



# Policy Communication Report

Coherent Communication

Sustainable Governance  
Indicators 2020

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Indicator

## Coherent Communication

Question

To what extent does the government achieve coherent communication?

41 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = Ministries are highly successful in aligning their communication with government strategy.
- 8-6 = Ministries most of the time are highly successful in aligning their communication with government strategy.
- 5-3 = Ministries occasionally issue public statements that contradict the public communication of other ministries or the government strategy.
- 2-1 = Strategic communication planning does not exist; individual ministry statements regularly contradict each other. Messages are often not factually consistent with the government's strategy.

### Canada

Score 9

The Liberal government's communication policies are more open than those of its Conservative predecessors. Ministers are now responsible for coordinating communications between their departments, the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office. However, the Prime Minister's Office has not fully relinquished its control over ministers and departments. The PMO's objective is still to deliver coherent messages to the public. A recent paper on the communications strategy of both the current and previous governments concluded that considerable efforts are made to spin and frame government information. The prime minister now conducts a series of town hall meetings, which are open to Canadians across the country. These meetings are a sign of his willingness to engage and obtain feedback.

Citation:

Marland, Alex. (2017). Strategic Management of Media Relations: Communications Centralization and Spin in the Government of Canada. *Canadian Public Policy*, 43(1).

### Sweden

Score 9

Improved communications dovetails with increasing coordination among the government departments. During the past couple of years, the government has developed and implemented a more coherent communications strategy. The flow of communication from government departments and the PMO is now carefully controlled such that only a very limited number of officials are authorized to engage the media or other actors outside the core of government.

This strategy is very similar to the communications strategies today used in countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom. It implies that cabinet ministers carefully

assess invitations from radio and television and, perhaps surprisingly, frequently decline those invitations if they cannot control the format or if they are to debate with representatives from the opposition.

This strategy has been rather successful; indeed, in some ways it may even have been too successful. Scholars and the media are increasingly objecting to problems in accessing ministers and other representatives of the governing parties. There is also increasing frustration with the GO's tendency to be slow in providing the media with public documents. Even among several agencies there is now frustration about the decreasing access to government departments and government information.

Citation:

Dahlström, C. J. Pierre and B. G. Peters (eds) (2011), *Steering from the Center* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

Erlandsson, M. (2008), "Regeringskansliet och medierna. Den politiska exekutivens resurser och strategier för att hantera och styra massmedier," *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* 110: 335-49.

Jacobsson, B., J. Pierre and G. Sundström (2015), *Governing the Embedded State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

## Australia

Score 8

Australian governments have traditionally made considerable efforts to align their policy priorities with the messages that they communicate to the public. A number of factors have helped in these efforts: a tradition of very strong discipline across all the major political parties (perhaps the strongest among the Westminster democracies); a tradition of suppressing dissent within the parties (often by the threat of deselection at the next election); strong adherence to the Westminster doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility; and an activist mass media and political opposition that seeks to exploit any apparent policy divisions within the government.

However, governments have been relatively unstable since 2007, rendering coherent policy communication more difficult. In a range of policy fields (e.g., economic policy, foreign policy, climate change policy), the government has been unable to publicly communicate a coherent policy agenda. The Morrison government appears to have returned to the previous pattern of a more coherent communication policy.

Citation:

<http://theconversation.com/is-the-morrison-government-authoritarian-populist-with-a-punitive-bent-126032>

## Denmark

Score 8

Effective communication is increasingly important for policymakers, and communication strategies and media attention have become important aspects of politics, and political survival depends on efficient communication. The PMO plays an important role in communication, but many ministries have upgraded and employ media advisers.

There are only a few examples of ministers speaking out on issues that were not in accordance with the government's policy. In such cases, the prime minister will act swiftly and a corrective statement will follow from the minister in question – or he or she will most likely be replaced.

The nature of coalition governments, which are typical in Denmark, can occasionally create problems in policy communication. This may arise both due to different viewpoints within the coalition and the need for the different government parties to communicate their views and visions, especially as the next election approaches.

Citation:

Henning Jørgensen, *Consensus, Cooperation and Conflict: The Policy Making Process in Denmark*, 2002.

Jørgen Grønnegård Christensen et al., *Politik og forvaltning*. 4. udg., 2017.

## Finland

Score 8

Since the prime minister's position is one of *primus inter pares* (first among equals), rather than one of absolute leadership, it is natural that the government's policy positions are advanced through discussion and consultation rather than through directives and commands. Furthermore, as directives and commands would challenge the principle of freedom of speech, such communication would probably be regarded as illegitimate and foster opposition. In practice, therefore, contradictory statements are rare. However, the fact that Finland has a tradition of broad-based umbrella coalitions that accommodate diverse interests and ideological shadings serves to diversify communication. This was true of communications from the Sipilä government, which were notably vague and often undecided, reflecting tensions or even conflicts between the Finns Party and the other government parties. The first months of the Rinne government, which was ideologically broader than the Sipilä government, revealed internal disagreements between the coalition partners with respect to a number of policy areas. The existence of an agreed-upon and fairly detailed government plan in principle serves to streamline communications. However, the Sipilä government demonstrated that the plan can be interpreted in different ways by different parties, and the same conclusion seemed appropriate for the Rinne government.

