

Transparency

Overview

Transparency is defined in this report as citizen access to publicly available information about the actions of those in government and the consequences of these actions. Public disclosure policies are bringing out greater information about the functioning of government and the actions of those in power. Greater information is available not only due to disclosure by governments, but also by non-government agents, such as investigative journalists and civil society groups. New media technologies broadcast information about government performance at all levels. The public availability of information, for all to see, is a fundamental part of the many prevailing definitions of transparency and is the basic concept used in this report.

Several initiatives that seek to promote transparency go beyond the availability of information to include in its definition its specific content, how it should be available, and for what purposes it should be used. The use of transparency as a tool to engage citizens to hold public officials and frontline providers accountable is prominent among these initiatives.¹ This report examines research evaluating the contention that transparency—defined as citizen access to publicly available information—improves political engagement and government accountability.

Sorting out causality between transparency, political engagement, and governance is challenging. Transparency can be an outcome of political engagement and the governance environment as much as a lever to influence governance. Government agencies' provision of information is subject to the same political economy and governance problems that transparency advocates often intend to solve.² The quality and quantity of economic data released by

governments are significantly correlated with measures of governance and political engagement (Hollyer, Rosendorff, and Vreeland 2011; Islam 2006; Lebovic 2006; Williams 2009), again likely reflecting causation in both directions.

Whether governments allow other nongovernment agencies of transparency, such as civil society and an independent press, to flourish is also an outcome of political incentives. The example provided in chapter 1 of the bribing of accountability institutions by Vladimiro Montesinos, the head of Peru's intelligence service under President Alberto Fujimori, is relevant here. McMillan and Zoido (2004) analyze the unique data obtained from the detailed records maintained by Montesinos to find that bribe payments to purchase the acquiescence of media owners was an order of magnitude greater than those paid to politicians and judges. They further describe how Montesinos was unable to purchase the support of one television channel, which continued to criticize the political regime in Peru. This channel ultimately contributed to the demise of the regime by broadcasting taped evidence of Montesinos' corrupt practices.

Different government, nongovernment, and media actors can undertake transparency interventions to bring data and information into public debate. The meaning of information from different sources—what is accurate, what is not, how it should be interpreted, and what it conveys about the functioning of government and the consequences of public policies—all matter for the effects of these interventions. For example, Glaeser and Sunstein (2013) provide evidence from experiments conducted in the United States that balanced information can intensify previously held polarized opinions. If a person believes in the information's source, then the new information will trigger a rational updating and bolster previous beliefs. In contrast, if a source is perceived to be dubious, the new information will reinforce a person's original doubts. Chapter 6 distills lessons from available research on how people respond to different types of media and transparency initiatives, and how citizen actions in turn affect governance and development outcomes.

As with other aspects of governance discussed in previous chapters, transparency is difficult to measure.³ To date, no single comprehensive index of transparency exists. In the absence of such a measure, this chapter assembles a variety of measures of different dimensions of transparency from different sources, including civil society organizations and international development partners. Transparency has spread through deliberate policy efforts to improve governance by providing information about government actions and their consequences. For example, the public disclosure of information about government budgets has been proposed as a condition for international development assistance. Civil society organizations

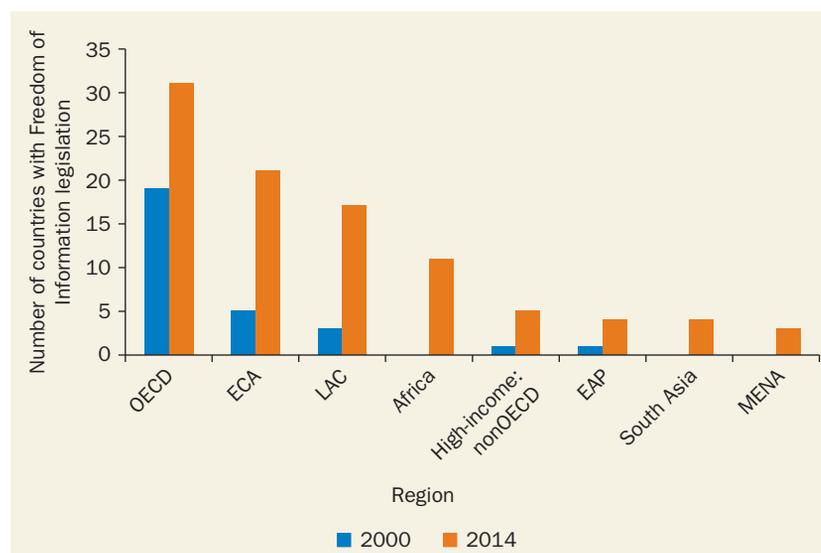
have also been making efforts to generate new information to monitor and evaluate government service provision. Finally, transparency has also grown as a result of technological forces that allow different news media to generate and broadcast information about government performance.

The following sections describe the global emergence of transparency through a combination of government policy changes, civil society actions, and the dynamics of media markets.

