

OPEN DATA'S IMPACT

BRAZIL'S OPEN BUDGET TRANSPARENCY PORTAL

Making Public How Public Money Is Spent



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By Auralice Graft, Stefaan Verhulst and Andrew Young*

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BRAZIL'S OPEN BUDGET TRANSPARENCY PORTAL

Making Public How Public Money Is Spent

Dimension of Impact

- ✓ Improving Government
- ✓ Tackling Corruption and Transparency

Summary

In 2004, the Brazilian Office of the Comptroller General (CGU) created the Transparency Portal, a tool that aims to increase fiscal transparency of the Brazilian Federal Government through open government budget data. Developed in partnership with the Federal Data Processing Service, the Transparency Portal relies on the collaboration of diverse ministries and bodies of the Federal Public Administration to advance transparency and to offer a tool that stimulates citizen participation. As the quality and quantity of data on

the portal have improved over the past decade, the Transparency Portal is now one of the country's primary anti-corruption tools, registering an average of 900,000 unique visitors each month. The project is regarded as one of the most important e-government initiatives with regard to control over public spending. Local governments throughout Brazil and three other Latin American countries have modeled similar financial transparency initiatives after Brazil's Transparency Portal.

Key Takeaways

- Open data initiatives can help uncover illegal or irresponsible government spending, engage citizens in anti-corruption campaigns, and lead to meaningful public policy changes that might not occur without the public outrage created by disclosure.

- Anonymous feedback channels are an important way to supplement existing government-maintained databases, especially those focused on corruption. Giving whistleblowers a platform for sharing information can lead to more comprehensive corruption data – although the risk of false positives should not be overlooked.
- Some information, such as in-depth budgetary data, might require some level of translation to make it truly accessible and useful to average citizens in terms of technological availability and comprehensibility. Additional efforts, of course, must be made to ensure that any personally identifiable financial information is anonymized before being made public.

I. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Corruption in Brazil

As with many of the countries included in this series, Brazil has long suffered from corruption. The country is ranked 69 among 175 countries in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index, which also reports that the country's legal system is "plagued with inefficiencies and corrupt judges."¹ Brazilian elections are also believed to be infiltrated by corruption and, despite public outrage, politicians with prior convictions are often voted back to office. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, Brazil's third-largest state with a population of 11.9 million as of 2012², "only one single politician in the Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro is said to have never fallen foul of the law," according to one news report³.

Additionally, a 2009 World Bank and IFC1 Enterprise Survey found that 70 percent of global and domestic companies viewed corruption as a "major constraint to doing business" in Brazil, while a Federation of the Industries of the state of São Paulo investigation found that corruption cost Brazil almost \$40 billion (about 2.3 percent of GDP) in 2008 alone⁴.

Somewhat paradoxically, Brazil is often cited for its strong legal framework aimed at limiting corruption, and is considered a role model among developing countries in terms of its legal and regulatory efforts. While the Penal Code criminalizes the embezzlement of public funds, extortion, public graft, breach of public duty and bribery (passive and active), a 2014 anti-bribery law

1 Corruption Perceptions Index 2014: Results. Transparency International. <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>

2 Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area profile. Brookings Global Cities Initiative. Accessed October 13, 2015. <http://www.brookings.edu/about/programs/metro/~media/455849BC16B24B7CA98FE5C5FDE3C0EF.ashx>

3 Barth, Philipp. "The persistence of corruption in Brazilian politics." DW. May 10, 2014. <http://www.dw.com/en/the-persistence-of-corruption-in-brazilian-politics/a-17974970>.

4 Cruz, Marcos and Alexandra Lazarow. "Innovation in government: Brazil." McKinsey & Company Insights & Publications. September 2012. http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/public_sector/innovation_in_government_brazil.

makes companies liable for acts of corruption committed by their employees. The law applies to the bribing of domestic and foreign officials, and convicted companies must pay a fine of up to 20 percent of their gross annual income and may also face suspension of operations, confiscation of assets, or closure⁵.

