

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING MODELS: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR UZBEKISTAN

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Participatory budgeting (PB) has emerged as one of the most significant innovations in democratic governance over the past three decades. Since its inception in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989, PB has spread to over 7,000 municipalities worldwide, enabling citizens to directly influence the allocation of public funds. This study conducts a comparative analysis of PB models across multiple countries and regions — including Latin America, North America, Europe, and Asia — to identify institutional, technological, and socio-economic factors that determine the success of participatory mechanisms. The findings are then applied to evaluate Uzbekistan's "Open Budget" initiative, which has been operational since 2019.

The theoretical foundation of participatory budgeting rests on three core concepts. First, direct democracy theory, rooted in the works of Rousseau and Dewey, posits that genuine democratic governance requires direct citizen involvement in decision-making. Second, Habermas's communicative rationality theory argues that open public deliberation among equal participants produces the most rational collective decisions. Third, social capital theory, as developed by Putnam (1993) and Coleman (1990), holds that collective participation builds interpersonal trust, cooperative norms, and social networks — all of which strengthen governance quality. These three pillars form the conceptual framework through which PB mechanisms across different national contexts can be systematically compared.

The Porto Alegre model remains the benchmark. The city's PB cycle spans 11 months, divides the city into 16 districts with 5 thematic forums, and allocates approximately 20 percent of the municipal budget (~USD 70 million annually) through citizen assemblies and delegated councils. In the United States, New York City expanded its PB program from 4 districts in 2011 to 33 by 2019, with each council member allocating at least USD 1 million in discretionary funds. Boston's "Youth Lead the Change" program, launched in 2014, is the first youth-targeted PB initiative in the U.S., giving residents aged 12-25 control over USD 1 million. In Europe, Milan (Italy) allocates EUR 4.5 million across nine districts, while Madrid (Spain) distributes approximately EUR 100 million annually through its "Decide Madrid" digital platform, operating in a three-phase online cycle. In Asia, the Indian state of Kerala has involved over 10 percent of its 31 million residents since 1996 through a five-stage process, with documented positive impacts on life expectancy and infant mortality. South Korea's "Open Discussions for the Public" mechanism conducts six-day deliberations across 12 policy areas, earning the country the second-highest ranking on the Open Budget Index among 117 nations.

Uzbekistan introduced its PB mechanism in 2019 through the "Open Budget" information portal. The system has undergone rapid institutional evolution: from quarterly cycles with supplementary budget funds (2019-2020) to a nationwide two-season format covering all districts and cities from 2022 onward. The minimum allocation was raised from 10 to 30 percent of supplementary district budgets, and from 2021 a mandatory 5 percent of total

confirmed district expenditures was directed to citizen-selected projects. By 2023, over 16 million votes were cast in the first season alone, with 1,666 winning projects funded from 1.572 trillion soums. In 2024, the introduction of a "one citizen — one vote" rule marked a shift toward more equitable and transparent participation, though it reduced aggregate vote counts due to the elimination of multi-vote mobilization practices.

The comparative analysis reveals five key findings applicable to Uzbekistan. First, all successful PB implementations are anchored by a robust legal-institutional framework — Uzbekistan's Presidential Decrees PQ-5072, PQ-5250, and PQ-197 provide this foundation. Second, digital technologies (as seen in Madrid, New York, and South Korea) substantially expand participation breadth; Uzbekistan's portal and SMS-based voting system align with this trend, but further mobile integration remains a priority. Third, population budget literacy is a critical quality factor — Korea's and India's experiences show the importance of state-led information campaigns. Fourth, small-scale neighborhood projects yield faster, more visible results and sustain public engagement. Fifth, a phased funding increase strategy (Uzbekistan's growth from 5 percent to over 8 trillion soums by 2023) is consistent with global best practice. However, Uzbekistan's hybrid model — combining online, SMS, and offline channels — is uniquely suited to its demographic and infrastructural context, particularly given the digital divide between urban (94 percent internet penetration) and rural (92.6 percent) populations observed in 2024.

This study demonstrates that Uzbekistan's participatory budgeting model has achieved significant institutional maturation in a short period. Future development should prioritize expanding youth participation (currently limited to 18+, while several international models start at 14-16), increasing budget literacy programs, and establishing a standardized monitoring framework for project implementation quality. These measures would strengthen both the breadth and depth of citizen engagement, aligning Uzbekistan's PB practice more closely with leading international standards.

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