

Citizen Participation in National Policy Formulation: Analysis TNI Law Rejection through Social Media

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Abstract

Citizen participation in national policy formulation is important in maintaining democratic sustainability and government legitimacy. However, citizen participation in the policy-making process in Indonesia is still limited, which often leads to social discontent and public protests. Cases of large demonstrations that took place in February and March 2025, such as the #IndonesiaGelap action, show people's dissatisfaction with government policies that are deemed incompatible with their needs, such as the 12% VAT policy and the revision of the TNI Law. The public, who felt ignored by formal channels, began to shift their expression of protest through social media, which allowed them to participate directly in the policy process. This research explores the role of social media as a channel for citizen aspiration in fighting for public policy change in Indonesia by looking at how social media can increase citizen engagement and strengthen government transparency and accountability. Based on the analysis of real cases, social media proved to be an effective channel to accelerate policy change despite challenges related to population bias and information credibility. This research suggests that the government improve the accessibility of citizen participation channels and integrate social media as part of a more inclusive and transparent policy formulation strategy.

Keywords: Citizen participation, social media, public policy, policy formulation.

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the national policy-making process has often been met with protests from the public due to their lack of involvement in the policy formulation process. There have been at least two major demonstrations since the beginning of 2025, namely in February 2025, with a peak demonstration that coincided with the 100 days of work of the new government, and in March 2025, which was a follow-up action with a bigger trigger. The demonstration titled #IndonesiaGelap was triggered by the lack of citizen participation in the policy formulation process, so the policies issued by the government were not to the needs and could not solve the problems that exist in society.

One of the aspirations of the demonstrators in February 2025 was to demand an evaluation of the budget efficiency policy, namely the change of Instruksi Presiden Nomor 7 Tahun 2023 tentang Pengendalian Program Strategis Nasional (policy of Control of National Strategic) to Instruksi Presiden

Nomor 1 Tahun 2025 tentang Efisiensi Anggaran (policy of Budget Efficiency). The policy drew protests because the budget efficiency of Rp 306.7 trillion cut the education and health sector budgets, which weakened the economy and development. One of the budget allocations was earmarked for financing the Makan Bergizi Gratis Program (Free Nutritious Meal Program), which was considered unable to alleviate the root of the problem in the community.

The wave of demonstrations continued with widespread opposition to the revision of Undang-Undang Nomor 34 Tahun 2004 tentang Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI Law), which was prominently amplified through the #TolakRUUTNI movement on the platform X. While revising the TNI Law, the draft revision was not published before ratification, discussions in the legislature were conducted behind closed doors, and the urgency of the revision was not communicated to the public. As a result, there was public concern that the revision of the TNI Law would restore the dual function of the TNI and weaken civilian supremacy. This rejection spread to various regions in Indonesia even though the revised law had already been passed.

The public response to the government's policy was done through demonstrations and social media platforms such as X and Instagram. Social media began the spread of ideas and discussions from various levels of society. The hashtag #IndonesiaGelap has become a symbol of criticism of government policies that do not favor the people. Based on Jangkara.id analysis (2025), in February 2025, public unrest against the government on social media with the hashtag #IndonesiaGelap got 13 million engagements on X and 4 million engagements on Instagram with 81% negative sentiment. The biggest emotion with the hashtag was 'anger' at 37%. The high public attention to #IndonesiaGelap indicates that the government is not responsive to the people's aspirations, where the people's voices are not heeded through formal channels, so they choose social media to convey their aspirations and criticisms (Lindquist & Huse, 2017).

Meanwhile, Indonesia's e-participation index has experienced fluctuating rankings since 2003 but has consistently improved since 2014-2024. However, research shows that despite efforts to improve the accessibility and quality of online services, active community engagement has not been optimized (Nurhidayat et al., 2024). Substantively, it is necessary to ensure that policies are aligned with the aspirations and needs of the community.

