

# Is Anyone Listening? Citizen Participation and The Illusion of Democracy in A Peru Regional Government

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## ABSTRACT

*This research examines the link between citizen participation and public decision-making in an entity of the public sector in the province of Paita in Peru, in 2024. The research is based on the premise that democratic governance, good public administration, and sustainable development require the involvement of citizens. The research has a non-experimental, descriptive, quantitative design. Information was obtained from questionnaires and interviews of 200 citizens and 40 municipal officials. The research analyzes citizens' participation and the decision-making process, and their dimensions, in the light of commitment, surveillance, and oversight, in the case of participation; and immediate response, effective decisions, and resolution of difficulties, in terms of decision-making. The results suggest that the citizens are "participating the most on average." Officials' decision-making is also considered, overall, to be largely medium. The trends in citizen participation and determining dimensions are similar, with the majority of scores falling into the middle range. The study underscores the imperative to enhance participatory governance through strengthened communication channels, digital engagement tools, and institutional mechanisms that facilitate collective action. By shedding light on the lived realities of municipal administration in a non-centralized, Global South context, the research offers critical insights for the design of inclusive and responsive public policies. These findings contribute to broader discussions on democratic innovation and the reconfiguration of citizen-state relations in public service delivery.*

## Introduction

Citizen participation is a key element of democratic governance and a vital factor in effective public management of contemporary administrative systems (Tholen, 2015). Institutions on a global scale are coming to realize the importance of

engaging ordinary citizens in decision-making in order to enhance the transparency, legitimacy, and accountability of public systems. In the Latin American and Peruvian context, municipal governments are the front line of public administration where citizen participation is most immediate and visible. However, the implementation of formal structures, effective and meaningful participation, is varied and has often remained symbolic (Bensus, 2021).

Participatory governance has in recent times been stressed by international and national laws. The inclusion of inclusive decision-making as a pathway to peace, justice, and strong institutions is being increasingly cited as a dimension of 'peace, justice, and strong institutions'. This is explicitly referred to in Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The legal construction in Peru—in its Organic Law of Municipalities (Law No. 27972) and the Participatory Budget Law (Law No. 28056)—which makes possible the participation of citizens in participatory budgeting at the local level, is ordered. But actual use continues to be a challenge. Despite legal provisions, the dichotomy between *de jure* and *de facto* participation continues to weaken the democratic process.

This gap between institutional mandates and operational practices becomes particularly visible in local governments like those in the City of Paita. Local government has a responsibility to enhance the quality of local life through effective use of resources, program development, and planning for the future. The lack of substantial citizen engagement undermines the efficacy of these aims. Citizens frequently lack the means, resources, or knowledge to express their rights and affect the policies that directly affect their lives (Loxton, 2022).

Globally, the public administration theory has developed to support models of participation (Dacombe & Wojciechowska, 2024). The idea of "collaborative governance" is that stakeholders should be actively involved throughout policy cycles, from diagnosing the problem to devising and implementing solutions. Valdiviezo (2013) and Sanhueza (2004) underscore that participation generates trust and promotes accountability and that it guarantees that local development plans reflect community priorities. On the other hand, the lack of participatory mechanisms results in policy failures, resource misallocation, and disengaged citizens. Hence, any institutional reform not addressing participation is likely to exacerbate governance failure.

In the Peruvian context, decentralization has increased the power of the municipalities. And yet, this has not necessarily resulted in better service delivery to the public or more effective citizen oversight. Weak communication mechanisms, gaps in civic education, restricted access to policymakers, and an administrative culture of opacity are some of the contributing factors against more substantive participation (Villacorta, 2013). Also, a top-down approach to governance still prevails in many cities, with citizens considered as mere recipients instead of active partners.

One of the most notable examples is the city of Paita. As a port city with high socio-economic potential, Paita needs flexible and participatory governance

mechanisms to accommodate its citizenry. However, the empirical evidence indicates that citizen engagement is low and municipal decision-making is opaque. Public hearings, participatory budgets, and suggestion boxes are some of the tools that have been formally established, but their impact is questionable. There is a need to empirically investigate to what extent citizen involvement in Paita is an operative reality and not just a bureaucratic rubber-stamping.