## Latvia

Score 8

The government office organizes monthly coordination meetings of ministerial communication units, which are jointly known as the Government Communication Coordination Council. Nine formal meetings were held in 2017.

Communication and statements are generated by the ministries and are generally consistent. A communications coordination council sets annual priorities for the

main messages to be propagated to the public. Communication messages are coordinated prior to weekly cabinet meetings. However, this system means that partisan ministerial disagreements are highly visible.

Citation:

Regulation of the Government Communication Coordination Council, Available at: [https://mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/editor/vkkp\\_nolikums.pdf](https://mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/editor/vkkp_nolikums.pdf), Last assessed: 28.11.2019

## Norway

Score 8 Norway currently features a majority coalition government. There is a tradition for coalition governments in Norway. They have worked effectively, but there will unavoidably be disagreements within any coalition, including in the current conservative-liberal coalition. The dynamics of party politics require that disagreements on important matters find some expression, leading to an occasional lack of clarity in government communications. On the other hand, Norway's coalitions have been remarkably cooperative and its cabinet members well-behaved, often going to act coherently, and going to great lengths to avoid airing disagreements in public, at least on key priorities. It is also common for ministries to offer their opinion on issues – sometimes publicly – which allows for the demonstration of differences of opinion across ministries regarding problems and their solutions. Communication of government policies is often dealt with by the line or sectoral ministry responsible for the issue at stake.

## Portugal

Score 8 Prime Minister António Costa's government showed itself to be mostly effective in terms of communication and coordination during the review period, despite being a minority government with an unprecedented parliamentary-support coalition.

## Switzerland

Score 8 Switzerland's government acts as a collegial body. All members of the government have to defend the government's decisions, irrespective of their own opinion. However, in the 2003 to 2007 period, when the Swiss People's Party's (SVP) Christoph Blocher participated in government, communication was less coherent than before and afterward, and the country's politics shifted, taking a more populist, aggressive and confrontational tack. Although the current government is much more consistent in its public statements, coherence has not yet returned to the level reached in the 1970s through the 1990s. The government includes two SVP members who have little incentive to increase communication coherence. The following factors have contributed to this decline in the coherence of government policy communications:

- the structure of the collegiate body itself, which makes it difficult to speak with one voice in the mass media age;
- political polarization, even among the members of the broad coalition government;
- the systematic distortion of the Federal Council's communication leaks on the part of some aggressive media outlets; and
- the Federal Council's lack of authority or capacity to punish and deter communication leaks, and its inability to manage its communication policy effectively.

Overall, as digital transformation proceeds, government communication is increasingly influenced by and conducted through various media forms, including social media.

Citation:

Raupp, Juliana and Jan Niklas Kocks (2019): Regierungskommunikation, in: Ritz, Adrian, Theo Haldemann and Fritz Sager (eds.): Blackbox Exekutive. Regierungslehre in der Schweiz, Zürich, NZZ Libro, 373-388.

Hinterleitner, M. & Sager, F. (2019). „Krisenmanagement und Risikovermeidung“, in Blackbox Exekutive. Eds. A. Ritz, T. Haldemann & F. Sager. 409-427. Zürich. NZZ Libro.

## France

Score 7

Government policy communication is usually subject to centralized control by the executive branch. One of the preoccupations of the executive branch is to avoid disagreement or contradiction within the ministerial team, even when coalition governments are in power. There have been situations in which ministers expressing divergent views in the media have been forced to resign.

Hollande's government communication was poor and messy. In contrast, Macron has defined a new strategy: precise indications about his program during the presidential campaign, a commitment to implement these policy measures fully and speedily, and strict control over communication by the Élysée staff. This has conferred a significantly higher degree of coherence on governmental communication. However, due to a lack of coordination between ministers, the presidential services and the political movement which supports Macron (the REM), this communication policy has displayed flaws in practice, triggering changes in the organization of the Élysée communication unit. The Macron's distrust of the media has not helped, and the relationship between the media and the President's Office is far from optimal. The price has been a highly critical press, which tends to compete with social networks, and which has prioritized form and style over substance. As communication is highly centralized and technocratic ministers often neglect the art of communication, the capacity of the executive to communicate with the public has been rather poor. In addition, the public's overall distrust of political elites makes official communication extremely difficult. The problem is further aggravated by the proliferation of fake news on social networks.

## Ireland

### Score 7

Under the constitution, the government is required to act in a collective fashion and all ministers are collectively responsible for government decisions. This doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility is normally adhered to and creates a clear incentive to follow a closely coordinated communications strategy.

In some controversial policy areas, communication between ministries as well as between ministries and the government has lacked coherence. Statements regarding healthcare continue to lack clarity and consistency, with inadequate coordination between the ministry and the government about what is planned and feasible in this area.

The creation of Irish Water has been characterized by a serious lack of transparency and coherence. This problem persisted throughout 2016. The government's attempt to remove Irish Water from the General Government sector and have it treated as a commercial state-owned body in the national income accounts was dismissed by a judgment from Eurostat in 2015: "Eurostat considers that Irish Water is a non-market entity controlled by government and should therefore be classified within the government sector." In 2017, domestic water charges payable to Irish Water were abolished and money already paid to Irish Water was repaid.

