**DPP Winter 2024: The Politics of Government Transparency**

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Time: Every Thursday E-mail: Corduneanu-HuciC@ceu.hu

8:50 pm – 10:30 am Office hours: Thursday 10:30 am-12:30 (B420)

Course Credits: 2 (ECTS 4)

**Background and Overall Aim of the Course**

Academics and policy makers have started to pay significant attention to how transparent governments (and other public and private entities) are to legislatures, media, courts, and ordinary citizens. Transparency implies opening the decision-making process, as well as publishing reliable and timely data. Without information, citizens are not able to assess the performance of politicians in office and curb abuses such as corruption or rent seeking. Accountability requires some level of transparency. Scandals in the United States and Europe about government secrecy raised important issues regarding the nature of public information, as well as the delicate balance between privacy and disclosure. Media censorship has been steadily on the rise in many countries around the world.

This course goes beyond the normative assumptions of openness and examines several questions. What are the dimensions of government transparency? When do politicians have incentives to disclose information, why, and to whom? When does transparency lead to accountability? Are there any unintended negative consequences of openness?

The readings for the course come from an emerging body of work on the topic. In addition to lectures, students will work in teams on concrete exercises related to the political economy of information flows between states and citizens.

**Course requirements**

Attendance is mandatory. Exceptions are allowed only in cases complying with the general university attendance policy and following the approval of the instructor. Students are required to complete all assigned readings prior to class. The course is designed in an interactive manner and will allocate time for lecture and interactive activities.

Electronics are permitted in class only as long as their use is strictly related to the course.

**Good academic practices**

Academic dishonesty – plagiarism, cheating, breaking other norms stipulated by the CEU Code of Ethics - will result in a failing grade. For detailed information on what constitutes plagiarism or cheating and their serious consequences, please go to the following link:

**Learning outcomes**

The course will address the major debates surrounding the emerging questions of how transparent governments should be and to whom. Additionally, there are two practical outcomes: students are encouraged through the final concept note/proposal to innovate in the general field of transparency (apps, websites, blogs, graphics, etc.). Methodologically, most readings use various levels of formal and statistical models. Students pursuing the quantitative specialization are strongly encouraged in their reading notes to also address methodological design and execution issues.

**Learning activities and teaching methods**

Lectures; seminar style discussions; class simulations and case studies.

**Grading policy**

The final course grade will evaluate the completion of the following assignments:

1. *One research note or case brief on a ‘transparency experiment’ (40%):* This short output (around 5 pages) will summarize your efforts to retrieve specific information on processes, data or institutions in a country/context of your choice.
2. *Final proposal/project (40%):* students are expected to write a short research, policy proposal or concept note (10 page) on an innovative topic related to government transparency. Some projects may be collaborative. Please consult with the instructor to obtain approval for the topic as well as for co-authored work.
3. *Participation and discussion* (20%): To receive the maximum number of points for class participation, you must arrive on time, miss no more than one class, contribute to the class discussion every week, and submit at least five sets of reading notes.

At the end of the semester, the final score is converted to a letter grade according to the CEU grading scale, as follows:

**A** 3.68 – 4.00

**A-** 3.34 – 3.67

**B+** 3.01 – 3.33

**B** 2.68 – 3.00

**B-** 2.34 – 2.67

**C+** 2.33 (minimum pass)

Additional information concerning grading procedures and specifications for turning in the assignments is also included in the CEU School of Public Policy Student Manual.

**Weekly content (\*subject to change)**

1. **Week 1: Introduction (housekeeping: January 11)**
2. **Week 2: Why is government transparency the new fad in town?**

Key concepts: open society, open government, principle of transparency, the link between transparency and accountability

**January 18**

Kosack, S., & Fung, A. 2014. Does transparency improve governance?. Annual review of political science, 17.

Fung, Archon. 2013. “Infotopia: Unleashing the Democratic Power of Transparency” *Politics and Society* 41(2): 183-212.

Adsera, Alicia, Carles Boix, and Mark Payne. 2003. “Are You Being Served? Political Accountability and Quality of Government.” *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 19 (2): 445–90.

*Recommended*: Fung, Archon, and David Weil. 2010. "Open Government and Open Society." Open Government: Collaboration, Transparency, and Participation in Practice. O'Reilly Media, Inc.: 105-13.

1. **Week 3: Information asymmetries between governments, bureaucrats, and citizens**

Key concepts: Who are the actors with transparency stakes? What has been the ideological trajectory of transparency reforms and why? What are the theoretical foundations of government transparency within the information economics paradigm?

**January 25**

Pozen, David. 2019. “Transparency’s Ideological Drift.” Yale Law Journal 100-128. Available at: https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/ylr128&div=5&id=&page=

Stiglitz, Joseph. 2008. “Fostering an Independent Media with a Diversity of Views.” In *Information and Public Choice: From Media Markets to Policymaking*, ed. R. Islam, 139–52. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Jensen, N., & Thrall, C. 2021. Who's Afraid of Sunlight? Explaining Opposition to Transparency in Economic Development. *Business and Politics*, 1-18.

