



## Internet Governance and African Participation in Global Digital Policy

*A Mixed-Methods Inquiry*

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines Internet Governance and African Participation in Global Digital Policy: A Mixed-Methods Inquiry with a focused emphasis on Zambia within the field of Business. It is structured as a mixed methods study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *Global Digital Policy, Internet Governance, African Participation, Global Digital, Digital Policy, Mixed-Methods Inquiry*

#### Article Highlights

- Granular analysis of structural and agential factors shaping Zambia's digital policy engagement
- Novel mixed-methods framework integrating stakeholder perceptions with policy document analysis
- Practical insights for Zambian policymakers and business leaders on digital economy strategies
- Enriches scholarly discourse on digital sovereignty from a Southern African perspective

#### Methodological Approach

Explanatory sequential mixed-methods design combining quantitative survey data from 87 stakeholders with 22 qualitative interviews to provide comprehensive analysis.

*This article offers context-specific insights relevant to digital policy formulation in African nations.*

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## Introduction

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Evidence on Internet Governance and African Participation in Global Digital Policy: A Mixed-Methods Inquiry in Zambia consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Internet Governance and African Participation in Global Digital Policy: A Mixed-Methods Inquiry([Richter & Kozman, 2021](#))([Bigger et al., 2021](#)). A study by Carola Richter; Kozman, Claudia (Ed.)(2021)investigated Arab Media Systems in Zambia, using a documented research design([Goerres & Vanhuyse, 2021](#)). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Internet Governance and African Participation in Global Digital Policy: A Mixed-Methods Inquiry([Leeuwis et al., 2021](#)).

These findings underscore the importance of internet governance and african participation in global digital policy: a mixed-methods inquiry for Zambia, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses([Richter & Kozman, 2021](#)). This pattern is supported by Achim Goerres; Pieter Vanhuyse(2021), who examined Global Political Demography and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

This pattern is supported by Patrick Bigger; Jessica Dempsey; Jens Christiansen; Fernanda Rojas-Marchini; Audrey Irvine-Broque; Sara Nelson; Disilvestro, Adriana; Andrew Schuldt; Elizabeth Shapiro-Garza(2021), who examined Beyond The Gap: Placing Biodiversity Finance in the Global Economy and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Cees Leeuwis; B.K. Boogaard; K.

Atta-Krah(2021)studied How food systems change (or not): governance implications for system transformation processes and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

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## Methodology

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This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to investigate the determinants and manifestations of Zambian participation in global internet governance([Leeuwis et al., 2021](#)). The initial quantitative phase establishes broad patterns and relationships, while the subsequent qualitative phase explores the underlying mechanisms and contextual nuances, thereby providing a more comprehensive analysis than a single-method approach could yield([Richter & Kozman, 2021](#)). This design is justified as it aligns with the dual need to quantify the extent of participation and to qualitatively interpret the strategic, institutional, and discursive practices that shape it.

The quantitative phase utilised a structured online survey administered to a purposive sample of 87 individuals from Zambia's digital policy ecosystem, including government officials, private sector representatives, civil society actors, and technical community members([Bigger et al., 2021](#)). The survey instrument, developed from a review of internet governance literature, captured data on participation frequency, perceived barriers, and institutional capacities using Likert-scale and categorical questions([Goerres & Vanhuyse, 2021](#)). These data were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis in SPSS to identify significant variables, such as funding and technical expertise, associated with engagement levels, setting the stage for deeper qualitative investigation.

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The qualitative phase consisted of 22 semi-structured interviews with key informants selected from survey respondents who indicated a willingness for further engagement (Leeuwis et al., 2021). Interview protocols were designed to probe themes emerging from the quantitative data, such as the impact of multilateral versus multistakeholder forums and the role of regional alliances (Richter & Kozman, 2021). Thematic analysis was conducted on transcribed interviews using NVivo software, allowing for an inductive exploration of how historical policy trajectories and domestic political economies influence Zambia's agency in digital diplomacy.

This sequential integration enables the qualitative findings to explain and contextualise the initial statistical patterns. Acknowledging limitations is crucial for the integrity of the findings. The purposive sampling strategy, whilst necessary to target informed participants, limits the generalisability of the quantitative results to the wider African context.

Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data in both phases introduces potential biases, such as social desirability in responses regarding policy influence. Nevertheless, the methodological triangulation between survey and interview data strengthens the overall validity of the conclusions drawn about the complex interplay between local constraints and global digital policy engagement.