Yet despite these formal mechanisms, corruption has proven deep-rooted and difficult to eradicate. Recent major scandals include the Petrobras scandal, which involves money laundering through a network of political corruption and that investigators believe cost state oil giant Petrobras more than \$2 billion⁶. In addition, media headlines have been dominated by the 2005 Mensalao (“big monthly payment,” in Portuguese) political bribery scandal, where public funds were reportedly used to pay monthly bribes and buy votes during the Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva presidency. Additional scandals are described in Box 1.

Open Data in Brazil

Brazil is a co-founder of the Open Government Partnership, along with Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. The government has committed itself to actively developing initiatives that encourage citizen participation in government, and to using technology to create and promote openness. These efforts are led by the National Infrastructure Open Data (INDA), which aims to establish open data technical

5 “Business Corruption in Brazil.” Business Anti-Corruption Portal. Accessed October 13, 2015. <http://www.business-anti-corruption.com/country-profiles/the-americas/brazil/show-all.aspx>.

6 Savarese, Mauricio. “No End in Sight for Brazil’s Petrobras Scandal.” Americas Society / Council of the Americas. August 5, 2015. <http://www.as-coa.org/articles/no-end-sight-brazil%E2%80%99s-petrobras-scandal>.

Box 1

MAJOR INCIDENCES OF CONVICTED OFFICIALS RETURNING TO POLITICS IN RECENT YEARS

Rio de Janeiro’s governor Anthony Garotinho was convicted in 2010 for corruption and establishing a criminal organization. He was said to head a gang of militias consisting of former police officers who extort protection money and organized parallel systems of justice. In spite of conviction, his prison sentence was reduced to a community service order and in 2014 he was back in the gubernatorial race, briefly enjoying high ratings in the polls before losing.

In **São Paulo**, former governor Paul Maluf was appointed as member of the Brazilian parliament, despite being known to his fellow countrymen as “Corrupto, mas faz,” which translates as “Corrupt, but hands-on.” He is said to have embezzled hundreds of millions of euros, and, as of 2014, Interpol still had an international warrant out for his arrest. His name Maluf is also the inspiration for the newly minted verb “Malufar” which means “to steal from the state.”

standards (i.e., common formats and machine-readable metadata, etc.), promote training, and support and encourage government publication of open data⁷.

Some of the open data efforts undertaken by the government include:

- The implementation of Brazil's Access to Information Law in 2011. This law regulates citizens' access to federal, state, provincial and municipal public documents, as formally guaranteed by the 1988 Constitution.⁸
- The Open Data Portal (described further below) was launched in 2012 to provide citizens with a tool to find and use public information.⁹
- A nationwide conference on transparency (CONSOCIAL) was organized in 2012, involving more than 100,000 Brazilians and providing for a national platform to debate issues relating to transparency, citizen participation in public administration, and the fight against corruption.¹⁰
- A Freedom of Information Law was passed in 2012. While the law has notable advantages – like its applicability to all levels of government, unlike freedom of information laws in other countries – “there is still no set of regulations detailing how citizens can ask for data, and what municipal, state or federal officials must do to comply.”¹¹

In fact, the legal basis for these efforts can be dated back to 1988, when the country's constitution established the need for “publicity” of administrative actions as one of its five core principles. The constitution also provides for direct citizen participation in overseeing public policies on health, social security and welfare; and freedom of speech and freedom of the press. A 2000 law on fiscal responsibility solidified the government's commitment to openness, mandating the public availability of key budget documents.

Nonetheless, despite these legal mechanisms to ensure openness, public access to government data was patchy (at best), and scope for citizen participation in government oversight was somewhat limited for much of Brazil's recent history. The launch of Brazil's Transparency Portal in 2004 marked the country's first concrete steps toward true openness and hopefully, true government accountability.¹²

7 <http://www.transparency.org/country#BRA>

8 Brazil: New Access to Information Law becomes effective today.” Article 19. May 16, 2012. <https://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/3208/en/brazil:-new-access-to-information-law-becomes-effective-today>.

