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# FRAMING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AN OVERVIEW OF MICHOACÁN STATE GOVERNMENT

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## Abstract

Since 2015, local governments of 30 Mexican states have joined the National Open Government Partnership to enhance openness through mechanisms of transparency, accountability and citizen participation. The objective of this paper is to analyze the frameworks promoted by the State Government of Michoacán on public participation since the adoption of an open government policy. To

achieve the objective, press releases from the Michoacán State Government's page were collected and subsequently examined through a framing analysis. Findings indicate that this subnational government has framed public participation in two ways: as a democratic advance and as a transfer of responsibilities to citizens. At the same time, there is a recognition of new public and private actors sharing public decisions with the government. Despite

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the progress found in this subnational context, the authors warn of serious risks due to the absence of clear rules for the implementation of mechanisms for public participation.

**Key words:** Open Government; public participation; framing analysis; digital methods; Michoacán; México.

## **ENCUADRES SOBRE LA PARTICIPACIÓN PÚBLICA. UNA MIRADA AL GOBIERNO DEL ESTADO DE MICHOACÁN**

### **Resumen**

Desde 2015, los gobiernos de 30 entidades federativas en México se adhirieron a la iniciativa nacional de Gobierno Abierto para impulsar la apertura del Estado mediante mecanismos de transparencia, rendición de cuentas y participación pública. El objetivo de este artículo es analizar los marcos promovidos por el Gobierno del estado de Michoacán sobre la participación pública a partir de la adopción de una política de Gobierno Abierto. Para lograr el objetivo, se recopilieron los comunicados de prensa emitidos por este gobierno y, posteriormente, se examinaron mediante un análisis de encuadre. Los resultados indican que el gobierno de Michoacán enmarcó la participación pública en dos sentidos: como un avance democrático y como una transferencia de responsabilidades hacia los ciudadanos. A su vez, se reconocieron nuevos actores públicos. A pesar de los avances encontrados, los autores advierten la presencia de riesgos derivados de la ausencia de reglas para la participación pública.

**Palabras clave:** Gobierno Abierto; participación pública; análisis de encuadre; métodos digitales; Michoacán; México.

### **INTRODUCTION**

A decade ago, governments around the globe launched the Open Government Partnership (OGP) to answer the citizens' call for greater transparency and accountability. This initiative was intended to "foster a global culture of open government that empowers and delivers for citizens and advances the ideals of open and participatory 21<sup>st</sup> century government" (OGP, 2011). While interest in government transformation began in the 1980s, the Obama administration set the precedent for Open Government based on three key components: the use of new communication technologies, citizen participation and collaboration among public actors (Wirtz & Birkmeyer, 2015). At present, 78 national governments have joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP), along with an increasing number of subnational authorities (OGP, 2020).

In the Latin American context, the OGP have placed special emphasis on the introduction of technological systems that contribute to managing transparency, fighting against corruption and promoting spaces for public participation. Additionally, Open Government initiatives have developed strategies to raise awareness among citizens and officials about the benefits of openness, by detecting useful information and reducing gaps for citizens (Oszlak & Kaufman, 2014). The launch of Open Government Initiatives at the

subnational level has also generated interest among academics and government officials. Previous studies have shown that local initiatives focused on developing mechanisms for public access to information, accountability and transparency (Chatwin *et al.*, 2019).

Since 2015, 30 Mexican subnational authorities have joined this lead (Chaidez & Moro, 2019). The commitment came as a progressive evolution from the adoption of e-government platforms (Cruz Meléndez & Zamudio Vázquez, 2017). Recently, the Open Government Index (OGI) revealed a positive change in the provision of information about government actions; nonetheless, it also showed the weakness of government mechanisms for involving citizens in public decisions<sup>1</sup> (Cejudo *et al.*, 2019). In the 2019 Metric, local authorities in Mexico obtained average ratings of .57 and .21 respectively, on a scale of 0 to 1.

