

Georgia's Tbilisi Municipal Open Government Issues

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ABSTRACT

The study addresses the importance of open government, particularly in Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, which is the only city in the country selected for the Open Government Partnership's Local Government Pilot Program. Open government is increasingly significant, with an emphasis on transparency, citizen participation, and governance reform. The paper aims to analyze the key issues surrounding Tbilisi's open government efforts, including citizen engagement, access to services, transparency, and collaboration. It highlights the challenges and potential areas of focus in improving governance. The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing bibliometric analysis to examine articles published from 2011 to 2024. Data is gathered from the Google Scholar database, and tools like Mendeley and VOSviewer are used for data selection and bibliometric mapping. The study reveals fluctuating interest in open government in Tbilisi, with 86 articles published on the topic. The key issues identified include challenges in governance, opportunities for improvement, and various topics like security, education, and policy reforms. New areas of interest include technology, smart governance, and digital information. The research concludes that Tbilisi is making notable strides in its open government initiatives, with a focus on citizen participation through platforms like Smart Map and participatory budgeting. Despite the fluctuating academic interest, Tbilisi's efforts are vital for local governance reform and could serve as a model for other cities.

Keyword: Open Government, Transparency, Civic Engagement



INTRODUCTION

The term open government is not new, but various social contexts and advances in information technology have contributed to the way open government is conceptualized (K. T. Tai, 2021; Wirtz, Weyerer, & Rösch, 2019). The origins of open government can be traced back to the Greek Athenian codification of law, but the Visigothic Code of the Kingdom of Sweden is considered the beginning of modern open government initiatives that consider citizens right to information (Afandi, 2024; Moon, 2020). Open government is an interesting agenda promoted by many governments since the 2000s. Open government initiatives have been widely introduced not only in Western democracies but also in Asian and African countries (Gil-Garcia et al., 2020a; Prastya et al., 2021).

Open government has become an important strategy for administrative reform, prompting many countries around the world to design and implement initiatives related to

access to information, transparency, participation, and collaboration (Afandi et al., 2023; De Blasio & Selva, 2019; Gil-Garcia et al., 2020b). Many governments have expanded the concept of open government; for example, the Obama administration announced the Open Government Directive in 2009 and, together with South Africa, Brazil, the Philippines, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and Norway, took a leading role in founding the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011, a multinational effort to promote open government worldwide (Moon, 2020; Schmidhuber & Hilgers, 2021).

The Open Government Partnership is based on the idea that open government is more accessible, more responsive, and more accountable to citizens, and that improving the relationship between citizens and government has long-term and exponential benefits for all (Ruijter & Meijer, 2020; K.-T. Tai, 2021). The partnership focuses on the policy areas of anti-corruption and integrity, beneficial ownership, open contracting, civic space, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of expression, digital governance, environment and climate, extractive industries, fiscal openness, inclusion, people with disabilities, youth, justice, land and spatial planning, open parliaments, public service delivery, education, health, water and sanitation, and right to information (Afandi et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2021; Ingrams, 2020; Ruijter et al., 2020).

OGP is a broad partnership that includes members at both the national and local levels. Currently, 73 countries and 110 local governments are members of OGP. Being part of a local OGP provides benefits to encourage open reforms that have become part of the vision and mission of every local government to achieve levels of accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and transparency (Ingrams et al., 2020). Through membership in this global community, every local government can obtain new information on the implementation of open government, as well as being able to share views, experiences, and resources to achieve the principles of open government (Wirtz, Weyerer, & Sch, 2019).

The Open Government Partnership has launched the Local Government Pilot Program, recognizing that much open government innovation and reform is happening at the local level where governments can engage more directly with citizens and deliver many important public services. The local governments involved in the program are Austin, Basque Country, Buenos Aires, Elgeyo Marakwet, Jalisco, Kaduna State, La Libertad, Sao Paulo, Sekondi-Takoradi, Seoul, South Cotabato, Paris, Madrid, Scotland, and Tbilisi.

