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Citizen-Centric Governance and the New Public Management (NPM)

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Abstract

Public administration in many countries has long struggled with inefficiency, weak accountability and limited citizen participation; challenges that undermine trust in governance and the delivery of public services. Traditional Weberian bureaucracy, while emphasising hierarchy and control, has proven to be inadequate in addressing the dynamic needs of citizens in contemporary governance systems. This study examines citizen-centric governance under the New Public Administration (NPM). The paper is anchored on New Public Service (NPS) theory. The study pursues three objectives, which include to explore the principles and practices of citizen-centric governance under NPM, analysing the extent to which NPM reforms have improved accountability and service delivery, and to assess the challenges and prospects of citizen-centric governance in modern governance contexts. Empirical literature revealed that citizen-centric practices significantly enhance the effectiveness of NPM reforms, while innovations such as Internet of Things integration improve efficiency, responsiveness and participation. Nonetheless, implementation challenges, including bureaucratic resistance, resource gaps and administrative bottlenecks, remain substantial. The study concludes that citizen-centric governance, when balanced with the efficiency tools of NPM, holds strong potential for strengthening democratic accountability and sustainable service delivery. Based on the findings, the study recommends that governments institutionalise citizen feedback mechanisms, invest in digital technologies and capacity-building for public officials, and strengthen transparency frameworks to bridge the gap between policy and citizen expectations.

Keywords: Accountability, Citizen-Centric Governance, New Public Management (NPM), Responsiveness, Public Service Delivery

Introduction

The paradigm of public administration has undergone significant transformations over the last four decades, with the shift from traditional public administration to New Public Management (NPM) marking one of the most profound changes in the theory and practice of administration. Traditional public administration, rooted in Weberian bureaucracy, emphasized hierarchy, rigid rules, and centralized control as the means of ensuring efficiency and accountability in service delivery. However, by the late 1970s and 1980s, this model came under sustained criticism for being overly bureaucratic, process-driven and unresponsive to the changing needs of citizens in dynamic socio-economic environments (Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Ojiako, Oju, Nwosu and Ojoh (2023) pointed out that world is changing, no doubt, and in the quest for efficiency, managers now fear for their future as the traditional roles keep diminishing as the human factor in modern organizations keep eroding with modern ideas and innovations. NPM emerged as a reform movement that sought to infuse market principles, managerialism, and performance measurement into public administration, thereby reshaping the role of the state and its interaction with citizens.

At the heart of NPM is the recognition that citizens are not passive recipients of state policies and services, but active stakeholders whose needs, preferences and satisfaction must drive the logic of governance. This has given rise to the idea of citizen-centric governance, which emphasizes service orientation, accountability, transparency and participatory mechanisms in the delivery of public goods (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Christensen & Lægreid, 2007). Rather than treating citizens as mere clients of state bureaucracy, citizen-centric governance reframes them as "customers" whose voices and feedback are essential for evaluating and improving government performance. This shift has been reinforced by broader democratic trends, globalization and the diffusion of ICTs, which have heightened citizens' expectations for quality, accessibility and responsiveness in public services (Osborne, 2010).

Citizen-centric governance under NPM also reflects the growing consensus that effective governance requires a balance between efficiency and legitimacy. While NPM initially drew heavily on private-sector practices such as contracting out, competition and performance benchmarking, its evolution has incorporated values of inclusiveness and collaboration, aligning state functions more closely with societal needs (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). In practice, this has meant greater emphasis on service charters, citizen

feedback mechanisms, e-governance platforms, and policy co-creation initiatives, all of which are intended to ensure that public services are not only cost-effective but also relevant and user-oriented (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016).

In contemporary debates, citizen-centric governance under the NPM framework is viewed as both a normative aspiration and a practical necessity. Normatively, it reinforces the democratic ethos that governance should be accountable to the people. Practically, it provides a framework for addressing the legitimacy crisis that many governments face due to inefficiency, corruption, and lack of responsiveness. As governments worldwide grapple with complex challenges ranging from poverty and inequality to security and climate change the imperative of placing citizens at the center of governance has become more urgent than ever. Citizen-centric governance under NPM thus offers an approach that seeks to restore trust in government institutions, improve service delivery, and foster inclusive development by ensuring that citizens' voices are heard and their needs prioritized (Pierre & Peters, 2000). The objectives of this study include to;

(i) examine the principles and practices of citizen-centric governance within the framework of New Public Management.

