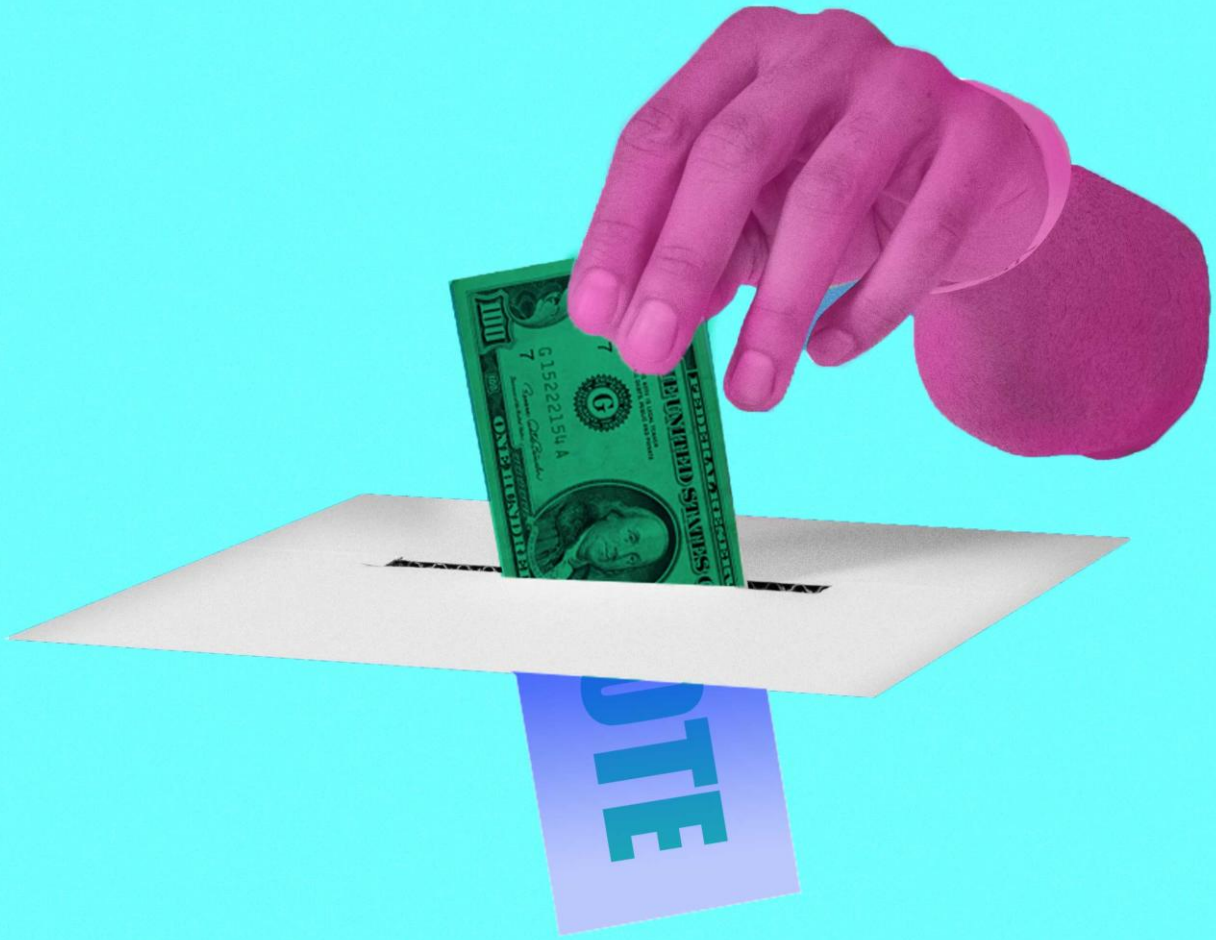
TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL
the global coalition against corruption



MONITORING POLITICAL FINANCE

Compendium of citizen initiatives and good practices

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Monitoring political finance

Compendium of citizen initiatives and good practices

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Executive summary **4**

Glossary **6**

Introduction **8**

How was this guide developed and how is it structured? 9

Who can use this guide and how? 10

Case studies **11**

Tracking funding sources and monitoring financial transparency **12**

OpenSecrets: A political finance public database in the United States 13

Cuentas Claras: Colombia's political finance reporting platform 15

A political finance observatory in Ecuador 17

Whose Vote Counts: A political funding platform in South Africa 19

Crowd-sourced political finance monitoring initiatives **21**

ARAMASO: A network of campaign monitors in Madagascar 22

Chanda Salli Meetare: A campaign observation platform in Sri Lanka 24

Reporting the misuse of state resources in Venezuela with Dilo Aquí 26

Good practices and challenges **28**

Good practices 29

Challenges 31

Acknowledgements **32**

Endnote **33**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Inadequate regulation and weak oversight of political finance can create significant risks of corruption, undue influence, distorted electoral competition, abuse of state resources and foreign interference. These risks are always present, but they are often heightened during election periods, when financial flows increase and growing numbers of stakeholders compete to influence the results. During elections and beyond, public scrutiny can play a critical role in mitigating these risks and complementing the work of oversight bodies in monitoring political finance.

This compendium aims to provide ideas for stakeholders interested in monitoring political finance. It presents seven monitoring and disclosure solutions from around the world, developed by groups outside the public sector. Through case studies and a cross-analysis of good practices and challenges, the publication provides concrete examples to inform future projects of this kind.

The seven case studies were selected from initiatives led by Transparency International chapters or other civil society actors. The selection aimed to reflect a diversity of electoral contexts and political finance systems. They cover initiatives in Colombia, Ecuador, Madagascar, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the United States and Venezuela.

The compendium covers all aspects of political finance, although several case studies focus more specifically on campaign activities and campaign finance monitoring. The methodologies used in each case study are described in detail, with some overlapping approaches explored further in the good practices section. The initiatives range from online reporting platforms and interactive dashboards for campaign finance data to networks of trained observers documenting campaign irregularities. To map these diverse approaches, the case studies are grouped into two broad categories: (i) tracking funding sources and monitoring financial transparency; and (ii) crowdsourced political finance monitoring initiatives.

Despite the diversity of contexts and approaches, common patterns have emerged in the types of findings these initiatives generate and how they contribute to enhancing public scrutiny of political finance.

Many initiatives identified gaps in compliance with national campaign reporting requirements. Several captured reports from political parties and candidates being submitted late, as well as inconsistencies and underreporting. For example, in Colombia, only 9% of candidates complied with the interim reporting requirements during the 2023 subnational election campaign.

In several instances, reported campaign finance information compared with other sources (such as news articles, campaign event monitoring and social media advertising), revealed hidden spending. In Ecuador, for example, a campaign concert which did not appear in the financial reports was reportedly worth 500,000 US dollars, despite a legal spending limit of approximately 200,000 US dollars. Digital advertising emerged as a growing transparency challenge across several contexts.

Several methodologies involved categorising expenditures by type, helping to identify specific corruption and integrity risks associated with different categories of spending. For example, in Sri Lanka, Chanda Salli Meetare documented high levels of spending on mainstream media during the 2024 presidential election. Combined with findings from electoral observation missions, this pointed to disparities in media access among candidates and concerns over the use of state-owned media to benefit particular contestants.

Some initiatives also directly documented forms of misuse of state resources during electoral campaigns. Transparencia Venezuela identified 41 cases of misuse of state resources, including cases of public officials actively campaigning for the ruling candidate; use of state-owned physical assets such as vehicles and buildings, and cases of financial or material transfers such as payments, bonuses, purchases, distribution of goods to the ruling party.

These issues point to potential enforcement gaps on the side of oversight bodies, perhaps due to limited institutional capacity or a lack of independence.

Across many countries, the case studies highlighted the predominant and growing role of private financing in electoral campaigns. In several instances, overlaps between political donors and public contractors were documented, thus highlighting potential risks of conflicts of interest and state capture. These risks are compounded by persistent transparency gaps surrounding private funding, including difficult-to-identify funding sources. In South Africa, where loans, among other sources, are classified as "other income" a major party reported circa 22 million US dollars in "other income", which left almost 80% of its private funding without identifiable sources.

In several cases, the initiatives documented a high concentration of political financing in the hands of a few. On the donor side, a small number of wealthy donors contributed a disproportionate share of campaign resources. Concentration was also observed among recipients of funding, with a few political parties – and, in some cases, just one – receiving a large share of campaign financing, including where private and public funding are considered together.

Some monitoring efforts also provided insights into the gender dimensions of political finance. They captured persistent fundraising gaps between men and women candidates, and the United States case study further examined the heightened gap for Black women candidates. The United States case study also shed light on women's participation as political donors, with an increase in women's political contributions documented, albeit still significantly lower than donations by men. The case study in Madagascar illustrates that women need to spend nearly twice as much as men to win an election.

In contexts where access to political finance information is limited during the campaign, these initiatives can help provide an early picture of the relative distribution of campaign spending among contestants before official information becomes available. The initiatives play a critical role in making political finance information more accessible, understandable and usable, and have become key sources of information for voters when making electoral decisions, as well as for journalists, academics, election observers, national oversight bodies, legislators and international organisations. Some also provide the basis for civil society organisations to conduct advocacy work aimed at strengthening political finance frameworks.