Indeks e-participation	Tahun											
	2024	2022	2020	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008	2005	2004	2003
Peringkat	35	37	57	92	114	110	66	86	135	34	32	41

Source: publicadministration.un.org, data processed.

The policy formulation process should be open, accessible, and monitored by the public (Widianingrum & Sulaeman, 2022). Beyond merely fulfilling a normative obligation, public

participation constitutes a functional prerequisite for democratic governance. Policy legitimacy is important because it shows that the public trusts the government, which happens when policies meet real needs and solve social issues, rather than just following laws or procedures (Hanberger, 2003). Papadopoulos (2013) emphasizes that legitimacy is contingent not only upon policy outcomes (output legitimacy) but also upon the inclusiveness and transparency of the policy-making process (input and throughput legitimacy). When citizens perceive exclusion from these processes, rejection of public policies becomes inevitable. The #IndonesiaGelap movement exemplifies the inadequacy of public participation in national policy formulation, contributing to the proliferation of social resistance across multiple regions.

Correspondingly, responsive governance demands that governments not merely disseminate information but proactively solicit, consider, and incorporate public aspirations into policy adjustments. Denhardt and Denhardt (2003) conceptualize responsiveness as a paradigmatic shift from bureaucratic control toward a public service model that engages citizens as equal partners. Thomas (2013) adds that true responsiveness means public institutions must consistently adjust their policies to meet what citizens want, which builds public trust and makes government actions more relevant and legitimate.

Citizen participation in the public policy formulation process is the spirit of a democratic state. According to Arnstein (1969), citizen participation equals citizen power. Citizen participation is a redistribution of power that empowers citizens not included in decision-making to be considered and included. Effective citizen participation will improve policy quality and prevent conflict (Correia et al., 2023). Citizen participation has been proven to increase positive assessments of government policies, including public concern in supporting these policies (Sun et al., 2023). New policies leading to change are also more easily accepted with citizen participation in the decision-making process (Liu et al., 2019).

One country that has succeeded in effectively involving citizen participation in policy is New Zealand through the 'deliberative democracy' program (IAP2 Indonesia, 2023). The form of this program can be seen in the community involvement program with random selection to discuss certain policy issues by providing access to information and sources and time for discussion so that the government will be better able to understand the problems and desires of the community. However, follow-up is needed in the form of political support and commitment from the government to carry out the community's aspirations (Wright et al., 2024).

Citizen participation allows the community to be involved in various developing public issues. The level of community involvement reflects how much the community can be fully active or passive in its interest in public issues (Zhang, Liu, and Vedlitz, 2017). Community involvement as citizen

participation is classified into three categories of participation, namely policy support, in this case describing the role of the community in providing feedback or expressing their views on existing or proposed policies (Brudney & England, 1983 in Roterm Vird, 2023). In this category, public engagement requires citizens to provide opinions or feedback on various public issues (Bovaird, 2007). The second form of participation is co-production, in which citizen participation is involved in the joint planning of government policies, which consists of attending meetings, providing input, and being actively involved in designing government programs. The third category of citizen participation is co-investment, which describes a situation where the community directly contributes resources for the common good of improving public services. These categories of citizen participation are implemented in support of government policies. The three categories have their comparisons, which explains that citizen participation in government policies has variations.

Brazil is one of the countries known for its success in involving citizen participation in the policy-making process, particularly through implementing the participatory budgeting mechanism. This initiative was first officially implemented in 1989 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Through this mechanism, citizens were actively invited to formulate and decide on the city's budget allocations each year, especially for vital sectors such as infrastructure, education, and health (Baiocchi, Gianpaolo, 2001). The tangible results of this policy are seen in the improved quality of public services, equitable development in poorer areas, and increased levels of political participation by citizens, including those previously marginalized. Porto Alegre has become a global success story involving citizens in inclusive and democratic governance.

