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Transparency in Public Administration

Summary

Transparency is one of the keywords of contemporary governance. It is often associated with democratic accountability, but it also carries connotations of market efficiency. Though transparency is a key concept for economics and politics, its ideational roots lie in access to government information. Transparency holds promises for increased democratization and economic performance, but these may also stand in contradiction. Coinciding with the rise of transparency as a token of responsible governance, we have witnessed rapid global diffusion of information access laws. In debates on public accountability, transparency appears as an element of both deliberation and performance, which is peculiar as these are often seen as complementary types of accountability. Moreover, increased transparency is often assumed to lead to increased citizen trust in government, but the relation of trust and transparency is more complex. Transparency also implies access to public information, which can consist of various types of documents and registries. Through digitalization, public information has become a pressing topic of interest, including as raw material for a knowledge-based economy. Public administration also manages significant amounts of personal data of citizens, raising additional concerns for privacy. While transparency and privacy are not antonyms, there is a trade-off between them. Nevertheless, transparency also appears as a means for holding government accountable for its use of registry data. Finally, transparency has become a measured element of governance indicators that are themselves an instance of transparency. As a key concept of public administration, transparency is relevant for both democracy and efficiency of governance, but it is ambiguous and even paradoxical by nature.

Keywords

transparency, public administration, accountability, deliberation, performance, public information, privacy, indicators

Introduction

Transparency is one of the keywords for contemporary governance. It is often associated with democracy and accountability, but it also carries connotations of responsiveness and efficiency. While transparency is a relevant concept for private corporations and political actors, its roots in many ways lie in access to government information, that is, transparency of public administration. Even though the term transparency is a newcomer to the political vocabulary of states, access to government information has in certain contexts a significant institutional history, reaching even to the 18th century. Since 2000, coinciding with the rise of transparency

as a token of responsible governance, we have witnessed the rapid global diffusion of information access laws.

There are different modalities and conceptualizations of transparency. Transparency holds promises for increased democratization and economic performance, but this article reminds us that these may also stand in contradiction. Transparency has nevertheless become a keyword for responsible governance and it is often referred to in debates on how to hold public administration accountable. Here transparency appears as an element of both deliberation and performance, which is peculiar as these are often seen as complementary types of accountability. Moreover, increased transparency is often assumed to lead to increased citizen trust in government, but in reality the relation of trust and transparency is more complex.

Transparency of public administration also implies access to public information, which can consist of policy documents and memos, but also of cartographic information, weather data, registry data, and so on. Through digitalization public information has become a pressing topic of interest, including as raw material for a knowledge-based economy. Transparency and privacy are not antonyms, but there are clear trade-offs between them. This concerns public administration, which manages massive amounts of personal data of citizens. Interestingly, to hold public administration accountable for its use of this information, transparency is often called for. Finally, transparency of public administration resonates with the global indicators of good governance and economic performance, also increasingly measured by such comparative assessments. Though implying transparency and improved quality of government, global rankings and performance indicators may have constitutive effects on institutional practices that are often surprising.

This article considers transparency as a key concept of public administration that is relevant for both democracy and efficiency of governance, but that is ambiguous by nature. While by no means exhaustive, the article outlines different elements of transparency in public administration, focusing on its often surprising and even paradoxical character and effects. This makes transparency a truly interesting topic for scholars and students of public administration.

History of Institutional Openness

The modern state was built on its ability to collect and analyze information (Sheehan, 2006, p. 9). In many ways the history of institutional openness or “transparency” in public administration reads as a history of social conflicts concerning markets, (state) institutions, and citizen rights (cf. Arendt, 1958; de Tocqueville, 1991; Emirbayer & Sheller, 1999; Habermas, 1989). These conflicts have set the normative boundaries of the “public,” leading also to different institutional trajectories of states.

The different lineages of openness and state secrecy have been discussed in terms of path dependence (Knudsen, 2003), where the critical junctures and crises have proved important in shaping practices. The secrecy of rule stems from the absolutist state tradition, where the monarch was the image of God on earth and all information concerning the state was solely in the hands of the ruler. The erosion of state secrecy in the 18th century can be understood as the decline in power of the absolutist state (Anderson, 1993, pp. 190–191).

