

## Local Open Government: Key Issues in Scotland, United Kingdom

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### Abstract

*This study aims to analyze critical issues of Scotland's open government. Scotland is a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) selected for the Local Government Pilot Program. Qualitative approaches and bibliometric analysis methods were used in this study. The data used were obtained from the Google Scholar database through Publish or Perish with four keywords: "Scotland information access," "Scotland transparency," "Scotland participation," and "Scotland collaboration." Data selection used Mendeley, while the bibliometric map was obtained using VOSviewer. The findings of this study indicate that open government in Scotland has been able to attract public attention. There are 168 relevant articles, 130 topics, and 20 topic clusters. The main focus topics are participation, collaboration, development, politics, community, young people, gender, justice, transparency, and freedom of information. Meanwhile, the latest and potential topics include e-participation, inequality, local authority, infrastructure, gender, capacity, culture, inclusion, Islamophobia, power, network, digital collaboration, elite, and public art. Scotland is focused on five open government commitments: fiscal openness and transparency; health service development, design, and improvement; empowering government through open data; building stakeholder networks on climate change policy; and supporting participation.*

**Keywords:** Key issues, Open government, Scotland

### 1. Introduction

Open government has emerged as a crucial strategy for administrative reform, leading many countries worldwide to develop and implement initiatives focused on access to information, transparency, participation, and collaboration. (Afandi et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2023; Astinayanti et al., 2024; De Blasio & Selva, 2019; Gil-Garcia et al., 2020; Pradnyawati & Antari, 2024). Many governments have broadened the scope of open government initiatives. For instance, the Obama administration introduced the Open Government Directive in 2009 and played a key role in founding the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a global effort to advance open government practices. (Afandi, 2024; Mindarti et al., 2024; Moon, 2020; Pangestu, 2023; Schmidhuber & Hilgers, 2021).

The Open Government Partnership is founded on the principle that open government is more accessible, responsive, and accountable to citizens. Enhancing the relationship between citizens and government is believed to provide long-term and significant benefits for everyone involved. (Afandi, Afandi, et al., 2023; Ruijter & Meijer, 2020; 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 (Gao et al., 2021; Ingrams, 2020; Ruijter et al., 2020).

The Open Government Partnership is a broad partnership that offers numerous benefits to its members at national and local levels. Being part of a local OGP encourages open reforms and aligns with the local government's vision and mission to achieve levels of accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and transparency. Through membership in this global community, local governments can gain new information on implementing open government, share views, experiences, and resources, and work towards achieving the principles of open government. The Open Government Partnership has launched the Local Government Pilot Program, recognizing that much open government innovation and reform is happening locally, 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, South Cotabato, Elgeyo Marakwet, Jalisco, Kaduna State, La Libertad, Sao Paulo, Sekondi-Takoradi, Seoul, Tbilisi, Paris, Madrid, and Scotland.

Scotland is the only local government in the United Kingdom selected for this program. Four local governments have joined OGP: Scotland, Glasgow, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and Northern Ireland. Scotland's selection for this program makes them play a significant role in the open government efforts in the United Kingdom. Scotland has made fifteen open government commitments, covering financial transparency, measuring Scotland's progress, delivering a fairer Scotland, participatory budgeting (also known as community choices in Scotland), increasing participation, financial and performance transparency; open policy making and participation in service delivery; improve data use; public service accountability; transparency and participation; powering participation in Scotland; establish an open government stakeholder network to deliver on participation and engagement requirements across key milestones for climate change policy; supporting government openness, transparency, and empowerment through open data; improving and increasing both service user/participant, and service delivery staff, in the development, design, and improvement of health and care services in Scotland; dan fiscal openness and transparency-improving the accessibility and usability of our data and information about the public finances. This research aims to analyze the main issues of local open government in Scotland.

## 2. Methods

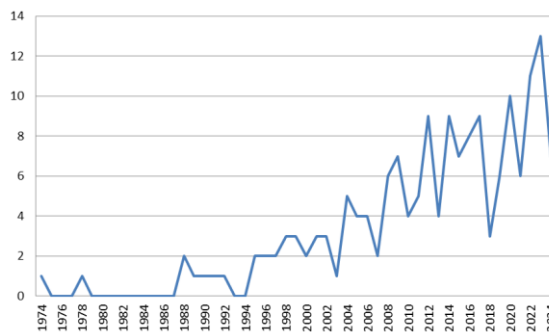
This study employs a qualitative approach combined with a bibliometric analysis method. Bibliometric analysis involves examining scientific literature within a specific field or topic to gain insights. (Donthu et al., 2021; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). This method is used to identify trends and emphasize key insights derived from scientific literature. (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019; Kulsum et al., 2022). The data used were obtained from the Google Scholar database via Publish or Perish with four keywords: "Scottish information access", "Scottish transparency", "Scottish participation", and "Scottish collaboration", based on the main principles of open government. The data was used in the period until August 2024. The data obtained were 224 articles, while the data used were 168 articles based on the main principles of open government. The data was stored in RIS format, selected using Mendeley, including completing the author's keywords, and analyzed using



VOSviewer to obtain a bibliometric map.

