

Open GOVERNMENT

IMM
Index

2019

Table of contents

5	Open Government Index 2019
5	I. Introduction
6	II. Methodology
6	Operationalization of open government
17	III. Results
18	IV. Conclusions
18	Methodology
19	Progress and remaining challenges
20	References

Open Government Index 2019

I. Introduction

In only a few years, Mexico has created a set of norms, institutions, and mechanisms that have transformed how can gain access to information generated and kept by their governments. Following a process of legal reforms and institutional changes, Mexico's Constitution guarantees a person's right to information since 2007. In the last decade, a National System of Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data (henceforth SNT) has been developed, and a General Act of Transparency and Access to Public Information (henceforth LGTAIP) was passed with the purpose of establishing the necessary conditions to guarantee access to information across the country. Additionally, an autonomous national body—the National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Personal Data Protection (or INAI)—, and 32 local transparency institutes currently oversee all regulated entities—public institutions with transparency obligations¹— in each state.

Moreover, since 2014, institutions previously not required to make public their information –such as political parties, public trusts funds, and public sector unions– are now mandated to do so. Public policy agendas are pushing for higher open data standards and more aggressive, proactive transparency. At the same time, Mexico's involvement in the Open Government Partnership, the creation of an Open Government Steering Committee at the federal level, and the development of local action plans, among other actions, have introduced the concept of open government into the policy agenda. This has led to a citizen demand not only for transparency but also for greater citizen participation in government institutions.

In 2017, INAI commissioned the Open Government Index² (henceforth, the Index) to the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (CIDE), a public research center in Mexico, with the in order to capture a baseline picture of Mexico's level of open government. The Index measured the extent to which individuals were able to obtain relevant information from different government institutions (*transparency*) and the degree to which they could participate in the decision-making processes of these institutions (*participation*), examining both the fulfillment of legal obligations on each matter (*governmental perspective*) and citizens' average experience when approaching institutions (*citizen perspective*). At that time, the overall score obtained was 0.39 out of a maximum of 1, with a score of 0.50 in transparency, and 0.28 in participation. These results highlighted the relative progress achieved in matters of transparency, while also underscoring the differences across states and types of institutions as well as the lack of availability of open data, among other challenges still faced by the nascent transparency system. In matters of participation, it showed the lack of institutionalization of participation mechanisms within government institutions.

¹ In Spanish, these entities are known as *sujetos obligados*.

² Note that, in the translation of the 2017 version of this exercise, the Index is translated as the Open Government Metric.

In the years since the first Index, the SNT has further developed, both with the crystallization of a national transparency platform (PNT) and the creation of the government's transparency obligations website (SIPOT) which compiles all published information required of regulated entities by the LGTAIP. Given the speed of progress in the matter and the encouragement of open government as a principle in the last years, it is useful to ask again whether the current institutional environment has translated into a better citizen experience in matters of transparency and civic participation. The 2019 Open Government Index is such an update on the previous edition. By evaluating the state of various aspects of transparency and participation from a governmental and citizen perspective, the Index represents a comprehensive snapshot of the current state of open government in Mexico. Moreover, the Index showcases the benefits of developing a measurable definition of government openness (see Cejudo, Michel, Sobrino & Vázquez, 2018).

II. Methodology

Operationalization of open government

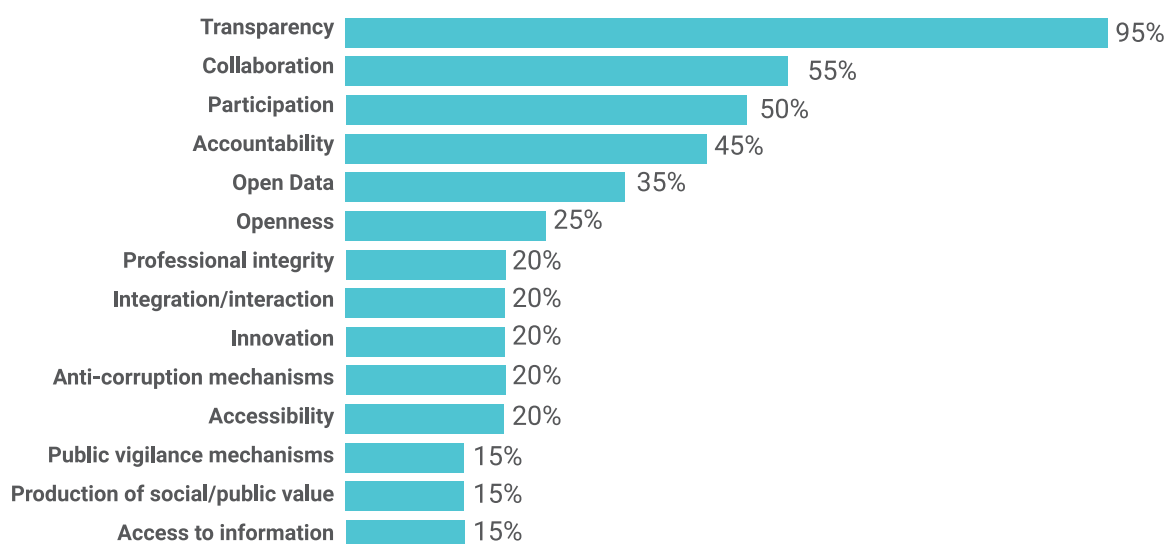
Any measurement of a concept requires that it first be operationalized. In the 2017 edition of the Index, several activities were carried out prior to the exercise in order to identify the attributes most frequently associated with open government, and, from this information, develop an adequate measurement of the concept.