#### Citation:

The complex details of the treatment of Irish Water in the national income accounts were discussed in an exchange of views between the Irish Central Statistics Office and Eurostat: see <http://www.cso.ie/en/surveysandmethodology/nationalaccounts/classificationdecisions/classificationofirishwater/>

## Israel

### Score 7

By law, the PMO supervises and coordinates activity between government ministries through a designated division. In 2013, representatives from several ministries wrote the Governmental Cooperation Guide in which they presented guidelines to ensure cooperation between ministries.

However, annual reports from the State Comptroller reveal major shortcomings in ministerial coordination, emphasizing the mutual tension and recrimination between ministries. Contradictory proclamations from different ministries are not uncommon, resulting from political power struggles within the coalition as well as from the treasury's stronghold on ministerial budgets and practices.

In recent years there has been a shift toward creating a more "open" government and improving the government's communications vis-a-vis the third sector and the public as well as within the government itself. The new emphasis on sharing and transparency has somewhat ameliorated the technical aspect of the divides, but its

influence over communicating policy is still uncertain. This trend of “open” government continued through 2016 – 2019, with greater emphasis placed on connecting government offices and services via online and computer services. This work has allowed for better communication and greater coherency in government work.

An example of this trend is the Open Government Action Plan 2018 – 2019, which would increase government transparency, and provide greater access to information to the public and government offices. A similar example, the Open Government Partnership, which started in 2012, is also still active. As part of this partnership, Israel has implemented or will develop various technologies, which will facilitate access to information and enhance government services.

Citation:

Government ICT Overview of Activity 2018, ICT authority Website, 2018

[https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/news/mabat2018/he/Tikshuv\\_Activity\\_06\\_singles.pdf](https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/news/mabat2018/he/Tikshuv_Activity_06_singles.pdf)

“Open government partnership: Progress report on action goals,” Official state publication (October 2013) (Hebrew).

Open Government partnership – Israel, 2019, (Hebrew):

<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/israel>

“Special report regarding the Mount Carmel Forest fire – December 2010 oversights, failures and conclusions,” the state comptroller website 20.6.2012 (Hebrew).

“The governmental guide for sharing: A model for interministerial cooperation,” Official state publication September 2013 (Hebrew).

Ravid, Barak and Lis, Jonathan, “After criticizing the government: Netanyahu fires deputy minister of security Danon,” Haaretz 15.7.2014: <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politi/1.2377994> (Hebrew).

## Luxembourg

Score 7

Following the Council of Ministers meetings on Fridays, the prime minister holds a public press conference intended to communicate the body’s work effectively and coherently. This weekly press briefing had been the government’s main method of communicating. Whereas public press briefings under former Prime Minister Juncker were rare toward the end of his administration, at least at the beginning, public relations have been given more importance under the new coalition. At the end of the last parliamentary term, the prime minister similarly held press briefings only sporadically. This development was also evident in 2019.

Aside from the prime minister, no government member has a press officer. Reporting directly to the prime minister, the state Press and Information Service (SIP) works to coordinate a coherent and wide-ranging government communication policy. Government members are encouraged not to voice disagreement in public, so as to give the impression of unanimous decision-making.

Citation:

“Der leise Abschied der Transparenz.” Luxemburger Wort, 25 July 2017. [www.wort.lu/de/politik/pressebriefing-des-premiers-der-leise-abschied-der-transparenz-5969d4ada5e74263e13c4243](http://www.wort.lu/de/politik/pressebriefing-des-premiers-der-leise-abschied-der-transparenz-5969d4ada5e74263e13c4243). Accessed 23 Oct. 2018.



## Malta

**Score 7** The Labor Party, now in government since 2013, has been credited with strong communication strategies under the present leadership, particularly during election campaigns. Once in government it initially adopted normal channels, including the Department of Information, which is the state's primary communication channel, as well as individual ministerial communication channels. However, the run-up to the 2017 EU presidency helped refine the party refine its communication strategy and tools, and it today has a broad strategy which includes an e-government service. Ministers give daily briefings when launching policies and projects. These are normally associated with campaigns that include social media. Overall, this strategy seems to be working well, with the government enjoying unprecedented levels of trust compared to the EU average, though trust ratings dipped slightly in 2019 – to 58% compared to 63% in 2018. However there have been calls for a reform of the public broadcasting service in order to ensure transparency and objectivity.

### Citation:

How the Maltese government spend over 2.5 million in social media ads. Malta Today 07/11/17

Times of Malta 06/11/18 MFSA spends €210,000 for communications advice

<https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/trust-in-malta-government-is-highest-in-the-eu-survey.697362>

<https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2019-08-06/local-news/Eurobarometer-58-of-Maltese-trust-the-government-6736211853>

<https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-12-22/local-news/63-of-Maltese-trust-government-Eurobarometer-6736201196>

Euro -barometer trust ratings 2019

## Mexico

**Score 7** The communication performance of the current administration is based on the communication skills of the new president. As a populist, AMLO relies heavily on public communication. The daily press conferences at 7 a.m. are not addressed to the press, but are rather a means of directly communicating with the public. So far, no other politician or ministry has engaged in strategic communication, and major contradictions in government communications have not occurred.

