



Parliamentary Monitoring in Tough Times: Lessons Learned for Building Networks and Achieving Results

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	01
Executive Summary.....	02
Introduction.....	04
What is parliamentary monitoring?.....	04
What is the theory of change?.....	06
What are the current trends and challenges that impact parliaments and parliamentary monitoring organizations?.....	07
What does the evidence say about parliamentary monitoring results?.....	09
What are some examples of national and international PMO networks?.....	12
What are lessons for successful parliamentary monitoring?.....	14
Conclusion.....	17

ANNEX

NATIONAL CASE STUDIES

National Case Study 1: <i>Directorio Legislativo</i> (Argentina)	18
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National Case Study 2: Citizen Congress Watch (Taiwan)	23
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REGIONAL CASE STUDIES

Regional Case Study 1: Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency	27
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Regional Case Study 2: African Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations Network	32
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

A thriving democracy hinges on a robust parliament, capable of articulating citizens' concerns, enacting laws for the common good, and holding the executive branch accountable for their implementation. For this to happen, the active involvement and participation of citizens is imperative. In this context, over the last decade citizen-led parliamentary monitoring has emerged as a potent mechanism to empower individuals with relevant, accessible, and timely information, enabling effective participation and informed decision-making. Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations (PMOs) serve as key facilitators of this process by systematically collecting and disseminating information on legislative proceedings. However, threats such as closing civic space, executive overreach, polarization, and anti-rights movements necessitate a fresh perspective on the efficacy of parliamentary monitoring programs.

This report reexamines parliamentary monitoring in the face of escalating challenges to democratic governance worldwide. The report reviews existing evidence on the impact of PMO initiatives, delves into the role of PMO networks, and draws lessons from real-world case studies to provide a tool for understanding the evolving landscape of parliamentary monitoring and its place in sustaining and enhancing democratic practices globally. The report finds that despite significant complexities, PMOs often engage in collaborative efforts, such as training, technical assistance, and fostering channels for citizen engagement, that continue to bolster the functioning of legislatures. Moreover, when PMOs form networks that exchange systems, approaches, and monitoring tools across countries and regions, their collective impact becomes amplified, allowing for shared experiences in navigating diverse contextual challenges.

KEY FINDINGS:

What we know so far

Growing significance of PMOs: In recent years, PMOs have garnered attention due to their potential to enhance parliamentary transparency, citizen engagement, and accountability. As illustrated in various studies, PMOs have demonstrated multifaceted impacts on information accessibility, civic discourse, and legislative behavior.

Impact on parliamentary transparency: PMOs have proven instrumental in enhancing parliamentary transparency by illuminating legislative processes and lawmakers' contributions. For instance, studies in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany reveal that PMOs contribute to improving the public's judgment about their representatives.

Influence on legislator behavior: While PMOs aim to hold legislators accountable, studies suggest their impact on legislator behavior may be counter-intuitive. For instance, monitoring statistics in the UK led to an increase in "unnecessary interventions" by members. However, PMOs also contribute to public debates on issues such as absenteeism and ethics, potentially leading to rules reform.

Role in budgetary oversight: PMOs contribute significantly to auditing and public finance management, advocating for citizen participation in parliamentary budget monitoring. Specialized budgetary monitoring organizations are deemed essential to bolster the accountability of executive agencies and ensure compliance with public management financing laws.

PMO networks

Strategies: One significant strategy employed by PMOs to enhance their capacity and influence is the creation of national and transnational peer exchange and networking activities. PMOs with specialized expertise often collaborate with good governance organizations or issue-based organizations focusing on specific policy areas such as gender, health, education, or environmental governance.

Diversity: PMO networks vary across countries, showcasing differences in formality, structure, and functionality. Some networks are formed by collective decisions with a structured approach, while others emerge from events that foster sustained collaboration, relying on a looser degree of formality yet achieving high impact.

Common Goals: The overarching goal of any PMO network is to ensure that democratic institutions and actors adhere to principles such as transparency, participation, integrity, and accountability. Networks may leverage each member organization's strengths, creating campaigns, and fostering collaborations to enhance their collective impact.

Pathway to success: The success of international networks depends on overcoming informational barriers, addressing knowledge gaps among member organizations, and maintaining continuous engagement, even with limited funding. Success hinges on a shared commitment to parliamentary monitoring and a commitment to cross-comparative tools for tracking parliamentary transparency and performance internationally.



INTRODUCTION

As the national institution most closely linked to constituent demands, legislatures have a vital role to play in ensuring the needs and priorities of their nations' citizens are addressed. With their core mandates for lawmaking, representation and oversight, legislatures are responsible for making the laws, passing the budgets and conducting the oversight that is essential for a nation's economic and social development. The role of parliament in upholding democratic principles and practices is of equal importance. The health of a democracy depends on the health of the parliament and its ability to represent citizens, pass laws that advance the common good and hold the executive to account for the faithful implementation of those laws.

The legislative role is, in fact, so vital that it cannot be entrusted to legislators alone. That is, inclusive input and participation are necessary to ensure that legislators are responsive to the citizens' needs rather than private interests.

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Citizen-led parliamentary monitoring can provide the relevant, accessible and timely information that citizens need for effective participation and informed voting decisions. By systematically gathering information and reporting on legislative processes, parliamentary monitoring organizations provide valuable information and lay the foundation for greater citizen influence over political processes and outcomes. Often, the role of this type of civil society organization (CSO) also extends beyond “monitoring” to include collaborative activities aimed at strengthening legislatures through training, technical assistance or channels for citizen engagement. In addition, when PMOs exchange their systems, approaches and monitoring tools for parliamentary assessments within and across countries and regions, their potential impact is

amplified. In particular, these networks allow PMOs to benefit from hearing how others have navigated challenging contextual realities.

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This resource, developed by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and *Directorio Legislativo* (Legislative Directory, also referred to in this report as DL), takes a fresh look at parliamentary monitoring, in light of the increasing challenges to democratic governance globally, including threats such as closing civic space, executive overreach, polarization and anti-rights movements. This report reviews the evidence regarding the impact of parliamentary monitoring programs and examines the role of national and international PMO networks. Finally, it offers a series of lessons learned, drawing on the academic evidence of parliamentary monitoring's effectiveness, as well as case studies from two national and two international PMO networks.

What is parliamentary monitoring?¹

Parliamentary monitoring scrutinizes and reports on the functioning and performance of legislative bodies and the elected members. A parliamentary monitoring effort can be undertaken wherever there is a directly elected body with legislative powers, including at the national, subnational or local levels.

The purpose of parliamentary monitoring varies depending on the country context and the monitoring organization's objectives, interests and capacities. In general, parliamentary monitoring aims to increase transparency of parliamentary processes, help the institution function more effectively and improve the accountability of members of parliament.

Different types of CSOs can engage in parliamentary monitoring. Impartial good governance groups, often called *watchdog organizations*, may monitor the overall proceedings with the aim of improving

¹ This section is adapted from “Political Process Monitoring Guidebook” (National Democratic Institute, February 17, 2023), www.ndi.org/publications/political-process-monitoring-guidebook.

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legislative transparency and performance (see Box 1 for the IPU's indicators for parliamentary transparency). In contrast, *issue-based groups* may focus their monitoring on a specific issue or cause, such as health-care reform, national security, gender equality or environmental governance, to ensure that the legislative work focused on that sector is carried out transparently, effectively and with integrity.

Parliamentary monitoring can focus on evaluating the performance of *individual members*, with an eye toward their level of engagement, transparency, integrity and effectiveness. Evaluation measures can cover areas including plenary/committee attendance, bill sponsorship, compliance with integrity norms (e.g., lobbying disclosures, asset declarations) and level of public engagement (e.g., up-to-date website, open hearings). Some PMOs choose to develop indices or ranking mechanisms that compare members of parliament (MPs) across these different measures, providing plaudits to well-performing members and critiquing others at the lower end of the ranking.

When focused on the performance of the *institution as a whole*, PMOs may scrutinize one or a combination of the following:

Openness and transparency– This form of monitoring often relies on examining legislative bodies using an established set of principles that assesses the degree of disclosure and compliance with the public's right to information. See Box 1 regarding the International Parliamentary Union's benchmarks on legislative transparency.

Participation– Monitoring of participation examines the extent to which parliaments create or improve processes and mechanisms for the public to inform or influence policymaking and enables a legal environment that guarantees freedoms of assembly, association and peaceful protest.

Inclusion and equality – There are a variety of issues that inclusion and equality monitoring can cover, including the level of representation of elected women and other marginalized groups in the parliament, the level of participation of women and other marginalized constituent groups in the parliament, and the extent to which legislative processes and policymaking are responsive to the priorities and interests of women and other marginalized groups.

Parliamentary proceedings – Civic groups may adopt parliamentary monitoring techniques to assess whether official rules and procedures are followed and oversight functions are performed. This work may focus on committees or other bodies, as well as plenary sessions.

BOX 1: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Benchmarks on Transparency

As a benchmark, a transparent parliament is one that ensures its work, decisions, procedures and spending are made available to the public, in a timely, understandable and user-friendly manner. Through a multi-stakeholder initiative, the IPU has also created the indicator "transparent parliament" to enable parliaments and civil society to assess the extent to which parliamentary information is accessible to the public in the following areas:

- Transparency of parliamentary work
- Transparency of the legislative process
- Budgetary transparency

The IPU tool provides a list of assessment criteria relevant to each aspect of creating a transparent parliament that is useful for PMOs to use as a way to hold parliaments to account.

Budget deliberation and enactment – A government’s budget directly or indirectly affects the lives of all its citizens. Public interest in the budget is generally at its high point during the legislative deliberation and enactment phase, and parliamentary monitoring can focus on the procedural, political and policy dimensions of the budget process.

Policy initiatives – An issue-based PMO with a particular interest in a specific bill may choose to track legislative proceedings of the bill, including the formulation, enactment and oversight stages.

It is important to recognize that although some organizations focus purely on monitoring activities, many other PMOs engage in direct action that seeks to *influence or strengthen parliamentary performance*. PMOs may leverage the findings from their monitoring reports to advocate for reforms that enhance legislative transparency or integrity. Single-issue PMOs often conduct advocacy to advance their policy priorities. In other cases, monitoring organizations strengthen legislatures through collaborative programs of training and technical cooperation that may focus on enhanced constituency communications or gender-responsive policymaking, among other topics (see Box 2 for an example of how OGP tries to bring all of these goals together under one initiative.)

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What is the theory of change?

The theory of change underlying parliamentary monitoring is that opening parliamentary processes to effective public scrutiny and reporting is integral to fostering accountability within parliamentary systems. By actively engaging in the scrutiny of parliamentary processes and advocating for reliable, accessible and timely reporting, PMOs play a central role in holding parliaments accountable for adhering to specific standards and promoting openness.

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Parliamentary monitoring has the potential to contribute to both vertical and horizontal accountability. In terms of the former, parliamentary monitoring contributes to a dynamic where voters are empowered to penalize politicians perceived as neglecting their duties or engaging in corrupt practices and parliamentarians are incentivized to align with public expectations in order to achieve re-election. Diagonal accountability is activated when citizens are armed with information that raises awareness regarding legislative performance and enables them to apply pressure and shape political processes.

BOX 2: Relationship with Open Parliament Agenda

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was founded in 2011 to support transparent, participatory, inclusive and accountable governance. In the years since, OGP has grown from its eight founding members to 75 countries. Along with national governments, local governments and civil society, parliaments represent a key stakeholder in any OGP process. Parliaments can develop their own stand-alone commitments or integrate them within the broader national OGP process. A year after OGP’s creation, NDI and the World Bank Institute organized a conference of civic groups that resulted in the Open Parliament Declaration, which includes 44 actions of parliamentary openness.² Over the last decade, parliaments around the world have adopted open government principles in their own processes and practices. PMOs are active participants in Open Parliament processes across regions and often build their tracking processes around Open Parliament standards and commitments.

² “Declaration on Parliamentary Openness,” OpenParliament.org, September 15, 2012, www.openingparliament.org/declaration.

