

ROLE OF CITIZEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLICY FORMULATION IN ADAMAWA STATE (2019 – 2023)

Naphtali Amana¹ and Bolanje Augustine Dikimono²

^{1,2}Adamawa State University, Mubi, Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences,
Adamawa State University, Mubi.

¹naphtaliamana@gmail.com, ²bolanjeaugustinedikimono@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of citizens' participation in policy formulation processes within Adamawa State from 2019 to 2023, examining the extent, nature, and effectiveness of citizen involvement in democratic governance. Using a mixed-methods approach and data obtained through surveys across three senatorial districts, the study assessed engagement levels, consultation mechanisms, participation channels, and perceived influence on policies. The findings reveal that a majority of respondents (57%) had never participated in any policy formulation process, while only 18.75% had done so frequently. Community forums (46.25%) and social media platforms (42%) were the most common participation channels, though traditional avenues like town hall meetings and online surveys were underutilized. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) believed that no policies or new laws were influenced by citizen input, indicating a weak connection between participation and policy outcomes. These results underscore significant gaps in citizen engagement, limited integration of feedback into policymaking, and low awareness of participatory opportunities. The study recommends increasing public awareness, diversifying engagement platforms, and institutionalizing structured consultation processes to promote transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in governance. Strengthening these mechanisms will enhance citizens' trust, foster democratic responsiveness, and improve policy outcomes in Adamawa State.

Keywords: citizens, policy formulation, democratic governance, participation, transparency, accountability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Engaging citizens in the decision-making process has become a central priority for governments across the world. Citizen participation is regarded as the core of democratic governance, as it enhances the legitimacy of political processes and strengthens accountability (Box, 1998; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998; Pateman, 1970). In contemporary governance, citizens are increasingly expected to play active roles in shaping policies that affect their lives rather than relying solely on public officials and administrators. This global shift toward participatory governance has been facilitated by decentralization, interdependence, and advances in information technology (Eriksson, Reestorff & Stage, 2018).

In developing countries, including Nigeria, citizen participation has been promoted as a mechanism for improving transparency, responsiveness, and accountability in public administration (Bochel, 2006; Devas & Grant, 2003). Meaningful involvement allows citizens to contribute to decision-making, priority setting, and policy evaluation (Van Meter, 1975), thereby aligning governance outcomes with public interests (Manor, 1999). However, the practical experience of citizen participation in Nigeria has revealed persistent challenges. In states such as Adamawa, participation often remains limited to consultation exercises that lack real influence on decision outcomes. This raises concerns about tokenism, where public input is solicited merely to create an illusion of inclusion without genuine impact.

Moreover, socio-political realities such as elite dominance, low civic awareness, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and political manipulation frequently undermine participatory processes. In many cases, participation spaces are captured by political or social elites, leaving marginalized groups underrepresented. This weakens the democratic potential of citizen participation and questions its authenticity as a tool for accountability and inclusive governance.

While the theoretical literature extols the virtues of participation—emphasizing its role in enhancing transparency, accountability, and development outcomes (Dean, 2019; Mumpower, 2001; Rahman, 2017)—empirical evidence from Adamawa State remains scarce. Thus, it is essential to move beyond normative assumptions and critically examine the extent, nature, and effectiveness of citizen participation in policy formulation within the state. This study, therefore, provides an empirical investigation into how citizens engage with policy processes in Adamawa State, the challenges they face, and the implications for democratic governance.

The experience of citizen participation in Nigeria has been largely discouraging due to entrenched political self-interest, weak institutional accountability, and persistent electoral malpractices. Although participation is frequently promoted as a pillar of democratic governance and a tool for rural development, many initiatives have failed to translate into genuine involvement or shared responsibility among citizens. The persistence of political patronage, bureaucratic inertia, and low civic education has continued to alienate citizens from policy processes.

In Adamawa State, the effectiveness of public policies and their successful implementation depend significantly on the quality of citizen participation in formulation and execution. However, existing evidence suggests that participation often remains symbolic rather than substantive. Many citizens are consulted only at later stages of policymaking or excluded entirely from agenda setting. This limited engagement raises concerns about elite capture, where political and traditional leaders dominate decision-making spaces, marginalizing youth, women, and rural populations.

Structural barriers such as centralized governance systems, weak institutional frameworks for consultation, and inadequate communication channels further restrict citizen involvement. Sociocultural factors—including gender norms, low literacy levels, ethnic loyalties, and distrust in government institutions—compound these challenges, resulting in uneven participation across communities. Moreover, while digital tools and social media platforms are emerging as alternative spaces for engagement, access disparities and limited digital literacy continue to hinder their full potential in rural areas.

