CROWDLAW FOR CONGRESS SERIES

MYGOV INDIA

POLL, DISCUSS, DO

https://mygov.in

CASE STUDY

MYGOV INDIA | POLL, DISCUSS, DO

Introduction

MyGov India (mygov.in) is an online crowdsourcing and "crowdscoring" platform that allows citizens multiple opportunities to engage with India's Government, including commenting on discussion topics, leaving feedback on polls and surveys, and participating in contests. These contests may involve a range of tasks, from drafting policy suggestions, to competing in knowledge-based quizzes, to participating in content creation competitions (MyGov, NIC, & MeitY, 2017). MyGov India is an example of a 360° CrowdLaw project, where participation happens through a combination of online discussions and offline tasks (GovLab, 2018). MyGov India indicates that in the Solution Identification phase of lawmaking, governments can draw participants in by providing multiple channels for participation that offer real-world incentives. Online polling can be used for public consultation on future programs and for feedback on existing initiatives. However, none of this will necessarily result in meaningful or impactful engagement if the proper institutional mechanisms for the Government to respond to feedback are not in place.

Background

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched MyGov on July 26, 2014, 60 days into his tenure as prime minister. The stated intent of the program is to "contribute to the social and economic transformation of India" by creating "an interface for healthy exchange of ideas and views involving the common citizen and experts" which would "bring…the government closer to the common man." In Modi's words, the intent of the program was to transform "'Swaraj' (self-rule) into 'Surajya' (good rule)" (MyGov India, n.d.-a).

Modi's government created MyGov to combat perceived systemic corruption in India's government. Under the rule of the United Progressive Alliance from 2004 to 2014, the increase of access to 24-hour news and talk shows, which fixated on a series of corruption scandals involving the members of the ruling party, "made exposure of high level corruption a daily national sport" (Nayar, 2015). Coalgate[1] and the 2G Telecommunications Scam[2], two of the most prominent scandals, coincided with a culture of normalized corruption, everyday bribery, and political patronage. These corruption

[1] In this 2012 scandal, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) exposed a practice in which the Indian Government allocated coal mining contracts at its own discretion rather than through a bidding process, which CAG estimates resulted in a Rs. 1.86 trillion gain by the private parties involved. (Gupta, Sultan et al. 2017).

[2] In this 2007 scandal, Telecom Minister A. Raja illegally manipulated the selection process for the allocation of 2G spectrum licenses to companies in his favor, again resulting in a Rs.1.8 trillion loss by the Indian Government.

problems, along with stagnating economic growth and a decline in the perceived legitimacy in the United Progressive Alliance government, set the stage for the "high-tech populism" (Jaffrelot, 2015) of Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Modi capitalized on the proliferation of access to visual media technologies during his 2014 campaign to cultivate his image as a powerful, technologically-advanced, and universally-beloved nationalist leader (Jaffrelot, 2015). The BJP furthered this effort with the publication of its 2014 Election Manifesto, which promised to reduce corruption, in part by creating an e-Governance platform to complement its transparent, policy-driven government. BJP intended the "Easy, Efficient, and Effective" e-Governance platform not only as an antidote to corruption, but as part of a broader Open Government goal which would include the digitization of public records, the further development of India's information technology infrastructure and economy, and public participation in policymaking (BJP, 2014).

Numerous disparate e-Governance initiatives existed in India at various levels prior to MyGov. In response to these "islands of e-Governance initiatives in the country at the National, State, district and even block level" (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008, p.106), the Department of Information Technology and the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances created the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), which the Government of India approved in May of 2006. To execute the plan, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) created the National e-Governance Division as an independent division of Media Lab Asia[3] to manage the project. NeGD organized e-Governance initiatives into 27 Mission Mode Projects (MMP) --which had expanded to 44 by 2018. Under the plan, NeGD also created numerous brick-and-mortar facilities, called "Common Service Centers," across India where citizens without internet access could go to access e-Services (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008).

In July 2015, PM Modi announced the creation of the Digital India campaign (Ray, 2018). Digital India is an umbrella program which combines initiatives created by Modi's Government (such as MyGov India) with updated versions of existing programs. For instance, NeGP was overhauled as "e-Kranti," receiving an additional 13 MMPs with a new focus on mobile, Cloud, and geographic information

[3] MeitY later restructured this division in the Digital India Corporation in 2017 (MeitY, 2017).

systems technologies (Kumar, 2018). Digital India takes a nine-pillared approach,[4] of which e-Governance is one. Under this framework, MyGov was created as the crowdsourcing, communications, and social media engagement platform, while e-Kranti assumed responsibility for e-Service delivery.

The MyGov platform launched on July 26, 2014, and is on-going. The Government of India created the platform via the National Informatics Center (NIC), the public organization in charge of India's information and communication technologies services, overseen by MeitY. In March of 2015, the NIC released an updated version of the site, dubbed "MyGov 2.0," which includes polling and survey features, better navigation and layout, and improved data analytics tools (Alawadhi, 2015). The platform is built on open-source software (Alawadhi, 2015), as per the Government of India's 2015 Policy on Adoption of Open Source Software for Government of India. MyGov launched a mobile app in 2017.

Project Description

MyGov India offers a range of curated participation opportunities, which fall into three categories: Do, Discuss, and Poll. The "Do" section consists of a mix of CrowdLaw tasks, some of which are used to create content for the Government of India and some of which serve to identify solutions to problems identified by the Government. Users can join communities called Groups (e.g. Clean Ganga, Sporty India, Tribal Development), which are led by public agencies (e.g. Department of Biotechnology, Department of Telecom, Department of Finance) to engage users on policy proposals, social issues, and other initiatives related to the Ministry's work. Most activities on the site are categorized by Group, while some are published to the whole site. Users can belong to a maximum of four groups at a time (MyGov, NIC, & MeitY, 2017).