First, a systematic review of already-existing open government and transparency indices revealed no consensus on how the concept should be understood and evaluated. For example, at the international level, the *Global Open Data Index* and the *Open Data Barometer* focus only on the level of openness of relevant datasets, while the World Justice Project's *Open Government Index* is based on citizens' and experts' perceptions of government openness. At the national level, the *Medición de la Transparencia en Línea* in Mexico defines open government only as transparency, and in the United States, the *Measurement of Open Government: Metrics and Process*, focuses on evaluating the progress achieved in the implementation of the Open Government Directive published by the White House in 2009.

Then, the most common definitions of the concept were analyzed. Google and Google Scholar were both searched with the phrases "open government" and "open government definition" and, in each case, the first 10 definitions were examined³, excluding those that focused only on open data. Each definition was then disaggregated into its components, resulting in 33 different components mentioned across all definitions. The frequency of these concepts was tallied (see Graph 1) and transparency, collaboration, and participation appeared as the concepts most often related to open government.

³ Given that most of the existing indices on the matter are carried out by international organizations and that the open government movement first started in English-speaking countries, both searches were carried out in English.

Graph 1. Open government concepts, by percentage of definitions that mention it



The indices found in the first exercise were then revisited to identify which of the aforementioned concepts was measured by each of them. Transparency, open data and participation were found among the most measured aspects of open government.

In the last exercise, 50 Mexican experts on transparency and accountability were asked to come up with a measurable definition of open government⁴. First, they were asked to grade a list of concepts from the previous exercise on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 meant “irrelevant to the definition” and 10 meant “essential to the definition” of an open government; they were also allowed to add concepts of their own. Then, they were asked to group these components in a maximum of three dimensions with, at most, four components each. Finally, they had to name each of the chosen dimensions and provide an operationalized definition of open government.

These results were analyzed in order to determine the frequency and ranking of each concept. Participation, open data, and transparency appeared as the most important attributes of open government, and the two most frequently used dimensions were access to information/transparency and participation.

Based on these three exercises, an open government was defined as one which makes useful information available to its citizens and allows and promotes citizens’ participation in its decision-making processes, therefore making the government more accountable and legitimate, and increasing the knowledge and control that people have over their government’s actions (for a full description of the operationalization process, see CIDE & INAI, 2017a).

⁴ Experts included people from academia, non-governmental organizations, and relevant government institutions. They were given a week to complete the exercise anonymously; of all the people contacted, 33 answered fully, 2 answered partially, and the rest did not answer.

Thus, for purposes of this exercise, a measurement instrument was developed which consists of two dimensions: *transparency*, which envelops access to information requests, transparency obligations under the LGTAIP, and open data, and *civic participation*, which captures aspects related to collaboration with citizens and shared decision-making processes within the government. Each of these dimensions is, in turn, studied from two perspectives: governmental and citizen, where the former focuses on the institutionalization of channels and procedures for achieving these objectives, while the latter looks at the experience of people when approaching their government. Figure 1 below describes what is measured by each dimension-perspective combination.