Tbilisi is Georgia's capital and most populated city, accounting for about a third of the country's total population. Tbilisi is one of five Georgian cities that have their own self-governing bodies. Tbilisi plays a key role in Georgia's open government efforts. It is the only city selected for the OGP program. Local governments in Georgia that are members of the OGP include Tbilisi, Akhaltsikhe, Khoni, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, and Rustavi. Tbilisi has made eight open government commitments, including: Smart Map civic activity portal; participatory budgeting; access to services and civic engagement; transparent governance; city hall transparency; introduction of petition system to Tbilisi city hall; interactive accessibility to budget expenditures and introduction of civil control mechanisms; and introduction of civil control mechanisms and accessibility to city services. This research aims to analyze the main issues of local open government in Tbilisi.

The urgency of this research lies in the increasing importance of open government at the local level, particularly in cities like Tbilisi, which play a crucial role in shaping the broader national governance landscape. Open government initiatives, such as those promoted by the Open Government Partnership (OGP), emphasize transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in governance, all of which are fundamental for enhancing democratic processes and improving public service delivery. By examining Tbilisi's local open government commitments, this study will contribute to understanding the practical implementation of these ideals in a specific urban context. Moreover, as the capital city of Georgia, Tbilisi's actions have the potential to set a precedent for other municipalities, making the findings of this research particularly relevant for local government reform both within Georgia and in

other countries seeking to implement similar reforms.

Additionally, the research addresses a gap in understanding how local governments, especially in non-Western contexts like Georgia, can effectively engage citizens and promote inclusivity through open government mechanisms. Despite the global spread of open government initiatives, much of the academic and policy focus remains on national-level efforts, with fewer studies exploring the localized challenges and opportunities. Tbilisi, as a key member of the OGP, offers a unique case study to explore the nuances of implementing open government at the municipal level, particularly in a post-Soviet context. This research is timely, as local governments worldwide are increasingly expected to adopt open government principles to foster trust and strengthen democratic governance.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research employs a qualitative approach combined with bibliometric analysis to explore the key issues of open government in Tbilisi (Donthu et al., 2021; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the subject matter by interpreting the various dimensions of open government practices, while the bibliometric analysis provides a structured way to analyze the trends, patterns, and focus areas on the existing literature (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019; Kulsum et al., 2022). The bibliometric method is particularly useful in identifying the volume and thematic evolution of research publications related to the open government in Tbilisi, offering insights into the scope and development of the topic over time.

Data for this study was gathered from the Google Scholar database using the Publish or Perish software, with keywords such as "Tbilisi information access," "Tbilisi transparency," "Tbilisi participation," and "Tbilisi collaboration" (Gil-Garcia et al., 2020b). The chosen keywords are directly linked to the main principles of open government and served as a foundation for selecting relevant articles from 2011 to 2024. These articles were then exported in RIS format and organized using Mendeley, a reference management tool, to ensure proper categorization and selection. The selection process was rigorous, focusing on articles that aligned with the central themes of open government, such as citizen participation, transparency, and collaborative governance.

To analyze the bibliometric data, the study employed VOSviewer, a software tool for constructing and visualizing bibliometric maps. The software was used to create network visualizations that depict the relationships between different topics within the open government literature related to Tbilisi. These visualizations provide a clear picture of the dominant themes, the connections between them, and the evolution of specific areas of research. Through this method, the study was able to identify not only the most prevalent research topics but also emerging trends in the field, such as the integration of technology and smart governance into open government practices in Tbilisi.

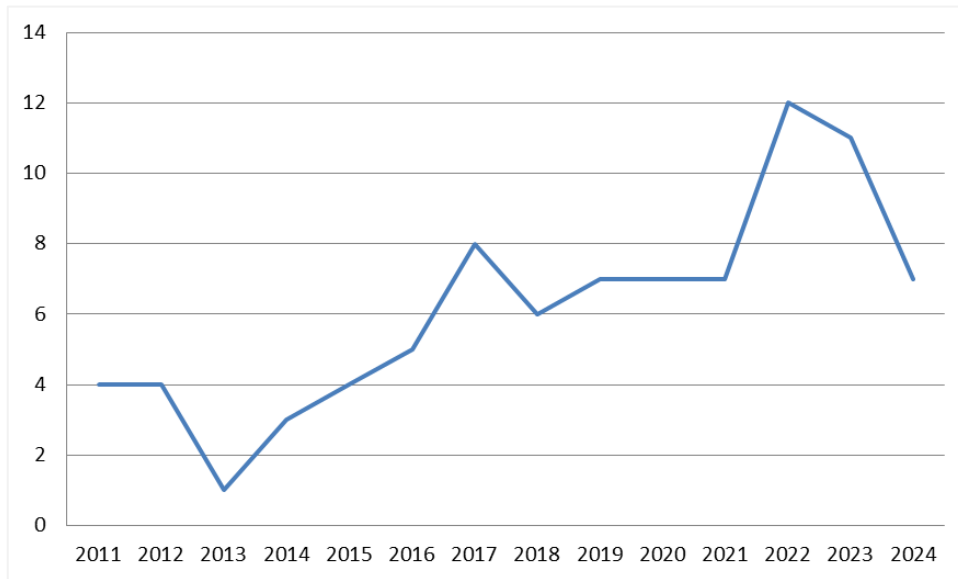
RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Publication Trends in Tbilisi Open Government Studies (2011-2024)

