OPEN GOVERNMENT: KEY ISSUES IN PHILIPPINES

by Muslim Afandi

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze key issues of open government in the Philippines. This country is one of the eight initiators of the Open Government Partnership. Qualitative approaches and bibliometric analysis methods are used in this study. Data are sourced from Google Scholar and collected using Publish or Perish (using keywords: Philippines transparency, Philippines public participation, and Philippines collaboration). The keywords are based on the main principles of open government. The data selection process and data completion are done using Mendeley, while the bibliometric map is obtained using VOSviewer. This study found 116 relevant articles, 87 topics, 437 total link strengths, and 270 occurrences. The dominant issues are: collaboration, transparency, public participation, accountability, local government, education, governance, economics, health, and extractive industries. At the same time, the latest and potential topics include: democracy, legitimacy, public service, financial reporting, information disclosure, government projects, public bidding, communication, capacity, climate change, health, public work management, disaster management, supply network, women count, sustainable development goals, and judicial consequences. Since its leading role in the OGP, the Philippines has made 75 of its open government commitments and is currently focusing on ten commitments. These commitments have the potential to create a more open Philippine government.

Keywords: Key Issues, Open Government, Philippines

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, open government has emerged as a significant paradigm in administrative reform and governance transformation across the world (Afandi, Erdayani, et al., 2024; Anisykurlillah, 2024). Historically, the notion of open government can be traced to the codification of Greek laws, while the Visigothic Code of the Kingdom of Sweden marked the early institutionalization of the right to access public information (Assyafaah & Dompak, 2024; Moon, 2020). Conceptually, open government represents a shift in public management thinking toward openness, participation, and collaboration—principles that challenge the rigid structures of traditional bureaucracy and market-oriented models (Ingrams, 2020).

Although the term *open government* is not new, its conceptualization has evolved alongside advances in information and communication technology (ICT) and growing societal expectations for government transparency and accountability (Tai, 2021; Wirtz et al., 2019). The Obama administration redefined open government as the extensive use of ICT to strengthen transparency, citizen participation, and collaboration in governance (Ingrams et al., 2020; Prastya et al., 2021). Since the early 2000s, open government has become as transformative to governance reform as *New Public Management* was in the 1980s (Moon, 2020), and it has

expanded to both developed and developing countries, including those in Asia and Africa (Afandi, 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, open government has been discussed within the broader discipline of public administration as part of the evolution from *Traditional Public Administration* to *New Public Management* and further to *New Public Governance* (Gil-Garcia et al., 2020; Mindarti et al., 2024). Within this theoretical continuum, open government operationalizes the values of *New Public Governance* by emphasizing co-production, interorganizational collaboration, and citizen engagement (Afandi et al., 2023; Moon, 2020; Schmidthuber & Hilgers, 2021). This framework shifts the focus of administrative theory from efficiency to legitimacy, and from control to cooperation. However, while the principles of open government are widely recognized in theory, their implementation and intellectual development in specific national contexts remain underexplored.

In the Philippines, the problem lies in the absence of a clear and systematic understanding of how open government has evolved as both an administrative practice and a field of scholarly inquiry. Although the country plays a prominent role as one of the eight founding members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), existing studies offer only general discussions on transparency, citizen participation, and accountability, without a comprehensive mapping of research trends, influential actors, and institutional dynamics. This lack of evidence-based understanding makes it difficult to assess how academic research in the Philippines contributes to the theoretical and practical advancement of open government and its connection to public administration reform. The present study thus addresses the gap by analyzing the intellectual landscape of open government research related to the Philippines, aiming to uncover dominant themes, influential scholars, and institutional networks.