## Netherlands

**Score 7** The Informatie Rijksoverheid service responds to frequently asked questions by citizens over the internet, telephone and email. In the age of “mediacracy,” the government has sought to make policy communication more coherent, relying on the National Information Service (Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst, RVD), which is formally a part of the prime minister's Department for General Affairs, and whose Director General is present at Council of Ministers meetings and is responsible for communicating policies and the prime minister's affairs to the media. The

government has streamlined and coordinated its external communications at the line-ministry level.

Another effort to engage in centralized, coherent communication has involved replacing departmentally run televised information campaigns with a unified, thematic approach (e.g., safety). These efforts to have government speak with “one mouth” appear to have been fairly successful. For example, the information communicated by the government regarding the downing of a passenger plane with 196 Dutch passengers over Ukraine on 17 July 2014 and its aftermath was timely, adequate and demonstrated respect for the victims and the needs of their families.

The continual technological innovation in information and communication technologies has led policy communication to adapting to the new possibilities. New developments are focused on responding more directly to citizen questions, exploring new modes of behavioral change, and utilizing internet-based citizen participation and communication channels in policymaking and political decision-making. For example, in 2011 the Dutch government decided to participate in the global Open Government Partnership. But in 2017 the Dutch government was criticized for structurally misleading and insufficient communication on issues of animal disease and food safety due to prioritizing agricultural interests over public health. In general, government communication occurs in an increasingly challenging media environment in which competition, polarization, trolling and “fake news” represent major challenges. The line between government communication and information, and defending government policies is becoming more and more blurred.

In 2019, in response to repeated criticism that the language used in official communications was unclear, the government decided to create an “Instant Clarity Brigade” (Direct Duidelijk Brigade) to assist departmental policymakers in writing more understandable proposals, rules and decrees.

Citation:

Nationale Ombudsman, 5 April 2016. Het verdwijnen van de blauwe envelop. Een onderzoek naar de digitalisering van het berichtenverkeer met de Belastingdienst. ([zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl](http://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl), accessed 8 November 2019)

[overheidsexpertise.nl/communicatie](http://overheidsexpertise.nl/communicatie) (overheidsexpertise.nl, accessed 8 November 2019)

NRC Next, 24 October 2019. De Direct Duidelijk Brigade moet teksten overheid weer begrijpelijk maken.

Raad van State, 24 July 2019. Samenvatting advies wetsvoorstel modernisering elektronisch bestuurlijk verkeer. ([raadvanstate.nl](http://raadvanstate.nl), accessed 8 November 2019)

## New Zealand

Score 7

New Zealand has a tradition of highly coherent and cohesive cabinets. The current government (2017–2020) is somewhat unusual, however, in that it is a minority coalition of two parties with quite disparate policy objectives (Labour, New Zealand First), supported by a third party with no history of government experience. And, in

fact, political commentators described the first few months of the coalition government as “chaotic”: while Labour tried to rush through an ambitious “100-day plan,” New Zealand First and the Greens – worried about getting “swallowed” by Labour in the 2020 elections – made a conscious effort to communicate differentiated policy positions. For example, coalition parties publicly clashed over Labour proposals to abolish the 90-day trial period for new workers, repeal the Three Strikes law (increases the prison sentences of persons convicted of a felony who have been previously convicted of two or more violent crimes), and introduce a capital gains tax. However, over time, communication among coalition partners became significantly more coherent – in line with previous governments. In addition, the government has invested heavily in public relations: between 2017 and 2018, the number of government communications staff doubled.

Citation:

Patterson (2018) “One Year On: Rating the government’s performance.” Radio New Zealand (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/on-the-inside/369348/one-year-on-rating-the-government-s-performance>)

Pennington (2019) “Government’s public relations teams rapidly expanding.” Radio New Zealand ([https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=12252394](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12252394))

## Spain

Score 7

A press office in the prime minister’s entourage (Secretaría de Estado de Comunicación) and the government’s spokesperson try to conduct coherent communication planning. Ministries tend to align their statements and press releases with government strategy. The conservative PP government (in office through May 2018) did not have a well-developed communications strategy. The management of the Catalan conflict was perhaps the best example of this problem, with unconvincing and contradictory statements released both internally and abroad. The PSOE government launched a more thoughtful national and international political communications strategy, which establishes a special office for the promotion of the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals in the country, among other things. In October 2018, the PSOE government created the State Secretariat for España Global, a higher body responsible for adopting measures to improve Spain’s image overseas.

However, minor scandals linked to the past behavior of appointed ministers, some policy reversals and interministerial disagreements (e.g., between the Defense and Foreign Affairs ministries regarding arms sales to Saudi Arabia) showed the limits of a coherent communication strategy.

Citation:

State Secretary for Global Spain  
<http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/en/Ministerio/SecretariosDeEstado/SecrerariaDeEstadoDeLaEspanaGlobal/Paginas/default.aspx>

## Austria

**Score 6** Previous cabinets used occasional, informal policy-coordination meetings to define the general direction of government policies. Following such meetings, the government would hold press conferences to provide the public with information about what has been decided.

In the past, government communication was dominated by the individual ministries. This communication is usually also seen as an instrument for the promotion of one of the coalition parties' agendas (and of the specific minister belonging to this party), rather than the agenda of the government as such. As the new government is based – like the outgoing government – on two more or less equally strong coalition partners, this might not change in the future. However, these partners have – at least verbally – committed to a coherent communication strategy and in this regard have also agreed to use one press officer for both parties.