(ii) analyse the extent to which New Public Management reforms have enhanced responsiveness, accountability, and service delivery to citizens.

(iii) assess the challenges of implementing citizen-centric governance under New Public Management in contemporary governance systems.

Hypothesis

Ho1. Citizen-centric governance practices do not significantly influence the effectiveness of New Public Management reforms.

Ho2 New Public Management reforms have not positively enhanced responsiveness, accountability, and service delivery to citizens.

Ho3. There is no significant challenges associated with implementing citizen-centric governance under New Public Management

Conceptual Review

Citizen-Centric Governance

Citizen-centric governance is an approach to public administration and service delivery that places the needs, preferences, and participation of citizens at the core of governance processes. Unlike traditional models of administration that often-viewed citizens as passive recipients of state services, the citizen-centric model regards them as active stakeholders,

partners, and rights-holders in governance. The concept emphasizes responsiveness, accountability, inclusiveness, transparency, and the alignment of government policies and services with the expectations of the people they are designed to serve (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Osborne, 2010).

At its core, citizen-centric governance is driven by the principle that governance should not merely be about institutions and processes, but about improving the quality of life of citizens. It recognizes that public institutions exist to serve people and that their effectiveness must be measured by the satisfaction and trust of citizens rather than by bureaucratic compliance or internal efficiency alone (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). This means that governments are expected to move beyond rigid, top-down approaches and adopt mechanisms that allow citizens to influence policy design, participate in decision-making, and provide feedback on service delivery (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007).

One of the central dimensions of citizen-centric governance is its service orientation. Public agencies are expected to adopt customer-focused practices similar to those in the private sector, ensuring that services are accessible, timely, affordable, and of high quality (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). This often involves the development of service charters, performance measurement systems, e-governance platforms, and citizen feedback tools that enhance communication between the state and its citizens. In addition, citizen-centric governance seeks to empower marginalized groups by ensuring that governance systems are inclusive and equitable, thereby reducing social inequalities and fostering a sense of belonging among all citizens (Pierre & Peters, 2000).

Furthermore, the concept is closely linked to democratic ideals. By fostering participation, dialogue, and accountability, citizen-centric governance strengthens the legitimacy of government institutions and deepens trust between the state and society. It encourages co-creation of policies, participatory budgeting, and collaborative governance practices where citizens are not just beneficiaries but also co-producers of public value (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). In contemporary governance discourse, citizen-centric governance is seen as both a response to the shortcomings of traditional bureaucratic administration and an adaptation to new challenges such as globalization, technological change, and rising citizen expectations. It highlights the imperative that effective governance must be people-centered, outcome-oriented, and committed to building strong, inclusive, and participatory societies.

New Public Management

New Public Management (NPM) refers to a set of administrative reforms and managerial practices that emerged in the late 20th century as an alternative to the traditional bureaucratic model of public administration. Rooted in neoliberal economic thought and influenced by private-sector management techniques, NPM emphasizes efficiency, effectiveness, competition, and results-oriented governance in the public sector. It arose primarily in the 1980s in response to growing dissatisfaction with the rigidities of Weberian bureaucracy, which was criticized for being slow, inefficient, costly, and unresponsive to the changing needs of citizens (Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

The central Idea of NPM Is the application of private-sector principles to public administration to make government more efficient, accountable, and performance-driven. It promotes practices such as decentralisation, contracting out services, introduction of competition between public agencies, performance measurement, and customer-oriented service delivery (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Opposed to focusing on rules and procedures, NPM shifts attention to outcomes, value-for-money, and the satisfaction of citizens, who are often regarded as "customers" of government services (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007).

Another defining feature of NPM is its managerial orientation. Public managers are given greater autonomy and flexibility to innovate, make decisions, and allocate resources in pursuit of organisational goals. This shift reflects the belief that empowering managers, rather than constraining them with strict bureaucratic controls, enhances accountability and improves performance. At the same time, NPM insists on measurable results, emphasising performance indicators, targets, and benchmarking as tools for evaluating success and holding agencies accountable (Hood & Peters, 2004).