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[4] The nine pillars are:

1. Broadband Highways through national optical fibre network
2. Universal access to mobile: connectivity in all 44,000 villages in the country
3. IT teaching skills for youth job skills training.
4. Electronics Manufacturing of items such as smart cards, smart energy meters, micro ATMs, mobile, set-top boxes, consumer and medical electronics.
5. Public access to Internet by renovating post offices to be e-Service delivery centers
6. E- Governance: delivery of services, publicly-visible government workflow automation, and public grievance redress through online platforms.
7. E - Kranti: delivery of electronic services to people which deals with health, education, farming, justice, rights, security, financial inclusion and many more services
8. Global Information: Hosting data online, engaging social media platforms and facilitating two-way communication through the creation of the MyGov website
9. Early Harvest Programmes: increasing usage of internet and e-books in universities and promoting email as a method of communication

(Kumar, 2018)

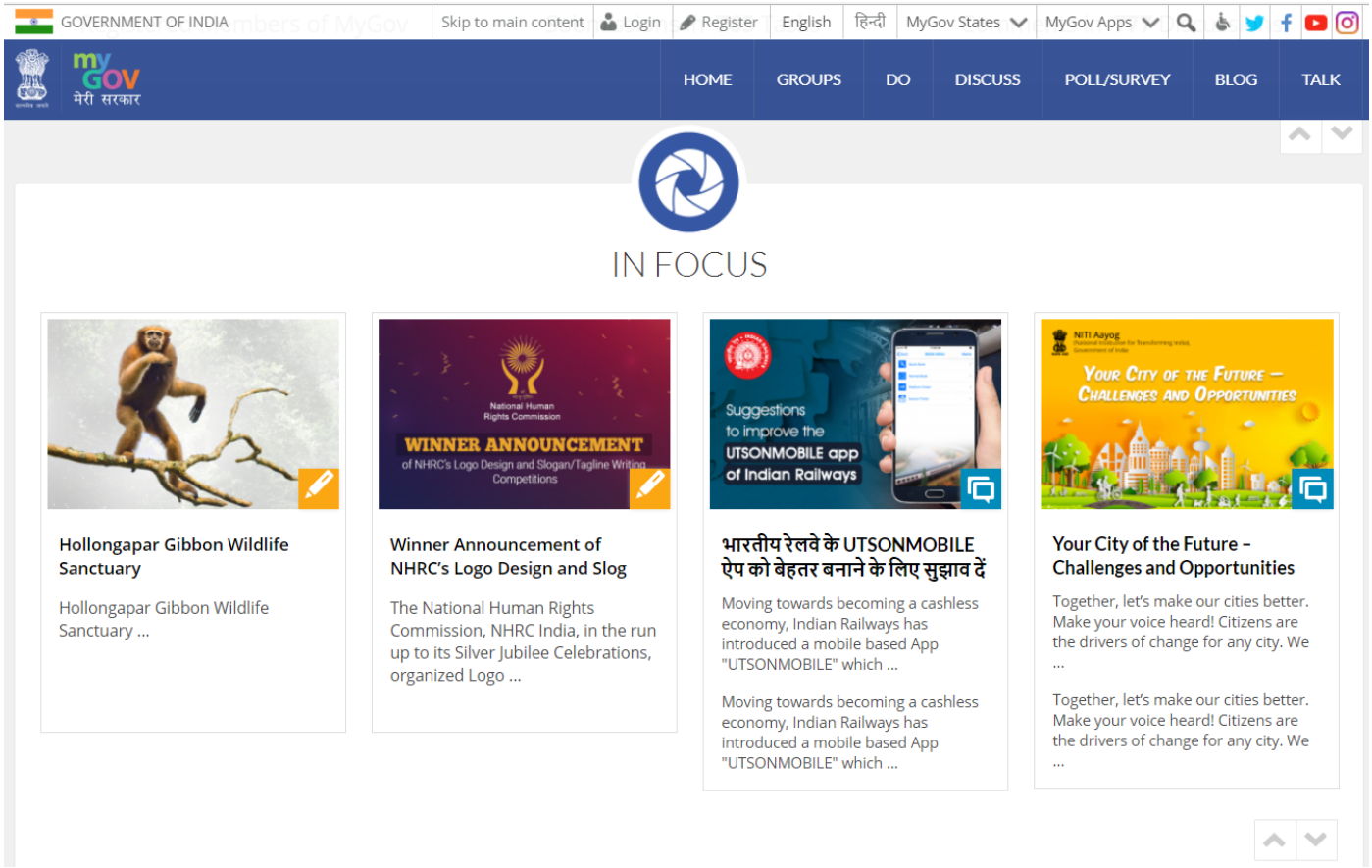

FIGURE 1: MYGOV INDIA HOME PAGE. SOURCE: MYGOV.IN

The Discuss section functions as a curated forum, where users respond to prompts or questions posed by ministries or by the central Government of India. Various Groups have asked users to provide suggestions about topics ranging from the Reduction of Corruption Through Technology, the Celebration of the 150th Birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, and the Development of Parks in Varanasi City. Additionally, in the lead up to each Mann Ki Baat (Prime Minister Modi's monthly national radio address), users are asked to submit topics and key themes about important issues. Users can post responses to discussion topics, along with file attachments, which other users can reply to by "crowdscoring" with up/down votes, or by leaving comments of their own (GovLab, 2018). The Discuss section is the primary CrowdLaw component of the MyGov platform, as it allows citizens to Identify Solutions to the problems identified by the Government of India, solutions which ministries take into account when formulating policies. This is in addition to the section's role as a general feedback/suggestions forum for various government programs.