Public participation has been defined in several ways. As a process of control and democratization of public administration (Cunill Grau, 2004); as a mechanism for including citizens in different public policy processes (Villarreal Martínez, 2010); or as a citizen intervention to make public administration more efficient (Aguilar Villanueva, 2015). From an Open Government perspective, public participation is defined as a mechanism for enabling the public, individual citizens and organizations, to contribute to government

work (Clarke & Francoli, 2014). In this regard, Ruvalcaba-Gómez and Rentería (2019) argued that there can be marked differences in perceptions of citizen participation, especially at the local level. Nevertheless, there is little evidence available about the frames promoted by subnational governments in Mexico on public participation after the adoption of Open Government policies.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to explain the main frames promoted by the State Government of Michoacán on public participation after the adoption of the OGP. The hypothesis of this paper is that embracing a new policy of openness promotes negotiation, within and outside of the government, which might be observed in slight changes in the subsequent frames promoted by the state. However, the introduction of an Open Government policy by itself is not enough to transform the prevailing ideas resulting from discourses on public participation. The research hypothesis stems from the fact that governments establish a government myth involving a system of beliefs that leads organizational actions and decisions from the beginning of their term (Riorda, 2008). Such myths occur in frames that emerge in government discourse, and which are mobilized through public relations activities to promote the interests of the organization (Knight, 1999); namely, through press releases. These texts are often used by journalists to construct news stories due to the dominant role of the government in the local public space (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007).

To examine what is proposed in this paper, frame device analysis was used to find the main frames promoted by the State Govern-

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1 The Open Government Index (OGI) was published for the first time in 2017 sponsored by the National Institute of Access to Information (INAI) and the Center for Economic Research and Teaching (CIDE).

ment of Michoacan regarding public participation. First, this research compiled all the press releases published by the Government's Press Bureau on its official website, from October 2015 to June 2020. A web scraping technique was used to extract information from press releases as a structured database. 3,906 press releases were compiled and subsequently filtered with the string [citizen participation] to obtain a sample of 137 press releases, eliminating duplicates. Then, following the work of Gamson and Lasch (1983), Clarke and Franco (2014) and Chatwin *et al.* (2019), the texts were coded to find the main frames involving public participation. Results suggest that the subnational government of Michoacan framed public participation as a democratic advance while pointing to it as a mechanism for transferring responsibility to citizens. The authors also found evidence of a lack of rules for public participation mechanisms.

The next section presents the leading initiatives that have been undertaken in Mexico related to public participation in an open government context. Then, the reader is provided with an overview of the State of Michoacan. In the following section, the methods and results of the research are explained. Finally, findings and conclusions about the future of Public Participation in this regional area are presented.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP IN MEXICO**

The definition of open government involves the integration of several concepts, perceptions and expectations about contemporary

state. Therefore, open government could be understood as an institutional technological platform which converts government data into open data to enable its use, including accountability and collaboration for public decision-making processes, and improvement of public services (Sandoval-Almazán, 2013). Therefore, open government is based on three concepts: transparency, accountability and digital technology. Furthermore, Criado and Ruvalcaba (2016) point out that at the local level, open government is a policy strongly related to transparency, access to information and accountability, not to mention other actions such as co-production or open data. Recently, Naser *et al.* (2020) defined open government as a paradigm that encompasses mechanisms designed to strengthen governance based on transparency, citizen participation, accountability, collaboration and innovation. In this paper, open government is understood as a cross-cutting policy<sup>2</sup> supported by technology and based on transparency, accountability and public participation to enhance mechanisms and results of public action.

Mexican authorities have embraced the foundations of open government in the course of a two-track democratization process. As a first step, and after a long process of negotiation with public actors, the state provided spaces for citizens' information and opinions. Thusly, civil society strengthened

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2 The opening of Government is a highly complex undertaking. We propose that its implementation requires an instrument operated from and within the organization and involves the participation of all of its members, also known as transversality (Serra, 2005).

its mechanisms of organization and public expressions (González-Galván & Demers, 2019). Open government was first established in the 2000s, when the Mexican Congress approved the Federal Law on Access to Information (Congreso de la Unión, 2002). As of 2013, an open data policy was promoted to strengthen productivity and civic innovation (OECD, 2018).

At the federal level, important advances have been made over the last twenty years in public participation; nevertheless, it is important to note the existence of bad practices aimed at civil society organizations by the authorities. For example, in 2017, the case #GobiernoEspía was made public, regarding digital surveillance carried out by the Mexican Government since January 2015. Individuals and organizations which had actively participated in the Open Government initiatives were among those targeted by Pegasus malware attacks, along with journalists, opposition figures, and other politically active Mexican citizens (Red en Defensa de los Derechos Digitales y Social TIC, 2017, art. 19). The unveiling of these acts triggered a rupture between civil institutions and the authorities, causing the Mexican civil society core group to end its participation in the Third OGP Action Plan, since at least two of its members were spied on by the Federal Government. Additionally, civil society also alleged inaction on the part of federal authorities to guarantee the rights of civil society (NOSC, 2017).