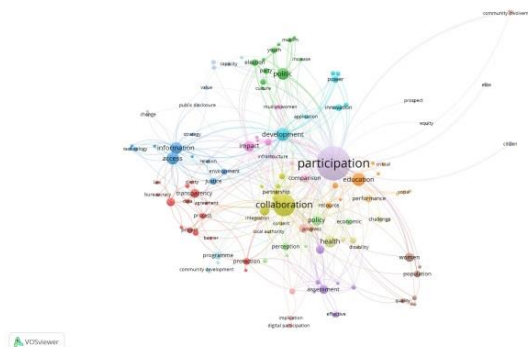
### 3. Results and Discussion

One hundred and sixty-eight relevant articles were found in the last half-century. The first article was published in 1974, and the latest in 2024. No articles were found in 1975-1977, 1979-1987, and 1993-1993. One article was published in 1974, 1978, 1989-1992, and 2003; two articles were published in 1988, 1995-1997, 2000, and 2007; three articles were published in 1998-1999, 2001-2002, and 2018; four articles were published in 2005-2006, 2010, and 2013; five articles were published in 2004 and 2011; six articles were published in 2008 and 2021; seven articles were published in 2009, 2015, and January-August 2024; eight articles were published in 2016; nine articles were published in 2012, 2014, and 2017; ten articles were published in 2020; eleven articles were published in 2022; and thirteen articles were published in 2023 (see Figure 1). Although fluctuating, there was an increase in publications in 2022-2023 and a potential increase in 2024. These trends indicate that the study of Scottish open government is famous and in demand.



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

Network visualization (Figure 1) displays topic relationships (Irfan et al., 2023). No duplicate topics are displayed in this visualization. Identical topics that appear in many articles are counted as a single topic (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019). 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. The lines between topics represent links, while the location of each topic indicates the closeness of the relationship (Ham et al., 2019; Lnenicka & Saxena, 2021).



**Figure 1. Network visualization**



(Source: Processed by the Author, 2024)

The Scotland, open government study, has 130 topics, 20 clusters, and 1199 link strengths. Participation (201 total link strengths); collaboration (74 total link strengths); development (43 total link strengths); access (38 total link strengths); information (35 total link strengths); health (35 total link strengths); impact (32 total link strengths); politic (29 total link strengths); education (26 total link strengths); community (22 total link strengths); assessment (21 total link strengths); policy (21 total link strengths); service (19 total link strengths); young people (16 total link strengths); comparison (16 total link strengths); gender (15 total link strengths); justice (14 total link strengths); transparency (13 total link strengths); election (13 total link strengths); environment (13 total link strengths); perception (13 total link strengths); freedom of information (12 total link strengths); protection (12 total link strengths); program (12 total link strengths); and performance (12 total link strengths) are the list of topics that dominate. These topics are the main focus of the Scotland Open Government study.