Recent literature highlights the significance of this judgment. Studies such as that of Morales (2019) in Colombia and Montecinos et al. (2020) in Chile show that even though participation mechanisms exist across Latin America, their use and effect depend largely on institutional culture, administrative capacity, and socio-political context. These studies all point to the promise of participatory governance in achieving development outcomes, only if done right. Similarly, works in Ecuador (Paliz, 2022) and Mexico (Sánchez & Córdova, 2022) have shown that, in local administrations, the distance between intentions and practices obfuscates citizenship functions.

Despite the rich theoretical foundation and emerging empirical works, Peru still lacks a robust municipality-level assessment that examines the tangible effects of citizens' participation in decision-making. Most of the existing research is normative or legalistic, which emphasizes the constitutional justification for participating but not necessarily the instrumental effects of it. In addition, there has been limited focus on assessing the extent of citizens' perceptions, engagement habits, and institutional receptiveness at the provincial level.

This study aims to fill that gap by looking at the relationship between citizen engagement and decision-making in a public institution in the Province of Paita. In contrast to the grim studies concentrating on the development of the intended institutional framework or policies themselves, this research employs a descriptive-correlative orientation in order to account for citizen and administrative perceptions. The relevance of this research is that it contributes to theory based on its empirical findings on participatory governance in Peru. It provides data at local levels for policy interventions, capacity-building, and institutional reform. The results are also anticipated to have broader applications to other cities dealing with comparable participatory issues. The study also helps render the democratic ideal in operation at the local working level, by giving light and shade to the processes and constraints of citizen participation and agency in public administration.

Moreover, this research is consistent with the Peruvian interest in complying with international governance standards. Based on the above discussion, the research question of this study is: "To what extent does citizen participation lead to the decision-making of a public body in the Province of Paita in 2024?"

## Literature Review

Citizen participation is a fundamental principle of democratic governance, denoting the active involvement of citizens in public decision-making beyond

merely casting votes (Verba et al., 1978). Citizens' involvement may simply be defined as engagement of citizens with a view to their becoming effective partners in the task of improving their own communities. It carries the idea that governance is about more than just elected officials; that governance is a shared activity where people can bring forward ideas, express concerns, and help shape the policies that, in turn, shape their lives. Beyond symbolic inclusion, over several decades, scholars such as Arnstein (1969) have discussed different levels of participation – from tokenism to full citizen control – arguing that symbolic inclusion is necessary although not sufficient. Some recent studies applied Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation to measure citizen participation in local development, particularly in Indonesia (Yani et al., 2017)

In the Peruvian context, citizen engagement is constitutionally guaranteed through procedures including participatory budgeting, public hearings, citizen oversight committees, and local consultation forums. Valdiviezo (2013) characterizes this privilege as a democratic necessity that promotes civic responsibility and guarantees responsiveness in public administration. Ocampo (2018) elaborates on this, contending that involvement fosters transparency, public trust, and more equal governmental policies.

Yet in practice, the success of citizen involvement in Peru has been uneven. As Sanhueza (2004) also points out, legal provisions without real implementation can result in public frustration and policy inaction. This discrepancy between rights and practice needs to be empirically studied, and the case of the Province of Païta is an example of how participation works in practice.

### *Theoretical Framework: Participation and Governance*

Public administration theory now has an emphasis on participatory governance in which stakeholders, including public, private, and civil, are encouraged to participate in the policy process. Collaborative governance, as defined by Ansell and Gash (2008), engages multiple stakeholders in organised decision making to ensure mutual accountability and innovation.

In Latin America, this theoretical perspective coincides with the post-authoritarian imperative to deepen democracy. As Kooiman (2003) points out, the governance model emphasises the significance of negotiation and of networked relationships as prevalent in contemporary public management. In this setting, citizen participation is not only consultative, but it is instrumental to good governance.