At the subnational level, some authorities across the country had already promoted laws and mechanisms for citizen participation

before adhering to the OGP. For instance, in the states of Jalisco, Michoacán and Nuevo León, mechanisms were developed to allow public participation, but remained limited to specific projects (Villarreal Martínez, 2010). Under this backdrop, Open Government became a collection of desires, imaginaries and practices. As of 2015, 30 local governments agreed to join the OGP. The integration of Open Government at the national level followed six activities for the development of action plans. Action plans at local level are based on the same sequence of activities, shown in Table 1. However, according to the civil society core group for Open Government in Mexico (NOSC), only 13 subnational authorities were actively working on their Action Plans of Open Government (Chaidez & Moro, 2019).

While the aim of the local action plan was clearly established by federal authorities, state governments have taken shortcuts that have yielded different results. At the end of 2019, Open Government exercises in six states were at an impasse due to reduced citizen participation and local government resistance; and moreover, an additional five were inactive because they did not report any follow-up activities, as well as two others that created their own agenda and chose not to follow the national proposition (Chaidez & Moro, 2019). This situation demonstrated that local government predisposition to citizen participation was unfavorable. Therefore, it is important to know, first of all, how local governments in Mexico frame the participation of citizens in the public space, including collaboration with government.

**TABLE 1. OPEN GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>
Start	Citizens, government and autonomous authorities sign a joint declaration to commit to carry out and follow up on the agreed activities at the local level.
Awareness and socialization	Participating authorities invite other public actors to join the local Open Government initiative. Workshops or training should be carried out to promote citizen interest in the initiative.
Integration of the Local Technical Secretariat (STL)	The steering committee calls for the integration of the STL, which is a space dedicated to the integration of the Local Action Plan. The STL should be comprised of a comptroller authority, civil society and the local government.
Integration of Participant Groups	Working groups should be convened to promote the participation of public actors with the objective of selecting local problems, establishing commitments, goals and indicators to solve them. The selected problems could be related to the national agenda of Open Government and the Follow the Money Project (a special project proposed at national level to learn how public money is spent).
Launching and implementation of the Local Action Plan (LAP)	Input collected from the working groups should be published in the LAP with a one-year due date. The final LAP must be integrated with measurable output as defined by the steering committee.
Monitoring and Evaluation of the LAP	Monitored activities should be published on the comptroller agency website. The evaluation must be carried out qualitatively and quantitatively within the first six months and at the end of the first year.

Source: Authors, adapted from the six steps of the local exercises of Open Government (INAI, 2016).

### **EMBRACING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: THE CASE OF THE MICHOACAN STATE GOVERNMENT**

Michoacan is a state located in the west of the Mexican Republic, bordering the states of Jalisco, Guanajuato, Querétaro, Mexico and Guerrero; its land area is equivalent to 3% of the national territory. It has a population of 4.5 million people (INEGI, 2014; Secretaría de Economía, 2019) and a large migrant community, namely in the United States, which makes it one of the states with the highest international mobility in Mexico (COESPO, n.d.).

The economy of the state is fragile with 85% of the population living in poverty (CONEVAL, 2020) and a high crime rate (INEGI, 2018). Additionally, the most recent National Survey on governmental quality indicated that citizens of this state perceive corruption as a very frequent practice in the local government, so only 27.5% of the interviewees expressed trust in their institutions (INEGI, 2020).

The contemporary political history of Michoacán is marked by a process of institutional erosion that comes from increased electoral competition, resulting in weak governments unable to effectively deal with powerful busi-

ness elites and criminal organizations (Pureco Ornelas, 2019). In recent years, the strength of the state has been diminished by the increased activity of criminal groups, a situation that led to the appearance of “vigilante” armed groups that sought to regain territorial control in 2013. Political and administrative control of local government virtually disappeared in 2014 when state control passed to the federal government, which took over social, economic and security programs (Ornelas & Ramírez Gutiérrez, 2017).

Michoacán’s subnational government is based on three branches: Executive, Legislative and Judicial. The Executive Branch is represented by the governor, elected every six years. The operation of the State relies on the local public administration, which is divided into 15 Ministries (Congreso de Michoacán, 2019). Despite its political autonomy, the government of Michoacán is highly dependent on federal resources, since at least 80% of the annual income is obtained from the national government and only 2% comes from local tax revenue; in addition, the government has historically presented a high level of public debt (Aguilera Villanueva *et al.*, 2017).