In contrast to the implementation of citizen participation in Indonesia, on the issue of #TolakRUUTNI, the revision discussion process is considered to lack transparency. The initial draft of the bill was not easily accessible to the public, and there were no open consultation forums or hearings before the legislative process began. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics, and civil society even learned about the contents of the draft only after it was leaked to the public (Kompas.id). Public responses, including protest hashtags on social media such as #TolakRUUTNI and position statements from various elements of civil society, show anxiety about the return of militaristic practices in civilian spaces. Unfortunately, policymakers did not respond to these voices constructively. This paper aims to identify the factors causing low citizen participation in the national policy formulation process and explore the potential of social media as an aspiration channel.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Popularly, public policy is 'whatever government chooses to do or not to do' (Dye, 2013). According to William Dunn (2018), public policy formulation is the second stage in the public policy process, while the first stage is agenda setting. It is further explained that policy formulation is a series of actions on how various alternative solutions are developed, analyzed, and considered to solve existing public problems. Actors will discuss public problems that have entered the policy agenda. This stage begins by defining the problem and then formulating several alternative solutions that can be implemented. From several alternative solutions, the best solution will be chosen. Keep in mind that the public policy process is political. So, determining one solution from several alternatives requires a strategy and depends on how the policy actors maneuver. Therefore, in this stage, it is important to know the actors involved, their respective roles and authorities, what interests they bring, and how they communicate.

According to Dye in Agustino (2016), there are at least nine models of policy formulation. The author highlights three relevant models to this paper: rational and group. The rational model is an important basis for every decision made by the government, and it must be based on the rationality of costs and benefits for society. So Dye arranged several stages, namely recognizing the choices and desires of the community, finding policy options that can be implemented, analyzing and assessing each existing policy option, comparing each policy option with a costs and benefits analysis, and choosing the most efficient policy alternative.

The group model reflects the power dynamics and influence between groups in society. This model allows various community groups to share their aspirations for influencing policy. Meanwhile, the government is an arbiter in balancing the various demands of interest groups. So, public policy results from negotiations and compromises between groups with different interests. This model can develop into a deliberative approach where there are discussions and interactions between stakeholders to produce policies that are more inclusive and consensus-oriented (Foster et al., 2019).

The author considers the two policy formulation models not to be independent but complementary, where the rational model is the basis and a big step in the policy formulation process by involving various community groups as a source of aspiration. Although the rational model is considered perfect and takes a long time, it can be adjusted to an incremental model by still involving the participation of community groups. Based on the principles of democracy, it would be ideal for Indonesia to apply the group model in the policy formulation process. However, on a national policy scale, this model is still very rarely used. The government tends to ignore the aspirations of people who contradict the government's wishes. The government has not been able to become a mediator in

balancing the various interests that exist. In practice, the elite model is more often applied where the role and voice of the community are very limited while policies are determined by political and economic elites (Lindquist & Huse, 2017; Gascó-Hernández et al., 2018).

Citizen participation

Citizen participation is an important pillar of democratic governance. By involving the public in the policy-making process, the government increases the legitimacy of its decisions and strengthens public trust and the quality of the policies themselves. Citizen participation can take many forms, depending on a country's prevailing social, political, and cultural context.

One widely referenced conceptual model is the “Ladder of Citizen Participation” developed by Sherry Arnstein (1969 in Gaber, 2019). In this model, there are eight levels of participation, ranging from manipulation (the lowest level) to full citizen control of the decision-making process (the highest level). Arnstein, 1969. In practical terms, citizen participation in policy can be categorized as informing, where the government provides information to the public about planned or implemented policies. This is a basic but important step in building deeper involvement. Consultation: The public can provide input through surveys, public forums, or online consultations. However, the final decision remains with the government. Involvement: the government involves the community directly in the policy formulation process, such as through development planning meetings (Musrenbang) or joint working groups. Collaboration is when the government and community work together as equal partners, for example, in participatory budgeting. Empowerment is where citizens are empowered to make decisions or manage resources, such as village management or community funds.

