

The Socialization of Civic Participation Norms in Government?: assessing the effect of the Open Government Partnership on countries' e-participation

PRE-PRINT- accepted manuscript

Wilson, Christopher. 2020. "The Socialization of Civic Participation Norms in Government?: Assessing the Effect of the Open Government Partnership on Countries' e-Participation." *Government Information Quarterly*: 101476. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2020.101476>.

Abstract

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a prominent international initiative promoting open and responsive government. This includes efforts to socialize norms for civic participation in government institutions. Noting the close alignment of discourses on open government and e-participation, this analysis considers whether comparative data on countries' e-participation performance provides evidence of socialization by OGP. Comparative analysis suggests that OGP membership is correlated with higher e-participation scores, that this is not solely attributable to national political factors, but that alignment of national traditions and structures with civic participation norms has a positive moderating effect on OGP's relationship to e-participation. OGP's effect on collaborative e-decision-making is consistently more pronounced than OGP's effect on e-participation generally. This supports the assertion that OGP membership socializes participation norms in government institutions, and that this socialization effect is more pronounced in more democratic countries and in regard to more advanced participation norms.

Keywords

Open government, e-participation, civic participation, policy diffusion, socialization, Open Government Partnership

1. Introduction

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a prominent international initiative that promotes participation and technology norms to national governments. Specifically, the OGP is designed to help national governments to become more transparent, accountable, and responsive to their own citizens, by requiring voluntary commitments and collaboration with civil society in the development of national action plans. National authorities determine which issues and activities are most relevant and should be included in open government action plans, but are encouraged to align their activities with four "core values", including access to information, civic participation, public accountability, and technology and innovation for openness and accountability (OGP, 2015). At time of writing, 99 national and sub-national governments are members of the initiative, which has come to dominate international policy discourse on the use of technology by government.

One of the ways in which OGP hopes to contribute to more open and accountable government is by socializing civic participation norms within government institutions, through repeated interactions with civil society in national policy process. As articulated in an early strategy document: "as norms shift and governments become more comfortable with transparency, governments will begin introducing more opportunities for dialogue and become more receptive to civil society input and participation" (OGP, 2014, p. 15). Such processes have not been clearly theorized in the literature on OGP or open government, which is problematic because peer learning and pressure are key mechanisms through which initiatives like OGP expect to influence policy (Turianskyi and Chisiza, 2018), and because national action plans are more dominated by "low-hanging fruits" of technology projects than the participatory norms that OGP hopes to socialize (Foti, 2016, pp. 22–23).

This analysis aims to remedy that shortcoming by adopting a conceptualization of government socialization from policy studies, which understands institutional socialization as a process that occurs both within and between official institutions (Bleich, 2006), and whereby informal changes to culture within government institutions often precede formal policy changes (Björnehed and Erikson, 2018). Heikkila & Gerlak's (2013) model of collective policy learning provides a detailed account of how this occurs, whereby individuals acquire and share policy learnings within and between government institutions, gradually contributing to a cascade of learning that changes the norms and procedures within institutions, eventually also contributing to formal policy outcomes. In the OGP context, this would imply that representatives of government learn about civic participation through OGP mandated interactions with civil society, which may support collective learning processes in their institutions, contributing to policy outcomes that are not directly linked to OGP.

E-participation is a particularly rich site for seeking evidence of peripheral policy outcomes in this regard. E-participation is closely aligned with the open government agenda and has enjoyed a remarkable rate of diffusion, apace with the launch and expansion of OGP (UNDESA, 2018, pp. 112–125). Despite significant scholarship surrounding e-participation (Cantijoch and Gibson, 2019), no research has to date explored the relationship between the diffusions of OGP membership and e-participation.

In summary, this analysis contributes to the growing body of research on open government by conceptualizing and assessing OGP's efforts to socialize civic participation norms in government institutions. It does so with reference to Heikkila & Gerlak's (2013) model for policy learning, which would suggest that socialization results in civic participation policy outcomes that are peripheral to OGP-specific policy processes. It then seeks evidence

of such outcomes in the global diffusion of e-participation, and applies causal analysis to correlations between OGP and e-participation in order to assess whether those correlations can be attributed to an OGP socialization effect. This is operationalized according to the first two research questions presented below. The third research question considers in which contexts socialization might be most effective, in relation to national political factors.

RQ1: To what extent can the diffusion of e-participation be attributed to OGP?

RQ2: To what extent can OGP's contribution to e-participation diffusion be explained as the mediation of national contextual factors?

RQ3: To what extent do national contextual factors moderate OGP's contribution to the adoption of e-participation in member countries?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Linkages between open government and e-participation

The open government and e-participation agendas overlap significantly, yet defy precise definition. While e-participation necessarily implies the use of digital media, technology is a prominent, but not necessary component of open government (OGP, 2015). While open government is often associated with publishing government information, more ambitious initiatives often involve citizen interaction that is reminiscent of the e-participation agenda (Abu-Shanab, 2015). Government activities such as setting up online consultation platforms, soliciting mobile feedback on service provision, or using social media to crowdsource citizen policy expertise, fit nicely within both rubrics. In the OGP context, "civic participation" is understood broadly to include any government-led effort to "mobilize citizens to engage in public debate, provide input, and make contributions that lead to more responsive,

innovative and effective governance" (Open Government Partnership, 2015, p. 18). E-participation is one of several types of participation that could be considered here.