While similar attempts were made elsewhere, the 1766 Swedish law on public access to state information was for a long time an exception to the prevailing practice of bureaucratic secrecy (Knudsen, 2003; Konstari, 1977; cf. Gestrich, 1994; Martens, 1971; van Dülmen, 1986; van Eijnatten, 2004; Würzler, 2002). The Swedish act was linked to a new printing technique and granted the right to publish information relating to the state and government documents. This also highlights the role of technological shifts in the history of institutional openness, as it was the new printing technique and related rise of the public sphere (Gestrich 1994; Habermas 1989) that created pressure for access to state information, though social conditions and the critique of mercantilist rule were also relevant in the Swedish case (Manninen, 2006).

Since the mid-20th century, politicization of government, the computerization of public administration, and transnational communication of policy innovations has led to the expansion of government transparency (Bennett, 1997; Schudson, 2015). In addition, the end of the Cold War and the opening of the global market economy have also greatly contributed to the rise of transparency in public administration (Best, 2005; Rose-Ackerman, 2005). Since the 1990s, the rise of the Internet has created pressures for transparency, and the use of big data, social media, and algorithmic governance has influenced states' information strategies and the transparency of public administration. While accounts of the global spread of transparency in public administration may appear to be a somewhat deterministic history of the Enlightenment and rationalization facilitated by technological advances and (global) power shifts, there are nuances to the story of transparency becoming a globally adopted principle of governance, which has also been appealing to organizations (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2015; Yiannis, 2005).

Global Diffusion of Freedom of Information Acts

Some analyses of the global adoption of information access laws echo functionalist explanations (Bennett, 1997), but there are also studies that highlight the social conflicts and politics involved (Berliner, 2014; Rose-Ackerman, 2005; Worthy, 2017). While these perspectives may be helpful in understanding states' different historical trajectories in the public accessibility of government information, such patterns of explanation face limitations in explaining the global drive towards transparency and convergence in the standards on public access to government information.

The global expansion of transparency can also be understood in the context of the international diffusion of liberalism (Simmons, Dobbin, & Garrett, 2006). While liberalist ideas of governing spread through the European communication networks of the 18th century, the late 20th century saw the worldwide spread of political and market liberalism (Peters, Pierre, & King, 2005; Schulz-Forberg & Stråth, 2010; Simmons et al., 2006). For example, democratization has been visible in the post-communist countries in Europe, where information access laws have also contributed to coming to terms with the past (Rose-Ackerman, 2005). As for market liberalism, the codifications of New Public Management (NPM) and good governance have enhanced performance through transparency, which has also hastened the process overall (Blomgren, 2007; Blomgren & Sahlin, 2007), implying the rise of results-based economic performance and accountability.

The diffusion of freedom of information in the 20th century has served as an example of political innovation, as assessed through the global adoption of information access laws (Bennett, 1997; Relly, 2012). Such ideational diffusion used to be mostly horizontal, meaning from one national context to another, but this is increasingly becoming vertical, from supranational organizations to national polities (Harlow, 2006; Knudsen, 2003). Moreover, the types of countries adopting the laws have changed, as the international diffusion of transparency also encompasses newly industrialized countries, and even autocracies (Adu, 2018; Cejudo, 2008; Lynden & Wu, 2008; Piotrowski, Zhang, Lin, & Yu, 2009; Rodan, 2004; Samaratunge, Alam, & Teicher, 2008). This development demonstrates the shift from the old ideas of publicity and public sphere to the new conceptualization of transparency, implying the increasing importance of market transparency in attracting foreign investments, loans, and development aid, also echoed in global governance indicators. But one should not underestimate the symbolic aspects of transparency. Endorsed by international organizations, transparency and anti-corruption measures have become an attribute of the modern state in “world society” (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997), leading states to adhere to this global policy script due to its symbolic and normative appeal (cf. Relly & Sabharwal, 2009). Here also the global country comparisons and rankings have influenced the policies of countries.

Table 1 shows the countries that have adopted information access laws. Though the global diffusion of freedom of information (FOI) legislation began in the 1970s and 1980s, the trend intensified in the 1990s after the end of Cold War. There was also a sharp increase in the early 2000s as the global drive for transparency intensified and its links to both democracy and economic performance were highlighted, and transparency became a global norm of governance.