Government disclosure policies

One focus of transparency efforts is on the legal framework for access to information from the government. According to the data gathered by a global network of civil society organizations that advocates for disclosure policies, freedominfo.org, 99 countries have enacted right-to-information legislation as of 2014, compared with only 29 countries that had done so by 2000 (figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Number of countries with Freedom of Information Legislation in 2000 and 2014, by region

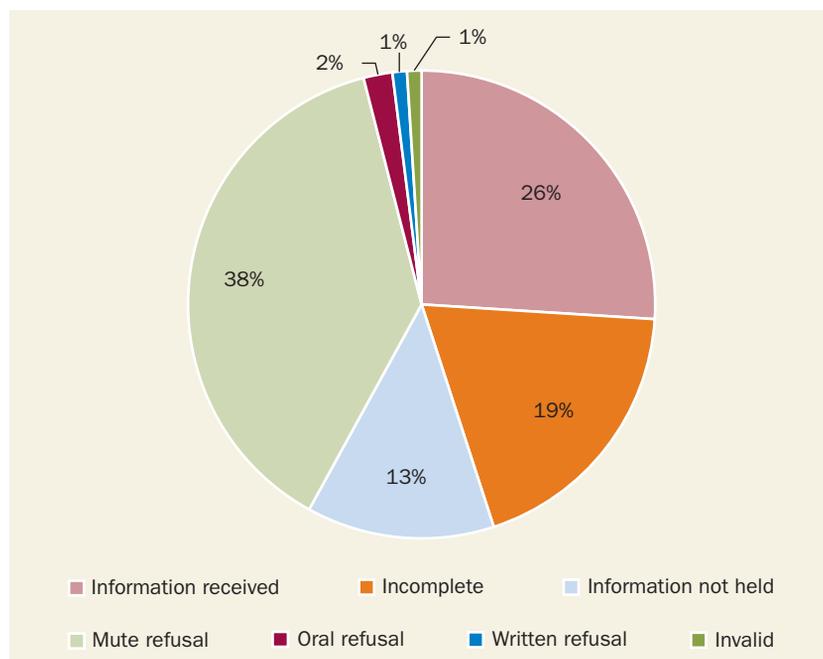


Source: Data from freedominfo.org.

Note: EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; MENA = Middle East and North Africa; OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The existence of a right-to-information law does not guarantee that citizens are in fact able to access government information in a timely, affordable manner. As a measure of actual access, in 2010, a collection of groups—the International Budget Partnership, Centre for Law and Democracy, and Access Info Europe—organized the “Ask Your Government! The 6 Question Campaign,” which made identical budget information requests to 80 governments. The requests included two questions in each of the following categories: maternal health, aid effectiveness, and environmental protection. The responses showed much progress is yet to be made (figure 3.2). Across all countries, only one in four requests was met with the full amount of information; nearly 40 percent provided no response at all. Not surprisingly, countries with right-to-information laws were much more responsive, on average, and response rates were higher the longer the law had been in place. Newer democracies or those in the developing world in particular tended to be more transparent: Georgia, India, and Namibia, for example, complied with all six information requests. Only 2 of the top 15 respondents were western democracies—New Zealand

Figure 3.2 Results of the 6-question campaign, all 80 countries, 2011



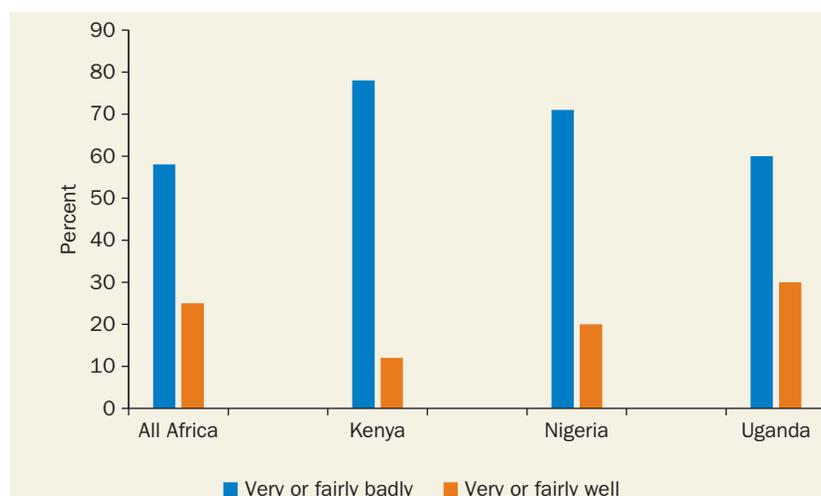
Source: “Ask Your Government! The 6 Question Campaign,” A Comparative Analysis Of Access to Budget Information in 80 Countries, 2011, Access Info Europe Centre for Law and Democracy International Budget Partnership.

and Germany. In general, established democracies performed no better than other governments with right-to-information laws. The Middle East region was the worst performer in every category by a wide margin.