The UN's E-Government Survey describes three stages of e-participation, which governments achieve sequentially, by providing online information (E-information), engaging citizens in regard to public policies and services (E-consultation), and "empowering citizens through co-design of policy options and co- production of service components and delivery modalities " (Collaborative e-decision-making) (UNDESA, 2016, pp. 55, 141). These stages can be considered in the OGP context, where national action plans have been criticized for the prominence of open data portals (Foti, 2016), corresponding to the first stage of e-information. Examples of e-consultation and e-decision-making have been less prominent in action plans, but feature regularly in OGP guidance to countries on developing those action plans, including minimum standards for online consultations (OGP, 2016, pp. 8–12) using technology to facilitate joint-decision making (OGP, 2017a).

It should also be noted that socialization of participation norms is not the only possible explanation for correlations between increasing OGP membership and the diffusion of e-participation. It may also be the case that the same contextual factors are driving both phenomena, or that the diffusion of e-participation may be driving OGP membership. What little research exists on national motivations to join OGP suggests that each of these explanations are equally plausible (Hasan, 2016, pp. 2-3). Nor are these explanations mutually exclusive. This analysis is dedicated exclusively, however, to assessing OGP influence on the global diffusion of e-participation, as evidence of socialization.

2.2. Socialization of participation norms across government agencies

OGP mandates collaborative national action planning as a common platform for reform efforts across government agencies (OGP, 2014, pp. 4, 19). Government institutions with activities or mandates relevant to open government send representatives to national action planning processes, where they are expected to consult and collaborate with national civil society. The OGP hopes that this will increase the quality of national action plans, and that the continued exposure of government to civil society will provoke "norm shifts" within government, socializing the idea of open government within institutions and over time making government "more receptive to civil society input and participation" (OGP, 2014, p. 16). This process of socialization in OGP not clearly theorized, though the importance of institutional culture is widely recognized, particularly its capacity to obstruct open government and citizen engagement initiatives (Chadwick, 2011; Wirtz et al., 2016).

Noting the absence of a clear conceptualization of norm socialization in open government studies, this analysis turns to policy studies, where the influence of norms and information on institutional cultures has been deeply theorized (see, for example Bleich, 2006; Hope and Raudla, 2012). Heikkila & Gerlak's (2013) model for policy learning describes the ways in which individuals' processes of policy learning feed into and can catalyze collective learning processes. Most notably, they argue that collective policy learning within institutions is marked by a three-step sequence of information acquisition, interpretation and application of that information in policy contexts, and the dissemination of that information to peers. OGP processes may feed into the first two of these phases: the collective acquisition and translation of policy information. When those policy learnings are subsequently disseminated within collective groups, it can lead to collective learning

processes and products within institutions. This may take the form of cognitive changes, including "new or strengthened ideas, beliefs, or values (e.g., about the nature of a policy problem or appropriate policy solutions)" or behavioral changes, from "new or enhanced informal routines and strategies, to new or expanded programs and plans that structure group behavior, or highly formalized rules" (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013, pp. 491–492).

This model helps to explain socialization processes anticipated by OGP. If government representatives participating in OGP processes return to their institutions with new ideas or beliefs about civic participation and accountability technology, those individual policy learning products can feed directly into collective learning processes in their home institutions. Whether or not that occurs depends on a number of things, of course, including how organizational structures and social bonds operate within institutions and the "political and economic climate" in which institutional processes occur (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013, pp. 490–501). The most immediate obstacle to this dynamic is nevertheless the eventuality that the government representatives participating in OGP processes simply do not learn new policy ideas or update their policy relevant beliefs or convictions. OGP addresses this risk explicitly and targets the design of domestic policy processes to "government champions of reform [already] working to overcome resistance within their own bureaucracies" (OGP, 2014, p. 4), but does not consider how this process might be blocked by contextual factors. Heikkila & Gerlak's model provides a framework for understanding how institutional context can obstruct or enable policy learning and socialization in OGP.

2.3. National political factors as mediators and moderators

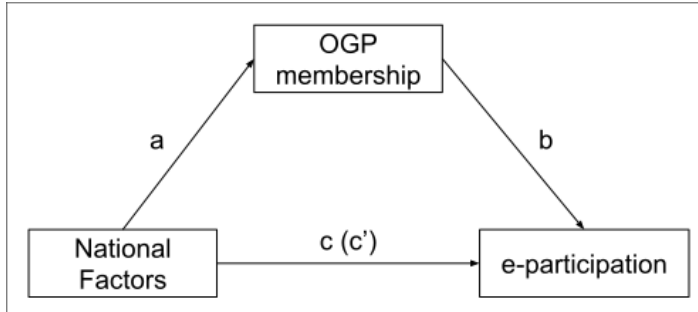
It is widely acknowledged that global norms "must always work their influence through the filter of domestic structures and domestic norms, which can produce important variations in compliance and interpretation of these norms" (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 893). This rationale is in keeping with the fact that OGP member governments themselves determine what types of open government issues and activities are most relevant in their national contexts. There is disagreement, however, about how national factors, and the quality of democratic governance in particular, affects the implementation and influence of OGP in participation countries. Two main propositions can be delineated.

