



**DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS
IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW UZBEKISTAN**

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| ABSTRACT | KEYWORDS |
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| <p>This article analyzes the formation of civil society institutions, their legal and institutional foundations, and their significance in the system of democratic governance in contemporary Uzbekistan on the basis of a political-institutional approach. It examines the role of non-governmental non-profit organizations, public oversight, the mass media, mahalla institutions, public councils, and civic initiatives in increasing the openness of public administration. Civil society institutions are assessed as an important system of institutions that ensure democratic legitimacy, social trust, and political communication. The article also advances scholarly conclusions regarding existing problems in the development of these institutions and the priority directions for their further improvement.</p> | <p>Civil society, non-governmental non-profit organizations, public oversight, democratic governance, social partnership, political institutions, New Uzbekistan, civic engagement, democratic legitimacy, political communication.</p> |

Introduction

In the context of New Uzbekistan, the substance of democratic reforms is directly connected with expanding citizens' participation in the life of the state and society, supporting social initiatives, and increasing the real influence of civil society institutions. Today, democratic development is manifested not only in the formation of state authorities or the existence of legal norms, but also through the active participation of non-governmental non-profit organizations, the mass media, mahalla, public associations, public councils, and other civic institutions in socio-political processes.

Civil society is not merely an external attribute or secondary element of a democratic state; rather, it is one of the key institutional pillars that ensures its internal stability, political legitimacy, and balance in social life. As open dialogue between the state and society, public oversight, citizens' initiative, and mechanisms of social partnership develop, the practical quality of democratic governance also increases.

The renewed Constitution of Uzbekistan has further strengthened the political and legal status of civil society by establishing the protection of human rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests as a priority area of state activity [1]. In addition, the Strategy of New Uzbekistan, the Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy,

the Concept for the Development of Civil Society in 2021-2025, and the documents concerning state support for civil society institutions demonstrate the emergence of a systematic political approach in this sphere [2; 3; 4; 5].

The relevance of this issue lies in the fact that civil society institutions are analyzed not as a mere set of separate social organizations, but as a complex political-institutional phenomenon that expresses interests within the system of democratic governance, exercises public oversight, improves the quality of public policy, strengthens social trust, and expands political communication. The main purpose of the article is to reveal the specific features of the development of civil society institutions in the context of New Uzbekistan, to substantiate their role in democratic modernization, and to formulate conceptual conclusions regarding existing problems.

Literature Review

Civil society is one of the most complex and multilayered categories in political science. Although it has been interpreted differently by various theoretical schools throughout historical development, modern political theory generally views civil society as a system of institutions that is relatively autonomous from the state, based on citizens' free association and self-organization, and oriented toward the articulation of social interests.

A. de Tocqueville emphasizes that free civic associations in a democratic society are an important means of preserving political freedom. In his theory, citizens' capacity for association transforms society from a passive mass into an active political subject. This very aspect demonstrates one of the core functions of civil society: it transforms citizens' everyday interests into collective interests, and collective interests into a political position capable of influencing public policy [9].

J. Habermas pays particular attention to the communicative nature of civil society. According to his concept of the "public sphere", democratic politics is formed through citizens' free discussion, critical exchange of views, and a culture of public deliberation. In this sense, civil society interprets state decisions not as administrative acts adopted unilaterally, but as political processes shaped through dialogue with society [10].

R. Putnam connects civil society with social capital, mutual trust, and a culture of cooperation. In his view, the effectiveness of democratic institutions depends not only on legal norms, but also on the level of trust, cooperation, and civic responsibility within society [11]. Therefore, assessing civil society solely by the number of officially registered organizations is insufficient; its real strength is manifested in citizens' social trust, initiative, and capacity to unite around common interests.

A. Gramsci, in turn, interprets civil society as a sphere in which ideological and cultural leadership is formed. This approach reveals not only the legal-institutional but also the ideological and cultural significance of civil society. Through civil society, values such as responsibility, solidarity, legality, collective interest, and social justice are shaped in society [12].

F. Fukuyama links state capacity and the effectiveness of governance with the quality of institutions. According to this approach, strong civil society does not weaken the state; on the contrary, it strengthens its social foundation, increases the legitimacy of decisions, and reinforces the connection between the governance system and society [13]. M. Castells argues that, in the modern network society, information and communication technologies have become an important factor in political processes [14]. This idea serves as an important theoretical basis for analyzing the influence of the

mass media, social networks, digital appeals, and open-data systems on civic engagement in New Uzbekistan.

