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TRANSPARENCY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN FACILITATING THE BUILDING OF TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The use of technology can play a key role in improving transparency and accountability in the digital age, as well as facilitating the strengthening of citizens' trust in public institutions, providing easy access to information and data for citizens, media and civil society organizations. This study examines the relationship between data availability on three key dimensions of the Global Data Barometer 2022 (GDB) - political integrity, public finances, and public procurement - and Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). The data was from 106 countries.

Consistent with expectations, political integrity exhibited a moderate correlation with the perception of corruption; the higher the political integrity, the less corrupt the country was perceived to be. In contrast, the correlations between CPI and data availability on public finance and public procurement were weak, although these areas are traditionally considered more exposed to corruption. Although the study does not enable the identification of a cause-and-effect relationship, the results suggest that the integrity of political and institutional actors may have more weight in building trust in institutions than transparency on the administration of public revenues.

In this context, the use of technology to provide open data, to build interactive platforms for public consultation, or to automate asset declaration systems, is presented as an important instrument for the democratization of information. However, while technology can contribute to creating a more favorable climate for accountability and increasing public trust, it must be accompanied by political will and clear institutional commitment to share complete, accessible in real time and, preferably, machine-readable data.

Keywords: *Digital technology, institutional transparency, open data, political integrity, public finance, public procurement, corruption, accountability, open governance.*

Introduction

The digital age has brought new opportunities for increased transparency through technology and online platforms. Governments are increasingly using the Internet to disseminate information on their activities and decisions, offering wider access. However, the challenge remains to ensure equal access to these digital resources and to bridge the gap between legal commitments to transparency and real availability and usability of online information, especially in countries with limited digital infrastructure or lower levels

of digital skills.

Despite the spread of technology and initiatives to increase transparency, trust in public institutions continues to remain unstable in many countries, with a significant decline in trust in representative institutions over recent decades (Valgarðsson, et al., 2025). This situation raises a fundamental question: is technological transparency sufficient to increase citizens' trust in the state, or are other institutional factors, such as commitment to accountability, more decisive?

This paper analyzes the relationship between data provision and perceived corruption, using data from the 2022 Global Data Barometer and the 2022 Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. While the validity of global indices for measuring corruption (discussed in Section "Theoretical Framework", below) can be questioned, the analysis undertaken here provides a valuable overview of the relationship between transparency and the perception of corruption, paving the way for further, more focused research. The basic theoretical premise of this paper is that increased transparency can serve as a deterrent to corruption by increasing accountability and enabling greater citizen control over public affairs.

Theoretical framework

Digital technologies have opened new avenues for interaction between public institutions and citizens. In its beginnings, e-government focused on the efficiency of public services, but gradually the focus shifted towards increasing transparency and the democratizing potential of technology through open government initiatives (Meijer et al., 2012; Bertot et al., 2010; Noveck, 2015). One of the most advanced and comprehensive forms of transparency is the publication of open data - data that is freely available for use and distribution by anyone, without restrictions. Compared to more basic forms of transparency, such as publishing documents in non-editable formats or simply providing information on request, open data goes much further in its potential to be used and to bring about change. Publication of open data transforms the approach from simply the "right to be informed" to the "right to use and disseminate information". While it can be argued that open data publication empowers citizens, supports investigative journalism and fosters innovation (Janssen et al., 2012; Zuiderwijk and Janssen, 2014), their effectiveness depends on their quality and usability (Janssen et al., 2012; Vetrò et al., 2016; Zuiderwijk et al., 2012; Marijn et al. al., 2018; Gurstein, 2011).

Institutional transparency is crucial for accountability and can enhance public trust in institutions (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; Porumbescu, 2017; Park and Blenkinsopp, 2011). This is because accessible information empowers citizens to monitor public officials, thereby fostering an environment of accountability (Fox, 2007; Bovens, 2007). However, merely releasing data is insufficient; the information must be both meaningful and usable (Heald, 2006; Kosack and Fung, 2014).

