

Open Government: Key Issues of the Open Government Partnership in the Basque Country, Spain

Muslim Afandi^{1*}, Syed Agung Afandi¹, Rizki Erdyayani¹

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim, Indonesia

Abstract

This study aims to analyse the main issues of the Open Government Partnership in the Basque Country. The Basque Country plays a leading role in the open government campaign in Spain because it is a pilot program of the local government of the Open Government Partnership. Qualitative approaches and bibliometric analysis methods are used in this study. The research data were obtained from the official website of the Basque Country government and sourced from the Google Scholar database. The findings of this study indicate that the Basque Country's open government is not popular. The key issues in the Basque Country's open government include accessibility, e-government, government websites, transparency, and e-services. Meanwhile, the current issues include public service innovation, private-public partnerships, and autonomy. These issues highlight the urgency and potential contribution of the Basque Country's open government going forward. The Basque Country is currently focusing on its five open government commitments. These commitments contribute to the Basque government's strategic vision by developing tools, models, and common guidelines for all levels of government, thereby increasing the value of public action and the standing of its public institutions and officials. The findings of this study serve as recommendations for stakeholders in the Basque Country, including all local governments in Spain and all members of the Open Government Partnership.

Keywords: Basque Country; Key Issue; Open Government; Open Government Partnership

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* Corresponding author email: muslim.afandi@uin-suska.ac.id

Introduction

The term open government is not new, but various social contexts and advances in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the government sector have shaped how it is conceptualised (Shao & Saxena, 2019; Wirtz, Weyerer, & Rösch, 2019). The origins of open government can be traced back to the Greek Athenian codification of law. Still, the Visigothic Code of the Kingdom of Sweden is considered the beginning of modern open government initiatives (Moon, 2020; Wang & Shepherd, 2020). Traditional open government refers to the freedom of information available to citizens, enabling them to hold government authorities accountable, even though the political environment often constrains their contributions. This traditional approach was reconsidered and reshaped when web technologies offered new channels for simultaneously providing more information to many unknown people, beyond the constraints of space and time (Gascó-Hernández, 2014; Khurshid et al., 2022).

Open government is an intriguing agenda promoted by many governments since the 2000s. Open government is seen as very important, similar to New Public Management (NPM) in the 1980s (Safarov, 2019; Zhao, Liang, Yao, & Han, 2022). Currently, there is a global trend toward creating a sustainable, open government through the use of artificial intelligence. Open government initiatives have been widely introduced not only in Western democracies but also in Asian and African countries (Afandi, Erdayani, & Afandi, 2024; Gil-Garcia, Gasco-Hernandez, & Pardo, 2020; Prasty, Misran, & Nurmandi, 2021).

Open government has become an important strategy for administrative reform, prompting many countries around the world to design and implement initiatives in e-government, including with a focus on access to information, transparency, public participation, and collaboration (De Blasio & Selva, 2019; Piotrowski, Berliner, & Ingrams, 2022; Schnell, 2020; Zafarullah & Siddiquee, 2023). Many governments have expanded the concept of open government; for example, the Obama administration announced the Open Government Directive in 2009 and, together with South Africa, Brazil, the Philippines, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and Norway, took a leading role in establishing the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011. The OGP is a multinational effort to promote open government worldwide (Raca, Velinov, & Kon-Popovska, 2022; Schmidhuber & Hilgers, 2021).

The Open Government Partnership comprises countries, local governments, and civil society organisations that support one another in designing and implementing projects that promote transparency in governance, public engagement, and accountability (Lnenicka & Saxena, 2021; Noushin, Farajollah, Mahdi, & Mahmoud, 2020). Transparency describes the public's access to information, enabling citizens to see and understand how their government works. Public engagement refers to the public's ability to influence government through its participation in government processes and programs. Accountability reflects the public's ability to hold the government to account for its policies and performance (Aboalmaali, Daneshfard, & Pourezzat, 2020; Bonina & Eaton, 2020).