Firstly, it has been noted that OGP activities and commitments often pre-date OGP membership and are driven by national political factors (Foti, 2016, pp. 14–16;). As one prominent evaluation has asked: "Are countries making reforms because of their OGP commitments, or is it simply that those nations [...] would have instituted reforms regardless?" (Elgin-Cossart et al., 2016, p. 37). In the context of this analysis, the implication is that the democratic characteristics driving countries' adoption of e-participation is also driving OGP membership. By this read, OGP would simply be mediating the effect of national factors on countries' e-participation. OGP's effect on e-participation would not actually be attributable to OGP, but to the national political factors operating "in the background."

The theoretical framework for understanding this is displayed graphically in Figure 1. Causal effects are represented by arrows, including the effect of national political factors on countries' OGP membership (a) and e-participation (c, and c' when controlling for OGP), and the indirect effect of national factors as mediated by OGP (b). Mediation analysis is a

method for testing alternative explanations in causal analysis when multiple contextual factors interact in complicated ways. A simplified representation is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Simple mediation model for national factors, OGP and e-participation



Secondly, there is an open question as to whether the OGP has greater impact in more or less democratic countries. The OGP steering committee has considered proposals to raise eligibility requirements to exclude less democratic countries (OGP, 2017b, pp. 20–21), while independent evaluations have suggested that OGP might be most effective in promoting civic participation in those countries “that lean towards more authoritarian characteristics” (Turianskyi, Corrigan, Chisiza, & Benkenstein, 2018, p. 18). This can be framed in analytical terms as whether national political factors related to civic participation exert a moderating effect on OGP’s influence on national governments, and the diffusion of e-participation in particular. If domestic political factors exert a strong positive moderating effect, this would support the argument that OGP is a more powerful mechanism for socializing civic participation and diffusing e-participation in countries that already enjoy strong traditions and structures for civic participation. A strong negative moderating effect would argue for OGP’s transformational potential in countries with weaker democratic norms and structures.

Research on the promotion of international human rights norms provides guidance on which national political factors might moderate or be mediated by OGP processes. Cortell

and Davis' (2002) review of that literature identifies two primary factors. The *national legitimacy* of norms describes the degree to which global norms resonate with different stakeholder groups and as appropriate within dominant policy fora, and *domestic structures* are the institutional, legislative and administrative features that regulate state-society relations (p. 7). This analysis considers whether the national legitimacy and alignment of civic participation norms are responsible for correlations between OGP and e-participation "behind the scenes" (mediation), or if they will strengthen or weaken any socialization effect that OGP might have on e-participation (moderation).

3. Data, measurement and methods

3.1. OGP membership and e-participation

The OGP secretariat provides data on countries' implementation processes, including an overview of years in which countries produced national action plans and first signaled their intention to join the initiative through a Letter of Intent. These dates are used to indicate OGP membership in OLS regressions, data tables and moderation tests.

Measures of countries' e-participation practice are drawn from the UN E-Participation Index (EPI), which scores country practice according to three progressive stages of e-participation programming: e-information, e-consultation, and collaborative e-decision-making (UNDESA, 2016, p. 141). Data for the EPI has been collected annually or bi-annually since 2003, through purposive questionnaires to civil servants, documenting and categorizing active e-participation initiatives according to the three "stages" of e-participation. Countries receive a percentile score for each of these stages, reflecting "the level of development of each stage in each country" as determined by researchers within the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

EPI measures, instruments, and country coverage have changed over time, and the survey's methodology has been criticized for opacity, substantive over-emphasis on tools at the expense of process, and lack of longitudinal survey consistency (Potnis, 2010, p. 47). Perhaps most importantly, advocates of a multi-dimensional measure of e-participation have criticized the survey's "checklist approach" (Berntzen and Olsen, 2009, p. 135). These criticisms are sound, but however flawed, the EPI remains the best source of comparative data on government use of technology to engage with the public. Curtin (2006) argues that the EPI's methodology is most useful for assessing broad trends in practice, rather than developments associated with specific countries or regions. This is in keeping with the current analysis, which applies scores for the general EPI and for the third stage of collaborative e-decision-making, drawn from E-government Surveys from 2003 through 2018.

3.2. National Factors

3.2.1. Legitimacy of norms for civic participation

Noting the rapid policy changes that often accompany countries' efforts to join OGP, this analysis associates the legitimacy of civic participation norms with long-standing practice and acceptance. It assumes that more established traditions for civic participation and engagement represent greater normative legitimacy. Two types of indicators are used, combining within-method and data triangulation strategies (Thurmond, 2001).

Firstly, freedom of information (FOI) legislation is closely linked to open government policy and advocacy (Fumega, 2015), and the diffusion of FOI policy over the last two decades provides a useful insight into the degree to which the public's right to information

has been socially accepted. The number of years that a country has had functioning FOI legislation is drawn from the Center for Law and Democracy's Global Right to Information Index, providing an objective, de jure indicator for normative legitimacy. Secondly, Freedom House's annual Freedom in the World report (FiW) provides a subjective aggregate measure of democratic practice over time, scoring countries' observance of civil and political rights as either "free", "partly free", or "not free". The frequency with which countries were scored "free" over the last 25 years constitutes the second variable for normative legitimacy.¹

It should be noted that the FiW methodology has been subjected to significant critique, regarding both ideological biases and validity for cross-time analyses (Giannone, 2010). The question of ideological bias raises important and nuanced questions about conceptual validity in the context of national policy development. These distinctions are less important in the current effort to assess how domestic political factors mediate or moderate the effects of global mechanisms on civic participation norms. Combined with a measure of years with FOI legislation, and as an aggregate of in-depth expert assessments over time, FiW provides a preliminary measure for triangulating normative legitimacy.