In 2016, the Michoacán State Government joined the OGP. The exercise would be implemented at the local level based on three pillars: transparency, citizen participation and collaboration with other public actors (SECOEM, n.d.). One year later, the creation of the State Anticorruption System was approved. This new mechanism included the development of a Citizen Participation Committee in charge of linking civil society organizations with government decisions regarding the fight

against corruption (Congreso de Michoacán, 2017).

In turn, civil society in Michoacán has advanced in its levels of organization to intervene in public affairs, in such a way that it has even been positively related to the improvement of living conditions in some of its state municipalities (Hernández Barriga *et al.*, 2013). Since the beginning of the century, civil societies have demanded participation in government decisions (Núñez Hurtado, 2005). Some of these demands were addressed in 2012, when the Local Congress approved a law on citizen participation that included citizen rights to intervene in the entire process of public decision making (Congreso de Michoacán, 2012). In 2015, this legal instrument was substituted by another law that aimed at regulating public participation mechanisms to make them more effective (Congreso de Michoacán, 2015).

Previous research has shown that Michoacán’s Open Government practices have focused on compliance with transparency regulations, redesigning its web portals to make them more user-friendly. Nonetheless, the State Government has neglected to design practices to strengthen open data availability and public participation. In this regard, it should be noted that the mechanisms used to promote citizen participation in Michoacán are not very clear and that the quality of government-citizen interaction to obtain information has declined (Sandoval-Almazán, 2020; Cejudo *et al.*, 2019). This paper intends to contribute to the understanding of public participation in this local context after the adoption of an Open Government policy; particularly, by examining what frames Michoacán State Government

has promoted about public participation after joining the OGP.

## METHODS

Framing analysis is an approach that has been used to explain how social life events are reproduced and represented in the media. Entman (1993) defines framing as:

“To select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52).

In this regard, frames are dominant principles that refer to situations, attributes, choices and actions taken by authorities, in this case, or any specific actor (Reese, 2001). A baseline summary elaborated by Lim and Jones (2010) found that framing analysis was used in public relations research primarily in two foci: 1) to identify how public relations professionals constructed a message and, 2) to compare the message delivered with the media coverage. Hallahan (1999) reported seven framing models in public relations, depending on what is framed: situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibility and news. In contrast, Pan and Kosicki (1993) argued that news frames are based on four structural dimensions: syntactical, script, thematic, and rhetorical.

Gamson and Lasch (1983) argued that organizations are capable of creating argumentative packages about events. These are built from frame devices that encompass the

symbolic and contextual characteristics of the event described. Frame devices are transmitted to the public space through public relations activities carried out by the government. One of the most important activities is the issuance of press releases. These texts serve to organize the significance of the events; usually, they tend to characterize facts positively and to defend the interests of the issuing organization. As a result, press releases are a primary source of information written in the third person for journalists (Pander Maat, 2007) and their content can be easily placed in the news cycle due to the large resources of government (Anderson and Lowrey, 2007). Nowadays, press releases are also available on digital spaces, such as government websites and social media profiles. Therefore, this article aims to know what frames were presented on public participation in the press releases of the Michoacán State Government, since they were a primary source of information for journalists and the general public.

In this paper, the method used is a combination of fundamentals of frame device analysis and digital methods. On June 24, 2020, press releases published on Michoacan State Government official website<sup>3</sup> were collected. The web page was launched in late 1998 and it has served as the main platform for information diffusion of the Michoacan government. The data was extracted by using a scraping web technique which consisted of customizing scripts to extract large amounts of information from a specific website (Perriam *et al.*, 2020). For this process the script Paser-

3 The official government website for press releases is [www.michoacan.gob.mx/noticias](http://www.michoacan.gob.mx/noticias).

Hub was used. A total number of 3,906 texts released from October 2015 to June 2020 were collected. The information collected from each release was 1) date, 2) link, 3) title, 4) bullet and 5) full text.

To organize the press release texts, Orange—a machine learning and data mining suite—was used (Demsar *et al.*, 2013). First, the widget [Corpus] was used to place the data on the canvas<sup>4</sup>; then, the widget [Pre-process Text] was selected to standardize all data. Next, by operating the widget [Create class] a class called [Open Government] was generated; after that, the string [participación ciudadana] was used to obtain all press releases containing this phrase. This combination of words was selected by the authors because that was the name given to public participation in the two laws in force for the state of Michoacán.

