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Transparency in public procurement and its impact on administrative efficiency and citizen oversight: A systematic review

Transparencia en contrataciones públicas y su impacto en la eficiencia administrativa y fiscalización ciudadana: revisión sistemática

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Abstract

This systematic review analyzed the impact of transparency in public procurement on administrative efficiency and citizen oversight. The PRISMA methodology was followed, consulting databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, SciELO, Redalyc and Google Scholar. Studies published between 2020 and 2025, with qualitative, quantitative, or mixed approaches, in English or Spanish, were included, adhering to strict inclusion criteria. The findings reveal that open data platforms, electronic procurement systems, citizen observatories, and regulatory reforms for contract traceability optimize processes and resources, increasing administrative efficiency. Furthermore, they strengthen citizen participation and social control, with variations depending on the institutional context. In local governments, obstacles such as limited institutional capacities, digital divides, and organizational resistance persist, hindering initial implementation. In conclusion, transparency correlates positively with efficiency and oversight, contingent upon accessible designs, robust regulatory frameworks, and technological openness. These results align with OECD and UN recommendations on global accountability standards. It is suggested that monitoring be strengthened, indicators standardized, and multi-stakeholder partnerships promoted for sustainable practices.

Keywords: public procurement, administrative efficiency, citizen oversight, open government, transparency.

Resumen

Esta revisión sistemática analizó el impacto de la transparencia en las contrataciones públicas sobre la eficiencia administrativa y la fiscalización ciudadana. Se siguió la metodología PRISMA, consultando bases de datos como Scopus, ScienceDirect, SciELO, Redalyc y Google Académico. Se incluyeron estudios publicados entre 2020 y 2025, con enfoques cualitativos, cuantitativos o mixtos, en inglés o español, bajo criterios de inclusión estrictos. Los hallazgos revelan que plataformas de datos abiertos, sistemas electrónicos de contratación, observatorios ciudadanos y reformas normativas para la trazabilidad contractual optimizan procesos y recursos, elevando la eficiencia administrativa. Además, fortalecen la participación ciudadana y el control social, con variaciones según el contexto institucional. En gobiernos locales, persisten obstáculos como capacidades institucionales limitadas, brechas digitales y resistencia organizativa, que limitan la implementación inicial. En conclusión, la transparencia correlaciona positivamente con la eficiencia y la fiscalización, condicionado por diseños accesibles, marcos normativos sólidos y apertura tecnológica. Estos resultados coinciden con recomendaciones de la OCDE y la ONU sobre estándares globales de rendición de cuentas. Se sugiere consolidar monitoreo, estandarizar indicadores y promover alianzas multiactor para prácticas sostenibles.

Palabras clave: contrataciones públicas, eficiencia administrativa, fiscalización ciudadana, gobierno abierto, transparencia.

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Introduction

In the contemporary global context, transparency in public procurement represents a critical governance challenge with far-reaching socioeconomic implications. Public purchases absorb approximately 70% of national budgets across most states, making effective and transparent administration essential for sustainable development and meeting citizen needs (Transparency International, 2023; OEA & BID, 2020). Nevertheless, corruption persists as a structural obstacle, diverting resources, undermining project quality, and eroding institutional trust (Quijano et al., 2024). The OECD (2024) has noted that low tax capacity and public distrust in regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean render governance an indispensable component for achieving equitable transitions. Within this framework, Sustainable Development Goal 16, which focuses on peaceful and inclusive societies and the reduction of corruption (target 16.5), is directly linked to the establishment of more transparent and accountable public procurement systems (OEA & BID, 2020).

At the regional level, a lack of clarity in public contracting processes constitutes a systemic challenge. In Latin America and the Caribbean, state purchases account for between 15% and 30% of GDP; however, corruption and excessive bureaucracy generate cost overruns, delays, and substandard project outcomes (Yomona et al., 2025; Transparency International, 2023). Furthermore, restricted access to information constrains citizen oversight, with the region carrying an average corruption risk of 46% (Transparency International, 2023). In countries such as Peru and Panama, data on direct contracting are frequently incomplete or inaccessible, thereby complicating oversight efforts (Condori & Liu, 2024).