In the Poll/Survey Section, Groups can post opinion polls and surveys about topics ranging from the naming of government programs, to the design of government apps, websites, and logos. Many polls are also used for priority-setting tasks around "Smart Cities" initiatives and area-based

development. For instance, one poll allowed residents to vote for which area of the city of Ghaziabad should be selected for area-based development as a Smart City. For the duration of the polling period (determined by the creator of the poll), registered users can vote in the poll or survey; the platform shows users the results of the poll after they have cast their vote. This is an additional CrowdLaw component, though one where users have markedly less freedom. While polling only allows users to select from a predefined list of options, and is not the focus of MyGov, it does allow citizens to express their opinions on policy initiatives. In the Blog section, MyGov staff, Senior Government Officials, Union Ministers, and invited guests post editorials relating to MyGov initiatives, relay general updates about the platform, and announce contest winners (MyGov, NIC, & MeitY, 2017). Groups also use the Blog to disseminate e-Books, which are largely long-form reports of "success stories" from past initiatives. Likewise, the Talks section hosts and archives a variety of live streamed events, panel discussions, webinars, and lectures organized by members of India's government. Together, these two sections function as a media outlet for the Government rather than as a CrowdLaw platform.

The Do section includes online and offline tasks that further the objectives of the Group or the Indian Government. Users can view the task, its description, and its duration as determined by the creator, and then accept the task by selecting "Do this task now." Users then can complete their task by uploading a document containing their submission. The organizer of the task announces the winner(s) on the Blog section. By successfully completing tasks, users can earn "activity points" and accumulate "hours" of participation, which are displayed on their profile to track their engagement on the site (MyGov, NIC, & MeitY, 2017).

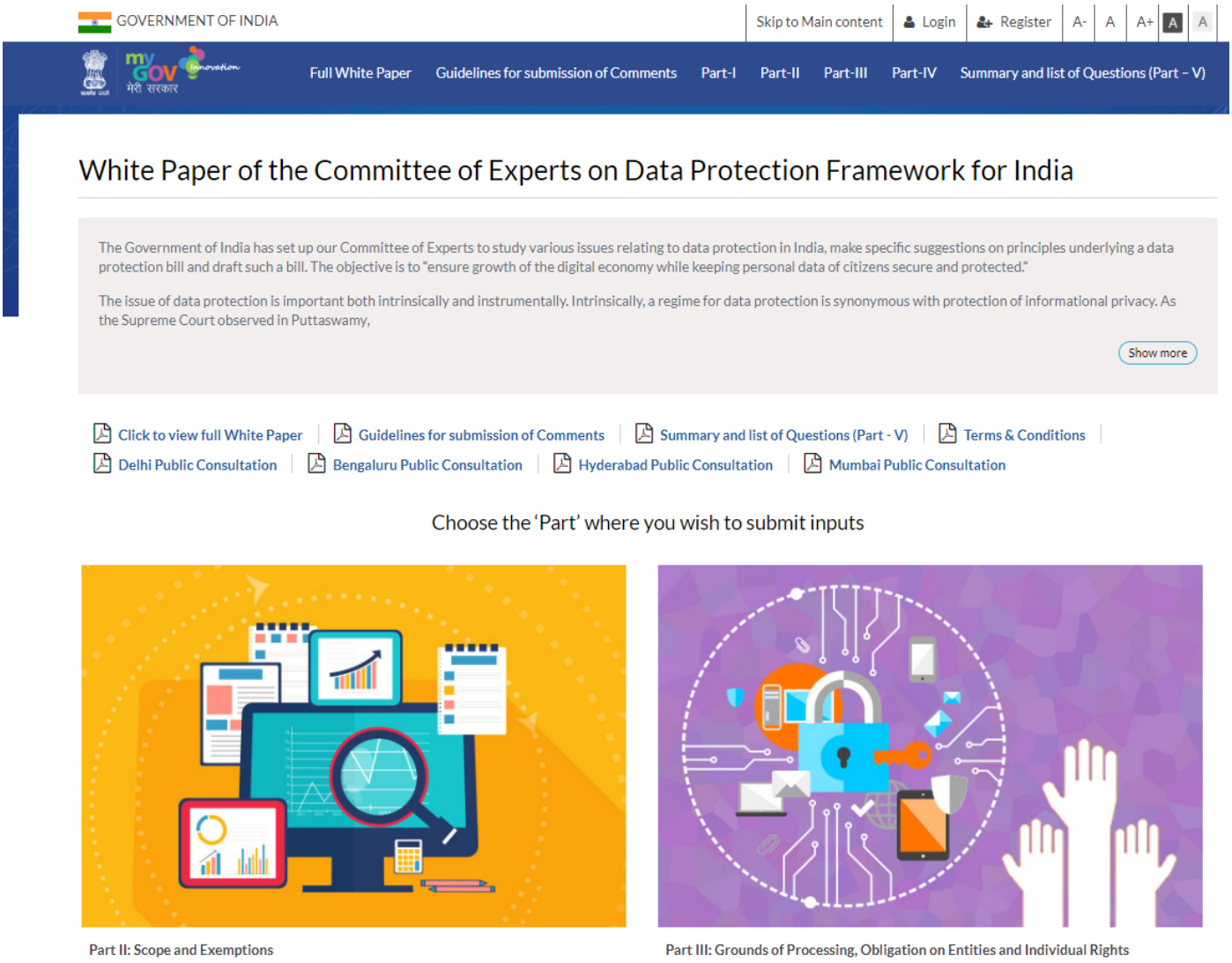

FIGURE 2: PUBLIC COMMENTING PROCESS FOR DATA PROTECTION WHITEPAPER. SOURCE: MYGOV.IN

The Do section offers a mix of CrowdLaw tasks. In one example of a public consultation task, the Ministry of Telecommunications invited the public to leave comments on specific chapters of the 2018 Draft National Digital Communications Policy through a portal on the MyGov site. The same process was used by MeitY to garner input on a White Paper of the Committee of Experts on Data Protection Framework for India, a precursor to a draft bill on data protection in India. These tasks solicit feedback on sections of draft legislation, in an effort to resolve specific issues, rather than to identify general solutions to problems, as is done in the Discuss section. Other tasks are framed as contests (or "Innovation Challenges"), where ministries ask users to submit proposals for how to raise money for India's railways or how to bring urban services to rural villages; the submission requirements, prizes, timelines, etc., vary from contest to contest. While some of these contests and other tasks are related to policymaking (grouped under the innovate.mygov.in module), many

others are creative tasks (grouped under the "Creative Corner" section) such as photography, letter-writing, logo design, sloganeering, and film contests. These contests are used to produce content for the Indian Government and its many schemes.