**Table 1. Topic Clusters**

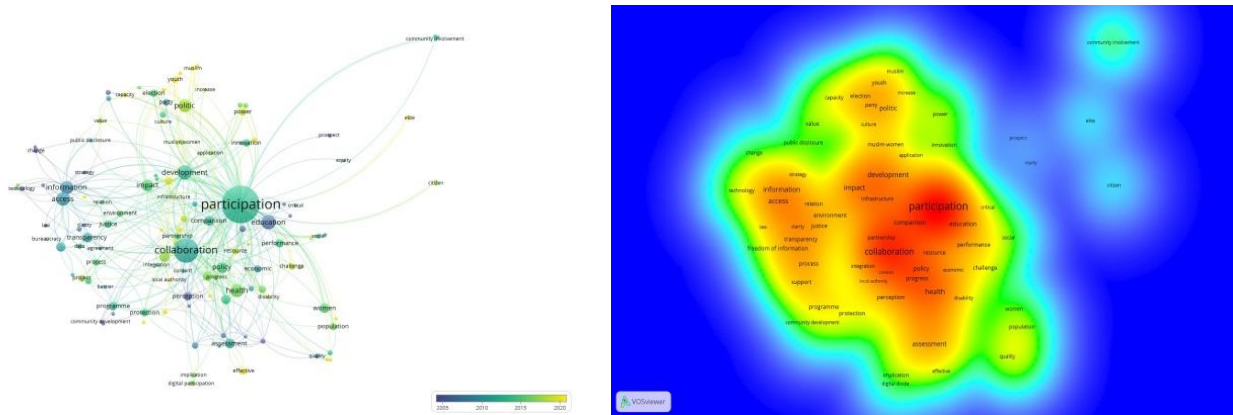
Clusters	Topics
1	transparency, freedom of information, protection, process, support, project, legislation, barrier, data, agreement, campaign, clarity, law, bureaucracy, social security
2	politic, election, muslim, parliament, party, democracy, inclusion, islamophobia, culture, increase
3	access, information, justice, environment, relation, technology, skill, social structure, strategy, cost, knowledge
4	collaboration, community, governance, partnership, engagement, improvement, voluntary, integration, content, local authority
5	assessment, service, risk, private sector, social care, effective, e-participation, trust
6	development, power, conflict, local planning, innovation, application, community empowerment, public-private collaboration
7	education, resource, progress, implementation, critical, digital collaboration, social analysis, society
8	women, population, quality, socioeconomic, influence, mobility, minority ethnic
9	impact, gender, muslim women, equality, infrastructure, religion, website
10	young people, investigation, implication, social class, digital divide, digital participation
11	policy, perception, economic, inequality, intervention, countryside management
12	capacity, value, decision-making, public disclosure, representation, planning
13	health, framework, challenge, standard, disability, opportunity
14	participation, citizen, energy, equity, prospect



15	programme, community development, empowerment, rural development
16	performance, social, network, promotion
17	community involvement, public art, tyranny
18	comparison, social network
19	elite, social capital
20	change, effect

Source: Processed by the Author, 2024

The overlay visualization (see Figure 2) is identical to the network visualization except for the colors. This visualization's colors range from blue (lowest score) to yellow (highest score). Current topics of interest in the Scotland open government study include e-participation, practical, social security, intervention, inequality, local authority, cost, voluntary, engagement, social class, infrastructure, gender, Muslim, capacity, democracy, culture, youth, inclusion, islamophobia, power, community empowerment, social capital, elite, network, digital collaboration, disability, influence, mobility, and minority ethnic. These topics allow for potential future studies of Scotland's open government.



**Figure 2. Overlay visualization and Density visualization**

(Source: Processed by the Author, 2024)

Based on the visualization above (see Figure 2), topics outside the main clusters that allow for potential studies of open Government in Scotland include prospect, equity, elite, citizen, public art, and community engagement. These topics are not firmly integrated with the main issues of open Government in Scotland, so it is exciting and essential to contribute to Scotland and support its efforts to be more open. Scotland is currently focused on five of its fifteen open government commitments, including fiscal openness and transparency. As the devolution process progresses, the Scottish Government will have more autonomy or choices in implementing economic and social policy decisions to advance the national outcomes in the national performance framework. The additional powers and responsibilities are intended to increase accountability and financial oversight but also bring greater complexity.

The Scottish Government aims to provide comprehensive, accurate, reliable, timely,



and interconnected fiscal data that is accessible, usable, and understandable by a broad audience, including open fiscal data for public reuse. This initiative seeks to enhance public understanding of how finances are managed, build trust in government data, and allow stakeholders to examine how, where, and why decisions are made. It also aims to boost financial accountability by improving the efficiency of data production and publication, facilitating more effective consultations, and making information more accessible, reusable, and understandable. By offering more transparent and accessible financial, procurement, and performance data, the government promotes greater transparency, allowing citizens, think tanks, researchers, and other stakeholders to better understand decision-making processes. This increased transparency supports citizen engagement and participation through both traditional and modern channels. In the long run, this effort is expected to foster greater fiscal openness and public involvement in government policy, ultimately advancing financial transparency and accountability throughout the Scottish Government, and embedding open government principles into its operations.

