



## Public Consultations and Hearings: A Vital Form of Public Participation in Legislative Activity

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**Abstract:** This thesis examines the legal and institutional framework for public participation, the process and benefits of consultations and hearings, and the challenges faced in ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness. It highlights how these processes promote transparency, accountability, informed decision-making, and social cohesion while fostering greater trust in the government.

**Key Words:** Public participation, Legislative activity, Public consultations, Public hearings, Civic engagement, Legal framework

Public participation in the legislative process is essential for ensuring accountability, transparency, and legitimacy in lawmaking. It serves as a direct link between lawmakers and citizens, allowing the public to influence policy and contribute to decision-making.

According to the World Justice Project's Global Rule of Law Index 2024, Uzbekistan ranks 83rd out of 142 countries, marking a decline from the previous year. The report highlights challenges in areas such as limitations on government powers and absence of corruption, which are crucial for effective public participation in governance<sup>1</sup>.

The legislative process in Uzbekistan, particularly in the context of public consultations and hearings, has evolved in recent years to align with the country's



ambitions for deeper democratic reforms. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan guarantees citizens the right to participate in the political, social, and economic life of the country, including the legislative process. In practice, this principle has been translated into mechanisms such as public consultations, hearings, and expert reviews, particularly on major legislative initiatives.

In recent years, Uzbekistan's government has taken steps to institutionalize public participation through legal reforms. For example, the Law on “Public Control”<sup>ii</sup> encourages transparency and public involvement in the decision-making process, providing citizens with avenues to voice their concerns on new laws and policies.

Various forms of public involvement in legislative activities can include:

- Legislative Initiative: The right of citizens or organizations to propose new laws or amendments.
- Public Consultations and Hearings: Opportunities for citizens and interest groups to express their opinions before or during the passage of laws.
- Petitions and Referendums: Mechanisms through which citizens can directly influence legislation.

In some countries, there is an institution for preliminary discussion of draft laws and other legislative acts. Its essence lies in the fact that every regulatory legal act of national importance must be submitted for discussion by public structures and institutions before it is signed. For example, in the Republic of Austria, this procedure is implemented in the form of a popular poll; in the Republic of Ireland, the bill is submitted to the public for decision.; In the Swiss Confederation, issues of concluding international legal treaties, adopting union laws and other federal decisions may be put to a referendum if at least 50,000 citizens with the right to vote or at least 8 cantons make such a demand. In the Portuguese Republic, there is an advisory and conciliatory body known as the Economic and Social Council, which reviews all bills related to the socio-economic sphere. In the Republic of Slovenia, the Council of the Republic has been established as a pre-parliamentary legislative body, responsible for overseeing decisions made by the National



Assembly — the country's highest legislative body. This Council also has the right of legislative initiative and the right to prepare opinions on decisions made by various state authorities.<sup>iii</sup>.

**Public consultations** in Uzbekistan are designed to ensure that the public has a say in shaping the laws and policies that impact their lives. Typically, consultations are held at various stages of the legislative process—especially in the early stages, when new laws or amendments are proposed.

These consultations are usually conducted through various channels, such as:

**Written Submissions.** Citizens and organizations can submit their opinions and suggestions on draft laws, either through official government websites or through specialized portals for public feedback. These online platforms have become more accessible in recent years, providing a convenient way for individuals to engage with the legislative process.

**Public Opinion Surveys.** In some cases, lawmakers may conduct surveys or polls to gauge public opinion on specific issues. These surveys may be distributed through mass media, social media, or governmental websites, giving people an opportunity to express their views on proposed policies.

**Open Forums and Public Meetings.** In certain instances, regional or local governments may hold open forums where citizens can discuss legislative proposals with lawmakers or experts in person. These meetings, often accompanied by presentations or debates, provide an informal space for dialogue.

Public hearings in Uzbekistan have become a crucial tool for engaging the public in legislative processes, especially on complex or controversial issues. A public hearing is typically organized by the Oliy Majlis or other government bodies to allow citizens, experts, civil society representatives, and interest groups to discuss proposed laws and regulations.

The structure of public hearings in Uzbekistan may vary depending on the topic and the level of government. However, some common elements include:



**Parliamentary Hearings.** The Oliy Majlis periodically holds hearings on draft laws, especially when they are likely to have significant social or economic impacts. These hearings may involve testimony from experts, government officials, and representatives from business or civil society groups. It is an open platform for lawmakers to hear firsthand accounts of how proposed laws might affect different segments of society.

**Expert Testimonies.** Often, public hearings are designed to incorporate expert testimony from scholars, legal professionals, and representatives from international organizations. This ensures that legislative proposals are informed by evidence-based research and global best practices.

**Regional Hearings.** Local governments may also organize hearings at the regional or municipal level to discuss issues that directly affect their communities. These local hearings are essential for ensuring that the specific needs and concerns of different regions are taken into account.

While public consultations and hearings have made significant strides in promoting democratic governance in Uzbekistan, several challenges remain. These challenges include limited access to information, underrepresentation of marginalized groups, and the potential ineffectiveness of feedback. In order to expand access to digital platforms and online resources to ensure that all citizens, particularly those in rural or underserved areas, can participate in public consultations it should be developed mobile-friendly and offline alternatives for those without internet access, such as community-based centers where citizens can access digital resources and participate in consultations.

Furthermore, providing training programs for citizens, particularly in remote areas, to help them navigate digital platforms and understand how to engage in the legislative process online.

By addressing these limitations through targeted initiatives, Uzbekistan can enhance the inclusivity, accessibility, and effectiveness of its public consultations and hearings. This will not only ensure that the voices of all citizens are heard but also contribute to more informed, transparent, and accountable governance. As Uzbekistan continues to



strengthen its democratic institutions, these efforts will build greater public trust in the legislative process and ensure that laws are reflective of the diverse needs of its population.

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