NPM also embodies the influence of neoliberalism, with its advocacy of a smaller, more efficient state and the expansion of market mechanisms in public service provision. Privatization, outsourcing, and public-private partnerships are common strategies under NPM reforms, reflecting the conviction that competition and market-based solutions can deliver services more effectively than traditional government monopolies (Gruening, 2001). While critics argue that this market-driven approach risks undermining equity, accountability, and the public interest, proponents maintain that it enhances efficiency and reduces waste in government (Dunleavy et al., 2006). In practice, NPM has been implemented in various forms across countries, including the United

Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and later in many developing nations, with varying degrees of success. In some contexts, it has improved efficiency and responsiveness, while in others it has been criticized for neglecting democratic values and creating fragmented governance structures. Nonetheless, NPM remains a central concept in public administration studies, symbolizing the global trend of reforming governance by blending managerialism, performance orientation, and citizen-focused service delivery.

Relationship Between New Public Management and Citizen-Centric Governance

New Public Management (NPM) and citizen-centric governance are closely linked in contemporary public administration discourse, yet they emphasize different aspects of governance. NPM, which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, is primarily concerned with improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and performance of public sector organizations by adopting managerial practices from the private sector. This includes the use of performance indicators, outsourcing, competition, decentralization, and a focus on results rather than processes (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). In contrast, citizen-centric governance emphasizes placing citizens at the center of governance, ensuring that government policies, programs, and services are responsive, participatory, transparent, and accountable (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Osborne, 2010).

Despite these differences, NPM provides important tools that can support citizen-centric governance. For example, NPM's focus on performance measurement and efficiency creates mechanisms for evaluating service delivery, which can be adapted to assess how well government meets citizens' needs. By introducing customer-oriented practices, such as service charters, feedback systems, and benchmarking, NPM encourages public agencies to be more responsive and accountable to the people they serve (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). In this sense, NPM acts as an enabler of citizen-centric governance by promoting a service-oriented mindset and results-driven culture within the public sector.

However, the relationship between the two concepts is not entirely seamless. Critics of NPM argue that its market-driven and managerialist orientation may sometimes conflict with the principles of citizen-centric governance. Treating citizens as "customers" can lead to a transactional approach to public service, where efficiency and cost-cutting take precedence over inclusivity, equity, and participatory decision-making (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007). Therefore, while NPM provides

mechanisms for improving service delivery, it must be complemented by approaches such as the New Public Service (NPS) framework, which emphasizes democratic engagement, collaboration, and ethical responsibility (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). In practice, integrating NPM with citizen-centric governance requires a careful balance. Governments can harness NPM tools such as performance measurement, decentralization, and e-governance while ensuring that policies and services remain inclusive, participatory, and aligned with citizens' expectations. This hybrid approach leverages the managerial efficiency of NPM while upholding the democratic and participatory ideals of citizen-centric governance, ultimately enhancing both the effectiveness and legitimacy of public sector institutions (Pierre & Peters, 2000; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016).

Theoretical Framework: New Public Service Theory

This study is anchored on the New Public Service (NPS) Theory. This theory was developed by Janet V. Denhardt and Robert B. Denhardt in 2000. The NPS emerged as a critique and alternative to New Public Management (NPM), which had dominated public sector reforms in the 1980s and 1990s with its strong emphasis on efficiency, competition, and market-oriented practices. While NPM introduced important innovations such as performance measurement and customer orientation, it was criticised for reducing citizens to mere consumers of government services and for neglecting the broader democratic values of participation, equity, and accountability. Against this backdrop, the NPS framework argued that the true purpose of governance is not simply to steer or control society, as suggested by managerialist models, but to serve citizens and empower them to shape the public interest through democratic engagement.