Participation

There is some opportunity for citizen participation in each section of the MyGov platform. For the most part, participation is self-selected; anyone with an email or phone number is able to participate in discussions and polls, while some contests with prizes are only open to Indian citizens. To participate, users must register for an account using either an email address or phone number and birthday, along with their full name, which is visible to other users. Users with "@nic.in" or "@gov.in" email addresses can directly log-in to the system using their government credentials without registering. Anonymous users may view the various tasks and discussions but may not participate (MyGov, NIC, & MeitY, 2017). Only members of government, MyGov employees, and select invited guests are allowed to post "Blog" or "Talk" content.

As of July 2018, the dashboard boasted 6.3 million registered users on the platform, with 222,000 submissions across 773 tasks, and 3.8 million comments across 780 discussions since the platform's creation.

The MyGov portal tracks the participation of individual users (MyGov, NIC, & MeitY, 2017), and publishes real-time metadata on a dashboard called "Highlights." As of July 2018, the dashboard boasted 6.3 million registered users on the platform, with 222,000 submissions across 773 tasks, and 3.8 million comments across 780 discussions since the platform's creation.

According to MyGov, actual engagement stretches to over 200 million citizens, including the less digitally or lingually literate who participate by voice. The platform has also hosted 64 Groups, 180 Talks, and 244 Polls. MyGov also hosts "#TransformingIndia" (See Figure 3), a performance dashboard for progress updates of the Modi Government's various schemes. A related dashboard, "48 Months Transforming India," celebrates the accomplishments of Modi's first four years in office.

MyGov provides multiple channels for participation, as part of Digital India's 360° Approach. Users can partake in some MyGov tasks and discussions even if they are not able to access the desktop

site. For instance, through the #FridaysAtMyGov program, Ministries hold meetups between experts and ministers in a particular field, which MyGov users can register to attend in person, or can call in through a WhatsApp phone line. Similarly, users can submit ideas for the Prime Minister's Mann Ki Baat address, and can record responses for some polls, by calling a toll-free phone number. Users can also participate in polls, discussions, and tasks, and consume talks and blog posts, through the MyGov Mobile app. Users can also make submissions using the site's text-to-speech function (Basu & Lin, 2018). These channels provide the opportunity for millions of Indians to participate in MyGov: while India has 462 million internet users, it has nearly three times as many (1.21 billion) mobile phone connections, 40 percent of which are smartphones (GovLab, 2018).

However, those who participate tend to be Modi supporters. There is no technical barrier to diverse engagement yet there is little, if any, interaction across the aisle or from vocal critics of the Government (Pugalia, Interview with the author, 2018). Also, while the platform has attracted 6.3 million registered users, this is a drop in the bucket (less than 0.5 percent) of India's total 1.3 billion population.