Corruption, as an abuse of public power for private gain, remains a serious obstacle to development. Rothstein (2011) describes a vicious cycle where low governance quality and high corruption erode social trust. This erosion of trust subsequently hinders the collective action and political resolve necessary for implementing reforms that could improve the quality of governance. However, the hidden nature of corruption makes its direct measurement difficult, so many indices rely on perceptions. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) by Transparency International is the most popular global tool for measuring corruption perceptions. The CPI offers the possibility to compare different countries and is widely used (Andersson and Heywood, 2009; Lambsdorff, 2007; Svensson, 2005). However, the CPI has faced methodological critiques (Andersson and Heywood, 2009; Donchev and Ujhelyi, 2014; Knack, 2006) because it captures only perceptions rather than actual corruption.

As increased transparency leads to greater accountability, it holds the potential to curb corruption. However, the impact of transparency on mitigating perceived corruption varies across sectors, with certain areas demonstrating a more significant effect than others. Notably, political integrity, public finance ad-

ministration, and public procurement procedures are three sectors where transparency is deemed to have a particularly strong influence on reducing corruption.

Political integrity means exercising political power in a way that serves the public interest, remaining independent of private interests, and avoiding the use of power for personal enrichment or consolidation of personal position. Some of the indicators of this concept, used in this paper, are the financing of political parties and election campaigns, the wealth of officials and politicians, and lobbying (see the Methodology section for a more detailed description of the indicators). Transparency about party financing and wealth declaration has been highlighted in previous studies as a key mechanism to promote ethical behavior by political parties and institutional actors (Norris and van Es, 2016; Bauhr and Grimes, 2014; Vargas and Schlutz, 2016).

Transparency in decision-making and procedures is also an essential element of transparent governance and implies that state officials must act in an open manner, keeping citizens informed about the decisions that are made and the rationale behind these decisions. This includes proactively publishing information in easily accessible formats, enabling public scrutiny and fostering a more informed citizenry. Two concepts are considered in this paper as indicators of transparency in decision-making, public finance administration and procurement procedures (see the Methodology section for a more detailed description of the indicators for each concept). These areas, which involve the allocation and expenditure of public resources, are particularly vulnerable to corruption and abuse of power. Therefore, mechanisms that promote both transparency and integrity are essential to protect public funds and ensure that they are used effectively for the benefit of society. Increased access to budget data is essential for monitoring public funds, and the literature shows that fiscal transparency is associated with lower levels of corruption (Wehner and de Renzio, 2013; Hameed, 2005). Also, since one of the sectors most exposed to corruption is public procurement, transparency on procurement procedures has the potential to increase accountability. Publishing procurement data in standardized formats can increase competition and identify "red flags" for corruption (Kenny and Karver, 2012; Fazekas et al., 2013; Adam et al., 2020).

Previous studies have highlighted the potential of digital technology to increase transparency and public trust. Transparency in sectors such as political integrity, public finances and public procurement is critical to the fight against corruption. However, transparency policies often are ultimately ineffective or even counterproductive in practice. The published information may be incomplete, technically incomprehensible, not relevant, or too voluminous for the intended users. Studies show that entities required to disclose information often develop strategies to present or manipulate it in order to be favored, hiding behind a facade of transparency, which undermines the underlying purpose of these policies (Fung, Graham, and Weil, 2007). Moreover, power dynamics and competing political and economic interests shape the policy-making process, potentially limiting its effectiveness and hindering real improvements in accountability.

The empirical link between the availability of data in critical sectors and the level of perceived corruption requires further examination. This study aims to address this need by analyzing data from the Global Data Barometer 2022 and the Corruption Perceptions Index 2022.

Methodology

For this study, secondary data was drawn from two sources: the 2022 Global Data Barometer (Global Data Barometer, 2022) and the 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2022). The Global Data Barometer (GDB) had only one edition published at the time of this study, which was in 2022. While the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) has more recent editions available, the 2022 edition was chosen for it also, to ensure a consistent comparison.