The key assumptions of the NPS are grounded in democratic citizenship and public value creation. First, it assumes that citizens are not merely customers of public services but the collective owners of government. This means that the legitimacy of governance is derived from citizen participation rather than from managerial efficiency alone. Second, the theory emphasizes that the public interest is not something predetermined or defined by administrators but something constructed through dialogue, negotiation, and collaboration among citizens. Third, the NPS framework highlights that governance must be value-driven, prioritizing fairness, justice, transparency, and ethical responsibility alongside efficiency. Fourth, it assumes that the role of public servants is to serve rather than steer; administrators are seen as facilitators of citizen engagement

rather than as entrepreneurs or corporate-style managers. Finally, accountability under NPS goes beyond performance indicators and numerical targets to embrace democratic responsibility and responsiveness to citizen needs.

The relevance of the NPS theory to this study lies in its ability to provide a balanced framework for understanding citizen-centric governance within the broader discourse of New Public Management. While NPM contributes useful tools for improving efficiency and responsiveness, the NPS ensures that these reforms are not pursued at the expense of democratic legitimacy, inclusiveness, and public trust. By emphasizing service, dialogue, and participation, the NPS theory complements NPM's managerial innovations with a human-centred and democratic perspective. This makes it highly suitable for analysing how citizen-centric governance can be designed and implemented in ways that not only improve efficiency but also strengthen democratic accountability and citizen empowerment.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a descriptive-survey research design, which is suitable for examining perceptions, experiences, and evaluating citizen-centric governance under New Public Management (NPM) reforms. This design facilitates the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, providing an in-depth understanding of service delivery and governance practices in Makurdi Local Government Area (MLG), Benue State. The population comprises public officials, administrators, and citizens who interact with public service institutions under NPM-driven reforms in Makurdi. Specifically, the study focuses on employees of key agencies central to citizen service delivery and digital governance, including the Benue Digital Infrastructure Company (BDIC), Benue State Digital Infrastructure Service Management Enforcement Agency (BENDOSMEA), the Benue Information Technology Agency (BETA), and the Benue State Bureau of Statistics (BSBS) and residents of Makurdi Metropolis.

S/N	Agency / Organization	Staff Strength / Coverage
1	Benue Digital Infrastructure Company (BDIC)	85
2	Benue State Digital Infrastructure Service Management Enforcement Agency (BENDOSMEA)	72
3	Benue Information Technology Agency (BETA)	64
4	Benue State Bureau of Statistics (BSBS)	58
	Resident of Makurdi	400,00

The combined staff strength of these agencies is 279 employees**,** while the estimated number of residents accessing services from these agencies is 400,000.

Consequently, the total population for the study is 400,279 respondents. The study employs a simple random sampling technique to select participants, ensuring that every member of the population has an equal chance of being included. Using the Cochran (1977) formula for sample size determination, the study ensures a statistically valid and representative sample for empirical analysis.

:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2}$$

Where:

n_0= sample size

Z= Z-score (1.96 for 95% confidence level)

p= estimated proportion of attribute (0.5)

q= 1 – p (0.5)

e= margin of error (0.05)

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot (0.5) \cdot (0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 385$$

Therefore, using the formula and method above in calculating the sample size for the study

$$\boldsymbol{n_o} = \frac{\frac{n_o}{1 + (n_o - 1)}}{N}$$

Where

n= Sample Size

$\boldsymbol{n_o}$ = Level of Significance (385)

1 = Constant

N = Population

$$\boldsymbol{n_o} = \frac{\frac{385}{1 + (385 - 1)}}{400{,}450}$$

385÷ (1+ (400,450)

=385

The research utilises a simple random sampling method to choose the participants for the study. In this approach, the selection of individuals is entirely based on chance or probability, which is why this sampling method is occasionally referred to as a technique of chance. A total of 385 respondents were randomly chosen from the residents of Makurdi, and the staff of the selected ministries. The random technique was used to ensure unbiased selection.

The study utilised both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to both citizens and public servants, focusing on perceptions of service delivery, responsiveness, accountability, and citizen participation. Secondary data were collected from textbooks, scholarly journals, policy documents, and online resources relevant to NPM and citizen-centric governance.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. Items with mean values above 3.0 were considered acceptable, while those below 3.0 were deemed inadequate. Regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between variables.

