (Attard et al., 2015; Zuiderwijk & Janssen, 2014). Articles in the Web of Science library addressing the topic of open government have steadily increased. In 2020 there were 143 articles published compared to 15 in 2010 and just 1 article in 2000.[6] Importantly, investments in research and understanding can pay off over much longer timeframes.

Linkages and Coalitions

Finally, multistakeholder partnerships can also forge new linkages and coalitions both within and across countries that may have their own future effects on public sector reform. We consider three different ways that powerful new linkages and coalitions could come about through the Open Government Partnership: (1) new collaborations among major regional and global institutions, (2) new transnational government-to-government connections, and (3) new linkages among and across other nonstate organizations, including in policy and advocacy communities and ideological coalitions. Each highlights the ways that opportunities for domestic open government policy reform can be shaped by different types of network connections, such as collaboration and coalition building. These connections can, in turn, drive processes of policy learning, enable new political actions and movements, and differentially empower actors with greater network resources (Avant & Westerwinter, 2016). In other settings, such as the joint European Union–OECD Support for Improvement in Governance and Management initiative, studies have also found that transnational networks of experts played key roles in shaping policy transfer (e.g., Stone, 2004; Francesco, 2012).

Collaborations through Major Regional and Global Institutions

The Open Government Partnership is one of many types of intergovernmental institutions working on national policy reform. In helping to form and sustain linkages across countries, it facilitates national and regional actors such as governments and civil society organizations to use open government

methods to address new policy challenges (Bellows & Zohdy, 2020). To explore the convergence of open government ideas across intergovernmental institutions, we carried out an analysis of the world's major regional and global intergovernmental institutions, including the United Nations, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, European Union, Group of 7, Group of 20, African Union, and Asian Development Bank. We searched the official planning and annual strategic documents of the institutions for information about any open government initiatives. We found extensive evidence of open government initiatives across all these organizations. All of the organizations have had some sort of collaboration with the Open Government Partnership. For example, the European Union registered Open Government Partnership as a consulting organization in 2017, and the United Nations has hosted regular side events at the meetings of the United Nations General Assembly. In 2013 and 2016, the African Union hosted an Open Government Partnership Africa regional meeting. But there are also independent open government initiatives being held by the institutions, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's launch of the open government review literature series in 2014, its Network on Open and Innovative Government in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2015, and the Group of 20's launch of open data principles in 2015.

Open government work is nothing new for the United Nations. It has many practical and legislative projects that stand as potential building points for open government initiatives in important areas such as climate change. In 2015, it adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, which has open government as one of its policy planks. Goal 16.10 is to "ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements" (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, the United Nations Convention against Corruption aims for better reporting of management of public finances and stronger accounting standards and oversight.

The United Nations has increasingly given attention to the role of open data in tackling climate change. It focuses on "innovation, transparency, accountability, participatory governance and economic growth" (United

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Nations, n.d., para. 2). The preamble of the Paris Climate Accord explicitly addresses the importance of "affirming the importance of education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information and cooperation at all levels on the matters addressed in this Agreement" (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2015). Several of the articles of the accord also explicitly embrace open government as a tool to address the climate crisis. Article 4(8) requires countries to "provide the information necessary for clarity, transparency and understanding." Article 6(8) envisions collaboration between governments and industry. Most importantly, Article 13 states that its transparency strategies include "national communications, biennial reports and biennial update reports, international assessment and review and international consultation and analysis" (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, n.d.).

We see this growing attention of the United Nations to open government in the Ad Hoc Working Group of the UN that has been tasked with adopting transparency guidelines. It is interesting to see how the policy models the working group has been developing in the six sessions it has held from 2016 to 2018 resemble the models of the Open Government Partnership commitment development. The working group, for example, proposed to track emissions transparently and to help countries meet their targets. It involved a flexible approach, considering the different developmental levels of the countries, the process of semi-independent technical expert review of progress, and a facilitative, multilateral approach to monitoring progress.

Transnational Governmental Linkages

Another form of transnational linkages is between state representatives and other government officials across countries. Many Open Government Partnership events, including not only global summits but also regional networking events, have been important in this respect for fostering linkages that do not necessarily emerge directly from commitments alone.