Data for three (out of seven) GDB modules were included in the study: political integrity, public finance, and public procurement.

1. Political Integrity: focuses on examining the availability and openness of data that are critical to ensuring transparency and accountability in the political sphere. This module emphasizes the importance of public access to detailed information about political party and campaign financing, officials' asset and interest declarations, lobbying activities, and public consultation processes in rulemaking.
2. Public Finance: focuses on the transparency of the management of public funds through the availability of data. This module examines the depth and openness of data related to all stages of the budget cycle, including budget proposal, adoption, implementation and audit, as well as details on government spending and public debt.
3. Public Procurement: focuses on the availability of detailed and structured data at all stages of the procurement cycle, from planning and tendering to the award and implementation of contracts.

Scoring for each module is on a 0 to 100 scale, with 0 indicating the lowest level and 100 the highest.

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), published by Transparency International, is one of the most popular global measures of corruption. It ranks countries according to perceived levels of corruption in the public sector, as assessed by experts and the business community. CPI does not measure real or absolute corruption, but the perception of it.

The CPI score is on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 is the highest level of corruption perception and 100 the lowest.

The analysis encompassed 106 countries, specifically those countries present in both databases.

Although based on the literature consulted, formal hypotheses could be raised for the existence of positive correlations between each of the three modules of GDB and CPI, the literature also suggests that the mere availability of data is not sufficient for increasing citizen trust or a low perceived corruption. A number of factors can modify the relationship. Considering this, the study was designed as exploratory form, based on the research question: Is there a relationship between Political Integrity, Public Finances and Public Procurement, according to GDB 2022, and Perceived Corruption according to CPI 2022?

Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationship between Perceived Corruption and three modules within the GDB analysis: Political Integrity, Public Finance, and Public Procurement. An initial Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to assess the normality of the data, a prerequisite for Pearson's correlation. The findings indicate that only Public Finances data approximate a normal distribution, though with a slight deviation ($W = 0.975$, $p = 0.040$). Conversely, data for Political Integrity ($W = 0.939$, $p < 0.001$), Public Procurement ($W = 0.964$, $p = 0.006$), and Perceived Corruption ($W = 0.940$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrate significant departures from normality (refer to Table 1).

Tab. 1. *Results of the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality of the data*

	GDB - Political Integrity	***GDB - Public Finances***	***GDB - Public Procurement***	***CPI***
Mean	*25.1*	*50.1*	*46.9*	*46.1*

Shapiro-Wilk W	*0.939*	*0.975*	*0.964*	*0.940*
p-value	*<.001*	*0.040*	*0.006*	*<.001*

Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to assess the relationship between variables due to its widespread use and interpretability in scientific literature, despite some variables showing deviations from normality according to the Shapiro-Wilk test. Visual inspection confirmed linearity and the absence of outliers. (see Figs. 1-3 in the Analysis and Findings section). As a corroborating measure, Spearman correlations were also computed to ensure the adequacy of Pearson correlation coefficients in describing the relationships (see Analysis and Findings section).

Analysis and findings

Descriptive analysis

The descriptive analysis of the data shows that Political Integrity is the indicator with the lowest mean value (M=25.1, SD=16.8), reflecting significant challenges in maintaining ethical standards and political accountability in many countries. On the other hand, Public Finances and Public Procurement presented higher averages (M=50.1 [SD=23.4] and M=46.9 [SD=25.2] respectively), which suggests more consistent efforts towards fiscal transparency or data related to procurement. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is centered on a mean of 46.1 (SD=17.5).

Tab. 2. *Descriptive statistics*

	GDB - Political Integrity	***GDB - Public Finances***	***GDB - Public Procurement***	***CPI***
N	*106*	*106*	*106*	*106*
Mean	*25.1*	*50.1*	*46.9*	*46.1*
Median	*22.0*	*50.5*	*50.0*	*42.0*
Standard deviation	*16.8*	*23.4*	*25.2*	*17.5*
Minimum	*3*	*0*	*0*	*17*
Maximum	*82*	*94*	*96*	*90*

Correlation analysis

A statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$) was found between Political Integrity and CPI through Pearson correlation analysis. This indicates that increased political integrity is linked to reduced perceived corruption.