³ Andrew G. Mandelbaum, “Strengthening Parliamentary Accountability, Citizen Engagement and Access to Information: A Global Survey of Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations,” National Democratic Institute and World Bank Institute, September 2011, www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/governance-parliamentary-monitoring-organizations-survey-september-2011.pdf.

What are the current trends and challenges that impact parliaments and parliamentary monitoring organizations?

From 2009 to 2011, NDI and the World Bank carried out a joint research project to 1) identify PMOs worldwide and collect basic information regarding their activities and 2) document good practices.³

The research mapped more than 190 PMOs monitoring more than 80 national parliaments worldwide. The key challenges identified in the 2011 report remain valid today:

- Difficulty gaining access to desired information;
- Lack of financial support from local funding sources;
- Lack of international donor support;
- Resistance to the activity's goals by MPs, parties and/or parliamentary staff and
- Lack of interest from local citizens and organizations.

While PMOs continue to grapple with these challenges, it is important to note, however, that the global democratic context has shifted in important ways over the last decade. The well-documented democratic decline entails a number of critical democratic challenges, all of which also impact parliaments and, by extension, parliamentary monitoring organizations. In contexts where democratic conditions have deteriorated, PMOs are required to analyze and report on an increasingly complex and unpredictable parliamentary landscape. In this new landscape, PMOs not only need the capacity, access and credibility to undertake monitoring, they also need, for instance, to actively preserve civic space, challenge executive overreach and call out human rights violations. In some respects, democratic decline has required PMOs to expand their roles and work more closely with other democracy defenders. In addition, increasingly, there is a transnational dimension to these threats as

antidemocratic forces learn from or coordinate with each other across contexts. In other instances, the threat is from technologies or crises that transcend borders.

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The following is a list of the challenges that are impacting the context and content of parliamentary monitoring:

Executive overreach: A growing number of democratically elected leaders have engaged in executive overreach, using the law to weaken checks and concentrate power.⁴ Legislatures are a common target of overreaching executives, who may seek to bypass the legislature, stack it with loyal agents or create parallel bodies charged with the same functions. In some cases, legislators themselves are accomplices to the executive in diminishing parliamentary independence, while, in others, the parliament is a victim of an executive power grab.

Closing civic space: As detailed by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute, the quality and scope of democratic governance has declined over the last 15 years.⁵ For the first time in over two decades, there are more autocratic governments in the world than liberal democracies. When NDI and the World Bank published their landmark PMO study in 2011, only 46 percent of the global population was living under autocratic governments; today, the number is 72 percent. As outlined by the Civicus Monitor, more than 70 percent of the world's population lives in repressive or closed societies.⁶ Increasing levels of closing civic space and restricted access to information often combine in contexts of democratic decline, presenting immense challenges to organizations attempting to monitor and engage with the parliament.

4 Will Freeman, "Sidestepping the Constitution: Executive Aggrandizement in Latin America and East Central Europe," *Constitutional Studies* 6, no. 1 (2020), [constitutionalstudies.wisc.edu/index.php/cs/article/view/48](https://www.wisc.edu/index.php/cs/article/view/48).

5 Evie Papada, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Lisa Gastaldi, Tamara Köhler, Martin Lundstedt, Natalia Natsika, Marina Nord, Yuko Sato, Felix Wiebrecht and Staffan I. Lindberg, "Defiance in the Face of Autocratization. Democracy Report 2023," University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem Institute), March 2023, https://www.v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem_democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf.

6 "Monitor: Tracking Civic Space," CIVICUS, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://monitor.civicus.org/about/>.

Anti-rights agendas: Closing civic space does not necessarily impact all groups equally. In many contexts, shrinking civic space has included rollback of the rights of women and marginalized communities. Illiberal political actors have allied with a broad range of non-state actors to attack civil society organizations that defend human rights and the rights of women and marginalized groups.⁷

More frequent and more severe emergencies:

From climate change to COVID-19 to quakes, crises have become the new normal. The frequency and complexity of emergencies are only expected to increase: experts predict that children born this year will experience a sevenfold increase in extreme weather events compared to their grandparents. In the first year of the pandemic, 95 countries implemented response measures that involved moderate or major violations to democratic norms.⁸ The separation of powers was an early COVID-19 casualty in many countries with some parliaments sidelined, or even suspended, by the executive, while others struggled to adopt the necessary technologies and rules of procedure needed for continuous, nimble and inclusive responses in the emergency context.



Polarization: Increasing levels of political polarization are closely linked to broader contexts of democratic deterioration. A recent V-Dem report found that levels of political polarization are twice as high in autocratic contexts as in democratic ones.⁹ In many contexts, information manipulation is a contributing factor, as it exacerbates social divisions and undermines confidence in democratic systems.

Covert foreign interference: Increasingly, around the world, illiberal states are using covert means to shift public discourse and influence policy, including through opaque contributions to candidates, political parties and elected officials. Parliaments are not immune to this challenge and, indeed, legislators from Australia and the European Union, among other countries, have been targets of the form of weaponized graft known as “strategic corruption.”

While the decline in democratic governance is concerning, it also serves as a catalyst for PMOs to advocate for greater openness and participation in government. This challenge encourages innovative strategies to protect and expand civic space that enable PMOs to receive greater investment in their work.

These challenges present significant concerns but also offer opportunities for proactive responses. For instance, the challenge of executive overreach highlights the importance of reinforcing checks and balances within democratic systems for which PMOs are well placed to advocate. Recognizing covert foreign interference provides an opportunity to strengthen national and international cybersecurity and transparency, as well as underscores the importance of campaign finance regulations and the integrity of electoral processes that PMOs facilitate. While the decline in democratic governance is concerning, it also serves as a catalyst for PMOs to advocate for greater openness and participation in government. This challenge encourages innovative strategies to protect and expand civic space that enable PMOs to receive greater investment in their work. Similarly, political polarization can undermine democratic systems, yet it also emphasizes the need for dialogue, mediation and efforts to bridge divides, just as the rollback of rights for marginalized communities has drawn attention to the importance of solidarity and collaboration in safeguarding human rights. All these challenges prompt societies to seek common ground and foster understanding between opposing factions, facilitated by a greater understanding of what is happening in parliament.

7 Ines M. Pousadela and Dominic R. Perera, “The Enemy Within? Anti-Rights Groups and Restrictions on Civil Society,” *Global Policy* 12, no. S5 (2021): 33–44, <https://online-library.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1758-5899.12981>.

8 Nazifa Alizada, Rowan Cole, Lisa Gastaldi, Sandra Grahm, Sebastian Hellmeier, Palina Kolvani, Jean Lachapelle, Anna Lührmann, Seraphine F. Maerz, Shreeya Pillai and Staffan I. Lindberg, “Autocratization Turns Viral,” University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, March 2021, www.v-dem.net/documents/12/dr_2021.pdf.

9 Evie Papada et al., “Defiance in the Face of Autocratization.”

What does the evidence say about parliamentary monitoring results?



In recent years, the role of PMOs has gained significant attention because of their potential to enhance parliamentary transparency, citizen engagement and accountability. Supported by a growing body of research, including studies by Andrew G. Mandelbaum and Daniel R. Swislow (2016); Arthur Edwards, Charlotte van Ooijeen and Dennis de Kool (2015); Iris Korthagen and Hade Dorst (2020); and Benjamin Worthy and Stefani Langehennig (2022), these organizations offer multifaceted impacts on information accessibility, civic discourse and legislative behavior.

This section highlights how PMOs influence parliamentary transparency, citizen engagement and legislative accountability and discusses how PMOs have been pivotal in fostering cross-party dialogue, enabling civic participation and facilitating the oversight functions of parliaments. It also explores the synergies between PMOs and complementary global movements, like OGP, Transparency International (TI) and the International Budget Project (IBP), which advocate for strengthened parliamentary transparency and accountability through collaborative efforts.

According to Mandelbaum and Swislow, *“increasing evidence shows that PMOs can encourage accountability of parliaments to the electorate, facilitate citizen participation in parliamentary processes and improve citizen access to information*

*about parliaments and their work.”*¹⁰ This assertion is substantiated by a multitude of studies investigating the impact of monitoring websites that illuminate parliamentary work, and legislators’ contributions, with the intention of creating transparency and bolstering citizen oversight.

For instance, research conducted by Edwards, de Kool and Van Ooijeen focused on parliamentary monitoring websites in the United Kingdom, France and Germany.¹¹ This study compared websites limited strictly to a monitoring role and that featured an explicit reformist stance. The research examined the websites from an “information ecology” perspective, which analyzes the interplay between people, values, technology and practices. British users noted that the *website information provided “improved the quality of their judgment about their MP.”* However, the study also noted that the consumers of the PMO information tended to be disproportionately higher-educated citizens.

A similar conclusion was reached in a later study conducted by Iris Korthagen and Hade Dorst, which examined two digital tools for monitoring parliaments in the UK and Germany. The research revealed a predominant use of these websites by journalists, NGOs and other professionals, with a noticeable male bias in UK participation. These findings echoed the Edwards study, indicating that *although these websites aimed to engage a broader public, they still often reach people through mass media channels.*

10 Andrew G. Mandelbaum and Daniel R. Swislow, “The Role of Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations,” in *Benchmarking and Self-Assessments for Parliaments*, ed. Mitchell O’Brien, Rick Stapenhurst and Lisa von Trapp (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2016), 157.

11 Arthur Edwards, Charlotte van Ooijen and Dennis de Kool, “The Information Ecology of Parliamentary Monitoring Websites: Pathways towards Strengthening Democracy,” *Information Polity* (IOS Press) 20, no.4 (2015): 253–268.

Iris Korthagen and Hade Dorst highlighted that the primary advantage of these tools lies in their contribution to providing impartial information on political votes. In consequence, while information about the impact of monitoring websites on users' perceptions of parliaments and parliamentarians is limited, the researchers did observe that *PMO reporting often sparked public debates on issues such as absenteeism, ethics and conflicts of interest*. In certain instances, these discussions subsequently contributed to the initiation of rules reform.

While information about the impact of monitoring websites on users' perceptions of parliaments and parliamentarians is limited, researchers did observe that PMO reporting often sparked public debates on issues such as absenteeism, ethics and conflicts of interest. In certain instances, these discussions subsequently contributed to the initiation of rules reform.

However, the impact of PMO websites on legislator behavior within these studies remained somewhat limited, if not counter-intuitive. For instance, the *UK research uncovered a perverse incentive: parliamentary monitoring statistics reporting the number of times a member of parliament intervened seemed to drive an uptick in "unnecessary interventions" by members*. Iris Korthagen and Hade Dorst also identified the unintended side effect of UK MPs increasing the number of times they spoke just to increase their scores.

Although PMOs place a strong emphasis on using parliamentary information to shed light on the effectiveness of parliaments and legislators, in most cases, their work is not limited to just monitoring. *PMOs often take approaches that are successful in facilitating greater citizen engagement and in building more constructive relationships between parliaments and citizens*. For instance, a website in Germany that facilitates discussion between MPs and citizens receives 350,000 unique visits a month. Evidence gathered by Edwards, de Kool and Van Ooijeen also indicates that other CSOs and activist groups make use of the information provided on PMO websites for their campaigns and advocacy efforts.

PMOs often take approaches that are successful in facilitating greater citizen engagement and in building more constructive relationships between parliaments and citizens.

At times, this advocacy has been made possible through the establishment of a network of PMOs. For example, a network of Argentinian PMOs formed a coalition that allowed them to sign a memorandum of understanding with the president of the National Congress.¹⁴ As a result, these PMOs can participate in regular working group meetings to help improve the transparency record of the National Congress. *Forming PMO networks has been particularly important at times when parliaments have failed to comply with rules governing access to parliamentary information*. In Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Tunisia and many other countries, several PMOs have used these networks to sue parliaments to ensure compliance.