There were eighty-six relevant articles published in the period 2011-2024. Four articles each were published in 2011, 2012, and 2015; one article in 2013; three articles in 2014; five articles in 2016; eight articles in 2017; six articles in 2018; seven articles each in 2019, 2020, and 2021; twelve articles in 2022; eleven articles in 2023; and seven articles in 2024 (see Graph 1). This trend shows that despite Tbilisi being part of OGP and selected for the Local Government Pilot Program, the region's open government studies are fluctuating and not very popular. This is certainly not in line with Tbilisi's efforts to be more open, and Tbilisi badly needs support in the form of strategic studies produced by scholars.

This trend indicates that despite Tbilisi's involvement in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and its selection for the Local Government Pilot Program, there has been a fluctuating and inconsistent interest in researching its open government initiatives. The

uneven publication pattern, with some years seeing very few articles and others more, suggests that the academic community has not fully embraced or prioritized open government studies in Tbilisi.



Graph 1. Publication trends
Source: Processed by the Author, 2024

Network visualization (see Figure 1) displays the relationships between topics. No duplicate topics are displayed in this visualization. Identical topics that appear in many articles are counted as a single topic. This visualization represents topics with circles. The size of the circle is determined by its respective weight. The more frequently a topic appears, the larger the resulting circle size will be. The lines between topics represent links, while the location of each topic indicates the closeness of the relationship.

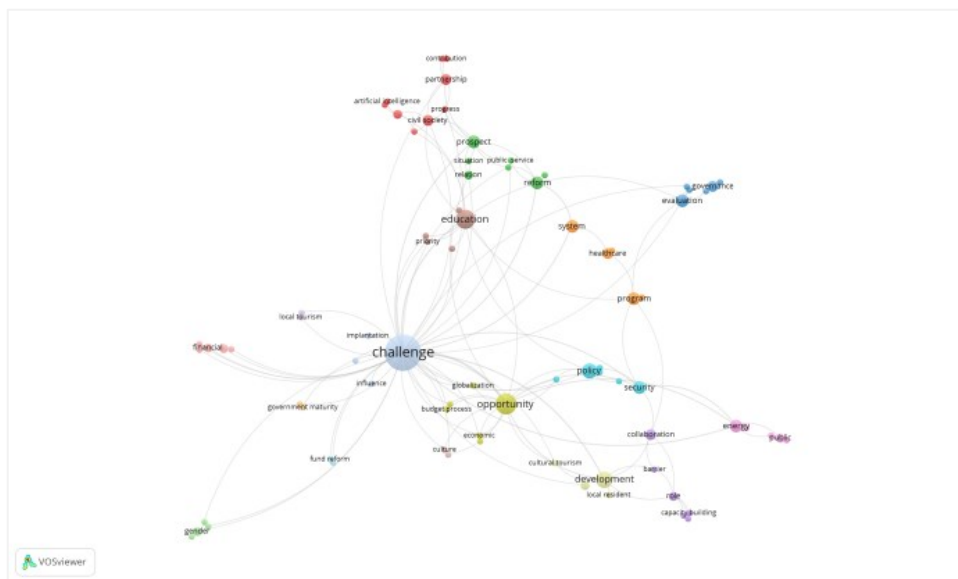


Figure 1. Network visualization
Source: Processed by the Author, 2024

There are 80 topics (see Table 1) and 368 total link strengths in the Tbilisi open government study. Challenge (67 total link strengths); opportunity (29 total link strengths);

education (15 total link strengths); development (12 total link strengths); prospect (11 total link strengths); security (10 total link strengths); energy (9 total link strengths); policy (8 total link strengths); reform (8 total link strengths); civil society (7 total link strengths); evaluation (7 total link strengths); partnership (7 total link strengths); and program (6 total link strengths) are the dominant topics. These topics are the main focus of the Tbilisi open government study.