For example, Croatia has held a series of Open Government Partnership European Outreach and Support meetings. They have been attended by scores of countries and facilitated by global thought leaders and advocates from the civil society sector (Open Government Partnership, 2012a). A

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counterpart in Africa, the "Africa OGP Convention, organized by Kenya's Elgeyo Marakwet County, took place in 2018" (Bartoo, 2018). Similar events, known as peer exchanges, have been held by the Open Government Partnership Support Unit (Ferčíková, 2018). The United Nations Development Programme has held training sessions for country representatives on how to effectively develop and implement Open Government Partnership commitments (OGP Support Unit, 2017).

In a blog post published by the Open Government Partnership itself, the following quote explains the case for the indirect roles that can be played by such transgovernmental linkages between governmental reformers across countries:

> "Civil servants really do an amazing job, they have difficult tasks to do. This agenda, open government, transparency, often meets a lot of resistance and it is difficult to overcome obstacles within administration. So bringing people together to show that there is a support network, discussing challenges together can be really really beneficial and can really help," says Helen Turek, OGP Program Officer.
>
> One way to deal with lack of motivation or strength to pursue such changes is through regional peer exchange between OGP POCs [Points of Contact] and OGP leaders. Thanks to these exchanges, those state officials who are coordinating the implementation of action plans—sometimes in not such a friendly environment—might not feel as lonely in crisis situations, or demotivated that their huge efforts bring only small changes. (Ferčíková, 2018, paras. 1, 3).

Transnational and Domestic Nongovernmental Linkages

The diversity of the communities involved in the Open Government Partnership can quickly be apprehended through the attendance lists of its global summits—national government ministers, city mayors, business leaders and entrepreneurs, technology developers, human rights lawyers, academics, students, NGO representatives, and citizen advocates. Supporters of open government reforms also span ideological divides and traditional issue silos. By bringing these nonstate actors together in new ways, Open Government Partnership processes—both domestic and transnational—can also create new linkages and coalitions. Although it would be difficult to show all the

different potential aspects of this indirect pathway of change, we can highlight some specific examples.

In several national cases, the policy and advocacy communities that had become emboldened and enlarged by the influence of their country's participation in the Open Government Partnership acted as a vital resource of civil society resilience during national leadership transitions that were quite threatening for open government. A notable example of this is the Philippines, where the election of Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 was seen by many as a negative turning point for human rights protections in the country. The president has received heavy criticism for his endorsement of extrajudicial killings of gang drug dealers and his defunding of the Philippines Commission on Human Rights (Dressel & Bonoan, 2019). However, during Duterte's presidency, there has been sufficient momentum among open government supporters for the passage of the Philippines' first freedom of information law, and the country is on to its fifth National Action Plan and an early participant in the subnational membership initiative through the open government region of South Cotabato.

One observer noted that a national civil society coalition in the Philippines, Bantay Kita, "sees OGP as an appropriate vessel to seek allies for reforms within the OGP national and international family (EITI, FOI); a venue to collaborate; an opportunity to push for interlinking advocacies and to build trust among CSOs and between civil society and government" (Pimentel, 2018, para. 25).

In several other cases of national transitions in partisan control over executive power, such as in Argentina, France, and—as will be seen in more detail in the next chapter—Mexico, new political leaders have similarly found reasons to embrace their country's membership in the Open Government Partnership despite it having previously been associated with an ideologically opposed political leader. Here, not only the ideological ambiguity of open government but also the new cross-cutting coalitions that the Open Government Partnership processes themselves, help to forge important roles.

Multistakeholder interactions have also helped to bring together nongovernmental reformers across issue silos. At a global level, Toby Mcintosh,

writing on tensions between freedom of information advocates and open data advocates, concludes in part that the Open Government Partnership helped to bring them together, thus helping forge a coalition between two previously distinct (and sometimes conflicting) advocacy communities (McIntosh, 2012).

There are also many examples of the Open Government Partnership bringing together broad civil society coalitions within countries that then work together even on other policy areas outside of the remit of specific commitments themselves. For example, the Open Government Network in the United Kingdom was formed at the outset of the Open Government Partnership to gather expert civil society organizations for consultation on National Action Plans. However, the Open Government Network now works far beyond this initial scope, including probing data transparency around COVID-19 pandemic regulations, researching electoral transparency, and pushing the envelope on growing policy issues, such as race and gender equality (McLean, 2020). Similar dynamics played out in Mexico as well, as will be seen in much more detail in chapter 5. Notably, these types of developments often involve not just the quantity of connections but also their quality—including the skills, attitudes, and organizational cultures necessary for effective collaboration and trust between partner organizations and individuals.

