CZU: 37.017:004.738.5:35 **https://doi.org/10.59295/sum5(195)2026_33**

NATIONAL MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AS A POLICY MANAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

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In contemporary governance, four streams – civic education, citizen engagement, national monitoring and evaluation systems, and digital-era approaches – are converging into a single performance loop that can improve policy responsiveness, trust and service quality. Civic education equips citizens with the knowledge, skills and motivation needed for informed participation. When civically literate citizens enter well-designed engagement channels, governments gain access to local knowledge, obtain early warnings and can iterate service design more fairly. Effective national monitoring and evaluation systems (NMES) close the loop by converting citizen-generated feedback and administrative/ statistical data into performance information and evaluative evidence that decision-makers can use to steer, adjust direction, allocate resources, and strengthen accountability. Building on three earlier articles that developed the conceptual basis of citizen engagement, examined education as an enabling condition, and linked engagement to monitoring and evaluation, this article deepens the discussion by introducing an actionable input–throughput–output framework, clarifying the “missing middle” concept, and providing a distinction between policy management and public administration.

Keywords*: civic education; citizen engagement; participatory governance; monitoring and evaluation; results-based management; evidence-informed policy; open data; digital government; accountability; public sector innovation.*

SISTEMELE NAȚIONALE DE MONITORIZARE ȘI EVALUARE ȘI IMPLICAREA CIVICĂ CA INFRASTRUCTURĂ DE MANAGEMENT A POLITICILOR

În guvernarea contemporană, patru direcții – educația civică, implicarea cetățenilor, sistemele naționale de monitorizare și evaluare și abordările erei digitale – converg într-o singură buclă de performanță care poate îmbunătăți răspunsul la politici, încrederea și calitatea serviciilor. Educația civică le oferă cetățenilor cunoștințele, abilitățile și motivația necesare pentru o participare informată. Atunci când cetățenii cu competențe civice intră în canale de implicare bine concepute, guvernele obțin acces la cunoștințe locale, obțin avertizări timpurii și pot itera designul serviciilor într-un mod mai echitabil. SNEM închide bucla prin transformarea feedbackului generat de cetățeni și a datelor administrative/ statistice în informații de performanță și dovezi evaluative pe care factorii de decizie le pot utiliza pentru a ajusta direcția, a aloca resurse și a consolida responsabilitatea. Bazându-se pe trei articole anterioare care au dezvoltat baza conceptuală a implicării cetățenilor, au examinat educația ca o condiție favorizantă și au corelat implicarea cu monitorizarea și evaluarea, acest articol aprofundează discuția prin introducerea unui cadru acționabil de input-throughput-output și prin clarificarea distincției dintre managementul politicilor și administrația publică.

Cuvinte-cheie*: educație civică; implicare cetățenească; guvernare participativă; monitorizare și evaluare; management bazat pe rezultate; politici informate pe dovezi; date deschise; guvernare digitală; responsabilitate; inovare în sectorul public.*

Distinguishing policy management from public administration

A recurring confusion in governance debates is to treat “policy management” and “public administration” as interchangeable. They are complementary but distinct [9].

Policy management is focusing on steering. Its core concentration is on the issues of defining policy intent, translating political priorities into coherent policy frameworks, setting objectives, learning from effective monitoring and evaluation systems, and adjusting the course to ensure that policies remain relevant. It could be said in simple terms that the policy management is preoccupied with the question: “Are we doing right things, and are they still relevant?” [9].



Figure 1. Difference of policy management and public administration

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Figure 2. Comparison of policy management as a steering function and public administration as a doing function

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Public administration is more concerned with the aspect of doing: organising public institutions to perform laws and policies, deliver quality services, enforce regulations, manage inputs and resources effectively and efficiently and comply with the procedures. It could be said that public administration main question is "Are we doing things right, efficiently, and according to the rules?" [10].

This distinction matters significantly because many governments actually invest more in administrative capacity while under-investing in the institutional machinery that transforms evidence, results, and citizen feedback into steering decisions [9; 10].