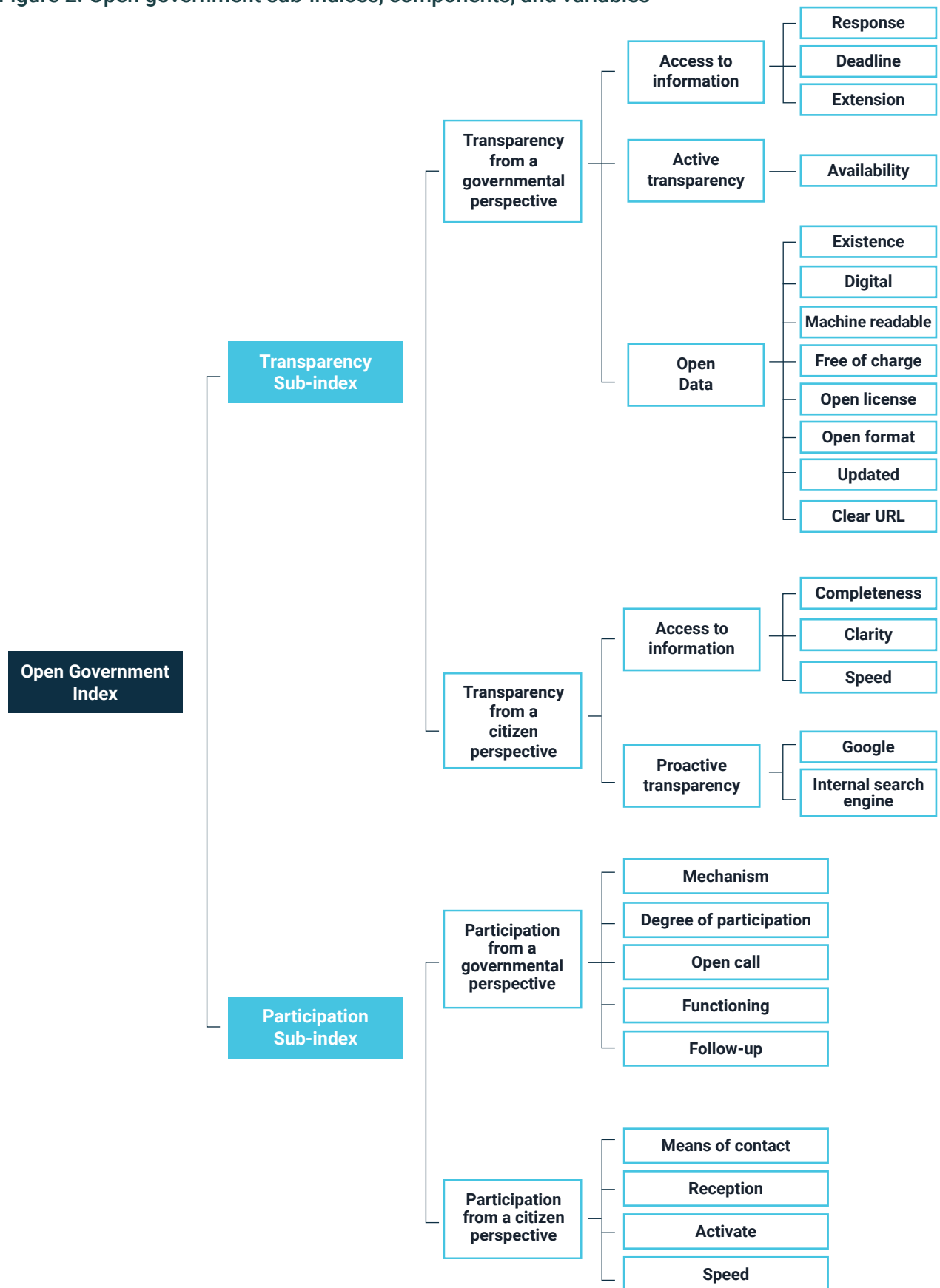
Figure 1. Operationalization of open government

	Transparency	Civic participation
Governmental perspective	Does the government make available information in its possession? If so, to what extent?	Through what formal channels can people influence the decision-making processes of public institutions?
Citizen perspective	How feasible is it for a person to get timely and relevant information from its government?	Can a person activate, through their own initiative, a communication channel that allows them to influence the decisions of public institutions?

Source: 2019 Open Government Index

In 2019, the second edition of the Open Government Index was published, carrying forward the operationalization used in the previous exercise, but with a few methodological updates that provide a more accurate and robust measurement of the state of government openness in Mexico. The sub-indices, components, and variables that make up the general index are shown in the following flowchart and explained afterwards.

Figure 2. Open government sub-indices, components, and variables



The general index is the *open government index*, which results from averaging the open government sub-indices from a governmental and citizen perspective. In turn, the sub-index from each perspective results from averaging the results of each dimension from that perspective. Results are calculated for each public institution and then averaged across the desired category of analysis (state, type of institution, level of government).