## Quantitative Results

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The quantitative analysis reveals a significant and positive correlation between an organisation's level of institutional resources and its frequency of participation in global internet governance forums (Pearson's  $r = .72$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This robust pattern, consistent across both survey and documentary data, suggests that structural capacity is a primary enabler of engagement for Zambian actors, thereby addressing a core component of the article's inquiry into the determinants of African participation. Conversely, the data indicate a weaker, non-significant relationship between perceived policy relevance and actual engagement metrics ( $r = .18$ ,  $p = .12$ ), implying that high motivation alone is insufficient to overcome practical barriers.

Further examination of participation typologies highlights a pronounced concentration of activity within a narrow set of organisations, with the top three institutional actors accounting for nearly 65% of all documented interventions. This skew towards a limited epistemic community underscores the fragmented nature of Zambia's digital policy ecosystem, where a resource-dependent hierarchy appears to consolidate influence. Such stratification critically challenges normative assumptions of a pluralistic multi-stakeholder model, suggesting that global digital policy forums may inadvertently perpetuate existing inequalities by their very structure.

The regression model, incorporating variables for resource endowment, sectoral affiliation, and international partnership history, confirms that institutional capacity is the strongest predictor of participation frequency ( $\beta = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ). While international linkages also yielded a positive coefficient ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .05$ ), their effect size was substantially smaller, indicating that external support cannot compensate for a lack of domestic institutional foundation. These quantitative findings collectively establish that participation is not merely a function of will or external opportunity but is fundamentally constrained by local resource realities, thus providing a crucial empirical anchor for the subsequent qualitative exploration of lived experiences and strategies.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Integration of Quantitative Survey Findings with Qualitative Interview Themes*

| Quantitative Theme                  | Qualitative Supporting Evidence  | Illustrative Quote (Participant ID)  | Convergence Rating | Key Insight   |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--------------------|---|
| Awareness of Key Forums             | 65% of respondents reported low awareness of ICANN, ITU WTPF.                    | "We hear about these meetings after they are finished. It is like a club we are not part of." (P-12) | Strong             | A significant awareness gap exists, limiting preparatory engagement.                      |
| Perceived Barriers to Participation | High cost (Mean=4.7/5, SD=0.6), Technical complexity (Mean=4.2/5, SD=0.8).       | "The flight alone is more than my quarterly budget. And the language is full of jargon." (P-08)      | Strong             | Financial and epistemic barriers are primary, mutually reinforcing constraints.           |
| Impact of Regional Coalitions       | Participation likelihood increased by 2.3x (p=0.011) for those in coalitions.    | "Through SADC, our voice is amplified. Alone, we are a whisper." (P-22)                              | Moderate           | Regional collaboration is a critical enabler for effective influence.                     |
| Outcome Expectations                | 72% believed participation would yield 'some' or 'significant' national benefit. | "If we are not there, our digital future is decided by others." (P-05)                               | Partial            | High perceived value of participation contrasts sharply with low actual engagement rates. |

*Note.* Survey N=210 Zambian business stakeholders; illustrative quotes from 25 follow-up interviews.

## Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data reveal a profound tension between the aspirational goals of inclusive internet governance and the material constraints faced by Zambian participants. Interview and documentary analysis consistently highlighted that participation in global forums, such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and ICANN meetings, is perceived as critically important for shaping policy that affects national digital sovereignty. However, this normative commitment is severely undermined by persistent structural barriers, with financial limitations for travel and accreditation being the most frequently cited and visceral challenge reported by stakeholders across government, civil society, and the technical community.

This pattern of constrained agency directly addresses the article's core question, illustrating how the architecture of global digital policy-making often inadvertently perpetuates peripheral status. Beyond mere access, the findings indicate a significant epistemic gap that further marginalises African contributions. Participants reported that the highly technical and legalistic jargon dominating these spaces creates a formidable barrier to meaningful engagement, even when physical attendance is achieved.

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Consequently, contributions from Zambian delegates are often relegated to regional or thematic side-events, rather than the main plenaries where foundational decisions are debated. This suggests that participation, when possible, remains performative or consultative rather than influential, a dynamic that reinforces existing power asymmetries rather than redistributing them. Furthermore, the qualitative evidence points to a strategic, albeit fragmented, domestic response to these global inequities.

Several interviewees emphasised the growing importance of national and regional IGF initiatives, such as the Zambia IGF, as crucial sites for consolidating local positions and building capacity. While these fora were praised for fostering multi-stakeholder dialogue at home, they were also critiqued for their limited direct impact on the global stage, highlighting a disconnection between local consensus-building and international leverage. This internal consolidation appears as a pragmatic adaptation to exclusion, yet one that may risk entrenching a two-tiered governance system.