Zooming in on a specific democratic effect, Stefani Langehennig and Benjamin Worthy's (2022) research explored how PMO websites influenced the accountability of the UK parliament.¹⁵ *These sites garnered substantial monthly visits, particularly during elections or scandals, and contributed to inforamatory accountability by making it harder for MPs and peers to conceal misconduct. However, this impact was uneven and could unintentionally incite resistance, political manipulation and conflicts*. Overall, the comprehensibility of the parliamentary system was not inherently altered by the transparency efforts of PMO websites. "The fact that civilians are better able to see how these processes work does not imply they accept and acknowledge them, let alone trust the politicians and political institutions that form the foundation of these processes."¹⁶

12 Arthur Edwards et al., "The Information Ecology of Parliamentary Monitoring Websites: Pathways towards Strengthening Democracy."

13 Iris Korthagen and Hade Dorst, "Parliamentary Monitoring," in *European E-Democracy in Practice*, ed. Leonhard Hennen, Ira van Keulen, Iris Korthagen, Leonhard Hennen, Georg Aichholzer, Ralf Lindner, and Rasmus Øjvind Nielsen (Springer Open, 2020), <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/22937/1/1007224.pdf>.

14 Mandelbaum and Swislow, "The Role of Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations," 157.

15 Benjamin Worthy and Stefani Langehennig, "Accountability, Analysis and Avoidance: How PMO Data Impacts on Westminster," *Journal of Legislative Studies* (September 2022).



In Uganda, research by Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein examined the use and impact of parliamentary scorecards produced by Ugandan PMOs. These scorecards hold MPs accountable by publicizing the initiatives undertaken by each MP and the positions they have advocated in plenary as well as in committee. The scorecards also rank their initiatives among other MPs of the same party as well as across all members of parliament. Parliamentary scorecard campaigns attracted widespread media attention and were “hotly debated” by MPs. The study showed that *while voters responded strongly to scorecard information, the nature of the response from politicians varied based on the revealed concerns, illustrating the nuanced effects of this type of PMO initiative.* In addition, the study was unable to clearly demonstrate that the use of scorecards impacted citizen voting.

These country- and web-specific analyses align with the global calls from OGP, TI and the IBP for increased involvement of PMOs in strengthening parliamentary transparency and accountability. Each of these organizations has underscored the significance of parliamentary monitoring and transparency as essential components for effective governance, albeit through distinct approaches.

A 2021 review of evidence collected by OGP found that *parliaments can help advance OGP commitments and PMOs have an important role in enabling them to do so.*¹⁸ The review underscored PMOs’ pivotal role in nurturing cross-party dialogue, engaging civil society and facilitating knowledge dissemination. It also underlined the fact that “PMOs could do more to engage parliaments in playing their oversight functions, and sharing lessons with the broader community where this is being done proactively.”¹⁹

Likewise, TI created a guide that underlined the integral role of PMOs as a particular category of CSO in enhancing a three-tier ecosystem of parliamentary oversight, transparency and effective governance. TI argued that as an integral category of a CSO, monitoring organizations can bolster parliamentary oversight before, during and after government action.²⁰ Before government action, PMOs have a role in helping parliament to approve the budget, debt arrangements and executive appointments. During government action, PMOs have an important role in monitoring executive commitments and tracking the implementation of policies, as well as in enabling civic engagement. After government action, PMOs have an important role to play in ex-post scrutiny of policies and laws and in following up on reports from oversight bodies. *The guide underlines the role of PMOs as a particular category of CSO in enhancing this three-tier ecosystem of parliamentary oversight, transparency and effective governance.*

Furthermore, Vivek Ramkumar and Warren Krafchik of the IBP delineated the role of CSOs in auditing and public finance management, advocating for citizen participation in parliamentary budget monitoring, with a specific implication for the necessity of specialized budgetary monitoring websites.²¹ Based on their findings from India, South Africa and the Philippines, Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) frequently lack the necessary independence from the executive and have limited communication with both the legislature and CSOs. Consequently, the IBP calls for dedicated budgetary monitoring organizations to bolster the efforts of SAIs across the globe. *These specialized*

16 Korthagen and Dorst, “Parliamentary Monitoring.”

17 Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, “Policing Politicians: Citizen Empowerment and Political Accountability in Uganda,” 2012, <http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/papers1/scorecard2010.pdf>.

18 “Parliamentary Engagement in OGP: Learning from the Evidence,” Open Government Partnership, July 21, 2021, www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/parliamentary-engagement-in-ogp-learning-from-the-evidence/.

19 “Parliamentary Engagement in OGP: Learning from the Evidence.”

20 Dominik Brenner and Mihály Fazekas, “Civil Society Interventions to Enhance Parliamentary Oversight,” Transparency International, 2021, www.knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/kproducts/CSO-interventions-to-enhance-parliamentary-oversight.pdf.

21 Vivek Ramkumar and Warren Krafchik, “The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Auditing and Public Finance Management,” The International Budget Project, January 2005, internationalbudget.org/publications/the-role-of-civil-society-organizations-in-auditing-and-public-finance-management/.

PMOs are viewed as having the potential to play a pivotal role in fortifying the accountability of executive agencies to national and state legislatures, as well as in ensuring that financial transactions conducted by public entities align with public management financing laws.

This call is supported by the fact that evidence from the last ten years demonstrates that PMOs have built effective capacities in analyzing and influencing public budgets. However, the scope of their monitoring work has predominantly centered on scrutinizing the budget as it is presented to the legislature. In turn, *there is a need for PMOs to carry out greater tracking of public expenditure after a budget has been implemented.* With this expanded focus, IBP believes PMOs have the potential to introduce the concept of public “hearing” into public auditing, which in turn will strengthen the effectiveness and efficacy of a country’s budgetary oversight framework.

What are some examples of national and international PMO networks?

One of the strategies that PMOs have deployed to increase their capacity and influence is the creation of national and transnational peer exchange and networking activities. As discussed in the national-level case studies, found in the annex, on the experiences of *Directorio Legislativo* (Argentina) and Citizen Congress Watch (Taiwan), PMOs with specialized congressional expertise may choose to work with other good governance organizations, or they may aim to partner with issue-based organizations that follow specific policy areas, such as health, education or environmental governance. PMO networks vary significantly across countries, with important differences in terms of form, formality and functionality.

“One of the strategies that PMOs have deployed to increase their capacity and influence is the creation of national and transnational peer exchange and networking activities.”

In some countries, networks of PMOs emerge by design, following a collective decision to work together in support of common goals. These networks typically

seek to follow a more structured set of engagements depending on the funds and resources allocated. In other countries, networks are formed by events that foster sustained collaboration to achieve mutual goals. These networks may follow a looser degree of formality yet still achieve a high degree of impact by working together.

What underscores the working relationship of any PMO network is the goal of ensuring democratic institutions and actors comply with principles such as transparency, participation, integrity and accountability. In some countries, the creation and delivery of an Open Parliament Action Plan (OPAP) serves as a useful platform for co-creating, formalizing and monitoring these commitments in line with these principles. National networks may also leverage the different strengths of each member organization. For instance, a PMO network often creates a campaign that leverages one organization’s ability to build public awareness to promote citizen usership of another organization’s digital platform. In consequence, issue-based organizations are often able to leverage PMOs and vice versa. At other times, networks leverage their relative subject matter expertise to compound the reach and impact of their messaging.

Directorio Legislativo



DL is a civil society organization based in Argentina that focuses on promoting transparency, public debate and public monitoring of the activities of the legislative branch. It originally began in 2000 as a publication aimed at providing information about what was happening in the Argentine Congress. Over time, its mission evolved, and in 2008, it officially became a CSO dedicated to its current objectives.

The organization plays a crucial role in enhancing citizen knowledge about legislative processes, fostering transparent governance and encouraging active civic engagement in Argentina's political system. Since 2016, the organization has played a key role in the Argentine Open Parliament Network (*Red Argentina de Parlamento Abierto, RAPA*), which enables Argentinian parliamentary monitoring organizations to support each other's goal of ensuring transparent governance. Through its various initiatives, DL seeks to empower citizens to participate in the democratic process and hold their representatives accountable. This work is essential for promoting accountability, improving legislative practices and strengthening democracy in Argentina.

Citizen Congress Watch (CCW)



CCW is a non-governmental organization based in Taiwan that focuses on ensuring the people of Taiwan are aware of the activities of Taiwan's Legislative Yuan (LY) and its MPs. It was formally established in 2007, justified using academic research that highlighted the deficit in information about the LY's activities and the importance of citizens overseeing the work of the legislature.

The organization comprises more than 35 CSOs that have a range of focus areas. Through its various initiatives, CCW seeks to conduct oversight over the LY, remove inadequate or underperforming legislators, improve the culture in the LY to be more transparent and efficient, serve public welfare and strengthen integrity. This work is essential for promoting accountability, improving legislative practices and strengthening democracy in Taiwan.

At the international level, PMOs have developed networks to exchange lessons, develop common tracking methodologies and provide support and solidarity. The Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency (*Red Latinoamericana por la Transparencia Legislativa, RLTL*) and African Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations Network (APMON) are included in the annex as two examples of regional networks.

Both of these regional networks emerged from a recognition that citizens and parliaments in neighboring countries were facing similar challenges and that by framing their domestic challenges within an international context, they might be able to identify new approaches for overcoming them. For this to be achieved, international parliamentary monitoring networks necessarily focus on creating the opportunity for organizations to share their experiences and exchange tools for parliamentary monitoring that can be adapted to a different legislative context. International parliamentary networks have also sought to develop and implement a cross-comparative tool for tracking parliamentary transparency and performance internationally.

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To achieve their goals, international networks must initially overcome informational barriers and address knowledge gaps among member organizations, as well as understand each other's work and contexts to align expectations. The success and effectiveness of these networks depends on a shared commitment to parliamentary monitoring and at least some level of continuous engagement, even when funding is limited.

Red Latinoamericana por la Transparencia Legislativa

RLTL is a coalition of 32 civil society organizations from 15 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Established in 2010, RLTL focuses on promoting transparency, access to information and accountability within legislative branches. It emerged to address deficiencies in these areas within regional legislatures. RLTL's objectives include measuring legislative transparency, offering recommendations for improvement, sharing best practices, fostering peer learning among organizations and addressing challenges to civic engagement in the region.

African Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations Network

APMON is a network of over 250 non-governmental organizations and civil society coalitions in Africa dedicated to monitoring and engaging with parliaments. While it primarily comprises members from West Africa, it also includes representatives from East and Southern Africa. APMON's key objectives are to promote access to parliaments by collecting information about their activities and operations; evaluate the performance of MPs and parliamentary actors; enhance citizen engagement and understanding of legislative processes; develop tools for measuring and documenting progress in transparency and parliamentary openness across African countries and facilitate knowledge sharing among member organizations.

What are lessons for successful parliamentary monitoring?

By systematically tracking legislative processes and representative conduct, PMOs provide essential information to citizens to improve their understanding of and influence over democratic institutions and practices. Examining their role and the ways in which these organizations have tried to form networks across the globe more closely reveals valuable insights that can be used to enhance their impact on citizen engagement and strengthen their ability to defend democracy. The following are ten key insights from this exercise.

1. The evolution of parliamentary monitoring

The strategy and internal organization of PMOs has evolved over time. Initially centered on advocating for democratic transparency, PMOs have started to shift their focus toward conducting substantive informational analysis and customizing transparency initiatives to align with broader thematic as well as regional or global initiatives, such as OGP. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data enables comparison along common metrics, while also allowing for deeper analysis of the political context and emerging threats identified earlier in this report. In response to political challenges, such as closing civic space or executive overreach, PMOs have developed a rapid response capacity that includes the activation of broader national coalitions and regional networks. The role of PMOs also extends beyond advocacy and monitoring to include coordination with parliaments for legislative strengthening. PMOs may provide MPs with training or technical assistance or by facilitating engagement with citizens. Since the creation of OGP, PMOs have engaged in ongoing, long-term collaboration with legislatures through the Open Parliament Multi-Stakeholder Forums (OP-MSF), which co-create and implement action plans.