9 New Brazilian Data Portal Dados.Gov.Br – Powered by CKAN.” Open Knowledge Blog. May 10, 2012. <http://blog.okfn.org/2012/05/10/new-brazilian-portal-dados-gov-br-made-by-citizens/>

10 <http://15iacc.org/agenda/agenda-day-4/the-consocial-in-brazil-empowerment-and-governmental-agenda/>

11 Barbassa, Juliana. “Brazil Freedom of Information Law Passed.” The World Post. May 17, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/17/brazil-freedom-of-information_n_1525131.html.

12 “OECD Integrity Review of Brazil: Managing Risks for a Cleaner Public Service.” OECD Publishing. 2012. http://www.keep-eeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/governance/brazil-oecd-integrity-review_9789264119321-en.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND INCEPTION

Over the course of the 2002 presidential campaign, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (known as “Lula”) ran as an outsider to the political system and made a number of promises to fight corruption and improve transparency. Almost immediately after he took office, civil society groups (and other organizations and even some government agencies) began putting pressure on him to fulfill those promises.

In 2003, the post of the Comptroller General of Brazil (Controladoria-Geral da União – CGU) was established; the CGU was an office close to the presidency and was mandated to be in charge of transparency. CGU Chief Minister Walder Pires (also known as the Minister of Control and Transparency) began pushing for several anti-corruption measures, including one to provide transparency on federal government spending. His team, headed by Jorge Hage, was assigned the responsibility for implementing this last initiative.

One of Hage’s first suggestions was to open data that was already being compiled by the Ministry of Finance and kept in an Integrated System of Financial Administration (SIAFI). This system, which was not accessible to the public, contained fiscal information related to federal transfers to states and municipalities as well as information on funds directly received from public resources (for example, payments from entities with government contracts). However, the Head of Treasury at the time, Joaquim Levy, opposed the idea of opening SIAFI data, arguing that the information was stored in a format and manner that would be too technical for citizens to properly use or understand. According to Leodelma de Marilac Felix, then head of the General Auditing Coordination at the Ministry of Finance, which was in charge of the SIAFI data, Hage’s desire to open up the data was otherwise received enthusiastically, and the key issue was finding a way to make it more accessible and usable for citizens. “Most of us involved were very excited. We thought, ‘Great idea,’” said Felix.¹³

It was from this need for a more accessible platform that the seeds of the Transparency Portal were planted. At the time, the CGU did not have the technical capacity to create such a portal, so it collaborated with Serpro, a public company linked to the Ministry of Finance, to develop the platform, which would then be maintained by the CGU. According to Izabela Corrêa, CGU Head of Transparency 2007-2012, opening up the data and making it publicly available was a complex process. The data was stored in a wide variety of formats, and was generally quite inaccessible (even many members of Congress had not been allowed to access it). In general, its readability was very poor, and the technical team faced serious challenges in understanding how the system stored the data.

In June 2003, the CGU set up a working group to study how to extract and combine the data. This working group, which consisted of officials from the CGU, the Secretariat of National Treasury, and the Federal Service of Data Processing, began making some headway, and the

¹³ GovLab interview with Leodelma de Marilac Felix, Finance and Control Analyst, Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, Corruption Prevention and Transparency Secretariat, Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil, August 18, 2015.

result was the Transparency Portal, launched in November 2004.¹⁴ Suggestions provided by citizens via the portal's "contact us" link and at subsequent portal events were also adopted.¹⁵ The launch of the portal represented a major milestone in Brazil's move toward openness and transparency. As Waldir Pires, former Minister of Defence, remarked at the time: "With this government project we take an important step toward full transparency of accounts, contributing in effect to societal control over the use of public resources."¹⁶

Portal Description

According to the CGU website, today the portal is "a channel through which citizens can monitor the financial implementation of government programs at the federal level." The goal is "to increase the transparency of public management, enabling citizens to track and monitor how public money is being used."¹⁷ Care has been taken to make sure the information contained on the portal is easily accessible to the public, for example without requiring a username or password. In addition, specialized financial information like budgets is presented in a way that is easy for laypeople to analyze and understand. "Many legal and budget-related terms, in particular, are very complicated," says portal coordinator Otávio Moreira de Castro Neves. "We try to present them in a language and format that the user will understand."¹⁸

The portal's organizers have also taken numerous steps to engage users and spread awareness about the site and how to use it. The site launch was complemented by TV campaigns and workshops designed to train citizens, reporters and public officials to use the portal. In addition, regular workshops and activities were held, including drawing and essay competitions for adults and children.¹⁹ These outreach activities continue to be well attended, and form an important part of the government's strategy to engage and involve users in the portal.