Thus, existing theoretical approaches make it possible to understand civil society in three main dimensions: first, as a system of institutions expressing citizens' free association and interests; second, as a social mechanism for exercising public oversight over state power; and third, as an important political space that ensures political communication, social trust, and democratic legitimacy.

Research Methodology

This study employs political-institutional, systemic, comparative-analytical, and normative-legal approaches. The political-institutional approach makes it possible to determine the role of civil society institutions within the system of democratic governance. The systemic approach allows civil society to be examined in its interrelation with the state, society, the legal system, political communication, and social oversight.

Through normative-legal analysis, the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Law "On Public Oversight", the Law "On Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations", the Law "On Social Partnership", the Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy, and presidential decrees concerning the development of civil society institutions were examined [1; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8]. The comparative-analytical approach was used to reveal the relationship between theoretical concepts and institutional processes in Uzbekistan's practice.

Analysis and Results

In the context of New Uzbekistan, the development of civil society is determined, first of all, by its constitutional and legal foundations. The renewed Constitution establishes the protection of human rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests as a priority direction of state activity, thereby further strengthening the legal status of civil society [1].

Such an approach makes it possible to interpret the citizen not as a passive object of state policy, but as an active participant in socio-political processes.

The Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy identifies such tasks as orienting public administration toward serving the people, strengthening openness and accountability, expanding citizens' oversight over the activities of state bodies, and ensuring social justice and the rule of law [3]. This strategic document presents the development of civil society as an important component of the broader process of democratic modernization.

One of the main legal sources regulating the activity of civil society institutions is the Law "On Public Oversight". This law regulates relations in the sphere of organizing and implementing public oversight over the activities of state bodies and institutions [6]. Public oversight is one of the most important functions of civil society, as it enables the assessment of openness, legality, and conformity of state decisions with social interests.

The Law "On Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations" defines the legal status, goals, areas of activity, and organizational foundations of NGOs [7]. As one of the most active institutional forms of civil society, NGOs are emerging in such areas as ecology, gender equality, youth policy, social protection, education, the rights of persons with disabilities, and local development as actors that complement, monitor, and, in some cases, offer alternative proposals to public policy.

The Law “On Social Partnership” establishes the legal foundations of cooperation between state bodies and civil society institutions [8]. This law makes it possible to understand civil society not only as a subject of oversight or critical response, but also as an important partner cooperating with the state in addressing social problems.

The adoption of the Concept for the Development of Civil Society in 2021–2025 by Decree No. PF-6181 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated March 4, 2021, served to systematize institutional policy in this area [4]. The Decree No. PF-124 of August 26, 2024, is also significant because it is aimed at further improving the system of state support for civil society institutions [5]. These documents show that state policy toward civil society is acquiring a consistent, gradual, and institutional character.

The first important function of civil society institutions in democratic governance is the articulation of interests. Every society consists of different social strata, professional groups, territorial communities, and cultural units. If public policy does not take these interests into account, decisions may remain formally legal but lack social legitimacy. Therefore, civil society institutions mediate between the state and society, bring social demands onto the political agenda, and contribute to improving the quality of decision-making [15; 16].

The second important function is public oversight. Public oversight makes it possible to evaluate the activity of state power from the standpoint of social interests, ensure the openness of state bodies, reduce corruption risks, and improve the effectiveness of governance. In Uzbekistan, this area is gradually developing through public councils, public discussions, open data, appeal mechanisms, social networks, and civic initiatives [6].

The third function is the expansion of political communication. In modern society, information networks and communication platforms have become important factors in political processes [14]. In Uzbekistan, digital platforms, the mass media, and social networks also play a noticeable role in enabling citizens to raise problems, address state bodies, and shape public opinion. However, this process gains democratic effectiveness only when it is combined with civic responsibility, information culture, and legal awareness.

The fourth function is the development of social partnership. The state cannot solve all social problems on its own. In such areas as education, ecology, social protection, youth affairs, women’s activism, and the integration of persons with disabilities, the initiative and expert capacity of civil society institutions are especially necessary. In this regard, cooperation between the state and civil society should develop not as an auxiliary relationship, but as a governance model based on the principle of equal partnership [8].

The fifth function is the strengthening of democratic legitimacy. When state decisions are understood, discussed, and at least partly shaped through civic participation, their level of social acceptance increases. In this process, civil society creates a bridge of trust between political power and society. From this perspective, strong civil society does not weaken the state; rather, it reinforces its social foundation [13].

