

## Editor's Note

# Glocal FOI: Local Government Transparency Across the World

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This issue of *The Journal of Civic Information* focuses on the big and small.

Both articles are entirely worldly, one delving into access to government information in Argentina and the other in the United Kingdom. We can learn so much across cultures and nations, especially now that 134 countries have adopted freedom of information laws.<sup>1</sup>

Comparative research is growing in the civic information realm, driven in part by increased sharing through the [Global Conference on Transparency Research](#), launched at Rutgers University in 2011 by Dr. Suzanne Piotrowski. The next conference is scheduled for May in Copenhagen, provided the pandemic doesn't get in the way.

Also, scholars from throughout the planet have shared their findings through a previous online open-access journal called *Open Government: A Journal on Freedom of Information*, which operated 2005-2010, and now through scores of venues across disciplines, such as *Government Information Quarterly*, *Communication Law & Policy*, *Public Administration*, and law reviews.

Initially, much research focused on picking apart the laws, or focusing on case studies of individual countries. Methodologies have expanded into experiments and sophisticated data analysis, and attempts at developing theory will help explain, predict, and improve the flow of civic information.

While much research has examined national-level transparency, more and more focus is being applied to local governments, where people are most likely to interact with information critical to fostering effective self-government. For decades, legal scholars have pointed out the similarities and differences of state public records laws, for example. But it's only recently that researchers have tried to measure actual compliance with the laws, and factors that lead to more or less transparency.

That is precisely what the two articles in this issue attempt to get at.

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<sup>1</sup> See the entire list at the Global Right to Information Rating Map, <https://www.rti-rating.org/>, produced by the Centre for Law and Democracy and Access Info Europe. Note that U.S. FOIA ranks 74<sup>th</sup> on the list, as far as the strength of law on paper.

Julia Amerikaner, from the London School of Economics and Political Science, examines some unique secondary data to find determinants of transparency among the 24 provinces in Argentina. The data indicate some interesting findings regarding the importance of electoral competition, population size, and media influence.

Lynn Wyeth, from De Montfort University, interviewed 17 freedom of information officers at local government jurisdictions in the United Kingdom about constraints that they face in disseminating information, and opportunities for making the system work better. The findings are relevant to local jurisdictions across the globe, including in the United States.

Both authors presented their work at the National Freedom of Information Coalition summit Sept. 28, 2021, for the annual [FOI Research Competition](#), Amerikaner earning second place.

We encourage more researchers to examine the ability for average people to engage with civic information at the local level, whether in Topeka or Tokyo.

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