Another effort to measure government transparency is the International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Index (OBI), a biennial expert assessment of the availability, timeliness, and quality of central government budget documents. The measure has expanded in scope from 59 countries when it was launched in 2006, to about 100 countries in 2015. The OBI assigns countries a transparency score on a 100-point scale using a set of survey questions that focus on whether the government provides the public with timely access to information contained in eight key budget documents in accordance with international good practice standards.

Efforts to measure budget transparency extend to the local government level. Survey data from Afrobarometer indicate that more than half of the respondents in Africa are unhappy with how well their local councils are providing citizens with information about their budgets (figure 3.3). Such survey evidence on citizens' experience with accessing information about government budgets suggests scope for much improvement in the effectiveness of transparency policies.

Figure 3.3 How well the local council is providing information about its budget, Africa and selected countries



Source: Afrobarometer Round 4, 2008–09.

Notes: The survey question is as follows: “How well or badly do you think your Metropolitan, Municipal or District Assembly is practicing the following procedures? Or haven’t you heard enough to have an opinion: Providing citizens with the information about the Assembly’s budget (i.e., revenues and expenditures)?”

One specific aspect of transparency that has been emphasized in international policy dialogue is the disclosure of how revenue from natural resources is managed. The Resource Governance Index (RGI) measures the quality of governance in the oil, gas, and mining sectors of 58 countries. The RGI scores and ranks the countries using a questionnaire completed by researchers with expertise in the extractive industries. The questionnaire is designed to assess the quality of the institutional and legal setting, reporting practices, safeguards, and quality controls. It also includes information on state-owned companies, natural resource funds, and subnational revenue transfers that are common channels for revenue flows from natural resources.

The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is a global coalition of governments, companies, and civil society working together to improve openness and further accountable management of revenues from natural resources. As a membership requirement, countries must fully disclose taxes and other payments made by oil, gas, and mining companies to the government in an annual, actively promoted report. Participation is voluntary, and as of 2014, 35 countries had produced at least one report.

Even the transparency of international organizations is subject to measurement. One World Trust's 2006, 2007, and 2008 Global Accountability Reports include a measure of how consistently international organizations publicly disclosed information and responded to information requests. Scorecards prepared by the Global Transparency Initiative have likewise rated international financial institutions' disclosure policies and information request procedures. The Aid Transparency Index produced by Publish What You Fund annually rates the level of transparency for about 70 bilateral and multilateral agencies, climate finance funds, humanitarian agencies, development finance institutions, and private foundations. In 2014, the World Bank Group's International Development Association was ranked 7th overall with noted commitment to the International Aid Transparency Initiative, while the International Finance Corporation, came in 39th.⁴

Civil society and the private sector as sources of information

Governments are not the only providers of information about their actions and performance. Civil society organizations, the private sector,

investigative journalists, researchers, and international development and global agencies use enhanced technologies and research methodologies to directly observe government actions, gather data, and draw conclusions about the consequences of government actions for development outcomes. For example, researchers have used satellite imagery data compiled by the U.S. Air Force Defense Meteorological Satellite Program's Operational Linescan System to generate new information on the performance of governments in delivering electricity to villages, finding that voting patterns of villages are a significant predictor of whether the village receives electricity (Baskaran, Min, and Uppal 2015).⁵

Civil society organizations have also been making efforts to generate new information to monitor and evaluate government service provision. For example, Uwezo in East Africa and the Annual Status of Education Report in India measure education service delivery and learning outcomes on a large scale, enabling performance measures to be computed at disaggregated jurisdictional levels, such as districts, that are managed by directly elected leaders.

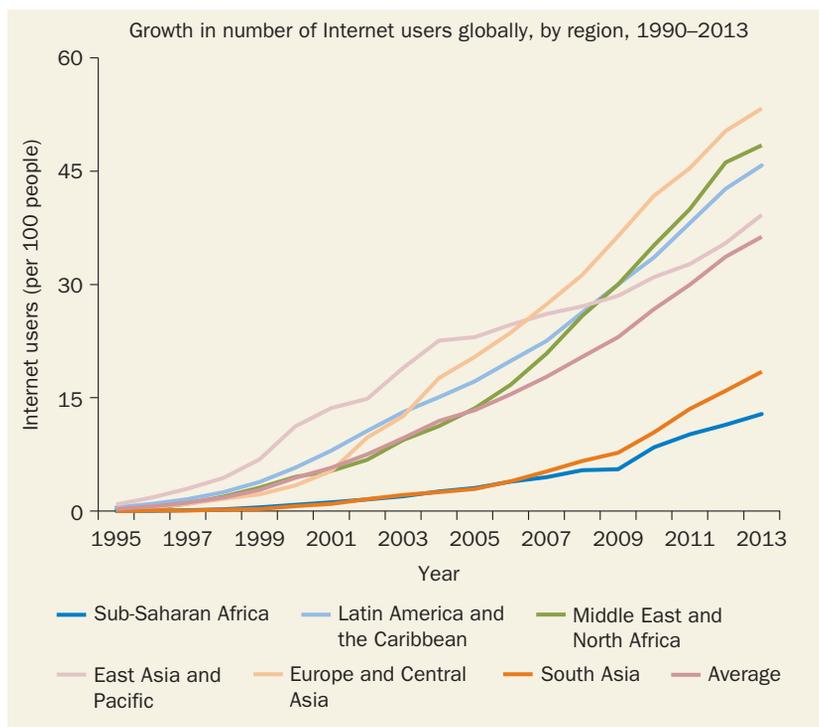
Global Integrity is an example of an international nongovernmental organization that works with local partners in developing countries to generate data about government performance through the participation of local civil society and investigative reporters.⁶ One of the areas of governance measured through their methodology is the extent to which legal frameworks for anticorruption policies in countries are effectively implemented, both at the national level and in select local governments.