In Peru, Montecinos, Contreras, and Fuentes (2020) present empirical evidence from Chile indicating that participatory models improve legitimacy and effectiveness, particularly in local governance. These results are consistent with Morales (2019), which suggests strong associations of participatory mechanisms with the level of public satisfaction about the municipal performance of Colombian municipalities.

Local governments are typically the level of government that citizens engage with first and foremost. They are therefore well placed to champion participatory

democracy." The Organic Municipal Law (Law No 27972) and the Law on Participatory Budget (Law No 28056) are frameworks that support the use of participative instruments, such as: public hearings, participatory budgeting, citizen oversight (veedurías), physical or digital suggestion boxes, open city councils (cabildos abiertos) (Simelio-Solà et al., 2021)

Rodríguez (2019) states that these mechanisms should work, be inclusive, and have accessibility. But in practice, many local governments face resource constraints as well as limited knowledge on civic duties and resistance from administrations. Paliz (2022) discovered that in Los Ríos province, Ecuador, participatory laws are in place, but a lack of bureaucratic transparency and citizen apathy prevent successful implementation.

Comparable tendencies are observed in Paita. In the case of the municipality, there may be policies and structures, but the extent to which citizens are well-informed, enabled, and inclined to participate is not well studied. Without proactive outreach and education, these mechanisms could become formal processes rather than authentic channels for impact (López, 2020; Zuñiga, 2018).

### *Decision-Making in Public Administration*

In the public sector, decision-making relates to the steps by which policies, programs, and administrative actions are developed and implemented. Problem definition, assessment of alternatives, solution selection, and implementation are all part of it. The key to good decision-making is the information, the consultation mechanisms, and accountability (Sánchez, 2020).

Decisions out in the open are political decisions and are value statements (Sánchez & Jaimes, 2019). At the local level, such decisions impact infrastructure, public service delivery, and resource allocation. Therefore, there is a legitimation gain, and decision quality is likely to be increased by the participation of citizens in these processes. As Salinas (2021) puts it, greater involvement in decision-making results in more sustainable and publicly supported decisions.

The impact of public input on decisions, if any, is yet less clear. Labour power worship of authorisers by participants. Local councils tend to keep the power to decide, and the role of the citizen is one of advisor, as Fernández and Rainey (2006) note. This gap raises questions about the role of citizens in processes that are shown in principle to be 'participatory'. "This is especially pertinent in Paita, where the municipal government has not always effectively communicated how citizen input is used to inform final decisions.

This study is in line with the study of Camacho (2018), which indicated that without actively encouraging oversight at the local level and ensuring the independence of municipalities, citizen supervision would be weak. Effective citizen participation, as measured in this study, includes the following three interconnected dimensions:

The first is that of being committed. This is called the willingness of the citizens to participate thanks to this activity. Valdiviezo (2013) refers to it as an

attitude and behavior toward civic engagement. Dissatisfaction with institutions, inadequate communication, and perceived inefficiency are frequently associated with lower levels of commitment.

The second factor is monitoring. In addition to proposing and selecting, citizens oversee the implementation of public policies. Louffat (2012) observes that this routine allows for accountability and offers an immediate response for administrators.

The third component is oversight. More than passive watching, oversight includes structured monitoring, audits, and performance reviews managed by citizen boards or other third parties. Perero (2002) calls this a watchdog role to reduce corruption and waste.

### *Prior Studies and Empirical Evidence*

Comparative studies throughout Latin America reveal the potential and challenges of promoting participatory governance in multiple municipal settings. In Chile, a rigorous empirical study by Montecinos, Contreras, and Fuentes (2020) finds a strong and highly significant association (rho of Spearman's 0.85) between citizens' participation and municipal efficiency. Their research found that local authorities who conducted participatory practices (e.g. open planning sessions, citizen monitoring frameworks) showed better organisational fit, improved resource deployment, and more satisfied citizens. This highlights the possibility for participatory power to go beyond mere tokenism and bring about real service delivery improvement when institutionalized appropriately.

