First Article: Transperancy of Parliament work within the activities of world open parliament week

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Global Legislative Openness Week
Topic Brief I: Open Data for Parliamentary Monitoring

Detailed information on parliaments and their activities is vital for citizens and civil society groups to keep track of their parliaments and participate in the legislative process. With parliaments around the world publishing growing amounts of data on the internet, a number of international initiatives have called on parliaments to comply with standards of open data, that is, information offered freely to the public in clear and a organized format that is easy to use and understand.

Open data can be as diverse as records of parliamentary proceedings, the text of bills and proposed amendments, and information about individual Members of Parliament (MPs) including their attendance, activity during sessions, voting records, assets and expenditures, and work done with their constituents. For data to be considered "open", it should be presented in a structured format that makes it easy to sort and analyze. A scanned image of MPs' attendance records, for example, might not be considered "open" data because of the time and resources needed to use that information. On the other hand, an electronic spreadsheet of the same information (preferably in a non- format such as .CSV that doesn't require commercial software to read) would be considered "open" because it is easy to search, organize, and analyze alongside other information.

Parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs) use collections of open parliamentary data to keep the public informed of ongoing legislative activity and to create organized public records that underpin efforts to increase parliamentary accountability. PMOs around the world have worked with innovative software developers to create websites and mobile apps that help citizens keep track of representatives and issues of interest to them. Some PMOs use detailed parliamentary data to give MPs scorecards on their performance, compare MPs' performance to their campaign promises, or keep citizens updated on changes to bills in real time.

When parliamentary information is released on a timely schedule, it can give citizens new opportunities to participate in the political process, for example, by enabling citizens to voice their interests to MPs while laws is still being formed. Opportunities like this can increase public trust in their governments and promote more citizen engagement in their countries' legislative processes.

A number of international initiatives and groups promoting the use of open data have attracted attention and support from around the world. These include the Global Open Data Initiative, the Open Government Partnership's Open Data Working Group, and the Declaration of Parliamentary Openness, the latter of which has been endorsed by a number of prominent international organizations.

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