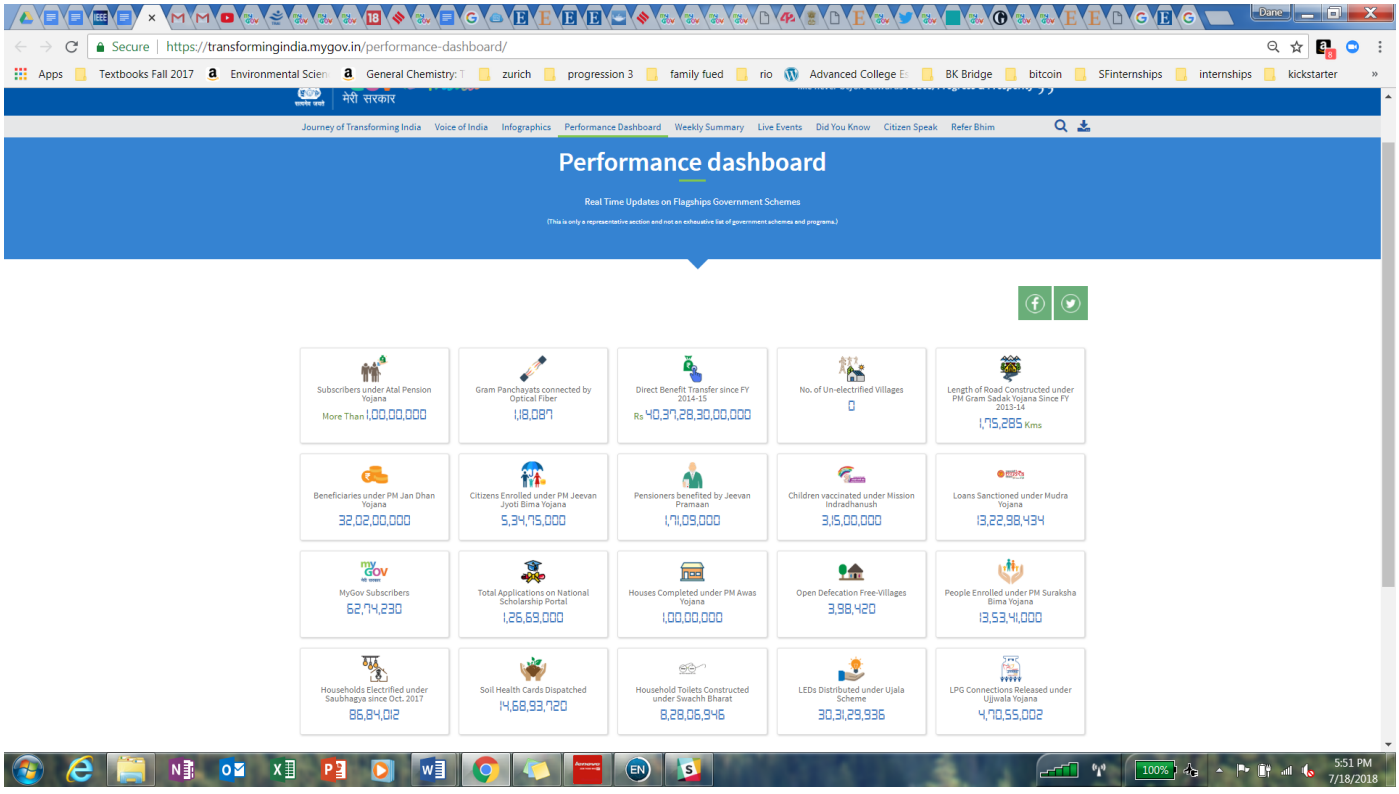

FIGURE 3: TRANSFORMING INDIA PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD. SOURCE: MYGOV.IN

These relatively low numbers may be attributed, in part, to the fact that the only real incentive offered to discussion participants is the ability "to take part in various initiatives towards public

good" and "to voice your opinion on the policy initiatives of the Government" (MyGov India, n.d.-b). In other words, the value of the user participating is the participation itself. While users accumulate credit points by participating, the only mention of how these points can be used is on the site's FAQ page, which simply states that "Incentives based on credit points will be announced in the future" (MyGov India, n.d.-b). Some incentives, such as cash prizes, electronic devices, and certificates of achievement, are offered to the winners of contests.

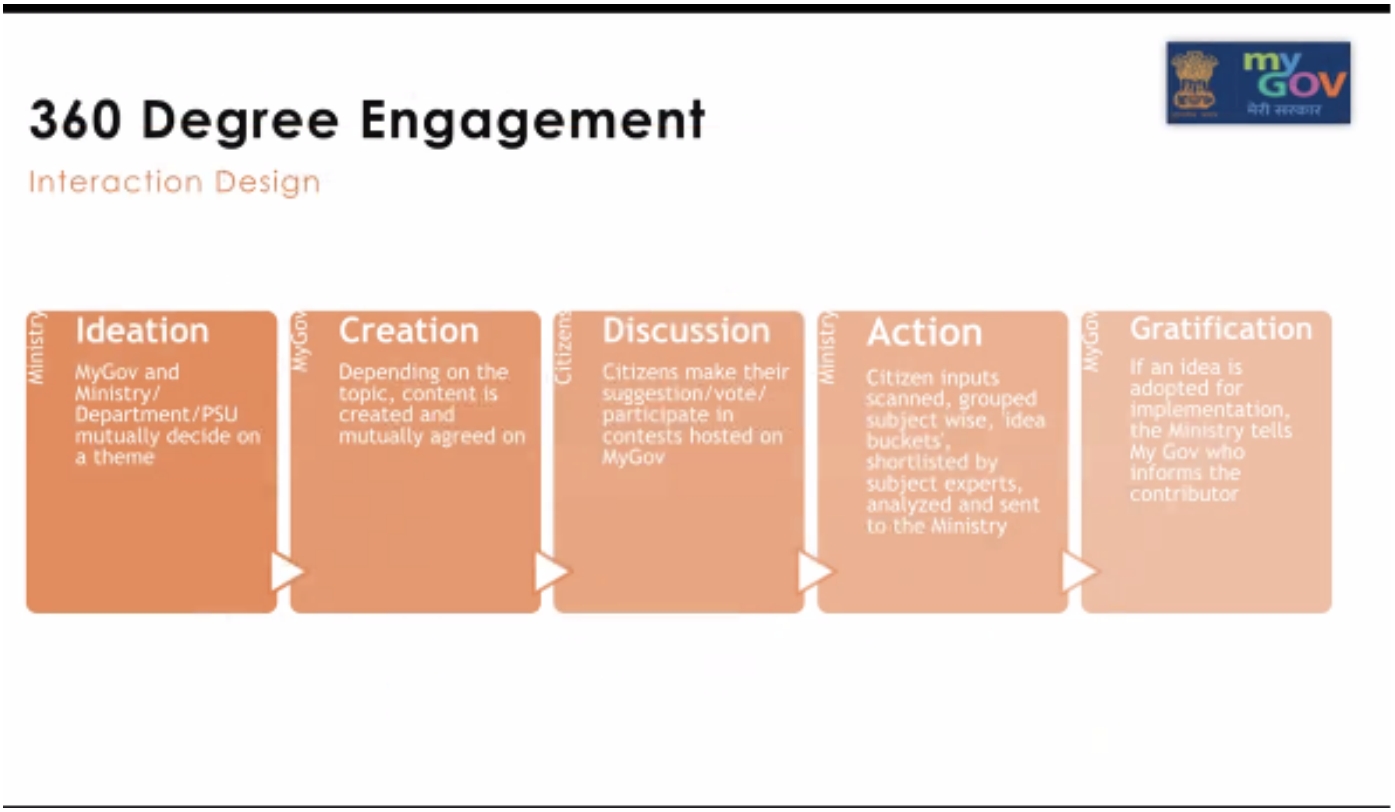

FIGURE 4: MYGOV INDIA'S INTERACTION PROCEDURE. SOURCE: MYGOV. INDIA

At the institutional level, a team of MyGov staff members collects and processes submissions through a five-step mechanism (See Figure 4). First, MyGov works with a relevant Ministry to identify an idea for the engagement initiative. Next, MyGov, the Ministry, and any other involved groups create the task (a discussion topic, contest, poll, etc.) with input from both ends. Once MyGov and the relevant division have approved the activity, it is published on the platform. MyGov users are then able to discuss, vote, or create content for the contest for the duration of the task.

