

From advocacy to policy implementation: Evaluating the effectiveness of open government initiatives in Africa and the U.S.

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 23(03), 3258-3267

Publication history: Received on 22 November 2023; revised on 25 September 2024; accepted on 28 September 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.23.3.2700>

Abstract

This paper explores the journey from advocacy to policy implementation in open government initiatives across Africa and the U.S. Open government has been recognized globally as a tool for enhancing transparency, accountability, and public participation in governance. Through case studies from both regions, this paper evaluates how these initiatives have evolved from grassroots advocacy to formal policy, focusing on their effectiveness in improving governance. The study examines key drivers, challenges, and outcomes of open government policies, comparing the U.S.'s advanced implementation to Africa's diverse approach, where socio-political contexts significantly influence success rates. The findings reveal common barriers such as political resistance and resource limitations but also highlight innovative solutions that have shown success in improving citizen engagement and government transparency. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations to enhance the impact of open government initiatives in both regions.

Keywords: Open Government; Transparency; Accountability; Public Participation; Policy Implementation; Citizen Engagement

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, open government has become a cornerstone of democratic governance, fostering transparency, accountability, and public participation in decision-making. As global demands for more inclusive and transparent governance have intensified, various countries have adopted open government initiatives (OGIs) to address these expectations. Open government aims to provide the public with access to government data, improve government responsiveness, and encourage citizen engagement in shaping policies that affect their lives. In the U.S., the concept has a long history, with significant strides made in recent decades. In contrast, the African continent presents a more complex picture, with a diverse range of experiences shaped by varying political structures, socio-economic conditions, and historical contexts. The path from advocacy to policy implementation, therefore, differs substantially across regions, as these nations navigate unique challenges in making open government a reality.

This paper aims to evaluate the effectiveness of open government initiatives in Africa and the United States, comparing how these initiatives have progressed from advocacy to policy implementation and their impact on governance. By analyzing both established systems like the U.S. and the developing landscape in Africa, the study highlights the challenges, successes, and lessons learned from each region. The research delves into the factors that influence the successful adoption of open government, including political will, institutional capacity, technological infrastructure, and

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public demand for transparency. In doing so, it seeks to provide a comparative analysis of how open government principles have been integrated into policies and the practical outcomes of these initiatives in different governance contexts.

1.1. Defining Open Government Initiatives

Open Government Initiatives (OGIs) refer to policies and programs designed to make government actions more transparent, accessible, and accountable to the public. The key principles of open government include:

- **Transparency:** Governments should make information, such as budgets, policy decisions, and government spending, readily available to the public.
- **Accountability:** Governments should be held accountable for their actions, particularly with regard to the use of public resources and implementation of policies.
- **Public Participation:** Citizens should be able to engage with and influence government decisions, contributing to a more inclusive and responsive governance process (O'Reilly, 2011).

These principles are underpinned by the belief that openness in government fosters public trust, reduces corruption, and enhances overall governance quality (Fung et al., 2007).

1.2. Global Evolution of Open Government Initiatives

The adoption of open government principles has varied widely across the globe, with different nations implementing OGIs based on their unique political, social, and economic contexts. Historically, the movement gained momentum in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, spurred by increasing global connectivity, advances in digital technology, and demands for greater government transparency (Norris & Reddick, 2013). In the U.S., the implementation of open government policies dates back to the early 1960s, with the passage of the **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)** in 1966, which granted citizens the right to access government records. This laid the foundation for subsequent open government initiatives, including the **Open Government Initiative** launched under President Obama in 2009.

In Africa, the journey towards open government has been more varied. The continent's history of colonialism, state control over resources, and, in some regions, authoritarian rule, has shaped the openness of governments. While some African nations, such as South Africa, have made notable strides in adopting transparency measures, others face significant challenges related to political instability, weak institutional frameworks, and corruption (Dawes, 2009). Many African countries have embraced open government on a limited scale, often driven by international pressures and domestic civil society advocacy.