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2. Strategic communication

PMOs have improved their efforts and capabilities for live-streaming parliamentary proceedings, but a common challenge is determining how to break through the noise of information that exists for citizens and communicate in ways that citizens connect to. PMOs have realized that the media can be a powerful ally in this process, as it often lends legitimacy to their efforts and helps disseminate their work effectively. To facilitate this, some PMOs have implemented a strategy of including media representatives on their governing bodies, ensuring that media perspectives and interests are integrated into strategic decisions.

Another key strategy involves diversifying public messaging channels and crafting concise, easily digestible messages. In some countries, PMOs have had to build deeper relationships with stakeholders to educate them about the Open Parliament paradigm and Open Parliament Index (OPI). This foundational effort is a critical communication pillar for PMOs operating in contexts of closing space or information manipulation.



3. Shaping behaviors

While establishing a direct causal link between PMO reports and parliamentary behavior remains complex, research reveals improvements in parliamentary performance in countries where reports gain public attention. PMO reports on MP activity in parliament stand out as one of the most potent tools at their disposal for garnering the support and attention of both parliamentarians and parliamentary leadership. PMO efforts in scrutinizing the performance of individual MPs have opened doors for collaborative initiatives with parliaments, such as organizing training sessions or engaging in discussions on their work. Increasingly PMOs are opting to work with legislatures in the definition and refinement of monitoring metrics in order to increase trust, legislative ownership of the results and prospects for implementation. Yet, a critical challenge remains in obtaining accurate and valid information, essential for compiling reports each year without causing unintended reputational harm to MPs and PMOs themselves. Overcoming this hurdle necessitates user-friendly data-capturing methods and a robust reputation to encourage MPs to provide accurate information about their activities.

“A critical challenge remains in obtaining accurate and valid information, essential for compiling reports each year without causing unintended reputational harm to MPs and PMOs themselves.”

4. Shaping incentives

Parliaments worldwide grapple with the complexities of polarized political narratives, posing the challenge of encouraging members of parliament to engage in ways that foster open discourse and information integrity instead of reinforcing populism or apathy. While research recognizes the potential of parliamentary monitoring to motivate MP participation in debates, it also suggests that such engagement can sometimes be unproductive or even counterproductive. Therefore, there is a pressing need for a deliberate focus on how PMO reporting can incentivize more substantive forms of participation that enrich democratic discussions, such as highlighting positive behaviors that contribute to a deeper democratic debate and evidencing ways that citizens also shape incentives.

5. Fostering inclusion

PMO reporting on parliamentary activity is seen to play a crucial role in promoting inclusivity, and PMOs are increasingly honing their efforts to achieve this goal. As PMOs develop more advanced tools and criteria, some have included a focus on facilitating greater internal inclusivity within parliament. This includes monitoring and showcasing metrics, such as the time allocated to opposition members, women and minority MPs during committee debates and assessing the level of engagement with their contributions on the part of other MPs. For issue-oriented PMOs, an inclusive perspective may also center on the legislative output of the parliament, such as the policymaking impact on women or other marginalized communities.

6. The power of a network

Parliamentary monitoring networks play a crucial role in boosting the visibility and legitimacy of individual PMOs, both nationally and internationally. They facilitate participation in global knowledge-sharing initiatives, ultimately enhancing the quality

of parliamentary evaluations and oversight activities. Networks also serve as powerful motivators for inspiring parliaments to engage in transparency initiatives and commit to improving their performance. This is emphasized by the diversity in operational expertise and approaches they frequently leverage to pursue a particular goal. For instance, PMOs often serve as watchdogs, champions of open governance or subject matter experts. Networks create initiatives that enable watchdogs and subject matter experts to enhance citizen engagement on platforms developed by open governance advocates. Additionally, the power of cross-border PMO networks lies in the way they work together as guardians of democratic principles, unifying organizations in a single regional voice to amplify global alerts in cases of closing civic space or lapses in parliamentary integrity in a national context.

7. Governing a network

To achieve their potential, parliamentary monitoring networks require a robust governance system that enables and guarantees the alternation of its leadership, the incorporation of new members, a common theory of change, shared and equitable responsibilities, a clear understanding of the goals and tasks necessary to achieve them and an open and ongoing discussion of new proposals and ideas. Evaluating the lessons learned from parliamentary monitoring networks also underscores the importance of sustained engagement and collaboration with diverse civil society and issue-based groups within these networks. This ongoing interaction is essential for adapting parliamentary reform strategies effectively to address evolving challenges collectively and requires tight and effective governance to be successful.

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8. Network products

Parliamentary networks foster the exchange of good parliamentary practices and help PMOs to overcome shared challenges and share tools for improving their operations. An essential lesson is for these networks to maximize their impact by collectively creating products that specifically address the current challenges and regional needs. PMO networks often develop common cross-country parliamentary indices to enable comparison in a way that highlights shortcomings and incentivizes a “healthy competition” between national parliaments. PMOs will choose metrics that can be leveraged for advocacy efforts in support of the principles of transparency, integrity, participation and efficiency. Examples of the types of core information often measured and compared across countries include the following: if there is publicly available information on the members and their staff, if parliamentary committees publish reports, if there is access to budget information and if there are mechanisms for meaningful public engagement. To achieve this, it is crucial for PMOs to stay engaged in global discussions on legislative development and subject all network products to periodic review processes. This ensures the continued relevance and effectiveness of their initiatives.

9. Networks need funding

Creating a network requires resources. Several parliamentary monitoring networks encountered delays in their establishment due to insufficient funds to pursue agreed-upon joint goals and initiatives. Similarly, some networks have struggled to consolidate their efforts because of the lack of international cooperation funds. To the extent possible, networks should be able to adapt and expand or contract depending on access to resources. While there is a case for maintaining some level of operations even in the absence of funding so that the network can be sustained over time, these challenges highlight the importance of financial support to enable and advance parliamentary networks in promoting transparency and democratic principles.

10. Defending democracy

This report has shown the growing importance of PMOs acting as defenders of parliamentary democracy as well as parliamentary watchdogs. In an increasingly polarized global political landscape, there is a compelling case for PMOs to continue to adopt more systematic and targeted approaches for addressing transparency issues connected to growing challenges of information manipulation, corruption and executive overreach. One proposed method to achieve this is to engage legislatures in integrity projects with actionable informational indices and tracking methods. Another identified strategy is for PMO networks to develop organizational approaches that enable PMO members to detect and report on emerging domestic and international trends that present threats to parliamentary independence and integrity, such as instances of executive overreach, closing civic space or covert foreign interference.

CONCLUSION

The role of parliamentary monitoring organizations in tracking legislative processes and representative conduct is pivotal in providing citizens with essential information to enhance their understanding of and influence over democratic institutions. This transparency is vital, as democracy faces multiple threats, including the rise of executive overreach, a decline in democratic quality, anti-rights agendas targeting marginalized communities and more frequent and severe emergencies. Political polarization and covert foreign interference further erode democratic systems and trust. These challenges collectively undermine democratic governance on a global scale. Within the larger ecosystem of civic actors, PMOs play an integral role not only in providing information but in actively demanding democratic behavior from political institutions. This proactive stance is particularly vital given the multifaceted challenges listed.

PMOs have also evolved to focus on substantive informational analysis and customization of transparency initiatives. The power of PMO networks lies in boosting visibility, legitimacy and knowledge-sharing, both nationally and internationally. Robust governance systems are crucial for network success. These systems must include leadership alternation and collaboration with diverse civil society groups.

Network products should address current challenges and undergo periodic review. Securing funding is essential for network establishment and growth. Strategic communication, media involvement and public messaging are vital for PMOs to break through information noise. While establishing a direct link between PMO reports and parliamentary behavior is complex, reports can incentivize more substantive citizen participation in national legislatures. PMOs can shape incentives for open discourse, countering polarization. Fostering inclusion within parliaments is an emerging focus for PMOs, promoting metrics like minority representation and legislative impact. Lastly, PMOs must assume the role of defenders of parliamentary democracy, addressing transparency issues and emerging threats, such as information manipulation and executive overreach. By applying these insights, PMOs can further strengthen their contribution to enhancing citizen engagement and defending democracy in a complex global landscape.

“The power of PMO networks lies in boosting visibility, legitimacy and knowledge-sharing, both nationally and internationally. Robust governance systems are crucial for network success.”

NATIONAL CASE STUDIES

National Case Study I: Directorio Legislativo (Argentina)

Directorio Legislativo is a civil society organization based in Argentina and the United States that works to strengthen Latin American democracies by building open and responsible governments through full access to public information and accountability. It began in 2000 as a publication for information about the Argentine Congress, its activities and its legislators, since citizens' knowledge on the subject was extremely limited. Subsequently, the consolidation of the initiative and the absence of a CSO in Argentina specializing in the legislative branch led to the formal establishment of DL in 2008.

Specifically, DL's objectives are as follows:

- To promote public debate and monitoring by civil society and citizens in general of the functioning of government entities, especially the legislative branches; and
- To ensure transparent, participatory, accountable, effective, accessible and inclusive processes for the construction of public policies, including those that promote gender equality.

The Argentinian Open Parliament Network

Given the lack of transparency in the legislative work and administrative management of the Argentine Congress,²² in 2016, DL, together with other CSOs,²³ created the country's Open Parliament Network (*Red Argentina de Parlamento Abierto, RAPA*). RAPA promotes actions to ensure effective compliance with the right of access to public information and to promote political will toward parliamentary openness.

One of the keys to the functioning of RAPA is the complementarity of the strengths of each member



15 years
Strengthening democracies
in Latin America

and their application in practice. For example, Democracy in Network (*Democracia en Red*) is recognized for its ability to develop digital platforms for decision-making processes. For this reason, in 2019, together with the Chamber of Deputies, it built the "Portal of Open Laws,"²⁴ a tool where deputies can upload their draft bills so that citizens can comment and contribute ideas to them. DL, taking advantage of the links built with the legislators' offices as a result of the preparation of the Legislative Directories, together with the rest of the RAPA organizations, carried out dissemination campaigns to encourage their use by deputies and citizens in general. Although there was an initial increase in the use of the portal by legislators, the evidence indicates that it should be recirculated every two years, when the Chamber of Deputies is renewed, to ensure its continued use.

“RAPA promotes actions to ensure effective compliance with the right of access to public information and to promote political will toward parliamentary openness.”

²² "Latin American Legislative Transparency Index 2016," Latin American Legislative Transparency Network, 2016, <https://alertas.directoriolegislativo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ILTL-2016-1.pdf>.

²³ The members include Civil Association for Equality and Justice (Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia, ACIJ), Center of Implementation of Public Policy for Equality and Growth (Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento, CIPPEC), Open Knowledge (Conocimiento Abierto), Democracy in Network (Democracia en Red), Legislative Directory (Directorio Legislativo), and Citizen Power (Poder Ciudadano).

²⁴ "Open Laws Portal," Diputados Argentina, <https://leyesabiertas.hcdn.gob.ar/>.

Likewise, one of the most important priorities of the network since its inception has been the creation of Open Parliament Plans (OPP), in line with the progress achieved by other Congresses in the region and the world. After several years of work and liaison between RAPA and authorities, in August 2019, legislators and officials of both chambers were presented two commitments (one by the Chamber of Deputies and the other by the Senate) to the Fourth National Action Plan of Argentina.²⁵ This political will was ratified by both bodies in December 2019 through a joint resolution, which established deadlines and standards for the co-creation of the plans.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to meet the original deadlines and forced the methodology to change to carry out the co-creation and monitoring of commitments. In the case of the Chamber of Deputies, the process was easier because of the fluid communication that existed between the Modernization Directorate of the Chamber of Deputies and RAPA and a greater political will to move forward. The First OPP was implemented between March 2021 and August 2022.²⁶

However, in the case of the Senate, RAPA had to monitor the issue in much greater detail and requested numerous meetings with the authorities as a result of the stilted progress within the agreed schedule. Finally, the roundtables for co-creation were held. They were divided into four themes: citizen participation, transparency, parliamentary modernization and diversity and gender. RAPA's involvement was organized according to the expertise of each organization, beyond legislative transparency itself. For example, DL focused on aspects related to access to information in committees and the development of a system of regulatory compliance. Citizen Power (*Poder Ciudadano*) also focused on the latter, together with gender issues, while *Democracia en Red* contributed to citizen participation commitments. The First Senate OPP²⁷ was implemented between February

and August 2022²⁸ and served to establish a basis for the Second Plan. For example, assessment reports on the digitalization of laws, information on senators and a guide to information on committees were prepared.

