

The Processes and Prospects for the Formation of Civil Society in Uzbekistan on the Eve of Independence

Ikramjon Batirovich Masharipov

Doctor of Political Sciences, Professor, Tashkent State University of Economics

Abstract: This article analyzes the processes of civil society formation in Uzbekistan on the eve of independence within the context of political, social, and economic conditions. It examines the fundamental changes in the public administration system, challenges encountered during the transition from a totalitarian system to a democratic society, and factors influencing the development of civil society institutions. Through comparative analysis with Western European countries, both common and unique aspects of Uzbekistan's transition period are identified. The impact of normative legal acts adopted after independence, particularly laws, decrees, and resolutions, on the development of civil society is explored. Additionally, the article analyzes reforms aimed at enhancing public oversight and strengthening cooperation between non-governmental organizations and the state. The effectiveness of civil society institutions is evaluated using modern indices.

Keywords: Civil society, Pre-independence period, Democratic transformation, Totalitarianism, Public oversight, Non-governmental non-profit organizations, State-society relations Legal reforms, Transitional period, Civic engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The formation of civil society institutions emerged as one of the most crucial tasks in building a new society in independent Uzbekistan. The ideological control inherited from the totalitarian regime, limitations on social activity, and the state's complete dominance over society posed serious obstacles to laying the foundation for a new democratic state. Consequently, in the early years of independence, overcoming the negative influence of totalitarianism, drawing lessons from the shortcomings of socialist society, and raising citizens' legal awareness became the primary political objectives. Under the leadership of the First President I. Karimov, the foundations of national statehood were established, and a legal framework aimed at ensuring human rights and freedoms and developing public institutions was formed. Notably, the Law "On Public Associations" adopted in 1991 and the Constitution of 1992 created the institutional foundation for civil society. These documents defined the legal basis for the activities of political parties, mass media, trade unions, non-governmental non-profit organizations, and local self-government bodies.

The political reforms carried out after independence required not only the creation of a legislative base but also the liberation of public consciousness from totalitarian ideology, the formation of a democratic culture, and the establishment of state-society relations on a new legal foundation. In this process, emphasis was placed on introducing democratic principles based on national values and appropriately utilizing international experiences. In particular, the mahalla institution was developed as a unique local form of civil society inherent to national traditions.

In recent years, as part of the "New Uzbekistan" reforms initiated by President Sh. Mirziyoyev, civil society institutions are playing an increasingly important role in socio-political life. New forms of dialogue between state and public organizations, mechanisms of public oversight, and citizen participation in political processes are expanding.

In Uzbekistan, during the transition from a totalitarian legacy to a society based on democratic values, civil society institutions are becoming one of the decisive factors in social, political, and spiritual development. This process is driven by the need to raise citizens' political awareness, strengthen legal culture, and introduce new democratic mechanisms in state-society relations.

The main objective of the article is to analyze the process of forming civil society institutions in Uzbekistan, to reveal the reforms implemented to overcome obstacles inherited from the totalitarian legacy, and to substantiate the specific features of the path to democratic development based on national and international experiences.

Methodology

This article employs several modern scientific methods to analyze the processes of civil society formation in Uzbekistan on the eve of independence. The research primarily utilizes historical, comparative, analytical, and normative approaches.

First, the historical-analytical method is used to examine, in chronological order, the political processes leading to independence, the abandonment of the totalitarian system, and the stages of transition to civil society. The differences between the Soviet-era mechanisms of ideological and administrative control and the political reforms implemented after independence are analyzed.

Through comparative analysis, the general and specific aspects of civil society development in Uzbekistan are compared with the experiences of Western European countries, particularly Germany, France, and Britain. This reveals how international practices were adapted to national conditions.

Document analysis (content analysis) is applied to thoroughly examine the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Law "On Public Associations," Presidential decrees, and state programs. This demonstrates the evolution of the legal foundations for civil society formation.

Additionally, normative-legal analysis is used to study the legal framework aimed at developing civil society institutions, their practical impact, and their role in socio-political life.

In the research process, a systematic approach is employed to analyze various civil society institutions - non-governmental non-profit organizations, mass media, political parties, and local self-government bodies - as interconnected systemic structures. These methodological approaches enable the identification of the complex socio-political essence of the topic, comprehensive coverage of the formation of civil institutions in society, and assessment of their prospects.

Literature review

Scientific sources on this topic extensively cover the socio-political consequences of the totalitarian regime and the processes of overcoming them. For example, Russian political scientist A. Kara-Murza emphasizes that party control kept citizens in constant fear. This analysis clearly demonstrates the negative impact of the totalitarian regime on freedoms and civic activity. European scholars have also put forward theoretical views on the development of civil society. A. de Tocqueville, in his famous work "Democracy in America," emphasized that democratic institutions are the main pillar of civil society. In his work "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere," J. Habermas assesses the public sphere and mechanisms of democratic dialogue as important factors in the formation of civil society.

