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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION FOR OPEN GOVERNANCE IN LATVIA: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

   This article analyzes the implementation of open governance principles in Latvia between 2011 and 2024 within the framework of the country's participation in the international initiative "Open Government Partnership" (OGP). Particular attention is paid to the institutional and communication mechanisms that either facilitate or hinder the integration of digital solutions, public consultations, and strategic reforms at both central and municipal levels. The theoretical foundation of the study is based on the framework of institutional economics, which posits that the sustainability of administrative changes depends on the quality of formal and informal institutions, the nature of multi-level interaction, and the degree to which openness norms are embedded in daily governance practices. Methodologically, the article relies on institutional analysis, comparative examination of international practices (Estonia, Finland, Georgia), and narrative modeling of reforms in the areas of digitalization and green energy. Both quantitative data on expenditures, investments, levels of digital maturity and citizen engagement, and qualitative assessments of reform perception in individual municipalities are used. A typology of citizen participation is constructed, and the effectiveness of communication channels─from the ManaBalss.lv platform to local consultation initiatives ─ is evaluated. The analysis identifies key institutional barriers: weak inter-ministerial coordination, fragmented digital infrastructure, asymmetry in the capacities of planning regions, and low digital literacy. It is emphasized that in the absence of mandatory public participation standards, stable engagement indicators, and regulatory support from the state, the implementation of OGP national action plans remains partial and often symbolic. At the same time, successful local cases ─ Riga, Jelgava, and Daugavpils, demonstrate strong outcomes in citizen involvement and public trust through digitalization and green energy initiatives. Based on the study, the article presents recommendations for institutional strengthening of coordination mechanisms, legal entrenchment of public consultation procedures, integration of digital platforms into administrative processes, and enhancement of strategic communications as a critical resource for governance resilience. The conclusion emphasizes the necessity of shifting from a declarative to an institutionalized and systemic approach to open government as a prerequisite for increased efficiency, economic performance, and the social legitimacy of public policy in Latvia.
   Keywords: strategic communications, digitalization, institutional economics, open government, public consultations, Latvia.

Stratēģiskā komunikācija atvērtai pārvaldībai Latvijā: no teorijas līdz praksei

   Raksts ir veltīts atklātās pārvaldības principu ieviešanas analīzei Latvijā laikā no 2011. līdz 2024. gadam, valsts dalības ietvaros starptautiskajā iniciatīvā "Atklātās pārvaldības partnerība" (Open Government Partnership, OGP). Īpaša uzmanība pievērsta institucionālajiem un komunikācijas mehānismiem, kas veicina vai, gluži pretēji, kavē digitālo risinājumu, publisko konsultāciju un stratēģisko reformu ieviešanu centrālās varas un pašvaldību līmenī. Pētījuma teorētiskais pamats balstās uz institucionālās ekonomikas atziņām, saskaņā ar kurām administratīvo pārmaiņu noturību nosaka formālo un neformālo institūciju kvalitāte, pārvaldības līmeņu savstarpējās mijiedarbības raksturs un atklātības normu integrācija ikdienas pārvaldības praksē. Metodoloģiski darbs balstās uz institucionālo analīzi, starptautisko prakšu salīdzinošo izpēti (Igaunija, Somija, Gruzija), kā arī uz naratīvās modelēšanas pieeju digitalizācijas un "zaļās" enerģētikas reformu jomā. Pētījumā izmantoti gan kvantitatīvi dati par izdevumiem, investīcijām, digitālās brieduma pakāpi un iedzīvotāju iesaisti, gan kvalitatīvs izvērtējums par reformu uztveri atsevišķās pašvaldībās. Tika izveidota pilsoņu līdzdalības tipoloģija, kā arī izvērtēta komunikācijas kanālu efektivitāte ─ no platformas ManaBalss.lv līdz vietēja līmeņa konsultāciju iniciatīvām. Analīze atklāj galvenos institucionālos šķēršļus: vāju koordināciju starp ministrijām, fragmentētu digitālo infrastruktūru, nevienlīdzīgas iespējas plānošanas reģionos un zemu digitālās pratības līmeni. Uzsvērts, ka bez obligātiem publiskās līdzdalības standartiem, noturīgiem iesaistes rādītājiem un valsts normatīvā atbalsta OGP nacionālo rīcības plānu īstenošana paliek daļēja un bieži vien simboliska. Tajā pašā laikā izcelti veiksmīgi piemēri ─ Rīga, Jelgava, Daugavpils, kur digitālās tehnoloģijas un "zaļā" enerģētika ir saistītas ar augstu iedzīvotāju iesaisti un sabiedrības uzticēšanos. Balstoties uz pētījuma rezultātiem, sniegti ieteikumi koordinācijas mehānismu institucionālai stiprināšanai, publisko konsultāciju procedūru normatīvai nostiprināšanai, digitālo platformu integrācijai administratīvajos procesos, kā arī stratēģiskās komunikācijas pastiprināšanai kā būtiskam pārvaldības noturības resursam. Secināts, ka nepieciešama pāreja

no deklaratīvas pieejas uz institucionāli un sistēmiski nostiprinātu atklāto pārvaldību, lai paaugstinātu pārvaldības efektivitāti, ekonomisko rezultativitāti un sabiedrisko leģitimitāti Latvijā.

Atslēgvārdi: stratēģiskā komunikācija, digitalizācija, atklātā pārvaldība, digitālā transformācija, institucionālā ekonomika, publiskās konsultācijas, Latvija.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the active implementation of the principles of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) – an international initiative aimed at developing and executing national plans to promote transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in governance – has become an important instrument of public sector reform (OGP 2025). In this article, the term "open government" will be used to denote a broader set of principles (transparency, accountability, citizen engagement, and digital technologies) within which the OGP program operates.