In 2023, RAPA worked with both chambers in the preparation of the new OPPs, based on a methodology agreed upon by both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The plans were published in December 2023.

Two pending issues of the Argentine Congress²⁹, which are on RAPA's agenda, are the appointment of the head of the Agency for Access to Public Information of the Congress and the enactment of a lobbying law.

DL monitoring product: The Legislative Directory

As previously mentioned, the main product of DL is its Legislative Directory. This publication contains information on the Argentine Congress and its 329 legislators, such as their academic and professional backgrounds, work teams, salaries, initiatives presented, and participation in committees. The data is obtained through extensive work by the entire organization, together with groups of university volunteers.

The Legislative Directory includes figures disaggregated by gender. For example, it sets out the number of women legislators in the period covered by the publication in comparison with previous periods, the number of committees chaired by women, the number of parliamentary blocs chaired by women and the most common professions of women legislators and makes comparisons between men and women in terms of educational level.

In this sense, the sources of information are (1) a pre-loaded electronic form that is sent to all offices for legislators or their collaborators to complete, (2)

25 "Fourth National Action Plan of Argentina 2019–2022," Open Government Partnership and Jefatura de Gabinete de Ministros and Secretaría de Innovación Pública, 2020, <https://nube.innovacion.gob.ar/s/ttS2c3xTFHDNfnj>.

26 "Primer Plan de Acción de Congreso Abierto 2020–2021," Honorable Cámara de Diputados Argentina, www.hcdn.gob.ar/institucional/infGestion/congreso_abierto/planDeAccion.pdf.

27 "Primer Plan de Acción de Congreso Abierto 2020–2021, Senado de Argentina," https://www.senado.gob.ar/bundles/senadomicrositios/pdf/plan/PRIMER_PLAN_DE_ACCION_CONGRESO_ABIERTO_WEB.pdf.

28 The period of implementation was less than the original schedule. However, the finalization date was not modified to coincide with the closure of the Fourth National Action Plan of Argentina (Cuarto Plan de Acción Nacional de Argentina).

29 Determined in article 28 of Law 27.275 on Access to Public Information, "Derecho del Acceso a La Información Pública: Ley: 27.275," Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos de Argentina, Infoleg, September 14, 2016, servicio.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternetvemorma.do?id=265949.

the Congress's website, (3) the legislator's official website, (4) the legislator's social media and (5) requests for access to information.

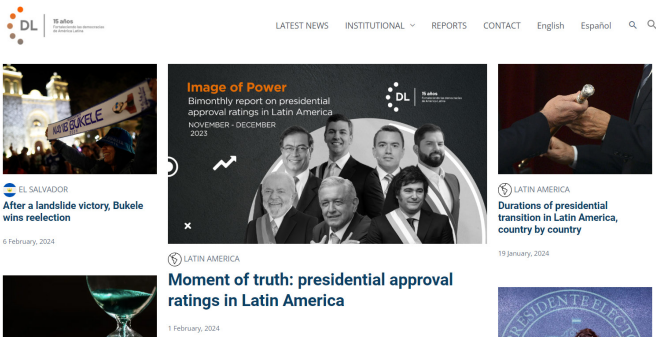
The data obtained is then standardized and published in a book and on a web platform. In this way, the initiative aims, on the one hand, to concentrate, in one place, information that is usually scattered in different spaces, and, on the other hand, to make available information that is otherwise unavailable to the public. By updating the directories every two years, we oblige legislators to be honest and frank with their constituents, which helps to entrench a culture of disclosure, build trust among voters and create a more responsive legislative system.

In Argentina, 12 editions have already been published, one every two years when congressional legislators are elected. At the regional level, Legislative Directories have also been produced for the Congresses of Mexico and Colombia. At the subnational level, the initiative has been carried out in the legislatures of the provinces of Cordoba and Corrientes, Argentina, among others.

Emerging challenges and DL's response

The COVID-19 crisis had a strong impact on access to information and parliamentary openness. One of its consequences was, as mentioned earlier, the change in the methodology for the creation and implementation of the OPPs of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. DL, together with RAPA, offered its support and expertise to the authorities responsible for carrying out such processes in order to ensure that they were adequately transparent and participatory.

However, during the pandemic, legislators put in place several virtual channels for communication with citizens, and upon the return of in-person activity, many of these channels lost effectiveness. This was particularly challenging in the development of the 2022-2023 Legislative Directory. There were various deputies and senators who did not respond to emails, phone calls or social media messages; thus, the only way to get their complete file was to visit them in their offices on a recurring basis. However, there was a smaller group who could not even be found in their offices. The latter are those who did not complete the form.



Another case was that of the Agency for Access to Public Information. Through its Civic Space Guardian monitor,³⁰ DL tracked the selection process of the new director of this agency in 2021. Noting that a leading candidate did not meet the minimum requirements for the position, DL coordinated with six CSOs³¹ to stop the nomination through a public campaign, the presentation of arguments against the candidate and participation in a public hearing. In the end, the candidacy was not endorsed by the executive branch. In this sense, the coordinated work with the rest of the organizations was fundamental to achieving effective advocacy.

Results

Over the last 15 years, a culture of transparency and accountability has been created in the Argentinian Congress, as reflected in several aspects:

1. The increase in the number of legislators answering the form. In the first Directories, the response rate was less than 60 percent; in contrast, in the latest editions, it exceeded 90 percent. This is due to at least two aspects: (1) a significant number of legislators (especially those who have more than one term as representatives before Congress) are familiar with the work of the organization, and (2) the long history of DL legitimizes the request for information, especially for new deputies and senators, who may not be familiar with the organization.

2. The amount of information that legislators provide when answering the form. Initially, there was much reluctance to provide information on aspects ranging from the legislators' academic and professional backgrounds to the people who make

up their work teams and how much they are paid. This information has become more accessible over the years, and, in general, legislators who complete the form answer almost all the questions. The most complex fields, however, are still those related to the salaries of the representatives and the donations they make.

3. Regulatory changes. Legislators' salaries are made up of several components. One of them is based on a system of cashing in on publicly funded air travel tickets. Funding for airfare is intended to allow deputies and senators to return to their home districts from time to time. Until 2018, there was no clear record of which legislators obtained tickets for travel, who actually used them and who exchanged them for money. Through an investigation, DL detected numerous non-transparent behaviors linked to the exchange system. As a consequence, both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate passed resolutions regulating the use and distribution of the tickets.

Engagement with legislators and staff

Over the years, DL has focused on building relations with legislators and generating trust in its work as a non-partisan CSO and expert in parliamentary affairs. For this purpose, in addition to phone calls and emails, the most important element is in-person meetings. DL often organizes breakfast meetings with legislators to talk about the thematic agenda they lead and the general situation of the legislative branch. These links are important to strengthen the implementation and impact of the organization's projects in Congress.

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³⁰ "Civic Space Guardian," The Latin American Civil Rights Monitor of Directorio Legislativo, Medium, <https://medium.com/@civicspaceguardian>. Civic Space Guardian is a Directorio Legislativo tool that monitors regulations and bills with real or potential impact on freedom of expression, of assembly and of association; public access to information; the right to privacy; and citizen participation in 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The regulatory processes are qualified by two indicators: the impact on civil society and the probability of sanction. In this way, the qualifiers are indicated to the Civicus Monitor to have a general view of the national situation.

³¹ Those organizations include the Civil Association for Equality and Justice (Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia, ACIJ), Democracy in Network (Democracia en Red), Foundation for the Development of Sustainable Policies (Fundación para el Desarrollo de Políticas Sustentables, Fundeps), Citizen Power (Poder Ciudadano) and Foundation for the Free Way and Regional Alliance for Free Expression and Information (Fundación Vía Libre y la Alianza Regional por la Libre Expresión e Información).

Likewise, DL emphasizes the relevance of having fluid communication channels with officials and with the secretaries of the party caucuses. These officials are important because of their role in policy implementation. Furthermore, they are critical actors given their direct access to all the legislators of their party group.

In the specific case of the preparation of the Legislative Directories, a recurring challenge when requesting information from legislators is that they say that such data “is already available on the Congress page or on their official profile,” when, in fact, it is either not so, or it is scattered in a large number of sources. A successful response to this is to explain that the Legislative Directory is building a unified and standardized database with information from all the legislative branches of the region.

Strategic communications

DL uses a number of tools to disseminate its projects and reports, which include its webpage (in Spanish and English), social media (X, formerly known as Twitter; Instagram; Facebook; LinkedIn), newsletters and other media (radio, television, newspapers and digital media) throughout the region.

To amplify their reach, DL also relies on partner organizations located in various parts of the country, such as the provinces of Córdoba, Mendoza, Neuquén, Salta and Santa Fe. The collaboration includes the development of communication campaigns related to access to public information and training of local communities in citizen participation initiatives.

Another key communication channel is DL’s broader networks. For example, at the national level, the aforementioned RAPA and the Network of Civil Society Organizations for the Open State (*Red de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil para el Estado Abierto*), made up of a dozen CSOs devoted to open government issues, represent important dissemination channels.

Lessons

Based on more than 15 years of experience in the field, DL has identified the following lessons:

Keep the network active and create synergy among organizations through the following:

- Periodic meetings;
- Sharing information about the projects they are promoting and
- Dividing up the agenda of legislative topics among the partner organizations to coordinate who leads what and who accompanies and supports.

Turn the organization and the network into relevant actors for the Congress by means of the following:

- Building a fluid communication channel with legislative officials involved in the Open Parliament agenda;
- Mapping and generating alliances with new and experienced legislators who can lead open parliament issues; and
- Collaborating with the Congress in the development, implementation and dissemination of transparency and legislative strengthening initiatives.

National Case Study 2: Citizen Congress Watch (Taiwan)



Citizen Congress Watch (CCW) is a non-governmental organization that works to strengthen Taiwan's Legislative Yuan (LY) through greater transparency and openness. Formally established on April 18, 2007, CCW was founded on the efforts led by the Taipei Society (澄社), a group of social science scholars in the 1990s that aimed to address the challenges within the LY. CCW is composed of more than 35 civil society organization (CSO) members across multiple issue-based groups.³²⁻³³

Specifically, CCW's objectives are as follows:

- Conduct oversight over the LY;
- Remove inadequate or underperforming legislators; and
- Improve the culture in the LY to be more transparent and efficient, serve public welfare and strengthen integrity.

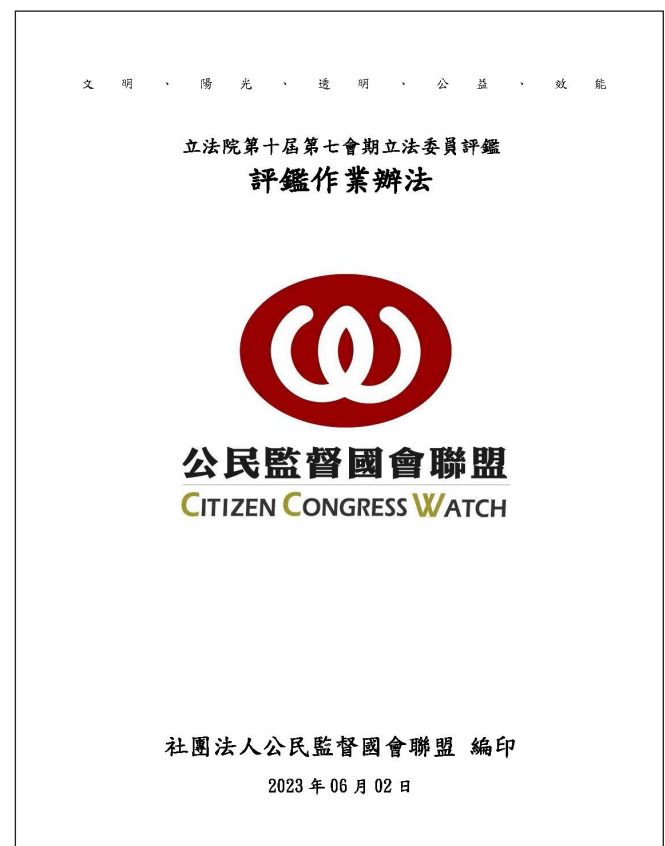
CCW's founders were motivated by their perception that the LY lacked accountability, oversight, transparency and opportunities for citizen participation. Candidate commitments often became broken promises and, in general, the public had limited understanding of legislative processes and decisions. Further, there were no live broadcasts, and the release of key written documents was delayed up to six months. CCW's current vice president, James Kan, compared the prior LY to



公民監督國會聯盟
CITIZEN CONGRESS WATCH

a “black box” that lacked public scrutiny.³⁴ Several organizations performed evaluations of legislators from 1990 to 2007 but with limited impact; therefore, CCW became the vehicle to unify the voices of these organizations.