3.2.2. Structural alignment with norms for civic participation

Structure is here understood as the institutional, legislative and administrative features that regulate state-society relations. The use of comparative institutional and de jure indicators for this phenomenon are well established (UNDP, 2013) including the Voice and Accountability dimension of the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators project

¹ See <http://www.rti-rating.org/country-data/> and <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world>, accessed 18 June, 2019.

(WGI). This dimension draws from just under 70 data sources² and has been subjected to a rigorous debate regarding methods and concept validity (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2007). This analysis utilizes country scores from 2014, normalized to a percentile value.

3.3. Socialization and causation

Socialization of participation norms is here understood as a casual mechanism, a way in which OGP influences and contributes to countries' e-participation practice. Though tested through quantitative methods (see section 3.4), this notion relies on a conditional understanding of causality that recognizes the complexity of causal relationships in social phenomena, and the tendency of multiple casual factors to interact and contribute to causal outcomes (Goertz, 2003; see also Mahoney and Goerts, 2006). Scholars have, for example, developed methods for differentiating between causal factors that "are neither necessary nor sufficient; rather, they are part of an overall combination that is sufficient for the outcome," and factors that are "a sufficient but unnecessary part of a factor that is insufficient but necessary for an outcome" (Mahoney et al., 2009, pp. 124, 126). This analysis does not attempt to make such fine distinctions, and recognizes that qualitative methods are best suited to assessing how multiple contextual factors would interact with OGP's socialization of civic participation (Kay & Baker, 2015; see Wilson, 2019 for an example of this applied in the OGP context). Instead, this analysis applies the quantitative methods described in section 3.4 to test for evidence of causal effects, as understood above. To do so, it first identifies a statistical correlation, and then tests temporality of effects through data tables, and the likelihood of alternative explanations for that effect through

² See <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#doc>, accessed 18 June, 2019.

mediation analysis. Doing so satisfies the three classic conditions for measuring causality: temporality, causation, and exogeneity (Kenny, 1979).

3.4. Methods and validity

For Research Question 1 (regarding the effect of OGP membership on civic participation), OGP membership in 2017 was treated as the independent variable, and 2018 country scores for e-participation and collaborative e-decision-making were used as dependent variables. Ordinary least squares regressions were run to test for correlations on 193 countries. Low R-squared values (.223, .196) for these tests raise some concerns about their validity, particularly for e-decision-making, though they are significant enough to merit tentative conclusions and to ground further analysis. Data tables and pattern matching are used to determine the directionality of that correlation for 56 OGP members. Average e-participation scores before and after OGP membership and T tests run on these numbers produced P values of less than .001, suggesting high significance and internal validity.

Research question 2 (mediation of national factors) was pursued using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2012) and research question 3 (moderation of national factors) used OLS regressions with an interaction term for moderation effects. T tests on mediation analyses and R squared values for moderation tests both suggest strong validity for these measures, particularly in regard to e-participation. The validity of tests for e-decision-making is weaker, likely reflecting the high variance in e-decision-making scores.

Tables 1 and 2 present an overview of all variables and data sources used here.

Table 1: Overview of variables and data sources used in regressions

| Type | Measure (short name if applicable) | Source |
|------|------------------------------------|--------|
|------|------------------------------------|--------|

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Independent Variable | Membership in OGP as of 2014 & 2017 (OGPmem14, OGPmem17) | OGP's online Data Explorer |
| Dependent Variables | Score on the E-participation Index in 2018 (e-part) Score for collaborative e-decision-making on the E-participation Index in 2018 (e-decm) | 2018 UN E-Government Survey |
| National Political Factors (mediating or moderating variables) | Norm Legitimacy 1: Years that a country has had a functioning freedom of information legislation (FOIAyrs) | Center for Law and Democracy's Global Right to Information Index, country data overview |
| | Norm Legitimacy 2: Frequency (%) of a "free" score on Freedom in the World Index over the last 25 years (FiW25) | Freedom House data center |
| | Structural Alignment: Score (normalized percentile) on Voice and Accountability dimension of the World Bank's 2014 Worldwide Governance Indicators (V&A) | World Bank |

Table 2: Overview of variables and data sources used in data tables (section 4.1, Table 4)

| Type | Measure (short name if applicable) | Source |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Independent Variable | Year of a country's first National Action Plan (NAPyr) | OGP's online Data Explorer |
| Dependent Variables | E-participation Index score for three surveys prior and two surveys following OGP membership | UN E-government Survey, years 2012-2018 |
| | Collaborative e-decision-making score for three surveys prior and two surveys subsequent to OGP membership | UN E-government Survey, years 2012-2018 |

4. Results

4.1. OGP effects on e-participation and e-decision-making

OLS regressions show a meaningful correlation between OGP membership in 2017 and countries' performance on the 2018 E-Participation Index, as displayed in Table 3. OGP

member countries appear to perform better by nearly 30 points on e-participation

percentile scores generally, and slightly better on the sub index for collaborative e-decision-making (though low R squared values suggest that this be treated with some caution).