One of the key institutional limitations of regional governance in Latvia is the absence of a formalized regional level as an independent administrative unit with elected authorities. Unlike most EU countries, where regions play an essential role in strategic planning and resource allocation, Latvia lacks such a structure (European Committee of the Regions 2020). The existing territorial divisions in Latvia differ in status and function. Historical and cultural regions (Kurzeme, Vidzeme, Latgale, Zemgale) reflect cultural and regional identity but do not possess administrative powers. Statistical regions (NUTS 2 and NUTS 3) are used solely for Eurostat reporting purposes and do not participate in governance processes. Planning regions largely correspond to historical regions, except for the Riga Planning Region, which includes the city of Riga and surrounding Pierīga municipalities. These municipalities lack separate administrative status and do not have historical-cultural equivalents, yet they are part of the same planning region. Planning regions are not administrative entities: they lack political subjectivity, legal status, independent budgets, and elected bodies. However, they do perform limited coordination functions – developing regional development documents, participating in the alignment of strategic plans, supporting inter-municipal cooperation, and representing territorial interests at the national level (Ignatjevs 2008). This institutional configuration is explained, on the one hand, by the compactness of Latvia's territory and its classification as a single region at the NUTS 1 level, and on the other hand, by the absence of a tradition of regional self–governance. Despite strategies and regulatory acts adopted since 2004 aimed at introducing open government principles (OGP 2025), the lack of a clearly structured regional tier creates an institutional vacuumparticularly in light of stark territorial disparities between Riga and the rest of the country–which limits the effectiveness of strategic and spatial policy implementation (Chmielewski 2023; Chao, Tao 2023).

In practice, citizens face limited access to public information, and participation mechanisms are often formalistic and non-transparent (Providus 2023). Digital tools are introduced only sporadically, which hampers the exchange of open data and the improvement of strategic planning processes (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of Latvia 2021). Strategic communications between central authorities and municipalities are carried out via planning regions, which serve as coordination platforms for information exchange, regional initiative alignment, and the dissemination of best practices in open governance.

Contemporary challenges–climate change, demographic decline, the pandemic, and geopolitical instability–require rapid adaptation and long–term resilience at the level of planning regions, meaning approaches that enable agile responses and stable coordination mechanisms across multiple municipalities (Komarova et al. 2024; Kudiņš et al. 2024). This requires not only formal adoption of open government principles but also the establishment of practical mechanisms for their implementation at the planning region level. The integration of transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement, supported by effective communication strategies and digital platform development, can enhance public trust and strengthen collaboration across all levels of government.

Based on the analysis of EU documents, national strategies, and comparative experiences from Baltic countries, Finland, and Georgia, this study identifies the strengths and weaknesses of Latvia's open governance model. The objective of this paper is to assess the degree of implementation of the open governance concept in Latvia, to determine the main institutional barriers, and to propose recommendations for improving coordination, expanding digital tools, and encouraging citizen participation in decision – making processes.

Literature review and research methodology of the Open Government Partnership in Latvia

The implementation of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in Latvia reflects a broader international movement toward enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in governance. Rooted in principles outlined by Transparency International and global standards initiatives such as Access Info Europe and the Sunlight Foundation, the OGP promotes an integrated model of open governance that emphasizes institutional reform, access to information, and participatory infrastructure as levers for improving democratic outcomes and administrative efficiency (Marín, Castilla 2013). Since Latvia joined the initiative in 2011, national and municipal efforts have included the development of open data portals, digital governance tools, and participatory policy mechanisms. However, while Latvia has made progress in institutionalizing open governance practices through its four successive OGP Action Plans, challenges related to regional inequality, digital capacity, and financial absorption persist. This literature review situates Latvia's OGP experience within the theoretical framework of open governance standards and assesses the degree to which these principles have been translated into practice across territorial contexts.

In parallel with its OGP commitments, Latvia has recognized the critical role of strategic communication in ensuring democratic resilience and national security. "The National Concept on Strategic Communication and Security of the Information Space 2023–2027" (State Chancellery of Latvia 2023), adopted by the Latvian government, outlines a comprehensive framework for strengthening public communication capacities and safeguarding the information environment against manipulation, disinformation, and foreign influence. Coordinated by the State Chancellery's Strategic Communication Department (StratCom), the policy promotes a partly decentralized model of communication governance, involving state institutions, municipalities, civil society, and the media. The Concept identifies three interdependent pillars of a secure information space – effective institutional communication, a strong media ecosystem, and a resilient, media-literate society – and outlines six strategic directions, including capability development, media quality, and international cooperation. Importantly, it directly complements Latvia's OGP agenda by enhancing transparency and civic trust, emphasizing the integration of strategic narratives and public engagement tools across all levels of administration (State Chancellery of Latvia 2023).

As it mentioned above, OGP was launched in Latvia in 2011 with the country's accession to the international Open Government Partnership initiative (OGP 2025). As early as 2013, the Riga City Council launched an open data portal, which led to a 37% increase in data downloads compared to the previous year (Delna 2023). The core principles of OGP – open data, citizen engagement, and government accountability – not only improve administrative efficiency but also have economic implications: in regions where open data was actively used, the average annual growth of small businesses between 2021 and 2023 reached 4.5% compared to 2.1% in less digitized areas (OGP Latvia 2023).

Between 2012 and 2024, Latvia implemented four national Open Government Action Plans. The first plan (2012–2015) allocated €3.8 million to create basic digital platforms. The second (2015–2017) supported the publication of open data on healthcare and education, with €2.6 million directed to data portals in nine major municipalities. The third plan (2017–2020) provided up to €50,000 per planning

region for the development of e-participation tools, amounting to a total of €600,000 distributed among 12 municipalities. The fourth plan (2021–2025) allocated €5 million for rural digitalization and inter-institutional coordination through the establishment of regional contact centers (OGP Latvia 2023).

In practice, the implementation of these plans has encountered financial and institutional barriers. According to the Latvian State Audit Office's (Latvian: *Latvijas Valsts kontrole*) 2023 public report, less than 30% of the funds allocated for digital administration projects – including €4.2 billion from the EU under the 2021–2027 program, equivalent to around 1.4% of GDP annually – had been used by municipalities by the end of 2022 (Latvijas Valsts kontrole 2024). The remaining 70% was returned to the central reserve due to the absence of infrastructure development plans in several municipalities. Low digital literacy also hampers efficiency: in 2022, only 51% of Latvian residents had basic digital skills (compared to the EU average of 54%), and this figure dropped to 38% in rural areas. As a result, in 2023, only 25% of Latvia's residents used open data portals to search for contractors and tenders (Providus 2023).