In total, 137 press releases containing this query were extracted, eliminating duplicates. The texts were then coded by the first author of this paper with the open software Taguette (Rampin *et al.*, 2019). This classification was later validated by the other two researchers and after that, by an external researcher. The coding was supported by a codebook adapted from Gamson and Lasch's (1983) framework analysis, shown in Table 2<sup>5</sup>.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on framing device analysis, this section presents the main frames found on public participation promoted by the Michoacán State Government after adhering to OGP. The frames were discovered in press releases published in the Michoacán State Government official website where several state agency communications are periodically released under the supervision of the Government Press Bureau. The texts revealed that “transparency and accountability were defined as the hallmark of Michoacán State Government administration” [PR28]; indeed, it seems to be clear that government openness to citizen contribution was still limited. In 2016, the State Governor made an announcement referring to the central role that citizens would play during the 2015–2021 administration [PR52].

The events described in the press releases analyzed were mostly located in the state capital, Morelia. The narrative mainly focused on the activities carried out by the State Governor and his speeches were frequently cited to support the information released. Two main frames were promoted by the Michoacán State Government on public participation. In the first one, public participation is seen as a result of the state democratization, and in the second, public participation is defined as a transfer of responsibilities to society. In this research, only one public participation activity supported by technology was found: the citizen proposal collected on the official web page for the Local Development Plan (LDP). In a way, this fact indicated that the local government preferred offline interactions with citizens compared to

4 Orange suit allows users to visually work with data. Thus, the data is placed on a blank canvas and then processed with the available widgets.

5 As the press releases reviewed were written in Spanish, the authors' translations are presented hereafter.

**TABLE 2. CLASSIFICATION CODEBOOK OF PRESS RELEASE CONTENT**

Device	Definition	Press Release Instance Example
Appeals to principles	Moral principles related to public participation.	Citizen participation is one of the main components to generate conditions of well-being and security [PR75] <sup>a/</sup>
Catchphrases	Sticky phrases used to draw attention to public participation.	Let Michoacan be heard! [PR120]
Consequences	They explain the different consequences of public participation.	Contribution to the reconstruction of the social fabric, the strengthening of institutions and the development of Michoacán [PR119]
Context	Date, place and description of the event recounted in the press release.	May 21, 2016, Cenobio Moreno, Apatzingán, during the fifth meeting of the Citizens' Committee [PR45]
Depictions	Constructed expressions used to explain public participation.	Citizen support [PR1]
Exemplars	Real examples, present or past, used to explain the mechanisms of public participation.	Regional Forums of Consultation and Citizen Participation have been held [PR38]
Metaphors	One or more imaginary entities used to explain the subject associated with public participation.	Contribution to Michoacan from the trenches of determined citizen participation [PR14]
Promises	Benefits that will be obtained or the actions that will be implemented to achieve public participation.	The Local Development Plan will respond to the aspirations of Michoacan citizens [PR5]

a/ For reading purposes, the code [PR] was used, followed by a number referring to the press release number where the phrase was first found.

Source: Authors; adapted from Gamson and Lasch (1983).

the use of technologies for online collaboration, despite the growing number of people using the internet in the territory<sup>6</sup> and, contrary to the global trend of promoting digital tools for participation at the local level (i.e., Ruvalcaba-Gomez *et al.*, 2020). In fact, this position partly contradicts the principles of Open Government, which rely heavily on the creation of digital platforms to bring citizens and the government together. The findings also showed progress in the symbiosis between the government of Michoacán and new public

actors; however, the quality of such interaction remains in question.

### Public Participation as a Democratic Advance

The Michoacan State Government promoted a frame of dialogical nature of exchange between government and citizens, as a natural result of a democratic progress. This frame emerged early in the current administration press releases and persisted with the adoption of Open Government as a policy. Michoacan State Government used depictions to illustrate plurality and openness to other political positions; for instance, it used phrases such as without political distinction [PR84] and a close dialogue between government and citi-

6 According to the most recent National Survey on Availability and Use of Information Technologies in Households, 58% of Michoacán's inhabitants are active Internet users (INEGI, 2019).

zens [PR119, PR120]. Here, public participation was conceived as a mechanism that would serve the following purposes:

1. To enhance democracy [PR82, PR88, PR92, PR103, PR106].
2. To collaborate with citizens on public policy design [PR34, PR49].
3. To improve living conditions for Michoacán migrants [PR40].
4. To achieve good governance [PR79].