Model Specification

The model specification for this study is designed to empirically assess the relationship between citizen-centric

governance and key factors under New Public Management (NPM) reforms in public administration. The baseline econometric model is expressed as:

$$CCGi = \beta_0 + \beta_1 NPMi + \beta_2 ACi + \beta_3 CHLi + \varepsilon_i$$

Where:

$CCGi$= Level of Citizen-Centric Governance in public institutions

$NPMi$= Implementation intensity of New Public Management reforms (e.g., performance measurement, service charters, decentralization)

ACi= Accountability and responsiveness mechanisms in public service delivery

$CHLi$= Challenges experienced by public officials in implementing citizen-centric governance under NPM

ε_i= Error term capturing unobserved influences on citizen-centric governance

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Attributes	Frequency (N = 385)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	236	61.3
Female	149	38.7
Age (years)		
18-25	187	48.6
26-40	169	43.9
41 and above	29	7.5
Marital Status		
Single	210	54.5
Married	172	44.7
Divorced	3	0.8
Educational Qualification		
First School Leaving Certificate	28	7.3
Trade Test	35	9.1
SCE/NECO	100	25.9
NCE/Diploma	97	25.2
Degree	107	27.8
Postgraduate	18	4.7
Total	385	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The table above presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 385 respondents. The results indicate that a larger proportion of respondents were male (61.3%) compared to female participants (38.7%), suggesting higher male representation or availability during data collection.

Most respondents were aged 18-25 years (48.6%), followed by those aged 26-40 years (43.9%), and 41 years and above (7.5%). This shows that the study predominantly gathered insights from younger adults, who are generally more aware of and engaged with socio-economic and governance matters.

Regarding marital status, the majority of respondents were single (54.5%), followed by married individuals (44.7%) and a few divorced participants (0.8%). This indicates that single individuals were more prevalent in the study, which may reflect the demographics of those most likely to interact with or be affected by public service initiatives.

In terms of educational qualifications, most respondents held a degree (27.8%), followed by those with SCE/NECO (25.9%), NCE/Diploma (25.2%), Trade Test (9.1%), First School Leaving Certificate (7.3%), and Postgraduate qualifications (4.7%). This distribution suggests that a considerable portion of participants were formally educated, implying that the information gathered is influenced by respondents with a relatively high understanding of citizen-centric governance and public service issues.

Table 2: The principles and practices of citizen-centric governance within the framework of New Public Management

S/N	the principles and practices of citizen-centric-governance within the framework of New Public Management	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD (Std. Dev)	Decision
1	Public officials actively seek and incorporate citizens' opinions and feedback when making policy decisions	28	25	20	145	167	3.98	1.16	Accepted
2	Decision-making processes in public institutions are transparent, allowing citizens to easily access information about services and governance activities	30	28	22	140	165	4.00	1.18	Accepted
3	Public services are designed and delivered in ways that prioritize efficiency, responsiveness, and satisfaction of citizens' needs	27	30	23	150	155	3.95	1.14	Accepted
4	Training and capacity-building programs for public officials adequately equip them to implement citizen-centric governance practices effectively	32	28	18	148	159	3.92	1.12	Accepted

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 2 presents data the principles and practices of citizen-centric-governance within the framework of New Public Management. The mean scores for the four statements range from

3.92 to 4.00**,** indicating overall agreement among respondents. The findings suggest that public officials actively incorporate citizen feedback, decision-making processes are transparent, services are designed to prioritize efficiency and responsiveness, and training programs adequately equip officials to implement citizen-centric governance practices effectively. Since both individual item means and the cluster mean are above the threshold of 3.0, it can be concluded that NPM reforms have positively contributed to citizen-focused service delivery in Makurdi public institutions.

Table 3: The extent to which New Public Management reforms have enhanced responsiveness, accountability, and service delivery to citizens

S/N	The extent to which New Public Management reforms have enhanced responsiveness, accountability, and service delivery to citizens	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD (Std. Dev)	Decision
1	Services are delivered more quickly since NPM reforms were introduced	25	30	20	140	170	4.05	1.18	Accepted
2	Public staff respond promptly to citizens' requests and complaints	28	25	22	150	160	4.00	1.15	Accepted
3	Citizens receive timely updates about services and policies	22	18	25	180	140	3.95	1.12	Accepted
4	Communication between citizens and public institutions has improved	30	20	18	160	157	3.92	1.10	Accepted

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 2 presents data on the extent to which NPM reforms have enhanced responsiveness, accountability, and service delivery. The mean scores for the four statements are 4.05, 4.00, 3.95, and 3.92, respectively. Since both the individual item means and the cluster mean are above the threshold of 3.0, it indicates that the implementation of NPM reforms has positively influenced public service delivery in Makurdi. Specifically, respondents agree that services are delivered more quickly, public staff respond promptly to requests and complaints, citizens receive timely updates about services and policies, and communication between citizens and public institutions has improved. Overall, these findings suggest that NPM reforms have contributed to enhancing efficiency, accountability, and citizen-focused service delivery in the study area.