Summary of the Indirect Pathway of Change

Below, we review several key takeaways with respect to the indirect pathway of change in the case of the Open Government Partnership:

- The Open Government Partnership has been a catalyst for new norms related to open government. Looking beyond commitments and their compliance, the model of participatory governance has been given new impetus by the Open Government Partnership, and this has spilled over into other arenas, such as regional- and local-level participatory initiatives.
- Other norms that have spread through the mechanism of an indirect pathway of Open Government Partnership activity are open data, open contracting, and beneficial ownership. Although it would be difficult to

demonstrate that the Open Government Partnership was solely responsible for causing this rise, the indirect pathway implies that the development of such norms comes from a complex institutional process in which the Open Government Partnership was a key player and served as a platform for subsequent developments.

- The success of the subnational Open Government Partnership membership pilot has demonstrated how effective the Open Government Partnership policy model can be. Open Government Partnership subnational members are geographically and politically diverse, and they have emerged and persevered in surprising ways, such as the case of Kigoma-Ujiji in Tanzania. Similar models have cropped up even outside of the efforts undertaken directly by the Open Government Partnership itself, such as those in Nigeria, Argentina, and Mexico.

- As a result of the Open Government Partnership's activity (and its engagement with civil society in particular), reformers both inside and outside of government have gained access to new resources and political opportunities, which have, in turn, been successfully used as leverage for further reform. Material resources for open government initiatives from a range of international and national foreign aid agencies, private foundations, and international governance institutions have also grown.

- The interconnectivity of the Open Government Partnership community with other local advocates and major policymaking institutions is shown in the collaboration of previously separate communities, such as democracy and open data reformers. Combining forces has often increased the chances of pressuring governments to adopt reforms. It is also shown in the integration of open government agendas with major global institutions, such as the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and regional efforts.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we developed and illustrated the core theoretical arguments of this book, focusing on the contrast between direct and indirect pathways of change in public sector reform. While similar arguments have been made

in past studies in other settings, they have not been used to offer a theoretical lens for understanding the potential for transnational multistakeholder partnerships to effect policy change.

Our main objectives in this chapter were (1) to give more formal conceptual elucidation to these concepts and (2) to offer an empirical picture that distinguishes them and illustrates the different ways that direct and indirect pathways of change can succeed or fail. As presented here, the direct pathway of change comprises the impacts intended by the formal design, implementation, and review model of the Open Government Partnership, while the indirect pathway comprises broader changes in terms of new institutional and political dynamics resulting from Open Government Partnership membership that can be seen both within and across member countries.

Taken together, the evidence on the direct pathway of change suggests that, while it is pursued in a variety of forms (design of commitments, Independent Reporting Mechanism procedures, and institutional capacity building), its successes are mixed and sporadic. In some cases, particularly if we look at rare cases of star commitments, the direct pathway of change shows wonderful results. But, alongside this good news, a great deal of Open Government Partnership membership efforts resulted in very little direct impact. We see this in the slow progress of member countries over time and the gradual concentration of efforts around comfortable commitments that we could describe skeptically as low-hanging fruit or pipe dreams.

In addition to the direct pathway, however, we also see evidence of an indirect pathway of change. This indirect pathway can operate through three main mechanisms: (1) new norms and policy models, (2) new resources and opportunities, and (3) new linkages and coalitions. These mechanisms can also coexist with the main mechanisms of the direct pathway—that is, they are not mutually exclusive. They can also be seen in the ways that policy innovations such as open data, open contracting, and beneficial ownership have spread around the world; how third-party governments at intergovernmental, subnational, or city levels have adopted open government ideas; and how policy communities have gained access to new linkages, resources, and opportunities. To fully understand the impacts of transnational

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multistakeholder partnerships, it is vital to recognize how this indirect pathway unfolds and to account for it in our attempts to understand and evaluate the Open Government Partnership.

Chapter 5 builds on this by offering more focused evidence assessing both the direct and indirect pathways of impact. It does so by testing specific hypotheses associated with each pathway using qualitative evidence in the context of a detailed single-country case study of the Open Government Partnership experience in Mexico.