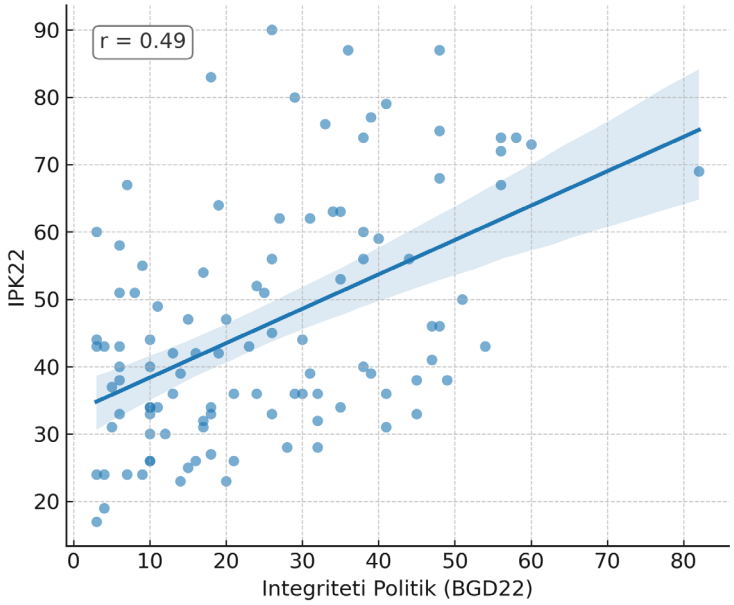

Fig. 1. *Correlation between Political Integrity and CPI*

Transparency in public finance management tends to be associated with a lower perception of corruption, though this relationship is not as strong as that with political integrity (r = 0.25, p = 0.011).

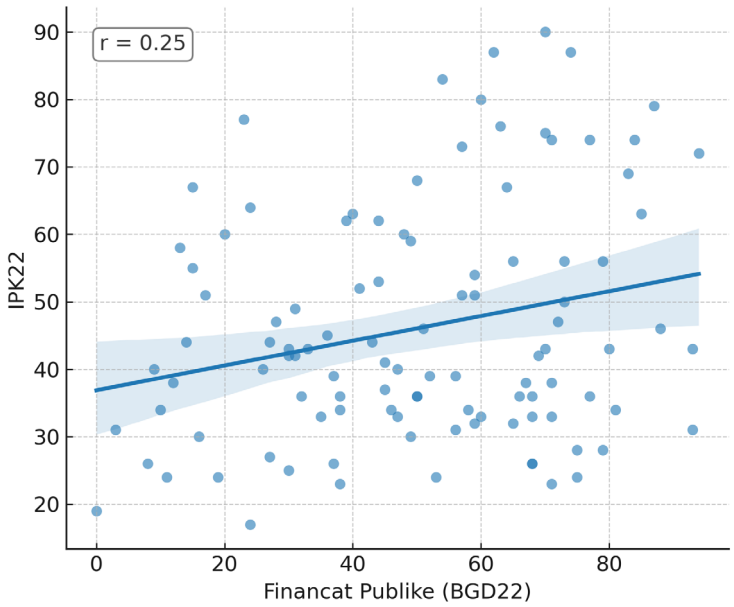

Fig. 2. *Correlation between Public Finances and CPI*

The relationship between Public Procurement and CPI was very weak and did not reach the level of statistical significance (r = 0.18, p = 0.072). Thus, the analysis did not find a statistically significant relationship between transparency in relation to public procurement procedures and the level of perceived corruption.