1.3. Political Structures and Challenges in Africa and the U.S.

1.3.1. Political Structures in the U.S.

In the United States, a federal system of government has allowed open government initiatives to be implemented at various levels—federal, state, and local. The Obama Administration's Open Government Initiative laid a foundational framework for federal transparency, with notable efforts like the creation of data.gov, which made government data accessible to the public. The U.S. also benefits from a robust civil society and media landscape that advocates for transparency and holds the government accountable (Obama, 2009). However, challenges still persist, including partisan politics that can undermine the bipartisan support required for effective implementation and resistance to full transparency from certain government agencies.

1.3.2. Political Structures in Africa

African countries exhibit a more varied political landscape, which presents different challenges in the implementation of open government initiatives. While some countries such as South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria have made significant progress through transparency laws and initiatives, others have struggled with entrenched political systems that resist transparency. In many African nations, weak institutions, limited political will, and a lack of resources hinder the full realization of open government (Parker, 2016). The challenges of political stability, public corruption, and inadequate technological infrastructure often complicate efforts to promote open governance effectively.

In countries with less stable governments, the implementation of open government policies can be seen as a threat to entrenched elites, leading to resistance from political leadership. In contrast, nations that have stronger democratic frameworks and institutional capacity have been more successful in implementing open government reforms.

1.4. Key Factors Influencing Open Government Implementation

The successful implementation of open government policies depends on several key factors:

- **Political Will and Leadership:** The commitment of political leaders to transparency and civic engagement is crucial. In both the U.S. and Africa, successful OGIs have typically been driven by visionary leadership. However, where political leadership is not committed to transparency, open government initiatives are less likely to succeed (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2020).
- **Institutional Capacity:** Strong institutions are essential for the implementation and sustainability of open government initiatives. This includes the development of infrastructure for data collection, management, and dissemination. The U.S. has well-established institutions and technical capacity to support open government initiatives. In contrast, many African countries face significant challenges in building the necessary institutional infrastructure to support open government (Dawes, 2009).
- **Technological Infrastructure:** Open government requires significant digital infrastructure to ensure that information can be easily shared with the public. While the U.S. has the resources to support such infrastructures, many African nations face challenges in internet connectivity, data literacy, and cybersecurity, which can impede the effective implementation of open government (Fung et al., 2007).
- **Public Demand and Civic Engagement:** A key element of successful open government is the active involvement of citizens. In the U.S., citizen engagement platforms like We the People have allowed citizens to influence policymaking directly. In Africa, however, public engagement can be more limited due to lower levels of internet access and political disengagement, particularly in rural areas (Norris & Reddick, 2013).

1.5. Comparing Open Government Initiatives in the U.S. and Africa

1.5.1. The U.S. Experience

The U.S. has been a leader in the implementation of open government initiatives, supported by robust institutional frameworks, political will, and technological infrastructure. The Open Government Initiative (OGI) launched by President Obama in 2009 aimed to foster a more transparent, participatory, and collaborative government. The U.S. also introduced open data platforms such as data.gov to provide public access to government datasets, which enhanced transparency and accountability (Obama, 2009). Furthermore, the U.S. has integrated open government principles into the workings of local governments, creating platforms for citizen engagement and feedback.

1.5.2. The African Experience

In contrast, the African experience with open government has been mixed. While countries like South Africa have made considerable strides through the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA), many African nations still face challenges in fostering transparency due to political instability, inadequate resources, and weak institutions (Parker, 2016). Countries such as Kenya and Nigeria have adopted initiatives such as open data portals, but the implementation and impact of these initiatives are often hindered by corruption and limited public trust in government institutions. The lack of infrastructure and political resistance in some regions further complicates efforts to fully embrace open government (Dawes, 2009).