Since this compendium aims to provide insights for organisations and groups interested in replicating similar projects, it also identifies cross-cutting good practices among the seven case studies:

- Cross-referencing political finance information with external sources can help identify under-declarations and omissions;
- Crowdsourcing information can fill critical gaps in countries where no data is publicly available;
- Voluntary self-declaration platforms can bridge information gaps and support integration into official infrastructure;
- Linking campaign finance data to procurement records can reveal patterns of corruption and favouritism.

Common challenges also emerged across the case studies analysed and were captured in this publication with a view to anticipating and addressing them when launching similar projects:

- Political finance monitoring is often resource-intensive and requires specialised skills and expertise;
- Limited availability and consistency of political finance data remain persistent challenges;
- Political resistance and shrinking civic space hamper political finance monitoring.

Overall, the experiences presented in this compendium demonstrate that political finance monitoring initiatives can play an important role in improving access to political finance information and in providing key analyses and solutions to further strengthen public scrutiny of political finance.

GLOSSARY

This glossary provides accessible definitions of key terms and commonly used acronyms found in political integrity frameworks. They are compiled from multiple sources such as UNCAC frameworks, the IFES Oversight Glossary,[1] Transparency International, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and OpenSecrets.[2] Additional acronyms referring to national organisations and legal frameworks that appear in the body of the text are not included in this glossary, but are explained and translated into English within the text.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REPORTING SYSTEMS: digital platforms used by electoral authorities to collect, standardise and publish information on campaign income and expenditure, thereby enabling monitoring, verification and public transparency.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: a situation in which a public official has a private or other interest that influences, or appears to influence, the impartial and objective performance of their official duties.

DARK MONEY: spending intended to influence political outcomes where the source of the money is not disclosed.

DONATIONS: money or donations in kind with a pecuniary value given by an individual or legal entity, with the knowledge and acceptance of a political party or electoral contestant (in the case of political parties) for either electoral campaign purposes or routine activities.

EXPENDITURE: expenditures, whether monetary and in-kind, incurred by or on behalf of an electoral contestant to promote them in an election or to campaign against other candidates or political parties.

IN-KIND DONATION: gifts, services or property provided free of charge or accounted for at a price below market value.

LEGAL ENTITY: an organisation or structure, such as a company, association, foundation or partnership, that has legal personality and can own assets, enter into contracts and incur obligations in its own name.

MISUSE OF STATE RESOURCES: any diversion or misappropriation of resources from their intended public purpose to influence the activities of political parties or electoral campaigns in a manner that favours one political party or candidate over others.

ONLINE POLITICAL ADVERTISING (OPA): paid or sponsored digital communications intended to influence voters, political actors or public policy decisions, disseminated through social media, search engines and digital news outlets.

OUTSIDE SPENDING: political expenditures incurred by groups or individuals independently of, and without coordination with, candidates' committees. Groups in this category range from conventional party committees to super political action committees (PACs) and "dark money" organisations.

OVERSIGHT BODY: a government body or agency mandated to oversee and enforce obligations arising from political finance regulations.

POLITICAL FINANCE: used for the purposes of this publication as an abbreviation for "the funding of candidatures for elected public office and, where applicable, the funding of political parties", to reflect the wording of UNCAC.

POLITICAL ADVERTISING: paid or sponsored communications designed to influence voters' views about parties, candidates or public policies, typically disseminated through media channels such as TV, radio, print media, digital platforms and outdoor displays.

PUBLIC POLITICAL FINANCING: the mechanism by which the state allocates money to political parties and/or electoral contestants. It can be direct (cash) or indirect (goods or services with a monetary value).

PUBLICLY CONTROLLED RESOURCES: assets, funds or advantages managed by the state, such as public budgets, government property, staff time and official communication channels.

SUPER POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE (PAC): in the context of the United States, independent expenditure-only committees that may raise unlimited sums of money from corporations, unions, associations and individuals, then spend unlimited sums to overtly advocate for or against political candidates. Unlike traditional PACs, super PACs are prohibited from donating money directly to political candidates, and their spending must not be coordinated with that of the candidates they benefit.

SUPPORT TO POLITICAL CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURE (SPCE): financial or in-kind assistance provided to political parties or candidates to cover the costs associated with campaigning, such as advertising, logistics and voter engagement activities.

TRADING IN INFLUENCE: the promise, offer, giving, solicitation or acceptance of an undue advantage in order for a person to abuse their real or supposed influence to obtain an undue advantage from a public authority.

TRANSPARENCY: a principle underpinning political finance regulation whereby there is clarity about the sources of funding for political parties, electoral contestants and non-contestant campaigners, and how those funds are spent.

UNDUE INFLUENCE: opaque or disproportionate exertion of pressure by private actors that distorts public decision-making for private gain over the public interest.

VOTE-BUYING: giving or promising to give something of value to influence how a voter votes or whether they vote.

WHISTLEBLOWING / REPORTING PERSON: communicating information about suspected wrongdoing to individuals or entities believed to be able to take action. The individual communicating such information is the reporting person.

INTRODUCTION

Money is indispensable to enable political parties, candidates and, in some cases, third parties to participate in political life, including by running electoral campaigns and communicating with voters. However, inadequate regulation and weak oversight can create risks of corruption, undue influence, distorted electoral competition, abuse of state resources and increased vulnerability to foreign interference.

Corruption and undue influence related to elections can take many forms: a company that has made substantial political donations later wins a public contract despite concerns about the fairness of the procurement process; online election advertising is paid for through third parties that do not appear in campaign finance disclosures, thereby making it difficult to determine who financed it and whether the funds originated from abroad; or government vehicles are used to transport campaign staff and public buildings are used for campaign events, thus blurring the line between the state and the governing party.

For years, Transparency International has been advocating for the development of strong standards to regulate political finance. In December 2025, a milestone was achieved: State Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) adopted a landmark resolution to prevent and combat corruption through enhancing transparency in the funding of political parties, candidates and electoral campaigns. Resolution 11/7 (hereafter referred to as "the resolution") represents the broadest global consensus ever reached on the topic. Transparency International, with the support of partner organisations, produced a detailed analysis of the commitments set out in the resolution, which highlighted good practice examples to illustrate how countries seeking to strengthen their political finance systems can implement these measures.

Importantly, the resolution acknowledges that ensuring effective political finance oversight is not solely the responsibility of oversight agencies, but requires the active contribution of groups outside the public sector. Paragraph 13 of the resolution:

> **(…) *calls upon* States Parties (…) to promote the active participation of individuals and groups outside the public sector, such as civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, and where applicable, electoral monitoring mechanisms, academia, the private sector and media, in the prevention of and fight against corruption, to support efforts to promote transparency in the funding of political parties, candidatures for elected public office and electoral campaigns, where applicable, and in line with the Convention;**
>
> **UNCAC Resolution 11/7,** Paragraph 13

The resolution therefore recognises the significant work undertaken over recent years by civil society organisations, investigative journalists and election observation groups to strengthen political finance, including in the context of elections. These initiatives employ a wide range of approaches, including monitoring funding sources, campaign expenditures, digital campaigning and the abuse of state resources, as well as citizen election observation and grassroots monitoring.

They may take the shape of online platforms for the submission of finance reports by political parties and candidates; interactive dashboards for compiling data on campaign income, expenditures and funding sources,[3] reports that provide in-depth analyses of political funding patterns and help identify emerging trends and regulatory or oversight gaps; and networks of trained observers who report irregularities during campaigns.

By improving access to data, providing trend analyses and exposing irregularities, they all help enhance transparency and public scrutiny over political financing. They have become key sources of information for voters when making electoral decisions, as well as for journalists, academics, election observers, national oversight bodies, legislators and international organisations. Some also provide the basis for civil society organisations to conduct advocacy work aimed at strengthening political finance frameworks.

This compendium presents seven citizen monitoring and disclosure solutions from around the world, developed by groups outside the public sector. Through case studies and a cross-analysis of good practices and challenges, the publication provides concrete examples to inform the effective use of citizen monitoring and disclosure solutions and advance the implementation of paragraph 13 of the resolution.

How was this guide developed and how is it structured?

The case studies were developed through desk research, as well as information gathered through interviews and structured questionnaires administered by the organisations leading each initiative. A cross-case analysis was then conducted to identify lessons learned, including good practices and challenges, encountered across the initiatives.

The compendium covers all aspects of political finance, although several case studies focus more specifically on campaign activities and campaign finance monitoring. It does not promote a single model but rather showcases a range of approaches that can inform future initiatives. The case studies reflect diverse regional contexts, monitoring approaches and institutional arrangements. The initiatives were developed either by Transparency International chapters or by other civil society organisations, sometimes in coalition or partnership with other stakeholders.

To map these diverse approaches, the case studies are grouped into two broad categories:

- Tracking funding sources and monitoring financial transparency;
- Crowdsourced political finance monitoring initiatives.

This compendium also highlights two evolving areas in political finance monitoring. First, it explores the growing interaction between citizen monitoring initiatives and formal oversight systems, including how civil society tools can complement or strengthen institutional oversight frameworks. Second, it applies a gender-sensitive lens to demonstrate how unequal access to campaign resources, media disparities and targeted harassment all create structural barriers for women in politics.