At the end of 2017, the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition established a new style of centralizing political communication (“message control”). This has been a significant departure from the style of previous coalitions in which individual cabinet members communicated with the public directly. Until 2019, communication was more or less centralized under the chancellor and deputy chancellor. It has to be seen whether the new coalition (which will likely be led again by the ÖVP, but without the FPÖ) will be willing and able to centralize political communication as the last government was able to do.

## Hungary

**Score 6** The Orbán government has tried to maintain coherent communication by taking drastic disciplinary measures at all levels. Most Fidesz politicians avoid journalists. At public events, they do not give interviews, but confine themselves to reading out texts written by the Cabinet Office, which is headed by Antal Rogán. The government also seeks to control the agenda by launching new topics to divert public attention away from problems raised in the media that can reflect poorly on Fidesz. Government communication is not designed to communicate information, it is instead an instrument of power politics aimed at bringing public discourse in line with the prime minister's and governing party's will. It uses fake news and manipulative strategies to achieve this goal. In the 2019 municipal elections, the government failed to pursue a coherent communication strategy, since it did not manage to address the large variation in local conditions.

## Iceland

### Score 6

The government of Iceland generally speaks with one voice. However, in the so-called West Nordic administrative tradition, where ministers are responsible for institutions subordinate to their ministries, every minister has the power to make decisions without consulting other ministers. Nevertheless, ministers rarely contradict one another and generally try to make decisions through consensus.

However, the 2009 – 2013 left-wing cabinet proved to be an exception to this tradition since three Left-Green Movement parliamentary members withdrew from the governing party coalition. Despite this internal dissent, the cabinet coalition held together to the end of its mandated term. Under the 2013 – 2016 center-right cabinet comprising the Progressive Party and the Independence Party, the situation reverted to the traditional Nordic practice. The leaders of the two coalition parties sometimes issued conflicting statements, but this did not result in any open conflict.

In April 2016, events took a dramatic turn following the publication of the Panama Papers. The papers, which included 11.5 million documents that detailed financial and attorney-client information concerning more than 200,000 offshore entities, exposed the methods by which wealthy individuals and public officials used offshore bank accounts and shell companies to conceal wealth and avoid tax. Among those exposed was Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson (Progressive Party). While initially denying involvement and without the knowledge of the leader of the Independence Party (who was also exposed in the Panama Papers), Gunnlaugsson tried to convince the president (whose wife was also exposed in the Panama Papers) to dissolve parliament and declare new elections. The president refused. Gunnlaugsson resigned as prime minister, but continued as chairman of his party whose vice-chairman took over as prime minister. New parliamentary elections were announced for autumn 2016. At the next party congress, Gunnlaugsson lost the position of party chair. Thousands of protesters took to the streets in Reykjavík as in 2008, forcing the government to advance the upcoming parliamentary election by six months, from April 2017 to October 2016. These events constitute the clearest example of open conflict in an Icelandic cabinet in recent years.

Shortly thereafter, an alleged breach of trust led to the breakup of the Benediktsson cabinet (January – September 2017). After only eight months in power, the center-right three-party coalition collapsed when Bright Future announced that they were ending their coalition with the Independence Party due to a serious breakdown of trust within the government in connection with the prime minister's father's recommendation letter of "restored honor" for a man convicted of pedophilia. Benediktsson, despite having been informed about this by the minister of justice, kept this matter to himself until a parliamentary committee compelled the ministry to release this information to the press. This affair reflects the pervasive culture of secrecy that permeates Icelandic politics.

The first two years of the current Jakobsdóttir cabinet (November 2017 to date) have passed without any notable public disputes.

## Japan

### Score 6

Policy communication has always been a priority for Japanese governments. Ministries and other governmental agencies publish regular reports on their work, including white papers and other materials.

However, the triple disaster of March 2011 seriously undermined the population's trust in governmental information, due to the lack of transparency and the failure to deliver timely public information. The degree to which Japan's public trusts the government has since recovered somewhat, but according to the Edelman Trust Barometer 2019 survey, only 39% of citizens trust the government, a significantly lower share than in many other countries.

LDP leaders occasionally make policy statements that are not fully in line with party positions, generally prompted by personal dissatisfaction with specific government policies. One recent example involved dissenting stances on plans to change the so-called peace clause of the constitution.

The LDP-led coalition has pushed through its policy priorities more assertively than earlier governments, while giving less consideration to dissenting opinions.

In late 2018, it came to light that the Monthly Labor Survey had used an improper methodology for collecting data since 2004, leading to an overestimation of wage growth. Following this exposure, weaknesses in some other government statistical measures also became apparent.

#### Citation:

Edelman, 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer – Japan, <https://de.slideshare.net/EdelmanJapan/2019-edelman-trust-barometer-japan>

Hideo Hayakawa, Japan's Statistics Scandal: The Need for New Approaches, Nippon.com post, 18 March 2019, <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00475/japan%E2%80%99s-statistics-scandal-the-need-for-new-approaches.html>

## Slovenia

### Score 6

The Šarec government started its term with several public clashes over the appointment of ministers whose poor performance in front of the parliamentary committees and in the first months of governing led to several changes and dismissals in the government. Within this context, the highly controversial appointment of Damir Črnčec, the prime minister's new national security adviser, should be emphasized. Since then, however, ministerial communication has become

more coherent. Compared to its predecessor Cerar, Šarec has exercised a more authoritative leadership style and has succeeded in limiting the number of contradictory statements from different coalition partners.