*They were second,* The Scottish Government prioritizes developing, designing, and improving health services that are person-centered, ensuring that the voices of service users are heard and can influence how services are designed and delivered. By applying open government principles, Scotland is working towards enhancing user participation and engagement in the design and delivery of health and social care services. This commitment aims to create better systems for involving individuals in shaping policies and services that cater to their needs. The Scottish approach to service design emphasizes the importance of forming multidisciplinary teams that include both service users and provider staff. The government is dedicated to this model, ensuring that post-pandemic service redesign and recovery will make it easier for people to co-design the services they need. This action seeks to embed co-design principles in health and social care policy, involving everyone—employees, partners, customers, citizens, and end users—in the design process. By doing so, Scotland aims to ensure that the services meet the needs of those involved and are practical and usable, empowering people to collaborate based on their lived experiences.

This commitment aims to ensure that the Scottish Government has an effective process for involving communities in the co-design of health and care services. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of involving communities as equal partners in driving change and highlighted the need for participatory evaluation. By applying these principles, Scotland is developing services that cater to both users and providers. Co-designing services with communities helps ensure timely access to necessary services, reducing barriers to care. By creating services that meet the needs of users and workers, efficiency is increased, leading to cost and time savings. This approach can also serve as a model for broader policymaking. In the long run, this commitment provides an opportunity to embed person-centered design and user participation into efforts to improve health and social care, in line with open government principles of engagement and innovation. It promotes a transparent, accountable, and user-centered approach, aligning with the broader goal of integrating open government principles across government operations. The Scottish Government acknowledges that engaging people and ensuring accessible participation in service design will better address the needs of both users and workers, while building accountability into



the process.

The third priority is empowering the government through open data. Scotland's Digital Strategy envisions becoming a data-driven nation, recognizing the transformative potential of data to boost transparency, empower citizens, enhance services, drive innovation, and improve outcomes. The pandemic underscored the critical role of data in saving time, money, and lives. By publishing and sharing open data internally, Scotland seeks to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance services. The goal is to make more public sector data openly available and easily accessible, enabling citizens, businesses, and developers to use this data for decision-making at various levels. Published data should be user-friendly, provide meaningful insights, and support informed decision-making. Scotland's approach should be shaped by understanding the diverse needs of different audiences and focused on achieving positive outcomes while reducing the complexity of data use and reuse. Additionally, Scotland is exploring ways to engage groups that are less involved with data, taking equity and skills into consideration. The process of using data in decision-making is just as important as the data itself, and Scotland is committed to using trusted, ethical, and inclusive artificial intelligence, as outlined in the Scottish AI Strategy.

Scotland is adopting a supportive approach to developing open data infrastructure by sharing valuable insights from various use cases across thematic areas, in line with its commitments. This methodology involves learning from best practices, understanding user needs, identifying and sharing relevant use cases, ensuring continuous improvement, and fostering connections between data users and producers to enhance data usability. Scotland has published several key strategies, including the Scottish Digital Strategy and the Scottish AI Strategy, which highlight the transformational power of data and AI in promoting transparency, empowering individuals, improving services, fostering innovation, and achieving better outcomes. These commitments aim to serve as a catalyst, aligning the ambitions of these strategies with open government principles. By focusing on specific thematic areas, Scotland connects open data to the value it aims to generate, driving greater engagement across civil society and government, and ensuring alignment with open government commitments.

Fourth, it is essential to build stakeholder networks around climate change policy. The Scottish Government aims to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 in a fair and equitable way for all. To achieve the systemic transformation required for this goal, it is crucial that stakeholders, communities, and citizens are informed about the global climate emergency and Scotland's climate change policies, understand how these policies impact their lives, and participate in their implementation. Engagement is key to ensuring that all groups are involved in Scotland's climate ambitions and contribute to the collective effort needed. To reach a wide range of audiences and enable participation in climate change policy, collaboration with diverse organizations across Scotland is necessary, as they are best positioned to carry out this work. Currently, no single platform exists to bring these organizations together with climate policymakers. Following the just transition approach and the principles of the Public Engagement Strategy for Climate Change (PES), there is a need to consolidate and expand existing stakeholder groups, streamline the consultation process, and leverage these networks to create new opportunities for public participation



and engagement in climate action.