The relevance of bibliometric analysis in this context lies in its ability to provide an empirical and systematic overview of research development. Bibliometric analysis allows for the identification of publication patterns, citation networks, and thematic clusters, thereby offering objective insights into the intellectual structure of a research field. Its application in this study is particularly justified for three reasons. First, it enables a longitudinal assessment of how open government research has evolved in the Philippines. Second, it helps reveal collaboration patterns and institutional influence that are not readily observable through traditional qualitative methods. Third, this method aligns with the very spirit of open government—promoting transparency, accountability, and evidence-based understanding within the academic domain.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP), launched in 2011, rests on the belief that open governments are more accessible, responsive, and accountable to citizens, thereby strengthening trust and governance legitimacy (Afandi, Afandi, et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2021). The OGP currently includes 77 countries and 106 local governments, representing over two billion people and more than 4,000 commitments worldwide (Ali et al., 2023; Erdayani et al., 2023). Among its eight founding members, the Philippines has made seventy-five open government commitments, compared with South Africa (26), the United States (148), Brazil (130), Indonesia (149), the United Kingdom (110), Mexico (87), and Norway (70). Despite this prominent position, little is known about how the concept of open government has been interpreted, developed, and institutionalized within the Philippine scholarly landscape.

Given the Philippines' foundational role within the OGP and its ongoing reforms to enhance transparency, participation, and collaboration, conducting a bibliometric analysis is both timely and necessary. This approach not only fills the existing research gap but also situates the Philippines within the broader discourse of open government and public administration theory. By mapping the intellectual structure and evolution of open government studies in the country, this research seeks to provide new insights into how academic production supports governance innovation and strengthens democratic accountability in the Philippines.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a bibliometric analysis method. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative technique used to examine scientific literature within a specific domain or topic to identify research trends, intellectual structures, and thematic developments (Donthu et al., 2021; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). This method allows researchers to highlight critical insights generated from existing academic works and to map the evolution of scholarly discourse in the field (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019; Kulsum et al., 2022).
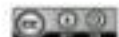
The data were obtained from the Google Scholar database through the Publish or Perish software using three primary keywords: "Philippines transparency," "Philippines public participation," and "Philippines collaboration." These keywords were deliberately selected because they represent the three fundamental pillars of open government—transparency, participation, and collaboration—within the context of public administration. The focus on these terms ensures that the retrieved literature accurately reflects the multidimensional nature of open government practices in the Philippines, encompassing both institutional and citizen engagement aspects.

The use of Google Scholar as the primary data source was intended to capture a wide range of scholarly publications, including journal articles, conference papers, and reports that might not be indexed in commercial databases. The inclusion criteria covered all documents published between 2010 and 2025, written in English, and explicitly discussing open government themes in the context of the Philippines. Studies that focused on other countries, general e-government topics without explicit reference to open government, or documents lacking bibliographic completeness were excluded.

All data were exported in RIS format and organized using Mendeley for reference management and metadata refinement, including the completion of missing author keywords. The cleaned dataset was then analyzed using VOSviewer to generate a bibliometric map, with the analysis type set to co-occurrence, the analysis unit defined as keywords, and the counting method applied as complete counting. This approach enables the visualization of thematic clusters and the identification of dominant research patterns within the open government literature in the Philippines.

3. Results and Discussion

An examination of the graph depicting the trend in open government publications in the Philippines from 1982 to 2024 reveals contrasting patterns of development between the early period and the current period (see Chart 1). During the early phase, from 1982 to approximately 2000, the number of publications was minimal, with an annual average of only one to three

articles. There were numerous years with no publications, including 1983–1986, 1989–1990, and 1996–1998. The paucity of scientific output during this period is indicative of the fact that the issue of government transparency had not yet become a significant focal point of research in the Philippines. At that time, the political and academic context was predominantly focused on the post-Marcos transition agenda and general development (Abueva, 1986). In the early 2000s, the number of publications increased steadily, although it remained relatively low. A notable peak was observed in 2006, with six publications. This increase can be attributed to the launch of the Philippine Strategic ICT Roadmap, which began to introduce an e-government framework as part of bureaucratic modernization (Bannister & Connolly, 2012).

Subsequent to 2011, when the Philippines became a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a considerable number of changes occurred. This development subsequently led to an increase in research activities over the subsequent decade. A notable peak in publication activity was observed in 2016, with nine publications, coinciding with the launch of the second edition of the Philippine Open Government National Action Plan and the transition of government from Benigno Aquino III to Rodrigo Duterte. This moment has given rise to a significant academic discourse surrounding the question of whether commitments to openness endure in the face of political transformation (Caruncho & Coronel, 2017). Another vital peak emerged in 2020, with nine publications, which were closely linked to data openness policies and public reporting related to the pandemic. This included the implementation of the "Response Transparency Measures" that strengthened public access to health data and social assistance (Mergel et al., 2020).