Latvia's regional development is closely linked to the work of planning regions, each encompassing on average 10 large municipalities (novadi), managing between €12 million and €18 million in EU funds annually. Significant differences in economic capacity and digital maturity are reflected in OECD data: in 2020, EU investments per capita in the Riga Planning Region amounted to €4,800, compared to only €1,200 in Latgale (OECD 2021). The digital maturity index, calculated using the EDIH (Digital Europe Programme) methodology, reached 0.85 (out of 1.0) in Riga in 2023, but only 0.42 in Latgale. This funding and technology gap resulted in an 18% increase in startups based on open data in Riga in 2022, while Latgale saw only a 3% rise (Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra 2024).

Administrative fragmentation and the lack of independent budgets for planning regions exacerbate inequality. According to the State Audit Office, in 2022, 42% of digitalization funds – about €4.2 million – were returned to the central reserve due to underutilization in rural areas (Latvijas Valsts kontrole 2024). To reduce this imbalance and increase economic return, coordinated allocation mechanisms are needed – for example, a mandatory allocation of at least 15% of regional budgets to support IT infrastructure and open data (Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra 2024).

The implementation of a nationwide web portal for all Latvian municipalities cost €100,000 but saved €35,000 in the first year by eliminating the need to maintain seven separate local websites (Latvijas Republikas Valsts kontrole 2024). These savings were redirected to training civil servants: in Daugavpils, following open data training worth €50,000, the number of electronic citizen requests increased by 240% within six months in 2019. In contrast, in Rēzekne, where digital literacy training was planned but not implemented, online service usage remained at only 15% of total inquiries (OECD 2021).

A comparison with Estonia and Lithuania underscores the economic efficiency of digitalization. In Tallinn, the unified civic engagement portal civicengagement.ee was created for €200,000, which saved 60% of the municipal consultation budget and led to a 35% annual increase in online citizen participation (OECD 2020). In Vilnius and Kaunas, digital platform investments of €150,000 each produced around €1 million in economic benefits over two years by reducing administrative costs and improving response times (OECD 2023).

At the national level, the strategies "National Development Plan 2021–2027" and "Digital Latvia 2021" outline the use of €4.2 billion in EU and national funding. However, the State Audit Office's 2023 report shows that only 48% of the planned €200 million for digitalization had been absorbed by the regions (Latvijas Valsts kontrole 2024), underscoring the need for stronger financial oversight.

Governance models such as multi-level governance (Hooghe, Marks 2001; Bache, Flinders 2004) and performance-based public administration (Pollitt, Bouckaert 2017) offer valuable frameworks for understanding and enhancing strategic communication within Latvia's open governance system. The

multi-level governance approach underscores the complexity of coordination across national, regional, and municipal levels, which is particularly relevant for Latvia, where disparities in communication capacity and digital maturity persist across regions. This model highlights the necessity of vertical and horizontal collaboration to ensure that strategic narratives and citizen engagement tools are not confined to capital-level institutions but are embedded throughout all layers of government. Concurrently, the performance-based public administration model focuses on the need for clear indicators, outcome tracking, and evidence-based reporting, all of which are foundational to effective strategic communication. As noted in the 2023 audit report, Latvia's ministries and municipalities often lack consistent metrics and fail to report on how public expenditures translate into measurable service improvements or policy outcomes (Latvijas Valsts kontrole 2024). Integrating these governance models into Latvia's strategic communication policies could promote not only institutional coherence and capacity-building but also enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen trust—core values of the Open Government Partnership. Together, they encourage the alignment of communication strategies with measurable goals and multi-tiered policy frameworks, thereby reinforcing the operational and normative dimensions of open governance.

Within open governance in Latvia, the special attention is given to strategic communication as a critical factor in ensuring transparency, trust, and the effective use of public funds. The 2023 audit of Latvia's consolidated financial statement underscores that municipalities with higher proportional investments in communication—such as Riga, where approximately 12% of the annual information budget is spent on webinars, press releases, and online surveys—show markedly greater success in engaging the public and disclosing budget performance, compared to municipalities like Ludza and Kuldīga, where the figure is just 2% (State Audit Office of Latvia 2024). This disparity reflects more than budgetary priorities: it reveals a structural issue in how institutions report on results. The audit found that none of the ministries in the sample disclosed how budget spending contributed to improving service quality or achieving strategic goals. In many cases, performance indicators were vague or absent, and up to 87% of evaluated budget programs lacked analytical indicators to assess efficiency and impact. Consequently, limited investments in strategic communication correlate with weak public reporting practices, reduced citizen oversight, and diminished institutional accountability. As Latvia continues to modernize its public administration under the OGP and the State Administration Modernization Plan 2023–2027, robust communication strategies and capacity-building in underfunded regions will be essential for aligning budget practices with democratic standards and public trust.

Recent study by Latvian researcher Latkovska (2023) reinforces the centrality of strategic communication as both a theoretical concept and a governance tool in Latvia's public administration. Her study situates strategic communication within a multidisciplinary framework, integrating media theory, organizational management, and political sociology, and emphasizes its role as a purposeful, structured, and mission-oriented process. Latkovska underscores that in the Latvian context, the institutionalization of strategic communication has accelerated following the approval of "The National Concept on Strategic Communication and Security of the Information Space 2023–2027", which redefines communication as a core administrative function with implications for national resilience, transparency, and public trust. She highlights that strategic communication is not merely about information dissemination but about shaping meaning, building symbolic relationships, and coordinating institutional narratives across government levels (Latkovska 2023). By applying a three-tiered model –macro (societal), meso (organizational), and micro (interactional) – Latkovska provides a granular framework to analyze communication flows and their alignment with strategic objectives. Her findings support the integration of performance-based governance and multi-level coordination into Latvia's OGP strategy, while also calling for capacity-building in communication maturity, particularly at the municipal level. Thus, her research bridges theoretical foundations and practical

implementation, reinforcing the necessity of embedding communication strategy into the broader architecture of open governance.

Despite the growing body of research on open governance and strategic communication in Latvia, significant gaps remain. Existing studies tend to focus either on national policy frameworks or isolated municipal innovations, often lacking a systemic analysis that integrates institutional economics, multi-level governance, and performance-based administration with empirical evidence from Latvia's planning regions. Moreover, prior work rarely evaluates the communicative infrastructure of open government through both quantitative and qualitative lenses or examines how strategic communication influences citizen engagement and administrative outcomes at subnational levels. This study offers a critical bridge between normative OGP commitments and the structural realities of their implementation, advancing the scholarly and policy understanding of open governance in post-Soviet contexts.