<TABLE 1 HERE>

Initially a Nordic institutional feature, and famously adopted by the United States in 1967, access to government information spread to Western Europe and anglophone countries in the 1980s and to several post-communist countries in the 1990s. But beginning in the early 2000s, information access laws began to appear in developing countries and even autocratic states. This points to the importance of implementation of such legal norms in the institutional context in which they are adopted (Adu, 2018; Benjamin, 2017).

Scholars have criticized the relatively loose conceptualization of transparency, arguing that it is unclear what actually is diffused under the notion of “freedom of information,” making the assessment of its impact difficult (Calland & Bentley, 2013). The operationalization of the concept of transparency is also not straightforward (Da Cruz, Tavares, Marques, Jorge, & de Sousa, 2015; Hollyer, Rosendorff, & Vreeland, 2014). One paradoxical characteristic of information access laws is that oftentimes they are actually secrecy laws, defining the limits of the public through exemption, that is, what is not public.

Like secrecy (Bok, 1989), transparency applies to a variety of different social interests, where different normative principles and values need to be assessed. This may be highly contextual, which makes the universal definition of access to information difficult. The impacts of information access laws may also be surprising at times, even leading to unintended consequences (Erkkilä, 2012; Götz & Marklund, 2014). This is also highly contextual and further complicated by the adoption of information access laws in different contexts, even autocratic states. Here some researchers have found transparency to have limited or even

negative effects on accountability (Adu, 2018; Rodan, 2004; Tan, 2014), while others argue that disclosure of governments' economic performance data can be linked to protest movements in autocracies (Hollyer, Rosendorff, & Vreeland, 2015), marking an opening for political change. Then again, scholars have pointed to auditing and performance management as means of hierarchical control that nevertheless often fail to produce information on how the organizations being assessed really function (Strathern, 2000). Finally, it needs to be asked what kind of effects freedom of information laws actually have and how this works on the organizational level. Field experiments have shown that information requests submitted with explicit references to freedom of information laws do increase government officials' responsiveness to them in comparison with informal requests (Grimmelikhuijsen, John, Meijer, & Worthy, 2018). In addition to the type of request, a study on access to information in the Slovakian municipal context found that organizational size and resources, ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as gender and party dependence of mayors may influence response rates (Spáč, Voda, & Zagrapan, 2018). It has also been argued that the way in which organizations comply with the information access laws also depends on their peer organizations' activities when facing similar requests (ben-Aaron, Denny, Desmarais, & Wallach, 2017). Moreover, organizational transparency can be perceived as a relational negotiation process between organizations and their stakeholders (Heimstädt & Dobusch, 2018). This points to a contextual understanding of access to information and transparency.

Different Modalities of Transparency

The transnational discourse on transparency has different modalities. It can refer to freedom of information as a civil right ("right to know"), implying a conflict of interest between the government and the public. Transparency is also linked to new forms of collaborative governance and enhancing citizen trust, arguably making governance more effective (cf. OECD, 2003). Finally, transparency is an economic concept, referring to performance of public organizations and regulative frameworks of countries. It is important to understand that these different modalities are not fully aligned and that their conceptual constituents are weighted differently from one national context to another.

The modalities of transparency may also come with different peer concepts, such as publicity and openness. For example, in the Finnish context access to government information has been traditionally understood in terms of "publicity," referring to democratic control, or as "openness" in consensual governance. The perceptions of effectiveness and economic competitiveness are discussed under the term "transparency," which entered the Finnish vocabulary of governance in the late 1990s (Erkkilä, 2012, pp. 52–54). It is also important to notice that transparency in public administration and governance functions very differently in different cultural contexts.

For instance, the consensual tradition of governance in Nordic countries is by and large a result of broad access to information, allowing inclusion of different stakeholders and hence their integration in the process of governing (Erkkilä, 2012; Götz & Marklund, 2014). Seen from this perspective, transparency becomes a principle—or even means—of governance. On the other hand, in the Anglo-American tradition access to government information is regarded primarily as a citizen right that enables control of government (Schudson, 2015; Worthy, 2017).