While the number of publications remained relatively high in the years following 2020, a decline in the trend became evident starting in 2022 (five publications), 2023 (four publications), and 2024 (two publications). This decline can be attributed to a shift in research focus to new issues such as digital governance and post-pandemic recovery. The graph illustrates the transformation of open government research in the Philippines from an almost neglected issue to one of the key areas of study in the public policy domain. There is a peak in academic activity coinciding with the implementation of strategic policies and global events.
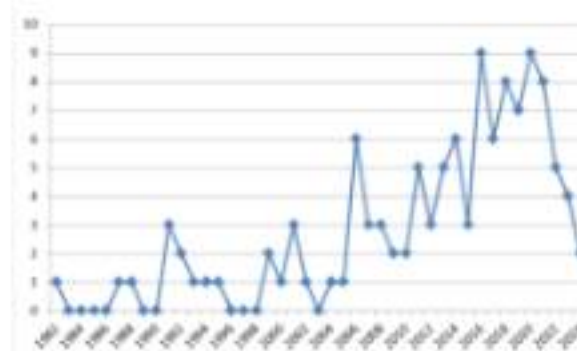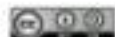

Figure 1: Article Publication Trends
(Source: Data processed by the author)

The Network Visualization results (see Figure 1) show that there are 87 topics related to open government studies in the Philippines, with ten of them occupying dominant positions, namely collaboration, transparency, public participation, accountability, local government, education, governance, economy, health, and extractive industries. From a thematic perspective, this list illustrates that open government research in the Philippines is not limited to the framework of bureaucracy and central government policy, but encompasses cross-sectoral issues. The presence of collaboration and transparency as top topics indicates a strong focus on the fundamental principles of open government, namely building public trust through information disclosure and cooperation among stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and the private sector (Meijer et al., 2012). Public participation and accountability complement these principles by emphasizing the importance of oversight mechanisms and citizen engagement in the policy process, which have been central pillars of the Philippines' commitment to the Open Government Partnership (OGP) since 2011 (Caruncho & Coronel, 2017).

The inclusion of local government as a dominant topic shows that the implementation of openness in the Philippines is widely discussed in the context of local governance, in line with decentralization and regional autonomy policies that provide room for policy innovation at the local level (Brillantes & Fernandez, 2011). Meanwhile, education and governance indicate that public literacy, institutional capacity building, and strengthening organizational management frameworks are important components of successful open government. The topics of economy and health highlight the relevance of government transparency to the public service and development sectors, including in the context of budget transparency, socio-economic policies, and responses to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Mergel et al., 2020). The extractive industry reflects attention to transparency in the natural resource sector, which is prone to corruption and conflict, in line with the implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in the Philippines since 2013 (Wilson, 2015).

The distribution of topics shows that open government research in the Philippines is multidimensional, linking principles of openness with sectoral issues that have direct implications for the quality of democracy and public welfare. In the context of network visualization, these dominant topics are nodes with high connectivity that link various research clusters, thereby forming the core of academic discourse while influencing the direction of public policy in the Philippines.

The results of the overlay visualization (see Figure 2) show that current open government research topics in the Philippines include democracy, legitimacy, public services, financial reporting, information disclosure, government projects, public offerings, communication, capacity, climate change, health, public works management, disaster management, supply networks, the role of women, sustainable development goals, and legal consequences. This list of topics indicates a shift in research focus from fundamental issues of information disclosure toward the integration of open government with the sustainable development agenda, specific public sector governance, and contemporary socio-political issues.