CCW monitoring activities



32 “About Us,” Citizen Congress Watch, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://ccw.org.tw/english/news>.

33 The organization, Social Legislation Movement Federation (社會立法聯盟), was established in 1998 and was renamed Citizen Congress Watch in 2007.

34 “Webinar 3: Citizens Watching Parliament: International Idea,” Facebook, accessed October 5, 2023, www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=1001426724625427.

35 The citizen evaluation committee is composed of members of the general public, college students and volunteers. They must meet the following criteria in addition to the approval of their application through cooperating universities, other CSOs or online: complete identity verification, be over 18 years of age and have no affiliation or third-degree or closer relation with a sitting legislator. Upon meeting the standards and criteria, citizens sign the “Legislative Evaluation Commitment” and officially register to become a legislative evaluator.

CCW began evaluating legislators in 2008 – the first open, transparent and citizen-based evaluation in Taiwan’s history. The evaluation remains a centerpiece of CCW’s activities, consisting of more than 50 indicators structured according to the following categories:

■ **Basic performance** (attendance, committee performance, bills proposed, budgets reviewed);

■ **Citizen evaluation** – both oral and written (professionalism, concern for public interest, problem-solving skills);

■ **Bonus indicators** (information disclosure on lobbying registration, conflicts of interest, labor rights of legislative staff, bills identified as a “Sunshine Act” that prevent corruption in the LY); and

■ **Deduction indicators** (infringement of basic human rights, violation of major public interest, misconduct, inappropriate behavior inside or outside the LY).

Conducted every six months, the evaluation includes contributions from scholars, technical experts and citizens. CCW has completed ten iterations of the evaluation, and the methodology, indicators and evaluation report are publicly available.³⁶ Legislators with high scores are qualified “outstanding” while those with low scores are labeled as “under observation.”³⁷ CCW regularly modifies the indicators as needed after each evaluation cycle to refine the evaluation process and to address any instances of legislators gaming the system to achieve higher scores. CCW carries out these quantitative evaluations to promote transparency and make legislators more accountable to the public. However, CCW recognizes that numerical data does not always correlate with adequate performance and is strategizing approaches to strengthen the qualitative scrutiny of legislators through a more holistic approach. Over time, CCW’s legislative engagement activities have expanded to include scorecard reports, oversight forums, press conferences, research on the relationship between legislators and the leadership of publicly traded companies, election observation and trainings for university students on how to

monitor parliaments along with other activities to promote civic education (e.g. *Congress in Taiwan* – a board game for youth to learn the procedures of the legislative process. It is tested by legislators).³⁸

CCW national network

One of CCW’s strengths is the diverse composition of its national membership. This includes issue-based groups focused on combating gender-based violence, environmental sustainability, persons with disabilities, education, social welfare and more. CCW has engaged these groups to leverage their technical and subject matter expertise while helping them understand the value of parliamentary monitoring and legislative procedures, particularly around budgetary issues that can impact organizations’ operations. In doing so, CCW has built the capacity of Taiwanese CSOs to monitor parliaments and boost messaging to identify and advocate to target legislators and committees within CCW’s network. The CSOs further support and endorse each other through joint statements and press conferences. In these partnerships, CCW maintains a stance of political impartiality and an emphasis on reforms for legislative strengthening.

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Engagement with legislators

Over the years, CCW developed a mutually respectful relationship with legislators based on a shared vision of working toward a more efficient and transparent LY. During its initial eight years, CCW appointed two volunteers to sit in committee meetings and monitor legislators’ attendance and engagement before live broadcasts were available. These in-person meetings and close communication with legislative staff have helped sustain CCW’s networks. When

³⁶ Available in Chinese at <https://reurl.cc/1DkgLY>.

³⁷ “Overview of the Evaluation of the Members of the Legislative Yuan,” Citizen Congress Watch, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://ccw.org.tw/en/assess>.

³⁸ Yang Chen-yu and Jonathan Chin, “Board Game Aims to Teach about the Legislative System,” Taipei Times, October 3, 2021, www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2021/10/03/2003765447.

new legislators are elected, CCW sends invitations to their offices to allow for an opportunity to introduce CCW and the reasons why the evaluations are performed. CCW seeks to not only expose problems in the LY but also to provide solutions. CCW engages with the LY to support their parliamentary functions and enhance their public database by identifying errors, highlighting the types of information that should be reflected and providing civic tech expertise to improve overall usability.

Strategic communications

CCW employs a number of formal and informal channels to disseminate their research, activities and news. This includes CCW's website; weekly newsletters; meetings with various organizations; webinars and dialogues; channels for discussions through LINE, a messaging app popular in the Asia-Pacific region with specific chat groups for the general public, CCW members and CCW's board of directors; social media (Facebook; X, formerly known as Twitter; YouTube; and Instagram) and leveraging partner networks.³⁹ Moving forward, one of CCW's objectives is to translate their work into English to reach a wider audience.

International networking



CCW established an International Affairs Department in 2021. It works to raise CCW's profile, increase regional Asia-Pacific networks, participate in international forums and exchange knowledge with

CSOs and parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs) through parliamentary evaluations and oversight workshops. In 2022, CCW and five multi-party legislators participated in an international knowledge exchange convened by NDI on the sidelines of the Copenhagen Democracy Summit to discuss parliamentary openness and implementation of Taiwan's OPAP commitments.⁴⁰ In March 2023, CCW co-organized a Parliamentary Openness and Monitoring Forum (POMF) that featured multi-stakeholders, including PMOs from Latin America, Europe and Asia with opening remarks from LY Speaker You Si-kun.⁴¹ In June 2023, CCW signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Perennial Opposition, a Japanese PMO aimed at cooperation for parliamentary oversight, shared data collection and evaluation. Through these networks, CCW is able to improve its credibility and relevance and also identify new international donors. CCW also leverages cross-country legislative research and analyses as a motivating force in its work with the LY.

Results

While a causal relationship is difficult to prove, CCW believes that its evaluations and activities have contributed to a number of positive results as reflected in the following:

- 1. Increased LY attendance and engagement.** During the evaluation of the seventh session of the LY (February 1, 2008, to January 31, 2012), attendance was 90 percent while interpellation was 44 percent compared to the current tenth session (February 1, 2020, to January 31, 2024), where attendance was recorded at 98 percent and interpellation at 90 percent.
- 2. Legislative transparency and ethics.** According to CCW, their continued efforts have directly led to a number of transparency improvements, including the live transmissions of parliamentary proceedings and committee meetings and compulsory conflict-of-interest declarations.
- 3. Open Parliament initiative.** Following increased pressure from civil society, the LY agreed to implement an Open Parliament initiative. The

39 Citizen Congress Watch, LINE Official Account, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://page.line.me/tyu0276q?openQrModal=true>.

40 "The Makings of an Open Parliament: Takeaways from NDI's International Knowledge Exchange," National Democratic Institute, September 7, 2022, www.ndi.org/our-stories/makings-open-parliament-takeaways-ndis-international-knowledge-exchange.

41 Jono Thomson, "Taiwan Legislative Speaker Opens Parliamentary Oversight Forum in New Taipei," Taiwan News, March 14, 2023, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4834361>.

Open Parliament Multi-stakeholder Forum (OP-MSF) was created in June 2020 with CCW as a core member, bringing together Taiwan's civil society and legislators. Taiwan published its first OPAP in November 2020, focused on five major themes: transparency, openness, participation, digitization and literacy. In May 2023, an independent initial review of Taiwan's OPAP was published.⁴² Notably, the review found substantial potential for results regarding Commitment 3-1, focused on developing advocacy platforms or programs that are convenient for public participation.⁴³ This commitment has strong buy-in from key stakeholders from CSOs and the LY to bolster civic participation.

Challenges

During CCW's more than 15-year history, the organization has grappled with longstanding and emerging challenges. CCW continues to struggle to get legislators to present complete and accurate information. CCW also finds that buy-in from some legislators remains low, particularly on the OPAP to effectively implement commitments.⁴⁴ Although CCW has called on all legislators, and the LY as a whole, to provide data in an open, machine-readable format that would allow for deeper analysis, the 2023 independent report found that information from the LY is provided in proprietary formats (e.g., .pdf, .doc or .jpg photo) that makes it "almost impossible" for CSOs to properly and adequately analyze.⁴⁵ Some key recommendations by the independent reviewers include the following:

- Developing a specific work plan and timeline for publishing selected data in an open, machine-readable format that also permits legal reuse;
- Training legislative staff on how to publish data and maintain data quality, security and privacy;
- Collaborating with watchdog organizations to identify their specific open data needs and
- Conducting routine monitoring of the open data publishing process.⁴⁶

To better address these challenges and recommendations from the independent review,

CCW is working to engage current and newly elected legislators along with legislative staff in order to best communicate citizens' needs and enhance access to public information with topical experts.

Effective public communication represents another challenge. Although social media has facilitated information dissemination, it can also lead to echo chambers, information manipulation and increased polarization. Generalized political apathy among Taiwanese citizens also remains a concern, and CCW is exploring ways to communicate their organization's mission and its importance more effectively to the general public.

Effective public communication represents another challenge. Although social media has facilitated information dissemination, it can also lead to echo chambers, information manipulation and increased polarization.

Lessons

From CCW's experience spanning over 15 years, lessons learned include the following:

- In a polarized environment, maintaining an impartial image is essential.
- Long-term engagement and exchange with a variety of national civil society and issue-based groups helps ensure the sustainability of reforms and their relevance to a broader range of stakeholders.
- There is a need to diversify public messaging channels and amplify CCW's mission in a way that is concise and easily digestible, with a focus on highlighting genuine and impactful reform processes.
- Proactive engagement in international exchanges has helped to inform and improve CCW's methods, capacities and profile.
- Since multilateral organizations and platforms are widely respected in Taiwan, CCW has been able to leverage commonly accepted standards to incentivize legislators on prioritized reforms.

42 Nodar Kherkheulidze, Ellen Y. J. Kao and Dea Tsartsidze, "Independent Initial Review of Taiwan Open Parliament Action Plan 2021–2024," University of Georgia, May 2023, https://www.ly.gov.tw/Pages/ashx/File.ashx?FilePath=~/File/Attach/229071/File_19785112.pdf.

43 Kherkheulidze, Kao and Tsartsidze, "Independent Initial Review of Taiwan Open Parliament Action Plan," 12.

44 Kherkheulidze, Kao and Tsartsidze, "Independent Initial Review of Taiwan Open Parliament Action Plan," 7.

45 Commitment 2-1 in Taiwan's OPAP 2021–2024: Data from the Legislative Yuan must be provided in an open data format.

46 Kherkheulidze, Kao and Tsartsidze, "Independent Initial Review of Taiwan Open Parliament Action Plan," 27.

REGIONAL CASE STUDIES

Regional Case Study 1: Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency



The Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency (*Red Latinoamericana por la Transparencia Legislativa, RLTL*) is a group of 32 civil society organizations from 15 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) that work for the active promotion of transparency, access to information and accountability in the legislative branches. It was created in 2010 as a space for collaboration and communication among PMOs in the region.