Against this backdrop, there remains a lack of comprehensive, evidence-based assessments of how citizens in Adamawa State actually participate in policy formulation and how such participation influences policy outcomes. Therefore, this study aims to empirically examine the extent, patterns, and impact of citizen participation in policy formulation within Adamawa State. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Assess the level and quality of citizen participation in policy formulation; and
2. Examine the effect of citizen participation on policy implementation outcomes in Adamawa State.

By focusing on both the depth of participation and the barriers limiting it, the study provides practical insights for enhancing inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in governance at the state level.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Perspectives on Citizen Participation

Citizen participation is widely recognized as a cornerstone of democratic governance, promoting legitimacy, accountability, and inclusiveness in policymaking. However, its effectiveness depends on the degree to which citizens are genuinely involved in shaping and influencing public policy rather than being passive recipients of decisions made by elites. Kasymova and Schachter (2014) highlighted that delayed or superficial involvement of citizens in decision-making is not confined to any one country but represents a global challenge. While their work was situated outside Nigeria, similar patterns can be observed within Nigerian states, including Adamawa, where citizens are often engaged after major policy decisions have already been made. This reactive rather than proactive participation limits citizens' influence and weakens policy outcomes.

2.2 Determinants of Effective Participation

John (2013) and McKenna (2011) emphasized that the knowledge, skills, and civic competence of participants shape the quality of engagement. In the Nigerian context, limited civic education, low literacy levels, and inadequate awareness of participatory channels have consistently reduced the

depth of public involvement in governance. For instance, rural communities in Adamawa State often lack access to policy information or forums where they can express their views effectively. Consequently, the benefits of citizen participation — such as improved transparency and accountability — are undermined by capacity and access disparities.

Moreover, studies by Devas and Grant (2003) and Manor (2011) support the view that effective participation requires institutional frameworks that empower citizens to influence policy design and implementation. In Adamawa, however, weak institutional linkages between local governments and citizens, combined with bureaucratic inefficiency and political patronage, often transform participatory exercises into tokenistic consultations rather than platforms for genuine inclusion.

2.3 Structural and Sociocultural Barriers

Beyond capacity constraints, structural and sociocultural barriers continue to limit participation in Nigeria. Deep-rooted issues such as patriarchal norms, ethnic divisions, elite dominance, and mistrust of government institutions have been documented as major impediments to inclusive governance. In Adamawa State, these factors are particularly visible in rural areas where traditional leadership structures still shape local decision-making. Although such institutions can promote stability, they can also centralize authority and marginalize women, youth, and minority voices. Furthermore, despite the rise of digital platforms, technological barriers — including poor internet access and digital illiteracy — constrain online engagement, especially outside urban centers.

2.4 Identified Gaps

The reviewed literature demonstrates that while global and national studies acknowledge the value of participation, they often overlook the context-specific realities of subnational governance. There is limited empirical evidence examining how citizens in Adamawa State actually engage in policy formulation, how institutions mediate this engagement, and what practical outcomes result. Most studies are either normative or descriptive, focusing on idealized forms of participation rather than the lived experiences of citizens within Nigeria's evolving democratic landscape. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by empirically analyzing the extent, nature, and impact of citizen participation in Adamawa State's policy processes, while accounting for local sociopolitical dynamics.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on New Institutionalism Theory and the Power Model (Decisional and Non-Decisional Approaches) as analytical lenses for understanding how institutional structures and power relations shape citizen participation in Adamawa State.

2.5.1 New Institutionalism Theory

The New Institutionalism perspective (Hall & Taylor, 2006; DiMaggio & Powell, 2015) posits that institutions — comprising rules, norms, and practices — structure the behavior of political actors and influence how citizens interact with governance systems. In the context of Adamawa State, this theory helps explain how formal institutions (such as local government councils) and informal ones (such as traditional authorities) determine who participates in policy formulation and whose voices are heard. The sociological dimension of the theory emphasizes legitimacy and shared values, suggesting that when institutions lack transparency and inclusivity, citizen participation weakens. The rational choice aspect explains how actors within these institutions may pursue self-interest, limiting genuine public input. Meanwhile, the historical perspective underscores how past political practices, including centralized decision-making and patronage, continue to shape current participation patterns.