In addition to civil society organizations, multilateral efforts are under way to promote transparency, notably the Open Government Partnership, which includes 65 countries. Member countries are required to make available information on governmental activities and to support civic participation. As a complement to broader commitments to transparency and good governance, several countries have implemented open data initiatives to provide greater coordination and share resources between civil society organizations to take advantage of open government data (Bayern 2015).

Media markets and technological forces

New technologies and communications media are being harnessed to widely distribute information. The Internet is perhaps the most obvious example of such technology. Figure 3.4 shows the growth in the number of Internet

Figure 3.4 Internet users, by region, 1990–2013



Source: International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Development Report and database, and World Bank estimates.

users by region. The *World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends* (World Bank 2016) finds that the Internet has reached developing countries much faster than previous technological innovations. Technological convergence or the move to a common digital platform is transforming the media globally. A significant trend is what has been called “the mobile wave,” that is, the increasing role of mobile technology in the delivery and consumption of news, current affairs, and entertainment, even in developing countries.

The leading technology companies, such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon, are playing a bigger role in the packaging and delivery of information, including news and current affairs, around the world. They are creating information curation services and even hiring journalists to help them manage these services. For instance, Facebook drives about 20 percent of the traffic to news sites (Somaiya 2014).

Google, Facebook, and Microsoft, among others, have projects around the world that are aimed at bringing Internet access to remote

communities. For instance, Facebook introduced Internet.org to make it easier for any mobile operator to sign up to offer free Internet access and basic online services. Internet.org was first launched in Africa, but has since expanded and is now available in 17 countries—including countries with very large populations such as India—spanning three continents, but only works with select operators. Facebook is now attempting to encourage more mobile operators to join the program, announcing a dedicated portal through which operators can sign up.⁷

Google has announced path-breaking projects to expand Internet access such as Project Loon, a network of balloons traveling on the edge of space, designed to connect people in rural and remote areas to the Internet.⁸ Project Loon's efforts first began in June 2013, when Google launched several balloons to heights of about 65,000 feet above Earth's surface (Barr and Greenwald 2015). Another example is Microsoft's support for closing the digital divide in India. According to Microsoft, its White-Fi technology, which uses the unused spectrum in frequencies used for broadcasting television signals, can provide free Wi-Fi connectivity to tackle the problem of last-mile broadband connectivity in India.

More and more state-owned news organizations are active globally. Several countries are setting up powerful news organizations, stretching their public diplomacy efforts into many corners of the world. The British Broadcasting Corporation is the global leader in news and current affairs programming targeting the world. Germany and France offer Deutsche Welle and France 24, respectively. The European Union has its own transnational news network, Euronews. The United States is a giant in the field, deploying Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Radio and TV Marti, Worldnet, and Middle East Broadcasting Networks. The Russian Federation has RT. China has deployed Chinese Central Television and Xinhua, China's state-run news agency. All these public diplomacy instruments are broadcasting in more and more languages in more and more countries. They also have powerful online presences. This trend implies that there are no hermetically sealed national media environments; agendas from a variety of sources are being pushed into different media markets.

Satellite broadcasting is now a major feature of the global media space, allowing programming to be beamed across national boundaries. Among the big players are SES (Luxembourg) with a global fleet of 53 geostationary satellites that together cover 99 percent of the world's population, Intelsat (Luxembourg), Eutelsat (France), Telesat Canada, and JSAT (Japan).

Satellite broadcasting is not only a massive cultural force (as a purveyor of entertainment programming), but also a force for transparency about government actions because they beam news and current affairs programming from different sources into a variety of countries. For instance, satellite broadcasting has created a virtual pan-Arab media space. According to the latest report from Digital TV Research on the Middle East and North Africa (2015),⁹ there are 34.3 million Arabic-speaking, free-to-air, satellite TV homes in the region.

Deregulation and commercialization have reduced the number of state media monopolies, especially broadcast monopolies. At independence, most developing countries inherited state media monopolies. In the 1970s, broadcast monopolies loyal to the government of the day were the norm. But in the 1980s and 1990s, a wave of media deregulation spread around the world. Perhaps because of the democratization wave or simply because state broadcasters became too expensive for many developing country governments to maintain, space began to be opened up for commercial broadcasters, first in radio, then television. Some of this movement could be described as deregulation to trusted friends, where authoritarian governments gave broadcast licenses to allies of specific regimes (Carpentier 2014; Das and Parthasarathi 2014). This trend has had a transformational impact in many countries, opening up media systems and promoting a diversity of voices. In contrast, public service broadcasting and community radio are not thriving. The trends noted above have led to more commercial broadcasting. More citizens in more countries have numerous media options, reducing the demand for public service broadcasting.