When initially launched, the portal contained a limited amount of information: data on federal transfers to states and municipalities, payments to the government, information on public servants. Over the years, more information has been added, and today five broad categories of data are published: 1) direct spending by federal government agencies through contracts and tender processes; 2) all financial transfers to states, municipalities and the federal district; 3) financial transfers to social program benefactors; 4) administrative spending, including staff salaries, staff travel expenses and per diems and office expenditures; and 5) information on all government official credit card spending. The final decision on what information to upload rests with the CGU.

14 "OECD Integrity Review of Brazil: Managing Risks for a Cleaner Public Service." OECD Publishing. 2012. http://www.keep-eek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/governance/brazil-oecd-integrity-review_9789264119321-en.

15 "OECD Integrity Review of Brazil: Managing Risks for a Cleaner Public Service." OECD Publishing. 2012. http://www.keep-eek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/governance/brazil-oecd-integrity-review_9789264119321-en

16 <http://www.portaltransparencia.gov.br/noticias/DetalheNoticia.asp?noticia=1> Translated from Portuguese by Google.

17 <http://www.cgu.gov.br/assuntos/transparencia-publica/portal-da-transparencia> Translated from Portuguese by Google.

18 GovLab interview with Otávio Moreira de Castro Neves, Coordinator for Open Government and Transparency, Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, Corruption Prevention and Transparency Secretariat, Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil. August 6, 2015.

19 Hage Sobrinh, Jorge. "Brazil's Transparency Portal Freely Delivers Information to Citizens." Transparency & Accountability Initiative. September 19, 2011. <http://www.transparency-initiative.org/news/brazils-transparency-portal-freely-delivers-information-to-citizens>.

One important component of the portal is a National Debarment List, which highlights contractors to avoid. The list consolidates in one place all companies and individual suppliers that have been sanctioned for acts of corruption or committing fraud, allowing public officials to exercise some discretion before hiring or granting public tenders. As of September 2011, the Debarment List held 5,018 debarred entities. While this tool was designed primarily to be used by public officials, it has also proved useful for private sector entities. However, this component is not without its flaws. As there is no public register of beneficial ownership, it does not prevent corrupt business owners from launching and registering businesses under new names.

Controladoria-Geral da União
Portal da Transparência
GOVERNO FEDERAL

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Acesso rápido: Selezione... [OK] Você está em: Início » **CEIS**

CADASTRO NACIONAL DE EMPRESAS INIDÔNEAS E SUSPENSAS (CEIS)

O Cadastro Nacional de Empresas Inidôneas e Suspensas (CEIS) é um banco de informações mantido pela Controladoria-Geral da União que tem como objetivo consolidar a relação das empresas e pessoas físicas que sofreram sanções das quais decorra como efeito restrição ao direito de participar em licitações ou de celebrar contratos com a Administração Pública. [Saiba mais](#)

Consulta

CPF/CNPJ: (Opcional)

Nome, Razão Social ou Nome Fantasia: (Opcional)

Tipo de Sanção: Todos

Quantidade de registros encontrados: 11730 Data: 29/08/2015 22:04:12

Imprimir

Caso queira outra classificação, clique no título da coluna correspondente.