2.5.2 Power Model (Decisional and Non-Decisional Approaches)

The Power Model complements institutional theory by addressing how decision-making authority and agenda control affect citizen involvement. The decisional approach examines who makes policy decisions and how citizens influence them, while the non-decisional approach focuses on how powerful actors prevent certain issues from reaching the policy agenda. In Adamawa State, this model is particularly relevant: political elites and bureaucratic gatekeepers often determine which community concerns are considered “policy issues,” thereby marginalizing grassroots voices. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for identifying mechanisms that can redistribute power and foster more inclusive governance.

2.5.3 Application to the Study

By combining these frameworks, the study situates citizen participation within the institutional and power structures that define governance in Adamawa State. It recognizes that improving participation requires not only citizen awareness and capacity but also institutional reforms that democratize access to decision-making and reduce elite dominance. Thus, the theoretical foundation directly informs the study’s objectives — to assess the level of citizen participation and evaluate its influence on policy outcomes within the state’s democratic context.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of citizen participation in policy formulation in Adamawa State. The quantitative component focused on collecting numerical data through structured questionnaires to measure the extent and patterns of citizen involvement.

The qualitative component, on the other hand, gathered contextual insights through semi-structured interviews with selected stakeholders, including community leaders, civil society representatives, and local government officials. The combination of both methods allowed for data triangulation, enhancing the validity and depth of the findings.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Adamawa State, Nigeria, located in the northeastern region of the country. The state is administratively divided into three senatorial districts—Adamawa North, Central, and South—with 21 Local Government Areas (LGAs). The state's population, estimated at approximately 4.9 million (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), is culturally diverse, comprising multiple ethnic and religious groups. This diversity made Adamawa State an appropriate context for studying variations in citizen participation across geographical and sociocultural settings.

3.3 Population and Sampling Procedure

The target population comprised all adult citizens (aged 18 years and above) residing in Adamawa State. Using the Taro Yamane formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the sample size was determined to be approximately 400 respondents.

To ensure representativeness, stratified random sampling was employed. The three senatorial districts served as strata, and within each stratum, two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were purposively selected to capture urban–rural and demographic diversity: Mubi North (urban) and Mayo-Belwa (rural) from Adamawa North and South, and Fufere (semi-urban) from Adamawa Central. Within these LGAs, respondents were randomly selected from wards and communities. This approach minimized selection bias and allowed for equitable inclusion across the state's subregions.

For the qualitative component, 12 key informants were purposively selected from government ministries, local councils, and civil society organizations actively involved in participatory governance. These informants provided deeper insights into institutional practices and barriers to citizen engagement.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Two main instruments were used for data collection:

1. **Structured Questionnaire:** The questionnaire comprised five-point Likert scale items and closed-ended questions designed to measure citizens' participation levels, preferred engagement channels, perceived influence on policy decisions, and barriers to participation. It was pretested for clarity and reliability before field administration.

2. **Semi-Structured Interview Guide:** The interview guide was used to collect qualitative data from key informants, focusing on institutional processes, consultation mechanisms, and perceptions of inclusivity in policy formulation. The interviews provided nuanced explanations for quantitative trends observed in the survey data.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection occurred over a four-week period. Enumerators trained in ethical research and local language translation administered the questionnaires in person. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded with participants' consent. Ethical considerations—including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and anonymity—were strictly observed.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using Stata 17 and SPSS 25. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, and percentage were used to summarize participation patterns, while cross-tabulations and chi-square tests examined associations between demographic variables (e.g., education, gender, location) and participation levels.

Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically. Transcripts were coded to identify recurrent themes relating to barriers, institutional practices, and public perceptions of policy inclusion. Findings from both data strands were integrated during interpretation, allowing the qualitative results to explain and contextualize quantitative patterns.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

Instrument validity was ensured through expert review by academics in public administration and political science. Reliability testing of the questionnaire produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency. Triangulation between quantitative and qualitative data also enhanced the robustness of the results.

4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

This section presents and interprets the results of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the study. Data were obtained from 400 validly completed questionnaires and 12 key informant interviews. The analysis focuses on four major areas aligned with the research objectives:

1. Level of citizen participation in policy formulation,
2. Channels of participation,

3. Influence of citizen input on policy implementation, and
4. Integration of citizen feedback in law-making processes.

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used for summary analysis, while cross-tabulation and chi-square tests examined relationships between participation levels and selected demographic variables. Qualitative insights are included to explain the observed trends.