The evolution of Open Government and digital practices in Latvia (2011–2024)

The evolution of open government and digital practices in Latvia from 2011 to 2024 began with the country's accession to the international Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative. This marked a starting point for the implementation of digital tools and increased transparency within public administration (OGP 2025). In its early stages, implementation was coordinated by the State Chancellery, which aimed to modernize governance through sustainable development and ecological responsibility. However, the effectiveness of these measures largely depended on economic cooperation and communication between central authorities and local governments. Over time, these relationships laid the foundation for a systemic digital environment, reflected in the chronology of initiatives implemented between 2011 and 2024 (Table 1).

Table 1

Key stages in the development of open government and digitalization in Latvia (2011–2024)

Year	Event	Economic aspect	Communication aspect
2011	Accession to the OGP	Initial investments in IT infrastructure (~€1.5 million) for government portals	Centralized communication via government press releases
2013	Launch of Riga's open data portal	37% increase in statistical downloads (savings of ~€0.5 million on data collection)	First webinars organized for businesses and NGOs
2014	Inclusion of regional initiatives in the national program	€3.8 million allocated for digital platforms in regions	Launch of newsletters for municipalities (monthly reports)
2016	Launch of ManaBalss.lv at the municipal level	€50,000 subsidies for implementing electronic petition systems	Social media campaigns to inform residents
2020	Modernization of data exchange mechanisms	Reallocation of €4.2 million in EU funds through upgraded IT systems (absorption rate <30%)	Introduction of a unified platform for publishing regional reports
2022	Development of online platforms for green energy monitoring	Planning regions' investments in eco-projects increased by 12%	Interactive citizen sessions held in Riga and Ventspils

| 2023 | Digital maturity report: gap between Riga (0.85) and Latgale (0.42) | +18% in open data-based startups in Riga | Information campaigns conducted in Rēzekne and Daugavpils |
| 2024 | Integration of digital platforms into the operations of public institutions | €120,000 allocated to economic statistics sections (Riga region) | Regular quarterly webinars with municipalities |

Sources: elaborated by the authors based on OGP Latvia 2023; Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra 2024.

Green energy occupies a central role in Latvia's sustainable development strategy and is also embedded in open government principles. The deployment of renewable energy sources requires active engagement of both local authorities and citizens, reinforcing the principles of open governance. Latvia has made significant progress in strengthening its energy system by actively implementing solar and wind power stations, which necessitate open data use and coordination at the regional level (International Energy Agency (IEA) 2024).

The ManaBalss.lv platform is actively used at the regional level to engage citizens in decision-making processes, including issues related to green energy and the environment. For example, in 2019, a municipality launched an initiative to improve public transport infrastructure that included proposals to introduce electric buses powered by renewable energy. The initiative gathered over 5,000 signatures and influenced local authorities to enhance route networks and increase the use of clean transportation (ManaBalss 2024).

The open data system has also impacted municipalities, including environmental and energy data. The Open Data Latvia portal (Latvian: *Latvijas Atvērto datu portāls*) offers access to data on renewable energy and carbon emissions. Since 2015, data on energy consumption from solar and wind stations, as well as information on regional green energy projects, have been available. However, access remains limited in remote areas like Sigulda or Balvi due to poor internet infrastructure and low digital literacy (Latvijas Valsts digitālās attīstības aģentūra 2017–2025).

Table 2

Challenges and solutions in digital transformation and green energy at the municipal level

Challenges	Solutions
Fragmented budget coordination (70% of funds returned to reserve)	Set regulation: at least 15% of regional budgets for IT infrastructure and open data
Low digital literacy (51% basic skills, 38% in rural areas)	Conduct training programs (≥€50,000 for workshops per major municipality)
Underinvestment in green energy (<55% fund absorption in Latgale)	Introduce grant schemes: up to €200,000 for renewable projects in high-potential municipalities
Limited internet access in remote areas	Increase fiber-optic investments (≥1 million for Latgale and Vidzeme, 2022–2024)
Weak citizen engagement (trust <30% in small municipalities)	Launch targeted campaigns (10% of outreach budget) and at least 4 interactive online consultations annually

Source: elaborated by the authors based on OGP Latvia 2023; Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra 2024.

Large municipalities and republican cities play a key role in implementing open government and digital solutions, particularly in the green energy sector. Cities like Riga and Ventspils have developed projects involving wind and solar energy, requiring digital platforms for energy and emissions monitoring to improve management and public engagement. However, cities further from the capital, such as Ludza and Preiļi, face infrastructure and staffing constraints that hinder such initiatives (Chmielewski 2023).

Furthermore, Jelgava has successfully launched green energy projects. Jelgava Palace was connected to a centralized biomass heating system under a sustainable energy project for historic buildings implemented by Gren Group (2024). The region is also home to the largest wind park in Latvia, being developed in the Kaigu bog by Laflora Energy, which will include 16 turbines with a total capacity of 108.8 MW, powering over 160,000 households (Latvenergo 2024).

Daugavpils exemplifies progressive energy management through solar energy adoption. The city has implemented an Energy Management System (EnMS) compliant with ISO 50001, covering over 100 municipal properties, yielding annual savings of 4.3 TJ and CO_2 reductions of 311 tons (Clean Energy Ministerial 2022). The nearby Augšdaugava county's Kalkūni parish hosts the country's largest solar power station (13.3 MW), supplying electricity to 6,500 households (Saules Energy 2025).

Communication strategies are critical for the successful implementation of open government initiatives. Beyond tool development, transparent and inclusive dialogue with citizens is essential. In smaller or remote municipalities, lack of communication hinders civic participation. Targeted information campaigns, interactive platforms, and digital feedback channels are key to involving local communities. Effective communication fosters trust, reduces digital inequality, and builds a culture of engagement.

Major risks include insufficient infrastructure and qualified staff, especially for green energy technology. In some municipalities, despite national efforts, skepticism toward new technologies persists. Education and digital literacy programs are essential for successful implementation.

The e–signature program (Latvian: *e–paraksts*) has seen success in cities like Riga and Liepāja, but remains underused in small municipalities such as Ludza and Preiļi, limiting access to digital services and hindering local integration into national projects. E–signatures are crucial for contracts related to solar panels and environmental initiatives (Latvijas Valsts kontrole 2024).