The Open Government Partnership is based on the idea that open government is more accessible, more responsive, and more accountable to citizens, and that improving the relationship between citizens and government has long-term, exponential benefits for all (Heywood, 2014; Lathrop & Ruma, 2010; Ruijer & Meijer, 2020). The Partnership focuses on several policy areas, including anti-corruption and integrity, beneficial ownership, open contracting, civic space, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of expression, digital governance, environment and climate, extractive industries, fiscal openness, inclusion, people with disabilities, youth, justice, land and spatial planning, open parliaments, public service delivery, education, health, water and sanitation, and the right to information (Gao, Janssen, & Zhang, 2021; Ingrams, 2020; Ruijer, Détienne, Baker, Groff, & Meijer, 2020).

Seventy-five countries and 163 local governments are currently part of the Open Government Partnership. Being a local OGP member provides benefits that drive open reforms, which have become part of the vision and mission of each local government, thereby achieving levels of accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and transparency (Ingrams, Piotrowski, & Berliner, 2020). Through membership in this global community, each local government can gain new information on the implementation of open government (Li, Yang, & Lu, 2024).

The Open Government Partnership has launched a local government pilot program because it recognises that much open government innovation and reform is happening at the local level. Local governments

can engage directly with citizens and deliver many important public services (Matheus & Janssen, 2020; Tai, 2021). Local governments involved in the program include Basque Country (Spain), Madrid (Spain), Sekondi-Takoradi (Ghana), La Libertad (Peru), Buenos Aires (Argentina), South Cotabato (Philippines), Paris (France), Tbilisi (Georgia), Austin (United States), Scotland (United Kingdom), Kaduna State (Nigeria), São Paulo (Brazil), Elgeyo Marakwet (Kenya), Jalisco (Mexico), and Seoul (South Korea) (Afandi, Afandi, & Erdayani, 2024).

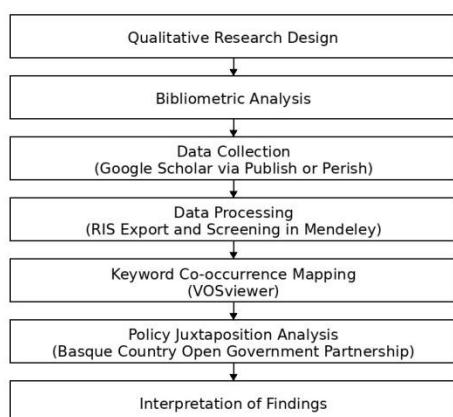
This study aims to analyse the main issues of the Open Government Partnership in the Basque Country. The Basque Country is one of the Spanish local governments designated as a pilot program by OGP. In the country, several local governments. Governments that have joined OGP include Aragón, Asturias, the Basque Country, Catalonia, Madrid, Navarra, and the Valencian Community. This makes the Basque Country one of the main actors in Spain's open government campaign. The Basque Country has made 10 open and government commitments since joining OGP in 2018. However, despite the growing body of research on open government and OGP, there is still limited empirical work that systematically links bibliometric patterns with the institutional and political context of subnational OGP members, particularly in regions with high fiscal and political autonomy, such as the Basque Country.

Research Methods

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

topic (Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, Pandey, & Lim, 2021; Moral-Muñoz, Herrera-Viedma, Santisteban-Espejo, & Cobo, 2020). This method is used to identify and highlight critical insights derived from the scientific literature (Gaviria-Marin, Merigó, & Baier-Fuentes, 2019; Kulsum et al., 2022). The research data were obtained from the Basque Country government policy documents and sourced from the Google Scholar database, taken using the Publish or Perish (PoP) application with the keywords Basque Country e-government, Basque Country information access, Basque Country transparency, Basque Country participation, and Basque Country collaboration, which are based on the main principles of open government. The data used covers the period from 2018 to June 2025, based on the Basque Country's involvement in the Open Government Partnership. Data were stored in RIS format, selected in Mendeley (including keyword completion), and analysed using VOSviewer (analysis type: co-occurrence; unit analysis: keywords; counting method: full counting). The bibliometric map is then juxtaposed with the Basque Country Open Government Partnership policies.