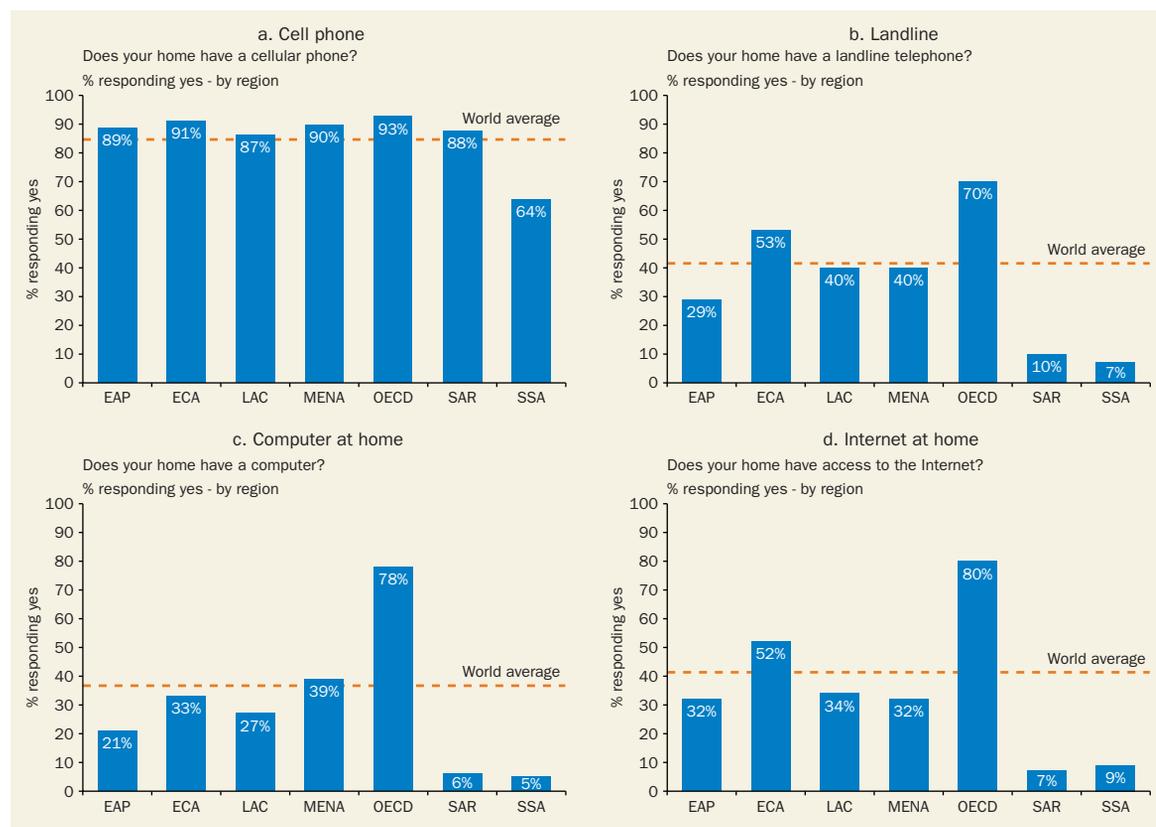
Citizens' reports on the media they use

Data from the Gallup World Poll, the World Values Survey, and the Afrobarometer survey provide insights into the types of media citizens use to access information. Cell phone penetration is about 85 percent worldwide. Even in Sub-Saharan Africa, the rate of cell phone ownership is greater than 60 percent (figure 3.5, panel a). Landline penetration is far lower worldwide and practically nonexistent in Africa and South Asia (figure 3.5, panel b). Since landline technology is older, these regions have “leapfrogged” that technology and directly adopted the new technology once they reached the level of development at which it became practical. The use of social media over

cell-phone-based platforms in the Arab Spring provides an example of how technology is enabling citizens to access information through different sources, bypassing the hurdles that might be put in place by repressive regimes.

In contrast, rates of access to a computer and to the Internet are quite low in all regions outside of the high-income Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (figure 3.5, panels c and d). This fact is important when designing transparency initiatives. Although it may seem tempting from the perspective of many development practitioners to make information available online because of the pervasiveness of that platform in the OECD, in fact there may be other media

Figure 3.5 Households' access to information technology, by region, 2007-13



Source: Gallup World Poll.

Note: EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; MENA = Middle East and North Africa; OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; SAR = South Asia Region; SSA = Sub-Saharan Africa.

better suited to disseminating information to citizens in regions with highly limited access. However, cell-phone-based platforms may enable citizens to access the Internet. Furthermore, those who *do* have access to the Internet in poorer regions may play a role in disseminating the information through older and more traditional media such as radio. In this way, new technologies can enhance the capacity of older and cheaper communications technologies that are widely used in poorer areas of the world.