The *sub-index for transparency from a governmental perspective* (TG) measures the degree to which institutions make information in their possession available to citizens, and it results from the weighted average of three components:

- 1) **Access to information:** All access to information requests received between July 1st, 2017 and June 30th, 2018 were analyzed in order to measure the responsiveness of institutions to citizens' demands. From this perspective, the component focused on measuring institutions' ability to answer, within the legal time limit, and without the use of an extension period.
- 2) **Active transparency:** The information published in the SIPOT was analyzed in order to measure whether institutions publish the required information online. The first 13 common obligations of the law were reviewed.
- 3) **Open data:** The government's open data website, as well as third-party sites⁵, were searched for evidence of the availability of open data files from each institution.

The above components are weighed in the following manner:

$$TG=(0.6*Access\ to\ information)+(0.3*Active\ transparency)+(0.1*Open\ data)$$

The *sub-index for transparency from a citizen perspective* (TC) measures the ease with which citizens can gather information relevant for their daily lives, and is the result of the weighted average of two components:

- 1) **Access to information:** All access to information requests received between July 1st, 2017 and June 30th, 2018 were analyzed in order to measure the responsiveness of institutions to citizens' demands. From this perspective, the component measured the completeness, clarity and speed of the responses received.
- 2) **Proactive transparency:** Institutional websites and Google were searched for availability of typically relevant information from each institution.

The above components are weighed in the following manner:

$$TC=(0.6*Access\ to\ information)+(0.4*Proactive\ transparency)$$

The following table lists both transparency sub-indices, the weighing of each component, and the grading criteria and measurement of each variable in the component.

⁵ This included Google as well as state-level open data platforms, where available.

Table 1. Grading criteria and measurement for variables in the transparency sub-index

Component	Variable	Grading criteria	Measurement
Transparency from a governmental perspective = (0.6 Access to information + 0.3 Active transparency + 0.1 Open data) *			
Access to information	Response	1 if the request received an answer of some sort 0 if request did not receive any answers	$Response = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n response\ i}{n}$ where i = graded request and n = total number of access to information requests received by the institution within the study period
	Deadline	1 if the response was received within the legal time limit 0 if the response was not received within the legal time limit	$Deadline = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n deadline\ i}{n}$ where i = graded request and n= total number of access to information requests received by the institution within the study period
	Extension	1 if the institution did not ask for a time extension 0 if the institution asked for a time extension	$Extension = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n extension\ i}{n}$ where i = graded request and n = total number of access to information requests received by the institution within the study period
Active transparency	Availability	1 if the SIPOT system contains information for all applicable transparency obligations 0 if there is no published information in the system	$Active\ transparency = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{13} availability\ i}{n}$ where i = graded obligation and 13 is the number of common transparency obligations graded for the purposes of the index **
Open data	Existence	1 if there exists at least one file in an open data format published by the institution and discoverable through the government's open data platform (www.datos.gob.mx) or through a third-party site 0.5 if there exists such a file but it was not the first one available 0 if an open data file does not exist	$Existence = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0.5 & \text{if criteria is partially fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
	Digital	1 if the data was generated as a digital file 0 if the data was not generated as a digital file 0 if an open data file does not exist	$Digital = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
	Machine readable	1 if the data can be read by a word processor, spreadsheet or statistical software 0 if the data cannot be read by a word processor, spreadsheet or statistical software 0 if an open data file does not exist	$Machine\ readable = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$

Component	Variable	Grading criteria	Measurement
Transparency from a governmental perspective = (0.6 Access to information + 0.3 Active transparency + 0.1 Open data) *			
Open data	Free of charge	1 if the data can be accessed free of charge 0 if the data cannot be accessed free of charge 0 if an open data file does not exist	$Free\ of\ charge = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
	Open license	1 if the file has an open license 0 if the file does not have an open license 0 if an open data file does not exist	$Open\ license = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
	Open format	1 if the file is stored in an open format 0 if the file is not stored in an open format 0 if an open data file does not exist	$Open\ format = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
	Updated	1 if the data is from January 2017 or later 0 if the data is from before January 2017 0 if an open data file does not exist	$Updated = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
	Clear URL	1 the data can be accessed through a clear URL 0 if the data cannot be accessed through a clear URL 0 if an open data file does not exist	$Clear\ URL = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
Transparency from a citizen perspective = (0.6 Access to information + 0.4 Proactive transparency) *			
Access to information	Completeness	1 if the response given was correctly classified and answered all points in the request 0.5 if the response was incorrectly classified but answered all points in the request 0.5 if the response was correctly classified but did not answer all points in the request 0 if the response was incorrectly classified and did not answer all points in the request	$Completeness = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^m \left(\frac{classification\ i + points\ i}{2} \right)}{m}$ where i = graded request and m = number of access to information requests randomly chosen for manual grading