A core group of stakeholders was initially formed to collaboratively develop the terms of reference for the network, establish governance structures, and outline the membership selection process. This provided a clear understanding of the network's purpose and a solid foundation for starting the co-creation process. The Open Government Partnership took its first step by creating a stakeholder network aimed at supporting participation and engagement in various aspects of climate change policy implementation. With an existing climate policy framework in place, the network's focus was more on execution than policy design, though it was open to adjustments if necessary. The network will bring together a diverse range of stakeholders, serving as a platform to gather advice on climate policy issues through various methods. Its primary goal is to promote greater participation in implementing key climate policies, ensuring that the objectives of these policies are met. This stakeholder network has the potential to offer guidance, enhance accountability, and provide transparency on Scottish Government actions. It also establishes a strong, representative platform for co-creating new opportunities that uphold the principles of openness, transparency, and accountability. Milestones will be updated as needed. In the long term, the aim is for people in Scotland to actively participate in shaping and delivering fair, inclusive policies that advance climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Fifth, supporting participation. The Scottish Government is dedicated to human rights, equality, inclusion, and participatory democracy, but it acknowledges the current lack of diversity in decision-making processes. Intersectional approaches are rarely adopted, and participation methods do not effectively address inequalities. There is limited representation from diverse groups within civil society, and many key organizations do not see themselves as vital contributors to creating an inclusive participatory culture. Scotland has a Participation Framework (PF), but it is underused and requires improvement to prioritize inclusion and equality, extending its impact beyond just government use. The PF aims to integrate human rights, equality, and the rights of children and young people into decision-making processes, providing a legislative foundation and guidance. A recent review of the PF recommended changes, particularly emphasizing the need for participation to be designed with those "furthest from" government in mind. This commitment seeks to enhance the PF by making it more inclusive and equity-focused, connecting policy and practice with tools, advice, and skills to support community engagement. It also aims to improve access to participation resources and ensure participation is designed with equity of access in mind. This involves addressing barriers related to understanding, skills, transparency, and accountability, while focusing on inclusive design and feedback mechanisms for participants.

Innovative democratic practices, such as participatory budgeting, citizens' assemblies, digital platforms, and targeted discussions with specific groups, are being strengthened. The Participation Framework (PF) offers guidance to institutionalize these methods, ensuring a more systematic approach and preventing the creation of unmet expectations that could result in further exclusion. In the long term, this commitment aims to embed meaningful and high-quality participation throughout the Government's work, supporting the delivery of other commitments in a participatory and inclusive way.





**Tabel 2. Scotland's Commitment**

No.	Commitments	Policy Potential
1	Fiscal openness and transparency	Encourage fiscal openness and increased public participation in government policies that allow for greater financial transparency and accountability
2	Health service development, design, and improvement	Create people-centered design and user participation in efforts to improve health service delivery. Support a people-centered approach that is open, transparent, and accountable
3	Empower government through open data	Link open data to the value it aims to generate. Foster increased engagement across both civil society and government, and ensure clear alignment with open government commitments.
4	Build stakeholder networks on climate change policy	Active participation of all interest groups in shaping and delivering inclusive policies that promote climate change mitigation and adaptation
5	Support participation	Create high-quality and meaningful participation across government work and support other commitments to be delivered in a participatory manner

Source: Processed by the Author, 2024

#### 4. Conclusion

The study of Scotland's open government has become popular and in demand. There are 168 relevant articles, the first published in 1974 and the latest in 2024. This study found one hundred thirty topics and 20 clusters of Scotland's open government. The main focus topics are participation, collaboration, development, access, information, politics, community, assessment, policy, service, young people, gender, justice, transparency, election, freedom of information, protection, program, and performance. Meanwhile, the latest and potential topics include e-participation, practical, social security, intervention, inequality, local authority, cost, engagement, social class, infrastructure, gender, capacity, democracy, culture, youth, inclusion, Islamophobia, power, community empowerment, social capital, network, digital collaboration, mobility, minority ethnic, prospect, equity, elite, citizen, and public art.

Scotland focuses on five open government commitments: 1) Fiscal openness and transparency. This commitment can drive fiscal openness and increase public participation in government policy, enabling greater financial transparency and accountability. 2) Health service development, design, and improvement. This commitment can create a person-centered design and user participation in improving health service delivery and supporting



an open, transparent, and accountable person-centered approach. 3) Empowering government through open data. This commitment can potentially link open data to the value it seeks to create. Encouraging greater engagement across civil society and government and creating precise alignment across open government commitments. 4) Building stakeholder networks on climate change policy. This commitment has the potential to develop active participation across all interest groups in shaping and delivering inclusive policies that promote climate change mitigation and adaptation. 5) Supporting participation. This commitment has the potential to create high-quality and meaningful participation across government work and support other commitments to be delivered in a participatory manner. These findings are recommendations for stakeholders to continue strengthening their commitment, including a strategic offer for researchers to continue this study to contribute more to open government practices in Scotland.

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