A concept of governance triangle and its reinforcing aspects

The synthesis of articles reviewed for this research brought us to the concept of "governance triangle" and its reinforcing convergence.

In particular, the three pillars of the governance triangle that reinforce or weaken its performance are as follows:

- **Policy management** - is an institutional capability, its backbone that helps to steer the policy cycle effectively and adaptively, based on the evidence-based methods. Independent evaluation is one of core policy management methods.



Figure 3. Governance triangle pillars

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- **Citizen engagement** - is considered in this context more as a governance not communication capacity. Citizen engagement informs policy quality when applied meaningfully in formal decision-making through feedback loops, among other means.

- **Civic education** - is an important enabling factor that furnishes civic and policy knowledge and experience into the informed deliberations, trade-offs, and constructive participation [9; 6].

The weakness or strength of any one pillar of the governance triangle either constrains or enhances its overall structure. Thus, evidence-based policies struggle without public feedback and broader understanding; engagement lacks impact without institutional uptake; and civic capacity loses momentum without effective and efficient policy performance [9; 4].

The governance performance loop: education → engagement → national monitoring and evaluation systems→ digital tools

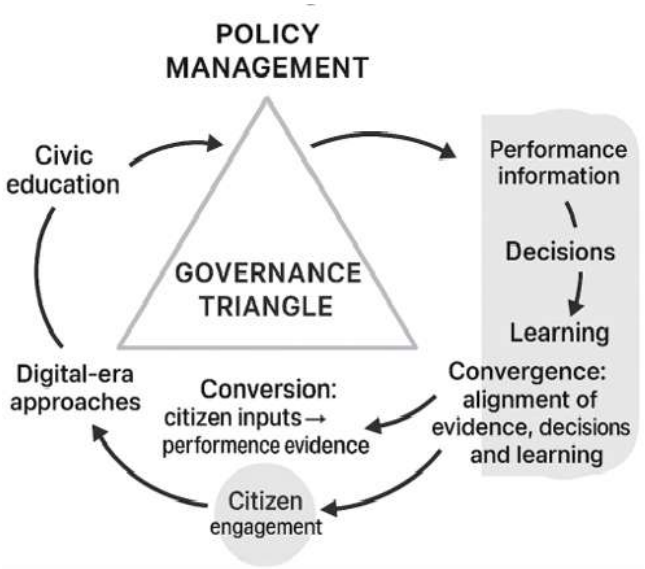


Figure 4. Operationalization Pathways of Governance Performance Loop

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To operationalize the above-mentioned governance triangle, this article proposes to consider four interconnected dimensions of the governance performance loop, which are as follows:

1. **Civic education** (dimension of capacity supply): develops knowledge of institutions and rights, deliberative and communication skills, norms of responsibility, and motivation to participate.

2. **Citizen engagement** (dimension of signal capture and co-creation): focuses on institutionalized channels of consultations, hearings, advisory bodies, participatory monitoring, and online feedback that surface local knowledge, preferences and experience.

3. **National monitoring and evaluation systems** (dimension of decision-making and steering conversion): monitoring routines, performance indicators and evaluation processes that translate citizen inputs and administrative and statistical data into evidence for steering decisions, learning and accountability.

4. **Digital-era technologies and methods** (dimension of speed and scale): open data, interoperable registries, digital platforms and analytics that widen access, improve timeliness and enable cross-system insights [4].

The value-added of this governance performance loop is in bridging its elements. Thus, engagement becomes meaningful when inputs are visibly reflected in performance information, decisions and learning. The literature studied for this article revealed that dashboards often remain insufficiently used or improperly institutionalized [9].

Measuring What Matters: An Input–Throughput–Output Framework and the Concept of the “Missing Middle”

Why metrics matter in governance

Metrics are central for both policy management and public administration. Public institutions are constantly in the choice of what to prioritize, which policy instruments and methods to deploy, and when and how to adjust the course. Without credible metrics, these choices risk being driven by assumptions, political cycles, or administrative conveniences rather than by the evidence of what works, for whom, and under what circumstances. Measurement therefore functions not merely as a reporting instrument, but as a core mechanism of robust, evidence-based, people-centered, and forward-looking policy steering. More specifically, it makes intentions visible, performance transparent and comparable, and enables knowledge accumulation and learning over time. OECD analyses consistently show that in places where monitoring and evaluation are weak or disconnected from decision authority, policies tend to persist regardless of their effectiveness. In those experiences adaptation becomes episodic rather than systematic.