In the case of Colombia, Morales (2019) explored participatory planning instruments and their effect on fiscal governance and citizen trust. The survey proved that local governments that had the citizens involved in the budgeting and planning decisions had not only enhanced the transparency of their operations, but they had also built stronger social capital and trust in the local government. Morales determined that through these participatory spaces, they were able to remove some of the mystery of the organizational process and to dispel the feelings of corruption. But he also warned that, without ongoing institutional support, and if not carefully facilitated, such initiatives could just as easily falter or be co-opted to be exclusionary, only preserving privileged segments of a community.

A further important dimension to the discussion is offered by Mexico's experience, as outlined in Sánchez and Córdova (2022), which stresses the relevance of feedback loops to participatory governance. Their study found that meaningful engagement isn't just about getting input from citizens at the outset, but also about engaging them over time on how their input has had an impact on a policy or program. In cities where citizen suggestions were openly included and feedback was consistently communicated, participation rates stayed high. When people's contributions were ignored or not acted upon by those in power, disconnection and cynicism also multiplied. So, continued engagement is due not just to access but to that responsiveness and reciprocity.

In conclusion, these Latin American case studies converge on a common, crucial point: the existence of participatory laws and mechanisms is not a sufficient condition for ensuring meaningful engagement or better governance results. For participation to lead to policy influence, it is important that there is political will, institutional reforms, and a strategic investment in empowering citizens. The Paita, Peru case is consistent with these more general regional findings as well as with a more specific finding that although there are frameworks of participation in place at a legal and procedural level, these have been relatively ineffective at the level of civic engagement, transparency, and follow-up. What this study adds as a unique feature is a local, empirical analysis of the overlapping of participation and decision-making in a medium-sized Peruvian municipality. By considering the perceptions of both citizens and local officials, it serves to fill an important research void in Peruvian governance literature, providing empirical data from which more inclusive, accountable municipal policies and practices can be drawn.

### *Critical Perspectives and Gaps in Literature*

On the basis of a review of the literature, the role of citizens and citizen participation in public management is mapped and critically evaluated. Although there is a general acceptance in the literature of the importance of citizens and citizen participation to public management, there are some gaps and some sites of critique. Numerous papers target the process of involvement without investigating their efficacy sufficiently. What is also needed are more studies that investigate the barriers to effective citizen participation and the strategies that can be used to overcome these barriers. Several reports indicate that there is a discrepancy between what is planned to be done participatively and what is done in practice.

The political character of citizen participation also needs more critical examination. Citizen participation, as a political issue, is not uniform, and opposing perspectives are not always consistent. This suggests that research needs to pay attention to the ways in which political dynamics condition the opportunities and limits of citizens' participation. Studies are required that investigate the power relations and possible imbalance in access to, and control over, decision-making processes in the local authorities.

The literature also often lacks a comparative perspective, so that findings can hardly be generalized across contexts. Consideration of such local contextual conditions that can affect citizen participation (such as different political cultures, socio-economic context, and level of institutional capacity) needs to be the focus of attention in future research.

This literature review section identifies that citizen participation is a multifaceted phenomenon crucial to democratic governance and sustainable development. Though previous literature contributes much to our understanding of the importance of citizen participation, there is a demand for more research that focuses on the feasibility of citizen participation programs, the political dimension of citizen involvement, and international comparisons. These critical observations contribute as a background to the current study and serve as a reminder to gain a

better understanding of the relationship between citizen participation and decision making in the public organization context in the Paita province of Peru.

## Research Methods

This research employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive, non-experimental design to examine the relationship between citizen participation and decision-making within a public entity in the City of Paita, Peru, in 2024. The study aimed to characterize citizen participation and decision-making and relate the two variables in the context of a municipal government. This methodology was selected by the research objectives, which sought to measure and analyze the perceptions and practices of both citizens and municipal employees.

The research design was non-experimental, as variables were not manipulated; instead, they were observed and evaluated in their natural context. A transversal approach was used, collecting data at a single time. This design is appropriate for descriptive and correlational studies that seek to understand existing relationships without inferring causality. While this approach has limitations, particularly in its inability to establish causal links, it is suitable for gaining insights into the problem. The study was also considered basic research aimed at enhancing understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

The study included two main segments: adult citizens of Paita and officials working in the municipality. The sample consisted of 200 citizens and 40 municipal officials, selected through a non-probabilistic and intentional sampling method based on the researcher's criteria and the willingness of participants to respond to the instruments. Exclusion criteria included individuals not residing in the city or unwilling to participate.