The following table summarizes the main functions of civil society institutions in democratic governance.

Table 1 Main Functions of Civil Society Institutions in Democratic Governance

| Function of civil society | Content | Significance for democratic governance |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Articulation of interests | Bringing the demands of social groups, territorial communities, and citizens onto the political agenda | Strengthens the social legitimacy of decisions |
| Public oversight | Assessing the activities of state bodies in terms of openness, legality, and effectiveness | Ensures accountability and transparency |
| Political communication | Expanding the exchange of information and dialogue between the state and society | Strengthens social trust and political dialogue |
| Social partnership | Cooperation between the state and civic institutions in addressing social problems | Forms a cooperative model of governance |
| Democratic legitimacy | Direct or indirect participation of citizens in the formation of decisions | Increases the level of acceptance of public policy |

Ongoing positive dynamics can be observed in the development of civil society institutions in Uzbekistan. These include the increasing openness of state bodies, the expansion of public discussion practices, the establishment of legal foundations for public oversight, the improvement of mechanisms for supporting NGOs, and the strengthening of civic initiatives. However, it is not sufficient to evaluate this process solely in terms of quantitative growth; the quality of civil society is determined by its capacity to demonstrate independent initiative, its expert potential, and its ability to engage in equal dialogue with state bodies.

The current stage of civil society development should be assessed not as a completed model, but as a transformational process. In some cases, civil society institutions may be perceived not as subjects of social activity, but as auxiliary structures implementing state programs. Such an approach may limit the independent oversight and interest-articulation functions of civil society.

These issues may be grouped into several categories.

First, it is necessary to strengthen the financial independence of NGOs. Without financial sustainability, civic institutions are limited in their ability to develop long-term programs, conduct independent research, and engage professional experts.

Second, the practical effectiveness of public oversight mechanisms should be increased. Oversight should not be limited merely to expressing opinions or holding discussions; it must become a mechanism capable of exerting a real influence on the quality of state decisions [6].

Third, it is important to develop the expert capacity of civil society institutions. This is related to the complex social, economic, ecological, and legal challenges of modern governance. Therefore, NGOs and public structures should contribute to public policy not only through general initiatives, but also through analytical data, monitoring results, international experience, and practical recommendations.

Fourth, the improvement of citizens' legal awareness and political culture should be regarded as one of the key conditions for the development of civil society [17].

Fifth, strengthening cooperation between civil society institutions and local government bodies remains an urgent task. Many social issues emerge at the level of mahallas, districts, and cities. Therefore, civil society should actively participate not only in political and legal processes at the central level, but also in local governance. This requires supporting territorial institutions of civil society, encouraging local initiatives through grants and social orders, and strengthening public monitoring at the local level.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, in the context of New Uzbekistan, civil society institutions are developing as an important political-institutional factor of democratic modernization. They play a significant role in developing dialogue between the state and society, articulating citizens' interests, exercising public oversight, strengthening social trust, and ensuring democratic legitimacy.

The results of the study show that the development of civil society should not be limited to improving the normative and legal framework. Its real effectiveness is manifested through the independence, initiative, expert capacity, financial sustainability, and equal-partnership-based cooperation of civic institutions with state bodies. Therefore, the next stage in the development of civil society in Uzbekistan is determined by the transition from formal-institutional existence to substantively influential, independent, and responsible civic participation.

From a scholarly and practical perspective, the following priority directions are important: *first*, strengthening the financial and organizational independence of NGOs and expanding their access to grants, social orders, and non-state sources of funding; *second*, institutionally guaranteeing the impact of public oversight results on state decisions and linking public discussions and monitoring conclusions with practical decision-making; *third*, increasing the expert capacity of civil society institutions by widely involving them in cooperation with analytical centers, universities, independent experts, and international organizations; *fourth*, supporting civic initiatives at the local level and strengthening public monitoring and social partnership mechanisms at the level of mahallas, districts, and cities; *fifth*, enhancing citizens' political culture and legal awareness, as well as encouraging the conscious and responsible participation of the population in decision-making processes.

Only under these conditions can civil society become not an external sign of democratic governance in Uzbekistan, but its internal driving force. This, in turn, will deepen the political substance of New Uzbekistan's development and strengthen a new system of relations between the state and society based on trust, openness, and responsibility.

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