Table 3: Ordinary least squares regression: OGP membership, e-participation (EPI18), and collaborative e-decision-making scores (EPI18-s3) 2018 (all countries).

| | Constant | OGPmem17 (Std. Error) | N | T | Significance | R Sqrd | Adjusted R Sqrd |
|----------|----------|--------------------------|-----|-------|--------------|--------|--------------------|
| EPI18 | .462 | .274 (.037) | 193 | 7.402 | .000 | .223 | .219 |
| EPI18-s3 | .367 | .308 (.045) | 193 | 6.832 | .000 | .196 | .192 |

To explore the directionality of the relationship, data tables compared e-participation scores before and after OGP countries produced their first national action plan. In order to capture medium-term changes, only countries that produced an action plan prior to 2015 were included, allowing for a review of two subsequent EPI surveys (2016 and 2018 or earlier, n=56). EPI scores were averaged and compared for the two surveys following, and the three surveys preceding their first NAP. As shown in Table 4, e-participation scores improved for most of the 56 countries for which data was available.

Table 4: Change in countries' e-participation scores following OGP membership

| Average change | Median change | Minimum Change | Maximum Change | Avg neg change | Avg pos change |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| all countries (n= 56) | | | | (n= 12) | (n=44) |
| 0,06 | 0,05 | -0,02 | 0,18 | -0,01 | 0,07 |

Note: all changes are statistically significant at $P < .001$ according to T test

Only 12 countries saw their EPI scores drop after producing a NAP, and decreases were modest: Jordan, Norway, Liberia, and Honduras fell by 0,02 points, Denmark, Guatemala, Czech Republic, Panama, Paraguay, Hungary, and Dominican Republic by less. Improvement was also modest, with a mean positive change of 0,7, and only 12 of the 44

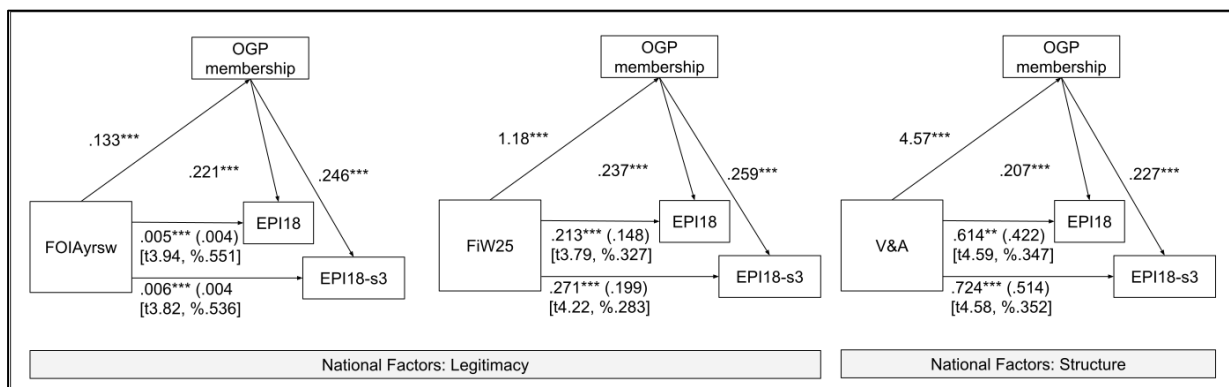
improving countries improving more than 0,10 (Azerbaijan, Chile, Costa Rica, Georgia, Ghana, Israel, Italy, Montenegro, Moldova, Serbia, Tunisia, and Uruguay).

That nearly four fifths of countries saw a rise in their e-participation following an OGP action plan nonetheless suggests that there is a directionality to the correlation presented in Table 3. This satisfies two of three classic criteria for inferring causality (temporal sequence and non-spurious correlation) but does not satisfy the criteria of eliminating alternative causes, which is typically addressed through experimental research design (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010). Lacking data for experimental analysis, the following subsection considers the alternative explanations related to national political factors, and assesses whether OGP's correlation with e-participation actually represents the mediation of national salience and structural alignment with participation norms.

4.2. OGP as a mediating variable

Bootstrapping mediation tests were run to assess whether the relationship between OGP participation and e-participation was attributable to domestic political factors operating "behind the scenes" of OGP. The full results of these tests are provided as supplementary material to this article, and displayed together graphically in Figure 2.

Figure2: Simple mediation effects of national political factors



Note: Coefficient values are assigned along each path, a, b, and c as described in Figure 1, with, *p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01. Values along the c path (national factors' effect on e-

participation) are followed by values for the c' path in parentheses (the direct effect of national factors on e-participation, controlling for OGP). This is followed by bracketed t -values for the c' path (t) and the proportion of the total effect mediated (%). Full results, including F values and adjusted R -squares are found in this article's supplementary material.