*Recommended:*

Stiglitz, Joseph. 2002. “Information and the Change in the Paradigm in Economics.” *American Economic Review* 92 (3): 460–501.

**Class simulation**

1. **Weeks 4-5: What kind of transparency? Varieties and dimensions of government transparency**

**February 1 (Week 4): Freedom of Information Acts**

Key concepts: What are FOIA/RTK/RTI laws and policies? Why and when have they been adopted? Do they prevent or punish corruption? How are they evaluated?

Berliner, Daniel. 2014. The Political Origins of Transparency. *Journal of Politics* 76(02): 479-491

Escaleras, M., Lin, S. & Register, C. 2010. “Freedom of Information Acts and Public Sector Corruption” *Public Choice* 145(3-4): 435-60.

Lagunes, P, Pocasangre, O. 2019. “Dynamic transparency: An audit of Mexico's Freedom of Information Act.” *Public Administration* 97: 162– 176.

Fox, Jonathan, Libby Haight, and Brian Palmer-Rubin. 2010. “Delivering Transparency: To What Degree Does the Mexican Government Respond to Public Information Requests?”Working paper.

**Case study**

*Recommended:*

Banisar, D. (2006). Freedom of information around the world 2006: A global survey of access to government information laws. Privacy International.

**February 8 (Week 5): Budgets and monetary policy**

Key concepts: What are the theoretical foundations of fiscal transparency? Why are budget and monetary policy transparency important? What does a transparent budget look like and how does politics shape it?

Alt, James. 2019. “Twenty Years of Transparency Research.” A keynote speech given at the conference “Public Sector Economics 2018 – Fiscal openness: transparency, participation and accountability in fiscal policies.”

Alt, J., Lassen, D., & Wehner, J. 2014. “It Isn't Just about Greece: Domestic Politics, Transparency and Fiscal Gimmickry in Europe.” *British Journal of Political Science*, 44(4), 707-716.

Kopits, George, and J. D. Craig. 1998. “Transparency in Government Operations.” Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund.

Andreula, Nicoló, Alberto Chong, Jorge Guillén. 2009. “Institutional Quality and Fiscal Transparency*.*”Inter-American Development Bank. Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank, Research Dept.

**Case study:**

Dye, K.M. 2007. "Corruption and Fraud Detection by Public Sector Auditors." *EDPAC: The EDP Audit, Control, and Security Newsletter* 36, (5-6): 6-15.

*Recommended:*

Geraats, Petra. 2005. “Transparency of Monetary Policy: Theory and Practice.” CESIfo Economic Studies, Vol. 52 (March): 111–52.

Heald, David. 2003. “Fiscal Transparency: Concepts, Measurement and UK Practice.” Public Administration 81 (4): 723–59.

1. **Weeks 6-7: Politics of secrecy**

**February 15 (Week 6): Channels of opaqueness**

Key concepts: Trade-offs between privacy, security and government transparency in democracies; censorship in autocracies

Benkler, Yochai. 2014. "A Public Accountability Defense for National Security Leakers and Whistleblowers" *Harvard Law and Policy Review* 1: 281-326. (http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/harlpolrv8&div=16&g\_sent=1&collection=journals)

King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. 2013. How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression. *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 326-343.

Samuel C. Rhodes. 2021. Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Fake News: How Social Media Conditions Individuals to Be Less Critical of Political Misinformation. *Political Communication*

Smidt, H., Perera, D., Mitchell, N., & Bakke, K. 2021. Silencing Their Critics: How Government Restrictions Against Civil Society Affect International ‘Naming and Shaming’. *British Journal of Political Science*, 51(3), 1270-1291.

**Class debate**

*Recommended*: Stalder, Felix. 2002. "Privacy is not the Antidote to Surveillance." *Surveillance & Society* 1(1).

**February 22 (Week 7):** **Hiding or lying? Transparency versus Obfuscation**

Key concepts: Various types of information concealment: strategic obfuscation, misinformation; missing information

Brosio, Giorgio. 2007. "Cases for and against Transparency/Obfuscation in Intergovernmental Relations." *The Economics of Transparency in Politics*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pages 173-87.

Kono, Daniel Y. 2006. "Optimal Obfuscation: Democracy and Trade Policy Transparency." *American Political Science* Review 100(03): 369-84.

Lindbom, Anders. 2007. "Obfuscating Retrenchment: Swedish Welfare Policy in the 1990s." *Journal of Public Policy* 27(02): 129-50.

Stasavage, David. 2004. "Open-Door or Closed-Door? Transparency in Domestic and International Bargaining." International Organization 58(4): 667-703.

**Case study**

1. **Week 8: Politics of disclosure**

Key concepts: What are the political determinants of information disclosure?