## South Korea

**Score 6** President Moon has placed a high priority on communication with citizens. He engages in more frequent press briefings than did his predecessors, and holds public hearings where he is likely to have more opportunities to have direct conversations with citizens. Ministries do occasionally issue mutually contradictory statements, but rarely openly contradict statements issued by the presidential office, which in Korea's presidential system dominates the government strategy. The Moon administration has not been successful in its goal of inducing bureaucrats to work harder and better, since high-ranking politically appointed officials in the Blue House have dominated the policy process in a comparatively less professional way.

Citation:

KBS News. "Activate the ministerial meetings for better collaboration." July 28, 2017. (In Korean) <http://news.kbs.co.kr/news/view.do?ncd=3523871>

## Czechia

**Score 5** Under Prime Minister Babiš, government communication has become less cacophonous than under the previous Sobotka government. However, rather than any coordination proper, the streamlining of government communication reflects the fact that the ANO ministers and ANO's coalition partner, the Social Democratic party, defer strongly to Babiš. Struggling for survival, Social Democrats have mostly fallen into step with the government. The MAFRA-owned media (Babiš's media conglomerate) have created scandal around every instance in which Social Democratic ministers have dared to issue public statements contradicting the official government line. ANO ministers perceived as unreliable, such as former Minister of Culture Antonín Staněk, have been replaced.

## Estonia

**Score 5** Government ministries have remarkable power and autonomy. Ministers from the various coalition parties sometimes make statements that are not in line with the general government position or have not been properly discussed by all the coalition partners. This tendency has become more pronounced in 2019 largely as a result of the inclusion of the radical-right, populist EKRE in the governing coalition. Ministers from the different coalition parties have issued contradictory statements on issues ranging from pension and pharmacy reforms to the fundamentals of defense policy.

## Germany

**Score 5** In a formal sense, the federal government's Press and Information Office is the focal point for communication, serving as the conduit for information originating from individual ministries, each of which organizes their own communication processes and strategies. However, this does not guarantee a coherent communication policy, which is a difficult goal for any coalition government. There is a persistent tendency of coalition partners to raise their own profile versus that of the other government parties. This tendency has increased mainly because of the governing parties' declining electoral support, the pressure of the elections upcoming in October 2021 and the increasing success of the right-wing populist AfD party and the Greens.

However, on the issue of climate change, which has risen to the top of the policy agenda, the government's communication of its new climate-related measures (the climate package) appeared more coherent. While the package was criticized by opposition parties, it was jointly defended by the government parties. In addition, new welfare-state-related policies such as the basic pension ("Grundrente") were – after tough negotiations – jointly communicated. Hence, there seems to have been a slight improvement compared to the dramatic controversies marking the years of the migration crisis.

## Lithuania

**Score 5** The political fragmentation associated with Lithuania's ruling coalitions has made it difficult to formulate and implement an effective government communications policy. Line ministries and other state institutions are responsible for communicating with the public within their individual areas of competence; however, the Communications Department of the Government Office attempts to coordinate these activities and provides the public with information about the government's performance. For instance, a unified government portal that aims at providing relevant information to the citizens about the performance of the whole government (the cabinet, the Government Office, ministries and government agencies) was launched in 2015.

In a 2015 report, the OECD recommended that the core government rebalance its engagement with other institutions by emphasizing its role as a facilitator of exchange and dialogue across government and with non-state stakeholders, rather than primarily focusing on top-down communication.

On the whole, the government continues to lack a coherent communication policy today. While contradictory statements are rare, they do occur to varying degrees depending on the particular government and the elections calendar. The Skvernelis government, composed mostly of nonpartisan ministers (so-called professionals), has



faced difficulties in coordinating its communications on policy priorities and reforms undertaken. This was particularly evident in 2018 and 2019 due to pending election campaigns, changes in the composition of the governing majority and preparations for the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Citation:

OECD, Regulatory Policy in Lithuania: Focusing on the Delivery Side, OECD Reviews of Regulatory Reform, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2015 [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/regulatory-policy-in-lithuania\\_9789264239340-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/regulatory-policy-in-lithuania_9789264239340-en).

## Poland

**Score 5** Ministerial communication is coordinated by the Government Information Center, a department of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. It regularly reports on government activities and connects to other ministries' press departments. However, information provided by ministries has tended to be selective and highly propagandistic. The government Center for Strategic Analysis, introduced in 2018, has helped to overcome this problem to a certain extent.

## United Kingdom

**Score 5** Compared with the culture of secrecy of earlier decades, government has become much more open in the United Kingdom in recent years. This is due to a combination of the Freedom of Information Act passed by a Tony Blair-led Labour government, and a willingness to use the internet to increase transparency and open up government. The government website (gov.uk) provides extensive information on government services and activities, and has been redesigned to be more user friendly. It is also a single gateway website, which aims to facilitate greater coherence in line with the government communications plan.