From a theoretical standpoint, transparency is defined as an essential principle of governance that ensures fairness, impartiality, and efficiency in the management of public resources (Ley N° 30.225, 2014). Although digitalization has enabled advances, such as Peru's SEACE platform, persistent problems with partial data and corruption continue to affect citizen oversight (Condori & Liu, 2024). Likewise, recent research warns that direct emergency contracting can lead to overvaluation and a lack of accountability (Madrid & Palomino, 2019).

Despite normative progress, the literature reveals gaps regarding the actual impact of transparency on public tendering. The gap between theory and practice is reflected in incomplete digital platforms and the absence of robust indicators for evaluating sustainability and efficiency (OEA & BID, 2020). Given this landscape, a systematic review emerges as the most appropriate methodological approach for synthesizing evidence, identifying patterns, and informing public policy. The research question guiding this study is: How does transparency in public procurement affect administrative efficiency and citizen oversight in public institutions between 2020 and 2025?

Methodology

This systematic review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology, which ensures a transparent and reproducible article selection process. This approach encompassed the identification of records, initial screening, eligibility assessment, and the final inclusion of relevant studies.

Eligibility criteria

The review included peer-reviewed scientific studies published between 2020 and 2025 in either English or Spanish that examined transparency in public procurement in relation to administrative efficiency and citizen oversight. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods articles, doctoral theses, and technical reports were accepted. Opinion pieces, blog posts, news articles, non-validated gray literature, studies lacking data analysis, documents without abstracts, and those without direct relevance to transparency or public management were excluded.

Records were retrieved from Scopus, ScienceDirect, SciELO, Redalyc, and Google Scholar. The final search was conducted in November 2025.

Search strategy

To locate studies, combinations of keywords in English and Spanish were entered into the search boxes of each database, including: *transparencia pública, public transparency, institutional transparency, access to information, accountability, administración pública, gobierno abierto, gestión gubernamental, and sector público*. Beyond date restrictions, no filters for country or region were applied.

Selection process

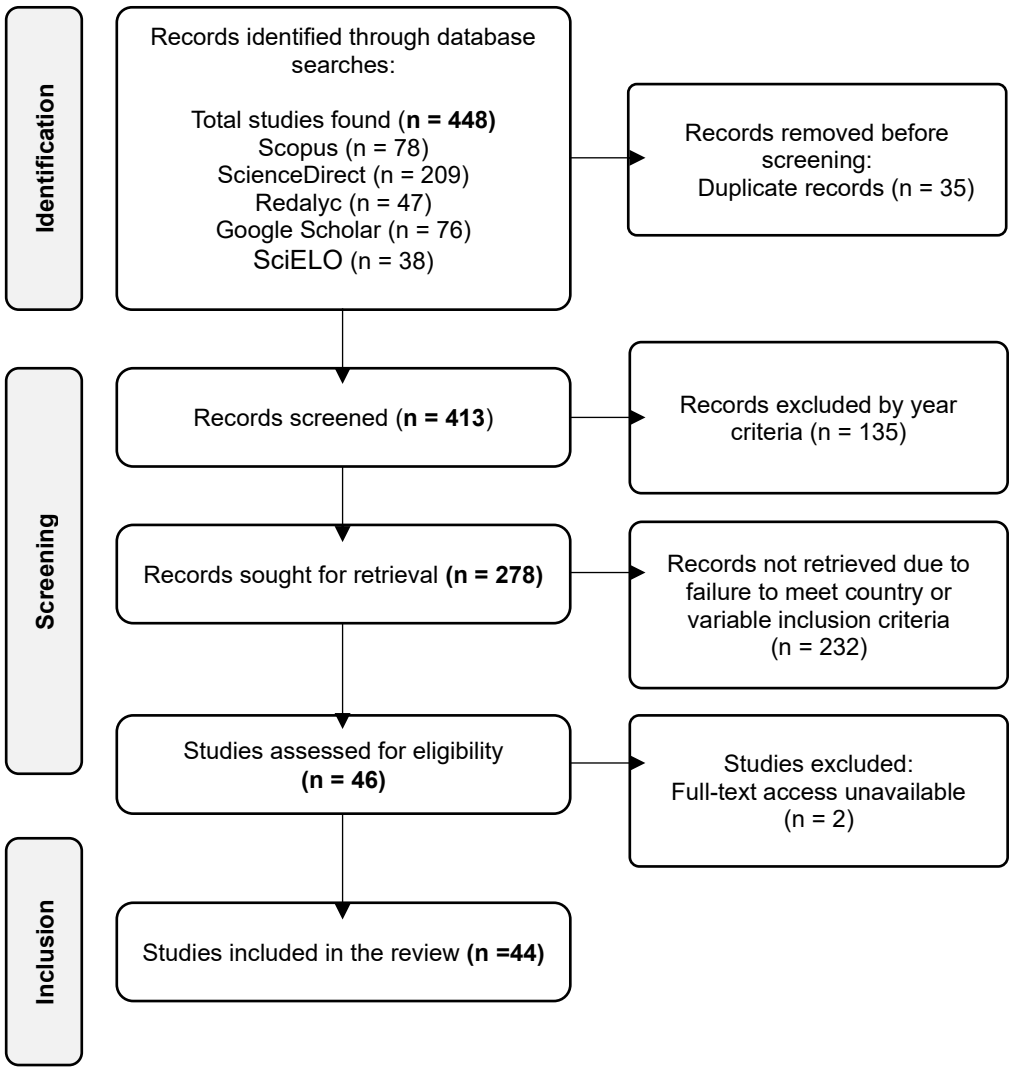
Articles were reviewed by the authors. Initially, abstracts were examined; subsequently, full texts were assessed, resulting in the final inclusion of relevant works. For screening, the Rayyan tool (an AI-based platform designed to assist researchers in conducting systematic reviews) was employed to select the most pertinent records one by one based on study variables and to filter out duplicates.