Many initiatives use several approaches simultaneously. For each initiative presented, the case studies identify one or more of the following focus areas: campaign finance transparency, campaign finance reporting compliance, donor disclosure, tracking campaign funding sources, gender-disaggregated campaign finance data, campaign expenditure monitoring, campaign cost estimation, monitoring digital campaigning, monitoring the abuse of state resources, monitoring links between campaign contributors and public contracts, monitoring campaign finance and governance risks, and monitoring electoral corruption risks.

Table 1. List of case studies

Tracking funding sources and monitoring financial transparency		
OpenSecrets	United States	A public database that references and analyses political finance data, including contributions, expenditures, lobbying activities and political nonprofits.
Cuentas Claras	Colombia	Initially a campaign finance disclosure platform created by civil society, this is now operated by Colombia's National Electoral Council (CNE) and is used by candidates and political organisations to report and submit official information on their income and expenditures.
Observatorio al Financiamiento de la Política	Ecuador	A citizen monitoring initiative that tracks compliance with campaign finance reporting, the use of public resources and digital campaigning. It produces open datasets and analytical reports on political finance.
Whose Vote Counts	South Africa	An online platform that monitors political finance data by consolidating public funding allocations and disclosed private contributions, thus enabling users to visualise and analyse the funding sources of political parties and independent candidates.
Crowdsourced political finance monitoring initiatives		
ARAMASO	Madagascar	A citizen monitoring initiative that documents campaign expenditures and promotes transparency in political financing by providing public access to information on candidates' campaign spending during electoral periods.
Chanda Salli Meetare	Sri Lanka	A collaborative campaign finance observation initiative that tracks and publishes information on candidate campaign expenditures.
Dilo Aqui	Venezuela	A campaign monitoring initiative supported by a corruption-reporting mechanism that allows citizens to document and report potential irregularities such as the abuse of state resources.

Who can use this guide and how?

The resolution recognises that political finance oversight requires action by independent oversight bodies, as well as civil society groups, media organisations, the private sector, academia and election monitoring mechanisms.

The examples presented in this compendium are designed to support the work of the following entities:

1) civil society organisations engaged in political finance monitoring initiatives, that are interested in practical examples, tools and lessons learned to strengthen existing methodologies, adapt approaches developed in other contexts and learn from the experiences of peer organisations;

2) media organisations that report on political finance and electoral integrity issues and are seeking practical examples of monitoring methodologies and tools that can support data-driven reporting and investigations;

3) election observers in search of practical examples of how to integrate citizen-led political finance monitoring initiatives that complement their other election observation activities, thereby contributing additional evidence and analysis on campaign finance compliance, digital campaigning and the abuse of state resources;

4) researchers focusing on political finance and electoral integrity issues and seeking additional data sources, examples of participatory monitoring methodologies and analytical approaches to inform their research;

5) political finance oversight bodies interested in how citizen-led initiatives can complement institutional oversight and contribute to greater political finance transparency and accountability.

CASE STUDIES



TRACKING FUNDING SOURCES AND MONITORING FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

This section focuses on initiatives that use political finance disclosure systems and public datasets to improve public access to information on the flow of money in politics. The four case studies were drawn from countries where political parties, candidates and campaigns are legally required to report political finance information, and where oversight bodies are mandated to make that information publicly available. The case study from Colombia describes the systems used by the oversight agency – originally developed by civil society – to implement legal transparency obligations. The case studies from the United States, Ecuador and South Africa illustrate initiatives in which civil society organisations use political finance information disclosed by oversight agencies, alongside other sources, to make this data more publicly accessible and provide independent analyses.

In the United States, OpenSecrets analyses and publishes information on political donations, campaign spending and lobbying activities to help citizens better understand the role of money in politics. In Colombia, *Cuentas Claras* is a public reporting system that was originally developed by civil society and later institutionalised by the National Electoral Council (CNE). It supports compliance with campaign finance reporting, institutional oversight and citizen monitoring, which continues to be carried out independently with the data provided by the platform. In Ecuador, the *Observatorio al Financiamiento de la Política* combines analyses of campaign finance reporting, public procurement data and digital campaigning to identify transparency gaps and potential risks in political finance. In South Africa, the dashboard Whose Vote Counts provides a comprehensive record of public and private funding sources for South African political parties and independent candidates, and allows users to browse the data through accessible, dynamic graphics and data visualisations.

These initiatives demonstrate the crucial role played by the publication, visualisation and analysis of political finance data in enhancing transparency and access to information in political finance.

OpenSecrets: A political finance public database in the United States

Initiative and lead	**OpenSecrets** is a public database that provides data and data analysis on political financing, including contributions, expenditures, lobbying activities and political nonprofits. OpenSecrets is also the name of the nonpartisan watchdog that operates the platform, which was formed in 2021.
Key elements of the legal framework	Campaign finance is regulated at both federal and state level. Federal elections are governed primarily by the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) and overseen by the Federal Election Commission (FEC). Each state maintains its own campaign finance framework for state and local elections.
Focus areas	Tracking funding sources · Campaign expenditure and digital campaigning · Abuse of state resources · Gender-disaggregated campaign finance data
Website	https://www.opensecrets.org/

METHODOLOGY

Data sources

- FEC disclosures and state-level campaign finance data
- Lobbying registrations, personal financial disclosures and Internal Revenue Service nonprofit filings
- Digital advertising libraries (Meta and Google)
- Data from research partnerships, for instance, to track political ads across TV and online platforms

Data processing and verification

- Standardises millions of donation and expenditure records and categorises them by donor types, industries, candidates, parties and outside groups
- Cross-checks against filings, media reporting, academic studies and external datasets
- Dedicated methodologies for crypto donations, shell companies and digital spending
- Interactive tools, such as Donor Lookup and Elections Overview dashboards, to explore donor profiles and fundraising totals

Gender-sensitive analysis

- Gender- and race-disaggregated datasets and methodologies developed since 2020
- Uses algorithms to infer the gender of donors and candidates, data that is often absent from official disclosures
- Examines fundraising disparities affecting women candidates, particularly women of colour

KEY FINDINGS

Monitoring by OpenSecrets highlighted growing transparency gaps, an increasing reliance on outside spending[4] and the concentration of political influence among a small number of donors and outside groups.

Political spending for which the original donors are not disclosed, also known as "**dark money**",[5] reached an estimated 1.9 billion US dollars during the 2024 US federal election cycle, double the figure for 2020.

Monitoring identified persistent loopholes allowing **foreign-linked** corporate interests to indirectly finance US elections through US-based subsidiaries and outside spending groups.[6]

OpenSecrets' data also revealed increasing concentration of political influence among a small number of ultra-wealthy donors and outside groups. In 2024, the **top-10 individual donors** contributed nearly 600 million US dollars (7% of all federal fundraising) and the top 1% of donors accounted for half of all money raised.

The **growing political influence of the cryptocurrency industry** is becoming increasingly visible. Sam Bankman-Fried, founder of FTX, "was the seventh largest donor of the entire 2022" and alone donated 38.8 million US dollars that year.[7] He later faced criminal charges, which prompted dozens of members of Congress to return or donate the funds they had received and highlighted regulatory blind spots.

OpenSecrets documented record-breaking campaign spending during the 2022 midterms. Combined costs of state and federal elections reached approximately 16.7 billion US dollars, federal election spending about 9.5 billion US dollars, and outside spending about 2.3 billion US dollars. **Super Political Action Committees (PACs)[8] and outside groups** played a growing role in shaping campaign narratives through large-scale advertising expenditures. However, online political advertising and digital campaign spending remained difficult to track due to fragmented disclosure standards across platforms.[9]

In the 2020 primaries, **women's participation as donors increased**, including high-value contributions (10,000 US dollars or more and 1 million US dollars of more), although disparities remain. Black women challengers raised about a third as much as white women challengers.

CHALLENGES FACED

Dark money is a central obstacle. OpenSecrets triangulates FEC's filings, media tracking and platform disclosures, but new forms of spending such **as streaming ads and influencer payments** remain opaque.