Component	Variable	Grading criteria	Measurement
Access to information	Clarity	<p>The structure and language of the response were graded, taking into consideration the following characteristics:</p> <p>ID 1 if the answer was easy to identify 0 if the answer was not easy to identify</p> <p>Structure 1 if the structure of the response made it easy to read 0 if the structure of the response made it difficult to read</p> <p>Language 1 if the language used was easy 0.5 if the language used was normal 0 if the language used was difficult</p>	$Clarity = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^m \left(\frac{Form\ i + Content\ i}{2} \right)}{m}$ <p>where</p> $Form\ i = \left(\frac{ID\ i + structure\ i}{2} \right)$ <p>and</p> $Content\ i = language\ i$ <p>where i= graded request and m = number of access to information requests randomly chosen for manual grading.</p>
	Speed	1-(number of natural days between date of request and date of response/30)	$Speed = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^m speed\ i}{m}$ <p>where i = graded request and m = number of access to information randomly chosen for manual grading</p>
Proactive transparency	Google	<p>1 if the information was found in the first page of Google results</p> <p>0 if the information was not found in the first page of Google results</p>	$Google = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
	Internal search engine	<p>1 if the information was found in the first page of results of the internal search engine of the institutional website</p> <p>0.5 if the institutional website did not have a search engine or the information could not be found through the search engine, but it could be found in the main page of the website</p> <p>0 if the information was not found in the first page of results of the internal search engine or in the main page of the institutional website</p> <p>0 if there is no institutional website</p>	$Internal\ search\ engine = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0.5 & \text{if criteria is partially fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$

Note: *In cases where the institution did not receive any access to information requests in the study period, the weights were modified such that Transparency from a governmental perspective = (0.6*Active transparency) + (0.4*Open data) and Transparency from a citizen perspective = Proactive transparency.

**Only information for the first 13 obligations of the LGTAIP was reviewed. For each institution, the number of obligations actually graded depended on those applicable to the institution according to its most recently published applicability table, such that only where all obligations applied were the 13 obligations reviewed. When no applicability table could be found, all 13 obligations were checked.

In a similar manner, the *participation sub-index* is divided into two perspectives. The *sub-index for participation from a governmental perspective* measures the existence of formal channels for citizens to communicate with authorities and engage in decision-making processes. This was measured by evaluating the participation mechanisms reported in the government’s transparency obligations website. Meanwhile, the *sub-index for participation from a citizen perspective* measures the ease with which citizens can contact government institutions and suggest courses of actions. This was measured through a simulated user exercise where analysts emailed and/or telephoned government institutions to suggest they set up recycling bins for batteries at their offices. Analysts then recorded whether the institution answered the contacting attempt; if it did, they recorded the speed of the answer, and whether some participation mechanism was activated as a result of the interaction.

The following table lists both participation sub-indices, and the grading criteria, measurement and weight of each variable.

Table 2. Grading criteria and measurement for variables in the transparency sub-index

Variable	Grading criteria	Measurement
Participation from a governmental perspective = (0.2 Mechanism + 0.1 Degree of participation + 0.1 Open call + 0.3 Functioning + 0.3 Follow-up) *		
Mechanism	1 if the institution reports at least one formal participation mechanism in SIPOT 0 if the institution does not report any participation mechanism in SIPOT	$Mechanism = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if the criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if the criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
Degree of participation	1 if the mechanism reported implies close collaboration between the government and its citizens (for example, participatory budgeting or binding advisory councils) 0.66 if the mechanism reported implies some sort of incidence in the design or implementation of public policy (for example, comptrollers, PTAs, neighborhood associations) 0.33 if the mechanism reported asks citizens for their advice or opinion (open forums, complaints or suggestion boxes, social media) 0 if no participation mechanism is reported	$Degree\ of\ participation = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if the mechanism implies cocreation} \\ 0.66 & \text{if the mechanism implies partial incidence} \\ 0.33 & \text{if the mechanism asks for advice} \\ 0 & \text{if no participation mechanism is reported} \end{cases}$
Open call	1 if there is evidence that the mechanism had an open call 0 if there is no evidence that the mechanism had an open call 0 if no participation mechanism is reported	$Open\ call = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if the criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if the criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
Functioning	1 if there is evidence that the reported mechanism functioned in the previous year 0 if there is no such evidence 0 if no participation mechanism is reported	$Functioning = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if the criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if the criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$

