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Article

Institutional Development of Uzbekistan's System for Financing Projects Shaped on the Basis of Public Opinion and a Regional Analysis of Its Financial Outcomes

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Abstract: This article systematizes the institutional and legal stages through which Uzbekistan's system for financing projects shaped on the basis of public opinion (the "Participatory Budget") developed between 2018 and 2026, traces the evolution of its financing sources and regulatory coefficients, and analyzes the system's practical outcomes by region and project direction using official data from the "Open Budget" portal and the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The findings show that, although the system's financial capacity expanded from 1.55 trillion UZS in 2019 to 6.7 trillion UZS by 2025, its growth rate has been declining steadily (from 147.7 percent to 18.6 percent), indicating that the system has moved from a phase of expansion to one of stable institutionalization. The declining number of submitted projects alongside the rising average amount per winning project points to the mechanism's growing qualitative maturity. The regional analysis confirms the stabilizing role that the guaranteed-minimum-funding mechanism plays in narrowing inequality, while the sectoral-structure analysis confirms that the mechanism remains responsive to actual needs under a bottom-up principle rather than fixed quotas.

Keywords: Participatory budgeting, public opinion, budget funds, financing sources, regional disparity, coefficient of variation, sectoral structure, "Open Budget" portal, Uzbekistan

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1. Introduction

Among the forms of public governance grounded in direct citizen participation, the practice of determining, on the basis of public opinion, how a given share of budget funds is allocated occupies a distinct place. Known internationally as participatory budgeting, this approach allows citizens not only to vote on budget expenditure priorities but also to exercise public oversight over the implementation of the decisions taken [1]. In Uzbekistan this mechanism has been introduced under the name "Participatory Budget" and has become one of the pillars of the reforms aimed at increasing the transparency of the budget process and ensuring active citizen participation in setting local expenditure priorities.

Since 2018 the mechanism has developed not through a single act but through a consistent, step-by-step process driven by successive legislative changes: the financing norms and sources, the criteria for allocating funds, and the institutional procedures have all undergone substantial reform over the years. At the same time, the scale of the mechanism has expanded considerably — a system that began as a pilot in 2019 was

extended nationwide from 2022 and, from 2026, moved to a qualitatively new model built around deputy initiatives and public-state partnership [2].

The idea of participatory budgeting was first piloted internationally in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 1989 and has since been applied, in various institutional forms, in hundreds of cities worldwide [3]. Analyzing this practice, Yves Cabannes treats it as an important vehicle for deepening participatory democracy and notes that its success depends considerably on its adaptation to the local institutional context. In Europe, Y. Sintomer, C. Herzberg, and A. Röcke showed that the Porto Alegre experience was transformed into several distinct procedural models adapted to different administrative traditions.

In a World Bank publication edited by Anwar Shah, the institutional models of participatory budgeting across different countries are compared, showing that the mechanism's effectiveness depends largely on the stability of its financing sources and the consistency of its legal regulation [4]. Tiago Peixoto, for his part, developed the concept of seven defining characteristics — openness, transparency, citizen participation, availability of financial resources, deliberation, public oversight, and continuity — which is widely used to assess the institutional sustainability of such mechanisms [5]. Empirical studies further show that municipalities adopting participatory budgeting achieved measurable improvements in social well-being, including a reallocation of spending toward sanitation and health services and a reduction in infant mortality [6].

As for domestic practice, the institutional and legal foundations and practical outcomes of Uzbekistan's participatory budgeting system have been examined in the research of U.Yu. O'roqov, Sh. Irgashev and O. G'aybullaev, as well as in the work of Kh.A. Qobulov and Z.K. Murtozayeva [7].

In the existing scholarly literature, including the studies cited above, individual aspects of the participatory budgeting mechanism — its legal foundations, its financial scale, or its social effectiveness — have generally been examined in isolation, and studies that link the mechanism's institutional formation stages to its financial outcomes and its regional distribution practice as a single, coherent system remain scarce. The purpose of this article is to help close that gap: to provide an integrated analysis of the legal-institutional evolution of Uzbekistan's "Participatory Budget" mechanism together with its financial dynamics and its practical outcomes by region and project direction over 2019–2026 [8].

2. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted using descriptive statistical analysis. To reconstruct the mechanism's legal-institutional formation stages, the relevant presidential decrees and resolutions, Cabinet of Ministers resolutions, and resolutions of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis adopted between 2018 and 2025 were systematized in chronological order. To analyze the financial dynamics, data from the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan on funds allocated to district (city) budgets, together with the statistical reports of the official "Open Budget" (openbudget.uz) information portal covering 2019–2026 (by season from 2023 onward), were used.

In the regional analysis, the per-capita financing indicator was calculated using the official population figures as of 1 January of each year, with the population base for 2023–2026 varying by year accordingly. The coefficient of variation (CV) — the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean — was used to assess the degree of inequality across regions. Structural analysis and cross-period comparison were used to identify tendencies in sectoral composition and regional disparity.

3. Results and Discussions

Stages of the mechanism's legal-institutional formation

The mechanism's legal foundation traces back to Presidential Resolution No. PQ-3917 of 22 August 2018, under which, from 2019, at least 10 percent of the supplementary funds of district (city) budgets began to be allocated to activities shaped on the basis of public opinion, and the official "Open Budget" (openbudget.uz) information portal was launched for this purpose [9]. Resolution No. PQ-5072 of 13 April 2021 fundamentally renewed the mechanism institutionally: the stated norm was tripled to 30 percent, an additional 5 percent of total expenditures was introduced as an independent financing source, and a "Citizens' Initiative Fund" was established under every district (city) administration. Resolution No. PQ-5250, adopted that same autumn, introduced supplementary balancing funds and a separate 50-percent financing channel for the repair of local roads [10].

Over the course of 2022 the mechanism was extended fully nationwide, and a series of Senate and government resolutions regulating it were adopted, including bringing the "Obod Qishloq" (Prosperous Village) and "Obod Mahalla" (Prosperous Neighborhood) programs under participatory budgeting principles. On 30 January 2024 the Senate of the Oliy Majlis approved the single, consolidated Regulation No. KQ-666-IV, which unified all previous procedures; this document, subsequently amended several times, now serves as the principal legal source governing the system [11]. Finally, under Resolution No. PQ-264 of 29 August 2025, a qualitatively new model was introduced: from 1 January 2026, deputy initiatives began to be financed directly from the republican budget, and from 1 February 2026 a public-state partnership model was introduced under which exactly half of a project's value is covered by residents and half by the republican budget [12].

The mechanism's seven-year evolution can thus be divided into three stages: a pilot stage in 2019–2020; a stage of nationwide expansion and institutional consolidation spanning 2021–2025; and a new stage, beginning in 2026, in which the financing logic is shifting from local-budget percentages to fixed sums allocated from the republican budget.

Financing sources and regulatory coefficients

Today the system is funded through several parallel financing channels: 5 percent of a district (city) budget's approved total expenditure; at least 30 percent of a local budget's supplementary funds; supplementary balancing funds allocated from the republican and regional budgets; 50 percent of the funds allocated to district and city budgets for local road repair; the dedicated funds under the "Obod Qishloq" and "Obod Mahalla" programs, amounting to at least 4 trillion UZS annually; and, from 2026, funds allocated directly from the republican budget for deputy initiatives and voluntary citizen contributions under the public-state partnership arrangement [13].

Project value ceilings are set not as absolute sums but relative to a base calculation value (BCV) that is revised annually, which keeps the system responsive to inflation (Table 1). Under the BCV in force through 1 September 2026 (412,000 UZS), the upper value ceiling for a single construction/renovation project stood at approximately 1.65 billion UZS; under the new BCV in force from 1 September 2026 (440,000 UZS), this figure rose to approximately 1.76 billion UZS [14].

Table 1. Ratio of the financial coefficients applied in the Participatory Budget process to the base calculation value in force (as of 2026)

Indicator	Coefficient set	Through 1 Sep 2026 (BCV=412,000 UZS)	From 1 Sep 2026 (BCV=440,000 UZS)	Legal basis
Upper value ceiling for a construction/renovation project	4,000 times	≈1,648,000,000 UZS	≈1,760,000,000 UZS	Regulation KQ-666-IV, item 23
Upper value ceiling for an equipment project	2,000 times	≈824,000,000 UZS	≈880,000,000 UZS	Regulation KQ-666-IV, item 23
Annual (2-season) allocation per deputy	8,000 times	≈3,296,000,000 UZS	≈3,520,000,000 UZS	Resolution PQ-264, 29.08.2025

Source: compiled by the author based on Regulation No. KQ-666-IV of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan (30 January 2024) and Presidential Resolution No. PQ-264 (29 August 2025).