Since 2021, OpenSecrets has standardised data from varying federal and state-level formats. In some states, reports were still submitted as **handwritten or scanned PDFs** requiring manual processing.[10]

Shell companies continue to channel funds without disclosing donor identities. **Incorrect identifiers, transposed numbers and fictitious donor names** have prevented OpenSecrets from fully assessing the scale and intent of their financial influence. The same disclosure challenge exists for nonprofits, albeit to a lesser extent, as issue advocacy falls outside federal reporting rules.[11]

OpenSecrets has observed the **increasing use of opaque financial practices and complex funding channels**, which requires cross-jurisdictional data tracking and the standardisation of fragmented datasets.[12]

As of 2026, OpenSecrets operates with **a 17-strong team and relies primarily on private funding**. Significant resources are devoted to acquiring, integrating and maintaining campaign finance data from federal and state sources. The current level of resources is barely sufficient to sustain the organisation's current technical capacity, including the continued development of its existing tools.[13]

IMPACT

OpenSecrets has become a **widely used source for campaign finance reporting and analysis**. In 2025, the organisation received 19,500 media citations. The platform's findings have been used by members of Congress, state legislators and regulatory agencies to inform hearings, oversight inquiries and proposals on dark money, disclosure gaps and online advertising regulations. Gender- and race-disaggregated datasets on donor behaviour have been adopted by advocacy groups, academics and congressional offices.[14] The initiative contributes to citizens' awareness of political finance and can support voters in making decisions.[15]

Cuentas Claras: Colombia's political finance reporting platform

Initiative and lead	**Cuentas Claras** (Clear Accounts) is the finance reporting platform operated by the **National Electoral Council (CNE).** Originally developed by **Transparencia por Colombia (TPC) and the National Democratic Institute**, it has served as the country's official source of public information on political finance since 2011. The data is used by TPC to conduct further analysis and produce independent reports.
Key elements of the legal framework	Colombia's political finance regime combines public and private financing for political parties' annual activities, as well as electoral campaigns, although campaigns rely predominantly on private financing. Law 1475 of 2011 prohibits certain sources of funding, requires CNE to set spending limits and imposes reporting requirements on political parties and candidates.
Focus areas	Campaign finance reporting compliance · Campaign funding sources · Links between campaign contributors and public contracts · Gender-disaggregated campaign finance data
Website	https://www.cnecuentasclaras.gov.co/

METHODOLOGY

Data sources

- Interim and final campaign income and expenditure reports submitted by political parties and candidates
- Supporting documentation submitted with campaign finance reports

Data processing and verification

- CNE reviews financial reports against banking records and spending limits to assess compliance
- Reports are then published through an open-data platform, which centralises and organises campaign finance reports by election type and jurisdiction
- TPC monitors the platform against other sources and provides independent analysis

Gender-sensitive analysis

- Party expenditure reports classify spending by target populations such as women, young people and ethnic minorities
- Dashboards allow for analysis by gender, party, year, type of contribution and amount
- TPC and partners cross-check campaign finance data to monitor the distribution of funds to women candidates and identify disparities

KEY FINDINGS

Reporting compliance continued to show some gaps. In the 2022 national elections, 12% of Senate candidates and 10% of House of Representatives candidates failed to submit campaign finance reports. In the 2023 subnational elections, around 8% candidates for mayor and governor either failed to submit reports or submitted incomplete ones. Compliance with near real-time reporting requirements introduced in 2021 was extremely low,

with only 9% of candidates complying with interim reporting requirements during the 2023 subnational election campaign.

Campaign financing remained heavily dependent on private and self-financing. In the 2023 subnational elections, direct **public funding advances accounted for less than 1% of campaign income**, while 58% came from candidates and their family members.

Additional monitoring conducted by TPC identified reporting inconsistencies and **possible underreporting**. Presidential candidates reported expenditures with varying levels of detail, while some mayoral candidates declared campaign spending as low as 500,000 Colombian pesos (about 132 US dollars at the time), despite visible campaign activity.

When TPC cross-checked campaign finance and procurement data through the initiative "Elecciones & Contratos", they also identified **significant overlaps between political financiers and public contractors**. Between 2018 and 2022, financiers of elected candidates obtained public contracts worth more than 6.4 trillion pesos (equivalent to approximately 1.8 billion US dollars), nearly 90% of which was awarded through direct contracting.

CHALLENGES FACED

Weak compliance with real-time reporting requirements during election campaigns continues to be a challenge, since it limits the visibility of the sources and use of campaign funds until final reports are submitted.

Political communications account for a large share of spending, but the absence of clear **regulation of online political advertising** continues to constrain the monitoring of digital campaigning.

The platform is designed to disclose self-reported information, but it does not in itself provide assurance of the accuracy of that information or assess compliance with the applicable campaign finance regulations. Verification relies on oversight from CNE and independent watchdogs. CNE lacks the human resources to conduct in-depth audits, and data sharing between campaign finance, procurement and other public databases remains rare. During the 2022 presidential campaign, CNE faced political pressure after opening investigations into alleged breaches of campaign spending limits and the receipt of funds from prohibited sources. Independent watchdogs also face resource and capacity limitations that restrict the scope of monitoring.[16]

IMPACT

The **CNE's adoption of Cuentas Claras** in 2011 was a significant outcome, as it formally recognised its value and institutionalised its use. Since then, **the platform's applications have expanded and diversified**. Since the adoption of Law 2003 of 2019, all members of Congress must attach a copy of their income and expenditure report, filed through Cuentas Claras, to the declaration submitted to the Statutory Private Interests Registry before or shortly after taking office.

Cuentas Claras has become Colombia's **primary public source of campaign finance information**, providing journalists, researchers, civil society organisations and citizens with **open access** to campaign income and expenditure data.[17]

Findings derived from Cuentas Claras data informed **public debate and reform proposals** on political finance transparency, donor disclosure, digital campaigning and public funding.[18]

A political finance observatory in Ecuador

Initiative and lead	The **Observatorio al Financiamiento de la Política** (Political Finance Observatory) is a citizen monitoring initiative that tracks compliance with campaign finance regulations and the use of public and private resources in elections. The initiative is led by **Fundación Ciudadanía y Desarrollo** (FCD), Transparency International's chapter in Ecuador.
Key elements of the legal framework	Ecuador's Code of Democracy establishes spending limits, prohibits certain funding sources such as corporate donations, and bans the misuse of public resources. It also requires that candidates and political organisations regularly report campaign income and expenditure to the National Electoral Council (CNE), including itemised income and spending, donor names and contributions. CNE is required to publish the campaign finance reports.
Focus areas	Campaign finance reporting compliance · Digital campaigning · Campaign finance and governance risks

METHODOLOGY



Data sources

- Campaign finance reports published through CNE's Political Financing Transparency System
- Access to information requests
- Media reporting
- Official social media accounts and the Meta Ad Library
- Field observation of campaign activities by trained monitors
- Reference to the legal framework and CNE regulations to develop the relevant indicators and identify irregularities



Data processing and verification

- Analyses campaign finance reports using indicators on income and expenditure, funding sources, donor and supplier information, spending patterns and reporting compliance
- Cross-references campaign finance reports with digital advertising data and campaign activities to identify inconsistencies
- Publishes a harmonised dataset obtained through data cleaning, validation and standardisation
- Publishes analytical reports, including additional research on public contracting data

KEY FINDINGS

Non-compliance with reporting obligations remained common. At the end of the campaign period for the 2025 general election, four political organisations had not submitted any of the biweekly reports required. Based on the reports available for the 32 candidates in the 2023 local elections, five reported zero campaign expenditure, while another five failed to submit mandatory reports.

Major discrepancies were identified between official reports and observed campaign activity. A campaign concert was reportedly worth 500,000 US dollars, despite a legal spending limit of approximately 200,000 US dollars and did not appear in official reports. Official filings showed the two runoff candidates reporting only 224,000 and

4,278 US dollars, respectively, for their first-round campaigns. However, these amounts appeared low compared with the scale of their visible campaign activities, which included rallies and online advertising.

Hidden spending on digital advertising emerged as a major transparency gap. Monitoring estimated that presidential candidates spent approximately 5.8 million US dollars on Facebook and TikTok advertising during the 2025 elections, while less than 1% of these expenditures were officially declared. In comparison, the spending limit applicable in the 2025 first-round elections was 5.49 million US dollars.

Potential risks of clientelism, conflicts of interest and state capture were also identified. Cross-checking donor information with public contracting data for the winning candidate in the 2021 presidential campaign revealed cases in which campaign donors later became state contractors or public officials.

CHALLENGES FACED

Although CNE is legally required to publish campaign finance reports, ideally in open-data formats, these reports were often uploaded as **scanned PDFs**. Some reports were also **missing, published late or incomplete**, which further complicated monitoring and analysis.[19]

Reporting requirements have been strengthened by law, but many candidates and parties continue to circumvent the rules, and **CNE does not consistently enforce deadlines or guarantee the quality of disclosures.**[20]

Sanctions exist for omitting or falsifying reported information and exceeding spending limits. However, **controls and audits**, as well as **administrative or judicial processes, are lengthy**, and there are suspicions that **sanctioning processes are carried out selectively.**[21]

Field observation is essential for detecting discrepancies between official filings and observed campaign activities, but it can also create **logistical and security challenges** for civil society monitors,[22] who faced **threats and intimidation** from political actors who reacted defensively when irregularities were exposed.[23]

IMPACT

The observatory has become a **leading source of campaign finance analysis in Ecuador** and provides journalists, researchers, civil society organisations and citizens with accessible information. Its analyses have been cited by international electoral observation missions; for instance, they were referenced in the Final Report of the EU Election Observation Mission in Ecuador 2025.