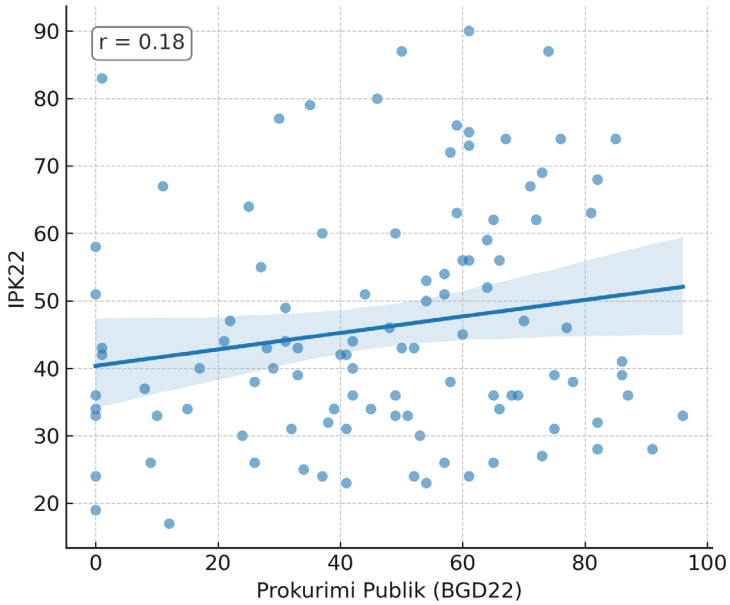

Fig. 3. *Correlation between Public Procurement and CPI*

As mentioned in the Methodology section, to assess the robustness of these findings, Spearman's rank correlation coefficients (ρ) were also calculated. The results of Spearman correlations are very close to those of Pearson (see Table 3). The correlation between Political Integrity and CPI remained positive and statistically significant ($\rho = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). Likewise, the correlation between Public Finances and CPI was positive and statistically significant ($\rho = 0.20$, $p = 0.044$). Although the Spearman correlation between Public Procurement and CPI was positive, it was not statistically significant ($\rho = 0.17$, $p = 0.086$) (see Table 2). The consistency between the Pearson and Spearman correlation coefficients strengthens the reliability of the findings.

Tab. 3 – *Pearson and Spearman correlations between Perceived Corruption (CPI22) and Political Integrity, Public Finances and Public Procurement*

		CPI
GDB - Political Integrity	**Pearson's r**	0.491***
	df	104
	p-value	<.001
	N	106
	Spearman's ρ	0.454***
	df	104
	p-value	<.001
	N	106
GDB - Public Finances	**Pearson's r**	0.245*
	df	104
	p-value	0.011
	N	106

		CPI
	Spearman's ρ	0.196*
	df	104
	p-value	0.044
	N	106
GDB - Public Procurement	**Pearson's r**	0.176
	df	104
	p-value	0.072
	N	106
	Spearman's ρ	0.168
	df	104
	p-value	0.086
	N	106

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

In summary, the correlation analysis suggests that there is a moderate negative (since increased political integrity is associated with decreased perceived corruption) and statistically significant relationship between Political Integrity and the level of Perceived Corruption. This implies that efforts to strengthen political integrity may be important in reducing the perception of corruption.

A statistically significant, albeit weaker, relationship was also found between Public Finances and Perceived Corruption, suggesting that factors related to the management of public finances may influence the perception of corruption.

The lack of a statistically significant relationship between Public Procurement and Perceived Corruption requires further investigation to understand the complexity of their relationship, taking into account other possible mediating or moderating factors. The consistency of the direction and significance of the correlations observed with both methods (Pearson and Spearman) increases the reliability of these findings.

Discussion

The strongest and most statistically robust association was found between political integrity and perceived corruption. The Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.49 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a clear and meaningful relationship: countries with higher political integrity, measured through transparency in party financing and asset declarations, tend to report lower levels of perceived corruption. This finding supports the argument that political transparency is foundational for ethical public conduct and accountability. Scholars such as Norris and van Es (2016), Bauhr and Grimes (2014), and Vargas and Schlutz (2016) emphasize that institutional mechanisms such as financial disclosure laws and transparent campaign financing enable public oversight, promote trust, and reduce opportunities for illicit behavior. The availability of such information facilitates citizen monitoring and is aligned with broader claims in the literature that transparency enhances legitimacy and strengthens accountability frameworks (Fox, 2007; Bovens, 2007; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; Porumbescu, 2017; Park & Blenkinsopp, 2011).