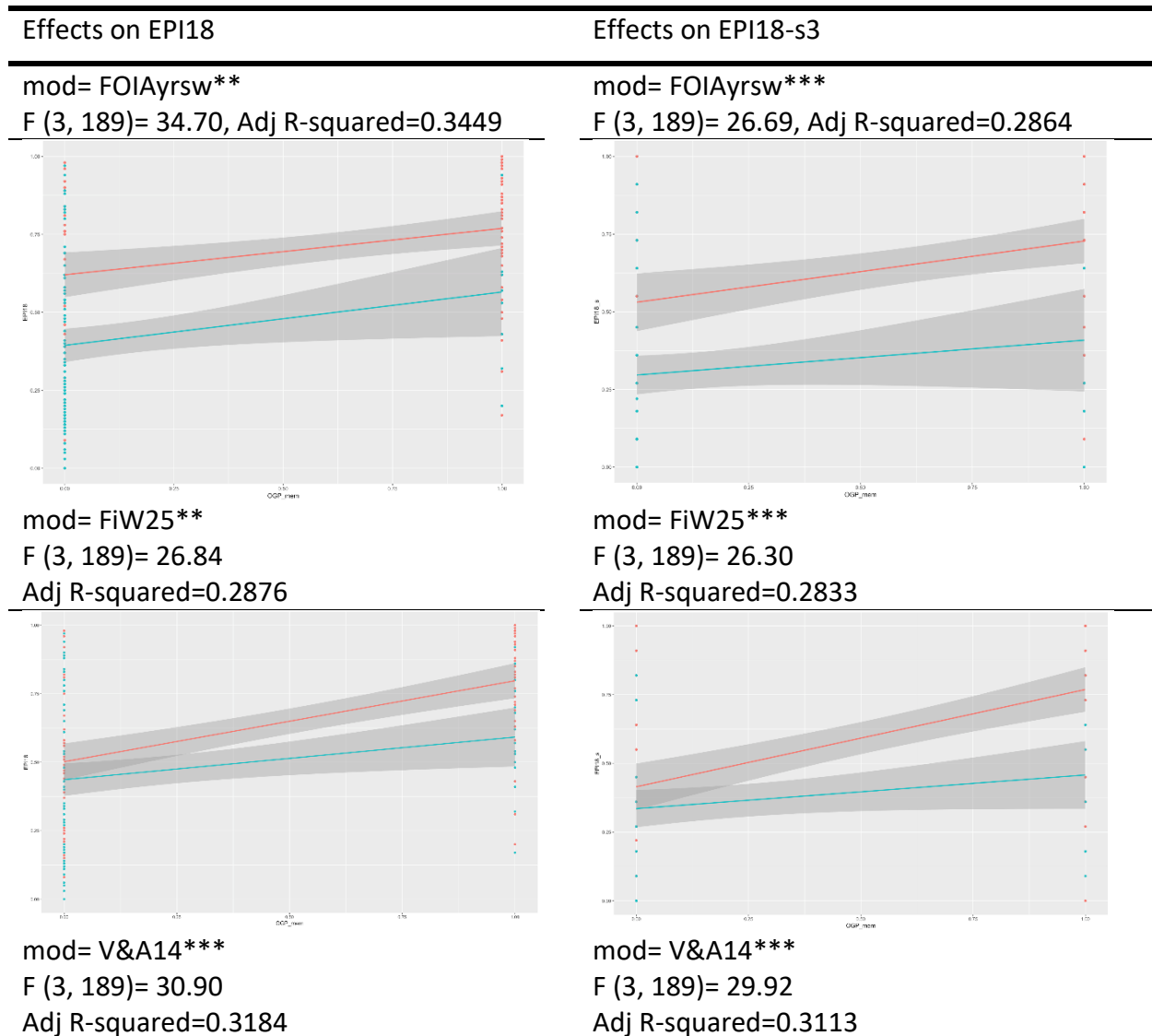
Mediation analyses reveal partial mediation across all three national factor variables for both dependent variables, as seen in the difference between effects for the c path and c' path, noted in parenthesis at the bottom of each figure. Of the three national factor variables, FOIAyrsw was the weakest predictor of e-participation variables, and this was effect most significantly mediated by OGP (55.1 and 53.6%). The other two variables had more pronounced effects on EPI scores, and those effects shrunk more considerably when controlling for the effect of OGP. OGP's mediation accounted for roughly a third of the effect on e-participation for both FiW25 and V&A. When considering the difference between e-participation and the more advanced measure of collaborative e-decision-making, the latter enjoys a slight, but consistently stronger effect from both national factors and OGP.

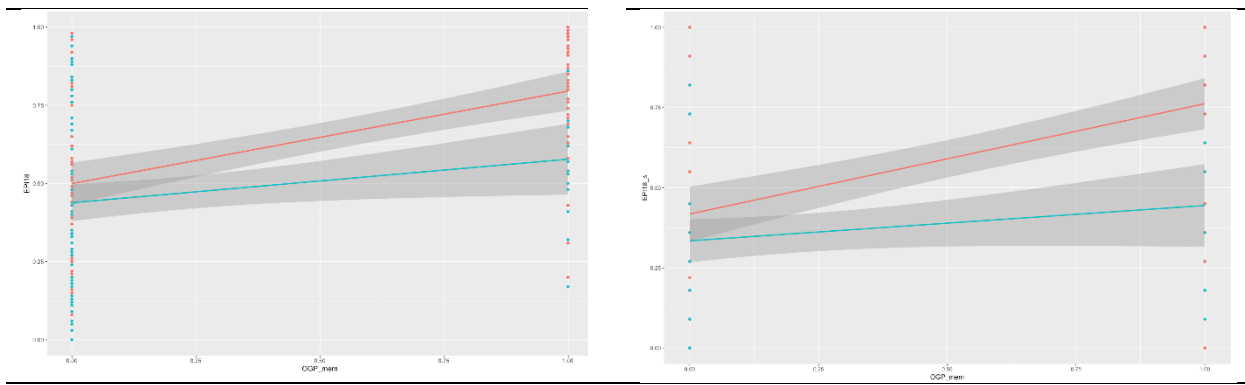
Though coefficients for the three national factor variables' interaction with OGP and EPI vary considerably (spanning .133 to 4.57 for the a path, .005 to .724 for the c path and .004 to .514 for the c' path), OGP's mediated effect on e-participation is considerable and remarkably consistent (spanning .207 to .221 for EPI 18 and from .227 to .259 for EPI18-s3), and is also consistent with the results of simple regressions displayed in Table 3. This implies that OGP's effect on e-participation interacts with, but cannot be solely attributed to national political culture or structures. Eliminating these alternative explanations adds credence to a causal reading of OGP's effect on countries' e-participation.