Evidence-based advocacy by FCD contributed to the introduction of **legal requirements under the Code of Democracy for bi-weekly financial reporting and online publication**, while also promoting improvements in reporting standards and transparency practices within CNE.[24]

By consistently exposing omissions, discrepancies and underreporting, which can conceal overspending beyond existing limits, the observatory increased **pressure on CNE to strengthen its supervisory role**. The strong, at times hostile, reactions of political actors to published findings demonstrate that the initiative reaches its targets and generates real accountability pressure.[25]

The observatory conducts additional activities with the aim of introducing positive incentives to **foster a culture of openness.** It provided training for journalists and civil society actors, thereby supporting independent monitoring of political finance. It also proposed a national award for transparency to incentivise public institutions and thus improve disclosure practices.[26]

Whose Vote Counts: A political funding platform in South Africa

Initiative and lead	**Whose Vote Counts** is a dashboard that provides a record of public and private funding sources for political parties and independent candidates. The platform is operated by **My Vote Counts** (MVC), which started out in 2012 as a public campaign to reduce the undue influence of money in politics and became a civil society organisation in 2016. MVC carries out research, monitoring, advocacy and strategic litigation.
Key elements of the legal framework	South Africa's Political Funding Act (PFA), in force since 2021, introduced a dual disclosure requirement for private donations to political parties and independent candidates, whereby both the recipient and the donor must declare donations. It also capped annual donations and prohibited certain sources of political funding, including foreign governments and state-owned enterprises.
Focus areas	Political finance transparency · Donor disclosure
Website	https://myvotecounts.org.za/whose-vote-counts/

METHODOLOGY

Data sources

- Financial reports submitted by political parties under the PFA and published by the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)
- Access to information requests to obtain information that is otherwise not publicly available
- Political party records, policy documents, legislative debates, investigative journalism and academic research

Data processing and verification

- Combines quantitative and qualitative analysis of the financial reports published by IEC to examine the power dynamics associated with political finance
- Triangulates data obtained through various sources to identify inconsistencies and validate trends
- Publishes data on the dashboard, which includes visualisation features

KEY FINDINGS

Despite improvements since the adoption of the PFA, MVC raised concerns about the concentration of political funding, gaps in the disclosure of private financing, and the enforcement capacity of IEC.

At least 70% of private and public political funding was concentrated in two political parties in 2023-2024. Parties received around 3.2 billion rand (approximately 174 million US dollars) in combined public and private funding, of which 1.7 billion rand (approximately 92 million US dollars) was received by the African National Congress (ANC).

Private funding increased sharply ahead of the 2024 elections. Political parties reported more than 1 billion rand (approximately US$55 million) in private funding, which represented 33% of the total political funding. However, less than one-third of this was publicly disclosed through the donation reporting system because only donations above the statutory disclosure threshold were subject to reporting requirements. Following the 2025

increase in the disclosure threshold from 100,000 to 200,000 rand (approximately 6,000 to 12,000 US dollars), MVC estimated that **more than 90 of the approximately 350 donations disclosed since the PFA entered into force** would no longer have been publicly reported.

Monitoring also identified transparency gaps relating to **loans, "other income"**[27] **and party expenditure**. ANC reported 413 million rand (approximately 22 US dollars million) in "other income", which left almost **80% of its private funding without identifiable sources**.

IEC's capacity to ensure compliance with disclosure requirements remains a concern. It issued more than 60 directions to political parties in 2023-2024, but only **two related to disclosure violations.**[28]

CHALLENGES FACED

Despite progress achieved through the PFA, **legal barriers to access to information** persist, alongside gaps in the regulation of other aspects of political finance, such as **disclosure thresholds.**

Monitoring efforts may encounter **resistance from political actors** who perceive transparency as a threat to their interests, thereby resulting in delays and limitations in the quality of disclosed information.

Gaps in available information, whether due to missing data **in specific areas** or a lack of standardisation and data quality, constrain the ability to produce comprehensive and comparable analyses over time.

MVC's work is affected by limited **technical, human and financial resources**, which constrains its capacity to sustain long-term monitoring efforts, develop advanced tools and expand the geographic scope of its activities.

IMPACT

MVC's monitoring, advocacy and strategic litigation work contributed to strengthened access to political funding information, legislative reform and increased demand for public scrutiny in South Africa.

Strategic litigation by MVC culminated in a 2018 Constitutional Court ruling (My Vote Counts NPC v Minister of Justice and Correctional Services CCT249/17) that recognised **access to information on political finance** as an **essential component of the right to an informed vote**. It also mandated amendments to the Promotion of Access to Information Act and additional measures to improve access to information on the private funding of political parties and independent candidates. The PFA was passed in 2019.

Advocacy and monitoring **supported the implementation of the PFA** and helped establish a system in which the disclosure of political financing information is mandatory. It contributed to greater transparency by revealing who funds political parties and to what extent.

Through the production of analyses and visualisations, MVC **strengthened the information available to citizens, journalists and policymakers**, and helped place money in politics on the public agenda.

CROWD-SOURCED POLITICAL FINANCE MONITORING INITIATIVES

This section focuses on citizen observation and grassroots monitoring initiatives that provide information on campaign activities and spending through field observation and systematic data collection. The Madagascar, Sri Lanka and Venezuela case studies illustrate how citizen-led initiatives can contribute to greater transparency and public scrutiny of political finance, particularly in contexts where campaign finance reporting, disclosure mechanisms or institutional oversight capacities remain limited.

In Madagascar, ARAMASO mobilises citizen monitors to document campaign activities and expenditures, thereby generating campaign finance information and enhancing public access to information on campaign spending. In Sri Lanka, Chanda Salli Meetare combines citizen observation with a digital reporting platform to document and estimate campaign expenditures based on observed campaign activities, thus providing campaign finance information during the campaign period and promoting greater transparency in campaign spending. In Venezuela, Transparencia Venezuela uses anonymous citizen reports of alleged abuse of state resources during electoral campaigns, alongside other sources, to document and identify broader patterns of violations of state neutrality.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate how citizen participation, field observation and grassroots data collection can complement official oversight mechanisms, expand public access to political finance information and strengthen public scrutiny of campaign finance.

ARAMASO: A network of campaign monitors in Madagascar

Initiative and lead	**ARAMASO** is a citizen monitoring initiative led by **Transparency International Madagascar** that draws on information collected by a network of citizen monitors to document campaign activities and estimate expenditures. This information is used to provide public access to campaign finance information during electoral periods.
Key elements of the legal framework	Madagascar's Organic Law on Elections and Referendums of 2018 requires candidates and candidate lists to submit campaign income and expenditure reports to the Political Financing Control Commission (CCFVP). The CCFVP is mandated to examine these campaign accounts and report on any irregularities identified. There are restrictions on permissible campaign funding sources, but there is no requirement to publicly disclose details of funding sources and no sanctions are in place.
Focus areas	Campaign expenditure monitoring · Electoral corruption risks · Gender-disaggregated campaign finance data
Website	https://aramaso.mg/

METHODOLOGY

Data sources

- ARAMASO combines a network of field and media monitors
- Field monitors collected baseline market prices before the campaign to establish cost references for campaign goods and services[29]
- Field monitors were deployed to monitor events throughout the campaign
- Media monitors tracked television, radio and newspaper advertising throughout the campaign[30]
- Monitors also documented indicators of electoral corruption, including vote buying and other irregular practices

Data processing and verification

- Data is verified by monitors and used to estimate campaign expenditure by matching observed activities with market prices
- Data is then recorded in a digital system
- Data is analysed to identify potential irregularities and fraudulent practices
- Results are published through the ARAMASO platform using filters, tables and interactive maps, categorised by candidate, political party, expenditure type and geographic area
- Analytical reports were also published

Gender-sensitive analysis

- Provides gender-disaggregated information on monitored candidates
- A total of 16 women candidates were monitored throughout the 2023 presidential, and 2024 legislative and municipal campaigns
- Allows users to access expenditure information for individual women and men candidates
- Supports gender-sensitive analysis of campaign finance data

KEY FINDINGS

For the 2023 presidential and the 2024 legislative and municipal elections, ARAMASO generated campaign finance data in a context where public access to such information is limited. Indeed, as of February 2026, **CCFVP had not yet published the legally required reports on campaign finance compliance** for none of these elections.

For the 2023 presidential election, ARAMASO monitored all 13 candidates. Based on the information collected, the platform estimated total campaign expenditures at 144.5 billion Malagasy ariary (approximately 32.5 million US dollars). Of this amount, **more than 80% was attributed to the incumbent and re-elected candidate.**

The largest share of estimated spending was devoted to planning and coordination (49%), while the **second largest share (32%) was attributed to electoral corruption**, including the abuse of state resources, reaching more than 46 billion Malagasy ariary (approximately 10.3 million US dollars).

During the 2024 legislative elections, 473 candidates competed for the 163 available seats. ARAMASO monitored 71 candidates, including 33 for event campaign expenditures.[31] The platform monitored a total expenditure of around 1.55 billion Malagasy ariary (approximately 350,000 US dollars). **Campaign events accounted for the largest share of monitored spending (61%).** This category is particularly relevant for identifying potential electoral corruption risks, as campaign events may involve practices such as the distribution of gifts, food, or cash, which can be associated with vote-buying. Digital campaigning accounted for 9% of monitored expenditures.

The comparison of campaign spending by successful candidates suggests that, on average, **women need to spend nearly twice as much as men to win an election.**[32]

CHALLENGES FACED

Producing campaign expenditure estimates is a lengthy process that **involves standardising, consolidating and categorising data**, including matching observed campaign activities to the relevant price references.[33]

Fact-checking information for accuracy and ensuring the data is **presented in a consistent manner** requires time and technical skills, resources that are often limited for such initiatives.[34]

Identifying and quantifying **expenditures linked to vote buying and other electoral corruption practices** is challenging, as these activities are often concealed and are not clearly defined in Malagasy legislation.[35]

The ARAMASO platform includes a feature that allows candidates and campaign donors **to voluntarily submit financial information**. However, no information has been submitted so far, which highlights the need to continue raising awareness on the benefits of political finance transparency.[36]

Looking ahead, the platform could be strengthened by **adding new functionalities to track campaign revenues** and thus increase transparency regarding the source of funds used to finance campaign activities.