The Gallup surveys suggest a striking diversity in media use across regions. Television and radio are the sources most people rely on (figure 3.6, panels b, c), with almost 80 percent of respondents in Asia

Figure 3.6 Citizens' consumption of different news media



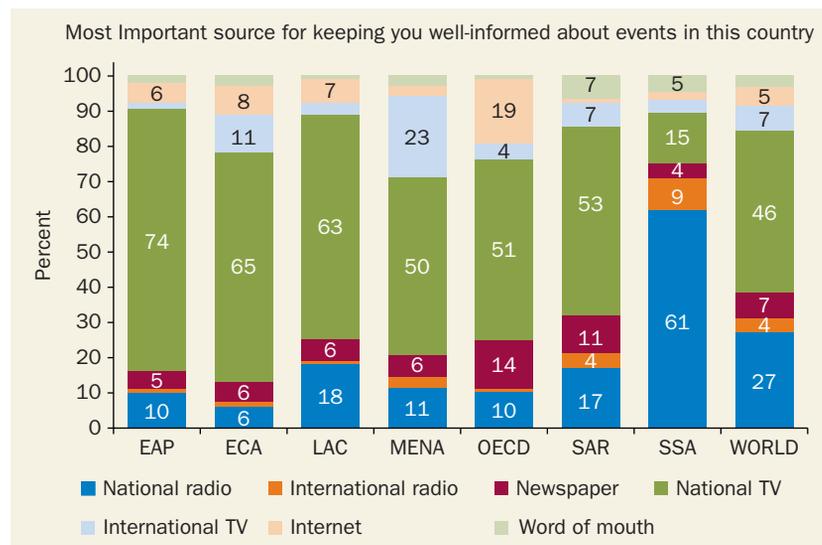
Source: Gallup World Poll.
 Note: EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; MENA = Middle East and North Africa; OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; SAR = South Asia Region; SSA = Sub-Saharan Africa.

and Latin America saying they watch TV every day. Radio is much more popular in Africa, where nearly 60 percent of people listen every day and more than 80 percent listen at least once a week. Newspaper readership, in contrast, is low, with daily readership rates of less than 20 percent worldwide (figure 3.6, panel a).

Figure 3.7 shows responses to a Gallup World poll question about the source people deem most important for becoming well-informed about events in their countries. Domestic (national) television is cited by a majority of people in all regions but Sub-Saharan Africa, where radio dominates. Radio is the most significant source of information for 61 percent of African respondents.

Although domestic sources are the most important in all regions, international radio and television also hold a degree of importance, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, where nearly a quarter of respondents said international TV was their most important news source about domestic events. One hypothesis is that if citizens are dissatisfied with the quality of information provided domestically, they may be willing to look abroad to find more trustworthy sources. It is notable in this regard that confidence

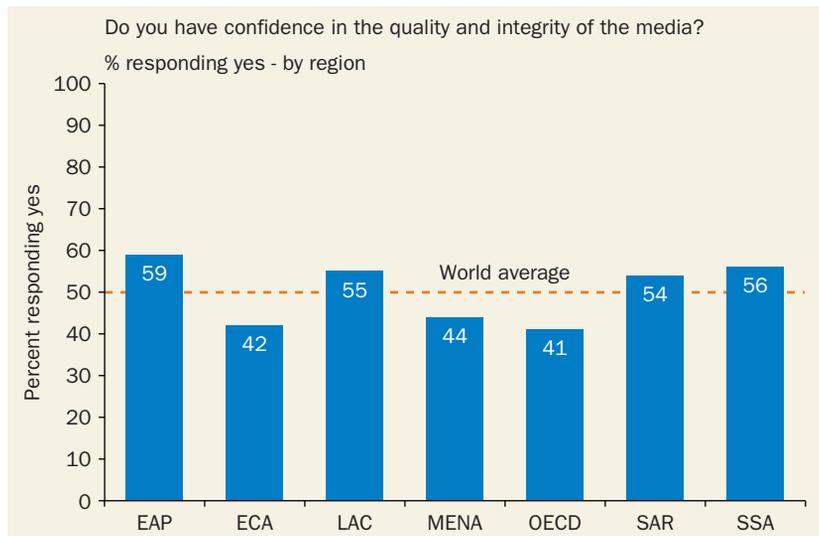
Figure 3.7 Most important media that citizens report using for news, by region



Source: Gallup World Poll.

Note: EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; MENA = Middle East and North Africa; OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; SAR = South Asia Region; SSA = Sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 3.8 Citizens' confidence in the quality and integrity of the media, by region, 2007-13



Source: Gallup World Poll.

Note: EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; MENA = Middle East and North Africa; OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; SAR = South Asia Region; SSA = Sub-Saharan Africa.

in the media is lowest in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and the OECD countries (figure 3.8), which are the three regions with the highest reported rates of reliance on international sources or the Internet (which is a global source) for news (figure 3.7).