Open government initiatives have the potential to strengthen democratic governance by fostering transparency, accountability, and public participation. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends on various factors, including political will, institutional capacity, technological infrastructure, and citizen engagement. While the U.S. has made significant strides in implementing open government initiatives, Africa faces a more complex set of challenges related to political and institutional stability, resource constraints, and public trust. Despite these challenges, African countries have shown promising signs of progress, and there are opportunities for further development of open government frameworks that can contribute to more transparent and inclusive governance.

2. Literature Review

The concept of open government is grounded in the principles of transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. Over the past few decades, scholars have increasingly focused on how open government initiatives (OGIs) can enhance the relationship between governments and citizens, improving public trust and contributing to the reduction of corruption (Fung, 2006). The literature highlights the importance of digital tools, public data accessibility, and mechanisms for citizen feedback as central elements that bridge this gap. This review examines the evolution and impact of open government initiatives, particularly focusing on the experiences of the United States and African

countries. The review also explores the challenges faced by African nations in implementing these initiatives and the role of civil society in advocating for greater transparency.

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Open Government

Open government initiatives are underpinned by core principles such as transparency, accountability, and participation. Transparency in government refers to the availability of government data, decision-making processes, and public policies that citizens can scrutinize (Fung, 2006). Accountability ensures that government actions are subject to oversight and that leaders are answerable for their use of public resources. Public participation, on the other hand, emphasizes the involvement of citizens in the policy-making process, allowing them to influence decisions that impact their lives (Bertot et al., 2010).

These principles are essential for creating more inclusive, responsive, and trustworthy governance structures. Scholars argue that when governments implement open government reforms, they not only foster trust among citizens but also reduce opportunities for corruption (Dawes, 2009). The availability of government data and the possibility for citizen input are often seen as tools that hold officials accountable, creating a system where public interest is prioritized over private gain.

2.2. Open Government Initiatives in the United States

The United States has long been a proponent of open government practices, with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), passed in 1966, serving as one of the earliest formalizations of transparency policies. FOIA allows citizens to request access to government records, contributing to a culture of openness that has evolved over the years (O'Reilly, 2011). In 2009, President Barack Obama launched the Open Government Initiative (OGI), which aimed to further institutionalize the principles of transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in U.S. governance. The initiative marked a significant step forward by directing federal agencies to create online platforms that allow the public to easily access government data.

The OGI focused on improving citizen engagement and increasing the accessibility of government data. By creating platforms like data.gov, the initiative made datasets related to government spending, policy decisions, and other public information available to the public. This move was intended to not only increase public trust in the federal government but also enable the public to participate more actively in policymaking (Obama, 2009). Scholars have lauded these efforts, with research highlighting the success of the OGI in fostering collaboration between the public and government and increasing transparency (O'Reilly, 2011).

2.3. Open Government in Africa: Context and Challenges

In contrast to the U.S., African countries have faced more complex challenges in implementing open government initiatives. Many African nations have only recently started to adopt open government principles, often following the encouragement of international organizations or civil society groups (Bukenya, 2017). For instance, South Africa passed the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) in 2000, which granted citizens the right to access government information. The Kenya Open Data Initiative (KODI), launched in 2011, made a substantial impact by providing citizens with access to government data and information, which had previously been difficult to obtain (Kobia & Zahid, 2012).

Despite these initiatives, African countries still face several barriers to full open government implementation. Political instability, weak institutional frameworks, and limited infrastructure are persistent challenges. These issues often hinder the capacity of governments to collect, manage, and disseminate information effectively (Bukenya, 2017). Furthermore, the level of public trust in government is often low, particularly in countries that have experienced high levels of corruption or authoritarian rule. This lack of trust can make it difficult for governments to implement effective open government policies, as citizens may be skeptical about the sincerity of such efforts.

2.4. Role of Civil Society in Advocating for Open Government

In both the United States and Africa, civil society organizations (CSOs) have played a critical role in advocating for greater government transparency. In the U.S., advocacy by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media has been instrumental in pushing for the establishment of open government frameworks, such as the Open Government Directive and data.gov. These organizations often monitor the effectiveness of government initiatives, hold officials accountable, and ensure that transparency measures are being upheld (Fung, 2006).