Tbilisi open government is dominated by studies on the challenges of implementing open government in Tbilisi, opportunities for implementing open government in Tbilisi, Tbilisi's open government policy in the education sector, development of open government in Tbilisi, prospects of open government in Tbilisi, data security in Tbilisi, Tbilisi's open government policy in the energy sector, Tbilisi's policies in the open government sector, open government reform in Tbilisi, the role of civil society in Tbilisi, evaluation of open government policy in Tbilisi, Tbilisi's partnership in open government, and Tbilisi's programs in open government.

Table 1. Topics List open government in Tbilisi

No	Items	No	Items	No	Items	No	Items
1	Challenge	21	Governance	41	Public health	61	Local tourism
2	Opportunity	22	Political constraint	42	Regional economic	62	Policy prospect
3	Education	23	Progress	43	Reporting	63	Population
4	Development	24	Public service	44	Rural development	64	Situation
5	Prospect	25	Relation	45	Self-governance	65	Smart governance
6	Security	26	Agricultural sector	46	Standard	66	Spatial
7	Energy	27	Barrier	47	Support	67	Strategy
8	Policy	28	Budget process	48	Tourism	68	Technology
9	Reform	29	Capacity building	49	Adherence	69	Youth attitude
10	Civil society	30	Cultural tourism	50	Artificial intelligence	70	Audit
11	Evaluation	31	Culture	51	Contribution	71	Communication
12	Partnership	32	Economic	52	Democracy	72	Cooperation
13	Program	33	Educational policy	53	Digital information	73	Implantation
14	Role	34	Equality	54	Disinformation	74	Influence
15	Collaboration	35	Green economy	55	Fund reform	75	Local resident
16	Integration	36	Healthcare	56	Globalization	76	Organization
17	System	37	Mediation	57	Government maturity	77	Participatory budgeting
18	Financial	38	Multifacility	58	Health system	78	Public awareness
19	Gender	39	Priority	59	Inclusive	79	Public participation
20	Challenge	40	Public	60	Information	80	Sustainable development

Source: Processed by the Author, 2024

The topics of Tbilisi open government studies are very broad, not only focusing on open government in general but more specifically on certain topics, including: Tbilisi open government policy in the education sector, data security, Tbilisi open government policy in the energy sector, Tbilisi open government policy in the agricultural sector, Tbilisi open government policy in the cultural sector, Tbilisi open government policy in the tourism sector, Tbilisi open government policy in the green economy sector, Tbilisi open government policy

Topics that are outside the main cluster (see Figure 3) allow for potential studies of Tbilisi's open government, including: reporting, standard, financial, inclusive, fund reform, population, agricultural sector, equality, gender, and women's role. Identical to overlay visualization, the above topics are closely related to information and communication technology in Tbilisi's open government. These topics are not closely integrated with the main topics of Tbilisi's open government, making it interesting and important to be able to contribute to Tbilisi in supporting their efforts to be more open.

2. Addressing Unregulated Urban Construction Projects through SMART MAP

Tbilisi is focusing on their five main open government commitments, including: First, multi-profile mechanism of open government and civic participation-Information and Civic Activities Portal "SMART MAP". SMART MAP includes an e-portal and uses as the basis the interactive map of Tbilisi. It utilizes from the base, diversifies, and radically changes the interactive maps of Tbilisi, the possibilities, and the purpose of their use. It not only creates on the map additional cover zones but also connects them to a number of functions that convert the standard e-map into the so-called "SMART MAP", a multi-profile mechanism for civic engagement-Information and Civic Activity Portal "SMART MAP". It is important that each functionality that is described and falls under the "SMART MAP" portal is a part of the unified portal and is not scattered in various portals and electronic means.

Unregulated urban construction projects are important issues in Tbilisi. Although these projects can affect the living environment in Tbilisi, residents currently have limited access to relevant information and are often not involved in the decision-making processes. This commitment is carried forward from the first action plan with slight modifications that focus on addressing specific urban issues, such as outdoor lighting, clearing services, and phytosanitary activities. Considering the importance of urban projects to Tbilisi residents, this commitment aims to create an electronic mechanism to provide citizens with relevant information about processes regarding their living environment.