Presentation of results

Finally, to organize the extracted information, data from the articles were recorded in tables using Microsoft Excel. This tool facilitated a clear summary, highlighting key aspects such as authors, year of publication, methodology, country of study, main findings, and relevance.

Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram of selected articles



Results

The main findings of this systematic review are presented below, organized by key thematic areas. The synthesis of included studies reveals clear patterns regarding the impact of transparency on public procurement, with particular emphasis on administrative efficiency and citizen oversight.

Table 1

Matrix on transparency aspects in public procurement

No.	Author and Year	Location	Methodology	Findings on Transparency in Public Procurement
1	Goddard (2021)	United Kingdom and Africa	Qualitative study	Accounting and accountability practices derive from strategies of accountability habits
2	Cruz-Meléndez & Vásquez (2024)	Mexico	Qualitative, cross-sectional, descriptive research	Municipalities have complied, albeit unevenly, with active transparency through the Internet
3	Barreto & Osorio-Sanabria (2020)	Latin America (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay)	Bibliographic review	Efforts exist to generate conversational models and make public resource management and judicial openness transparent
4	Benítez (2021)	Spain	Longitudinal study	Blockchain offers innovative applications for governance, public management, and collaboration
5	Fernández (2020)	Spain	Longitudinal study	Low degree of compliance with legal obligations in Spanish municipalities, with multiple and varied causes
6	Curto-Rodríguez & Pascual-Fernández (2021)	Mexico	Cross-sectional study	The open data movement is incipient in Mexico. 18 of 32 Mexican states do not offer data associated with active transparency
7	Reggi & Dawes (2022)	Italy	Quantitative study	Governmental organizations as data providers and intermediaries play a crucial role in disseminating OGD and facilitating its use by local communities
8	Feeney et al. (2025)	United States	Quantitative study	Managerial comfort with data disclosure is shaped by the integration of three dimensions: beliefs, value systems, and experiences (BVE framework)
9	Medina & Valle (2025)	Spain	Quantitative study	Effectiveness of the Transparency Portal
10	Matheus et al. (2021)	Belgium, Ireland, United Kingdom	Bibliographic review	The mere opening of data does not itself result in digital transparency; design principles are needed
11	León-Silva et al. (2022)	Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru	Content analysis study	Local governments of the Pacific Alliance present low disclosure levels (around 40%)
12	Saputri et al. (2024)	Indonesia	Logistic regression study	Local government size and regional head commitment had a positive effect on financial statement transparency