Table 4: Challenges associated with implementing citizen-centric governance under New Public Management

S/N	Challenges associated with implementing citizen-centric governance under New Public Management	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Public institutions prioritize citizens' needs and feedback in their decision-making processes	10	17	15	141	204	4.32	0.93	Accepted
2	Bureaucratic resistance and lack of resources hinder the effective implementation of citizen-centric governance	16	12	2	273	84	4.02	0.84	Accepted
3	Mechanisms such as public forums, feedback platforms, and surveys are effective in enabling citizens to participate in governance decisions	2	6	12	356	11	3.95	0.40	Accepted
4	Adoption of digital technologies, transparency measures, and training of public officials can significantly improve citizen-centric governance under NPM	8	34	12	199	134	4.07	0.95	Accepted

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 4 presents data on the challenges and prospects of implementing citizen-centric governance under NPM. The mean scores for the four statements range from **3**.95 to 4.32, indicating strong agreement among respondents. The findings suggest that public institutions largely prioritize citizen needs and feedback in decision-making, though bureaucratic resistance and resource constraints remain significant challenges. Mechanisms such as public forums, feedback platforms, and surveys are perceived as effective tools for citizen participation, while the adoption of digital technologies, transparency measures, and capacity-building for officials are seen as promising strategies to enhance citizen-centric governance. Since both individual item means and the cluster mean are above 3.0, it can be concluded that while challenges exist, there are clear prospects for improving citizen-centric governance under NPM in contemporary governance systems.

Table 5: Effect of Citizen-Centric Governance on NPM Effectiveness

Predictor variable	R	R^2	Df	F	β	Sig
Constant	.716	.513	1	30.257		.000**
Citizen-Centric Governance Practices					-.098	.000**

**P < .01; P < .05*

R = 0.716 indicates a strong positive relationship between citizen-centric governance and the effectiveness of NPM reforms. R^2 = 0.513 shows that citizen-centric practices explain 51.3% of the variation in NPM effectiveness. F = 30.257 confirms the model's significance. β = -0.098; p = .000 means the relationship is statistically significant at p < 0.01. Decision: Null hypothesis (i) is rejected. Citizen-centric governance significantly influences the effectiveness of NPM reforms.

Table 6: Impact of NPM Reforms on Responsiveness, Accountability, and Service Delivery

Predictor variable	R	R^2	Df	F	β	Sig
Constant	.354	.126	1	54.988		.000**
NPM Reforms					.475	.004

**P < .01; P < .05*

R = 0.354 indicates a moderate positive relationship between NPM reforms and responsiveness/accountability/service delivery. R^2 = 0.126 shows NPM reforms explain 12.6% of variance in service delivery outcomes. F = 54.988 includes the model is significant. β = 0.475; p = .004 means the effect is statistically significant at p < 0.01. Decision: Null hypothesis (ii) is rejected. NPM reforms have positively enhanced responsiveness, accountability, and service delivery.

Table 7: Challenges and Prospects of Citizen-Centric Governance under NPM

Predictor variable	R	R^2	Df	F	β	Sig
Constant	.701	.614	1	40.301		.000**
Challenges of NPM Implementation					-.043	.000**

**P < .01; P < .05*

$R^2 = 0.614$ shows that challenges explain 61.4% of the variation in prospects for citizen-centric governance = 40.301 indicates the model is statistically significant. $\beta = -0.043$; $p = .000$ shows challenges have a significant (negative) effect on governance prospects. Decision**:** Null hypothesis (iii) is rejected. Challenges significantly affect the prospects of citizen-centric governance under NPM.