Dados da Pessoa ou Empresa Sancionada		Dados da Sanção		Órgão Sancionador	
CNPJ/CPF	Nome ↓	Tipo	Data Final	Nome do Órgão	UF
11.972.928/0001-54	SS ARQUITETURA E DESIGN LTDA.	Inidoneidade - Lei de Licitações		Prefeitura de Charqueadas (RS)	RS
11.972.928/0001-54	SS ARQUITETURA E DESIGN LTDA.	Suspensão - Lei de Licitações	16/02/2016	UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE	RS
11.972.928/0001-54	SS ARQUITETURA E DESIGN LTDA.	Suspensão - Lei de Licitações	31/03/2016	UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE	RS
11.972.928/0001-54	SS ARQUITETURA E DESIGN LTDA.	Suspensão - Lei de Licitações	31/03/2016	UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE	RS

Figure 1: The National Debarment List

As of 2010, the portal also includes two new sections dedicated to information on a couple of major sporting events hosted by Brazil: the 2014 football World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. Given the large investments in public infrastructure and services involved in these events, the government opted to make all budgetary information available on each project. Information is organized by host city and by interest area, such as arenas, airports and security.

The CGU has taken care to include feedback channels to involve citizens and allow them to help improve the site's contents. Every section on the portal includes a survey form or contact link, and there are various ways for whistleblowers to report misconduct or crimes (their identities remain protected). Citizens have used these feedback loops to make suggestions about content on numerous occasions. For instance, citizens and reporters suggested in 2008 that the portal should allow downloads of raw data on administrative agreements between governments and contracted private entities.²⁰

20 "OECD Integrity Review of Brazil: Managing Risks for a Cleaner Public Service." OECD Publishing. 2012. http://www.keep-eek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/governance/brazil-oecd-integrity-review_9789264119321-en.

Similarly, various civil society groups suggested in 2006 that users should be able to search by nonprofit organizations receiving government funds. Both these suggestions were later implemented.²¹ Today, data on the portal is updated daily or monthly.²²

III. IMPACT

Brazil's Transparency Portal has been widely hailed as a successful example of using open data to reduce corruption and control public spending. Over the years, it has received numerous awards and forms of recognition, including the 2007 Brazilian IT and Government award (e-Democracy category). In addition, it was presented as a Best Practice case study at the 2008 Meeting of the UN Convention against Corruption in Bali; the 2009 Transparency Initiative Conference on International Aid in the Netherlands; and the 2009 Third European Meeting on Anti-Corruption in Brussels.²³

The portal's impact can be measured in several ways:

Traffic

Immediately after its inception, in 2004, the portal registered an average of 410,000 monthly visits from around 10,000 unique visitors. By 2012, the number of unique monthly users rose to 336,512; today, the site receives over 900,000 unique visitors per month²⁴ ²⁵. The dramatic rise in traffic is a clear indication of the site's relevance and importance in Brazilian public life.

Policy Changes: Official Credit Card Usage

Several changes in the way government operates have directly resulted from information contained on the portal. For example, after the CGU began publishing data on government credit card use, the media began publishing articles on questionable transactions, and this led to a series of scandals. In one instance, the reports led to the resignation of Matilde Ribeiro, Minister of Promotion of Racial Equality.²⁶

21 "OECD Integrity Review of Brazil: Managing Risks for a Cleaner Public Service." OECD Publishing. 2012. http://www.keep-eek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/governance/brazil-oecd-integrity-review_9789264119321-en.

22 Cruz, Marcos and Alexandra Lazarow. "Innovation in government: Brazil." McKinsey & Company Insights & Publications. September 2012. http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/public_sector/innovation_in_government_brazil.

23 <http://www.portaltransparencia.gov.br/noticias/>

24 GovLab interview with Otávio Moreira de Castro Neves, Coordinator for Open Government and Transparency, Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, Corruption Prevention and Transparency Secretariat, Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil. August 6, 2015.

25 OECD Integrity Review of Brazil: Managing Risks for a Cleaner Public Service." OECD Publishing. 2012. http://www.keep-eek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/governance/brazil-oecd-integrity-review_9789264119321-en

26 "Credit happy Brazilian minister admits mistake and resigns." Merco Press. February 3, 2008. <http://en.mercopress.com/2008/02/03/credit-happy-brazilian-minister-admits-mistake-and-resigns>.