Data was collected using two questionnaires: one for citizens to evaluate their participation and another for municipal employees to assess decision-making processes. These instruments were designed by the author based on the theoretical framework and were subjected to a pilot test to ensure their reliability. The pilot test showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.852 for the citizen participation questionnaire and 0.812 for the decision-making instrument, indicating good internal consistency.

The survey technique was applied in the field to collect the data, with participants providing their informed consent before participation. This ethical consideration ensured that participants understood the study's purpose and their right to decline or withdraw at any time. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, and means to characterize each variable and its dimensions. Tables and graphs were used to present the findings in an organized manner, focusing on an average interval above 50% of the rating.

Normality tests, specifically the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, were conducted to assess the distribution of the data. These tests were important to determine the statistical treatment of the data, and the study found that the data corresponding to

both variables and their dimensions presented a normal distribution. Although the study aimed to correlate citizen participation and decision-making, a correlation test could not be performed because the samples for the two groups were independent and unequal. This limitation on sample size inequality restricts the conclusions that can be drawn from the study.

The research adhered to ethical principles, including respect for participants, confidentiality, and non-maleficence. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, the anonymity of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any point. The research also complied with the guidelines set by the Graduate School of César Vallejo University. A similarity report using Turnitin software ensured less than 20% of the document was plagiarized.

The methodological approach was carefully selected to align with the study's objectives and research problem. The quantitative design, combined with the descriptive and correlational analyses, provided a structured framework for understanding the relationship between citizen participation and decision-making in the municipal context of City of Paita, Peru. While the study offers valuable insights, the limitations in sample size and inability to perform correlation tests highlight areas for future research to build upon these findings.

## Results and Discussion

The study conducted in 2024 examined citizen participation and decision-making within a public entity in Paita, Peru. Quantitative analysis revealed significant trends in both variables and their dimensions. As seen in Table 1, the study shows that citizen participation is the majority (52.5%), demonstrating an average level of engagement, while 21% showed high participation and 26.5% exhibited low involvement. These findings indicate that while a considerable portion of the population engages in participatory activities, a substantial segment with limited involvement remains.

**Table 1.** Citizen Participation in Public Organization at the Paita Province

Interval	Frequency	Percentage
High	42	21 %
Half	105	52,5 %
Low	53	26,5 %
Total	200	100 %

*Source: Primary data based on the survey (2024)*

In Table 2, this study shows that decision-making within the public entity, the majority of officials (57.5%) displayed a medium level of engagement in decision-making processes. A smaller proportion (23%) showed low engagement, while 19.5% demonstrated high involvement. This distribution suggests a need for enhancing opportunities for more active participation in decision-making among public officials. Further analysis of the surveyed officials revealed that 45% received

a medium rating in decision-making, 25% received a high rating, and the remaining 30% were rated low. These results underscore the importance of developing strategies to improve decision-making capabilities and engagement across all levels of the public entity.

**Table 2.** Decision-Making in Public Organization at the Paita Province

Interval	Frequency	Percentage
High	10	25 %
Half	18	45 %
Low	12	30 %
Total	40	100 %

*Source: Primary data based on the survey (2024)*

The findings highlight the interconnected nature of citizen participation and decision-making within the public sector. While there is a foundation of engagement in both areas, there is significant room for improvement. The study suggests that efforts to enhance citizen participation could influence the quality of decision-making processes within the public entity. Conversely, improving decision-making mechanisms might encourage greater citizen involvement. These insights provide valuable direction for policymakers and public administrators seeking to strengthen democratic processes and governance in Paita, Peru.