This information was previously not available on a unified platform. SMART MAP will also comprise Fix-Tbilisi and Tbilisi Forum, which are platforms on which citizens can submit appeals and discuss issues with each other. Based on territorial marking on an interactive Tbilisi map, residents will be able to obtain information regarding any infrastructure projects and green cover cutting and planting by Tbilisi City Hall or its subordinate agencies at any stage. The commitment also aims to increase civic participation in the decision-making processes through the Fix-Tbilisi portal's integration into the SMART MAP.

SMART MAP entails an obligation by the Tbilisi City Hall to respond to citizens' issues reported through Fix-Tbilisi and develop more adequate and evidence-based services and projects based on the feedback. Though Tbilisi Forum will also allow space for discussions, there will be no formal obligation for City Hall to take these inputs into account. Relevant legal obligations for City Hall to respond to citizens through SMART MAP are yet to be determined. However, the commitment indicates that all responses and citizen-submitted problems will be publicly displayed. For these reasons, the commitment is relevant to the OGP values of civic participation and public accountability and furthers access to information.

The commitment consists of specific milestones to verify its degree of completion. If fully completed, the platform will stand as a unified source of information, which will make it easier for citizens to obtain information, provide feedback to City Hall, and engage in online discussions. In terms of improving government practice, City Hall's obligation to respond to and address citizen-identified problems submitted through SMART MAP within specific time frames can improve government practice.

3. Implementation of a budget participatory planning mechanism.

An integrated electronic platform will be created alongside other electronic applications, enabling Tbilisi residents to rate in a visually presented thematic budget each

thematic priority and, thus, easily reconfigure the priorities in different sequences. Citizens will also be able to see sub-topics of each priority and will also have access to information about how the budgets of the previous year were allocated, or which distribution of the priorities was supported by the population, and what was the distribution in Tbilisi or separately taken municipalities or districts. The program automatically generates the average weighted outcome from the selected priorities. This outcome will be mandatory at any stage of the drafting and approval of the budget. The Tbilisi Forum will give the possibility to leave comments on the Tbilisi Forum and present viewpoints directly to City Hall. In addition, it will be possible to interactively conduct different types of statistics (budget, year, territories, voting characteristics, etc.).

4. Deadline and Procedures for Participatory Budgeting in Tbilisi

Deadlines and procedures will be established regarding when the platform will open for voting, when it will close, and at what stage, within the framework of the government procedures of budget formation and correction processes, the consideration of the weighted budget drafted by the society will take place, and a brief explanation about the comparison result of the finally approved budget will be published. The requirement and format for informing and interviewing the public, including engagement of people with disabilities and other target groups, will also be established.

Participatory budgeting is important for Georgia within the EU Association Agreement and for introducing good governance practices to the country. Georgia ranks among the top five countries in the world, according to budgeting transparency. However, according to the Local Self-Government Index, most Georgian municipalities lack citizen participation during budget planning processes, and IDFI assesses the country to be at an early stage of evidence-based policy development. Currently, the Tbilisi budget planning process is a prerogative of City Hall, with the Tbilisi Assembly Committees providing comments and recommendations on City Hall's draft budget until the Assembly's final approval. While the City Assembly meetings to discuss the budget are open to the public, public interest is usually low. Tbilisi's budget for previous years is published on the municipality website, but currently no participatory mechanisms exist, and citizens lack access to the budget planning processes.

As a result, Tbilisi City Hall has committed to introducing an electronic participatory budgeting mechanism for citizens to rate budget priority areas. Following public voting, the program will generate a weighted average to determine the budget priorities. This commitment also foresees the development of relevant documents formalizing processes for City Hall to consider the weighted budget and provide official feedback on the final budget. The newly developed electronic mechanism will not only allow citizens to provide inputs on budgeting but also to gain easier access to information on budget distribution and planning processes. It will also explain through an electronic portal how the funds of previous years were allocated. The commitment is thus relevant to the OGP values of access to information, civic participation, and technology and innovation.