International organizations such as the OECD and UNDP emphasize the importance of citizen participation as part of the principles of good governance. According to OECD (2001), citizen participation not only improves the quality of policies but also strengthens government accountability and responsiveness to the needs of the people. Meanwhile, UNDP (2013), through its Reflections on Social Accountability report, highlights that community involvement in the governance process can catalyze inclusive and sustainable development (UNDP Report). Thus, strengthening citizen participation is not just a normative obligation but a strategic necessity to produce policies that are more fair, transparent, and oriented towards the wider community's interests.

Progressive governments utilize social media to design policies based on open citizen input. Successful examples can be seen in several cities that use collaborative online platforms such as Change.org, U-Report, or Lapor.go.id. People active on social media form strong advocacy groups, build collective movements, and even initiate alternative solutions to public problems—such as the #SaveKPK movement, #ReformasiDikorupsi, or local environmental campaigns. However, the current

public issue shows that the Indonesian government has failed to seek citizen participation in government policies.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Source : IAP2 (2023)

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses the desk study method, which collects data and information by reviewing literature, documents, reports, or other relevant data sources without conducting direct fieldwork (Pingge, 2023). The desk study method, also called secondary data analysis (SDA), utilizes previous research and other secondary data relevant to developing digital information (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). The literature reviewed in this study was purposively selected through a systematic search across academic databases such as JSTOR, Springer, and Google Scholar, using keywords including *citizen participation*, *public policy*, *policy legitimacy*, *responsive governance*, and *social media in policymaking*. The selection criteria emphasized topical relevance, recency, and alignment with the context of Indonesian policy-making. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify conceptual argumentation patterns that support the development of the theoretical framework and discussion. The material object of analysis focused specifically on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), which serves as an alternative channel for public participation in policy discourse, particularly through the #IndonesiaGelap movement and other visual-advocacy content related to national policy issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indonesia, as a democracy, is increasingly facing major issues regarding civil liberties in the national sphere, which can be seen in the lack of citizen participation in policy-making. The narrowing of citizen participation has been prevalent before the current administration. Policies were passed

without any public discussion with the government. Legally, citizen participation in policy formation and the formation of laws and regulations is contained in the principle of openness of Undang-Undang Nomor 12 Tahun 2011 tentang Pembentukan Peraturan Perundang-undangan (Law Number 12/2011), which states that involvement is a condition for the formation of laws and regulations starting from planning, preparation, discussion, ratification or stipulation, and promulgation carried out openly or transparently (Riskiyono, 2016).

In a democracy, citizen participation has an ideological basis: people have the right to participate and determine the course of government. However, in practice, Indonesia has witnessed a contraction of participatory space, characterized by a lack of transparency and meaningful public involvement in the legislative process. One concrete example is the formulation of the revision of the TNI Law, which will revive the dual function of the TNI (Amnesty International Indonesia, 2025). The proposed expansion of civilian positions that TNI soldiers can occupy has become controversial. The placement of the TNI outside of its functions will have a major impact on the confusion of the authority of TNI soldiers (IMP press release, 2024). Changes to the articles of the law will damage the organizational pattern. In addition, the ratification of the TNI Law Revision Bill is wrong. It deviates from the drafting stages mandated in Chapter V of Law Number 12/2011 concerning the Formation of Legislation (Riskiyono, 2016). The formation of a bill that is not transparent has a huge impact on the death of space for community participation. Citizens have been largely excluded from substantive engagement, beginning from the initial stages of planning through to the deliberation of legislative content. This erosion of transparency and inclusivity in policy formulation has led to a diminished level of public legitimacy toward the resulting policies.