Overall dynamics of financing volume, 2019–2026

The system's financial capacity has expanded steadily over the past seven years. In 2019 a total of 1,553.3 billion UZS in supplementary funds was formed nationwide, of which 174.2 billion UZS (11.2 percent) was allocated to public initiatives through 52,634 proposals and 87,755 votes. With the mechanism's full nationwide expansion, this figure reached 1,739.1 billion UZS in 2022. The main seasonal outcome indicators for 2023–2025 are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Main outcome indicators of activities shaped on the basis of public opinion, by season, 2023–2025

Year	Season	Total projects	Rejected	Winning projects	Funds allocated (bln)	Winning-project total (bln)	Fund utilization (%)	Average satisfaction (%)	Citizen engagement (%)
2023	1	55,970	22,289	2,985	2,882.9	2,788.3	96.7	72.6	44.9
2023	2	49,464	15,975	1,192	1,424.4	1,319.2	92.6	36.4	48.4
2024	1	35,575	6,560	2,824	3,373.3	3,259.0	96.6	75.6	31.9
2024	2	27,474	4,228	1,950	2,271.7	2,330.5	102.6	77.4	24.5
2025	1	28,399	4,942	2,419	3,359.8	2,991.7	89.0	74.9	27.5
2025	2	22,263	3,529	2,367	3,337.8	3,292.4	98.6	82.6	28.3

Source: compiled by the author based on data from the "Open Budget" portal (openbudget.uz).

Turning to annual aggregate figures: funds allocated stood at 4,307.3 billion UZS in 2023 (+147.7 percent, roughly 2.5-fold, over 2022), 5,645.0 billion UZS in 2024 (+31.1 percent), and 6,697.6 billion UZS in 2025 (+18.6 percent). The steady deceleration of the growth rate (147.7% → 31.1% → 18.6%) is a statistically expected phenomenon — as the base grows larger, the percentage growth rate naturally slows (a "base effect") — and indicates that the system has moved not toward crisis but toward a stage of stable institutionalization. Another notable tendency is the steady decline in the share of rejected projects: from 39.8 percent in the first season of 2023 to 15.9 percent by the second season of 2025, reflecting both citizens' growing experience in preparing proposals and an improvement in the initial screening quality of local administrations [15].

The number of submitted projects and the average amount per winning project have moved in opposite directions: the number of submitted projects fell from 55,970 in the first season of 2023 to 21,049 by the first season of 2026 — a decline of nearly 2.7-fold — while the average amount per winning project rose from 934.1 million UZS to 1,433.0 million UZS, an increase of 53.4 percent. These two tendencies occurring together is no coincidence: in the mechanism's early stages, residents submitted a large number of small-scale initiatives, whereas, as experience accumulated and a culture of project preparation took hold, larger but more thoroughly prepared projects began to prevail [16].

Regional distribution: an analysis of per-capita financing

The distribution of funds across regions is shaped in two stages: local sources (the 5 percent and 30 percent shares) are naturally distributed unevenly, depending on each region's own economic capacity, while the supplementary balancing funds allocated from the republican and regional budgets are specifically designed to soften this inequality, being distributed evenly on the basis of a region's population and the number of active neighborhoods (mahallas). The practical effect of this equalizing mechanism is clearly visible in the per-capita financing indicator (Table 3) [17].

Table 3. Per-capita funds financed under the Participatory Budget project, by region (first season of 2026)

Region	Funds allocated (bln UZS)	Population (thousand)	Per-capita funding (UZS)
Republic of Karakalpakstan	205.8	2,040.7	100,829
Andijan region	290.1	3,487.9	83,181
Bukhara region	174.2	2,089.4	83,382
Jizzakh region	119.9	1,551.7	77,246
Kashkadarya region	280.0	3,673.7	76,225
Navoi region	119.8	1,103.3	108,621
Namangan region	267.8	3,158.4	84,797
Samarkand region	365.0	4,335.7	84,195
Surkhandarya region	223.3	2,974.4	75,082
Syrdarya region	112.6	938.5	120,031
Tashkent region	358.8	3,134.1	114,494
Fergana region	353.0	4,181.0	84,419
Khorezm region	171.7	2,045.7	83,910
Tashkent city	232.1	3,145.2	73,801
Republic total / weighted average	**3,274.2**	**37,859.7**	**86,484**

Source: calculated by the author based on data from the "Open Budget" portal (openbudget.uz) and official population statistics (stat.uz).