**February 29**

Wehner, Joachim, and Paolo de Renzio. 2013. "Citizens, Legislators, and Executive Disclosure: The Political Determinants of Fiscal Transparency." *World Development* 41 (C):96-108.

Hollyer, James R, B Peter Rosendorff, and James Raymond Vreeland. 2011. "Democracy and Transparency." *The Journal of Politics*, 73 (4):1191-1205.

Vallely, Paul. (2006, May 16). “Transcript of Interview with Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Nigerian Finance Minister.” *The Independent*. Retrieved April, 2012.

*Recommended:*

Pozen, D. E. 2013. “The Leaky Leviathan: Why The Government Condemns and Condones Unlawful Disclosures of Information.” *Harvard Law Review*, 127(2), 512-635.

1. **Week 9: Transparency without accountability**

Key concepts: Does transparency always lead to accountability? Under what conditions? When does it have unintended consequences?

**March 7**

Schatz, Edward. 2008. “Transnational Image Making and Soft Authoritarian Kazakhstan.” *Slavic Review* 67 (1): 50–62.

Kolstad, Ivar, and Arne Wiig. 2009. “Is Transparency the Key to Reducing Corruption in Resource-Rich Countries?” *World Development* 37(3): 521-532.

Carey, John M. 2003. “Transparency versus Collective Action.” Comparative Political Studies 36 (9): 983–1006

Malesky, Edmund, Paul Schuler and Anh Tran. 2012. “The Adverse Effects of Sunshine: A Field Experiment on Legislative Transparency in an Authoritarian Assembly” *American Political Science Review 106*(4): 762-786.

*Recommended:*

Prat, Aandrea. 2005. "The Wrong Kind of Transparency." *The American Economic Review* 95(3): 862-877.

Gavazza, A., and A. Lizzeri. 2007. “The Perils of Transparency in Bureaucracies.” American Economic Review 97 (2): 300–05.

Mattozzi, Andrea, and Antonio Merlo. 2007. “The Transparency of Politics and the Quality of Politicians.” American Economic Review 97 (2): 311–15.

1. **Week 10: How do we recognize (lack of) transparency?**

Key concepts: Methods and techniques for identifying and evaluating the link between transparency and accountability

**March 14**

Dunning, Thad et al. 2019. *Information, Accountability, and Cumulative Learning: Lessons from Metaketa I.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press (excerpts posted on Moodle).

Olken, B. 2007. “Monitoring Corruption: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia.” *Journal of Political Economy* 115 (2): 200–49.

Stockmann D, and M. Gallagher. 2011. “Remote Control: How the Media Sustains Authoritarian Rule in China.” *Comparative Political Studies* 44 (4): 436–67.

*Recommended:*

Humphreys, Macartan, and Jeremy Weinstein. 2012. “Policing Politicians: Citizen Empowerment and Political Accountability in Uganda.” Working paper.

1. **Week 11: Transparency with (some) accountability**

Key concepts: What are the conditions that may lead from information to public goods provision?

**March 21**

Bauhr, Monika; Carlitz, Ruth. 2019. “Transparency and the Quality of Local Public Service Provision: Street-Level Discretion in Education, Health and Infrastructure.” QOG Working Paper Series 5: 1-43.

Keefer, Philip, and Stuti Khemani. 2011. “Mass Media and Public Services: The Effects of Radio Access on Public Education in Benin.” *Policy Research Working Paper* 5559, World Bank, Washington, DC.

**Success cases of disclosure**

Hemson, David, and Imraan Buccus. 2009. “The Citizen Voice Project: An Intervention in Water Services in Rural South Africa.” *IDS Bulletin* 40 (6): 60–69.

Fung, Archon, Hollie Gilman and Jennifer Shkabatur. 2011. Impact Case Studies from Middle Income and Developing Countries, <http://www.transparency-initiative>. org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/impact\_case\_studies\_final1.pdf.

Reinikka, Ritva, and Jakob Svensson. 2004. *The Power of Information Evidence from a Newspaper Campaign to Reduce Capture.* Washington, DC: World Bank, http://www.econ.worldbank.org/view.php? type=5&id=34028.

**Case study**

1. **Week 12: Technology and transparency**

Key concepts: What technological solutions may promote government transparency? When are they likely to be adopted and with what outcomes?

**March 28**

Bauhr, Monika, Ágnes Czibik, Jenny de Fine Licht and Mihály Fazekas. 2019. “Lights on the Shadows of Public Procurement: Transparency as an Antidote to Corruption.” *Governance*.

Beck, T. 2005. “Learning Lessons from Disaster Recovery: The Case of Bangladesh. Disaster Risk Management.” *Working Paper Series 11*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Yildiz, Mete. 2007. “E-government Research: Reviewing the Literature, Limitations, and Ways Forward.” *Government Information Quarterly* 24(3): 646-665.

**Course wrap-up**