Green energy is part of Latvia's sustainable strategy, with emphasis on renewable sources like wind, solar, and biomass (International Energy Agency (IEA) 2024). National and local governments support such initiatives, including public building electrification in Ventspils and Kuldīga. Larger cities implement broader projects, such as wind farms in Riga. Smaller municipalities require financial and technical support to transition to a green economy.

Table 3

Challenges and solutions in green energy integration for Latvia

Challenges	Solutions
Insufficient infrastructure for green energy in remote areas	Develop targeted investment programs (≥200,000 per year per renewable project in small municipalities)
Lack of local expertise to maintain green energy systems	Organize annual engineer training (≥30,000 per year)
Lack of coordination between central and municipal green energy programs	Establish quarterly meetings with ministry, business, and local stakeholders
Limited funding (low co-financing from local budgets)	Introduce 50/50 grant schemes (regional and national/EU funding)

Source: elaborated by the authors.

The implementation of open government and green energy principles significantly contributes to Latvia's sustainable development. EU studies show that access to open data on energy efficiency and renewables enables municipalities to optimize utility expenses, reducing operational costs by 8–12% annually (European Commission 2025a).

Municipal-level co-financing of green energy projects–up to 50% covered by EU structural funds and the remainder by national or local budgets – enables even smaller municipalities to launch pilot initiatives like smart grids and solar stations (State Audit Office of Latvia 2024; European Commission 2025b). Digital technologies not only promote transparency but also serve as economic drivers: open energy monitoring platforms led to a 15% increase in green grant applications in the Riga planning region alone (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia 2024).

Thus, the synergy of open data and green energy improves governance quality, boosts citizen participation, and enhances Latvia's overall economic resilience.

Key challenges and reform perceptions

Despite the existence of a strategic regulatory framework – such as the Declaration on Open Governance in Latvia (Latvian: *Deklarācija par atklātu pārvaldību Latvijā*) (2020), the State Administration Development Plan 2020–2025, and the National Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plans – persistent institutional and cultural barriers continue to hinder the effective implementation of open government principles in Latvia. One of the key challenges remains the lack of coordination among executive institutions, particularly in the horizontal dimension. An analysis by the State Chancellery and SIGMA (OECD 2021) revealed that cooperation on openness and digital participation issues is typically confined within the boundaries of individual ministries. This leads to the duplication of platforms (e.g., *līdzdalība.lv* and various ministerial initiatives), the absence of unified standards for processing feedback, and inconsistencies in the implementation of open government initiatives.

In 2021, three ministries – the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Economics – independently initiated citizen consultations on sustainable development. However, they employed different platforms, timelines, and engagement mechanisms, resulting in confusion and reduced effectiveness of public participation (Latvias Pilsoniskā alianse 2022). Despite the availability of tools such as *ManaBalss.lv* and *līdzdalība.lv*, their influence on decision-making remains limited. According to Open Government Partnership IRM reports for 2017–2019 and 2020–2022, fewer than 40% of supported initiatives were reflected in actual policy-making. Feedback is often absent or limited to formal notifications, lacking genuine dialogue with participants. This undermines trust in participation mechanisms and renders state–society interaction largely one-sided.

A local study in the city of Ludza (Ludzas novada pašvaldība 2019) revealed typical problems: of the 416 residents surveyed, 57% expressed interest in participating, yet 49% lacked access to relevant information. Traditional media, such as the *Ludzas Novada Vēstis* newspaper, remain the primary source of information (75%), while digital platforms are used by less than 11% of respondents. This indicates a significant gap between the development of digital tools and their integration into daily life. More than half of the respondents struggled to suggest improvements in communication, indicating a weak participatory culture.

An assessment of the third and fourth OGP National Action Plans showed that only 35% of planned activities were fully implemented, nearly all at the central level (Providus 2023; OGP Latvia 2023). Municipalities rarely integrate OGP objectives into their strategies and budgets, often limiting themselves to formal participation in centrally driven initiatives. Meanwhile, Estonia and Lithuania demonstrate more sustainable models: in Estonia, over 80% of local governments use the *Volis* platform for electronic voting (Eesti Koostöökogu 2022); in Lithuania, a mandatory procedure exists for aligning draft regulations with citizen input (Transparency International Lithuania 2023).

The typology and scale of stakeholder engagement in Latvia between 2017 and 2023 are presented in the following table, reflecting institutional constraints and formats of interaction.

Table 4

Forms of stakeholder participation in Latvia, 2017–2023

Form of participation	Level of engagement	Examples / Initiatives
Information	Low	Website publications, OGP implementation reports
Consultation	Medium	Online surveys, public discussions, ManaBalss.lv platform
Co-design	Medium / High	Working groups at the Ministry of Finance and the State Chancellery
Joint decision-making	Limited	NGO participation in sustainable development strategies
Civic monitoring	Very limited	Individual initiatives using open data
Bottom-up initiatives	Fragmented	Budget transparency, civic activism via #ManaBalss

Source: elaborated by the authors.

In addition to institutional factors, sociocultural preconditions play a critical role. Sociocultural features and historical legacy significantly influence how reforms are perceived and the degree of civic engagement across different regions. Latvia's historical regions – Kurzeme, Zemgale, Latgale, and Vidzeme – developed under varying political, religious, and economic regimes: from Polish–Lithuanian influence in Latgale to German–Swedish governance in Kurzeme and Vidzeme. These distinctions are still reflected today in levels of civic activity, regional loyalty, and responsiveness to governmental reforms.

For example, in Latgale – a region with pronounced religious and cultural identity – there is traditionally a stronger commitment to preserving regional distinctiveness, which leads to a more reserved attitude toward centralized initiatives. Trust in local self-governments is higher than in national authorities. According to OECD data, only 29% of Latvians report high or moderately high trust in the national government, compared to 41% who trust local governments (OECD 2021). This limits receptiveness to top–down reforms, particularly when those reforms are perceived as disconnected from local community interests. In such regions, participation in public consultations remains low, due to both institutional constraints and accumulated skepticism regarding the ability to influence policy.

At the same time, the absence of political subjectivity among historical regions prevents these differences from being institutionalized in the current governance framework. This hinders the adaptation of national reforms to regional specificities and weakens feedback channels between the population and the state.