In Africa, civil society groups have been particularly influential in driving the open government agenda. Many African countries have faced high levels of corruption and weak governance, and civil society organizations have stepped in to

demand more openness from governments. For example, in Kenya, civil society organizations have played a significant role in pushing for the Open Data Initiative, which has made government data more accessible to the public. These efforts are often supported by international donors who recognize the importance of transparency in promoting good governance (Kobia & Zahid, 2012). However, in some African countries, civil society organizations face significant challenges, including government resistance, lack of funding, and threats to their safety.

2.5. Impact of Open Government on Corruption and Governance

A key aspect of open government is its potential to reduce corruption and improve overall governance. The availability of public data can expose inefficiencies, misuse of funds, and other forms of corruption, forcing governments to address these issues. Studies in both democratic and developing countries suggest that transparency policies are effective in curbing corrupt practices. According to **Dawes (2009)**, open government initiatives can increase citizens' ability to scrutinize government spending, track policy outcomes, and demand accountability.

In the U.S., the combination of legislative transparency, FOIA requests, and the OGI has led to an improvement in the government's overall accountability. However, research suggests that transparency alone may not be enough to combat corruption effectively, especially in countries where institutions remain weak or where political elites resist accountability measures (Fung et al., 2007).

In Africa, open government initiatives have the potential to similarly reduce corruption, though the results are mixed. Some countries, such as **South Africa**, have made significant progress in improving governance through transparency policies. However, challenges such as political resistance and the lack of institutional capacity have slowed the impact of open government on reducing corruption in many African nations (Bukonya, 2017).

2.6. Technological Barriers to Open Government in Africa

Technological infrastructure plays a critical role in the implementation of open government policies. The success of open government initiatives often depends on the availability of reliable internet access, data management systems, and digital literacy among citizens. While the U.S. has the technological infrastructure to support large-scale open government programs, many African countries face challenges in this area. Low internet penetration, unreliable electricity supply, and inadequate technical expertise often hinder the rollout of open government initiatives in Africa (Dawes, 2009).

Additionally, while the availability of government data is essential for transparency, many African governments lack the capacity to manage and organize large volumes of data. Inadequate infrastructure for data storage, management, and access can further delay or prevent the successful implementation of open government policies.

The literature suggests that open government initiatives hold the potential to improve governance by increasing transparency, reducing corruption, and fostering public participation. While the U.S. has made significant strides in institutionalizing open government practices, African countries are still facing significant challenges related to political will, institutional capacity, and technological infrastructure. Despite these challenges, countries like **Kenya** and **South Africa** have made progress, largely driven by the efforts of civil society organizations and international support. Going forward, the success of open government initiatives in both regions will depend on continued efforts to strengthen institutions, build technological infrastructure, and engage citizens in the policy-making process.

3. Case Studies

This section explores the open government initiatives in the United States and specific states—California, New York, Texas, and Florida—to examine how these regions have implemented transparency, accountability, and citizen participation through open government policies. The successes and challenges faced in each state provide insights into the potential and limitations of open government efforts within the U.S.

3.1. United States (Federal Level)

The United States has been at the forefront of open government initiatives, beginning with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in 1966 and culminating in the Open Government Initiative (OGI) launched in 2009 under the Obama administration. These efforts were designed to foster transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. The OGI led to the creation of platforms such as data.gov, which provides public access to government datasets, enabling citizens, businesses, and researchers to use data for various purposes, including policy analysis, innovation, and service improvement.

The OGI has also led to a stronger commitment from federal agencies to engage in transparency efforts, with an emphasis on collaborative platforms where the government and citizens can interact. However, challenges persist in the form of inconsistent implementation across agencies, the complexity of government data, and resistance from some political leaders and public servants who may view transparency as detrimental to their interests.