Chart 1. Methodological Flowchart



Source: Processed by the Author, 2025

Results and Discussion

Since its involvement in OGP, fifty-nine scientific publications on open government in the Basque Country have been found. Nine publications were found in 2018 and 2020, eleven publications in 2019 and 2021, ten publications in 2022, three publications in 2023, four publications in 2024, and two publications in January-June 2025 (see Graph 1). The fluctuating number of publications over the years suggests a relatively low level of academic visibility of open government in the Basque Country, rather than necessarily indicating weak policy performance.

Chart 2. Publication trends



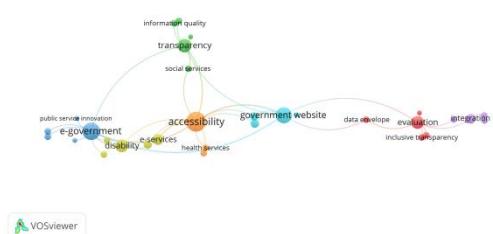
Source: Processed by the Author, 2025

There are 32 main issues of open government in the Basque Country, divided into 7 main focuses (see Figure 1). The first issue focuses on data envelope, effectiveness, evaluation, inclusive transparency, and local government. The second issue focuses on information quality, local administration websites, political environment, social services, and transparency. The third issue focuses on banking, e-commerce, e-government, public service innovation, and public value. The fourth issue focuses on disability, e-services, public services, public web services, and service standards. The fifth issue focuses on autonomy,

integration, private-public partnership, and sustainable Development. The sixth issue focuses on citizen participation, data, government websites, and transparent information. The seventh issue focuses on accessibility, health services, and the public health system.

These dominant issues indicate that open government implementation in the Basque Country remains strongly oriented toward service delivery and digital accessibility. The emphasis on e-government, government websites, and transparency suggests a consolidation phase in which improving access to information and usability across social groups is prioritised. These issues show the urgency and potential contribution of open government in the Basque Country in the future.

Figure 1. Network visualization



Source: Processed by the Author, 2025

By leveraging the Basque Government's fiscal and political autonomy from Spain, the country has promoted open government policies in recent years. As a result, the Basque Country ranks well in various rankings of transparency, open data, and overall government quality. The Basque Country action plan aims to open new lines of action based on priorities expressed by citizens. After analysing feasibility, scope, potential impact, and

institutional availability, these priorities resulted in five open government policies.

First, designing and launching a central online office and three joint pilot offices to offer support to those over 65, or those approaching retirement, for their individual and collective life projects. The project aims to offer information, guidance, intermediation, and accompaniment on issues related to the life projects of older people or retirees, from the time they approach retirement age until the end of life, with the aim of allowing them to enjoy life to the full and to be involved in society. This commitment facilitates informed, conscious personal decision making about how they want to live through the different stages of this very long-life cycle. The project also seeks to provide the impetus for resources adapted to the profiles, expectations, values, and new generations, together with comprehensive, personalised, and specialised support.

The goal is that the support offered can serve as a basis for older people to engage in their life projects, in line with their hopes, values, and interests, both individually and as families and groups. This will involve projects and initiatives that allow them to develop their abilities and talents, to serve the common good (voluntary, intergenerational, self-managed projects), and to have an impact on the communities where the offices are established.

This service is aligned with the community model, which is characterised by personalisation, continuity, comprehensiveness, proximity of care, and participation of the recipient (elderly) and which includes the resolution of questions, information, guidance, and intermediary services to access various resources and social guidance during the

different stages and important milestones of this stage of the life cycle.