According to the table data, the highest level of per-capita financing in the first season of 2026 was recorded in Syrdarya region — 120,031 UZS, 38.8 percent above the national average. This is because, under the applicable rules, every district (city) is guaranteed at least 6 projects (approximately 8.6 billion UZS) regardless of its population, so this floor applies irrespective of regional population size. As a result, even sparsely populated Syrdarya receives an allocation close to that of more populous regions, meaning the funds are divided among fewer people and the per-capita figure comes out higher. The lowest figure was recorded in Tashkent city — 73,801 UZS, 14.7 percent below the national average — owing, conversely, to the capital's high population density. The gap between the highest and lowest figures is only 1.63-fold, a relatively moderate disparity confirming that the guaranteed-minimum-funding mechanism is effectively performing its equalizing role for sparsely populated regions.

Sectoral structure of projects and the dynamics of priorities

The projects financed under the system fall into several substantive categories, reflecting the mechanism's gradual institutional development (Table 4).

Table 4. Sectoral structure of projects under the Participatory Budget program (first season of 2026)

No.	Direction	Submitted	Winning	Share (%)
1	Repair of local roads (pedestrian walkways, crossings)	9,878	943	43.0
2	Repair of general secondary schools and upgrading of facilities	2,921	604	27.6
3	Repair of healthcare facilities and upgrading of facilities	556	180	8.2
4	Repair of preschool institutions and upgrading of facilities	590	117	5.3
5	Repair of other educational institutions and upgrading of facilities	405	87	4.0
6	Activities related to electricity supply	1,282	40	1.8
7	Repair of sports facilities and upgrading of facilities	135	39	1.8
8	Repair and restoration of neighborhood commons and other public facilities	982	37	1.7
9	Other directions (landscaping, playgrounds, drinking water, etc., 9 directions combined)	2,590	145	6.6
	Total	19,339	2,192	100.0

Source: compiled by the author based on data from the "Open Budget" portal (openbudget.uz).

As the table shows, local road repair (43.0 percent) and the repair and equipping of general secondary schools (27.6 percent) together account for 70.6 percent of all winning projects. Sectoral priorities, however, are not linear over time but fluctuate: in 2021, local road repair led with 34.0 percent; by the first season of 2023, priority had shifted sharply to school repair (up to 45.7 percent); and by the first season of 2026, priority had returned to road repair (43.0 percent). This fluctuation confirms that the mechanism operates not on fixed sectoral quotas but on the actual needs shaped at neighborhood-citizen assemblies each season — that is, in line with its bottom-up principle.

The sectoral structure also varies considerably by region. The most striking case is Tashkent city, where nearly half (49.7 percent) of winning projects went to school repair while only 1.1 percent went to road repair — explained by the fact that the capital's road and transport infrastructure is financed mainly through other, centralized state programs. By contrast, in Kashkadarya (73.4 percent), Khorezm (69.3 percent), and the Republic of Karakalpakstan (67.4 percent), local road repair dominates, with the share allocated to schools nowhere exceeding 15 percent. This difference stems from the regions' demographic and infrastructural characteristics — in particular, the greater need for roads in rural areas — and confirms the system's adaptability to each region's circumstances.

The degree of regional disparity and concentration

To assess the dynamics of financing inequality across regions over time, the coefficient of variation (CV) and the share of total funding held by the three largest and three smallest regions were examined (Table 5).

Table 5. Dynamics of regional disparity and concentration indicators under the Participatory Budget program, 2023–2026

Period	Coefficient of variation, CV (%)	Share of top 3 regions (%)	Share of bottom 3 regions (%)
2023, season 1	40.7	33.2	9.6
2023, season 2	29.2	29.2	11.7
2024, season 1	28.4	30.0	14.3
2024, season 2	34.2	31.7	11.7
2025, season 1	34.7	30.6	10.2
2025, season 2	38.2	32.3	9.7
2026, season 1	37.7	33.4	10.7

Source: calculated by the author based on data from the "Open Budget" portal (openbudget.uz), 2023–2026.