At the end of the task, MyGov staff receive the submissions and process them using listening tools, open-source software to translate and transcribe the country's diverse languages (GovLab, 2018), and algorithms used to analyze and prioritize comments (Basu & Lin, 2018). Going forward, MyGov plans to further explore the use of voice-to-text conversion, as voice is a primary mode of access

and communication for people in India. This will also include support for regional languages (MyGov, personal communication, 2018). Subject experts also analyze the submissions before referring them to a relevant ministry. The opinions and feedback of all individuals are then presented to the relevant divisions so that the ministries can make educated policy and governance decisions. How the submissions are processed after MyGov has turned them over differs from division to division. Each ministry has a team that is responsible for ensuring participative governance. If the ministry implements a user's idea, they must inform MyGov, who in turn informs the user. MyGov employs a team of approximately 50 staff members, overseen by CEO Arvind Gupta. These team members are spread across several verticals including Research, Content, and Technology, according to the strengths of each employee. Employees receive training in both "soft" and technical skills, making use of subscriptions to technical tools to upgrade work-related skills (MyGov, personal communication, 2018).

For the 2016-2017 financial year, the MyGov division of the Digital India Corporation reported a total expenditure of Rs. 1,066,194,458 ($14,480,499 USD). MyGov is funded in full by a yearly grant-in-aid from India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. Nearly 90 percent of this budget -- Rs. 938,544,82-- was spent on administrative expenses. The vast majority (over 96 percent) of the administrative expenditures went towards promoting the MyGov platform through advertising and conferences; only Rs. 6,033,936 --or 0.6 percent of MyGov's total budget-- was spent on direct maintenance and data storage related to the website (Digital India Corporation, 2017).

The Government of India has communicated the existence of the MyGov platform to citizens through a targeted campaign involving social media, online articles, radio broadcasts, and live events. The platform operates a Facebook account, Instagram page, YouTube channel, and most notably a Twitter feed (@mygovindia) with over 1.4 million followers and 11,000 tweets. The platform and its initiatives have been covered in online and print media outlets including The Economic Times, The Indian Express, The Hindu, and Hindustan Times. The Prime Minister's monthly Mann Ki Baat radio address is broadcast on the public radio station All India Radio. Each of these outlets is in addition to the MyGov platform, whose "Talk" and "Blog" sections function as a media outlet for the Modi Government. The MyGov website, as with most of its publications and related media, is available in English and Hindi.

Unlike other CrowdLaw processes, MyGov India is not supported by a formal legislative framework or defined legal process. Though there are opportunities for citizens to provide input on government initiatives, there is no guaranteed way for user-submitted policy ideas to become

codified in law through MyGov India. While various government organizations may solicit suggestions or feedback regarding policy proposals or draft legislation, it is at the discretion of the ministry involved to determine what to post for public input and to what degree the suggestions will be implemented, if at all. There is no mandatory feedback requirement.

Impacts

By holding discussions on MyGov, the Government of India and the ministries that are active on the platform benefit from a curated list of suggestions that is "crowdscored," or rated by other users on the forum, and ranked by relevance using MyGov's algorithms, which can give the ministers an idea of which proposals are most worth considering and make the data consumption process easier (Basu & Lin, 2018). As ministries must post a discussion topic before users can respond, the ministers can control the flow of proposals by determining how often they post a forum. This allows the institutions to avoid being overloaded by information. Ministries benefit from a diversity of ideas, experiences, and opinions. Holding discussions on MyGov also allows ministers to create policies that are more in line with the beliefs and values of the people of India, as seen with the debate around India's Net Neutrality[5] policy in 2015 (GovLab, 2018).

Holding discussions on MyGov also allows ministers to create policies that are more in line with what the beliefs and values of the people of India, as seen with the debate around India's Net Neutrality policy in 2015.

Prior to 2015, India had no official policy regarding net neutrality. In response to the rapid growth in traffic on web platforms like Google, Yahoo, and Facebook, the Department of Telecommunications'(DoT) tasked the country's Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRAI) with drafting a series of recommendations for the regulation of India's internet service providers. In March 2015, these recommendations were made public in the form of a rambling, hundred-plus page Consultation Paper[6] on TRAI's website. Many saw the TRAI report as favoring differential pricing,

[5] "Net Neutrality" is the principle that Internet service providers (ISPs) cannot discriminate based on the source or type of Internet data with regard to their service. For instance, an ISP cannot "throttle" access to a rival ISP's website by slowing down data speeds to that site.

[6] Differential pricing is a practice where a provider charges different prices to access multiple websites, even if the same amount of data is transmitted to each site.

zero-rating,[7] and other controversial practices, much to the chagrin of net neutrality supporters. The backlash from supporters of net neutrality was immediate, with the TRAI receiving over 1 million emails about the report in the four months that followed (Soni, 2016). In July, DoT moved the discussion to MyGov, where it garnered over 70,000 responses --the vast majority of which opposed TRAI's recommendations-- before the topic closed on August 20, 2015. This feedback was reflected in TRAI's revised set of recommendations published in November of 2017, a complete reversal of the agency's prior position. The revised recommendations sought to "prohibit Internet service providers (ISPs) from engaging in 'any form of discrimination or interference' in the treatment of online content" (The Wire Staff, 2018). In July of 2018, the DoT's Telecom Commission adopted these recommendations, with a few exceptions for providers of "special services" (The Wire Staff, 2018). For the institution, the MyGov platform provided a centralized repository for ministers to receive and process comments in a crowdscored thread, in contrast to the millions of individual emails that comprised the only channel for feedback prior to MyGov.

FIGURE 5: THE IDEA FOR SWAYAM, INCORPORATED INTO THE 2017 UNION BUDGET. SOURCE: MYGOV. INDIA

[7] Zero-rating is a practice where a provider allows users free access to a website or network of websites, usually one(s) with which the provider is affiliated. Backlash against Facebook's plan to bring "Free Basics," scheme to provide zero-rated access to Facebook and affiliated sites to India, sparked the country's larger discussion about net neutrality policy.