For future elections, **the timely publication of the CCFVP's campaign finance compliance reports** would provide an important basis for ARAMASO to develop further insights.

IMPACT

Since its launch in 2023, ARAMASO has expanded its field monitoring coverage from **three presidential candidates in 2023 to 63 candidates** across the 2024 legislative and municipal elections.

The platform **increased public access to campaign expenditure information**. ARAMASO brought unprecedented visibility to the scale of **electoral spending**, thereby helping citizens, civil society actors and other stakeholders better understand financial flows in elections.

The data generated can also be used to inform public discussions and engage decision-makers on the need for greater transparency and accountability in political finance.

Chanda Salli Meetare: A campaign observation platform in Sri Lanka

Initiative and lead	**Chanda Salli Meetare** (Campaign Finance Meter) is a campaign finance observation platform launched in 2024 by a coalition of local civil society organisations led by **Transparency International Sri Lanka.**[37] Through a mobile application, trained observers collect, verify and publish campaign expenditure in an online centralised database.
Key elements of the legal framework	Sri Lanka introduced its first campaign finance law in 2023 through the Regulation of Election Expenditure Act, which established spending limits, restrictions on funding sources, disclosure requirements and sanctions for non-compliance.
Focus areas	Campaign expenditure monitoring · Campaign cost estimation · Campaign finance transparency · Gender-disaggregated campaign finance data
Website	https://chandasallimeetare.lk/home

METHODOLOGY

Data sources

- Electoral Observers from specialised civil society organisations are trained and deployed across the country to monitor campaign activities and materials, such as public rallies, billboards or digital advertisements[38]
- Electoral Observers record campaign activities in their electoral districts through a mobile application and upload supporting evidence, such as photographs, descriptions, and location
- On occasion, the coalition submits access to information requests to cross check information[39]

Data processing and verification

- Information undergoes a two-step verification process
- District Observers (the coordinators of Electoral Observers in their respective districts) verify the information
- The information is transmitted in real time to a back-end system, which automatically calculates the estimated campaign expenditure incurred by candidates[40]
- The secretariat of the coalition, composed of campaign finance experts, then validates and publishes the information on the platform
- The platform provides visualisations of campaign spending by category, candidates and region[41]

Gender-sensitive analysis

- The platform provides expenditure information for individual candidates, including female candidates
- Information can be reviewed and compared at candidate level
- The absence of gender-disaggregated reporting limits the systematic analysis of campaign spending by gender

KEY FINDINGS

Chanda Salli Meetare provided insight into the financial scale of campaign spending among leading candidates in Sri Lanka. The initiative captured about 18–26% of the total amount of the expenditures ultimately reported by the main candidates in the Presidential election.[42]

Mainstream media represented 77% to 98% of spending for the four candidates with the highest campaign expenditure recorded by Chanda Salli Meetare during the 2024 presidential elections,[43] making it by far the largest expenditure category. This concentration raises concerns about a level playing field, the misuse of public resources as well as undue influence. ANFREL noted a clear bias in the coverage of state-run television and private print media, largely owned by individuals with political affiliations. The mission also observed a "significant influx of campaign funds" into paid advertising, which allowed wealthier candidates to secure extensive media coverage.

Public events were the second-largest expenditure category for the same four candidates (representing 10% to 16% of recorded spending for three of them). This category of expenditure presents risks of vote-buying or misuse of public funds, and therefore warrants increased scrutiny.

Social media spending was recorded at less than 1% for all four candidates, but ANFREL found that "campaign activities were most vibrant on social media," including high levels of misinformation. The discrepancy suggests that the monitoring captured only a limited share of online campaigning, revealing the challenges of tracking such spending, including where it may be conducted through informal or third-party networks.

The initiative has highlighted a gender gap: **women candidates spent less than men.**

CHALLENGES FACED

Chanda Salli Meetare highlighted challenges related to the availability of campaign finance information, access to reliable public data and the sustainability of citizen-led monitoring efforts.[44]

Information on the **sources and use of campaign funds remained limited**, and requests for information were not consistently addressed by either the Election Commission or candidates, which **constrained access to reliable public data.**

The initiative relied on a **network of trained observers** to collect and document campaign expenditure information. Ensuring consistent application of the monitoring methodology and maintaining data quality required significant coordination and occasionally resulted in data reprocessing due to reporting errors.

Limited financial resources affect the **long-term sustainability and scalability** of Chanda Salli Meetare.

IMPACT

Chanda Salli Meetare increased **real-time public access to information on campaign expenditure** in a context where official information only becomes available after elections and, even then, might show inconsistencies. For instance, most campaign finance submissions for the presidential election did not fully comply with the 2023 Act.[45] The EU Election Observation Mission noted that the initiative was particularly useful because the Electoral Commission was not mandated to verify campaign expenditure.

The EU mission also recognised that the initiative "has been an awareness-raising and empowerment tool for the participating organisations and citizens," as well as an instrument for promoting transparency.

The initiative **identified challenges related to campaign finance regulation, monitoring, and access to information,** particularly at the district level., Transparency International Sri Lanka additionally developed a legislative brief comparing Sri Lanka's campaign finance framework with TI's global political finance integrity standards. They engaged with the Election Commission and political actors to put forward **recommendations to improve the traceability of financial flows and strengthen accountability mechanisms**.

Reporting the misuse of state resources in Venezuela with Dilo Aquí

Initiative and lead	**Dilo Aquí** (Say It Here) is a citizen reporting mechanism operated by **Transparencia Venezuela** since 2015 to record corruption cases. During electoral periods, it also supports campaign finance monitoring by gathering reports on the misuse of state resources. Combined with other evidence sources, these reports help document patterns of public assets being diverted for partisan purposes, which undermines state neutrality. In a restricted electoral environment, the reporting mechanism plays a key role in supporting the civil society oversight of campaign finance.
Key elements of the legal framework	Political finance in Venezuela is regulated by the Organic Law of Electoral Processes of 2009 and the Law on Political Parties of 2010. The legal framework does not impose limits on campaign expenditure and prohibits public financing of political organisations. It mandates the publication of information on campaign finance, but several reports have identified gaps in public disclosure of political financing and a lack of control mechanisms.
Focus areas	Citizen reporting · Abuse of state resources
Website	https://transparenciave.org/project/dilo-aqui/

METHODOLOGY

Data sources

- The reporting system makes it possible to report suspected corruption cases, including abuses of state resources in the context of electoral campaigns, and relies on several channels, including a mobile app, WhatsApp and email
- Reports indicate the institution involved, the location and date, and a description of the incident
- Incident reports come from citizens, civil society organisations and allied monitoring networks

Data processing and verification

- Each incident report generates a tracking number and, where necessary, access to legal assistance
- Transparencia Venezuela's staff and lawyers monitor publicly available sources, including (social) media, to verify incidents
- Through legal analysis, they classify each incident by corruption category
- Verified incidents feed into reports and alerts that are either used internally or shared with targeted stakeholders

Gender-sensitive reporting mechanism

- Since 2022, Dilo Aquí has incorporated gender-disaggregated reporting data into its monitoring approach
- From 2022 to 2025, 44% of cases were submitted by women
- The mobile and remote reporting mechanism is considered to be a good practice in terms of inclusion, as it allows individuals to report cases from home and potentially reduces exposure risks for complainants

KEY FINDINGS

For the 2024 presidential elections, Transparencia Venezuela documented electoral irregularities that occurred before the campaign period (starting in January 2024), during the campaign (4-25 July) and on election day (28 July), and compiled them in an internal report. Among the 314 irregularities identified by Transparencia Venezuela through Dilo Aquí, 41 involved the misuse of state resources, including:

- cases of public officials actively campaigning for the ruling candidate through events, propaganda, mobilisation or official communications
- cases of state-owned physical assets such as vehicles, buildings and public walls being used for murals
- cases of financial or material transfers such as payments, bonuses, purchases, distribution of goods, credit offers and use of funds for propaganda.

This monitoring contributed to the Carter Center's 2024 election observation mission, which documented the "abuse of administrative resources on behalf of the incumbent" during the campaign.[46]

Since 2017, citizens have reported irregularities in the food programme of the Local Committees for Supply and Production (*Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción*, CLAP). During the 2024 campaign, TI-Venezuela documented the use of government-distributed food parcels in support of the incumbent.

CHALLENGES FACED

During the 2024 presidential election, the Carter Center identified restrictions on civil society and election observers, as well as a climate of fear and reprisals, sometimes justified through allegations of hate speech. These factors discourage citizens from reporting abuse and lead many users to limit the information they share or refrain from following up.

The Carter Center states that "public disclosure of political financing is inadequate and control mechanisms are not sufficient," which makes it challenging to verify many of the reports submitted through Dilo Aquí.

It is rare for oversight institutions or the judiciary to take action in cases of misuse of public resources. The 2024 UNCAC parallel report describes limited judicial independence, pressure on prosecutors and selective enforcement, which reduce the likelihood of cases involving state actors being investigated or sanctioned.

IMPACT

The analysis generated has contributed to building a body of evidence and created **opportunities for collaborations among civil society and international stakeholders**. For example, the report on the 2025 municipal elections produced by the civil society platform Venezuela en Movimiento references an analysis by Transparencia Venezuela, including the expression "elecciones sin elegir" ("*elections without a choice*").