From a governance perspective, metrics are also essential for linking the three dimensions of the governance triangle and bridging the governance performance gap. Policy management requires metrics to assess and inform whether policy objectives still remain relevant and whether strategic trajectory should be corrected. The effectiveness of citizen engagement, among other factors, depends on metrics that make participation meaningful rather than symbolic; by making observable how public inputs are translated into action; and whether - and how - they influence decision-making. In other words, civic education, relies on credible evidence-informed metrics to demonstrate how abstract policy goals translate into signals of progress, understandable tradeoffs, and results on the ground; how they informed deliberation and sustained public trust. When measurement is absent or narrowly focused on compliance, the following three dimen-

sions drift apart. Evidence fails to inform steering; engagement loses credibility; and civic capacity is not used to inform, validate, or signal policy performance [10].

Civic education and citizen engagement are closely linked. Civic education empowers individuals with the knowledge, skills and values that contribute to active participation in democratic processes, while citizen engagement aims at the practical application of these skills in order to make governance more efficient and improve community life. Taken together, they strengthen democracy by promoting volunteerism and responsibility, commitment and civic activism.

This is supported by a growing body of evidence that well-designed civic education can have significant positive impacts. Research typically identifies three distinct ways in which students absorb and apply civic knowledge: (i) acquiring basic knowledge, (ii) becoming more politically active, and (iii) internalizing deeper democratic values [13].

At the same time, to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of civic education across the education system requires more rigorous national evaluations of civic education programmes, with a focus on quality, accessibility, and impact on diverse student populations [11].

However, governance metrics face a welldocumented structural challenge. While most governments are able to measure inputs (such as budgets, staff, and activities) and are increasingly pressured to report on highlevel outcomes, the intermediate space where policies are interpreted, contested, and operationalized often remains insufficiently measured or evidenced. This challenge is called a "missing middle". The "missing middle" often relates to, or insufficiently informs such aspects as changes in awareness, access, uptake, service quality, institutional responsiveness, and behavioural adaptation. More precisely, it does not show robust metrics and mechanisms through which policy intent is translated into societal change. Without reliable metrics in this space, governance systems and practitioners will struggle to explain *how* results were produced, *how* to attribute change credibly, or *how* to learn or apply adaptive management methods in real time [8].

Recognizing this gap shifts the purpose of measurement from compliance toward actionability to inform steering. Hence, the purpose of metrics is not to add complexity, but to clarify causal pathways for decision points within the governance process. A practical way to operationalize this logic is therefore to articulate governance performance through a straightforward and explicit mechanism of input–throughput–output. When effectively established, it shall be visible *what* enters the system, *how* it is processed, and *what* informs decisionmaking and accountability.

To make governance performance loops actionable and effective, the measurement mechanisms shall move beyond the culture of tracking activities and outcomes. Instead, it shall focus on how policy intents translate into decisions, actions, and adaptive change. This challenge or gap is often discussed in evaluation and other literature as the "missing middle". It refers to a space between inputs and ultimate outcomes where learning, engagement, and institutional uptake actually occur, yet often remains weakly measured or conceptually underdeveloped. Addressing this gap requires a consistent and explicit analytical structure that clarifies what enters the system, how it is processed, and what is produced as an end result. A practical way to design the loop, therefore, is to articulate inputs, throughputs, and outputs as logically connected development chain. It will make the results framework consistent and robust to inform policy steering and governance performance loop management.

In simple terms, inputs, throughputs, outputs and the missing middle could be defined as follows:

***Inputs*:** institutional, legal, financial, and technological resources that enable policy steering, together with civic competence produced through curricula and adult learning, and administrative and statistical data.