Access to government information increasingly has an economic function as well, tackling information asymmetries in the market (Stiglitz, 2002). As opposed to the concepts of publicity and openness, the notion of transparency also carries explicit economic connotations, that is, market transparency, that tie it to the so-called Washington Consensus that informed development economics and global markets in the 1990s (Stiglitz, 2008). The evolution of administrative thinking on transparency goes hand in hand with the theorizing of (good) governance that emphasizes the rule of law and aims to uproot information asymmetry (opacity) and hidden transaction costs, such as corruption. These ideational changes of democracy and efficiency are often reflected in conceptual change, where “transparency” has become a keyword of responsible governance.

Transparency and Accountability: Performance and Deliberation

Transparency is generally seen as a central element of accountability. Accountability is often defined as a process of “being called to account to some authority for one’s actions,” or a process of “giving an account” (Mulgan, 2000, p. 555; see also Bovens, 2009; Dubnick, 2005, p. 6). As a process, accountability can be reduced to three questions: accountable for what; to whom; and how? (Mulgan, 2000). Here, the most important question is how, implying a “mechanism of accountability” through which the actors are made accountable. Transparency and access to information are often perceived as such mechanisms, though this is not always as straightforward as one might think.

There are different types of accountability cited in the literature with varying mechanisms of accountability, such as political accountability (mechanism: democratic elections), bureaucratic accountability (legal rules and supervision), personal accountability (ethics), professional accountability (peer review), performance (responsiveness), and deliberation (public debate) (Erkkilä, 2007; cf. Mulgan, 2000). However, these types are not always clear-cut and often overlap. Furthermore, as new forms of governance are replacing more hierarchical government, there are shifts within the types of accountability, highlighting performance and deliberation. This is also relevant for government transparency that is linked to both.

In the debates over accountability, performance and deliberation are often seen to be opposed to one another, but they meet in the concept of transparency. Owing to the NPM reforms of the early 1990s, performance was identified as a new type of accountability, and public administration has been exposed to new efficiency-seeking programs and means of control. This has also potentially diminished the public political debate, increased expert authority, and privatized bureaucratic processes (Erkkilä, 2007). New deliberative models of governing have arisen as a counterbalance to this.

Many scholars of political science, administrative studies, and international relations see transparency as a means for bringing about democratization. In the political science literature on deliberative democracy, the notions of consensus, collaboration, and trust have become democratic virtues (Cohen, 1997; Dryzek, 2002; Habermas, 1996; Young, 2000). This has brought the transparency of public institutions to the fore of research on democratization and

democratic government (Chapman & Hunt, 2006; Kelly, 2004; Lord, 2006; Roberts, 2006). At the same time, scholars of international political economy consider transparency as a means for enhancing efficiency (Best, 2005, p. 141), improving market information, and lowering transaction costs (Breton, 2007; Kono, 2006; Lambsdorff, 2007; Libich, 2006). Moreover, many analyses of public sector reform currently see transparency as an element of performance management, an heir of NPM (Blomgren, 2007; Blomgren & Sahlin, 2007). In other words, though deliberation is often seen as balancing the performance demands of NPM reforms, transparency has been a central part of the NPM doctrine. There is also a strong drive towards quantification and use of indicators that is a further instance of transparency.

Interestingly, debates on performance and on deliberation both hold “openness” and “transparency” as keys to better governance (cf. Hood & Heald, 2006). This implies that we can do away with either—or dichotomies (cf. Jessop, 1998, p. 31) and have a transparent system of governance that is both democratic and efficient, merging the spheres of market and bureaucracy (hierarchy). However, “performance” and “deliberation” may not singlehandedly provide a mechanism of accountability (Dubnick, 2005; Erkkilä, 2007; Mulgan, 2003). Deliberation does not necessarily imply that the conclusions of these debates are taken into account. And enhanced performance does not readily provide a mechanism for calling someone to account when things go wrong (Dubnick, 2005). Rather they become effective when linked to more traditional types of accountability, as part of political or bureaucratic accountability or as an input channel to the experts, deferring to peer review. Yet the discussion about performance and deliberation has influenced the understanding of available means for controlling government, highlighting transparency and access to information.