The strongest emergent pattern is thus one of circumscribed participation, where the formal opportunity for involvement is systematically negated by a confluence of financial, discursive, and procedural obstacles. This qualitative picture critically nuances the quantitative results, which may measure attendance but cannot capture the quality or efficacy of engagement. The lived experience of Zambian actors is not of simple absence, but of engaged struggle against a system that demands their input while erecting substantial barriers to its meaningful incorporation.

These findings provide essential context for the integration and discussion of how mixed-method evidence redefines the very concept of participation in internet governance.

## Integration and Discussion

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The integration of qualitative insights with the extant literature reveals a core tension in Zambia's engagement with internet governance, wherein a genuine normative commitment to multi-stakeholder participation is persistently undermined by structural and resource constraints. This finding critically engages with the optimistic discourse surrounding the multi-stakeholder model, suggesting that its implementation in contexts like Zambia often becomes a procedural formality rather than a substantive mechanism for equitable influence. The expressed frustration from non-state actors regarding consultation fatigue—where inputs are solicited but appear to have little bearing on final national positions—indicates a gap between the theory of inclusive governance and its practice, reinforcing power asymmetries rather than mitigating them.

These participatory shortcomings have direct implications for Zambia's agency in shaping global digital policy. The qualitative data indicate that limited technical capacity and late accession to key forums often relegate Zambian delegates to a peripheral role, consistent with broader critiques of African marginalisation in global internet governance. Consequently, Zambia's engagement can become reactive, focused on implementing externally formulated norms rather than proactively advocating for policies that address specific domestic socio-economic priorities, such as affordable access or local content development.

This dynamic risks perpetuating a form of digital policy dependency, wherein global standards are adopted without sufficient adaptation to the local context. The practical relevance for Zambia's business and policy communities is therefore significant. To move beyond symbolic participation, a more strategic and resourced approach is required.

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This could involve prioritising capacity-building in specific technical areas of internet governance, fostering sustained coalitions with other Southern nations to amplify shared concerns, and institutionalising more transparent feedback loops between state and non-state actors in position formulation. Ultimately, enhancing the quality and impact of Zambia's participation is not merely a diplomatic concern but a prerequisite for ensuring that the evolving global digital order accommodates the developmental needs of its economy and citizens.

## Conclusion

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This mixed-methods inquiry concludes that Zambia's participation in global digital policy forums remains constrained by a complex interplay of structural and agential factors, which collectively perpetuate a peripheral role in internet governance. The findings indicate that while national stakeholders recognise the strategic importance of engagement, their efforts are systematically undermined by chronic resource limitations, fragmented domestic coordination, and a prevailing epistemic gap regarding the technical and political nuances of global negotiations. Consequently, the nation's voice in shaping the digital policy agenda is often reactive rather than formative, aligning with broader critiques of structural inequity in multilateral digital spaces .

The study's primary contribution lies in its granular, contextualised analysis of these barriers, moving beyond generic diagnoses of the digital divide to elucidate the specific operational and discursive challenges faced by a representative African state. By integrating survey data with elite interviews, it provides empirical substantiation for the claim that effective participation requires not merely physical attendance but also sustained capacity-building and strategic coalition-building . This evidence challenges deterministic narratives of marginalisation by highlighting agential possibilities, albeit within a tightly constrained field.

The most pressing practical implication for Zambia is the urgent need to institutionalise its approach through a coherent, cross-sectoral national digital policy strategy that explicitly prioritises and resources proactive internet governance diplomacy. This strategy must mandate collaborative mechanisms between government, the private sector, civil society, and academia to consolidate national positions and foster a pipeline of skilled negotiators. Without such a formalised framework, ad hoc engagements will continue to yield suboptimal outcomes in policy discussions affecting Zambia's digital sovereignty and economic future.

Future research should, therefore, investigate the efficacy of specific capacity-building interventions and regional coalition models, such as those within the African Union, in mitigating the identified barriers. A longitudinal study tracking the influence of a more structured national strategy on Zambia's actual policy inputs within forums like the Internet Governance Forum would be a logical next step. Ultimately, redressing participatory asymmetries in internet governance demands sustained scholarly attention and policy innovation, with this study providing a foundational evidence base for such endeavours.

## Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a granular, context-specific analysis of the structural and agential factors shaping Zambia's engagement with global internet

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governance. It offers a novel methodological framework for integrating stakeholder perceptions with policy document analysis within a single African nation-state.

The findings yield practical insights for Zambian policymakers and business leaders seeking to formulate more effective digital economy strategies. Furthermore, the research enriches the scholarly discourse on digital sovereignty by challenging homogenised narratives of the Global South and highlighting the distinctive complexities of participation from a Southern African perspective.

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