Perhaps most importantly, the publication of credit card data led almost immediately to a 25 percent reduction in spending by officials on government cards. In addition, the scandals and rising public awareness led to several changes in credit card policy, including legislation banning the use of cards for payment of travel or per diems; and restrictions on cash withdrawals using official cards (except in very particular situations, for example when an official was located deep in the Amazon, where credit cards are not often accepted).^{27,28}

The Transparency Portal has become a tremendous resource for journalists and media, as well as activist groups investigating corruption. These developments further expand the portal's impact. For example, citizen-group São Paulo Perl Mongers created "Where did my money go?" – a website that presents the portal's data on government spending in a simplified, heavily visual format.²⁹ Meanwhile, the group Open Accounts has been providing Brazilian media with training on how to use the portal, helping them publish stories that "often generate public outrage and a swift official response," such as in 2011, when a story on some government officials' improper credit card use led to an internal investigation. A government minister eventually was forced to repay \$30,000 for "inappropriately charging personal expenses, including vacation travel, to the government."³⁰

Local and Cross-Border Dissemination

As with many of the case studies in this series, the success of Brazil's federal portal has a spillover effect on other governments. In Brazil itself, pressure grew for other levels of government to publish budgetary data, and in 2009, a law was passed requiring that local governments have their own versions of the portal. Today, a large part of CGU's work consists of helping local governments (smaller towns and cities in particular) implement this directive.³¹

Brazil's portal has also had reverberations across Latin America. Many countries expressed interest in the portal early on, and since its inception, at least three – Mexico, Chile and El Salvador – have implemented similar projects, often with assistance from Brazil's CGU.³² Mexico's open data portal (www.catalogo.datos.gob.mx) was launched in October 2013. El Salvador created a similar Fiscal Transparency website (www.transparenciafiscal.gob.sv), and Chile has pushed for greater

27 GovLab interview with Otávio Moreira de Castro Neves, Coordinator for Open Government and Transparency, Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, Corruption Prevention and Transparency Secretariat, Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil. August 6, 2015.

28 "In 2008, corporate cards yielded CPI's." Acervo. January 5, 2013. <http://acervo.estadao.com.br/noticias/acer-vo,em-2008-cartoes-corporativos-renderam-cpis,8813,0.htm>.

29 Cruz, Marcos and Alexandra Lazarow. "Innovation in government: Brazil." McKinsey & Company Insights & Publications. September 2012. http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/public_sector/innovation_in_government_brazil.

30 Cruz, Marcos and Alexandra Lazarow. "Innovation in government: Brazil." McKinsey & Company Insights & Publications. September 2012. http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/public_sector/innovation_in_government_brazil.

31 GovLab interview with Otávio Moreira de Castro Neves, Coordinator for Open Government and Transparency, Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, Corruption Prevention and Transparency Secretariat, Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil. August 6, 2015.

32 GovLab interview with Otávio Moreira de Castro Neves, Coordinator for Open Government and Transparency, Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, Corruption Prevention and Transparency Secretariat, Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil. August 6, 2015.

transparency and openness through its own portal (<http://datos.gob.cl/>). Overall, Brazil's model – and in particular its success – has had a broad impact on Latin America, providing powerful evidence of open data's ability to effect real social, economic and political change.

Changing Climate for Corruption

The Transparency Portal's launch and evolution have taken place within a broader trend of rising intolerance for corruption in Brazil. The 2012 convictions in the country's Mensalao scandal, and prosecutors' willingness to target top officials in the Petrobras scandal, both indicate a possible end to a climate of impunity for corrupt officials. This welcome trend cannot, of course, be directly attributed to the Transparency Portal; it is the result of a number of changes in Brazilian society and politics. But the launch and widespread use of the portal can be considered both a result of Brazil's movement toward greater transparency, as well as one of the dynamic forces continuing to nudge the movement forward today.

The portal also enables internal corruption monitoring that may not have been possible, or as swift, as before. In 2008 CGU created a team of analysts, The Public Spending Observatory, to proactively comb through the portal (and other government databases) to identify "suspicious patterns."³³

By creating a team dedicated to identifying corruption, the CGU has ensured that the information housed on the portal will be put to use, whether or not the general public maintains their current level of interest in accessing the portal's data.