Transparency and Trust

Citizen trust is essential for governing (Tilly, 2005), and trust is seen as a critical element in avoiding social traps such as free-riding (Rothstein, 2005). As an abstract concept, trust is maintained through narratives and collective memory that may help to generate joint understanding of the virtues of governing and responsibilities of individuals as citizens (Rothstein, 2000). Transparency is often seen as key to trust in government; the more transparent the government, the more citizens trust it. However, the relation of transparency and trust is complex (Moore, 2018) and increased information does not always straightforwardly contribute to more rational government (Tsoukas, 1997). An experimental study found the link between transparency and trust to be limited (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012), while another study on participation found a positive link between transparency of digital public services and trust in government (Kim & Lee, 2012). In the context of healthcare decision-making, increased transparency was even found to potentially weaken citizens’ trust in government (de Fine Licht, 2011). Moreover, transparency is also linked to gossip and even conspiracy theories that can undermine or indicate the limits of public trust (Birchall, 2014; West & Sanders, 2003).

In fact, as a mechanism of government control transparency may require an element of mistrust to be effective. Paradoxically, if transparency leads to broad sharing of information among policy actors, it runs the risk of making these deliberations non-public (Erkkilä, 2012, chap. 5) and may even create incentives for corrupt behavior (Tiihonen, 2003, p. 112). Larsson’s

account of the Swedish experience in government transparency states the same problematic slightly differently: the openness of Swedish government builds trust, but at the same time government can “afford” to be transparent because there is no mounting social pressure or mistrust of its work (Larsson, 1998).

While openness and consensus may endorse cohesive qualities, they can also have limiting effects on democratic accountability, public debate, and public scrutiny (Mouffe, 1999). This is a somewhat troubling finding for the deliberative democracy theory that holds transparency as a means for reaching consensus, a normative goal as such (Habermas, 1996). The trust-based sharing of information can be termed accountable through representation, but the control function of transparency often requires systematic control and even mistrust in those who govern.

Transparency and Public Information

Government transparency is often understood as access to public information, which may refer to policy documents, registry data, cartographic information, and meteorological data. Giddens has referred to modern nation-states as surveillance states, as the public authorities’ knowledge of their subjects of governance is highly detailed (Giddens, 1985, p. 14). Such tools of government are essential for efficient government (Hood & Margetts, 2007), but they are also necessary for democratic and predictable rule. For instance, political rights such as the right to vote are based on registry data, as is the allocation of potential government benefits.

Digitalization and knowledge-based economy have given such public information resources a new meaning as they are understood as raw material for digital services. States habitually maintain massive information resources, as (digital) public goods are acquiring different uses, including by private and civil society actors. Though governments have made efforts to provide public data online, users’ ability to locate and utilize this data meaningfully requires attention to ensure equal access (Jaeger & Bertot, 2010). In many countries public information has also been commodified, and the public organizations that hold it have started charging for their digital services (Blakemore & Craglia, 2006). This is often a result of performance management. Paradoxically, budget transparency—organizations’ responsibility for economic performance and reporting on this—has created further pressures to charge for public information, limiting public access to it (Erkkilä, 2012, chap. 4).

Furthermore, the use of big data and algorithmic governance have been discussed in relation to transparency. As automatization is increasing in public administration, scholars have discussed transparency both as its facilitator as well as a means of control, linking to ethical questions (de Laat, 2018; Hansen, 2015). This has also concerned the issue of privacy and its reconceptualization (Janssen, 2015).

Transparency and Privacy

Privacy—often understood as the right to be left alone—is a concept closely related to transparency. While not its direct antonym, there is often a perception of a trade-off between the two. Hence, full transparency is not desirable by most accounts. This also points to the key

characteristic of transparency and freedom of information laws that indeed apply to a variety of various social interests. This makes the regulation of public access a difficult matter legally, given the technological changes and shifts in public norms and values over time.