The legitimacy deficit implicates multiple stakeholders with their respective interests. The House of Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR), as the principal actor endowed with the authority to draft, deliberate, and enact legislation, has been notably associated with deviations from democratic norms, including conducting closed-door deliberations and bypassing public consultation processes. This shows that the DPR, as the people's representative, overrides the people and does not carry out its duties as the people's representative. Deviations in the stages of drafting this bill became controversial in the community, giving rise to mass action movements and action movements on social media. The action movement on social media is a form of public concern for the government. This form of public protest demanded that the government and DPR cancel the revision of the TNI law, which was carried out non-transparently and hastily and left out the public voice. Another key actor involved is the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), which directly serves as the principal subject of the proposed regulation. The limited public participation facilitated by both the House of Representatives (DPR) and

the TNI has prompted widespread criticism from citizens, community groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who argue that the legislative process lacked transparency and inclusiveness. This controversy subsequently mobilized civil society actors and the broader public to exert collective pressure through digital media campaigns, most notably using the hashtags #TolakRUUTNI and #IndonesiaGelap to amplify their demands for greater public involvement and accountability in policymaking.

According to Airnstein in Gaber (2019), practically, the form of citizen participation in policy can be categorized as the delivery of information; in this case, ideally, the government should provide information about the contents, changes, and impacts of the TNI Bill to the public. However, what happens is that the public is limited to clear information about the substance of the TNI Bill. This can be seen from the emergence of public unrest and misinformation on social media with the emergence of #tolakRUUTNIpemerintah, which shows the weak function of public information. The form of citizen participation that the government should also carry out is to provide opportunities for the public to provide input through surveys, public consultation forums, and other consultations. The government does not use various platforms that are trending among the public but also has features that can be utilized to provide input and public consultation. This culminated in the media presenting various government problems characterized by #IndonesiaGelap. In addition to consultation, the government also neglects active involvement through direct community involvement in the policy formulation process through deliberation. This is evident in the discussion of the TNI Bill, which was held behind closed doors at the Fairmont Hotel, Central Jakarta (tempo.co).

Observing the unfolding issues, the policy dynamics surrounding the revision of the TNI Law reveal a significant imbalance between governmental actors and societal actors. The policy-making process was notably misaligned with the principles of democratic governance, as the drafting was conducted through closed-door deliberations, drawing substantial criticism from civil society. The primary implication of this policy dynamic is the erosion of public participation in legislative processes, resulting in the dominance of governmental actors in the formulation of the TNI Bill revision. This dominance marginalized public voices and influenced the substantive direction of the revision, raising concerns over the potential remilitarization of civilian domains beyond national defense. Furthermore, the observed policy dynamics suggest that the government's disregard for public participation is not incidental but rather driven by several underlying factors that warrant deeper examination. One of the most powerful is the political factor. Delivered by the Deputy Chairman of the DPR RI through tempo.co responding to the community's rejection of the TNI Bill policy is a political dynamic. However, the political dynamics that occur tend to have motives for certain political interests (tempo.co). Through

the Independence Journalist, an analyst said that revising the TNI Bill is considered a political direction that strengthens the position of the military in the structure of civilian government (www.aji.or.id). The political dynamics that occur are increasingly visible because the role of digital media is very fast in making mass movements in the community to voice their actions.

Digital transformation is a comprehensive change in mindsets, working methods, interactions, and implementation of new technologies (Young, 2020). This opens up opportunities for the government to communicate with the public and for the public to convey their aspirations to the government (Mannayong et al., 2024). The concept of Citizen Relation Management (CRM) allows for the advancement of democracy with a system used by the government or public institutions to manage interactions and relationships with citizens by utilizing various communication channels (Kontokosta & Hong, 2021; Mohammadi et al., 2022). CRM increases citizen participation by facilitating two-way communication and improving government responsiveness, transparency, and accountability, increasing citizen satisfaction (Xu & Tang, 2020). LAPOR! (People's Online Aspiration and Complaint Service) is one form of CRM that can be found in Indonesia. Citizens can submit their complaints to be followed up by the relevant agencies. This mechanism tends to be technical, with complaints about inappropriate public services. Research by Wu, W.-N. (2024) shows that even at this level, there is political influence on citizen participation through power dynamics between citizens and local governments, political change based on the ideas and political motives of stakeholders, and the use of discretion by government officials based on certain motives.