At the beginning of the 2015–2021 administration, consultation forums were the main formula used to gather citizen opinions for the creation of an LDP, described as a democratic exercise prepared to consolidate a government accentuated by popular interests [PR4]. A total of 12 events were held in several venues [PR49], as far as Chicago and Los Angeles in the United States [PR20]. The forums were organized in nine or 10 thematic roundtables that addressed a wide variety of issues, such as economic development, employment, poverty, attention to vulnerable groups, crime prevention, innovation, productivity and competitiveness, environmental sustainability, urban prosperity, social cohesion, gender, justice and peace, human development, quality education, health access, accountability and transparency [PR5, PR7]. Furthermore, 1,266 proposals were collected through an online consultation [PR49]. According to press releases analyzed, municipal authorities [PR7] and a large number of citizens participated in the events [PR5, PR22]. In this frame, the recognition of civil society, such as the migrant community, was also highlighted; the government agenda even made several references to the presence of a binational community

[PR19, PR20, PR30, PR31, PR32, PR40]. The Michoacán State Government remarked on two outputs resulting from the democratic process of public participation: The Local Development Plan and the State Human Rights Program [PR5, PR93]. Moreover, the government proximity to citizens was supported by the decentralization of public services in some of the state municipalities [PR128, PR131].

### **Public Participation as a Discharge Public Service Obligation**

Michoacán State Government framed structures of public participation that clearly intended to share public power with citizens. Thus, the following depictions were found citizen support [PR1, PR3, PR44]; determined citizen participation [PR14, PR78, PR80]; active citizen participation [PR42] and social participation [PR45, PR67, PR81]. It was often found a narrative related to principles such as coordinated work between government and society [PR1], common good [PR75], citizen engagement [PR13, PR35] and promotion of family values [PR41].

From this frame, public participation was described as a useful mechanism to:

1. Preserve social order and peace [PR1, PR3, PR90].
2. Generate well-being and security [PR75].
3. Prevent crime [PR83, PR100].
4. Promote citizen reporting [PR96, PR100, PR101].
5. Recover public spaces from crime [PR98].
6. Build proposals on public security [PR126].
7. Strengthen public security [PR133].

8. Deliver efficient results [PR51, PR133]
9. Transform municipalities [PR67, PR72].
10. Carry out public work and government actions [PR68].
11. Rebuild social cohesion [PR69, PR100].
12. Monitor the actions of authorities [PR100].

As of 2016, with a diffuse legal and conceptual definition, three key structures related to public participation emerged in the press release narrative: Security and Justice Roundtables, Citizen Committees and Citizen Councils.

The first structure, Security and Justice Roundtables, was described as one of the main achievements in public participation in the Michoacan State Government public security area [PR120, PR126, PR132]. These structures were installed throughout the territory and aimed at integrating citizens in order to strengthen public security and to generate trust between citizens and authorities [PR14, PR132]. A total of nine roundtables were installed in the same number of cities [PR120] and 1,400 security meetings were held [PR133]. Meetings were led by members of the civil society, but also included authorities from all three levels of government [PR14, PR16]. Press releases reported benefits in the reduction of crimes such as homicide, extortion, kidnapping and robbery from the appearance of these structures [PR132]. For example, in the Tierra Caliente region a 32.4% reduction was reported in high-impact crimes [PR134].

Regarding Citizen Committees, they were conceived as a space to convene community priorities between the government

and citizens. According to their purpose, they were divided into two kinds: supervision of public works and public security. Public Works Supervision Committees were based on the “Model Communities Program”, launched in the following towns of the Tierra Caliente region: Uspero (Paracuaro), Cenobio Moreno (Apatzingan)—highlighted as a model of citizen participation by the current governor [PR45]—and Pinzandaro (Buenavista Tomatlan) [PR59]. Later, the program was replicated in Felipe Carrillo Puerto (Buenavista), Tepalcatepec and Coahuayana [PR65, PR66]. The Committees included regional leaders who allowed the incorporation of members of the self-defense groups [PR58]. Yet, performed work included watching over public works for 20 million pesos in Pinzandaro [PR59], 7 million pesos in Felipe Carrillo Puerto [PR65] and 70 public works in Tepalcatepec [PR66, PR63]. Furthermore, the “Zero Corruption” campaign was launched to promote the integration of social control committees among the beneficiaries of public programs in order to monitor public resources use [PR10]. Likewise, it was announced that Social Comptrollers would be designated for all the 113 municipalities in Michoacan, which would allow the public in general to take part in the supervision of public resources [PR21]. On the other hand, Citizen Committees focused on public security throughout all the state under the brand “Community Surveillance Committees” (Comvive). This program was announced as an innovative intervention to involve the population in crime prevention activities and to generate a culture of citizen co-responsibility [PR21, PR48]. To begin with,

400 committees were formed in the western region of the state. Each committee received a citizen emergency button, connected to all the state Public Security Systems, to report any crime that might occur in any neighborhood and to get a response from the police in less than three minutes [PR13, PR16]. These committees reported some participation in the rehabilitation of public spaces [PR129]. State authorities also promised that this strategy would move forward with the creation of Municipal Committees for Public Security and Crime Prevention [PR27]. Later in July 2016, it was announced that the model would be replicated in other communities [PR48].