13	Chípuli (2022)	Mexico	Qualitative study	Despite being oriented toward transparency and access to information, the policies studied do not observe most international obligations
14	Mena (2020)	Cuba	Literature review	Transparency is a fundamental part of accountability. Records management is essential for information quality and reliability
15	Da Silva & Ventura (2023)	Portugal	Quantitative study	The SNCP has a low overall performance level, despite the positive contribution of "Information and control" and "Electronic platforms" factors in process management
16	Ansari et al. (2022)	Albania	Literature review	Promising strategies include advanced OGD platforms with embedded visualization and analysis tools
17	Ripamonti (2024)	United States	Factorial survey experiment	The act of disclosure generally improves perceptions of trust
18	Vera & Martinez (2022)	Latin America (Argentina; Chile; Mexico)	Comparative method	Politics prevails over law and institutions; the judicialization of politics and budget under-execution are challenges
19	Navarro-Castillo & Rodríguez (2024)	Peru	Quantitative, exploratory, descriptive study	Only 3 of 18 Peruvian ministries (Energy and Mines; Housing, Construction and Sanitation; and Labor and Employment Promotion) comply 100%
20	Páez et al. (2023)	United States; United Kingdom	Literature review	Significant increase in scientific production on transparency and accountability (6,852 works between 2008 and 2023)
21	Schuler et al. (2025)	Switzerland	Exploratory case study design	Digital tools improved access, but most municipalities struggle to improve comprehensibility and relevance for non-expert users
22	Cubero y Valdez (2022)	Ecuador	Literature review	Current transparency policy and regulations have limitations in their implementation mechanisms for GA principles
23	Ruiz-Cueva et al. (2022)	Peru	Quantitative, exploratory, descriptive study	Acceptable level of GA management and use of the transparency portal, with moderate direct correlation ($r=0.5$, $p<0.01$)
24	Romandía & Ordaz (2023)	Mexico	Quantitative study based on documentary and statistical analysis	Clear progress in transparency and accountability during 2019-2021 compared to 2017-2019
25	Matt et al. (2023)	Germany, Austria and Switzerland	Descriptive, cross-sectional study	Legal Information Portals (LIPs) are centralized information offerings that provide digital access to the law for various user groups
26	Palmaccio et al. (2022)	Belgium	Case study of a natural experiment	Information on the quality of an open government helps transparency in public procurement
27	Navarrete et al. (2022)	Chile	Logistic regression analysis	Trust in public bodies affects citizen evaluation, increasing the probability of being satisfied with the information received
28	Khorana et al. (2024)	Global (133 countries)	Cross-sectional study	Electronic procurement systems promote transparency, especially in countries with strong institutional frameworks
29	Ballari et al. (2025)	Argentina, Chile and Colombia	Qualitative study	Significant digital divide impacts OGDIs development. Technological gaps persist in the digital transformation of the public sector

30	Kawashita et al. (2022)	United States	Qualitative study	Benefits of OGD use include increased transparency and the development of new/improved processes, products and services
31	Hernández & Hütt (2024)	Costa Rica	Qualitative study	Costa Rica's citizen participation model is incipient and needs to strengthen methodologies, channels and resources
32	Piray et al. (2023)	Ecuador	Quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional study	Open government and digital government prevent acts of corruption in public entities
33	Luna et al. (2019)	Mexico	Qualitative study	Three families of services were identified (payment/transactional, information requests, requests/complaints). Interaction is multichannel
34	Rodrigues (2022)	Brazil	Theoretical-legal analysis study	Transparency in Public Administration is fundamental for responsible and effective functioning
35	Benmohamed et al. (2024)	Australia	Quantitative study	OGD portal use and user satisfaction significantly predict OGD public value
36	Abang et al. (2020)	Malaysia	Qualitative study	Greater influence of coercive pressures on non-disclosure of accountability practices information on websites was found
37	Ramos & Teixeira (2023)	Brazil	Qualitative study	The most important factors identified were: the importance of encouraging fundraising, credibility in accountability
38	Kinder et al. (2023)	Finland	Qualitative study with case studies	AI is widely used in local public services in health, social care, education, and planning in Tampere and Oulu
39	Ruijer et al. (2024)	Netherlands	Living lab methodology	Working with open data for empowered deliberative democracy requires improving community awareness and capacity
40	De la Torre & Núñez (2023)	Ecuador	Qualitative study with case studies	High non-compliance rate with Article 7 of the Organic Law on Transparency and Access to Public Information (LOTAIP) by municipal GADs
41	Osorio-Sanabria & Barreto-Granada (2022)	Brazil	Literature review	Public transparency is not a State monologue; it must identify the characteristics of the citizen it addresses and satisfy their information needs on public management
42	Cortés-Cediel et al. (2023)	Spain	Literature review	Government chatbots focus on information and service search, leaving aside citizen consultation and collaboration
43	Shin et al. (2024)	United States	Systematic analysis of digital tools	Digital tools facilitate the flow of information from citizens to governments
44	Weigl et al. (2024)	Australia	Qualitative systematic literature review	User-centricity can deepen the digital divide