The concept of open government is defined by Wirtz & Birkmeyer (2015) as a multilateral, political, and social process that is transparent, collaborative, and participatory by the government. So, citizens and public interest groups need to be integrated into a process with the support of modern information and communication technology that will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of government actions. In Indonesia, Sugiarto revealed that formal aspiration channels such as recess and public hearing meetings tend to be considered mere formalities and prerequisites (Media Indonesia, 2016). Another alternative to conveying citizens' aspirations is through social media. Social media, especially X, has become a popular platform for people to voice their aspirations, share their ideas, build awareness, pressure public officials, and mobilize mass movements. Social media as a tool for mass mobilization and other social movements is a cheap alternative, including seeing the amount of support to fill out a petition (Simamora, 2017).

Learning from past experiences, pressure exerted by citizens through social media has succeeded in changing government policies. In 2016, the online petition #SaveRonny received more than 50,000 supporters and restored the student status of Ronny, who was previously fired for criticizing the rector

of UNJ (Media Indonesia, 2016). At the end of 2024, calls and online petitions to 'Reject 12 Percent VAT' on social media, along with direct demonstrations, succeeded in making the 12% VAT policy apply only to luxury goods (Tempo, 2025). In other cases, when the government continues to pass policies that are not supported by citizens, such as the Job Creation Law, big data analysis shows that there is a spike in engagement that contains citizen disappointment at a certain momentum, even though it is intermittent (The Conservation, 2024). This shows that increased social media activity and coverage in various media can mobilize public support for social and political issues (Harrison et al., 2022).

Social media has proven to be an effective alternative channel to convey people's aspirations that are not accommodated through formal channels. Social media functions not only as a one-way communication tool but also as a two-way interactive platform that allows citizens to participate in policy making and provide feedback on existing policies (Lin, 2022; Yuan et al., 2022). Frequent exposure to information through social media can strengthen citizens' trust and interest in campaign participation.

As a channel for citizen aspirations, social media allows people to be more actively involved in the political decision-making process, which in turn can accelerate policy changes that are more responsive to community needs. Social media has the potential to support policy planning due to the rapid and wide distribution of information, low cost, and allowing various forms of communication to flourish despite differences (Liu, 2022). The successful use of social media in influencing policy demonstrates the importance of more inclusive citizen participation in national policy formulation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that citizen participation in Indonesia's national policy formulation process has experienced significant obstacles, especially related to the lack of public involvement in decision-making that affects their lives. This is reflected in policy polemics, such as the rejection of VAT 12% and the revision of the TNI Law, which were triggered by the lack of transparency and citizen participation in the legislative process. The powerlessness of the people to participate effectively creates discontent and leads to social protests through demonstrations and social media.

Although the Indonesian government has implemented several digital innovations, such as LAPOR! (People's Online Aspiration and Complaint Service), which allows citizens to submit complaints and inputs, the overall citizen participation system is still not optimal. This is evidenced by the public's limited access and active participation in broader decision-making. For example, in the case of the revision of the TNI Law, there was insufficient transparency in the discussion and passage of the law, leading to widespread rejection from the public.

Social media is an effective channel for citizens' aspirations, replacing formal channels often considered unresponsive. The #IndonesiaGel hashtag, for example, shows how social media can open up space for wider participation, even when formal channels are less accommodating of people's voices. Active citizen engagement in social media can accelerate policy change and pressure governments to respond better to public needs and aspirations. This research underscores that improving citizen participation in the public policy process is crucial to creating policies that are more inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the community's needs. The government should strengthen participation channels through digital platforms and formal mechanisms to ensure that any policies adopted truly represent the interests of the people.

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