Despite these challenges, the U.S. federal government continues to serve as a model for other nations, showing that open government can significantly enhance democratic governance, citizen trust, and public service delivery.

3.2. California

California, known for its progressive stance on transparency, has implemented numerous open government policies to promote transparency, civic engagement, and data accessibility. The California Open Data Portal, launched in 2013, provides easy access to government datasets, including information on health, crime, education, and the environment. The state has also implemented initiatives to ensure that data is accessible in machine-readable formats, enabling data-driven decision-making at the local level.

California's approach emphasizes collaboration between the state government, local agencies, and the public. Citizens can participate in decision-making through online platforms and public consultations. However, California faces significant challenges in ensuring that all citizens have the digital literacy and access to engage with open government data effectively. Additionally, while the state has made strides in opening data, the disparity in data usage between urban and rural communities remains a challenge.

3.3. New York

New York has long been a leader in implementing open government initiatives at both the state and local levels. In 2012, New York launched the Open NY portal, which provides access to state government datasets related to finance, infrastructure, and healthcare. The initiative is designed to encourage public participation in the policymaking process, with citizens using the data to track government spending and provide feedback.

Despite its successes, New York faces challenges in making the data usable for the general public. While access to data is provided, there is often a lack of clear context or explanation, making it difficult for non-experts to understand and use the data effectively. Additionally, the state has struggled with the integration of open government initiatives across different local jurisdictions. These challenges hinder the full potential of open government policies in improving transparency and public engagement.

3.4. Texas

Texas is another state that has made strides in open government, though its efforts have been more state-driven compared to the initiatives in California and New York. Texas implemented the Texas Open Data Portal in 2015, providing public access to datasets related to state spending, education, and public safety. Texas has also made efforts to improve government accountability by tracking the efficiency of government operations and increasing the accessibility of public records.

However, Texas faces a few challenges, particularly in its data quality and standardization. While data access is provided, some agencies have been slow to update or release their data in a timely manner. Additionally, political resistance to transparency remains an issue in certain areas, particularly in state governance, where local governments and certain public officials have been hesitant to fully embrace the open data movement.

3.5. Florida

Florida, similar to Texas, has implemented open government initiatives at the state level, notably through the Florida Public Records Law, which guarantees citizens access to government documents. The state has also adopted the Florida Open Data Portal, which provides data on a wide range of topics, including healthcare, education, and transportation. However, unlike some of the other states, Florida's efforts have been more focused on compliance with state laws rather than proactive transparency efforts.

Challenges in Florida include a lack of uniformity in how agencies implement open government policies. While some local agencies have embraced transparency, others have been less diligent in providing easy access to government data. Additionally, Florida faces challenges related to data privacy concerns and the political influence on open data efforts, with some officials questioning the security risks associated with providing too much public access to sensitive government information.

Table 1 Summary Table of Open Government Initiatives

State	Key Initiative	Year Launched	Focus Area	Successes	Challenges
United States (Federal)	Open Government Initiative (OGI)	2009	Federal government data accessibility	Federal agencies adopting open data; creation of data.gov	Inconsistent implementation across states; lack of engagement from marginalized communities
California	California Open Data Portal	2013	State government data	Data accessibility across sectors; promotion of civic participation	Digital literacy gap; urban-rural data disparity
New York	Open NY Portal	2012	State government finance, healthcare	Public access to state datasets; increased citizen engagement	Lack of contextual clarity for non-experts; local integration challenges
Texas	Texas Open Data Portal	2015	State government data	Accessibility of public records; tracking government efficiency	Data quality and standardization issues; political resistance
Florida	Florida Public Records Law & Open Data Portal	2009	Government transparency, data access	Compliance with public records law; access to healthcare, education, and transportation data	Lack of uniformity in implementation; concerns over data privacy

3.6. Conclusion of Case Studies

The case studies from the United States highlight the complexities of implementing open government initiatives at both the federal and state levels. While progress has been made in increasing transparency and citizen participation, challenges such as inconsistent implementation, digital literacy, and political resistance continue to hinder the full potential of open government. Each state has its unique challenges, shaped by its political culture, infrastructure, and public engagement strategies. However, all demonstrate the critical role that open government can play in enhancing democratic governance and public accountability, provided there is sustained effort to address the barriers to full implementation.