### *Dimensions of Citizen Participation*

The study explored the dimensions of citizen participation and decision-making in municipal governance, revealing nuanced patterns of engagement and effectiveness. In terms of citizen participation, the research examined three key dimensions: commitment, monitoring, and oversight. Across all three dimensions, a consistent trend emerged, with the majority of citizens demonstrating medium levels of engagement. For commitment, 49% of citizens showed medium levels, while 30% exhibited low commitment and 21% displayed high commitment. Similarly, in the monitoring dimension, 56% of citizens demonstrated medium levels, 26.5% showed low levels, and 17.5% exhibited high levels (see Table 3). The oversight dimension followed a comparable pattern, with 45% of citizens in the average range, 35% in the low range, and 17.5% in the high range. This consistent pattern suggests a substantial potential for cultivating more active citizen involvement across all dimensions of participation.

**Table 3.** Dimensions of Citizen Participation in Public Organization at the Paita Province

Dimension	Commitment		Surveillance		Supervision	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
High	42	22	35	17,5	39	19,5
Half	98	49	112	56	115	57,5
Low	60	30	53	25,5	46	23
Total	200	100	200	100	200	100

*Source: Primary data based on the survey (2024)*

The research also delved into the dimensions of decision-making among municipal employees, focusing on immediate response, effective decisions, and resolution of difficulties. The findings revealed a similar trend to that observed in citizen participation, with the majority of employees demonstrating moderate levels of effectiveness across all dimensions. Table 4 presents that in the immediate response category, 42.5% of employees showed medium effectiveness, 37.5% exhibited low effectiveness, and 20% demonstrated high effectiveness. For effective decision-making, 47.5% of employees fell into the medium range, 35% in the low range, and 17.5% in the high range. Regarding the resolution of difficulty, 45% of employees showed medium effectiveness, 28.89% low effectiveness, and 22.5% high effectiveness. These results highlight the need for improvements in decision-making processes within municipal governance.

**Table 4.** Dimensions of Decision-Making of Employees in Public Organizations at the Paita Province

Dimension	Commitment		Surveillance		Supervision	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
High	9	22,5	8	20	7	17,5
Half	18	45	17	42,5	19	47,5
Low	13	28,8	15	37,5	14	35
Total	40	100	40	100	40	100

*Source: Primary data based on the survey (2024)*

To ensure the validity of the statistical analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to assess the normality of distribution for both variables and their dimensions. The results indicated that the data for citizen participation and its dimensions (commitment, surveillance, and oversight) were normally distributed, with statistical significance values below the 0.05 threshold. Similarly, the data for decision-making and its dimensions (immediate response, effective decisions, and difficulty resolution) also exhibited normal distribution. These findings were crucial in determining the appropriate statistical techniques for further analysis.

Despite the study's aim to analyze the correlation between citizen participation and decision-making, applying a correlation test was impossible due to the independent nature and unequal sample sizes of the two groups. This limitation restricts the ability to conclude how these two variables influence each other. However, the descriptive analysis and normality tests provide valuable insights into the characteristics of each variable independently. The inability to correlate the two variables statistically underscores the need for future research to focus on developing methodologies that can effectively examine the relationship between citizen participation and decision-making in municipal governance.

The research results reveal a consistent pattern of moderate engagement across both citizen participation and decision-making processes within the public entity in the province of Paita. Responses predominantly clustered in the average or medium range, indicating a moderate level of engagement rather than a high one. This finding suggests that while there is some degree of citizen involvement and decision-making activity, there is substantial room for improvement in fostering greater engagement across all dimensions of both variables.

The data underscores the need to enhance citizen participation and decision-making mechanisms to achieve greater integration. By improving these processes, the public entity could potentially increase citizen engagement and decision-making effectiveness, ultimately working towards a greater public good. However, it is important to note that the study's limitations, particularly the inability to conduct a correlation test, restrict the conclusions that can be drawn about the relationship between citizen participation and decision-making. This limitation highlights the need for further research employing a more robust design and methodology to overcome the constraints of the current study.

Despite these limitations, the results provide a detailed snapshot of citizen participation and decision-making within the public entity. While there is evidence of engagement, the findings also reveal significant opportunities for improvement. These insights serve as a valuable foundation for developing targeted interventions and policies to enhance citizen participation, refine decision-making processes, and improve the integration of these two crucial aspects of public governance. Future research and policy initiatives can build upon these findings to create more effective strategies for fostering civic engagement and improving public administration in Paita Province.