In several instances, Transparencia Venezuela's analysis has also supported **monitoring work carried out by regional and international bodies**. In a report on the 2024 presidential elections, the Organization of American States (OAS) referenced Transparencia Venezuela and highlighted the use of public resources and patronage networks for campaign purposes, as well as a lack of transparency.

More broadly, the impact of the initiative should be assessed in relation to the contextual challenges identified above. The Carter Center's statement on the 2024 presidential election stated that it "did not meet international standards of electoral integrity and cannot be considered democratic." In such a context of limited electoral competition, the initiative represents an important contribution to monitoring campaign finance.

GOOD PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES



The case studies included in this compendium demonstrate that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to citizen monitoring of political finance. Monitoring initiatives operate in diverse political, legal and technological environments and pursue different objectives. Despite these differences, several common good practices and challenges have emerged.

Good practices

Cross-referencing political finance information with external sources can highlight underreporting and inconsistencies

The main approach of several initiatives was to check political finance information against other sources. They typically rely on reports submitted by political parties and candidates and disclosed by oversight bodies, and compare this data with other sources, such as (social) media monitoring, campaign event monitoring and the monitoring of (online) political advertising. When discrepancies or missing information are identified, some also document and analyse potential violations that require further investigation against the legal framework or oversight body regulations. On the income side, this triangulation can help uncover undeclared sources of funding, while on the expenditure side, it can support identify unreported campaign spending.

OpenSecrets (United States) (pp. 13-14), Transparencia por Colombia (Colombia) (pp. 15-16), the Observatorio al Financiamiento de la Política (Ecuador) (pp. 17-18) and Whose vote counts (South Africa) (pp. 19-20) compare campaign finance reports with (social) media monitoring, digital advertising data, access to information requests and field observation.

A growing share of this work focuses on digital advertising, where clear transparency gaps have been identified. In practice, this involves reviewing public advertising repositories, such as the Google Ads Transparency Center, TikTok's Commercial Content Library and the Meta Ad Library, to identify political advertisements. Information on advertisers and spending disclosed through these libraries can help identify the source of funds and the scale of advertising activity. In some cases, it can also reveal the involvement of third parties in political campaigning, which may be subject to regulation in the country concerned.

OpenSecrets (United States) and the Observatorio al Financiamiento de la Política (Ecuador) independently developed the same technique, which involves extracting data from ad repositories, estimating the cost of observed digital advertising and comparing those estimates against declared expenditures. In Ecuador, this produced an estimate of 5.8 million US dollars in spending on Facebook and TikTok, compared to only a fraction of this amount being declared. In the United States, it feeds into the broader dark money tracking methodology.

In countries where no data is made public, crowdsourcing information can fill a critical gap

Chanda Salli Meetare (Sri Lanka) (pp. 24-25), for example, deploys trained observers to campaign events and estimates the cost of observed activities using a back-end pricing system. The information submitted by monitors is then verified by participating monitoring organisations and approved by a group of experts. The result is an independent expenditure estimate that is available regardless of whether the candidate files a report or whether it is subsequently disclosed. A similar approach is taken by the Transparency International Zambia election monitoring tool, which does not feature in this publication.[47] ARAMASO (Madagascar) (pp. 22-23) also uses a network of civil society monitors to conduct campaign finance expenditure monitoring in their respective regions. Monitors document campaign activities, which are then cross-checked against a detailed costing framework that assigns average costs to different types of campaign events and media advertising. This methodology is used to provide a picture of expenditure levels per candidate. Furthermore, the platform Dilo Aquí (Venezuela) (pp. 26-27)

uses reports crowdsourced from citizens on irregularities to develop an overview of the abuse of state resources in elections.

Even if these approaches do not offer a comprehensive picture of campaign expenditures or irregularities, they can help bridge information gaps in countries where reporting compliance is low and the disclosure of political finance data by oversight institutions is delayed or insufficient. In the context of elections, when the relevance of information depends on its timeliness, crowdsourcing initiatives can provide insights into campaign financing practices and potential violations that can help inform voters' decisions.

Voluntary self-declaration platforms bridge a gap and can develop into official infrastructure

Citizen monitoring tools can offer candidates a channel to declare finances voluntarily, independently of the official reporting system. This is the case with Madagascar's ARAMASO platform, which includes a feature allowing candidates to voluntarily disclose their campaign expenditures. Such a feature therefore has the potential to serve as a naming-and-framing tool: candidates who choose to disclose this information may be seen as demonstrating their commitment to transparency, while those who do not disclose send a signal of opacity. The Colombia case shows how this approach can operate at scale. Transparencia por Colombia developed Cuentas Claras as a voluntary civil society platform and donated it to the National Electoral Council (CNE) in 2011. By 2013, reporting through this platform was mandatory for all candidates. What began as a voluntary transparency tool driven by reputational incentives had become Colombia's official national campaign finance disclosure system within a decade

Linking campaign finance data to procurement records can reveal patterns of corruption and favouritism

Analysing campaign finance and public procurement information together can help identify companies that may have received preferential treatment in procurement process following significant donations to parties or candidates during a campaign. To identify such practices, monitors must extract information on campaign donors, including names, personal details and donation amounts. This is then cross-checked against public procurement databases to determine whether those same individuals or companies were subsequently awarded government contracts. If they find suspicious linkages, monitors can then examine the timing of the donations and awards, the procurement method (direct awards or competitive tenders), the value and frequency of contracts, and any links between the contracting authority and the elected official or party that received the donation. By themselves, these details might not be enough to demonstrate wrongdoing, but they help identify potential conflicts of interest, clientelism or risks of state capture that can then be further scrutinised.

Transparencia por Colombia's monitoring of Cuentas Claras data alongside procurement databases found that donors to elected candidates obtained the equivalent of 1.8 billion US dollars in public contracts between 2018 and 2022, nearly all through direct contracting. Ecuador's observatory identified similar patterns and flagged donors who subsequently received public contracts and may have had conflicts of interests associated with their donations.

With such evidence, civil society can lead advocacy efforts for stronger political finance and public procurement rules around donor transparency, including beneficial ownership information, and improved coordination between electoral, procurement and anti-corruption bodies.

Challenges

Political finance monitoring is often resource-intensive and requires specialised skills and expertise

Political finance monitoring requires specialised expertise in legal and regulatory frameworks, as well as data analysis. Categorising data into itemised spending categories or defining indicators for analysis requires a strong understanding of national political finance frameworks. Likewise, identifying irregularities related to the abuse of state resources or developing methodologies to estimate campaign expenditure based on political events and activities requires substantial technical expertise and contextual knowledge.

On another front, six of the seven initiatives presented in this compendium publish the data they collect and analyse through online platforms, and many include datasets or data visualisation features with filtering options. These require sustained investment in data management and technical skills to maintain and continuously improve the platforms and tools.

Chanda Salli Meetare (Sri Lanka) and ARAMASO (Madagascar) both rely primarily on volunteer networks, with both reporting that maintaining data quality requires significant coordination efforts and occasionally data reprocessing due to human error. OpenSecrets (United States) requires significant technical expertise and sustained investment to collect, integrate and publish political finance data. Sustaining monitoring initiatives requires continued investment in staff expertise, volunteer training and data management systems.

Limited availability and consistency of political finance data persist

Access to political finance data remains a challenge in all countries, albeit to varying degrees depending on the context. While this is one reason the initiatives presented here are valuable, it also means that significant efforts are required to collect, clean, verify and harmonise the data. Even in contexts with strong reporting and disclosure requirements, data has to be collected from multiple sources, some of which is only available in PDF format, which makes it difficult to use and compare.

Whose Vote Counts (South Africa) identified transparency gaps relating to disclosure thresholds and funding sources. OpenSecrets (United States) relies on the integration of data from multiple reporting systems, while Chanda Salli Meetare (Sri Lanka) and ARAMASO (Madagascar) have invested significant efforts in collecting and standardising information that was not otherwise publicly available.

Political resistance and shrinking civic space hamper political finance monitoring

Political finance monitoring is particularly challenging in countries where civic space is shrinking and public institutions lack independence. Political pressure, fear of reprisals, and, in some contexts, state capture hamper efficient oversight. They also reduce the impact of public monitoring initiatives, as their findings can rarely be used to advocate for sanctions or reforms.

In Venezuela, fear of reprisals and restrictions on civil society discouraged people from reporting abuses. In South Africa, political resistance led to delays in disclosing political finance information and, at times, gaps in the data published. In Madagascar, candidates and donors did not use the ARAMASO platform's voluntary reporting feature, which suggests the need to continue raising awareness of the benefits of political finance transparency.