Variable	Grading criteria	Measurement
Follow-up	<p>1 if there is evidence that at least one of the opinions/proposals/decisions/observations vested into the mechanism was considered in the decision-making process or motivated action by the institution</p> <p>0 if there is no evidence of such follow-up</p> <p>0 if no participation mechanism is reported</p>	$\text{Follow-up} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if the criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if the criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
Participation from a citizen perspective = (0.2 Means of contact + 0.3 Reception + 0.3 Activate + 0.2 Speed)		
Means of contact	<p>0.20 points were given for each means of contact available in the institution, from among the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electronic mailbox, email or online chat Phone Address In-person attention Social media 	$\text{Means of contact} = \begin{cases} 0.20 & \text{if 1 means of contact is available} \\ 0.40 & \text{if 2 means of contact are available} \\ 0.60 & \text{if 3 means of contact are available} \\ 0.80 & \text{if 4 means of contact are available} \\ 1 & \text{if all 5 means of contact are available} \end{cases}$
Reception	<p>1 if the institution answers at least one phone/email attempt</p> <p>0 if the institution does not answer any attempts</p> <p>0 if the institution does not have any electronic means of contact or a telephone available</p>	$\text{Reception} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
Activate	<p>1 if the institution acts to implement the suggestion made by the citizen or provides a reason for not doing so</p> <p>0 if the institution takes no action</p> <p>0 if the institution never answered</p> <p>0 if the institution does not have any electronic means of contact or a telephone available</p>	$\text{Activate} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if criteria is fulfilled} \\ 0 & \text{if criteria is not fulfilled} \end{cases}$
Speed	<p>1 if the first attempt received an answer</p> <p>0 if the institution never answered</p> <p>0 if the institution does not have any electronic means of contact or a telephone available</p>	$\text{Speed} = \frac{1}{\text{number of the successful attempt}}$
<p>Note: *For institutions not obliged to publish information about their participation mechanisms, Participation = Participation from a citizen perspective.</p>		

In the 2017 edition of the Open Government Index, the data was captured through exercises where a team of analysts pretended to be real-life citizens in order to evaluate the openness of government institutions. However, a series of changes to the national access to information system since then allowed the 2019 Index to use administrative, rather than user-generated, data for some components.

In particular, all access to information requests received by government institutions in the year preceding the evaluation were analyzed. This required close collaboration with INAI and their mediation with local transparency institutes. Although the process to obtain information underscored some of the existing deficiencies in the way data is currently handled and systematized, it also highlighted the potential of using administrative data to ameliorate existing practices⁶. These databases allowed researchers to manually review 2,785 responses to requests, and to evaluate the answer process of 329,590 requests, which represent 41.69% of the total number of requests received by all government institutions during the study period. Table 3 below lists the changes in the sources of information used from the 2017 to the 2019 Index for each component.

Table 3. Changes in the source of information used across Index versions

Sub-index	Component	Source 2017	Source 2019
Transparency from a governmental perspective	Access to information	Access to information requests filed by researchers	Administrative data of all access to information requests filed to all regulated entities in the study sample from July 1st, 2017 to June 30th, 2018
	Active transparency	Internet search	Information on transparency obligations published in SIPOT, the government's transparency obligations website
	Open data	Internet search	Internet search
Transparency from a citizen perspective	Access to information	Access to information requests filed by researchers	Administrative data of all access to information requests filed to all regulated entities in the study sample from July 1st, 2017 to June 30th, 2018
	Proactive transparency	Internet search	Internet search
Participation from a governmental perspective		Access to information requests filed by researchers	Information on transparency obligations published in SIPOT, the government's transparency obligations website
Participation from a citizen perspective		Simulated-user exercise	Simulated-user exercise