The subjects of democracy and legitimacy imply that research is no longer confined to the technical mechanisms of openness, but instead examines how open government policies can strengthen political legitimacy and the quality of democracy in the Philippines. This perspective

aligns with the findings of Meijer et al. (2012), which suggest that openness can serve as a means of strengthening the relationship between the government and citizens. Public services, financial reporting, and information disclosure reflect a focus on operational transparency and fiscal accountability, consistent with Hood (2010) perspective on transparency as a fundamental instrument of public management.
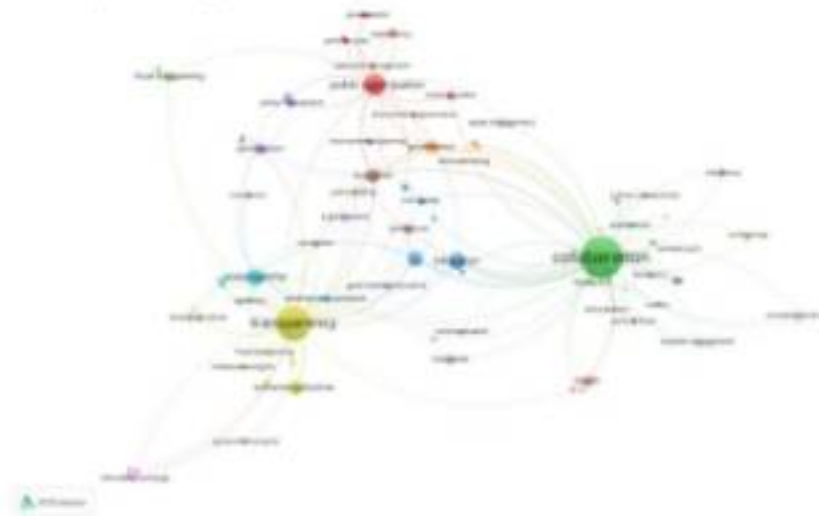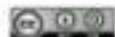

Figure 2: Network Visualization
(Source: Data processed by the author)

Sectoral issues, including government projects, public tenders, public works management, supply chains, and disaster management, substantiate the notion that transparency in procurement, infrastructure development, and emergency response constitutes a strategic component of good governance (Comfort & Boin, 2010; Thai, 2001). The integration of climate change and health as subjects underscores the growing nexus between open government and global challenges, which necessitate data transparency for risk mitigation and evidence-based policies (Guha-Sapir & Santos, 2013).

The role of women as a topic of discussion indicates a commitment to gender inclusivity in openness policies, aligning with global commitments to gender equality in public governance (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016). The link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicates an emerging body of research associating government transparency with global development targets, particularly in terms of accountability for achieving SDG indicators (United Nations, 2015). Concurrently, the ramifications of legal intricacies underscore the necessity of lucid regulatory frameworks to guarantee transparency is executed with uniformity, as accentuated by Peled (2011) within the purview of information transparency legislation. This overlay visualization reflects the increasingly complex and interdisciplinary development of open government research in the Philippines. While early research focused more on the principles of transparency and participation, current research integrates open government into strategic

issues of public sector governance, sustainable development policies, and the values of democracy and social inclusivity.
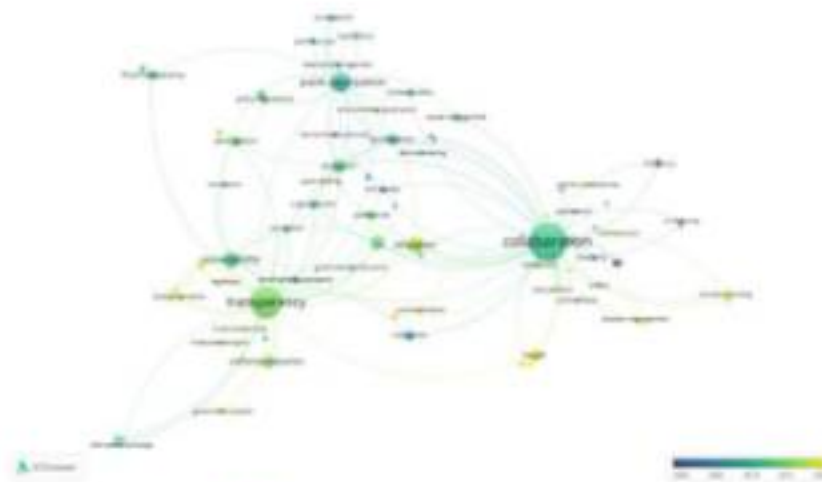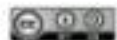