By hosting contests on MyGov, these institutions benefit from a content creation system, crowdsourced by users through a gamified approach, that can be more convenient and less expensive than the mechanisms that are traditionally used to design content for the government. For instance, MyGov India CEO Arvind Gupta recounts a 2014 project where MyGov was used to crowdsource the logo for Swachh Bharat ("Clean India"), a campaign to build community-owned sewerage infrastructure. Rather than outsourcing the creation of the logo through a conventional request for proposals (RFP) process, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation held a logo design contest on MyGov, where users could submit their designs for the chance to win a Rs.50,000 prize. The task amassed over 1,600 submissions, which users could then "like", and share on social media. This crowdscoring process was taken into consideration by the Selection Committee in determining the winner. The entire crowdsourcing process accrued a total cost of only $1,500 USD, approximately 1 percent of what the cost would have been using the RFP process (GovLab, 2018).

Similarly, in 2015, the Prime Minister's Office and Google co-hosted a contest on MyGov for the design of Prime Minister Modi's mobile application. The contest was held in three phases: Idea Submission, Wireframe Development, and App Development. Users were first asked to submit ideas for the app's content and function, with the best ideas (as decided by a MyGov Screening Committee) included in a "blueprint." In the second phase, teams of users consulted the idea blueprints to design wireframes of the app's functional layout. The Screening Committee shortlisted the top ten wireframe designs and invited their team members to present their work for a MyGov jury consisting of eminent professionals and government representatives. This jury then selected five of the wireframe design teams to participate in the third phase, where each team received mentorship from Google to develop their app. The jury then evaluated each app and selected a winning team, who won a sponsored trip to meet for six weeks with a team of engineers and developers at Google's Headquarters in Silicon Valley (MyGov India, n.d.-c). Through this contest, the Government of India was able to crowdsource the development of the application at minimal financial and labor cost; none of the participants in the contest received any financial compensation, and Google assumed the heavy lifting duties involved in developing the app. The Government also retained ownership over the app and its source code (MyGov India, n.d.-c).

Numerous suggestions made by users of the platform have also had real-world impacts. The ideas for SWAYAM (a Massive Open Online Course platform run by the Government of India) and the India Post Payments Bank (a system in which certain third-parties can offer some financial services usually provided by banks) originated from users on MyGov India (Baru & Lin, 2018). Several other

ideas from MyGov users have made it into proposals for Union and Railroad budgets of 2015, 2016, and 2017 including the installation of digital display networks in train passenger cars; collaboration with startups to support innovation in the railway system; and making Rs. 2,000 the maximum cash donation a political party could receive from a single person.

Challenges and Risks

Several scholars have identified ongoing challenges faced by the Digital India project, many of which are also more narrowly applicable to MyGov India. Of the 1.326 billion people who live in India, approximately 67.6 percent live in rural areas, which tend to suffer from reduced access to the internet; it is estimated that 864 to 950 million Indians lack internet access (Kumar, 2018; Ray, 2018). One survey found that only one in five households in Indian cities owns a computer, while only 9.8 percent have a computer with internet access in their home (Praharaj, Han et al. 2017). Many rural villages that are connected to the internet suffer from slow internet speed. While the Digital India plan seeks to solve this problem by further building out India's broadband internet infrastructure and by providing citizens internet access via Common Service Centers, the country's vast size makes this an ongoing challenge.

Linguistic diversity is another challenge, as over 1,600 languages and dialects and 15 official languages are spoken across India (CIA, 2018). Although English is an official language that is used by government officials and often learned as a secondary language, less than 1 percent of India's population speaks it as a first language and less than 5 percent are considered fluent. Although 41 percent of Indians speak Hindi (CIA, 2018), this still leaves at least half of India's population unable to fluently navigate the MyGov site without the use of outside software. Likewise, processing these many languages on the backend of MyGov is an additional ongoing challenge, and one that will compound as the platform continues to expand (Basu & Lin, 2018).

In analyzing Digital India, Kumar (2018) notes that "with cybercrime on the rise, the idea of putting information of about a billion citizens online seems like a risky move." While cybersecurity is a growing problem worldwide, India is especially prone to this problem due to its rapidly growing population of internet users and lack of institutional capacity to deal with cyber threats. In particular, the country lacks human capital of cyber security professionals, technologically savvy law enforcement officers, and cyber security R&D personnel. This problem is compounded by underreporting of crimes and low conviction rates for cyber criminals (Kshetri, 2016).

Reactions

MyGov has faced several technical hurdles, including those associated with the website's design. Rather than having one central engagement opportunity that draws in users and then directs them to other features, the site's overload of features spreads engagement out across the various sections of the site, causing it to feel empty. While the site's modular design allows for new ministries or states to easily be added, the generally poor design can also cause the site to be sluggish and prone to OTP (One Time Password) and other login issues. (Pugalia, Interview with the author, 2018).

MyGov has also been subject to controversies caused by the rapidly changing digital landscape in India, in which technologies and citizens' needs advance at a pace that leaves government institutions struggling to keep up. Recent controversies such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal (involving the collection and misuse of Facebook users' personal data) and data security issues related to Aadhar --India's digital identification card system-- have brought data privacy concerns into the public consciousness. In particular, some have questioned MyGov's request for ministries to share users' data with them in order to improve engagement on the platform (Sharma, 2018). In response to these concerns, MyGov CEO Arvind Gupta defended the platform's data usage as following "best practices," and argued that the tracking of users' engagement is crucial so that users "are not bombarded with unnecessary information and get communication from government which is relevant to them" (qtd. in Sharma, 2018). Others have raised the issue of public access to data. While MyGov is a government platform with publicly available data, PM Modi's app, which draws upon many of the same resources and is often used interchangeably with MyGov, is privately owned by the Prime Minister and as such its data is not publicly available (Pugalia, Interview with the author, 2018). While some of these issues may be addressed with the forthcoming data protection bill, as of now, India's data best practices, and by extent MyGov's own data conventions, remain unclear.