At that time, national legislatures in LAC faced enormous shortcomings in terms of access to information, ethics, probity and citizen participation. Although CSOs specialized in parliamentary monitoring were aware of this situation in their respective countries, they did not have a complete picture of what was happening in the region, nor was there a quantitative tool to objectively demonstrate this situation.

As such, a group of organizations from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru created RLTL. Its main objectives are as follows:

- To generate instruments that measure and document progress in transparency and legislative openness in the countries where RLTL is present;
- To offer recommendations to improve the standards of transparency and legislative openness in the region;



- To disseminate good practices for openness and transparency of Congresses and assemblies in the region;
- To promote peer learning and knowledge exchange among organizations in the region and the world who work with legislative branches and
- To analyze and implement collective strategies to address the shrinking civic space in the region.

Emerging challenges and RLTL's response

In a region as large as Latin America and the Caribbean, the challenges to parliamentary monitoring are numerous. For situations where the right of access to public information is threatened through action or omission by the parliaments or the executive branch seeks to undermine the independence of the legislative branch, RLTL developed an alert system. This is a rapid response mechanism through which it seeks to address a particular situation as a collective of organizations. The procedure is as follows:

1. RLTL's coordination department contacts the PMOs of the member country where the events are occurring (or vice versa) to carefully analyze what is happening and how it affects the legislative branch.
2. The parties discuss possible courses of action in response to the events; it is always essential to have the approval of the national organizations.
3. The coordinator then submits the plan to the rest of RLTL's members for their endorsement.
4. For efficient and effective coordination, the proposals are sent by email and reinforced via a WhatsApp group with all members. Given that the objective is to address the situation in a timely manner, it is essential to have agile communication channels.
5. Once the initiative has been approved, the coordination department implements the plan. In previous cases, it has consisted of the following:
 - a. Preparation and dissemination of RLTL communiqués;
 - b. Statements to public officials through messages, emails and meetings and
 - c. Adherence to national and regional advocacy campaigns.

RLTL's advocacy regarding the selection of the authorities of Mexico's National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data (*Instituto Nacional de Transparencia, Acceso a la Información y Protección de Datos Personales, INAI*) provides a case of coordinated cross-border efforts, while also illustrating the political challenges and limitations. As the body that nominates the INAI director to the executive branch, the Senate had an important role to play, but decision-making was stymied due to disagreement among the parliamentary groups, as well as a lack of support from the executive.⁴⁷

Confronted by this situation, RLTL published a communiqué⁴⁸ urging the senators to reach consensus to elect the new commissioner candidates to INAI. This document was also sent to the members of the Senate's Political Coordination Board (*Junta de Coordinación Política, JUCOPO*), the body that defines the agenda. In addition, several member organizations, including DL,⁴⁹ published material on social media on this issue to give it greater visibility. RLTL also signed on to letters prepared by global civil society actors. Although the Senate complied with a judicial ruling to include the issue on its agenda, the nomination process broke down once again due to continuing discord among the parties. With mounting pressure from the legal community and civil society, the Supreme Court of Justice opted to authorize the INAI to operate even without the mandatory quorum. At time of writing, the INAI continued to operate but with only four of seven commissioner seats filled.

Monitoring tools and products

With the aim of objectively assessing and tracking the level of transparency of the legislatures of the region, the Latin American Legislative Transparency Index (*Índice Latinoamericano de Transparencia Legislativa, ILTL*) was created in 2011. Through an impartial, independent and periodic measurement, the tool provides information on the existence of transparency and citizen participation policies and mechanisms in legislatures in the LAC region. ILTL also makes it possible to compare the performance, good practices and challenges of these institutions

from a regional perspective. To date, six editions have been developed (2011, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020–21 and 2023). Since 2021, the ILTL is also applied at the subnational level.



In the legislatures where it is being measured for the first time, the ILTL sets a baseline from which RLTL members can subsequently assess progress. In cases where it has been measured repeatedly, the ILTL quantifies the evolution or regression in the institution's openness and accountability. Significantly, the index includes numerous indicators that assess Congress based on a gender perspective. For example, it disaggregates statistics on staff and salaries by gender and examines whether parliaments have policies that guarantee gender equity in the election of authorities or hold information related to requests for access to information disaggregated by gender.

47 Civic Space Guardian, "La parálisis del Instituto de Transparencia de México o cómo borrar sin eliminar," Medium, July 3, 2023, <https://medium.com/@civicspaceguardian/la-par%C3%A1lisis-del-instituto-de-transparencia-de-m%C3%A9xico-o-c%C3%B3mo-borrar-sin-eliminar-afb776b6570a>.

48 Red Latinoamérica por la Transparencia Legislativa, X Post, April 11, 2023, 3:24 p.m., twitter.com/RedLTL/status/1645870504195117056/photo/1.

49 Direlegislativo, Instagram, June 15, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CthdqFCxoUz/>.

“ In the legislatures where it is being measured for the first time, the ILTL sets a baseline from which RLTL members can subsequently assess progress. In cases where it has been measured repeatedly, the ILTL quantifies the evolution or regression in the institution’s openness and accountability.”

The ILTL is composed of more than 300 questions grouped in four dimensions, which are as follows:

1. Normative aspects: this indicates the existence and scope of laws on transparency, citizen participation, ethics and probity – for example, regulations for managing requests for information, open data and active transparency; mechanisms for citizen participation with a focus on gender and vulnerable groups; codes of conduct; sworn statements and declarations of interests. It represents 15 percent of the total score.

2. Legislative work: this indicates the implementation of mechanisms that guarantee the transparency of the parliamentary function and process. For example, this category evaluates the existence of mechanisms to track the work of the committees, broad access to the bills presented, a register of lobbyists, information on the process of discussion and approval of the national budget and the control activities carried out. It represents 25 percent of the total score.

3. Budget and administrative management: this indicates the degree of transparency in the use of public resources allocated to the work of Congress. For example, this measure considers the existence of citizen participation mechanisms for the control of the budget process, gender-sensitive operations, the publication of internal and external audits and their results and information on the number of congressional employees and legislators and salaries. It represents 25 percent of the total score.

4. Citizen participation: this indicates the existence of practices that allow the involvement of citizens in the legislative process and the

accountability of the Congress. For example, this category evaluates the use of social media with wide reach and interactive and educational tools; the implementation of participatory activities, such as citizen consultations; the possibility for citizens to connect with their representatives through various media; and the existence of open data platforms and OPPs. It represents 35 percent of the total score.

An important modification to the ILTL was reflected in the fifth edition. Taking into account the advance of the open parliament agenda globally, additional questions were incorporated and the relative weight of the “citizen participation” dimensions was increased.

Another key revision has been the decreased weighting of the normative dimension, since the ILTL seeks to reflect mainly the implementation of transparency and ethics, probity and participation policies and not the existence of regulations per se.

Since the ILTL was created more than ten years ago, RLTL members have increasingly engaged with legislatures for the development of the index benchmarks. Though the assessment is led by civil society, PMOs have learned that involving legislatures in the definition of metrics presents multiple benefits: (1) improving the relationship between civil society and legislators, (2) making the measurement more accurate and reliable, (3) increasing the legitimacy of the ILTL and (4) and enhancing prospects for implementation.

Results

Over the years, legislatures in the LAC region have made progress, to a greater or lesser extent, in legislative transparency, accountability and citizen participation reforms. Each ILTL measurement offers a set of recommendations for the legislatures to implement, taking into account the strengths and aspects to be worked on in each one of them. Some examples are the following:

1. Argentina: The ILTL 2016 measurement⁵⁰ focused on the lack of transparency in the publication of data on budgetary execution of the Congress and, in the cases where it was available, on a format

50 Available at “Latin American Legislative Transparency Index 2016,” Latin American Legislative Transparency Network, <https://alertas.directoriolegislativo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ILTL-2016-1.pdf>.

that made reuse difficult. This analysis contributed to subsequent discussion between officials and civil society on the availability of key information on legislative management, such as scholarships and subsidies, staff payroll, salary scale and expenses incurred by legislators traveling to their provinces. As of 2018, all this information, together with other data related to the legislative process, was published in the Open Data Portals of both chambers.

2. Córdoba, Argentina: In 2021, the ILTL was applied for the first time in a subnational legislative branch. Among the main suggestions offered to the legislature of Córdoba was one related to the co-creation and implementation of an OPP, respecting the standards of transparency and citizen participation set by international practice.⁵¹ This Plan was co-created with CSOs and universities in 2022 and has been since implemented.

3. Ecuador: The 2020 measurement prompted the National Assembly to implement an open parliamentary data search system with information on legislators, plenary sessions, votes and topics to be discussed. Additionally, in 2022, the first multi-stakeholder forum for OPPs was formed, composed of civil servants, CSOs, academics and members from the private sector.

Strategic engagement of legislators

When applying the ILTL, the first contact made from RLTL is with the transparency or parliamentary services offices of the Congress in question. This communication is led by the local organization, which sends a letter from RLTL at the beginning of the measurement inviting and advising said institution to participate in the review and exchange instances. In those cases where, after repeated attempts, there is no response from the authorities, RLTL's coordination proceeds to communicate with the entity to open the dialogue channel. To this end, it is useful to rely on other actors, such as ParlAmericas, an independent network composed of the national legislatures of 35 countries of the American continent, with broad outreach to officials and legislators.

The RLTL also identifies those legislators who work on the thematic agenda in order to build their support in promoting recommendations for improvement.

Strategic communications

The results of the ILTL process are communicated in several ways. On the one hand, a regional report is prepared with details of each country's performance, its strengths and recommendations and a balance of the best, worst and pending issues at the Latin American level. The final report is presented in a virtual event to ensure the participation of as many stakeholders as possible, where RLTL's coordinator, another partner organization and representatives of the legislatures are invited to speak. Subsequently, each RLTL member is encouraged to hold an in-person event and a debriefing session with the officials and legislators to discuss the points for improvement and define the priorities to be worked on.

“Each RLTL member is encouraged to hold an in-person event and a debriefing session with the officials and legislators to discuss the points for improvement and define the priorities to be worked on.”

In addition, both for the application of the ILTL and for other products launched by RLTL, the aim is to take advantage of the networks of contacts of member organizations to disseminate and increase awareness of the importance of legislative transparency among civil society, journalists and the public sector.

⁵¹ Form available at “Latin American Legislative Transparency Index 2016,” Latin American Legislative Transparency Network, <https://alertas.directoriolegislativo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ILTL-2016-1.pdf>.

Lessons

■ Coordination across CSOs serves for more effective pressure on the legislative branch, while cross-country comparators help to gain media coverage and create a dynamic of “healthy competition” between national legislatures.

■ Including legislatures in the definition and refinement of index metrics builds trust and ownership of the results.


■ In order to stay current with the evolving challenges and needs of the region, the products should be subjected to review processes and informed by global conversations on legislative development.

■ Advocacy should center on aims that are specific and achievable – taking into account budgetary, regulatory, technical or political will reasons.


■ The regional network should have a defined governance system that guarantees alternation of its leadership, the incorporation of new members and the open discussion of proposals and ideas.

■ Some level (though reduced) of network coordination should be maintained even in times of funding downturns and budget cuts.