This commitment continues from the previous, which involved conducting face-to-face interviews with Tbilisi residents for annual public opinion surveys to support evidence-based budgeting. With OSGF support, the methodology and questionnaires were developed. To increase the commitment's relevance and civic participation, TI Georgia and USAID GGI suggested that City Hall allocate specific funds to be spent based on citizens' priorities. However, according to the Budgetary Department of City Hall, this is too difficult legally to implement. USAID GGI also suggested that Tbilisi City Hall could pursue the Estonian model for participatory budgeting, which commits local governments to allocating a certain amount of funds to implement citizen-proposed projects.

This commitment is specific enough to be verifiable considering its detailed milestones in developing the software for the application and system, establishing a legal framework, testing the system, and training relevant City Hall employees. If fully completed, it could have

a moderate impact, as citizens will be able to more easily submit their priorities to City Hall for consideration in the Tbilisi budget compared with their ability to do so previously. The creation of an easy-to-use tool for citizens to rate their budget priorities could better integrate the public into the budgeting process. This integration is important, as the budget process often inadequately reflects public needs, whereas citizens have practically no access to the budget design process. In terms of access to information, the mechanism will allow citizens to compare budgets from previous years in a user-friendly manner and check the distribution of funds allocated to public priorities. It could also reduce the time needed for citizens to check budgetary information. Citizens will also be able to share their comments on budgeting in the Tbilisi Forum, but the commitment does not specify whether City Hall will be obliged to respond and to reflect these comments in policies.

5. Access will also be possible via the mobile app.

The format will consider the possibility of reporting the information and the feedback by citizens on the services. This information will be subject to periodic analysis by Tbilisi City Hall. Service providers will analyze and summarize the received feedback and statistical data on electronic services. This analysis will be made publicly available and will be used by Tbilisi City Hall to improve services. A legal analysis will be made publicly available and will be used by Tbilisi City Hall to improve services. A basis will be established for the procedures related to this mechanism.

This commitment continues from Commitment previous. The Georgian population reports that they trust local government institutions and that half of Tbilisi residents hold an unfavorable view of their local government's work. This lack of trust underlines the need for the public to have greater access to information on local government institutions' work, including the services local government provides. Tbilisi City Hall has made progress in fostering public service delivery and access to government services by introducing several e-portals. With support of IDFI, City Hall launched a new centralized webpage (www.tbilisi.gov.ge) for easier access to public information and increased civic participation in polls and assessments. However, citizen knowledge is limited, and citizens ask for better accessibility to available e-services. Furthermore, citizens often confuse the responsibilities of agencies, such as the Tbilisi mayor's office, Gamgeoba (local administrative districts), or the City Assembly.

To respond to these needs, Tbilisi City Hall plans to create an integrated web application, and a mobile app based on a one-window principle whereby multiple services and information from different departments will be available in a single location. Users will be able to register online through a personal account and modify and select services based on their interests. The web portal will grant access to all services of the Environmental Protection Department and City Transport Department, functions of the Municipal Supervision Department, and architecture and urban development directions. Apart from obtaining information and accessing services from home, the portal will allow users to submit feedback for City Hall to improve its services. The commitment foresees summarizing and publishing the analysis of feedback received so that citizens will know whether their efforts were addressed.

6. Good Faith and Transparent Governance Strategy of Tbilisi Municipality City Hall.

In accordance with the OECD recommendations, Tbilisi Municipality City Hall, together with civil society representatives, will develop a medium-term strategy for improving good faith and transparency of governance. This strategic document will define the standards of good faith and transparency for Tbilisi Municipality City Hall and the subjects in its system, whereas for the implementation of these standards, performance indicators and a monitoring framework will be elaborated. Despite improvements in anti-corruption rankings, the population in Georgia believes that officials misuse power and thinks that officials use their

positions for personal gain. Tbilisi residents have raised questions regarding accountability and transparency of Tbilisi City Hall, largely due to a lack of access to financial or other relevant information about projects the institution or its subordinate agencies have implemented.

In the monitoring report, the OECD recommended that Georgia should not only establish an independent anti-corruption agency but also develop and implement anti-corruption action plans in sectoral ministries and in local governments. This commitment aims to address this recommendation by strengthening the good faith and transparent governance practices at City Hall. Specifically, it calls for developing an evidence-based strategic document. It is noteworthy that USAID's Good Governance Initiative (GGI) developed and proposed the commitment. USAID GGI is also responsible for its implementation, including conducting a situation analysis at City Hall. The draft strategy will be discussed within the working group and at public consultations. This is not the first instance of CSOs supporting public institutions in developing the Good Faith Governance Strategy, but the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, with support from USAID GGI and in partnership with IDFI, developed a Building Integrity and Transparency Strategy 2017–2020.