4.3. Moderating variables on OGP's effect

Results for moderations tests are provided as supplementary material to this article and displayed as banded visualizations in Figure 3. The red line represents OGP's effect on e-participation in countries with a score above the median value on the dependent variable (EPI18 and EPI18-s3), the blue line for countries with scores below the median.

Figure 3: Moderation effects of domestic factors, banded and visualized





Note: * $p < |t| .10$, ** $p < |t| .05$, *** $p < |t| .01$, for interaction variable coefficient

The difference in steepness of slope for each line can be read as the degree to which that variable moderates the effect of OGP membership on e-participation practice, with a greater divergence between the two lines representing a greater moderation effect.

Moderation effects are clear for FiW25 (which has an interaction coefficient of .1918 on EPI18 and .2715 on EPI18-s3) and V&A (.6293 on EPI18 and .9593 on EPI18-s3), but not for FOIAyrsw (which has an interaction coefficient of -.0147 on EPI18 and -.0136 on EPI18-s3).

5. Discussion

5.1. OGP's contribution to e-participation

This analysis revealed a significant but modest correlation between OGP membership and e-participation in member countries that is temporally sequenced on p . Mediation analysis suggests that this effect is not solely attributable to domestic political cultures and structures, which may have contributed to e-participation outcomes independent of OGP. Indeed, while traditions and structures for civic participation do significantly predict countries' e-participation scores, the strength of that effect decreases significantly for all variables when controlling for OGP as a mediating variable. This suggests that OGP membership has a causal effect on countries' e-participation in interaction with other variables, which in turn is evidence of OGP's socialization effect. It may be true that action plans are dominated by "low-hanging fruit" (Foti, 2016, pp. 22–23), and that governments

sometimes use OGP to obscure corruption (Fraundorfer, 2017) or to “get credit” for reforms and activities already underway (Hasan, 2016, p. 3). This analysis demonstrates, however, that the initiative can also be credited with socializing participation norms to such an extent that they are manifest in peripheral policy areas, in this case, e-participation.

It is worth noting that data for dependent variables in this analysis provide no contextual information on the content of e-participation initiatives at the country level. It is impossible to know whether or not they are associated with OGP-processes. The significant lack of civic participation in OGP action plans (Foti, 2016, p. 26; Wilson, 2017) suggests, however, that they are not. If OGP is contributing to the adoption of e-participation in policy contexts that are not directly associated with OGP domestic policy processes, that would in turn validate the initiative’s ambitions to socialize participation norms through continued exposure to civil society and “norm changes” in government institutions (OGP, 2014, pp. 16–17). While this has not been definitively demonstrated here, it is implied, and the theoretical framework for policy learning advanced by Heikkila & Gerlak (2013) provides a compelling explanation for how that might occur. Further research is necessary to determine the extent to which, and the conditions under which this takes place.

5.2. Effects on e-participation and collaborative e-decision-making

The above analyses suggest that OGP has a slightly greater effect on countries’ e-decision-making than e-participation in general. This was demonstrated in the simple OLS regression (revealing coefficients of .274 and .308), as well as OGP’s mediated effect in interaction with national factors (revealing coefficients between 0.221 and 0.246 for FOIAyrsw, between 0.237 and 0.259 for FiW25, and between 0.207 and 0.227 for V&A).

While these differences are subtle, they do provide important counterpoints to criticisms that OGP represents little more than "a big push for open data" (Schwegmann, 2013, p. 11).

The dominance of unambitious open data initiatives in OGP action plans is well documented (Wilson, 2017). This has raised concerns of equivocation between open data and open government in OGP action plans (Francoli & Clarke, 2014, p. 263). It may be, however, that OGP is simultaneously providing a public check-list and validation platform for open data portals that governments would have been pursuing anyway, *and* encouraging adoption of more active and progressive approaches to e-participation and collaborative e-decision-making, which are less visible in national action plans.

5.3. The moderating effect national political factors

This analysis found evidence that OGP's contribution to the global diffusion of e-participation was moderated by national contextual factors. This was particularly notable in regard to FiW5, which aggregates democratic performance scores over a quarter century, and V&A, which indicates the strength of legal and political structures for civic participation at a fixed point in time. These findings support calls to raise the eligibility requirements for OGP membership (OGP, 2017b, pp. 40–42), and to concentrate resources for the promotion of civic participation norms in countries where domestic contexts are already well aligned to those norms. It is in this sense that the OGP might act as an accelerant (Brockmyer & Fox, 2015, p. 34), providing a final nudge in contexts where national reformers, political will and institutional conditions are already in place.