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ENDNOTE

[1] IFES, Glossary: Oversight Toolkit for Political Finance Institutions. Available at: https://www.ifes.org/pfit/0/3/glossary#electoral (last accessed on 28 April 2026).
[2] OpenSecrets. Available at: https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/vote-buying.pdf (last accessed on 3 July 2026).
[3] When possible, the authors have included links to the existing platforms and dashboards developed by the initiatives. Please note that these may occasionally be unavailable due to routine maintenance, technical issues or other operational factors.
[4] See the glossary for a definition.
[5] See the glossary for a definition.
[6] Evers-Hillstrom, K. & Arke, R. (2019). Following Citizens United, foreign-owned corporations funnel millions into US elections. OpenSecrets. Available at: https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2019/03/citizens-united-foreign-owned-corporations-put-millions-in-us-elections/ (last accessed on 3 July 2026).
[7] Kurson, K. (2023). Sam Bankman-Fried Political Donations Were Hardly 'Bipartisan'. Modern Consensus. https://modernconsensus.com/politics/sam-bankman-fried-political-donations-were-hardly-bi-partisan (last accessed on 3 July 2026).
[8] See the glossary for a definition.
[9] Interview with Hilary Braseth, Executive Director of Open Secrets, on 5 August 2025.
[10] Interview with Hilary Braseth, Executive Director of Open Secrets, on 5 August 2025.
[11] Interview with Hilary Braseth, Executive Director of Open Secrets, on 5 August 2025.
[12] Interview with Hilary Braseth, Executive Director of Open Secrets, on 5 August 2025.
[13] Interview with Hilary Braseth, Executive Director of Open Secrets, on 5 August 2025.
[14] Interview with Hilary Braseth, Executive Director of Open Secrets, on 5 August 2025.
[15] Interview with Hilary Braseth, Executive Director of Open Secrets, on 5 August 2025.
[16] Analysis by Juan David Hincapié Gómez, Projects Coordinator, and Sandra Ximena Martinez Rosa, Program Director, Political system and State Initiatives, Transparencia por Colombia.
[17] Analysis by Juan David Hincapié Gómez, Projects Coordinator, and Sandra Ximena Martinez Rosa, Program Director, Political system and State Initiatives, Transparencia por Colombia.
[18] Analysis by Juan David Hincapié Gómez, Projects Coordinator, and Sandra Ximena Martinez Rosa, Program Director, Political system and State Initiatives, Transparencia por Colombia.
[19] Interview with Mauricio Alarcón, Executive Director of FCD, on 16 July 2025.
[20] Interview with Mauricio Alarcón, Executive Director of FCD, on 16 July 2025.
[21] Written interview with Mauricio Alarcón, Executive Director of FCD, on 8 July 2026.
[22] Interview with Mauricio Alarcón, Executive Director of FCD, on 16 July 2025.
[23] Interview with Mauricio Alarcón, Executive Director of FCD, on 16 July 2025.
[24] Interview with Mauricio Alarcón, Executive Director of FCD, on 16 July 2025.
[25] Interview with Mauricio Alarcón, Executive Director of FCD, on 16 July 2025.
[26] Open Government Partnership (n.d.). Portal Nacional de Transparencia (EC0016). Available at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/es/members/ecuador/commitments/EC0016/ (last accessed on 3 July 2026).
[27] Under South Africa's Political Funding Act, "other income" falls outside the Act's donor disclosure regime. Parties are not required to disclose the underlying source of these funds, preventing the Electoral Commission and the public from independently verifying their origin. As My Vote Counts notes, this creates a significant transparency gap. My Vote Counts (2024). Analysis of the IECs Annual Political Party Funding Report for FY2023/2024. pp. 12-13. Available at: https://myvotecounts.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/MVC-Report-Analysis-of-the-IECs-Annual-Political-Party-Funding-Report-2023-24.pdf (last accessed on 3 July 2026).
[28] In South Africa, a direction is a formal administrative instruction issued by the Electoral Commission to a political party to enforce legal compliance before any official sanctions or penalties are applied. It can be considered functionally the equivalent of enforcement measures (such as warnings and compliance notices) in other contexts.
[29] Based on the presidential election experience, TI-Madagascar developed a detailed classification of campaign events and media advertising, with an average cost assigned to each category. During the following campaigns, monitors classified each observed activity according to this framework, allowing campaign expenditures to be estimated using standardised cost references.
[30] The monitoring approach was adapted to each election, taking into account the geographic coverage, feasibility of data collection and available resources. During the presidential election, around 35 field monitors were deployed 15 days before the official campaign to collect baseline market prices and remained in place throughout the campaign and around 10 media

monitors covering television and newspaper advertising. During the parliamentary election, around 35 field monitors and 15-20 media monitors monitored campaign events and media advertising, while the municipal election relied on around 40 field monitors focusing on campaign events only.

[31] The selection of the candidates to be monitored was based primarily on geographic and political relevance. TI-Madagascar selected candidates from the six electoral divisions where political competition is highest, namely the capital cities of the former provinces. One exception was made: instead of the Antananarivo district, TI-Madagascar selected Atsimondrano, which has the largest electorate in the country. All candidates running in the selected electoral divisions were monitored. A total of 71 candidates were monitored using different approaches: 26 candidates were monitored exclusively for campaign event expenditures, 38 exclusively for media expenditures, and 7 for both. During the data validation process, some candidates were excluded because the information collected was incomplete or did not meet the required quality standards. Following validation, complete and quality-assure d data were available for 66 candidates, including 32 candidates for field monitoring of campaign event expenditures.

[32] Written interview with Shely Andriamihaja, Knowledge and Community Manager at TI Madagascar, on 20 April 2026.

[33] Written interview with Shely Andriamihaja, Knowledge and Community Manager at TI Madagascar, on 20 April 2026.

[34] Written interview with Shely Andriamihaja, Knowledge and Community Manager at TI Madagascar, on 20 April 2026.

[35] Written interview with Shely Andriamihaja, Knowledge and Community Manager at TI Madagascar, on 20 April 2026.

[36] Written interview with Shely Andriamihaja, Knowledge and Community Manager at TI Madagascar, on 20 April 2026.

[37] The other organisations behind the initiative People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), Campaign for Free and Fair Elections (CaFFE), Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV), Hashtag Generation and the Institute for Democratic Reforms and Electoral Studies (IRES).

[38] The monitoring approach is adapted to each election, depending on resources available. For the Presidential election in 2024, 177 Electoral Observers and 25 District Coordinators were deployed. 47 of them were specifically trained to monitor campaign finance. The presidential election counted a total of 39 candidates, or 38 active candidates, after one candidate's death. Among the 38 candidates, 22 stood on a party ticket, while 16, including the incumbent, contested as independents. For the Parliamentary elections, observers from Transparency International Sri Lanka were dispatched within four districts. The remaining districts were covered by partner election observation organizations. This approach was adopted due to limited financial and human resources, as well as the large number of candidates contesting this election.

[39] Access to Information requests are not used systematically as part of the monitoring methodology. Instead, they are employed on a case-by-case basis to support targeted investigations, especially when examining possible misuse of state resources or seeking clarification on financial and administrative matters. Examples include requests to verify payments or authorizations related to the use of state aircraft and requests to assess whether media airtime has been allocated fairly.

[40] Before the election, minimum cost estimates are set for different types of activities using market prices. These cost benchmarks, along with standard assumptions and formulas, are then used to calculate the estimated value of the activities observed during the campaign.

[41] Six expenditure categories have been identified: mainstream media, public campaigns, social media, public events, press conferences and launching ceremony, campaign office. Graphs are produced to present the distribution of spending across expenditure categories for leading candidates, comparisons of expenditure levels for the top-10 candidates and aggregate spending patterns across Sri Lanka's provinces. The platform provides an option for financial disclosure statement by candidates, but it hasn't been used. The platform does not provide information on the source of campaign funds, as no publicly available information on candidates' financial returns existed during the campaign period.

[42] Looking at the three candidates who received the highest number of votes, the initiative correctly identified which candidate spent the most, second most and least, and broadly reflected the relative distribution of campaign expenditure among them. Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the election winner, accounted for 21.4% of the observable campaign expenditure captured by Chanda Salli Meetare, compared with 19.9% of the total campaign expenditure reported in his official disclosure (LKR 133 million observed; LKR 527 million reported). Sajith Premadasa, who finished second, accounted for 48.2% of the observable expenditure captured by Chanda Salli Meetare, compared with 42.5% of total reported expenditure (LKR 299 million observed; LKR 1.12 billion reported). Ranil Wickremesinghe, who finished third, accounted for 30.3% of the observable expenditure captured, compared with 37.6% of total reported expenditure (LKR 188 million observed; LKR 990 million reported).

[43] Namely Sajith Premadasa, Ranil Wickremesinghe, Dilith Susantha Kayaweera and Anura Kumara Dissanayake.

[44] Based on responses to a structured questionnaire administered by Transparency International Sri Lanka.

[45] A report by the Sunday Times, cited by ANFREL, found that most campaign finance submissions, including those of the leading candidates, did not fully comply with the requirements of the 2023 Election Expenditure Act. Only 12 of the 38 candidates submitted both supporting documentation for their campaign expenditure and information on donations and sources of income. The submissions also varied considerably in format and level of detail. Some showed inconsistencies in reported expenditure totals. See more at: ANFREL (2025), 'Final Report: 2024 Sri Lanka Presidential Election'. Available at: https://anfrel.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/ANFREL_2024-Sri-Lanka_Final-Report_Presidential-f.pdf (Last accessed on 11 August 2026).

[46] In the 2024 presidential elections in Venezuela, the Carter Center was the only international organisation to deploy an election observation mission.

[47] More information about TI-Zambia's monitoring platform can be found at: https://elections.tizambia.org.zm/

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