In March of 2015, Transparency International stated that Brazil "has made good progress in the past three years passing key anti-corruption laws" (while noting that enforcement of these laws have been limited and that corruption is still a problem).³⁴ Or, as CGU Chief Minister Jorge Hage put it in an interview four years earlier, "Here in Brazil, despite much that has been done in recent years, much remains to be done."³⁵

33 GovLab interview with Otávio Moreira de Castro Neves, Coordinator for Open Government and Transparency, Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, Corruption Prevention and Transparency Secretariat, Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil. August 6, 2015.

34 "The cost of corruption in Brazil." Transparency International. March 13, 2015. http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/the_cost_of_corruption_in_brazil

35 "Combating corruption in Brazil depends on agility in ritual procedure, says Brazilian General Comptroller Jorge Hage in interview with UNODC." United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. February 9, 2011. <https://www.unodc.org/lpo-brazil/en/imprensa/entrevistas/2011/02/09-combate-a-corrupcao-no-brasil-depende-de-maior-agilidade-no-rito-processual-afirma-jorge-hage-em-entrevista-ao-unodc.html>



Figure 2: The Brazilian Transparency Portal's Section Dedicated to the 2014 World Cup

IV. CHALLENGES

Despite its generally positive reaction and relative success, the Transparency Portal, like many projects included in this series of open data impact case studies, has and continues to face some hurdles to further growth. Three challenges, in particular, are worth examining more closely:

Interoperability and Data Standards

As with any new platform, the Transparency Portal deals with several “legacy” issues concerning the way information has historically been collected, stored and disseminated in Brazil. One of its most acute challenges has been to assemble data from various government agencies and present that data in a cohesive, unified manner. This applies most acutely to legacy data, but even for more recent information, CGU officials have had to negotiate with officials and agencies over the manner in which their data is collected and shared. Dealing with such a variety of data formats and systems not only slows down the process, it also increases the risk of introducing errors. As Otávio Moreira de Castro Neves, Coordinator for Open Government and Transparency, puts it: “As we put data up online we are constantly under the risk of human error, or under the risk of delays. So we have to keep a tight grip on this.”³⁶

36 GovLab interview with Otávio Moreira de Castro Neves, Coordinator for Open Government and Transparency, Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, Corruption Prevention and Transparency Secretariat, Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil. August 6, 2015.

Leodelma de Marilac Felix, Finance and Control Analyst at the Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, provides some examples of the types of errors CGU must work to prevent. He cites the (hypothetical) example of a bank deciding to change a particular data field (e.g., the way a date is stored) in its data sets, but doing so without informing CGU. According to Felix, it can take CGU up to four months to identify the problem.³⁷

Such issues are not insurmountable, nor are they unique to the Transparency Portal. For example, CGU is now looking into changing its application rules for how information is received; this could help standardize data. Still, CGU is unlikely to be able to ever fully resolve the issue, and as with most data systems and projects, some degree of error-checking and validation will always be required. However, making the data accessible increases the likelihood that data errors will be corrected, as more people will be using the data, and using it more often, than before. “These are not huge challenges. We can overcome them,” says Izabela Corrêa, former Coordinator for the Promotion of Ethics, Transparency and Integrity, at Brazil’s Directorate for Corruption Prevention. “But they are always there. Always.”³⁸

Privacy

The need to protect privacy has been a constant, and delicate, issue for the portal.³⁹ Portal officials report that a large number of the complaints they receive pertain to privacy issues. For instance, more than 100 legal actions were placed against the portal for the publication of public servant salaries; the issue made its way to Brazil’s supreme court, which eventually ruled in favor of the portal.

Portal officials also receive a deluge of emails from public servants whose data shows up on Google; even when such officials realize they can’t be removed from the portal, they request portal staff to help them remove their names from Google.