On international measures, such as the Open Data Index or OECD government assessments, the United Kingdom scores well and there is clearly a strong push from within the administration to enhance communication, for example with a strategic communications plan and a single communications budget.

However, while the mechanisms of communication were laudable, communication in recent years can be criticized. Government communication around the divisive issue of UK membership of the European Union has been far from clear and this lack of coherence remains apparent as governments in recent years have struggled to explain their stance to the public. Theresa May failed to develop a clear message, with briefings from rival factions in government undermining the prime minister's communication. Although her successor, Boris Johnson, sought to clamp down on leaks, the fraught politics of autumn 2019 were not conducive to a coherent strategy. As with so many facets of governance, the settlement of Brexit is expected to result in a return to more coherent communication.

Citation:

OPM Approach: <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/> is an open site with short articles on the OPM approach  
<https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/communications-plan/>

## Bulgaria

Score 4

Government communication in Bulgaria exhibits a relatively low degree of coherence. The various ministries' communication activities are not centrally coordinated, so it is easy for the media to identify inconsistencies and contradictions in the information they release and the positions taken. These tend to be more pronounced under coalition governments in which the various ministries are headed by representatives of different parties. Public announcements and communications are often intended to hide rather than highlight and explain the true intentions behind proposed regulations and policies. One example in this regard was offered by the proposed Belene nuclear power plant. Whereas the government's initial announcements stressed that the project was reactivated due to interest from Chinese investors and Chinese construction companies, without any Bulgarian commitments or finances involved, it later emerged that Russian investors and companies were the only candidates, and Bulgarian public financing may play a major role in the project.

## Chile

Score 4

Each new government designs its own communication policy. As a result, strategic communication often tends to be rather haphazard at the beginning of a presidential term, but improves as the administration gains experience. During the period under review, the government's communication and coherence regarding public announcements worsened significantly. Several announcements were perceived by the public as contributing to and accelerating the generalized discontent and social crisis. Incoherence and lapses in the field of government communication were particularly noticeable during the October 2019 protests. For instance, in announcing the curfew, President Piñera announced that "we are at war," a statement that he withdrew two days later and followed up with a public apology.

## Italy

Score 4

Italian governments have in general coordinated communication rather weakly. Ministers and even undersecretaries have often been able and willing to express their personal positions without coordinating their comments with the Prime Minister's Office. Under the first Conte government, communication was dominated by Di Maio and Salvini, the leaders of two coalition parties who also served as deputy prime ministers. The prime minister was systematically overshadowed. The cabinet

thus demonstrated a rather incoherent communication “strategy.” Only in the final days of the government did the prime minister try to regain a leading role. Under the second Conte government, the prime minister has sought with greater determination to affirm his communication primacy, but is frequently challenged by the very vocal leaders of the coalition partners.

## Romania

Score 4 Despite the fact that the Chancellery of the Prime Minister was tasked with taking care of public relations and the communication with the mass media, the Dăncilă government has lacked a unified and coordinated communications strategy. The Chancellery has often competed with individual ministries in communicating new policy initiatives and programs.

## Slovakia

Score 4 The formation of a coalition government after the 2016 parliamentary elections has made it more difficult to streamline government communication. However, until the coalition crisis in August 2017, SNS and Most-Híd, the junior coalition partners, were cautious to avoid engaging in open conflict. Since the resignation of former prime minister Fico, however, the coherence of government communication has deteriorated. In a number of cases, most notably the recent healthcare reform, government coalition parties have failed to streamline their communication. The upcoming parliamentary elections in February 2020 have driven the government coalition partners to pursue more “independent” office-seeking strategies.

## Turkey

Score 4 The extensive restructuring of the executive branch has allowed for further centralization in policymaking through the president. Policy coordination among central government institutions has remained strong, but planning, monitoring and reporting on whole-of-government performance remains inadequate. Rules of procedure are lacking in administrative decision-making processes, which undermines the parliamentary lawmaking process. Legislative development and policy formulation have not pursued an inclusive and evidence-based approach, but the responsibility for producing draft legislative proposals now lies with members of parliament, rather than with the government. The president has issued over one thousand executive decisions and 50 decrees, some on limited, others on extensive issues. Exactly how nine recently established presidential policy councils relate to the work of individual government departments is not clear.

Some ministers have expressed doubts over President Erdoğan's plan to resettle Syrian asylum-seekers in a safe zone 30 km into northern Syria and to extend the Iraqi border. The president has claimed that municipal hospital projects are realized through a build-operate-transfer model that does not involve public funding. However, the Minister of Health has stated that the construction of these hospitals can be funded by public money and are not necessarily dependent on public-private partnerships.

Although the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), declared the number of unemployed to have reached 4,650,000 in August 2019, Turkey's employment agency, İŞKUR, registered 4,044,640.

The full introduction of the presidential system also increased the multitude of "decisive voices" emanating from within the government, including that of the president, the ministers (on particular policies), their spokesmen and chief consultants, as well as the spokesmen from the ruling party (which holds the parliamentary majority with another party whose party leader acts partly as a consent giver or an opposition to the president/ ruling party-chairman). On foreign and security policies and in particular Turkey's military interventions abroad, the voice of the minister of defense (and former chief of staff) is taken into account.