The view of older people, especially the new generation, is that they are people with talents and skills that can be used for the common good or public interest, and that they hope for a full life in the later stages of the life cycle. A full life is a paradigm of comprehensive fulfilment of needs and personal growth across various aspects, broadening the active ageing approach. Synergy between different types of stakeholders enables the talents of older people to be channeled and nurtured while relying on their participation.

This commitment aligns with the Basque Government Social Policy Office's implementation of the Basque Governance Strategy with older people and with the Nagusi Agenda, a related participatory methodology, in recent years. It is also connected to the inherent dynamics of civil dialogue and therefore to the rights of individuals, families, groups, and communities targeted and who are at the heart of social interventions as they participate in all phases of public policies that affect them, including the implementation phase of the Basque Third Social Sector Law.

On the one hand, this commitment seeks to encourage citizen engagement to improve public services. Public engagement, in the form of co-design, clearly benefits institutions whose processes incorporate the knowledge, ideas, innovation capacity, and critical scrutiny of citizens, particularly older people, in the design, implementation, and evaluation of these services. Furthermore, this commitment seeks to safeguard the capacity of non-profit organisations and civil society to generate public value. Finally, implementing this

commitment will enable institutions to explore the opportunities new technologies offer for sharing information and fostering greater engagement and collaboration.

Second, the city's pandemic observatory and the adaptation of public services. The pandemic and its consequences have radically changed the reality of society, forcing government institutions and plans to adjust their priorities. The initial objective of the project was to define broad vision indicators that allow us to know and monitor the situation and progress of society and citizens (economic and social activity, situations involving fragility, and the state of specific groups) while allowing the effects of the different measures taken to alleviate the situation in different areas to be examined.

The project also examines the need for reflection and rethinking by institutions on their priority agenda and the adaptation of services to new circumstances, such as defining the essential services to be ensured in each case, strengthening and prioritizing other actions already established in government plans, rethinking public care and the relationship between the community and the institution, as well as new paradigms of service provision. The challenge is to obtain real information about what happened during the adaptation of services to the current reality, assess the impact of the actions taken, and conclude with lessons and paradigm shifts from what has been experienced that should make us reconsider.

The institutions have certain information and indicators that, to varying degrees, reflect the situation in the territory and its population. The management scorecard for this information generally meets standard management needs.

However, such a sudden change will, force us to review and diversify the sources of information, identifying new values necessary to know what is happening in real time and analyse the impact of actions, something that is not common in the management bodies of the various administrations.

Modelling how to act in unexpected situations can enable greater internal and community knowledge about the different situations experienced by the public and provide transparent information, a basic starting point for achieving open government. It also facilitates action models for specific situations as well as validated systems that can be incorporated into stable management dynamics.

Transparency and shared knowledge of data are fundamental to open government and to public involvement in government decisions. It also allows people to know and analyse the real impact of actions and policies adopted at any given time. Specific knowledge of actions and their impact on society is a key factor for empowering civil society.

Third, budget transparency and accountability tools. One of the most common criticisms from citizens is the difficulty in understanding public budget management, and, as a result, it is often questioned due to ignorance. This effect is exacerbated in critical situations, such as the current financial and COVID-19 crises, which increase distrust and distance between citizens and public institutions. Basque public institutions publish their budgets and are accountable for their budget execution according to established legal standards, which, however, are not understood by most citizens. In addition, the Basque

institutional infrastructure, with several levels of public administration and distributed and delegated powers, makes it even more difficult for citizens to understand how public resources financed by their taxes are managed. The challenge is to create tools for transparency and accountability that enable citizens to understand the public budget and, consequently, adequately assess public management and participate more actively in public policy.

Currently, each public institution publishes its budget in different ways. However, the internal structure of the budget is perfectly standardised by law; there is no standard for displaying it, so that the budget can be found in different formats and channels depending on the organisation. Transparency information is published in a scattered manner: budget web pages, transparency portals, open budgets, etc. In addition, the budgets of institutions and their dependent entities are often not consolidated, which makes it difficult for citizens to understand the overall management of public resources. On the other hand, the standardised budget structure is very technical and difficult for the layperson to understand. For this reason, citizens often cannot find the information they are looking for or do not understand the budget. To facilitate understanding of the budget, a new format or scheme is needed, in a unified way, that allows an integrated explanation of the budgets of the different public institutions.