Independence and plurality in media markets

Because the media can play a large role in transparency by monitoring government officials, informing citizens, and serving as a forum for public debate, plurality of media sources and independence from state control can to some extent also serve as a barometer for transparency itself. Developments in communications technology provide citizens across the world with access to different types of news and social media. However, the quality of the available information is likely to be shaped by who owns and controls these media. Djankov et al. (2003) consider 97 countries and find that in nearly all cases, ownership is concentrated in the national government or a few private family-firms who own the largest media. Government ownership is more common in broadcasting than in print

media. Based on total circulation and share of viewing, state ownership of the top five media firms is 29 percent for newspapers, 60 percent for television stations, and 72 percent for the top radio stations. Government ownership of media is higher in poor countries as well as in nondemocracies. In cross-country regressions, Djankov et al. (2003) find that government ownership of media firms is associated with less press freedom, more corruption, weaker property rights, and worse health and education outcomes.

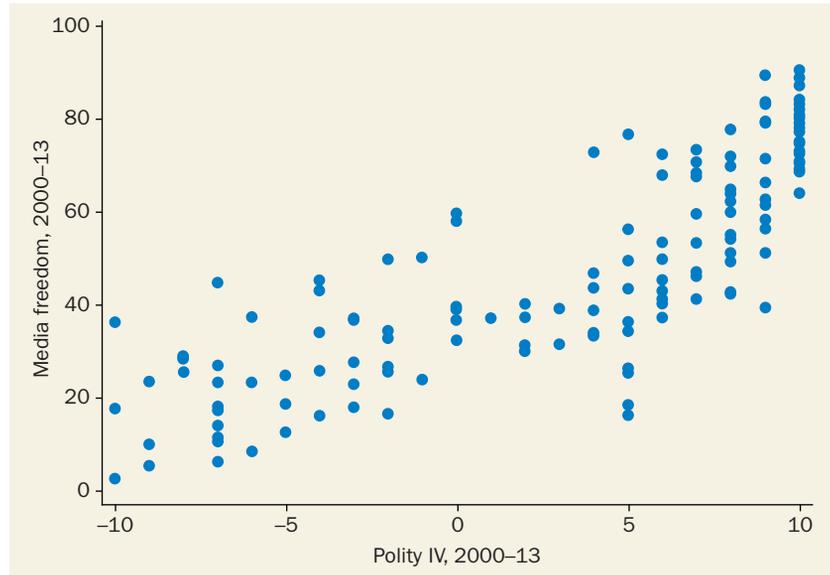
Press “freedom” is another dimension on which several organizations rate governments. Reporters Without Borders, for example, incorporates quantitative measures such as imprisonment and the death of journalists and citizens in its press freedom index, along with qualitative information reported in surveys sent to nongovernmental organizations, researchers, journalists, and human rights activists.¹⁰ The 2015 index shows that conditions for journalists are problematic, difficult, or serious in almost all regions of the world. A striking feature of these ratings is that Africa is not that different from the rest of the world. The African continent exhibits large variation, just like the rest of the world, rather than being uniformly poor on indicators of media freedom.

Freedom House also rates countries on freedom of the press. Freedom House’s methodology comprises 23 questions and 132 indicators that are divided into three broad categories: the legal environment, the political environment, and the economic environment. It focuses on the “enabling environment,” that is, the extent to which governments can apply pressure on the nature and flow of information and intimidate journalists.¹¹ The ratings of press freedom by Reporters Without Borders generally point in the same direction that press freedoms are greater in rich countries than in the developing world.

Not surprisingly, indicators of media freedom are correlated with indicators of political freedom. Figure 3.9 shows that countries that are measured as more democratic using Polity IV indicators also tend to have greater measures of press freedom, suggesting that these two forces go hand-in-hand in many countries. At the same time, countries with intermediate levels of media freedom are spread across the measures of democracy on Polity IV. That is, even countries measured as autocracies allow some degree of media freedom or perhaps are unable to fully control media.¹²

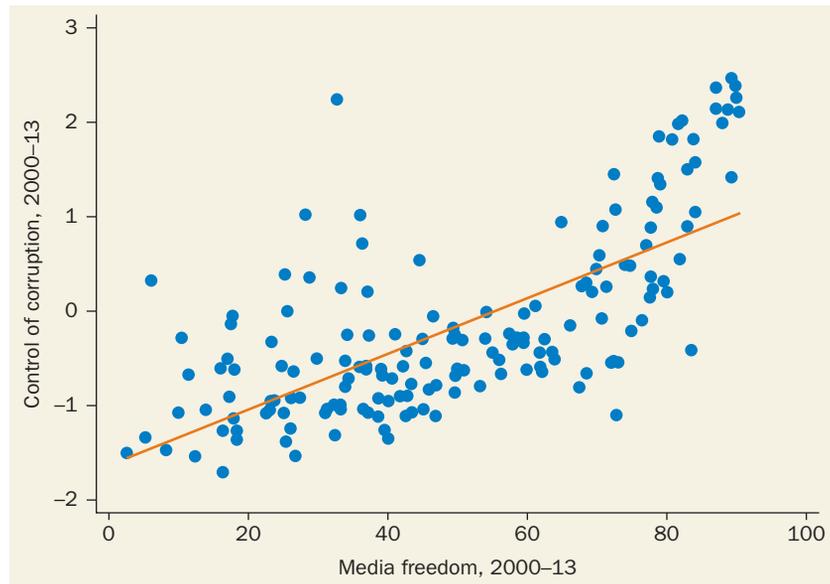
Figure 3.10 shows that there is a positive association between media freedom and the control of corruption. However, as indicated at the outset, such correlations are difficult to interpret and could reflect a direction of