***Throughputs*:** national monitoring and evaluation systems and performance management routines that structure how citizen engagement is conducted and how inputs are converted into decisionrelevant evidence for steering, learning, and accountability.

***Outputs*:** products, capital goods, and services that result from a development intervention, produced by evaluation systems and made available to inform decision-making, accountability, and policy improvement [9].

Missing Middle: the key objective to address “missing middle” is to bridge the gap between operational data (budgets, activities, services delivered) and population-level outcomes (for example national or global Sustainable Development Goal indicators). Without this intermediate level outcome evidence and robust measurement of data on such aspects as awareness, uptake, service quality, behavioural change, the policies cannot be effectively and credibly steered or adapted [9; 4].

Table 1. Provides an indicative simple chain illustrating ‘missing middle’

Inputs	Outputs	Intermediate outcomes – often the “missing middle”	National-level indicator
Budget, staff, communication assets, civic competence	Awareness campaign; outreach; knowledge products, support services	Awareness increase; access increase; service uptake increase; satisfaction increase; behaviour change	Population prevalence indicator (e.g., tobacco use rate)

Source: World Bank learning materials, Global Evaluation Initiative, 2025 [2]

Building up national monitoring and evaluation (NMES) systems and ecosystems: three approaches and common challenges

Building up a National Monitoring and Evaluation System is not a small and easy task. The World Bank/ Global Evaluation Initiative 2025 learning resource on the building blocks of effective national M&E systems outlines three broad routes: revolutionary (scrap everything and start fresh), copying (adopt a tested model from elsewhere), and incremental (build on existing strengths while addressing gaps, grounded in the local context) [2].

The incremental route is often emphasized as it supports continuity, leverages existing strengths and adapts reforms to reality. Common challenges include: (i) institutionalizing M&E practices so monitoring and evaluation become a permanent and integrated part of government operations; (ii) ensuring effective use of data in policy management (often data exist but are not used to inform decisions); (iii) sustaining progress beyond crises when momentum declines; and (iv) maintaining long-term commitment to invest in systems and capacities [2; 9; 4].

Thus, taken together, the three routes for building the national M&E system underscore that the central issue is not the choice of reform model, but whether evidence use becomes embedded in the everyday functioning of government. Revolutionary or copied systems may appear technically robust on paper, yet often struggle to take root if they bypass existing institutions, incentives, and routines. Incremental approaches, while slower, highlight that effective NMES development is fundamentally about institutionalization: making monitoring, evaluation, and learning part of how policies are steered, adjusted, and justified over time. The common challenges identified – limited use of available data, episodic momentum linked to crises, and fragile longterm commitment – point to a deeper governance risk: without sustained investment in systems and capacities, M&E remains peripheral, compliancedriven, or symbolic.

Digital and adaptive M&E: lessons from crises and complex systems

The materials reviewed for this article note that complex and interconnected policy challenges (e.g., health emergencies, climate risks, economic shocks) have increased demand for more adaptive, timely and people-centred evidence. Practical directions include: digital/remote data collection, mobile surveys, and real-time feedback mechanisms; adaptive management approaches that allow indicators and targets to be refined as contexts change; community-led monitoring where local actors contribute to data generation; and cross-system analysis that integrates information across sectors [4].

These approaches broaden the scope through understanding of *what* evidence is available and *when* it is available. However, they only improve policy management when embedded in institutional routines, roles and incentives for evidence use [9].

Examples of international best practice snapshots: Canada, United Kingdom, Republic of Korea

The review of global experience provides examples of how national monitoring and evaluation systems link to governance accountability, service quality and trust. Below are three illustrative examples:

***Canada*:** A results-based framework institutionalizes performance information and evaluation to support evidence-informed decision-making and accountability across the government [12; 4]. Canada is a strong globally known example as it demonstrates how the national monitoring and evaluation system can be institutionalized and inform policy management. The federal *Policy on Results* embeds performance measurement, evaluation, and departmental results frameworks into core management processes, linking evidence directly to planning, budgeting, and reporting across the government. For the purpose of this article, Canada example illustrates how NMES can function as the *conversion mechanism* in the governance performance loop: citizen needs, administrative data, and programme experience are systematically translated into results for steering and parliamentary accountability. The case shows that the key value of NMES is not in sophisticated indicators alone, but in clearly assigned mandates, standardized expectations, and routinised use of evidence within executive decision-making.