The tool will be available on a common web platform and on the web portals of various public institutions. Its use will be free and require no software installation. The budget will be increased annually, and the history of previous years' budgets will be retained. The

tool will use easy-to-read language, and its design will consider the perspective of linguistic Equity and compliance with the Basque language promotion policies of the participating public entities.

The Basque governments (Autonomous Government, Provincial Councils, local governments, Parliament, etc.) will include a link to the accountability platform on their websites so that citizens can consult their budgets. At the end of the financial year, the level of budget execution will also be reported. In this way, citizens will have a simple tool to jointly consult and understand the budgets of the Basque public institutions.

This initiative will empower citizens and harness the power of new technologies to make the budget easier to understand. It is an initiative that promotes collaboration with organised and unorganised citizens to achieve greater prosperity, Well-being, and human dignity in the country and in an increasingly interconnected world. It is an initiative that facilitates the interoperability of government information systems at the state, regional, provincial, and local levels. It is an initiative that encourages citizens to listen and facilitates equitable, affordable access to technology, thereby promoting connectivity for political participation. It is a unique, reusable tool for all Basque governments and citizens, grounded in the principles of simple language, usability, and accessibility.

If we want to increase citizen participation in public affairs, governments need to communicate budget information well so that citizens can assess public management. Ultimately, what is sought is to empower and mobilise citizens, exploiting the potential

offered by new technologies for equal and non-discriminatory participation in the design and Development of public policies.

Fourth, the Development and strengthening of citizenship through open schools. This commitment aims to develop the knowledge and skills needed to combine citizen participation with full guarantees in a new model of public governance. To respond to the various demands received from citizens, the government considers it important to use and optimise spaces such as open schools. In this space, the government must identify work commitments to implement over the coming years to achieve active, participatory, and empowered citizens.

In terms of citizen participation, the global pandemic has created the need to face new challenges. The government has created new obstacles for citizens to participate in or continue the empowerment process that has already begun. In the medium to long term, thanks to this training and empowerment, the government will achieve greater citizen participation and, by raising awareness of public ethics, foster a higher level of shared responsibility among citizens.

This is a project that benefits all citizens and should be applicable in any municipality in the Basque Country. It is a project that should systematise the processes being tested in this municipality and share in the Community of Practice (exchange of experiences). It is a space to raise citizens' awareness of public ethics. The government will develop an open school model to advance the vision of Open Government, fostering continuous training, creating spaces for citizen debate, identifying the needs and deficiencies that citizens may face in

participating in participatory processes, and generating resources to respond to this social demand.

The government will identify the need for new technologies that have emerged during the pandemic and have increased the digital divide. Once this digital divide has been identified, the government must establish policies to address it and thereby ensure that everyone can participate equally. To achieve a more just and cohesive society that is fully capable of taking part in participatory processes, with adequate training, information, and knowledge. Providing the necessary elements to achieve a more educated and therefore more empowered citizenship.

Fifth, tools to promote the collection of proposals and supporters of citizen policy/regulation/legislation initiatives. While the processes to be followed to promote Citizen legislative/regulation/policy initiatives are fully described in the relevant regulations of many countries, such activities are virtually non-existent in the Basque Country due to the lack of general awareness among citizens and the difficulty of collecting the compliance required by each procedure, in a certified and secure manner.

Many initiatives are abandoned due to the expiration of compliance submission deadlines, and those that are implemented come from anonymous citizen groups. This factor partly undermines the purpose of citizen initiatives. This means that the task of certifying compliance becomes complicated and, to simplify it, requires interoperability between administrations.