The commitment is directly relevant to the OGP value of civic participation because it entails holding public discussions of the draft strategy. The commitment follows a logical structure, with needs assessment to be conducted at an initial stage. It will set a baseline for measuring progress and identifying gaps and loopholes to plan actions. Elaboration of the monitoring framework will be important to ensure adequate evaluation of the strategy implementation.

Most milestones are specific and verifiable. However, the commitment is not specific about the format of public discussions and the degree to which public opinion will be addressed in the final good governance strategy. The initial step is to select a CSO to conduct situation analysis on good faith and transparent governance at City Hall, followed by drafting, discussing, and approving the final version of the Good Faith and Transparent Governance Strategy. According to USAID GGI, the whole process is based on a co-creation process and on the involvement of stakeholders. Its potential impact is coded as minor. If the commitment is fully implemented, City Hall will have its strategy and vision, with relevant action points to increase transparency and good faith governance. The strategy could have the capacity to potentially change City Hall's culture, but its impact will depend heavily on its content points and implementation.

Although the specific action points are yet to be developed, the implementation of this commitment could lead to greater disclosure of information on internal transactions and the use of funds, as the assessment could reveal loopholes. According to TI Georgia, local governments in Georgia, such as Tbilisi, need to introduce good governance standards by addressing issues related to salaries and salary supplements; improving the rules for recruitment, promotion, and dismissal of employees; and ensuring transparency and accountability. Thus, the anti-corruption strategy could raise public awareness about corruption risks and relevant response mechanisms, which can enhance the credibility of the agency.

7. Development of Transparency in Tbilisi City Hall Through Electronic Mechanisms.

The commitment integrates three directions aimed at improving e-transparency in Tbilisi City Hall and increasing access to open data. In particular, the commitment provides for the following issues: update of the Tbilisi City Hall Portal, taking into consideration the version of the concept prepared by the IDFI; elaboration of a new version of the public information page; and creation of an open data page for Tbilisi City Hall. This commitment was proposed by the Georgian CSO, the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), and seeks to improve Tbilisi City Hall's transparency. The National Assessment of Transparency and Accountability of Municipalities rated indicating a lack of proactive disclosure of public information, electronic governance, and citizen participation and accountability.

Information scarcity and lack of proactive disclosure lead the media and citizens to question the trustworthiness and openness of the Tbilisi government and make it difficult for the public to monitor work quality and government efficiency.

Georgian legislation ensures access to public information, with Global Right to Information placing it in the upper-middle cohort according to the strength of legal frameworks for information. Chapter 3 of the General Administrative Code of Georgia guarantees access to public information available at the administrative body, as well as the right to receive copies unless the information contains state, professional, or commercial secrets or personal data. In Tbilisi, it is possible to submit a formal request for public information to City Hall, with the public institution obliged to issue requested public information immediately or no later than 10 days thereafter. The agency must provide justification for refusing information disclosure and introduce procedures for appeal within three days of the decision. Proactive release of information, however, does not free public institutions from issuing requested public information.

Georgia has developed several open data portals for publishing government-held information. For example, the government introduced the open data portal www.data.gov.ge, though municipal governments often do not provide relevant information in a timely manner. Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) funded another open data portal (www.opendata.ge), but it is currently inactive. IDFI operates yet another open data platform (www.DataLab.ge), which incorporates datasets on local government, including Tbilisi City Hall's revenues from tree-cutting permits, the number of constructions permits, personnel wage statistics, and so on.

This commitment aims to introduce new and improved electronic platforms to make access to information easier and less time-consuming. It contains three deliverables: 1) upgrading the Tbilisi City Hall Portal to incorporate and promote the pages of local districts (Gangeoba); 2) elaborating on a new version of the public information page, which will make it easier for users to find desired information and operationalize information requests; and 3) creating an Open Data Portal, which will publish public sector data in an open and accessible format. Data will be structured by thematic category so that they are presented in a more user-friendly format.