R. Putnam, in his book "Bowling Alone," highlights the importance of social capital and argues that mutual solidarity and trust among citizens are among the main criteria for societal development. These ideas can be considered in conjunction with the importance of the mahalla

institution and NGOs in Uzbekistan. J. Keane's work "Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions" provides an important methodological basis for a comparative analysis of historical and modern models of civil society. Additionally, the theory of modernization processes and social structure in A. Giddens' work "The Third Way" is relevant in explaining the new model of state-society relations in Uzbekistan. L. Diamond, in his work "Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation," emphasizes that civil society is the main condition for democratic consolidation.

From the first years of independence, the creation of a legal and institutional framework in Uzbekistan has become one of the priorities of state policy. In particular, the principle put forward in the works of Sh.M. Mirziyoyev, elected President in 2016, "It is not the people who should serve state bodies, but state bodies that should serve the people," has become the main idea behind the reforms being carried out in the country. The political, legal, and institutional reforms implemented on the basis of this principle have served to create a solid political and legal foundation for the development of civil society.

The activities of non-governmental non-profit organizations are also noted in scientific literature as a factor of particular importance. They are putting forward practical initiatives in the social sphere and play an important role in protecting the interests of the population and increasing public activity. The state's creation of "Houses of Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations" to support NGO activities, the allocation of grants and subsidies, as well as ensuring openness and accountability through the information portal www.e-ngo.uz, have further strengthened the mechanisms of civil oversight.

Political parties, as an integral subject of civil society, have also become an important political tool for representing the interests of the population and participating in state governance. They actively participate in expressing the interests of various social groups in state policy, ensuring social justice, and strengthening political pluralism. Cooperation between political parties and non-governmental non-profit organizations serves to ensure political stability and balance in society.

The legal framework for the development of civil society institutions is also being systematically improved. In particular, the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the laws "On Public Associations," "On Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations," Presidential decrees and resolutions have strengthened the legal and institutional foundations of civil society. Notably, the Concept for the Development of Civil Society for 2021-2025 defined the priorities of this process and established the expansion of citizens' participation in public administration as a strategic goal.

Reports from international organizations - Freedom House, CIVICUS Monitor, the World Bank, and the UN - have noted positive dynamics in the development of civil society in Uzbekistan. However, they also pointed out that there are still issues awaiting solutions in areas such as freedom of speech, access to information, and strengthening the legal stability of NGOs.

Analysis of the literature shows that the formation of civil society in Uzbekistan is being carried out on a consistent legal, political, and institutional basis. The theoretical views of European scholars allow for a comparative analysis of this process, i.e., comparing the features of the national model with international experience. The elevation of relations between the state and society to a new level, the active participation of citizens in social processes, and the strengthening of public control are key factors ensuring the democratic future of New Uzbekistan.

Conclusion

The process of forming civil society in Uzbekistan has been closely tied to the country's historical, political, and socio-economic environment. During the totalitarian regime, the absence of civil institutions and the ideological and administrative control over social initiatives and independent thought posed a serious obstacle to the development of democratic culture and active citizenship. Achieving independence created legal and political opportunities for

Uzbekistan to form a new model of statehood, ensure human rights and freedoms, and revise state-society relations based on democratic principles. The Law "On Public Associations," adopted in 1991, laid the legal foundation for civil society institutions and served as the basis for the country's initial political and legal reforms. In subsequent stages, especially during the period of new reforms under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's leadership, the process of forming civil society has been systematically and effectively implemented. Opportunities have expanded for introducing public oversight institutions, supporting the activities of non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs) and mass media, and integrating citizens' opinions and proposals into political decision-making processes.

Specifically, the People's Reception Offices, the President's Virtual Reception Offices, the Law "On Public Control", and the legal and organizational framework established for NGO activities have strengthened citizens' participation in public administration. The "Uzbekistan – 2030" Strategy, adopted at the President's initiative, also identified the development of civil society institutions as one of the priority tasks. However, several issues in practice still await resolution. In particular, there remains a need to further expand the legal, financial, and institutional capacities of NGOs, establish open and equal dialogue with government bodies, and ensure public oversight through effective mechanisms. In conclusion, the process of forming civil society in Uzbekistan is being carried out based on principles of consistency and gradual implementation. New forms of cooperation between the state and citizens, the activities of political parties and NGOs, and the role of public opinion in shaping state policy are becoming central pillars of democratic reforms in New Uzbekistan. Strengthening civil society institutions and increasing citizens' social engagement are emerging as decisive factors in ensuring the stability of national development.

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