A moderate but statistically significant relationship is also observed between fiscal transparency and perceived corruption, with a correlation coefficient of 0.25 ($p = 0.011$). While weaker than the association with political integrity, this finding nonetheless corroborates theoretical claims that open access to budgetary and financial information enhances the integrity of public spending. Prior research has underscored the value of fiscal transparency for enabling the monitoring of government expenditures and improving

the quality of governance (Wehner & de Renzio, 2013; Hameed, 2005). Moreover, transparency in fiscal matters is seen as a way to build citizen trust by demonstrating responsible and accountable financial management (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; Porumbescu, 2017). However, the lower correlation suggests that fiscal data alone may not be sufficient unless accompanied by other enabling conditions such as effective oversight institutions and active civic engagement.

In contrast, the correlation between public procurement transparency and perceived corruption is not statistically significant ($r = 0.18$; $p = 0.072$), indicating that no clear linear relationship can be established within the parameters of this analysis. Although the positive coefficient suggests a weak tendency for greater transparency to align with lower perceived corruption, the lack of significance implies that the publication of procurement data alone may be insufficient to influence public perceptions meaningfully. This finding challenges assumptions commonly found in the literature regarding the role of procurement disclosure in combating corruption (Kenny & Karver, 2012; Fazekas et al., 2013; Adam et al., 2020). Instead, it might point to limitations in how such data is presented and used. Scholars have noted that the quality, accessibility, and usability of data are critical to its impact (Janssen et al., 2012; Vetrò et al., 2016; Zuiderwijk et al., 2018). Additionally, the phenomenon of "facade transparency", when data are selectively published to create an appearance of openness without substantive accountability, may further reduce the effectiveness of procurement disclosures (Fung, Graham & Weil, 2007; Gurstein, 2011).

Overall, the findings provide empirical support for the theoretical linkage between transparency and the perception of corruption, while also illustrating that not all forms of transparency are equally effective. Political integrity emerges as the most potent dimension, with fiscal transparency showing moderate promise. Procurement transparency, however, might demonstrate the limits of an approach with incomplete, inaccessible, or poorly contextualized data. These findings highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of transparency, one that goes beyond availability of information to encompass its usability, interpretability, and integration into broader accountability systems.

Conclusions and implications

The findings reveal valuable insights into the complex relationship between transparency and perceived corruption across sectors. Political integrity and public finance transparency correlate with perceived corruption, supporting theoretical arguments. However, no significant correlation was found for public procurement, suggesting data availability alone doesn't guarantee reduced corruption perceptions. Factors like data quality, usability, comprehensiveness, and complementary accountability mechanisms might be crucial for effective transparency policies in this sector.

The findings carry important policy implications. In the areas of political integrity and public finance, the findings suggest that enhancing transparency, particularly regarding the financing of political and institutional stakeholders and the accessibility of budgetary information, might positively influence public perceptions of corruption. By contrast, in public procurement, a more nuanced strategy is needed. Rather than focusing solely on increasing the volume of disclosed data, policymakers should prioritize improving data quality, usability, and comprehensiveness. Moreover, the effectiveness of transparency depends on the presence of robust accountability mechanisms capable of leveraging this information to detect and deter corrupt practices.

The study also underscores the need for further research to deepen understanding of how transparency affects corruption across different sectors. Given the challenges in measuring corruption, as highlighted by Rothstein (2011), future research should examine which specific transparency interventions are most effective in varying institutional contexts, the role of contextual factors in shaping outcomes, and the limitations of relying on perception-based indicators as proxies for actual levels of corruption.

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