In this context, communication performs not only an informational but also an integrative function. The clarity, transparency, and targeting of communication concerning reform goals and rationales affect both trust and the willingness to participate. In Latvia – where skepticism and detachment between the center and regions are pronounced – a shift is needed from formal, uniform channels of communication to formats tailored to local needs. This includes visualizations, storytelling, interactive formats, and targeted campaigns via local media. Effective communication requires not only technical solutions but also a conscious strategy that reflects regional differences, digital maturity, demographic specifics, and established participation practices.

Comparative data on trust and civic involvement in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia provide a more systemic picture. In Latvia, the share of citizens participating in public consultations does not exceed 10% (Providus 2023), whereas in Estonia it reaches approximately 18% (Eesti Koostöökogu 2022). Trust levels in both national and local governments in Latvia are also significantly lower than in neighboring countries, pointing to the need to strengthen both institutional frameworks and communication mechanisms for citizen engagement.

A comparative analysis of trust and participation in public consultations across the Baltic States highlights institutional divergences and varying levels of civic engagement.

Table 5

Comparative data on trust and participation, 2022–2023

Indicator	Latvia, 2023	Lithuania, 2023	Estonia, 2022
Trust in the national government	22%	34%	50%
Trust in local self-governments	35%	47%	60%
Participation in public consultations	up to 10%	up to 12%	around 18%

Source: elaborated by the authors on the data from Eesti Koostöökogu 2022; Providus 2023; Lithuanian Open Data Portal 2023.

In addition to sociocultural and institutional challenges, a major obstacle remains the lack of a stable and coherent methodology for measuring the effectiveness of open government policy. Different institutions apply their own approaches and indicators, complicating not only the assessment of progress but also the comparison of results at both national and international levels. The absence of harmonized monitoring tools reduces the capacity for adaptive governance and strategic adjustment, while also weakening the evidence base for decision-making.

Structural barriers also include pronounced inequalities between central and local levels. Open government initiatives are predominantly implemented by national agencies, while the role of municipalities remains limited. This is particularly acute in small and peripheral self–governments, where financial and human resources, as well as analytical and digital infrastructures, are insufficient. As a result, reforms are implemented unevenly: in some areas systematically and effectively, in others only partially or formally. This leads to institutional asymmetry and exacerbates territorial inequality, diminishing trust in centralized strategies and undermining the overall resilience of the open government model.

Thus, the sustainable development of open government principles in Latvia requires not only regulatory and methodological harmonization but also the construction of lasting communication bridges between the center and the regions, and between the state and society. Only with a unified methodology, targeted support for municipalities, and open, trust–based formats of interaction is it possible to advance toward a more equitable and inclusive model of governance.

Comparative analysis with other OGP countries

Continuing the analysis of internal barriers that constrain the development of open government in Latvia, it is appropriate to turn to international experience to identify institutional and communication practices that ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of related reforms. Comparison with other countries participating in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) not only helps identify successful mechanisms but also assesses how the quality of strategic communications influences citizen engagement and institutional resilience. The most illustrative examples are Estonia, Finland, and Georgia, where comprehensive approaches to digital transformation, feedback, and participatory support are implemented.

Estonia demonstrates a high level of digitalization and a systemic approach to citizen engagement. A key element is the e–Consultation platform, where ministries are required to publish draft legislation and accept citizen comments in an open format. All feedback is documented and made available for analysis, enhancing accountability and ensuring procedural transparency (Eesti Koostöökogu 2022). This approach not only involves stakeholders but also builds trust based on visible participation

outcomes. In Latvia, by contrast, public consultations are not mandatory and are not regulated by a unified standard, leading to inconsistent practices and a formal approach to feedback.

Moreover, the digital ecosystem of e–Estonia is structured as an integrated model of citizen–state interaction. It includes notifications, case tracking, automated feedback, and a single access point to services. This ensures continuous communication and proactive citizen participation. In Latvia, the analogous platform latvia.lv does not fully integrate participatory mechanisms and primarily functions as a technical interface (Kassen 2017).

Finland promotes a model based on the "open by default" principle, under which government data must be accessible from the moment of creation. This policy is supported by active communication: the government conducts public information campaigns, thematic seminars, and consultations, including with businesses and research institutions. Particular attention is paid to monitoring perceptions of open data – annual audits include user surveys and feedback analysis (Open Data Finland 2021). This builds a culture of responsiveness, in which public authorities are required to consider citizen input. In Latvia, the Data.gov.lv platform lacks such mechanisms: systematic user feedback collection is not carried out, and data on usage and engagement are not regularly analyzed (Latvijas Valsts digitālās attīstības aģentūra 2017–2025).

Georgia is an example of a post-Soviet country where citizen participation has been institutionalized through the my.gov.ge platform. It combines access to public services, budget monitoring tools, voting on initiatives, and the ability to submit proposals. These functions are embedded in the decision-making cycle and legally supported. Georgia's national open government plans include specific measures for involving vulnerable groups – through local NGOs, regional media, and blended communication channels. In Latvia, similar principles were outlined in the OGP Action Plan for 2020–2022, but mechanisms for sustainable implementation have not been established, as noted in national and international assessments (Providus 2023).

Comparative analysis highlights several systemic shortcomings in Latvia's strategic communications. First, there is no mandatory procedure for open consultations: unlike in Estonia, neither the format, nor the publication scope of drafts, nor the feedback mechanism is regulated. This reduces transparency and leads to fragmented practices – some institutions are active, others completely ignore participatory mechanisms. Second, Latvia lacks indicators for evaluating communication effectiveness. There is no monitoring of engagement, no analysis of digital user behavior, and no use of feedback to revise strategies. This sharply contrasts with Finland's practices, where such metrics are built into annual decision-making cycles. Third, communication with civil society remains institutionally unstructured. Unlike Georgia, which has a coordination council involving NGOs and local initiative representatives, Latvia engages with NGOs sporadically and without clear integration into communication strategy development.