## ***Discussion***

This study explored the dynamics of citizen participation and decision-making within a public entity in the Paita province of Peru, revealing a complex landscape where moderate engagement coexists with a clear need for improvement. The findings indicate a consistent trend of moderate engagement in both citizen participation and decision-making. While a notable portion of citizens demonstrates some level of participation (52.5% at an average level), and officials show moderate involvement in decision-making (57.5% at a medium level), a significant opportunity exists to enhance these levels. The distribution of citizen participation across its dimensions – commitment, monitoring, and oversight – further highlights

this moderate engagement. Similarly, the decision-making dimensions of immediate response, effective decisions, and resolution of difficulty show a similar trend, with the majority of officials clustering in the average range. This suggests that while existing mechanisms facilitate some level of engagement, they do not fully promote active and consistent involvement.

The considerable percentage of citizens exhibiting low participation (26.5%) underscores the need to address potential barriers to engagement, such as lack of awareness, limited access to information, or feelings of disempowerment. The moderate engagement in decision-making among officials (with 23% at low and 19.5% at high levels) suggests that while they are somewhat involved, there may be room for greater autonomy and responsibility in their roles. The normality tests confirm the distribution of the data, suggesting that it is appropriate for the descriptive statistics performed, although they do not allow for further statistical analysis of the correlation between the two variables.

A key finding of the study is the inability to establish a correlation between citizen participation and decision-making due to the independent samples of citizens and officials and the unequal sample sizes, which prevented a correlation test. This lack of correlation reveals that the two variables are not necessarily working together or impacting each other as might be desired for the ideal functioning of a public entity. This finding aligns with some existing literature while also revealing important differences. Several studies emphasize the importance of citizen participation as a cornerstone of democratic governance and public management. For instance, Serrano (2015) points out that democracy implies citizens have the right to participate in the management of their authorities. However, the current study's findings suggest that the practical application of this principle is inconsistent and needs improvement.

The importance of communication and transparency is a recurrent theme in the literature. Hong and Cho (2018) note that poor communication can lead to misinformation and lack of public confidence. The current study also points to the need for better communication channels to facilitate citizen participation, consistent with the idea that active participation requires clear and accessible information, as well as transparency on the part of the local government. The study's findings on moderate participation levels contrast with studies that advocate for more active and direct involvement of citizens in all stages of project management. Pinochet (2017) found that active participation in community life contributes to a more cohesive society, yet the present study does not show this active participation to the degree required.

The study reinforces the concept that effective municipal management requires the integration of citizen participation, as highlighted by the Organic Law of Municipalities (2003). However, the results show that this integration is not fully realized at the local level. Some literature suggests that a lack of citizen participation can be linked to political dynamics and favoritism. The current study notes that different points of view may exist, but they don't always present the same

orientation. The need for consensus and citizen satisfaction regarding municipal actions is highlighted as a requirement for effective management.

Prior research in Mexico by Sánchez and Córdova (2022) also found a need for active citizen participation in public administration, aligning with the current study's emphasis on the need for citizen participation in decision-making and municipal management. The study points to the need to develop digital tools and technologies to enhance citizen engagement and improve the decision-making process. This suggests that future research could explore the potential of digital platforms in fostering greater citizen participation and more effective decision-making in public entities.

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into public management practices in the Paita province, highlighting several areas for improvement and potential strategies for enhancing citizen engagement and decision-making processes. The consistent trend of moderate engagement observed in the study underscores the need for targeted interventions to address specific barriers to participation. These interventions should focus on providing clear information, creating accessible channels for citizen input, and promoting greater inclusion in decision-making processes. To achieve this, it is crucial to establish robust communication channels between the public entity and its citizens, utilizing diverse media, digital platforms, and regular public forums that are clear, accessible, and interactive to foster trust and engagement.