Diverging cultural and historical trajectories of nation building have shaped different conceptualizations of the public sphere as a cultural form (Eder, 2006). In a similar fashion, national attitudes to personal privacy reflect historical trajectories, often going back to the experiences of misuse of public registry data during World War II or even to the liberalist ideas of the 18th century (Desrosières, 1998; Wietog, 2001). These historical patterns are also evident in different approaches to privacy protection in Europe and the United States (Newman & Bach, 2004). This is currently reflected in the different regulatory schemes on personal data in Europe and the United States, for example. The concerns over privacy have emerged in the debates over social media and new techniques of personalization such as facial recognition.

Countries also have different traditions in registering their citizens and the use of single identifiers in government registers that in some countries even allow for combining different registers. This can bring significant gains in efficiency of governance, but it also requires great responsibility in data handling. Such “transparency” of citizens’ information vis-à-vis the administration fundamentally builds on social trust, which also resonates with privacy. In fact, concerns over privacy triggered the adoption of information access laws in some countries in the 1970s and 1980s (Bennett, 1997). Transparency hence appears both as a concern and a remedy in the debates over privacy: too much transparency may compromise individuals’ privacy, but when trying to control the use of registry data by the public administration, we call for transparency.

Transparency and Governance Indicators

Since 2000 there has been a surge in global indicators and rankings that measure and compare countries’ performance in economic competitiveness and good governance. Whereas large country comparisons were previously done mostly by academics, the practice has largely been taken up by international governmental organizations (e.g., the World Bank, UN, OECD), non-governmental organizations (e.g., Transparency International), private companies (e.g., Standard & Poor’s), and associations (e.g., World Economic Forum). The emergence of governance indices can be linked with the global concern over good governance and corruption (Ivanov, 2009). Transparency is associated with these measurements in two respects. First, the indicators themselves are an instance of transparency. On a global level, indicators are bringing the state of governance in different countries to light. Moreover, indicators are also used in performance management, where public organizations are observed against measurable criteria. Second, some global indicators also seek to measure how transparent institutions does a country have.

Many of the early governance indicators of the mid-1990s, such as the Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank Institute) and the Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International), do not measure transparency, but rather hold it as a premise for their assessments, where sound institutions and transparent policy-making lead to enhanced performance, lower rates of corruption, and democratization. Transparency—in its different conceptualizations—has also been used as a measure for global comparisons. This can be

understood against the development in global ranking that is moving towards more specific measurements of governance, often labeled as “second generation” governance indicators (Erkkilä, 2016; Knack, Kugler, & Manning, 2003).

Transparency is difficult to conceptualize, as is evident from the different measurements of transparency, ranging from freedom of press (Freedom House) to e-government readiness (UN), open budgeting (International Budget Partnership), and right to information (Center for Law and Democracy). These nuanced measurements of good governance, focusing on different aspects of transparency, are aiming for change in institutional practices on the national level (Trapnell, 2011). This bears similarities to the use of indicators in performance management on the organizational level.

Governance indicators are also seen to influence policies and institutional practices of nation-states (Kelley & Simmons, 2015; Löwenheim, 2008). However, the effects are often indirect and such performance indicators can have surprising policy effects. While these effects are often regarded as unintended consequences, on closer inspection they may in fact appear as constitutive effects of indicators (Dahler-Larsen, 2013). In other words, while the measurements themselves are an instance of transparency, their effects are not always clear and require closer analysis. This is quite typical for transparency in general.

Conclusions

This article has summarized some of the key issues of transparency in public administration. As has been discussed, transparency has become a keyword of responsible governance, but its impacts and qualities can be somewhat surprising and even paradoxical. As scholars have pointed out, the effects of the global expansion of transparency are difficult to assess due to the somewhat loose understanding of what actually is being diffused. Moreover, there is a strong symbolic element in the process, as even autocracies have felt the need to adopt information access laws. Furthermore, though the global adoption of transparency is often linked to democratization, it is also deeply entangled in perceptions of economic performance.

In fact, transparency seems to have a somewhat surprising quality in that it eludes traditional dichotomies, such as democracy–efficiency, market–hierarchy, and public–private. Arguably, it enhances both democracy and efficiency of governance, concerning the market and bureaucracy alike, while also touching upon different modalities of public and private. However, a closer look may reveal tensions between the different categories that are important for understanding the actual effects of transparency in public administration. This is apparent in the discussion on deliberation and performance, both of which build on “transparency” but nevertheless may be in tension with each other.