These differences have not only institutional but also potential economic consequences. International research emphasizes that sustainable open government practices help reduce transaction costs, improve budget efficiency, and strengthen trust – thus contributing to fiscal discipline and lower administrative costs (Peixoto, Fox 2016; World Bank 2020). For example, in Finland and Estonia, the active use of open data by the private sector led to the creation of new digital services, increasing added value without additional public spending (European Data Portal 2021). Such outcomes are only possible with an institutionalized and two-way communication environment, where digital tools serve not as a showcase, but as a mechanism of interaction. In Latvia's context, this means that investments in platform development and regulatory support for participation must be linked with feedback systems, regular engagement assessments, and support from local structures. Only under these conditions can one speak not only of democratic, but also of economic returns from implementing open government principles.

Open Government in Latvia: the role of communication in institutional strengthening

An in-depth analysis of comparative international experience reveals not only the strengths of open government systems in Estonia, Finland, and Georgia, but also outlines the areas where Latvia objectively requires institutional restructuring. This is not about technically replicating individual elements – such as digital platforms or formal consultations – but about a systemic transformation of administrative culture. In modern terms, open government is not a set of isolated decisions but a model of interaction in which transparency, participation, and feedback are embedded into the everyday logic of public administration. For Latvia, the key challenge is to shift from a declarative approach to an institutionally embedded practice based on standards, stability, and trust.

One of the central development priorities should be the formalization of public consultation procedures. As of now, Latvian legislation does not require mandatory public discussion of regulatory initiatives, except in isolated areas. As a result, some ministries publish draft documents and solicit citizen feedback, while others bypass this practice entirely. The absence of unified standards – for publication deadlines, response formats, and documentation of comments – makes citizen participation irregular and largely symbolic. Meanwhile, the experiences of Estonia and Finland show that procedural obligation, platform institutionalization, and ease of access create real conditions for stakeholder involvement in decision-making. If Latvia introduced regulatory standards for such consultations, it would foster greater predictability, enhance administrative accountability, and establish a foundation for evaluating the substantive impact of civic participation on regulatory content.

Another crucial direction is strengthening the role of municipalities within the open government ecosystem. The municipal level is closest to citizens' daily needs, and this is where the impact of openness principles can be most tangible. However, in Latvia, municipal involvement in OGP-related initiatives remains episodic. Municipalities rarely develop their own open interaction tools, and participation in national strategies is often limited to the endorsement of isolated projects. This stems from a lack of resources, personnel shortages, inadequate methodological support, and weak institutional ties with central government. Under such conditions, a state support framework for local open governance initiatives is essential – including the creation of methodological centers, capacity-building programs, co-financing for digital tools, and stable partnerships with local NGOs. Such support is particularly vital in a territorially fragmented context, where differences between municipalities extend not only to scale but also to managerial innovation capacity. Expanding participation at the local level not only increases the legitimacy of reforms but also enables regional differentiation, laying the groundwork for territorially balanced policy.

A core component of institutional strengthening should be the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system. Currently, Latvia lacks a harmonized set of indicators for tracking progress in implementing openness principles. Neither the level of citizen engagement, nor the usage intensity of digital platforms, nor the quality of feedback is systematically analyzed. This makes adaptive governance – revising strategies based on empirical data – virtually impossible. International practice demonstrates that such indicators can be integrated into annual strategic planning cycles and serve as a basis for resource reallocation and policy adjustment. Moreover, a transparent evaluation system enhances external accountability and fosters public trust. Economically, it also improves budget planning efficiency, reduces transaction costs by eliminating duplicative procedures, and minimizes spending on ineffective initiatives.

Finally, open government cannot be sustained without a strategically designed communication system. Communications in this sphere must not merely disseminate information but serve as a fully functional mechanism for building trust between the state and society. In Latvia, where skepticism toward reforms remains high and participation in consultations is low, a transition from basic

information campaigns to structured dialogue formats is necessary. This entails a multi–level communication architecture tailored to the digital habits of various social groups, including visualization, storytelling, local channels, offline events, and feedback mechanisms. Only through such measures can the effect of administrative detachment be overcome, and open governance be perceived as genuinely serving citizens' interests. In the long term, investment in quality communication is not only about democratic consolidation but also economic efficiency: engaged citizens are more receptive to reforms, more fiscally loyal, and more active in joint initiatives.

Thus, institutional development of open government in Latvia requires a comprehensive reassessment of approaches at four levels: legal, territorial, evaluative, and communicative. Each of these dimensions is closely interconnected, forming a mutually reinforcing architecture of resilience. Only through legal guarantees, municipal empowerment, transparent monitoring systems, and coherent communication policies can an environment be established in which open government is not a declaration but a lived reality. This, in turn, will serve as the foundation for more flexible, economically efficient, and socially legitimate public administration.

Prospects

For Latvia, which strives to strengthen its position within the international Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative, the key strategic direction is to shift from a declarative approach to openness toward building a sustainable, measurable, and inclusive model of governance. Such transformation is impossible without the institutional entrenchment of open government principles and without effective strategic communications that not only accompany reforms but are integrated into the very logic of their implementation (Latkovska 2023).

The prospect of integrating open governance into national strategies and the legislative framework is the foundation of long–term resilience. These principles must not be externally imposed but organically embedded in development strategy documents so that they become part of administrative practice rather than temporary campaigns. Communications efforts, in this context, aim not only to inform but also to establish a trust-based dialogue in which reforms are explained, discussed, and adjusted with citizen participation. This approach reduces resistance, strengthens institutional accountability, and enhances coordination across different levels of government.

Digitalization of participation processes becomes the second key pillar of transformation. The experience of countries like Estonia demonstrates that the use of digital platforms can significantly expand civic engagement in decision–making. In Latvia, this requires not only technical modernization but also a thoughtful implementation of new forms of digital interaction based on convenience, accessibility, and transparency. Digital channels–such as e–consultations, thematic forums, or mobile apps–gain political significance only when complemented by a robust communication strategy that ensures actual engagement rather than an illusion of participation. Economically, the effectiveness of digital solutions is reflected in reduced administrative costs, faster response times, and automation of routine procedures. Estonia has shown that transitioning to digital interaction allows for substantial annual savings through streamlined documentation processes and reduced burden on the public sector (OECD 2021).

According to the European Data Portal (2021), efficient use of open data enables EU states to generate cumulative economic benefits of up to €1.7 billion annually. Proportionate to Latvia's scale and infrastructure, the potential return could be about €80 million per year, including reduced transaction costs, shorter citizen-government interaction times, and growth in digital services. In Estonia, such mechanisms have led to savings equivalent to 2% of the national GDP, thanks to full-scale electronic administration and unified feedback channels (Eesti Koostöökogu 2022).