The study also demonstrates the potential for more active and continuous citizen participation in public policies and oversight. This can be achieved by empowering neighbourhood councils and civil associations and promoting actions integrating citizens in public management. Such initiatives would not only enhance the quality of decision-making but also strengthen the democratic fabric of the community. Furthermore, the findings highlight the need to improve decision-making processes within the public entity. This could involve developing training programs for municipal officials, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and promoting collaborative decision-making approaches incorporating citizen input.

The importance of strategic planning in municipal management emerges as another key implication of the study. Effective resource allocation and better attention to the population's needs can be achieved through comprehensive strategic planning processes that consider both short-term and long-term objectives. Additionally, the findings emphasize the critical role of transparency and accountability in municipal management. Implementing measures such as publishing relevant information, ensuring oversight of municipal projects, and creating mechanisms for citizen monitoring of public resources can significantly enhance public trust and engagement.

While this study provides a detailed snapshot of citizen participation and decision-making in a public entity in Paita, it also reveals considerable opportunities for further research. Future studies should build upon these findings to develop robust strategies that promote more active, continuous, and meaningful citizen

engagement in municipal governance. By improving participation and decision-making processes, public entities can foster better outcomes and a higher quality of life for their citizens. Such research could explore innovative approaches to citizen engagement, evaluate the effectiveness of different communication strategies, and assess the long-term impact of increased citizen participation on municipal governance and community well-being.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between citizen participation and decision-making in a public entity in the Paita province in 2024. Although a direct correlation between these variables could not be established, the research yielded valuable insights into their levels and characteristics. The findings revealed a consistent trend of moderate engagement in both citizen participation and decision-making processes. Citizen participation was characterized according to its dimensions of commitment, monitoring, and oversight, while decision-making was assessed based on immediate response, effective decisions, and resolution of difficulty.

The significance of these findings lies in their implications for public management practices. The moderate levels of citizen participation and decision-making practices highlight the need to improve the municipality's engagement with its citizens. This lack of optimal engagement suggests that current practices may not be conducive to a fully functional and transparent public administration. Furthermore, the absence of a correlation between citizen participation and decision-making indicates a potential disconnect between these two processes, which are typically considered interlinked and ineffective local governance.

Based on these results, several recommendations can be proposed. Municipal authorities should prioritize updating information and creating spaces for dialogue to enhance transparency and foster greater citizen involvement. Public entities should develop comprehensive training programs for staff and community representatives to improve their understanding of public management and encourage more effective participation. The municipality should also explore strategies to enhance public participation and develop robust oversight mechanisms for municipal projects. Citizens, for their part, should utilize civil, communal, and union organizations to contribute ideas and communicate their needs effectively.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The sample was confined to the Paita province and may not represent other regions in Peru or other countries. The inability to perform a correlation test between citizen participation and decision-making restricts the study's capacity to conclude their relationship. Additionally, while providing valuable data on participation and decision-making levels, the quantitative approach does not offer insights into the underlying reasons for these levels or the qualitative perspectives of the individuals

involved. The cross-sectional design limits the analysis of changes over time and causal inferences, while the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias.

Future research should address these limitations and explore additional aspects of citizen participation and decision-making. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how these variables evolve, particularly in response to interventions or policy changes. A mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups, could offer a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing participation and decision-making. Comparative studies examining regions or municipalities could identify best practices and challenges in various contexts. Experimental research designs could determine the efficacy of interventions to enhance citizen participation. Furthermore, future studies should delve into the specific contextual factors within the Paita province that influence citizen participation and decision-making, such as cultural or political elements.

In conclusion, while this study provides a valuable snapshot of the current situation in Paita, further research is necessary to fully understand the complex dynamics of citizen participation and decision-making in public entities. The findings underscore the importance of continued efforts to enhance citizen engagement and improve decision-making processes in local governance. By addressing the identified limitations and pursuing the suggested avenues for future research, a more comprehensive understanding of these critical aspects of public administration can be achieved, ultimately contributing to more effective and responsive local governance.

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### *Declaration of Interest*

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, and no financial, personal, or professional relationships influenced the results, analysis, or interpretation presented in this study.

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