4.2 Level of Citizen Participation in Policy Formulation

Table 1: Frequency of Participation in Policy Formulation (2019–2023)

Participation Frequency	Frequency	Percent
1–2 times	57	14.3
3–5 times	34	8.5
More than 10 times	75	18.8
Never	228	57.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The results in Table 1 show that 57% of respondents have never participated in any policy formulation process in the last four years. Only 18.8% reported frequent participation (more than 10 times), while a combined 22.8% participated occasionally (1–5 times). This pattern indicates a low overall level of citizen participation, suggesting widespread disengagement or lack of opportunity for involvement. Cross-tabulation by education level revealed that respondents with tertiary education were significantly more likely to report participation ($\chi^2 = 12.47$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that awareness and literacy strongly influence civic engagement.

Qualitative data from interviews confirmed that participation is often limited to those “with access or connection to political figures,” indicating that elite capture and low civic sensitization remain key barriers to inclusive participation.

4.3 Channels of Participation

Table 2: Channels Utilized for Participation in Policy Formulation

Channels of Participation	Frequency	Percent (%)
Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)	168	42.0
Community forums or group discussions	185	46.3
Online surveys or feedback forms	18	4.5
Town hall meetings	17	4.3
Multiple channels (e.g., town hall + social media)	12	3.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The result in Table 2 revealed that, community forums (46.3%) and social media (42%) emerged as the dominant channels of engagement. Traditional forums such as town hall meetings and surveys accounted for less than 10% combined, revealing a shift toward informal and digital platforms as preferred modes of civic interaction.

Further analysis showed that younger respondents (aged 18–35) were significantly more active on social media ($p < 0.05$), while older respondents (46 and above) preferred in-person forums. This suggests a generational divide in participation style, highlighting the need for hybrid engagement strategies.

Interview data revealed that government institutions “rarely organize open consultations,” pushing citizens toward self-organized forums and online advocacy. This supports earlier findings that formal participation mechanisms are weak or inconsistent across local government areas.

4.4 Citizen Influence on Policy Implementation

Table 3: Perceived Influence of Citizen Input on Implemented Policies

Perceived Number of Policies Influenced	Frequency	Percent (%)
1–2 policies	140	35.0
3–5 policies	46	11.5
6–10 policies	18	4.5
None	196	49.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Results in Table 3 revealed that, nearly half of the respondents (49%) believe that citizen inputs had no influence on policies implemented in Adamawa State during the period. Only 35% felt that 1–2 policies reflected public contributions. This demonstrates a weak translation of participation into policy outcomes, suggesting that even when citizens engage, their voices rarely shape final decisions.

Interviews with civil society representatives indicated that government consultations are often “symbolic” and occur after decisions have been made, reinforcing a culture of tokenistic participation. This aligns with institutionalist perspectives, which argue that entrenched bureaucratic practices and centralized decision-making constrain meaningful citizen influence.

4.5 Integration of Citizen Feedback in Legislative Processes

Table 4: Perceived Incorporation of Citizen Feedback in Newly Enacted Laws

Number of Laws Incorporating Feedback	Frequency	Percent (%)
1–2 laws	162	40.5

3–5 laws	23	5.8
6–10 laws	18	4.5
None	197	49.3

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

The result in table 4 revealed that, about 49.3% of respondents believed that no newly enacted laws incorporated citizen feedback, while only 40.5% felt that 1–2 laws reflected such input. This points to a continuing disconnect between citizen consultation and legislative action. Key informant interviews corroborated this perception, with one local government official admitting that “citizen feedback is rarely documented or formally included in policy drafts.” This lack of procedural linkage between consultation and legislative drafting underscores institutional weaknesses in accountability and transparency.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

The findings collectively reveal that citizen participation in Adamawa State remains limited, fragmented, and weakly institutionalized. Although there are isolated instances of active engagement particularly among educated and urban citizens broader participation is hindered by structural, political, and sociocultural barriers. This outcome aligns with the argument by Devas and Grant (2003), who observed that in many African local governments, participation often exists more in rhetoric than in practice due to bureaucratic bottlenecks and lack of institutionalized consultation frameworks.

The low engagement rate (57% non-participation) confirms limited citizen access to decision-making processes. This pattern mirrors the findings of Arowolo and Aluko (2010) in their study on civic participation in Nigeria, which revealed that citizens’ involvement in local governance is largely constrained by inadequate awareness, political apathy, and elite dominance. Similarly, Kasymova and Schachter (2014) noted that post-decision consultation is a common global trend, suggesting that citizens are often engaged after policies are formulated rather than during the decision-making stage. In Adamawa, this translates into a system where participation is largely reactive, not proactive.