⁶ Initially, INAI shared a database of all access to information requests sent to federal-level entities in the sample during the study period. This database then served as the structure for the databases that were requested from transparency institutes in each state. The process of obtaining the data from each state was complex and slow. INAI first had to hold a meeting with all state-level institutes in order to explain the purposes of the Index and ask for their collaboration; this resulted in an information sharing agreement from all institutes. While the data was expected to be shared over a period of one month, a series of difficulties extended the period for two additional months. Several states did not have the technical capacity to successfully run the code required to generate the databases; others simply did not have the data ordered or systematized, which resulted in incoherent or incomplete datasets, and communication to clear doubts with regards to these data was often inefficient. Additionally, there was a lack of knowledge over which institutions were in fact mandated to publish their information, given that an institution can be regulated one year and not the next, according to whether it receives public funding, and there is currently no up-to-date official list of regulated entities. Moreover, some fields in the database, such as *type* and *status of response*, which were specifically useful for understanding the federal data, were not homogeneous across states, and thus made the state-level data incomparable in these categories.

Another significant change in the new edition of the Index was the increase in the number of government institutions evaluated. Whereas the 2017 Index considered 908 institutions, the current version studies 1,243 institutions, which means a 37% increase in the sample size and an analysis of approximately 15% of all institutions regulated by the existing transparency laws.

In the executive branch and in the decentralized and autonomous institutions, new subjects were chosen from among those not already included in the sample and that exist in every state. At the municipal level, five additional municipalities were randomly selected in each state, two from among those with more than 70,000 inhabitants and three from among those with more than 70,000 inhabitants⁷.

With the same operationalization as the one used in 2017 and with the new sources of information available, the 2019 edition of the Index provides the most robust and detailed picture of the degree of open government achieved at different levels of the Mexican public sector. In doing so, it highlights successful areas and provides directives for improvement in others.

III. Results

The 2019 Open Government Index is of 0.52 (on a scale of 0 to 1). This represents an increase of 13 decimal points in relation to the previous Index. The score is a simple average of the score obtained in the two dimensions: transparency (0.64) and participation (0.41). In turn, each dimension is made up of a governmental perspective, which measures the degree to which institutions fulfill their obligations on the respective matter, and a citizen perspective, which measures the experience individuals have when approaching their government, whether to gather information from it or to influence its decisions.

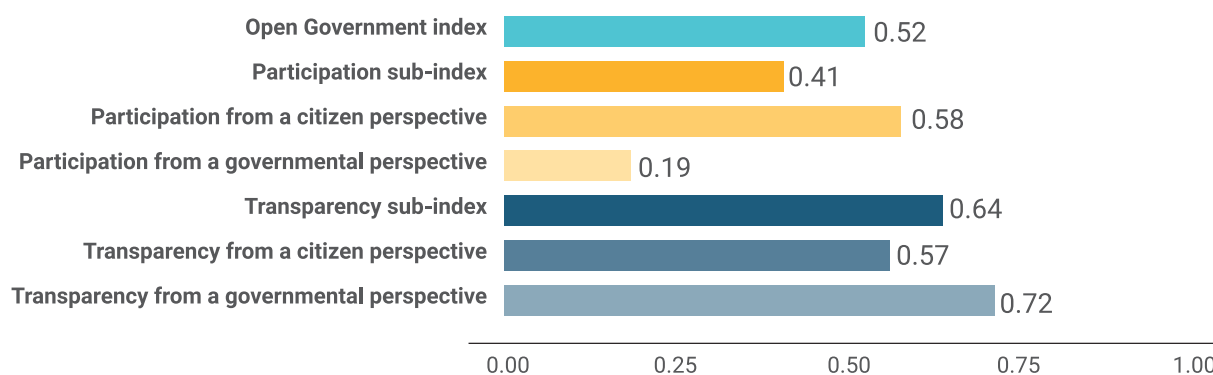
Generally, these results show that the measures carried out in the last years in terms of transparency, —such as the new legal framework, the operation of the SNT and the day-to-day functioning of the PNT— have achieved a more regular and homogeneous exercise of people's right to information. Even so, there is an observable difference between the two perspectives, which means the government usually fulfills its legal obligations on the matter (0.72), such as answering information requests within the legal time limit, but this does not necessarily mean that people receive useful information (0.56); in this case, the answers given are often not clear, complete or timely.

In participation, the Index shows a substantial lag with respect to transparency and a noticeable difference among perspectives. This means that, even though there exist several means for contacting and establishing communication with public institutions if a person has the initiative to do so (0.58), these conversations rarely translate into action, and there are few institutionalized channels that allow for substantive participation from citizens (0.19).

The following graph shows the results obtained in the general index as well as in the two main sub-indices, from each perspective (detailed results for each sub-index and component can be found in the Spanish version of the report; see CIDE & INAI, 2019).