Organizations that make up the Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency

 **Argentina:** ACIJ, CIPPEC, Directorio Legislativo, Poder Ciudadano


 **Bolivia:** Fundación CONSTRUIR


 **Chile:** Chile Transparente, Ciudadanía Inteligente


 **Colombia:** Congreso Visible, Instituto de Ciencia Política, Transparencia por Colombia


 **Costa Rica:** Abriendo Datos Costa Rica, ACCESA, Instituto de Prensa y Libertad de Expresión, Asociación Costa Rica Íntegra

 **Ecuador:** Corporación Participación Ciudadana, Observatorio Legislativo – Fundación Ciudadanía y Desarrollo


 **Guatemala:** Acción Ciudadana, Guatecambia

 **Honduras:** Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa (ASJ)

 **Mexico:** Fundar, Impacto Legislativo, Transparencia Mexicana, Visión Legislativa

 **Panama:** Fundación para el Desarrollo de la Libertad Ciudadana, Espacio Cívico

 **Paraguay:** Semillas para la Democracia, TEDIC

 **Peru:** Asociación Civil Transparencia Perú

 **Dominican Republic:** Participación Ciudadana

 **Uruguay:** DATA, CIVICO

 **Venezuela:** Transparencia Venezuela

REGIONAL CASE STUDIES

Regional Case Study 2: African Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations Network



The African Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations Network (APMON) is a network of non-governmental organizations and coalitions of CSOs dedicated to monitoring and engaging with parliaments in Africa. It currently has more than 250 members from 14 countries – mainly located in West Africa but also from East and Southern Africa.

The main objectives of APMON are as follows:

- Promote access to parliaments by gathering information about their activities and functioning;
- Assess or evaluate the performance of members of parliament (MPs) or other parliamentary actors or some aspect of parliaments' functioning or values;
- Promote citizen engagement and understanding of legislative processes by developing virtual and

face-to-face mechanisms for interaction between legislators and citizens;

- Generate tools for effective measurement and documentation of progress in transparency and parliamentary openness among countries in Africa and offer recommendations and proposals for improvement and
- Promote peer learning and knowledge sharing among member organizations and other similar organizations across the world.

Origins and early history

The first attempts to create an African network of PMOs were in 2015, when the Ghana-based PMO, Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), organized a conference and subsequent baseline

52 Enhancing Transparency in African Parliaments: The African Parliamentary Monitoring Organization, Mapping/Baseline Study of Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations in Africa, accessed January 12, 2024, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wpxA2S80Ong3uy0D6pmq5nnzJwPgaE11/view?usp=sharing>.

survey⁵² of civil CSOs monitoring parliaments on the African continent. This gave everyone involved a sense of how many organizations with common goals there were on the continent. From this mapping, the idea of creating a continent-wide network of PMOs to foster the exchange of good parliamentary practices and address common challenges gained momentum. However, the network was not consolidated because of a lack of international cooperation funds.

Again in 2020, CDD-Ghana obtained funding to organize a regional conference⁵³ of PMOs, which was also supported by Parliamentary Network Africa (PNAfrica) that serves as secretariat to APMON. These efforts were complemented by parallel conversations that PNAfrica held with DL during 2021 and 2022 to learn about the case of RLTL, particularly with regard to its governance and sustainability.

This work of linking PMOs in Africa and setting up a structure to support a network at the continental level included numerous virtual and face-to-face meetings. In these spaces, aspects related to APMON's statute were further refined, such as the governing bodies, the incorporation of members and the network's products, such as the Open Parliament Index (OPI).⁵⁴ Finally, the network was launched in 2022, with PNAfrica acting as chair and Mzalendo Trust (Kenya) as secretary-general. An East African wing was later formed in February 2023, with a full-fledged Southern African leg in the offing.

Monitoring tools and products

Between 2021 and 2022, following the example of the ILTL, APMON, under the coordination of PNAfrica and with the technical support of DL,⁵⁵ developed its own version of a cross-country monitoring tool: the OPI. By highlighting progress and shortcomings, the initiative seeks to incentivize the openness and accountability of and citizen participation in African parliaments. The first version was measured in 13 West African countries in 2022, but the intention is to expand the index to the entire continent.

Like the ILTL, it is applied every two years, which allows comparison of the results obtained by a parliament along different measurements and elucidation of its progress (or regression) in the implementation of Open Parliament policies.

AFRICA OPEN PARLIAMENT INDEX 2022

Maiden Release
West Africa Edition



OPEN PARLIAMENT INDEX 2022											
COUNTRIES OVERALL SCORE (%) AND RANKING											
COUNTRY	POSITION	OVERALL SCORE	COUNTRY	POSITION	OVERALL SCORE	COUNTRY	POSITION	OVERALL SCORE			
	1ST	63.03		6TH	45.00		11TH	36.28			
	2ND	61.86		7TH	43.86		12TH	33.65			
	3RD	57.97		8TH	42.69		13TH	22.36			
	4TH	49.21		9TH	41.24						
	5TH	45.32		10TH	37.16						

COUNTRIES ASSESSED

1. BENIN	6. GHANA	11. SENEGAL
2. BURKINA FASO	7. GUINEA-BISSAU	12. SIERRA LEONE
3. CAPE VERDE	8. LIBERIA	13. TOGO
4. COTE D'IVOIRE	9. NIGER	
5. THE GAMBIA	10. NIGERIA	

53 Center for Democratic Development-Ghana and strengthening Parliament Monitoring Conference, August 17, 2021, <https://cepps.org/story/ghana-conference/>.

54 Launch of Africa Open Parliament Index (OPI), September 1, 2022, <https://parliamentafrica.com/OPI/>.

55 The members of the APMON Working Group that developed the OPI are the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana); Parliamentary Network Africa (PNAfrica), Ghana; Mzalendo Trust, Kenya; Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG), South Africa; Pan African Parliament Civil Society Forum (PAP-CSO Forum), South Africa; African Parliamentary Press Network (APPN); and Directorio Legislativo.

The OPI is composed of 44 questions grouped into three dimensions:

Transparency: this includes whether parliament discloses enough information, improves the legal or institutional frameworks to guarantee the right to information, improves the quality of parliamentary information disclosed to the public or increases the transparency of its decision-making processes or systems. It represents 35 percent of the total score;

Civic participation: this includes whether parliament creates or improves opportunities, processes or mechanisms for the public to inform or influence decisions and whether it creates, enables or improves participatory mechanisms for minorities or underrepresented groups, among other things. It represents 35 percent of the total score and

Accountability: this includes whether parliament creates or improves opportunities to hold members and officials of parliament answerable for their actions and whether it reports on their institutional performance in a regular and transparent manner. It represents 30 percent of the total score.

An interesting aspect of the OPI is that the measurement is carried out simultaneously by the CSOs and the parliament of that country to compare the perception that both parties have of the same issues. The final score is calculated as a sum of the individual scores assigned to each country based on the evidence reviewed by both parliament and the CSOs. The scores are assigned based on the evidence provided in each case.

“An interesting aspect of the OPI is that the measurement is carried out simultaneously by the CSOs and the parliament of that country to compare the perception that both parties have of the same issues.”

In order to involve parliaments in the measurement, several meetings are held with authorities and officials so they can learn about the indicators, the methodology and the process. Furthermore, the motivation to perform better than other parliaments inspires their involvement and commitment to the process and outcome in the long term.

Strategic communications

The results of the OPI are presented in a manner similar to those of the ILTL. On the one hand is the preparation of a report analyzing the information collected in the various countries – which dimensions parliaments performed best and worst in – and the recommendations to address the areas for opportunity. The final report is launched in a hybrid event aimed at the entire international community (mainly African stakeholders) and then disseminated through press releases published by the organizations that participated in the measurement, parliaments and the media.

In addition to engaging with legislators and staffers, APMON has worked to connect with parliamentary journalists on the continent, specifically with the African Parliamentary Press Network (APPN). This group is represented on the APMON Executive Committee so that their interests can be considered in planning. All training and opportunities are shared equally with both CSOs and journalists to build on and enhance their skills and ability to monitor and report effectively from parliament.

APMON also collaborates with the Media Office of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) to disseminate PAP's policies and programs and also to give Africans a better understanding of the impact of a regional body such as the PAP on their daily lives. The OPI and its usefulness to even the PAP were presented to the relevant committee of the continental Parliament to engender its involvement in future OPI measurements.

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APMON structure

APMON members are monitoring organizations working to promote transparency, citizen participation and accountability of national and subnational parliaments and issue-based groups focused on diverse themes such as gender, governance, persons with disabilities, anti-corruption and conflict. Their size and location may vary, as there are small and large CSOs participating in the network that are located not only in the capital cities of their respective countries but also in remote areas.

In all APMON countries, there is a network that is led by a national committee elected from among the members of the country network. In turn, there is an organization that chairs that committee and represents the country at the regional level (more details to follow). The National Committee is responsible for the effective functioning of the country network, through the development and implementation of a work plan that includes permanent engagement with the country's parliament and parliamentarians, among other functions. The national network meets every three months.

APMON is divided into five blocks/regions: Central Africa Bloc, East Africa Bloc, North Africa Bloc, Southern Africa Bloc and West Africa Bloc. This is to facilitate coordination among so many organizations and countries. Each bloc is led by a regional committee, which is composed of the chairs of each country network.

Results

One year after the implementation of the first edition of the OPI, several initiatives related to the promotion of Open Parliament in the region's parliaments have emerged. Many of them are aimed at strengthening citizen participation in parliamentary business. Among them, the following stand out:

1. Ghana: The Speaker of Parliament conducted a survey to gauge the perceptions of PMOs on the work of parliament and its challenges. From this emerged the need to create a formal body (called the Citizen Bureau) in parliament to mainstream CSO

engagement instead of having ad hoc meetings. In order to enhance citizen education and participation, there are also plans to establish a radio and TV station for parliament and to revise standing orders of the committees to allow media and public participation.

2. Sierra Leone: The parliament expressed its interest in developing an OPP to increase the role of the institution in the implementation of OGP commitments at the national level. In this framework, within the area of citizen participation, the parliament wants to use the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) U-Report platform⁵⁶ to receive proposals and suggestions from citizens regarding issues of concern and importance to them. They will also promote spaces to encourage gender participation in lawmaking processes.

Emerging challenges and APMON's response

Despite its recent creation, APMON has had to face challenges mainly related to the promotion of the Open Parliament paradigm and the measurement of the OPI in many of its target countries, including countries with military governments. In the first case, some legislative branches were not familiar with the Open Parliament concept. Therefore, APMON, together with local organizations, held meetings with parliamentary officials to explain the concept and what it implies in terms of transparency, citizen participation and accountability. This increased not only the level of knowledge of parliamentarians on the subject but also their political will to participate in the measurement of the OPI and implement policies that make parliaments more open and participatory.

In contrast, closing civic space presents a challenge in terms of the scope that PMOs have for accessing and reporting information. Mali and Guinea represent two extreme challenges. As part of a spate of recent coups in West Africa, both countries have been under military governments since 2020 and 2021, respectively, and the democratically elected parliaments were dissolved. As a result, APMON determined that the OPI measurement could not be carried out in these two countries.

⁵⁶ U-Report: Empowering and connecting young people around the world to engage with and speak out on issues that matter to them, accessed January 9, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/U-Report>.

Lessons

In its brief history, APMON has already made important inroads in developing solidarity and coordination among network members as they work together to plan and engage their national parliaments. The network has begun to act as a united front for more effective advocacy efforts. Some of the emerging lessons from this nascent network include the following:

■ When it comes to engaging with national and regional parliaments, it is important to:

- Identify and establish a working relationship with a familiar point of contact (staff or MP champion) to help begin conversations around your area of interest;
- Understand the problem to be addressed and specific solutions tailored to those needs. Clarity helps for easy alignment and collaboration;
- Identify other entry points to showcase the network's work and boost its legitimacy and
- Be patient. Parliaments are political institutions, so PMOs may need to wait a long time before seeing progress.

■ OGP's Open Parliament initiative is a helpful platform. The easily accessible materials and peer-to-peer exchanges offered by OGP are very useful, especially in those countries where there is not much knowledge about the Open Parliament agenda, even if they are not part of the partnership.

■ Working with groups from diverse cultural backgrounds requires different approaches to be tailored, depending on which works.

■ Communication and consultation with members must be consistent so that organizations do not feel left out or marginalized.

■ Ranking parliaments by results can serve as an incentive for those with the worst scores (i.e., the least open) to improve in time for the next index.

And in the case of those that achieved a good score, the index can serve as positive reinforcement to continue working to maintain that position in relation to their peers.

■ The media are allies of civil society, as they legitimize and disseminate the PMO work. To this end, it is useful to include representatives of the sector in the governing bodies of PMO networks, so that they feel part of the conversation and their interests are taken into account.



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