Figure 3: Overlay Visualization
(Source: Data processed by the author)

The Philippine government has made seventy-five commitments since its involvement in OGP in 2011. This is a sign of the Philippines' support for this multinational partnership and a symbol of the country's commitment to opening up. In 2011, the Philippines made nine commitments; in 2013, it made nine commitments; in 2015 and 2017, it made thirteen commitments each; in 2019, it made eleven commitments; and in 2023, it made ten commitments.

First, increase the number of registered overseas voters. This commitment can achieve a more comprehensive and diverse representation of overseas Filipinos. This inclusiveness promotes transparency by ensuring that the voices and preferences of overseas Filipinos are reflected in the electoral process. Increasing the number of overseas voters can influence policy priorities that address the needs of overseas Filipino communities. This creates greater scrutiny on how the Philippine government addresses issues relevant to the diaspora, such as labor rights, consular services, and support for migrants.

Second, NGO participation in verifying the voter list. This commitment has the potential to increase public trust in the accuracy of the data, considering that the verification process involves multi-party checks. Thus, the transparency policy is adhered to in all aspects of the election process. The verification and certification of the voter list carried out by various institutions makes the process a multi-party responsibility and accountability, which is shared among members, including representatives of non-governmental organizations.

Third, increasing public access to legal services. The broader the base of legal services, the greater the understanding of the legal process, which will allow for a better understanding of the system by those who use its services. The Philippines is leveraging free and no-cost access

through electronic or digital means, including social media, which will expand the reach of court services and bridge the information gap between the public and not just litigants and the courts. Increasing access to quality legal services and legal information serves as an equalizer and an empowerment tool that demands accountability among court officials and key actors in the legal process.

Fourth, the justice zone should be expanded and improved. This commitment can increase citizens' understanding of how the justice system works. In turn, citizens' trust in the justice sector will increase rapidly with increased awareness of how the process and actors work, so that there is no room for doubt and speculation. Expanding the reach of the justice system encourages the government to ensure effective and timely delivery of justice in remote areas, knowing that more people can better monitor and access the designated authorities.
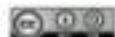
Fifth is the Stakeholder Chamber on Sustainable Development Goals. As part of the institutionalized SDG governance mechanism in the country, the Stakeholder Chamber will not only have access to information. Still, it will also be able to take part in decision-making for SDG implementation in the country. The Stakeholder Chamber is the official platform for engaging non-state actors in SDG implementation in the country. Specifically, it is a venue for private entities, CSOs, and other non-state organizations to advocate for better SDG governance and improved government responsiveness to SDG-related actions and initiatives.

Sixth, sub-nationalization of extractive industry transparency. The sub-nationalization of the Philippine Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (PH-EITI) encourages disclosure of information and data related to the extractive sector at the local level. This includes information on licenses, contracts, revenue flows, and environmental impacts. This commitment will increase public access to information, encourage the establishment of a complaint mechanism for citizens, and provide a feedback mechanism that is open to all sectors, providing an opportunity for the industry to provide suggestions for efficient information flow. By creating an effective feedback cycle, PH-EITI improves government transparency and responsiveness.

Seventh, participation of vulnerable sectors towards empowerment in local governance. Through this commitment, CSOs who are part of and participants in the Technical Working Group (TWG) have the privilege of having direct access to data on programs and projects from the initial planning stage, implementation, to the evaluation and assessment stage. They are consulted based on the feedback that will be collected from the implementation of Third-Party Monitoring (TPM). This means that their perspectives, insights, and input through reports from the implementation of TPM and the dissemination of Participatory Governance Metrics (PGM) are not only considered but also integrated into the formulation of policies or the development of new programs and initiatives of the department.