Thirdly, Citizen Councils were defined as a work form for the three levels of government in which citizens were directly involved [PR28]. During the analyzed period, two types of Citizen Councils stood out: Education Councils and Social Development Councils. Education Councils were created in 94 out of the 113 municipalities and aimed at supervising elementary school education [PR117]. These structures were devoted to reviewing the education that children receive. A total number 1,613 councils were created throughout the state [PR117]. Parents and teachers participated in Education Councils to exchange views and to propose improvements on educational issues [PR123]. Meanwhile, Social Development Councils were installed in the municipalities of Nahuatzen, Aquila, Uruapan, Chinicuila, Lazaro Cardenas, Zitacuaro and Puruandiro [PR64, PR67, PR68, PR71, PR75, PR76, PR80]. Despite not being very clear how such Committees were formed, press releases described that they were made up by

60 to 78 citizens from academia, the business community and the civil society [PR71, PR75]. These organizational structures were responsible for validating the infrastructure projects that the government would carry out. For instance, in Nahuatzen, a predominantly indigenous locality, they validated a 35-million pesos investment in public works [PR64]. The main difference between Citizen Councils and Citizen Committees was that a liaison officer was designated by the Michoacan State Government to be a member of the former in order to monitor activities [PR70, PR71, PR80], whereas the latter was a more autonomous structure with more power to decide about public works that the government would execute in the communities.

In addition to these three structures, press releases also mentioned other spaces for public participation. Namely, Citizen Committee for the Michoacan Plan Follow-up [PR47]; State System of Artistic Education Inter-Institutional Committee [PR53]; Michoacan State Council for Territorial Planning and Urban Development [PR99]; Public Security State Council [PR105]; Electoral Process Follow-up Board [PR103]; Advisory Council on Climate Change [PR124], and Municipal Youth Councils [PR15]. In addition, the program “Your Community is in You” was also reported on press releases. In it, a group of 300 undergraduate students would be sent to 500 communities to diagnose community problems related to poverty and social exclusion and then, to propose solutions to the Michoacan State Government [PR9].

The two frames promoted by the Michoacan State Government were an extension

of previous government frames with subtle changes, despite the adoption of a new Open Government policy. This fact proved the initial hypothesis of this paper: embracing an Open Government policy promotes negotiation, inside and outside a public organization, but by itself cannot change the frames established by government, as was noted in the case of public participation. For example, during Lazaro Cardenas Batel administration (2002–2008) the catchphrase “to govern *with* and *for* all inhabitants of Michoacán” was used (Núñez Hurtado, 2005, p. 124). In order to achieve such a campaign promise, Núñez Hurtado pointed out that an extensive public consultation process was conducted in the state and abroad. Actually, it became the first participatory local plan in the State’s history involving several public actors across the State and abroad.

With the adoption of an Open Government policy in 2016, the Michoacan State Government committed to strengthening mechanisms for public participation. At the same time, it promoted the creation of various structures integrating regional leaders and citizens. Nonetheless, a role definition of such structures to enhance governmental efficiency was lacking, which was evident in instances where a structure was referred to both as a Council and as a Committee within the same press release. In addition, the operating performance tended to be diffuse due to the absence of a legal framework that supports the operation of such structures, because the laws in force do not recognize them. Thus, citizen groups might have tasks that range from repairing urban furniture, approving public

works to doing crime prevention work; in such a way that it is not possible to know whether these structures increased the effectiveness of government actions. These shortcomings cause some serious concern since this territory has historically shown that a legal gap allows the incursion of regional *caudillos*, as happened between 2013 and 2014.