The weak influence of public input (49% reporting no policy effect) suggests that existing participatory mechanisms are largely symbolic or tokenistic. This corroborates Bochel’s (2006) argument that while participatory initiatives have expanded in many democracies, they often serve to legitimize pre-determined policy outcomes rather than genuinely shaping them. Similarly, Adeniyi and Fatile (2019) found that in Nigeria, participatory structures are often undermined by political interference and limited administrative transparency, reducing the effectiveness of citizen contributions in influencing policy decisions. The study also reflects the Power Model perspective,

where decision-makers exercise non-decisional power by excluding certain issues from policy agendas, effectively muting grassroots voices (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962).

The minimal incorporation of citizen feedback into newly enacted laws in Adamawa State reflects a disconnect between consultation and policy outcomes. This finding is consistent with John (2013) and McKenna (2011), who emphasized that the quality and impact of participation depend on citizens' competence, institutional openness, and political will. In the Nigerian context, Ezeani (2015) similarly observed that weak feedback mechanisms and lack of follow-up accountability often result in public contributions being ignored during legislative and policy drafting stages. The Adamawa case exemplifies this gap where input is collected but rarely integrated into final outcomes, reinforcing public skepticism about the value of participation.

These results illustrate a broader governance deficit characterized by weak institutional capacity, poor communication between government and citizens, and limited trust in public institutions. Despite the growing use of digital platforms for engagement, the absence of structured, accountable mechanisms has hindered the realization of meaningful citizen influence. Okafor and Onyishi (2017) emphasized that digital tools can enhance participation only when embedded within transparent and responsive governance systems—a condition largely unmet in Adamawa State.

Overall, the findings reaffirm that strengthening participatory governance in Adamawa State requires institutional reforms, civic education, and the formalization of feedback mechanisms. This conclusion aligns with Manor (2011), who argued that decentralization and institutional accountability are key drivers of inclusive governance in developing democracies. Thus, unless participatory processes in Adamawa evolve from symbolic exercises to substantive decision-making platforms, citizens' trust and democratic legitimacy will continue to erode.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the role of citizen participation in policy formulation in Adamawa State between 2019 and 2023. The findings revealed that although democratic governance structures are formally in place, citizen engagement remains limited, fragmented, and weakly institutionalized. More than half of the respondents had never participated in any policy formulation activity, while

nearly half believed that citizen contributions had no influence on the implementation of public policies or the enactment of new laws.

These outcomes point to a deeper participation deficit rooted in structural, political, and sociocultural constraints rather than mere disinterest. Structurally, the absence of institutionalized consultation frameworks and weak feedback mechanisms prevent citizens from engaging meaningfully in governance. Politically, elite dominance and bureaucratic control continue to restrict decision-making spaces, allowing only token forms of participation. Socioculturally, low civic awareness, limited access to information, and gender and class inequalities further marginalize large sections of the population, especially rural residents and women.

Drawing on the New Institutionalism Theory, these findings underscore how institutional rules, norms, and historical legacies in Adamawa State continue to reinforce centralized decision-making and limit public accountability. The Power Model further explains that citizen exclusion is sustained by non-decisional power, where elites control which issues reach the policy agenda, effectively silencing alternative voices. Overcoming these barriers requires a fundamental rethinking of how institutions interact with citizens—shifting participation from an ad-hoc exercise to an institutionalized democratic practice that redistributes power and fosters accountability.

5.2 Recommendations

To strengthen citizen participation in policy formulation in Adamawa State, the study recommends the institutionalization of participatory governance through a state-level Citizen Participation and Consultation Policy, mandating regular stakeholder engagement and the establishment of consultation units within ministries. Local governments should be empowered to organize Community Policy Forums that enable grassroots input into policymaking.

The government, in partnership with the National Orientation Agency (NOA), civil society, and educational institutions, should implement continuous civic education programs targeting youth, women, and rural populations to build awareness and participation skills. Additionally, digital inclusion should be promoted through the creation of a State Digital Governance Portal to facilitate online consultations and transparency, complemented by radio-based outreach for rural communities.

To enhance inclusivity, government institutions must mainstream gender and disability representation in consultation processes and collaborate with traditional and religious leaders to challenge cultural barriers. Finally, accountability mechanisms such as publicly accessible Policy Feedback Reports should be institutionalized to ensure citizen inputs are documented, acted upon, and communicated transparently, thereby fostering public trust and responsive governance.

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