As discussed, the link between trust and transparency is also complex and sometimes even counterintuitive. While transparency is associated with citizens’ trust in government, increased transparency may in some circumstances lead to a decrease in trust. As a means of government control, transparency even requires some mistrust of government, leading to active attempts to hold it accountable through requests for information. Moreover, increased openness and broad-based inclusion of actors in the policy process may paradoxically have a negative effect on public debate.

Transparency is linked to the allocation of public information not only through the legal framework that allows access but also through performance management schemes that may lead to commodification of public information, hence limiting its public access. Moreover, concerns of privacy are also related to transparency—here transparency appears both as a cause of concern and a remedy for breaches of privacy. Finally, transparency is prominently visible in global indicators and country rankings that measure good governance, democracy, and economic performance, where transparency is becoming a measurable attribute. At the same time, the indicators themselves are an instance of transparency that may have (constitutive) effects on the subjects of measurement, leading to changes in public governance and administration.

Transparency of public administration is a multifaceted topic, resonating with both democracy and efficiency. While it is often assumed to bring somewhat straightforward advances in these, the nature and effects of transparency are often surprising and even paradoxical. This makes transparency a fascinating topic for scholars and students of public administration.

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Table 1. Countries with Information Access Laws (Source: Fringe Special, FreedomInfo.org).

=>1980s	1990s	2000–2004	2005–2009	2010s
Sweden (1766)	Italy (1990)	Lithuania (2000)	United Kingdom (2005)	Ethiopia (2010)
Finland (1951)	Hungary (1992)	Czech Republic (2000)	Azerbaijan (2005)	Russia (2010)
United States (1967)	Ukraine (1992)	Georgia (2000)	India (2005)	Guinea (2010)
Denmark (1970)	Portugal (1993)	Liechtenstein (2000)	Montenegro (2005)	Indonesia (2010)
Norway (1970)	Belgium (1994)	Bulgaria (2000)	Taiwan (2005)	Liberia (2010)
France (1978)	Belize (1994)	Moldova (2000)	Switzerland (2006)	El Salvador (2011)
Netherlands (1980)	Iceland (1997)	Japan (2001)	Germany (2006)	Mongolia (2011)
Australia (1982)	Thailand (1997)	Trinidad (2001)	Uganda (2006)	Niger (2011)
New Zealand (1983)	Uzbekistan (1997)	Estonia (2001)	Honduras (2006)	Nigeria (2011)
Canada (1983)	South Korea (1998)	Slovakia (2001)	Macedonia (2006)	Tunisia (2011)
Colombia (1985)	Ireland (1998)	South Africa (2001)	Jordan (2007)	Brazil (2011)
Greece (1986)	Latvia (1998)	Romania (2001)	Kyrgyzstan (2007)	Malta (2012)
Austria (1987)	Israel (1999)	Bosnia & Herzegovina (2001)	Nepal (2007)	Yemen (2012)
	Albania (1999)	Poland (2002)	Nicaragua (2007)	Rwanda (2013)
		Angola (2002)	China (2008)	Guyana (2013)
		Pakistan (2002)	Bangladesh (2009)	Sierra Leone (2013)
		Panama (2002)	Chile (2009)	Spain (2013)
		Tajikistan (2002)	Guatemala (2009)	Ivory Coast (2013)
		Zimbabwe (2002)	Uruguay (2009)	Maldives (2014)
		Mexico (2003)	Cook Island (2009)	Paraguay (2014)
		Armenia (2003)		Burkina Faso (2015)
		Croatia (2003)		Kazakhstan (2015)
		Kosovo (2003)		Sudan (2015)
		Peru (2003)		Kenya (2016)
		St. Vincent & the Grenadines (2003)		Philippines (2016)
		Slovenia (2003)		Sri Lanka (2016)
		Jamaica (2004)		Tanzania (2016)
		Serbia (2004)		Togo (2016)
		Turkey (2004)		Vietnam (2016)
		Antigua (2004)		Vanuatu (2016)
		Argentina (2004)		Malawi (2016)
		Dominican Republic (2004)		Lebanon (2017)
		Ecuador (2004)		Cyprus (2018)
				Luxembourg (2018)