Eighth, the procurement diagnostic center. This commitment can promote transparency by centralizing data analysis and diagnostics in public procurement. At the same time, anyone from the public can easily access procurement information without the need for registration. The available communication features make it easy for the public to communicate their questions or clarifications. This commitment fosters accountability because procurement information from national perspective to a procurement process perspective is showcased and dissected for a better understanding of the health of public procurement.

Ninth, a digital information project for monitoring and evaluation. Public disclosure of

agency performance at the project level will be made available by providing access to information on physical achievements adjusted for financial utilization reported by various government agencies to the Department of Budget and Management (DBM). This commitment encourages partnership and collaboration between DBM and other supervisory agencies, implementing agencies, civil society, and other stakeholders, including the general public. They will engage in a feedback cycle intended to improve the implementation strategy of priority projects.

Tenth, the implementation of the freedom of information program should be improved. This commitment encourages transparency by enforcing greater public awareness, empowering citizens to request national and local public information, and enabling government offices to disclose public information to citizens. This ensures that the government is committed to providing public services and meeting the public's information needs, thereby stimulating greater public participation, citizen engagement, and accountability. Accountability in this commitment is fostered through the localization of the KIP Program and the enactment of the KIP Law. Through this commitment, more national and local bureaucratic officials will be held accountable for disclosing public information to citizens.

4. Conclusion

This study provides a systematic bibliometric overview of the intellectual landscape of open government research in the Philippines over the last four decades. From 1982 to 2024, a total of 116 publications were identified, reflecting a gradual yet steady growth in academic attention toward the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration. The findings reveal 87 recurring topics with 437 total link strengths and 270 occurrences, indicating that research on open government in the Philippines is thematically rich and increasingly interdisciplinary. The most dominant themes—collaboration, transparency, public participation, accountability, local government, education, governance, economy, health, and extractive industries—demonstrate that scholarly inquiry extends beyond central government reform to encompass sectoral governance and community-level innovation.

The bibliometric mapping also shows a temporal shift in research focus. Early studies primarily concentrated on fundamental aspects of transparency and information access. At the same time, more recent works engage with complex governance issues such as legitimacy, democracy, financial reporting, disaster management, climate change, and gender inclusivity. This transition reflects the maturation of the open government discourse in the Philippines—from normative discussions on openness to applied research that connects openness with development effectiveness and institutional performance.

From a theoretical standpoint, the results indicate that open government research in the Philippines is closely aligned with the paradigm of *New Public Governance*, emphasizing co-production, inter-organizational collaboration, and citizen engagement as key administrative principles. However, the bibliometric evidence also highlights a gap between conceptual advancement and empirical grounding—many studies remain descriptive, with limited integration into broader theories of public administration or institutional design.

In addresses the research problem by confirming that although the Philippines has been a pioneering member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) with seventy-five commitments,

the academic exploration of these initiatives remains fragmented. The absence of a comprehensive theoretical linkage between open government practices and administrative reform weakens the ability to assess policy effectiveness and institutional learning. To strengthen the field, future research should move toward comparative, evaluative, and policy-oriented studies that connect bibliometric findings with real-world governance performance.

Based on the findings, three policy implications can be proposed. First, the Philippine government should enhance the integration of open government principles into national and local governance frameworks through measurable performance indicators. This includes institutionalizing openness not only as a transparency initiative but also as a mechanism for participatory decision-making and accountability. Second, government agencies should invest in research–policy linkages by collaborating with academic institutions and civil society to translate empirical evidence into actionable reforms. Establishing a national open government research consortium could ensure that knowledge production directly informs policy innovation. Third, given the identified thematic trends, policymakers should prioritize capacity-building in digital transparency, citizen engagement, and inclusive participation, particularly at the local level where implementation gaps remain.
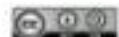
In conclusion, the bibliometric evidence underscores that open government in the Philippines is evolving from a normative aspiration into an institutionalized governance practice. Yet, realizing its transformative potential requires not only sustained political will and citizen engagement but also stronger synergy between academic inquiry and administrative action. By grounding future open government policies in both theory and evidence, the Philippines can reinforce its role as a regional leader in transparency, collaboration, and democratic governance.

Acknowledgements

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