The increased number of spaces for public participation signals the ongoing process of civil society development. The public recognition of stakeholders by the Michoacan State Government, such as immigrants and business communities, represented progress in the visibility of some citizen organizations in the public space. From Honneth’s (2004) perspective, this would be the first step in limiting the actions of the State and foster transparency, accountability and access to Michoacan State Government information. Within the Open Government principles, these actors could become authority partners, which would open doors to public-private partnerships to provide and monitor public services. In a context where citizens perceive local government as deficient and contaminated by corruption, such alliances could be remarkably beneficial to increase public trust. However, findings also showed a limited description of these new public actors; that is, press releases only pointed to the presence of prominent people from the communities, members of civil society and other state actors, without a greater description. This could be associated with a low level of relationship between government public relations activities and the Open Government policy, as has happened in states such as Queretaro and Hidalgo (Negrete-Huelga

& Rivera-Magos, 2018). For instance, visible public actors were described as public program beneficiaries [PR30, PR71, PR80, PR98, PR123], government shareholders [PR83, PR94, PR112], business community members [PR43, PR45, PR46, PR101] and organized civil society members [PR1, PR3, PR6, PR15]. This situation could lead to public decisions finally being made by the elites and government, leaving out the ordinary citizen. This concern stems from the fact that not all organizations were recognized by the government; such is the case of the Committee on Citizen Participation of the State Anti-Corruption System installed in 2017, since it was not mentioned in any of the press releases analyzed. Furthermore, there is a risk that local governments could use these structures as open washing strategies and not as a cross-cutting policy to push government openness. In other words, as Chatwin *et al.* (2019) have pointed out, it is possible that governments will use shallow measures to improve their citizen acceptance, without these strategies representing fundamental changes in their open government policy. Besides, the results of this paper confirm the findings of Sandoval-Almazan (2020) who pointed out a low willingness of the Michoacán State Government to collaborate with citizens through digital platforms; for example, by providing tools to evaluate programs, send complaints about the services or gather citizen opinion about public works. To quote Cunill-Grau's words (2004), the institutionalization of citizens into the Michoacan State Government is going to be a successful action only if political pluralism and decision-making autonomy are guaranteed

through clear rules for public participation in order to achieve real citizen engagement and keep public actors' political interests aside. In summary, the authors could identify the following opportunity areas: a) rules and requirements to issue an open call for citizens to join the committees; b) a clear methodology to select the public work to be evaluated and to assess/measure its execution, c) establishment of citizen responsibilities for each of the activities previously mentioned and, d) incorporate digital tools to diversify participants and expand the scope of actions.

## CONCLUSIONS

Over the last twenty years, democratic progress in Mexico has led to a higher level of government openness. Co-operation arrangements for transparency and accountability have been established with civil society, academia and the business community. As a result, it was increasingly common for governments across the country to implement different kinds of policies in order to be more transparent and open to society.

The adoption of Open Government policies in Mexico has meant a wave of novelty for government operation, because it renewed the aspirations towards the democratization of public administration, supported by a strong partnership with civil society and technological development. At the local level, Open Government initiatives were particularly important because they represented a new commitment to drive greater efficiency in public services in the midst of a weak state and low citizen trust.

This paper identified the main frames promoted by the Michoacan State Government of public participation from the adoption of an Open Government policy. Subtle changes in the scope of public participation mechanisms were observed, which proved the initial hypothesis of this paper. The central finding of this research was that the Michoacan State Government promoted two main frames about public participation from OGP implementation: 1) as a democratic advance and, 2) as a mechanism for transferring responsibility to citizens. These frames were supported by the description of several activities, such as public consultations and the creation of consultative committees to monitor government activities.

Special attention was given to new participation spaces in the Tierra Caliente and Indigenous communities, which historically have been lagging and where other political forces have taken over. As the government policy of openness does not necessarily have a cross-cutting nature, framing public security, education and public works was very important due to the interest of the local authority to align with citizens. However, the definitions, scope and outputs of government-citizen collaboration are still pending at the discursive, legal and conceptual levels.

Based on these findings, it can be pointed out that the local opening process is emerging, as is the case in the neighboring state of Jalisco (Ruvalcaba & Rentería, 2019), which is evidenced in the transformation of public space and participating key actors. It is not yet possible to know if they are generating the desired effects on the effectiveness of public decision-making beyond what is reported in

press releases, but some risks clearly appear. An important limitation for this study lies in the fact that there are few pre-existing elements in the literature regarding public participation, to enable a comparison with other government periods, except for the Lazaro Cardenas Batel administration. Consequently, further research is recommended concerning the appropriation of these frames by media and public actors, the impact on street-level bureaucrats as well as the civil society perception of public participation mechanisms.

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