It is also worth noting that the weaker effect OGP displays in less democratic contexts might involve more than a tendency to pursue "low-hanging fruit" in OGP activities. "Open washing" may also be taking place, whereby OGP membership is "coopted and used to

bolster the international legitimacy of regimes that remain fundamentally closed and undemocratic" (Brockmyer & Fox, 2015, p. 11). This reading of the moderation results aligns with Åström et al.'s (2012) findings that non-democratic countries are responsible for a significant portion of the so-called "second wave" of e-participation diffusion, but that the adoption of e-participation by those countries is primarily driven access to global economies, and that in many cases "e-participation in non-democracies does not reflect aspirations to democratize, or even liberalize, the regime (p. 148). Countries not already well-aligned with democratic norms for open government and civic participation may be more prone to use OGP to curate and validate information provision, and will be more resistant to accountability measures such as collaborative e-decision-making (Foti, 2016, pp. 22–23).

5.4. The uncertain role of freedom of information

The number of years a country has had FOI legislation diverges from the other national factors assessed here, exhibiting a much weaker direct effect in mediation analysis, and is the only factor in moderation analysis to exhibit a negative interaction term and to display a smaller coefficient for interaction with e-decision-making than e-participation. This may be partly attributable to the distribution of values in FOIAyrsw, which is a continuous measure of the years that a country has had FOI legislation (minimum 0, maximum 251, mean 51, and median value of 4), unlike the normalized percentiles of other the other two variables. Removing or normalizing values for FOIAyrsw does not significantly change the results of regressions, however, and assessing the relationship between FOIAyrsw and e-participation in scatterplots suggests that countries with the earliest FOI legislation (Scandinavian countries, USA and the Netherlands in particular) deviate significantly from an otherwise strong correlation between FOIAyrsw and e-decision-making. Limited space

precludes discussion, but it seems that long-standing freedom of information practice interacts with e-participation in curious ways, meriting further research.

6. Conclusion

The most immediate and important finding of this analysis is OGP's modest but statistically significant effect on countries' e-participation. While not definitively causal, this analysis has demonstrated that the correlation between OGP membership and e-participation is temporally sequenced, non-spurious, and not solely explainable by mediation of national factors such as the national legitimacy of participation norms or how those norms are manifest in national political structures. This is compelling evidence in support of claims that OGP processes socialize participation norms in government institutions. This analysis also revealed that national political factors exercise a significant moderating effect on OGP's contribution to e-participation, and there are notable distinctions between OGP's effect on e-participation, and the more specific variable of collaborative e-decision-making, which aligns with more ambitious understandings of civic participation norms promoted by OGP. Moderation analyses bolster concerns about "open washing" and argue against a "low hanging fruit" approach to OGP advocacy, suggesting that suggesting that open government norms are less likely to be socialized in less democratic institutional context, more likely in countries already closely aligned with those norms.

Some limitations should be mentioned. The indicators applied here, and especially regarding domestic factors, are novel and to some extent arbitrary. Additional comparative analysis with different measures for national factors might confirm or challenge these findings. Country scores on the EPI are, moreover, an imperfect measure of e-participation, plagued by methodological challenges and lacking substantive information on what types of

participatory activities are actually being measured. Further research should explore the degree to which e-participation outcomes tracked here are actually distinct from OGP action plan processes, and data should be collected to support experimental analysis confirming the causal effect suggested here. Within-case research should be applied to trace the processes of socialization that are suggested above, to validate their explanatory power and suggest conditions under which socialization is most likely to occur. Further research should also explore the curious relationship between longstanding access to information practice and low levels of e-participation. Despite these limitations, and preliminary nature of this analysis, however, there are clear theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretically, this analysis contributes to research on the drivers of e-participation by demonstrating the contribution of international advocacy efforts, which have not been significantly treated (Cantijoch and Gibson, 2019), and complements analyses that explore how national political factors influence the uptake and adoption of e-participation initiatives (Åström et al., 2012). This analysis also suggests a point of entry for theorizing the ways in which the OGP socializes participation norms in government institutions. Application of Heikkila & Gerlak's (2013) model for collective policy learning processes can be doubly productive. On the OGP side, this approach provides an explanatory model for how OGP might be expected to function as "an effective focal point where a transformative culture of openness and transparency can take root" (Basford, Webster, Williamson, & Zacharzewski, 2016, p. 11), which has not been conceptualized systematically in OGP research. This approach also demonstrates the relevance of OGP to the field of policy studies, which has to date acknowledged the roles of multilateral organizations, professional networks, and non-

governmental standard-setting organizations, but has not attended to the advocacy of multi-stakeholder initiatives like the OGP (Stone, 2012, pp. 491–496).

Practically, this analysis validates OGP ambitions to socialize civic participation norms through consultative processes, but suggests that this dynamic will be unlikely to manifest in countries not already institutionally and culturally aligned with civic participation norms. This should inform the ongoing debate on OGP eligibility criteria, and also suggests that participation advocates do not limit themselves to “low hanging fruit” in OGP deliberations, but consider advancing more progressive participation norms such as collaborative e-decision-making. Lastly, validating OGP’s capacity to socialize open government norms and identification of an effect outside of national action plans complicates the current debate on OGP’s impact and effectiveness. Donors and policy-makers should assess the initiative’s contribution to civic participation less in terms of individual action plan processes, and more in terms of long-term institutional engagement.

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