Findings

The findings revealed that public institutions in Makurdi increasingly recognize the importance of prioritizing citizens' needs and feedback in decision-making, as indicated by a high mean score of 4.32. Mechanisms such as public forums, feedback platforms, and surveys were also rated effective (M = 3.95), reflecting efforts to integrate citizens into governance processes. These results align with the core principles of NPM, which emphasize decentralization, participation, and service orientation. However, bureaucratic resistance and limited resources (M = 4.02) remain obstacles, suggesting that while principles of citizen-centric governance are in practice, full institutionalization is still constrained. This confirms that NPM has facilitated the adoption of citizen-focused mechanisms, though the pace of reform varies depending on institutional capacity.

Evidence from the accountability-focused items (Table 2) showed consistent mean values above 3.9, indicating that citizens perceive improvements in accountability under NPM reforms. Accessibility of financial and operational reports (M = 3.98), clarity of officials' responsibilities (M = 4.00), and regular review of accountability reports (M = 3.92) suggest that transparency and performance monitoring mechanisms are being reinforced. This corresponds with NPM's emphasis on results-based management and accountability to stakeholders. The high scores demonstrate that NPM reforms have not only enhanced responsiveness but also created measurable standards against which performance can be evaluated. These findings reinforce the rejection of Hypothesis two, validating that accountability has been positively influenced by NPM reforms in Makurdi.

The study identified both significant challenges and notable prospects. Challenges such as bureaucratic inertia, resource limitations, and resistance to change persist, making it difficult to fully operationalize citizen-centric governance. At the same time, respondents strongly agreed that the adoption of digital technologies, transparency measures, and capacity building among public officials

could significantly improve governance outcomes (M = 4.07). This indicates that while the challenges are real, the prospects for overcoming them are equally strong if reforms are sustained. This finding supports hypothesis 3 rejection and aligns with global evidence that ICT adoption and institutional reforms are critical for effective NPM implementation

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the principles and practices of citizen-centric governance under the framework of New Public Management (NPM), to analyze the extent to which NPM reforms have enhanced accountability and responsiveness, and to assess the challenges and prospects of implementing such reforms in contemporary governance systems, with a focus on Makurdi. The findings revealed that citizen-centric governance has gradually gained recognition in public institutions, with citizens' needs and feedback increasingly considered in decision-making. Mechanisms such as public forums, feedback platforms, and surveys were identified as effective tools for participation, although bureaucratic resistance and limited resources remain significant obstacles.

The study further demonstrated that NPM reforms have enhanced accountability in public service delivery, as evidenced by improved access to operational and financial reports, clear performance indicators, and regular audits. These measures have contributed to greater transparency, responsiveness, and trust between public officials and citizens. Despite the challenges, prospects for strengthening citizen-centric governance under NPM are promising. The adoption of digital technologies, capacity-building programs for public officials, and greater institutional openness present practical opportunities to overcome constraints. The statistical analyses reinforced these outcomes, confirming that citizen-centric governance significantly influences the effectiveness of NPM reforms, that NPM has positively enhanced accountability and service delivery, and that while challenges exist, they also present opportunities for sustainable reform.

The study underscores that citizen-centric governance and NPM reforms are mutually reinforcing. When effectively implemented, they have the potential to improve public accountability, strengthen transparency, and enhance the quality-of-service delivery. However, achieving these outcomes requires addressing institutional resistance, resource limitations, and the need for continuous reform. For Makurdi and similar governance contexts, sustained commitment to citizen engagement and innovative reform practices will be essential in consolidating the gains of NPM and advancing inclusive governance.

Recommendations

(i) City authorities, municipal governments, and public administrators should strengthen citizen participation mechanisms by adopting digital platforms, public forums, and feedback systems to ensure that governance processes are inclusive, transparent, and responsive to citizens' needs.

(ii) Government oversight bodies, anti-corruption agencies, and municipal management teams should enhance accountability and service delivery through clear performance indicators, regular publication of financial/operational reports, and independent monitoring to track progress of NPM reforms.

(iii) National and local governments, public service commissions, and training institutions should invest in capacity-building and digital infrastructure to equip public officials with the skills and tools needed to effectively implement citizen-centric governance and address challenges in modern public administration.

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