Frequency of studies

Of the 44 studies reviewed, Latin America emerges as a significant contributor: Mexico leads with 5 publications, Ecuador with 3, and Peru and Brazil with 2 each. Additionally, 4 analyses address the region as a multi-country bloc, underscoring an integrated continental approach. In Europe, Spain contributes 3 works, and the United States contributes 2. Nine investigations adopt global, theoretical, or systematic review perspectives, demonstrating the universal scope of the topic. The remaining 14 are distributed as single contributions by country or area, including the United Kingdom, Africa, Italy, Indonesia, Portugal, Belgium, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba,

Malaysia, Finland, the Netherlands, Australia, Switzerland, and the DACH region (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland). Methodological approaches are balanced between qualitative and quantitative (34.1% each), followed by systematic reviews (20.5%), with the remaining 11.3% comprising theoretical, design science, and mixed-methods works, a distribution that highlights both geographic diversity and interdisciplinary character.

Transparency in public procurement

Contractual transparency rests on clear publication via digital platforms, which promote equity and mitigate corruption (Cuenca et al., 2024; Quijano et al., 2024). A notable example is the comprehensive compliance of Peruvian ministries in disseminating contractual data (2018-2020), which boosted public trust (Navarro-Castillo & Rodríguez, 2024). Blockchain technology contributes immutable and verifiable records (Benítez, 2021). Even so, "opaque transparency" emerges, characterized by formal but inadequate or non-reusable data (Medina & Valle, 2025). In Ecuador and Mexico, deficiencies in accessibility and open formats have been observed (Cubero & Valdez, 2022; Curto-Rodríguez & Pascual-Fernández, 2021). Studies from 2020-2025 validate these gaps, despite progress such as Peru's example, and emphasize the need to convert available data into empowering tools for citizen scrutiny (Ruijer et al., 2024; Ruiz-Cueva et al., 2022).

Administrative efficiency

Technology and innovation drive effectiveness in public administration, according to the review. E-procurement platforms and digital government optimize resources, automate workflows, and reduce costs (Cuenca et al., 2024; Da Silva & Ventura, 2023; Cortés-Cediel et al., 2023). Blockchain emerges as a disrupter by eliminating intermediaries through smart contracts (Benítez, 2021), in line with New Public Management principles (Mena, 2020; Matheus et al., 2021). However, barriers such as low budget execution, failures in electronic systems, and "opaque transparency" with fragmented data hinder progress (Medina & Valle, 2025; Ruiz-Cueva et al., 2022). Talent shortages, staff turnover, and technological weaknesses further exacerbate the situation (Fernández, 2020; Schuler et al., 2025), alongside economic dynamics that strain efficient allocation (Saputri et al., 2024). The 2020-2025 synthesis extends previous observations, insisting on overcoming opacity for optimal information comprehension and use (Ansari et al., 2022).