Figure 3.9 Media independence across countries with different measures of democracy



Sources: Polity IV Project for measures of democracy, and Freedom House for measures of media freedom. Note: The Polity IV measures of democracy and the Freedom House measures of media freedom are averaged over the period 2000-13.

Figure 3.10 Correlation between media freedom and control of corruption, 2000-13



Sources: WGI for Control of Corruption and Freedom House for measures of media freedom. Note: WGI measures of the Control of Corruption and the Freedom House measures of media freedom are averaged over the period 2000-13. WGI = Worldwide Governance Indicators.

causation from better governance to better-functioning media markets. The research evidence on the role of mass media (covered in chapter 6) is much more nuanced and is focused on situations in which it is possible to correlate exogenous changes in media access with governance outcomes.

In sum, the trends discussed in this chapter suggest transparency is on the rise across a variety of institutional contexts. Several reasons likely explain this emergence, including international and domestic political pressure, but also the spread of market forces and information and communications technology. Transparency and political engagement, in short, are together gaining strength around the world as interlinked forces that can potentially affect governance for economic development. The following chapters use available research to probe how these forces might improve governance and strengthen public sector institutions for the goals of economic development.

Notes

1. For example, the Transparency International website contains the following description of what transparency is about (<http://www.transparency.org/what-is-corruption/#what-is-transparency>): “Transparency is about shedding light on rules, plans, processes and actions. It is knowing why, how, what, and how much. Transparency ensures that public officials, civil servants, managers, board members and businesspeople act visibly and understandably, and report on their activities. And it means that the general public can hold them to account. It is the surest way of guarding against corruption, and helps increase trust in the people and institutions on which our futures depend.” The World Bank’s public sector work also uses the term transparency to refer to the greater availability of information between government departments as well as greater clarity about government processes, rules, and definitions (Trapnell 2014). This report focuses on transparency for citizens rather than between government departments to examine the role of citizens as external checks upon those who wield power within the government. This report also distinguishes outcomes (greater clarity of government processes and rules) that depend upon the political incentives, from the input of greater availability of information. For example, government processes and rules might be deliberately clouded when it serves the incentives of leaders to use their discretionary powers for rent-seeking and providing preferential treatment.
2. A recent example related to the provision of public access to information under access-to-information laws comes from the province of British Columbia in Canada, where the province’s Information and Privacy Commissioner uncovered a “culture of suppression of information.” This culture manifested itself in avoidance of documenting government policy

decisions and an informal policy of systemic “triple deletion” of emails (see Denham 2015). The handling of emails offers an example of mounting evidence that the introduction of information and communications technology within governments can have offsetting effects on accountability and transparency. Without proper regulatory safeguards in place, new digital forms of communication make it easier to perpetrate fraud and corrupt practices and to erase records or to avoid capturing them altogether (see Lemieux 2015). In countries with independent monitoring and oversight of public access to information and media that are aware of the issue, attempts to subvert public access to information can be uncovered, forcing the politicians to change their behavior. In many countries, however, these preconditions are not met, so such behaviors often go undetected.

3. The following parts of this chapter on measures and indicators of transparency draw on background research prepared by Scott Abrahams for this report.
4. Aid Transparency Index (<http://ati.publishwhatyoufund.org/major-donor/world-bank/>).
5. In constituencies that hold special elections, state governments significantly increase the provision of electricity. Manipulation of electricity provision is more pronounced when elections are closely contested and in localities where the state government only holds a small majority.
6. Global Integrity, <https://www.globalintegrity.org/>.
7. “One Year In: Internet.org Free Basic Services,” 2015 (<http://newsroom.fb.com/news/category/trends/>).
8. <https://www.google.com/loon/>.
9. Digital TV Middle East and North Africa Forecasts (February 2015), Digital TV Research, available at: <https://www.digitaltvresearch.com/products/product?id=112>.
10. 2013 World Press Freedom Index—Methodology (https://en.rsff.org/IMG/pdf/2013_wpfi_methodology.pdf).
11. Freedom House Methodology (<http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press-2014/methodology#.VBEb32RdWDp>).
12. Egorov, Guriev, and Sonin (2009) argue that autocrats will choose to allow media freedom when they need the information generated by a free press to manage the far-flung, lower-tier public officials in their countries. Media-generated information is critical, in their argument, because it enables leaders to establish strong incentive systems for lower-level officials.

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