⁷ This was the case for all states except Baja California and Baja California Sur, which only have 5 municipalities each. For Mexico City, where all municipalities (alcaldías) have more than 70,000 inhabitants, 5 additional municipalities were simply chosen at random.

Graph 2. Open Government Index and sub-indices



Source: Open Government Index 2019

IV. Conclusions

Methodology

The use of administrative data on access to information requests and transparency obligations made possible a more comprehensive analysis of some aspects of open government in Mexico. The databases gathered from each local transparency institute allowed researchers to measure the entire universe of access to information requests presented over the period of one year to institutions in the study sample. Besides resulting in a more robust measure of access to information, the use of this new source of information highlights the potential of these sort of data. Transparency institutes can use it to carry out periodic assessments of the performance of regulated government institutions, thus diagnosing roadblocks and ineffective practices early on. They can also identify topics of recurring interest among citizens and thus develop targeted proactive transparency directives.

Nonetheless, as the difficult process to obtain the data made clear, this information is currently almost never organized in such a way that it can be immediately used. In this sense, targeted technical accompaniment from INAI to local transparency institutes and more homogenized practices across states, as well as a national and official listing of regulated entities, would likely have a significant impact on the usability of these sources of information for everyday improvements in transparency.

At the same time, and despite all its convoluted and very technical organization and its limited downloading options⁸, the SIPOT represents an untapped potential for government institutions to identify frequently requested information and make it more readily available to citizens. With improvements, the systems now in place have the potential to inform government institutions, at no cost, on how to best meet the information demands of their citizens.

⁸ At the time of the data capturing process, SIPOT required users to know the article and fraction that obliged the publication of each type of information. A new version no longer requires this knowledge and appears to be heading in the right direction with a more user-friendly design. Nonetheless, there still exists limitations in the type of downloads that can be carried out and in the usability of the downloaded data.

However, these changes in transparency also highlight the lack of improvement in matters of civic participation. In that sense, the low participation scores could serve as a starting point for a national public conversation on how civic participation can be institutionalized and promoted in a way that opens up channels for citizens to make their voices heard and to collaborate with their government, while being flexible enough to adapt mechanisms to the needs of specific populations.

Progress and remaining challenges

There is general progress in the openness of the Mexican government. The data suggest that the transparency laws, institutions, and systems created in the last few years work and are being used by citizens. The system received a total of 790,400 access to information requests in the 12 months under study, making it, per capita, a more widely-used system than that of the United States⁹, England¹⁰, or Spain¹¹. Additionally, the achievement gaps between states and types of institutions are beginning to close. However, there are still ample opportunities to improve the way in which people exercise their right to access information. Greater homogeneity or integration of the state-level and the national systems and a more user-friendly SIPOT would go great lengths to making sure citizens' information demands are met with quality and in a timely manner.

In contrast, participation is much less developed: channels of incidence are few and, generally, not effective (as an example, only 4% of published participation mechanisms had evidence of follow-up by the institution) and attempts to contact government institutions, while frequently answered, do not commonly translate into sustained and consequential communication (only 29% of contacting attempts kick-started a participation process). Mexico lacks an institutional framework to promote the existence and regular functioning of participation mechanisms able to process and respond to citizens' demands and to incorporate their suggestions and points of view into public decision-making.

Citizens must be kept front and center of all efforts to face these challenges. Successful open government policies cannot simply ask institutions to comply with the law, fill out formats and generate data; they must be sensitive to citizens' needs and interests in order to guarantee their rights. This means providing better answers for access to information requests, publishing relevant open data and targeted proactive transparency, and developing institutionalized and commonly-used participation mechanisms.

⁹ In fiscal year 2017 (October 2016 – September 2017), the United States federal government received 818,271 access to information requests. This is slightly larger than the amount received by Mexico's national and state systems in the period studied, but the opposite is true when adjusted for population. Information available at <https://www.foia.gov/data.html>.

¹⁰ In 2017, all monitored bodies in the United Kingdom received a total of 46,681 freedom of information requests. Information available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/704094/foi-statistics-annual-2017-bulletin__1_.pdf

¹¹ In the same 12-month period as this study, Spain received 4,742 access to information requests. In fact, Mexico received almost 40 times more requests in one year than Spain has received since launching its system in late 2014 (19,845 requests as of April 2019). Information available at https://transparencia.gob.es/transparencia/transparencia_Home/index/Derecho-de-acceso-a-la-informacion-publica/Datos-derecho-de-acceso.html

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