The commitment involves concrete and verifiable milestones, including the development of technical tasks for portals, launching the renovated City Hall website, adding the upgraded public information portal to it, and piloting the open data platform. Currently, City Hall does not have any open data modules, which makes it difficult for citizens to know whom to contact or where to find relevant information. The public information page is also currently difficult to use and does not offer information in an open format. As a result, upgrading the City Hall website and public information portal and introducing an open data system could make it easier and less time-consuming for stakeholders to find information. However, while the renovated portal can help advance the open data principle in public administration and present information in a more user-friendly manner, the actual impact depends on the number and type of datasets to be disclosed as well as the frequency of updating the portal, which is not explained in the commitment text. Therefore, this commitment is considered to have a minor impact on improving access to information in Tbilisi.

Table 2. Tbilisi's Commitments

No	Commitments	Goals
1	Multi-profile mechanism of open government and civic participation. Information and Civic Activities Portal "Smart Map"	Create one of the most important elements of the result-oriented, accountable engagement system. Tbilisi City Hall will be able to give a timelier response to the city's problems reported in the portal and better analyze the needs of the population. Improve the quality of Tbilisi City Hall service and, consequently, living conditions for

No	Commitments	Goals
		citizens. Create a system that will support Tbilisi Municipality in making their decisions through public participation and based on their needs.
2	Implementation of a budget participatory planning mechanism	Approximation of the budget planning to the citizens' renewable needs. Creation of electronic and procedural mechanisms for increasing their managerial involvement in this regard. Establishment of a mechanism of cooperation that will make Tbilisi authorities more accountable to the public.
3	Implementation of mechanisms for improvement of access to services and citizen engagement	A substantial increase in availability and raised awareness on services that will facilitate easy access to services and will somewhat improve the quality of life of citizens. The introduction of online services will also create an additional basis for implementing more efficient improvements, and increased awareness will create additional grounds for more effective civic feedback and participation.
4	Good faith and transparent governance strategy of Tbilisi Municipality City Hall	Strengthening transparent and good faith governance in Tbilisi Municipality City Hall.
5	Development of transparency in Tbilisi City Hall through electronic mechanisms	Improvement of electronic transparency mechanisms for providing quality and comprehensive information for citizens (including open data).

Source: Processed by the Author, 2024

CONCLUSION

The study of open government in Tbilisi has seen fluctuating interest over the past decade, with eighty-six relevant articles published on the subject between 2011 and 2024. Despite the limited focus, a wide range of topics related to open government have been explored, including the challenges and opportunities of implementing open government practices, particularly within the education and energy sectors. Many studies have also focused on open government reforms, data security, the role of civil society, policy evaluation, and the development of partnerships in open government. Researchers have primarily examined how open government can evolve in Tbilisi, exploring its impact on various areas such as governance, transparency, and citizen engagement. However, there has been a growing recognition of the need to explore new topics, such as technology, artificial intelligence, smart governance, and the integration of open government principles in various sectors including culture, tourism, health, and the green economy.

Tbilisi's open government commitments are clearly outlined in a strategic framework aimed at enhancing civic participation, transparency, and public service delivery. The city's first key initiative involves creating a multi-profile mechanism for open government and civic participation, notably through the "Smart Map" portal. This platform serves as a tool for citizens to report issues and actively participate in decision-making processes. It is designed to improve the responsiveness of Tbilisi City Hall and provide better insights into the needs of its population, leading to enhanced service quality and overall living conditions. Another critical commitment is the implementation of participatory budgeting, designed to align budget planning more closely with citizens' needs. This initiative will provide mechanisms for citizens to engage more deeply in the budgetary process, ensuring that the local government is more accountable to the public.

In addition to these efforts, Tbilisi is focused on improving citizen access to services and boosting public engagement. The establishment of online services and the promotion of civic awareness are central to this strategy, as they offer an additional avenue for citizens to provide feedback and participate in the governance process. Tbilisi City Hall is also working

on a good faith and transparent governance strategy to strengthen trust between local authorities and the public. This commitment extends to enhancing electronic transparency mechanisms, such as open data platforms, that will allow citizens to access comprehensive information and further engage with their local government. These efforts collectively form a foundation for ongoing open government practices in Tbilisi, and they underscore the importance of continued research and commitment from stakeholders to ensure these initiatives contribute to sustainable and effective governance in the city.

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