All the above means that legislative/regulatory/policy-making initiatives

of citizens are practically non-existent; either that, or many proposals are rejected because they do not obtain the number of adherents stipulated in the relevant regulations. In this framework, the objective of this project is to develop a digital experience focused on citizens. One of the key elements of this commitment is an easily accessible and usable digital tool, well-known and available for use by citizen groups promoting legislative/regulatory/policy-making initiatives for the Basque Country, allowing publishing and giving transparency to the process; secure, verifiable, irrevocable and auditable electronic data collection of adherents; verifying adherents and certifying them using existing interoperability systems (identity documents, municipal censuses, etc.), depending on the requirements of each regulation.

The idea is for the tool to be placed on the Basque Government platform and offered as free software with technical support to allow external installation by citizen promoters if desired. The Basque Government (parliament, general assembly, autonomous, provincial, and local governments) has already posted the tool on its website and is promoting its use. There is a Promotion Committee that also has the tool for its dissemination among citizens and public agents. In the medium term, activity is being generated, and the proposed regulation is under review.

This initiative empowers citizens and harnesses the power of new technologies to make legislative and executive institutions more effective and better focused on citizen demands; it is also an opportunity to experiment with new models of collaborative governance. It promotes collaboration among organised and

unorganised citizens to achieve greater prosperity, Well-being, and human dignity in our country and in an increasingly interconnected world. It enables the interoperability of government information systems at the state, autonomous, provincial, and local levels.

It is an initiative that encourages citizens to listen, provides fair and affordable access to technology, and promotes connectivity to participate in politics. It involves civil society and public administrations in identifying innovative approaches to policymaking. It is a unique tool, reusable by all Basque administrations and citizens, based on the principles of simple language, ease of use, and accessibility. It is a measurable, impactful commitment that will be designed together with civil society (organised and unorganised). It is a digital experience that strengthens collaborative governance, bringing citizens closer to public institutions and public policymaking.

Demand for transparency in policymaking, with institutional agents more focused on citizens' aspirations and needs and more effective in their implementation. Greater citizen participation in public affairs, in the belief that this will help improve public services, rationalise public resources, foster public innovation, and, ultimately, prosperity, Well-being, and human dignity in an increasingly complex society. Increasing access to new technologies in a spirit of openness and responsibility, developing safe and accessible online spaces, namely platforms for configuring services, citizen participation and collaboration, and systems for sharing information, ideas, proposals, and public priorities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The Basque Country's open government is not popular despite being a pilot program of the OGP local government. The dominant issues of the Basque Country's open government include accessibility, e-government, government websites, transparency, evaluation, disability, e-services, and integration. Meanwhile, current issues include public service innovation, service standards, private-public partnerships, and autonomy. These issues show the urgency and potential contribution of the Basque Country's open government in the future.

Basque Country is currently focused on its commitment to design and launch a centralized online office and three joint pilot offices to offer support to those over 65, or those approaching retirement, for individual and collective life projects; a pandemic observatory in the city and adaptation of services to the public; a budget transparency and accountability tool; the Development and strengthening of citizenship through Open Eskola; and a tool to promote the collection of proposals and supporters of citizen policy/regulation/legislation initiatives.

This commitment contributes to the strategic vision of the Basque government by developing common tools, models, and guidelines for all Basque governments, regardless of their level (autonomous, provincial, or local) or size, to promote transparency and accountability of public activities, citizen empowerment and participation in public life, public-private collaboration and institutional integrity, all of which contribute to increasing the value of public action and the standing of its institutions and public officials.

The findings provide recommendations for stakeholders in the Basque Country. The Basque Country's open government implementation contributes to all local governments in Spain, including the hundreds that are members of the OGP. The open government practices of the Basque Country are particularly relevant for implementation by local governments with similar characteristics.

Acknowledgement

Our primary open government study produced this article as one of its results. Our sincere gratitude and appreciation go out to everyone who has helped, notably the Institute for Research and Community Service at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, which has provided important support.

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