The table shows that the coefficient of variation fell sharply from 40.7 percent in the first season of 2023 to 28.4 percent by the first season of 2024, but then rose again in subsequent periods, reaching 37.7 percent by the first season of 2026 — nearly back to its starting level. At the same time, the share held by the three largest regions (29.2–33.4 percent) was formed, across all periods, mainly by Fergana and Samarkand regions, while the share held by the three smallest regions (9.6–14.3 percent) was consistently formed by Navoi and Syrdarya regions. The remarkable stability of the leading and lagging regions' composition confirms that, although overall inequality fluctuates, this reflects not a systematic concentration or a shift toward equal distribution but the stability of the underlying, largely population-driven structure.

It is worth noting separately that disparity in the funds-per-vote indicator (2.94-fold) is considerably higher than disparity in the per-capita indicator (1.63-fold). This difference is not financial but reflects civic voting activity: where fewer residents vote in a given region, the same amount of funding is divided among fewer votes, and the indicator comes

out artificially high. Moreover, owing to the "one citizen – one vote" rule introduced in 2024, it would be incorrect to interpret the apparent "decline" in the citizen-engagement indicator from 44.9–48.4 percent in 2023 to 26.8–31.9 percent by 2026 as a direct decline in civic activity — it is, rather, largely the result of purging fraudulent and duplicate votes.

Comparative standing relative to other citizen-initiative programs

The Participatory Budget is not the only mechanism introduced in the Republic for financing projects shaped on the basis of public opinion. Over 2022–2026, supplementary programs were also implemented, including "Mening Yo'lim" (My Road, local road repair), "Mening Bog'im" (My Garden, courtyard and recreational-area improvement), "Mening Bog'cham" (My Kindergarten, construction and renovation of preschool institutions), "Mening Maktabim" (My School, repair and equipping of general secondary schools), and "Deputat Tanlovi" (Deputy's Choice). The total funds allocated under these five programs over 2022–2026 amounted to 2,114.8 billion UZS — less than the Participatory Budget's total for a single season alone. This confirms that the Participatory Budget remains the dominant, largest-scale mechanism within the citizen-initiative financing system, with the remaining programs functioning as supplementary, specialized channels alongside it.

Among the supplementary programs, "Mening Maktabim" shows the most rapid institutional growth: the funds allocated to it rose from 30.6 billion UZS in the first season of 2024 to 312.0 billion UZS by the second season of 2025 — a roughly 10.2-fold increase — bringing it close in scale to the system's two largest programs ("Mening Yo'lim" and "Mening Bog'cham"). At the same time, its win rate rose from 7.1 percent to 18.2 percent (a 2.6-fold increase), reflecting a year-on-year improvement in the quality of its selection and moderation process [18].

4. Conclusion

The study conducted shows that Uzbekistan's system for financing projects shaped on the basis of public opinion has followed a consistent, step-by-step path of legal-institutional development since 2018 — from an initial pilot to a universal nationwide mechanism, and then, from 2026, to a qualitatively new model built on fixed sums allocated from the republican budget and public-state partnership. The analysis of financial dynamics showed that, although the system's growth rate is declining (from 147.7 percent to 18.6 percent), this reflects not crisis but a marker of stable institutionalization: even as the number of submitted projects falls, the rising average amount per winning project and the declining share of rejected projects point to the mechanism's growing qualitative maturity. The regional analysis confirmed the stabilizing role played by the guaranteed-minimum-funding mechanism in narrowing inequality (with only a 1.63-fold gap between the highest and lowest per-capita indicators), while the sectoral-structure analysis once again demonstrated that the mechanism responds to actual needs on a bottom-up basis rather than through fixed quotas. At the same time, the persistence of an overall regional disparity (with the coefficient of variation ranging between 28.4 and 40.7 percent) and the near-constant composition of leading and lagging regions indicate that the system's equalizing potential has not yet been fully realized. A deeper assessment of how these tendencies affect financing efficiency at the project and regional levels, using a comprehensive integral indicator and econometric modeling, forms the logical continuation of this study and the subject of further research.

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