Equally important to a sustainable model is the development of partnerships with civil society and the private sector. Effective open data use, including in urban planning, healthcare, and education, requires both access to information and mechanisms for collaboration. Establishing platforms for joint data analysis, co-programming of solutions, and priority alignment should occur within an institutionalized dialogue framework. In Finland, where data openness is enshrined in national strategy, over 2,500 datasets are available for commercial use, stimulating Civic Tech and digital entrepreneurship, particularly in mobile services, transportation, and education (Open Data Finland 2021). These examples confirm that transparent and open digital ecosystems not only enhance citizen engagement but also drive economic growth. Strengthening such links improves decision-making quality and boosts economic activity, especially in digital startups and service platforms. Open, machine–readable data becomes a valuable resource for commercial and non-commercial innovation, as shown in countries with developed Civic Tech ecosystems (European Data Portal 2021). Communications in this context function as the "connective tissue" between sectors, overcoming fragmentation and lowering transaction costs.

Long-term success also critically depends on educational support. This involves not only training in digital technologies and analytics but also fostering a culture of participation, data literacy, and understanding of governance mechanisms. Engaging educational institutions, launching targeted campaigns, creating open courses, and participating in transnational education initiatives can sustain capacity growth. Over time, such investments in digital literacy and data skills reduce state dependency on external contractors, enhance domestic technological potential, and foster a more resilient knowledge economy. With strategic communication, these initiatives can serve as entry points for youth into public governance, thus improving the staffing resilience of the public sector.

Technological prospects such as using blockchain for tracking budget flows or artificial intelligence for analyzing large open data sets open new horizons for transparency and accountability. However, successful implementation depends on society's digital maturity and trust in government innovations. Without communications strategies that clarify functions, boundaries, and risks of new technologies, technical innovations may lead to alienation rather than support. Thus, digital solutions and communications must evolve synchronously, reinforcing each other and forming a sustainable ecosystem.

On this path, Latvia will face challenges–institutional inertia, inter-agency fragmentation, limited resources, and resistance from some actors. Overcoming these barriers is only possible with political will and a coordinated strategy. Here again, communications play a key role by ensuring not only transparency but also inclusive participation in shaping changes, mitigating misunderstanding and conflicts of interest.

In the long run, with a systemic approach, Latvia has the potential to become a model country for digital and democratic transformation in Eastern Europe. Achieving this requires not simply emulating international examples but developing context–specific national solutions. At the core of these solutions must be people–informed, engaged, empowered, and trusting those who govern. Communications in this sense are not auxiliary tools but primary resources for open government resilience. Their significance lies in reducing institutional and transactional barriers, enhancing business climate, and increasing investment predictability–especially when transparency and accountability are key benchmarks in international assessments of governance systems.

Conclusions

Since joining the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative in 2011, Latvia has demonstrated a clear commitment to building a more open, accountable, and participatory system of public administration. Significant initiatives have been implemented, including the ManaBalss.lv platform,

the open data portal Data.gov.lv, and the active engagement of organizations such as Delna and Providus in drafting and monitoring national action plans. These instruments laid the foundation for dialogue between the state and society, marking the beginning of the institutionalization of open government practices.

Nevertheless, alongside these achievements, numerous unresolved structural and communication problems persist. The līdzdalība.lv platform, initially created as a tool for online consultations, has not become an effective channel of interaction between ministries and citizens. Unlike in Estonia, where public e-consultations are mandatory, in Latvia they remain irregular and often symbolic. Local examples, such as the participatory digital budget in Valmiera, are exceptions rather than the rule. Although Data.gov.lv formally hosts a large volume of datasets, it suffers from outdated content, a lack of systematic user feedback analysis, and weak integration with decision-making processes. All of this points to a lack of coordination, systematic monitoring, and institutional resilience.

Open government has the potential to significantly improve the effectiveness of public decision-making, strengthen trust in public authorities, and ensure a fairer allocation of resources. However, this requires moving from a patchwork of digital and political initiatives to a coherent model centered on citizens and the public interest. In this model, communications cease to be a technical accompaniment to reforms and become a structural element of resilience. Only through institutionalized forms of dialogue–mandatory consultations, co-programming, regular feedback–can declarations of openness be transformed into actual administrative practice.

To move in this direction, Latvia needs to establish a stable coordination mechanism involving all stakeholders–from ministries and municipalities to NGOs and the academic sector. In addition, it is necessary to legally enshrine participation procedures, develop indicators for assessing the effectiveness of open data and civic engagement, and ensure the active involvement of regions in the implementation and monitoring of reforms. Communication strategies play a special role, ensuring the visibility, transparency, and accessibility of these processes for broad segments of society.

Beyond democratic and institutional significance, open government also has a clearly measurable economic dimension. International research shows that digitalization and open data reduce administrative costs, shorten procedural timelines, and increase the return on IT infrastructure investments. In the Baltic states, the economic impact of Civic Tech innovations is estimated at a GDP increase of 0.3% to 0.7% in specific sectors, including transport, public services, and municipal governance (European Data Portal 2021). Latvia already allocates more than 1% of its public budget to digital government (OECD 2021), but to achieve returns comparable to Estonia or Finland, systematic feedback loops, civic engagement monitoring, and digital literacy support are required.

At this point, the principles of institutional economics become particularly relevant. The development of open government institutions is not only a matter of technical design but also of understanding the incentive structures, transaction costs, and informal norms that shape behavior within public administration. Institutional economics emphasizes the role of stable rules, credible commitments, and predictable interactions in enhancing the efficiency and legitimacy of governance. In the Latvian context, applying these principles means prioritizing not just technological or procedural fixes, but also cultivating a culture of trust, accountability, and cooperation across all levels of government.

In the context of growing international competition in governance quality, the ability to maintain openness and effective dialogue is not only a marker of democratic maturity but also a factor of economic resilience (Chehabeddine, Tvaronavičienė 2020). Latvia, with its digital infrastructure and civic potential, can become a regional model. But this is only possible if political will is supported by institutional mechanisms and a systemic communication policy that ensures not just information dissemination but shared responsibility for the country's future.

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