United Kingdom: A government-wide efficiency framework sets definitions and reporting standards to track efficiencies, strengthen oversight, and improve transparency in public spending [3; 4]. The United Kingdom provides a compelling example of how evidence systems can be leveraged to strengthen policy discipline and transparency. The *Government Efficiency Framework* sets common definitions, reporting standards, and performance expectations across departments, enabling comparability and oversight in how public resources are used and what value is generated. For this article, the example of UK shows how monitoring information can support *strategic steering* rather than retrospective control: efficiency metrics are explicitly designed to inform tradeoffs, prioritization, and reform decisions at system level. It highlights that NMES effectiveness depends not only on data availability, but on authoritative frameworks that align incentives, clarify what "performance" means, and ensure that evidence feeds into highlevel fiscal and policy decisions.

Republic of Korea: Open data policy illustrates how making government data accessible can strengthen service quality, accountability and citizen participation [1; 4]. The Republic of Korea stands out as a best-practice example of how digitalization and open data can reinforce national monitoring and evaluation systems when paired with governance arrangements and data use. Korea open data policy demonstrates how making government data accessible, standardized, and reusable can improve service quality, enable external scrutiny, and stimulate citizen participation—while still supporting internal performance management. For the purposes of this article, Korea example illustrates the *acceleration function* of the governance performance loop. In Korea example digital tools increase the speed, scale, and visibility of evidence flows. Its governance value-added is when data are monitored, interpreted, and linked to service improvement and accountability mechanisms. The case demonstrates digital openness not as a substitute of NMES, but as a linkage to institutional routines for evidenceinformed policy management.

Governance performance loop and NMES design principles

Based on the synthesis across the reviewed materials, the following principles make the governance performance loop operational: (1) Link engagement to decision authority: consultations should have a clear pathway to influence, and institutions should communicate how inputs were considered; (2) Institutionalize evidence use: assign mandates, roles and routines for monitoring, evaluation and learning across the policy cycle; (3) Measure the "missing middle": track intermediate outcomes that connect services and budgets to national indicators; (4) Balance supply and demand: build technical capacity while strengthening incentives for evidence use among decision-makers; (5) Govern digitalization: invest in interoperability, data quality, transparency and safeguards so digital tools strengthen (not undermine) trust [9; 10].

Conclusion

This article synthesized elements of civic education, citizen engagement, national monitoring and evaluation systems and ecosystems, and digital-era tools into a single governance performance loop that supports evidence-informed policy management. The core messages are straightforward: (1) participation contrib-

utes to governance improvement when citizen knowledge and experience are meaningfully involved; (2) civic education builds competence; engagement captures societal signals; (3) NMES converts signals into steering and accountability; and (4) digital tools accelerate and scale governance performance loop. To improve governance performance loop, the priority is to strengthen its connective tissue, use evaluative evidence for quality steering, and ensure robust intermediate outcome measurement of the ”missing middle”.

Viewing through the concept of governance triangle, policy management and public administration are complementary functions of the same system: civic education enables meaningful engagement, engagement generates signals, NMES translates those signals into steering, and public administration turns that steering into performed actions and results.

In conclusion, four streams of contemporary governance – civic education, citizen engagement, national monitoring and evaluation systems, and digital-era approaches – are strongly interrelated and create a single convergence loop that strengthens or weakness the policy management infrastructure. As a firm recommendation, the need to conduct more rigorous evaluations of civic education programs and use them properly through national monitoring and evaluation system for policy management and steering. Regular evaluations will also foster accountability and ecosystem of policy management, continuous improvement, ultimately contributing to a more engaged and informed citizenry.

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Presented: 27.02.2026
Reviewed: 30.04.2026
Accepted for publication: 20.05.2026