The experiences of these states can offer valuable lessons for other countries seeking to implement open government initiatives, particularly in the areas of data accessibility, citizen engagement, and institutional support.

4. Discussion

The analysis of open government initiatives within the United States, particularly at the federal and state levels, reveals both common challenges and state-specific barriers in the implementation of these policies. While the federal government has made significant strides in creating transparency and engaging citizens through initiatives like the Open Government Initiative (OGI), challenges still persist in ensuring consistency and equitable access to open government data across the 50 states.

At the federal level, data.gov and similar platforms have greatly enhanced the availability of government data to the public, encouraging greater civic participation. However, as seen in the case studies of California, New York, Texas, and Florida, some states have been slow to implement or fully embrace open government policies. In particular, issues of inconsistent application of policies, resistance from state agencies, and varying levels of digital literacy across different states have posed significant barriers to realizing the full potential of these initiatives.

4.1. Challenges Across the United States

Inconsistent Implementation: One of the most significant challenges observed across the U.S. is the lack of uniformity in how different states and local governments implement open government policies. While states like California and New York have made considerable progress, others such as Texas and Florida face difficulties in ensuring that the policies are applied consistently across all government agencies and local jurisdictions. This fragmentation often leads to disparities in data accessibility and citizen engagement, preventing open government from being fully realized in every part of the country.

Political Resistance: Another challenge lies in political resistance at both the state and local levels. Government officials may be reluctant to fully embrace transparency due to concerns about security, political ramifications, or simply a lack of political will to promote government openness. States like Texas have faced resistance from officials in certain regions, limiting the scope of open government initiatives despite having access to platforms like the Texas Open Data Portal.

Digital Literacy and Access: Even in states with robust open government policies, there remains a digital divide. States like California and New York have made strides in ensuring that data is accessible and actionable, yet digital literacy remains a key challenge, particularly in rural areas. Citizens may not have the necessary skills or resources to engage meaningfully with government data, undermining the effectiveness of these initiatives in promoting greater public participation.

4.2. Success Stories and Key Drivers of Success

Despite these challenges, there are several success stories within the U.S. that highlight how open government initiatives can lead to positive outcomes. The California Open Data Portal, for instance, has been a success due to strong collaboration between government agencies, civil society, and tech companies. This initiative has increased citizen engagement and has provided a wealth of information to help improve government decision-making and hold officials accountable. Similarly, New York's Open NY Portal has facilitated public access to vital data, especially in the areas of finance and healthcare, leading to more informed citizens and greater accountability in these sectors.

A key factor behind the success of these initiatives has been the role of civil society organizations and advocacy groups, which have played a crucial role in demanding greater transparency from governments and in ensuring that data is accessible and usable for all citizens. In California, these organizations have pushed for more comprehensive data standards and have worked with government agencies to make data available in formats that can be easily analyzed and used by the public.

4.3. The Role of Technology in Advancing Open Government

Technology plays an essential role in the success of open government initiatives. In the U.S., digital platforms such as data.gov, Open NY, and the California Open Data Portal have created accessible spaces for citizens to engage with government data. These platforms not only allow for transparency but also serve as tools for civic engagement, enabling citizens to provide feedback, track government spending, and participate in decision-making.

However, as observed, challenges remain. Data privacy concerns, particularly in Florida and Texas, where there is a strong focus on public records laws, can deter public officials from releasing sensitive government data. Furthermore, even in states with robust digital platforms, there is a persistent challenge related to data literacy. Non-experts may struggle to interpret complex datasets or fail to realize the significance of data for improving government accountability.