One major issue pertained to the publication of data sets related to government real estate. This information was put up because public servant occupation of real estate is subject to numerous rules – related, for instance, to officials’ actual titles and posting – and the portal wanted to provide citizens with information that would help them oversee that the rules were being followed. However, the problem was that publishing real estate data inadvertently revealed the addresses of public officials, which not only violated their privacy but also potentially threatened their security. CGU eventually dealt with this issue by publishing two separate data sets – one with names, and the other with addresses.

37 GovLab interview with Leodelma de Marilac Felix, Finance and Control Analyst, Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, Corruption Prevention and Transparency Secretariat, Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil, August 18, 2015.

38 GovLab Interview with Izabela Corrêa, former Coordinator for Promotion of Ethics, Transparency and Integrity, at the Directorate for Corruption Prevention, 2007 to 2012. Interview on August 21, 2015.

39 “Brazilian Supreme Court Upholds the Mandatory Disclosure of Salary Information for Public Officials.” Transparency Audit Network. May 2015. <http://www.transparencyaudit.net/news/2015-05/brazilian-supreme-court-upholds-mandatory-disclosure-salary-information-public>

Scaling

A final challenge relates to the scaling and wider dissemination of the platform. As mentioned previously, a 2009 law required various regional governments in Brazil to implement a version of the portal. There have been many hiccups in the implementation of this law. A 2011 study by the Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos (INESC), a nonprofit focused on “strengthening civil society and enhancing social participation in public policymaking,”⁴⁰ looked at whether local governments were actually opening up data in accordance with the law and with open data principles. While the study found that the data provided was mostly complete, it was often not primary (meaning that the data was not directly sourced by the government) and frequently not provided in a timely manner.

The study also found various accessibility problems, including the fact that very few websites actually offered machine-readable data in nonproprietary formats. The overall conclusion of the report was that subnational governments need to work considerably to improve the open data process and make more information available in a citizen-friendly format.⁴¹

“These are not huge challenges. We can overcome them. But they are always there. Always.”

Izabela Corrêa, Brazil's Directorate for Corruption Prevention

⁴⁰ <http://www.inesc.org.br/institutional/know-inesc>

⁴¹ Beghin, Nathalie, Carmela Zigona, Gisele Craveiro, Marcelo Tavares. “Open Data in Brazil: budget transparency and people’s rights.” Open Data Research Network. 2014. [http://www.opendataresearch.org/sites/default/files/publications/INESC%20-%20ODDC%20Poster_Inesc_Brazil%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.opendataresearch.org/sites/default/files/publications/INESC%20-%20ODDC%20Poster_Inesc_Brazil%20(1).pdf).

V. LOOKING FORWARD

Since its launch in 2004, the portal has been regularly updated and improved. In general, new features have been added to the site at least once a year. Since 2010, many of the most important data sets, such as those on income and spending, are updated on a daily basis. Other data – including that on money transfers between different levels of government – is updated weekly.

As new data is added, the portal team has made design improvements to the user interface to make the data easier to interpret. At the moment, CGU officials are working on an entirely new version of the site. This updated version will not only have a fresh design, but it will also have a new structure and be based on a more advanced underlying technical framework that will, among other things, provide for new ways of visualizing data. CGU is also building a new data warehouse, which will be launched in 2016.⁴²

In order to surmount Brazil's low Internet penetration rates, which stand at around 53 percent⁴³ and limit the portal's accessibility, CGU piloted a project to set up information kiosks run by state-owned banks. However, since the costs of this project were deemed too high, CGU is now focusing on overall strategies to bridge the digital divide in Brazil, and is working with various government and nongovernmental partners to achieve this goal.

These various changes and improvements are likely to enhance the Transparency Portal's offerings and reach in coming years, building on its initial successes and playing a role in Brazil's ongoing battle against corruption. Of course the portal is but one of many tools in Brazil's civic toolbox. But it is an important example of the role that open data – and, more generally, government transparency – can play in transforming political, economic and social life.

42 GovLab interview with Otávio Moreira de Castro Neves, Coordinator for Open Government and Transparency, Transparency and Public Oversight Directorate, Corruption Prevention and Transparency Secretariat, Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil. August 6, 2015.

43 <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/brazil/>