Week 1 Summary: What are participants talking about?
Thank you for all the contributions to the e-discussion so far and we look forward to hearing more from you in the coming days! Observations that we see coming out of the discussion and ideas to promote accountability, rule of law and human rights are mentioned below:

What’s happening?:

- Increasing demand for strong institutions to deliver public services, leading to, in some cases to using the pandemic as a cover to silence dissent, infringe upon human rights, and constrict people’s ability to demand accountability. In many contexts, there has been further consolidation of power in the executive, undermining institutions responsible for oversight and accountability, including the key role of parliaments and citizens.
- The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing societal fault lines further highlighting pre-existing challenges and inequalities. It has underscored the need for substantial improvements in State capacities for the provision of public services, and to counter exclusion and organized crime.
- Dis- and misinformation, or “infodemic”, is a growing concern since the beginning of the pandemic. It has been instrumental in undermining trust and transparency, eroding basic democratic principles, increasing polarization and affecting the functioning of institutions.

What’s needed?:

- Collaborative and cooperative institutional frameworks, and more consensual institutional arrangements which strengthen representative institutions and open the system through participatory mechanisms.
- Technology, which can play an important role to assist in decision-making and political participation, bringing together citizens and representatives and improving levels of transparency, responsiveness and accountability, keeping in mind potential risks as unequal access to technology will exacerbate inequalities (e.g. digital gap and lack of accessibility for population groups already at risk of being left behind).
- The link between access to reliable data and evidence and trust in governance institutions has been highlighted especially in terms of supporting social accountability, i.e., how most populations interface with government on a daily basis at the local level and can meaningfully be involved in decisions that affect their lives.
- Appropriate Data representation which is easily digestible and understandable. Targeted information and engagement campaigns must consider digital infrastructure, literacy, education, accessibility and inclusiveness in order to reach those consistently left behind, such as indigenous peoples, ethnic or linguistic minorities, and persons with disabilities.
- The issue of privacy, data protection and the surveillance state, given that quick solutions to fight the pandemic have raised ethical questions about technology use without adequate checks and balances, raising the question “In a global pandemic, do we still have a right to privacy?”

Questions still needing answers include: What mechanisms of social accountability were successful during the pandemic? How can governments address trust deficits? What was the role of other actors in promoting oversight and accountability, such as National Human Rights Institutions or civil society? What are some examples of how data be made more accessible to promote transparency and access to information?