Citizen oversight

Citizen oversight strengthens governance and combats corruption through active transparency in processes and outcomes (Cuenca et al., 2024; Pérez et al., 2021). E-procurement and e-government concentrate bidding and budget data, enhanced by blockchain for citizen audits (Quijano et al., 2024; Benítez, 2021). This control is anchored in information access, fostering demands for accountability (Chípuli, 2022). Nevertheless, "opaque transparency" generates dispersed or incomplete data that impede scrutiny (Medina & Valle, 2025). Underutilized open data due to a lack of visualizations and limited feedback restrict participation (Ansari et al., 2022; Ruiz-Cueva et al., 2022), aggravated by digital divides affecting vulnerable groups (Piray et al., 2023). The 2020-2025 review validates these constraints and proposes enhancing data usability with blockchain and AI for robust public oversight (Schuler et al., 2025; Kinder et al., 2023).

Discussion

The findings of this systematic review confirm that transparency in public procurement constitutes a central pillar for ensuring administrative efficiency and strengthening citizen oversight in the 2020–2025 period. The clear and accessible disclosure of opportunities, terms of reference, and technical specifications, together with the implementation of digital platforms, has reduced discretion and promoted more equitable competition. However, evidence shows that the effectiveness of these measures varies according to institutional context: while Peru achieved full compliance in evaluated ministries, challenges of efficiency and trust persist in other settings.

Concerning administrative efficiency, transparency consolidates as an indispensable requirement for governance and informed decision-making. Technological advances, including artificial intelligence, blockchain, and electronic procurement (e-GP) systems, have demonstrated potential for automating processes, reducing bureaucracy, and ensuring record inalterability. Nevertheless, limitations persist: human resource shortages, institutional delays, and IT problems hinder budget execution. Experiences such as the low performance of Portugal's SNCP (National Public Procurement System) reveal that technological modernization does not always translate into substantive efficiency improvements.

Regarding citizen oversight, transparency presents itself as a key tool for social control and corruption reduction. The availability of public data strengthens trust and governmental accountability, although its impact is limited by information dispersion, lack of detail, and limited analytical capacity on the part of citizens. The existence of access-to-information laws does not alone guarantee effective oversight, as the quality and comprehensibility of disclosed data remain insufficient for genuine empowerment.

Digital technologies play a pivotal role in this arena. The dissemination of Open Government Data, together with blockchain and chatbots, has enhanced accessibility and reduced operational costs. Nonetheless, OGDs are frequently underutilized and lack practical functions for the broader public. The technological gap, in turn, restricts participation among vulnerable sectors, perpetuating inequalities in information access and use.

Despite the legal mandate for transparency, recent studies confirm the persistence of "covert transparency" practices, characterized by official portals with incomplete information, broken links, or poorly reusable formats. Cases such as Ecuador and Mexico show that, although normative frameworks and access portals exist, information quality and relevance remain deficient. These findings reinforce the need to move beyond mere data publication toward communication strategies that promote effective citizen participation.

Finally, this review offers a more detailed perspective on the application of transparency in public procurement, enriching previous studies by extending the analysis through 2025. Concrete progress is highlighted, such as ministerial compliance in Peru, but significant and persistent gaps in data quality and comprehensibility are also underscored. The main contribution consists in demonstrating that the problem transcends the existence of portals: it involves institutional proactivity, clarity of information, and citizen capacity to engage with it. In this sense, transparency is reaffirmed as a dynamic process requiring both technological innovation and political and social commitment to consolidate its impact on administrative efficiency and citizen oversight.

Conclusions

Between 2020 and 2025, transparency in public procurement showed relevant advances in the technological sphere, especially in institutions with greater resources. However, the low quality of disclosed information and the persistence of corrupt practices continue to limit both administrative efficiency and citizen oversight.

Evidence indicates that formal transparency based on digital portals is insufficient if not accompanied by effective participation strategies and institutional strengthening. The adoption of emerging technologies such as blockchain and process digitalization contribute to improving efficiency, but their benefits remain uneven due to structural failures, technical shortcomings, and the absence of clear policies.

In this context, transparency is reaffirmed as an essential mechanism for citizen access and democratic oversight, although its impact depends on the quality, relevance, and accessibility of data. Overcoming "pseudo-participation" requires holistic approaches that integrate technological innovation, institutional credibility, and inclusive tools that genuinely empower citizens.

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