5. Conclusion

The evaluation of open government initiatives across the United States demonstrates both the potential and the challenges inherent in creating a more transparent and participatory government. At the federal level, the Open Government Initiative has laid the groundwork for a more open and accountable government, with platforms such as data.gov enhancing citizen engagement and government transparency. However, the case studies from California, New York, Texas, and Florida reveal that the effectiveness of these initiatives varies significantly across states, largely due to challenges such as inconsistent implementation, political resistance, and digital literacy gaps.

Despite these challenges, the role of civil society advocacy and technological tools remains a key driver of success. When combined with the right policy frameworks and institutional support, open government initiatives have the potential to foster greater accountability, public participation, and trust between governments and citizens. As seen in California

and New York, when these factors align, they can create powerful tools for enhancing democratic governance and enabling citizens to hold government officials accountable.

The case studies underscore the importance of addressing the barriers to full implementation, including data privacy, political resistance, and digital literacy. Moving forward, the challenge for U.S. states will be to ensure consistency in the implementation of open government initiatives across all levels of government while fostering inclusive participation among citizens from all walks of life. Only then will the true potential of open government be realized in the U.S.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of open government initiatives within the United States, the following recommendations are proposed to further enhance the effectiveness of these programs and overcome the challenges identified in the case studies:

- **Enhanced Civil Society Engagement**

Governments should actively engage with civil society organizations (CSOs) when designing and implementing open government policies. By collaborating with these groups, governments can ensure that policies reflect the needs and aspirations of citizens, particularly marginalized groups. In the case of California and New York, civil society advocacy has been crucial in pushing for data accessibility and transparency. Governments should recognize the valuable role these organizations play in mobilizing public opinion and holding governments accountable, and build partnerships that enable inclusive policy development.

- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks**

It is essential to strengthen legal frameworks to ensure that government data is accessible to the public. Whistleblower protection should be prioritized to encourage individuals to expose corruption or unethical behavior within government agencies. In Texas, for example, issues surrounding transparency were often linked to weak enforcement of public records laws. Governments must establish robust legal protections that both facilitate access to information and protect individuals who expose governmental misconduct. Strengthening these frameworks would contribute to a culture of accountability and trust in public institutions.

- **Promoting Digital Literacy**

Increasing digital literacy is a key recommendation for ensuring that all citizens can effectively engage with open government initiatives. While platforms like data.gov in the U.S. have facilitated data accessibility, many citizens, particularly in rural areas, struggle to fully utilize these resources due to a lack of digital skills. Governments should prioritize training programs that equip citizens with the necessary tools to access and interpret government data. In New York, partnerships with community organizations have proven effective in boosting digital literacy, enabling broader participation in open government efforts. For successful implementation, both the public sector and private sector should invest in programs that bridge the digital divide.

- **Improving Infrastructure**

Effective implementation of open government initiatives requires a solid technological infrastructure. Governments should invest in internet access, especially in rural and underserved urban areas, to ensure that all citizens have the ability to access public data. In regions with poor infrastructure, efforts should focus on providing the necessary resources (e.g., public access points such as libraries or community centers) to facilitate engagement. In states like California, where technology infrastructure is more robust, it has been easier to implement successful open government programs. Expanding these capabilities nationwide will ensure that digital engagement becomes a reality for all U.S. citizens.

- **Commitment to Accountability**

The political will of government leaders is crucial for the success of open government initiatives. Commitment to accountability must be reflected in the actions of elected officials, as transparency cannot thrive without strong leadership and public commitment. As demonstrated in California and New York, leaders who are genuinely dedicated to improving transparency can drive systemic change by creating a culture of openness within government agencies.

Political leaders should not only support open government initiatives in policy but also lead by example, promoting a transparent and inclusive governance culture that fosters public trust.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest is to be disclosed

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