The platform's role as a facilitator of public debates has also been subject to criticism. Although the platform was used in India's Net Neutrality debate, its role in this discussion was controversial, as some saw the move from email submission as an attempt to move the discussion behind a sign-in wall. MyGov CEO Arvind Gupta stated that this was not, "a one-way mechanism of seeking feedback," since "India announced the net neutrality policy shortly after the discussion was closed" for which "the bulk of the comments were sourced from [MyGov India]" (qtd. in GovLab, 2018). On the other hand, The Guardian reported that many net neutrality campaigners "...suspected the

move was designed to discourage people from participating in the debate because the site made it harder to leave comments" (Soni, 2016). While users posted 70,000 comments on MyGov's discussion forum, this pales in comparison to the over 1 million emails submitted before the debate was moved. The net neutrality example calls into question the role that MyGov has played in facilitating public debates and also raises the larger issue of whether this platform is the proper feedback mechanism for holding a meaningful conversation between people and the government.

A related issue that has arisen in the last few years is the desire for a channel by which to organize and express resistance to established policies of the Indian Government. This want is illustrated by the widespread citizen involvement in debates around net neutrality, data privacy, and other socioeconomic issues related to caste. The Government of India has thus far lacked the institutional capacity to deal with these changes through traditional feedback mechanisms like email and online forms (Pugalia, Interview with the author, 2018). While MyGov was largely created to address these challenges, the site's discussion tools serve simply as an update to their appearance that does not solve the underlying issues with the older feedback mechanisms. As such, the engagement opportunities available on the platform have come short of delivering the much-needed two-way conversation between the people and their government.

Another shortcoming has been the inability to attract and engage citizens and government members at the local level. Praharaj, Han et al. (2017) examined the intensity of participation on MyGov India discussion pages across 100 cities and found that participation on the platform varied substantially based on geography. Medium-sized cities, such as Bhopal and Indore (with populations under 2 million), and small cities like Udaipur and Jabalpur (under 1.3 million), drew higher rates of citizen engagement than did larger cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Chennai. To explain these differences, the authors also studied the intensity of participation in relation to demographic characteristics, and found a statistically significant negative correlation between participation and internet access ($r=-.221$, $p<0.05$), mobile phone access ($r=-.253$, $p<.05$), and literacy rate ($r=-.243$, $p<0.05$). This indicates that while internet access, device ownership, and literacy may be prerequisites for participation on the platform, increasing these characteristics will not necessarily lead to greater engagement on MyGov. As MyGov "..is being managed by the central government" the platform's "lack [of] local level engagement...could be identified as a key reason for low level of participation in majority of cities and even the ones having [a] considerable share of population" (Praharaj, Han et al., 2017, p.1431). This, combined with the overall low participation rates on local-level pages, indicates that rather than focusing solely on improving the

country's wireless infrastructure, the Indian government should pursue strategies to increase engagement at the local level.[8]

MyGov CEO Arvind Gupta contends that one successful aspect of MyGov's 360° approach has been the blending of online and offline features. In particular, the combination of online submissions with offline prizes has attracted a high level of engagement on the platform, as seen in the example of the 2018 Padma Awards. In contrast to past years, where only ministers were able to nominate recipients for these annual civil service awards, nominations for the "#PeoplesPadma Awards" in 2018 were open to anyone. Users could make nominations through an open submission process on the padmaawards.gov.in website, beginning in Fall of 2017 (Express Web Desk, 2017). In the lead up to the awards ceremony in Spring of 2018, a quiz was held on the MyGov site where users were asked knowledge-based questions about the lives and accomplishments of Padma nominees. The top scorers were entered into a lottery for a chance to attend the Padma Awards in person at the President of India's residence (Express Web Desk, 2018). This example is typical of MyGov's gamified approach, wherein a user competes in online activities for the chance to win real-life experiences as prizes. These rewards bring users personal gratification, which is important for achieving high-quality engagement on the platform (GovLab, 2018).

Another strength has been the Government of India's role in sponsoring the site, as this has helped MyGov India to develop a strong brand (Pugalia, Interview with the author, 2018).

Key Learnings

The platform's most consistently successful features, where it has garnered the most engagement and had the most real-world impacts, have been in its content creation tasks and competitions rather than in its lawmaking function. Similar platforms can succeed in attracting users by blending online and offline engagement opportunities, and by providing real-world prizes to participants. Likewise, institutions can reduce their workloads involved in soliciting feedback on initiatives by creating a centralized repository where citizens' comments are collected, crowdscored, and priority-ranked using an online forum.

[8] So far, local-level pages exist for the states of Haryana, Maharashtra, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, and Chhattisgarh. Participation varies among these local pages, both in scale and in activity. While Maharashtra has attracted over 78,000 participants, its users have submitted only 1,700 comments. This is less than half the number of comments submitted on the Madhya Pradesh page, which has only 23,500 members. Haryana, a state with a population of over 25 million, has only 12,000 registered users who have left a little over 100 comments.

The key shortcoming for MyGov is its lack of a formal lawmaking mechanism or even a simple grievance redressal system by which citizens' submissions could have some direct bearing on government policy; even though discussions are held on MyGov, ministries are not compelled to respond. To this end, while MyGov may be a more convenient and more aesthetically-pleasing replacement of the prior modes of feedback done via email and ministry websites, it has not truly improved or updated their function as a "one-way" conversation between the Government and the common person. Participation on MyGov is lacking at the local level, among critics of the government, and among those lacking reliable internet access, leaving out large swaths of India's population. Future projects must address the underlying issues in their systems of engagement such that they can provide a "two-way" conversation between people and their government that is accessible to their whole population. While the provision of offline participation channels is a step in the right direction, this must be combined with meaningful engagement opportunities that draw users in and then allow them the opportunity to truly impact the way their country is governed.