Finally, the president's push for policies that undermine international (EU) standards and ignore scientific common sense (e.g., his position on a non-independent central bank or currency policy), and the way in which public opinion is manipulated by the centralized party-government-system and pro-government media, as well as the government's nationalist discourse renders communication and deliberation in its liberal understanding ineffective and unsustainable.

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## United States

Score 4

Under normal conditions, politically appointed leadership in every agency means that executive agencies and departments will typically have coordinated their messages with those responsible for the White House communications strategy. Agency press releases and statements on politically salient matters are often cleared with the White House and will be planned for consistency with the president’s priorities and political strategy.

During the Trump presidency, the White House press office has been heavily engaged in defending or obscuring Trump’s many false claims and inconsistent positions. The Washington Post has counted more than 14,000 false or misleading claims (including repetitions) in Trump’s first three years of office.

The coherence of administration messaging is often undermined by chaotic policymaking, sharp deviations from established doctrines and practices, and the pursuit of unacknowledged policy priorities. For example, the 2018 National Climate Assessment, a collaborative product of thirteen federal agencies and 300 scientists, confirmed standard scientific findings indicating the need for urgent action to mitigate climate change – yet Trump declared that he did not believe the report’s findings. He has generally denied the validity of intelligence-community findings on Russian interference in the 2016 election. The administration has sometimes denied, and sometimes acknowledged, a policy of separating refugee families at the Mexican border. Trump often announces major policy changes by tweet only to not follow through with official action.

It is rare for different agencies to issue conflicting statements, but White House and agency statements may change rapidly and lack close coordination.

## Belgium

Score 3

Maintaining coherent communication has proven difficult for the Michel government, with each coalition party seeking to make a display of power to their respective voters, particularly in its last year, with local elections in 2018, and regional, federal and European elections in 2019. For example, members of the Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V), tasked with pleasing the party’s center-right and center-left wings alike, have quite different views on immigration, inequality and

taxation than do members of the more liberal-right N-VA. On several occasions, the prime minister's statements have even been publicly contradicted by other members of the government.

The last blow, which brought down the government coalition, came as a reaction to the U.N. pact on migration. As searing tensions on immigration came to the fore, the N-VA, the right-wing conservative member of the government, suddenly refusing to uphold the government's commitment to sign the pact.

Since then, the federal government has operated as a minority in parliament, with no new government formed at the time of writing (November 2019).

Citation:

<https://plus.lesoir.be/196934/article/2018-12-22/la-crise-politique-en-cinq-coups-de-theatre>

## Croatia

Score 3

The Prime Minister's Office is formally responsible for policy coordination and the communication of policy to the general public through the Public Relations Service. In practice, however, ministries have often followed their own communication strategies, only to reverse their stance following criticism from the Prime Minister's Office or other line ministries. This was best exemplified during the longest strike in Croatia's history, which was orchestrated by teachers' trade unions in 2019. The Ministry of Education and PMO were not communicating effectively in developing a coherent and common set of proposals for the negotiation process.

## Cyprus

Score 3

Government communications through official channels were complemented by increasingly intense interactions between government officials and the media. With ministers and other officials acting more independently in their communications, the long-standing goal of achieving coherent communication could not be met.

In 2019, the president and his government faced some highly critical challenges, including the case of seven missing women, victims of a serial killer, corruption and the selling of passports. However, their communication performance has again been poor. There was a failure to communicate policies in a clear and coherent manner. In addition, responses to criticism from domestic political forces and the EU on political and ethical issues were often contradictory. The active resorting to conspiracy theories and blame games as well as attempting to discredit critics did not help the government. Thus, informing the public and dispelling confusion saw little success.

Citation:

1. Don't expect a deep investigation into dodgy passport recipients, Cyprus Mail, 25 October 2019, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/10/25/our-view-dont-expect-a-deep-investigation-into-dodgy-passport-recipients/>

## Greece

### Score 3

In August 2018, the Third Economic Adjustment Program for Greece (the Third Memorandum, 2015 – 2018) was completed. The government in power at the time considered the program's completion to be a successful final "exit of the Memoranda," though in June 2018 it had consented to a continuation of periodic performance reviews of the Greek economy (i.e., site visits by IMF and European Commission representatives every three months). After that time, the prime minister, the government's spokesperson, the minister of finance and other ministers conveyed positive messages about future economic growth, although Greece's economy continued to show rather slow growth (under 2% of GDP). Private foreign investment continued to stay away, businesses continued to close down or leave the country, and the flight of skilled labor ("brain drain") continued. The government thus tried to divert attention from growth rates by highlighting the decline in the unemployment rate, and by emphasizing ideological differences between "left" and "right."

The center-right New Democracy party, which assumed power in July 2019, embarked on a new communication strategy focusing on the idea that the "experiments" with the economy and the political system attempted by the previous government during 2015 – 2019 were now over. The new communication strategy took on a central theme of "normality," with the new government implying that it was time for Greece to become a typical, normal EU-like market economy and parliamentary democracy. This was evidently a successful strategy, as the new governing party's popularity remained strong in the six months following its electoral victory in July 2019. However, there is still a need for a longer-term government vision articulating the direction and intention of Greek policy.

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