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LEGAL AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGION–STATE RELATIONS IN UZBEKISTAN

Sultanov Rustam Ibragimovich
Second-year student, Faculty of History,
Samarkand Campus, Oriental University
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Abstract. The article analyzes the legal and social transformation of religion–state relations in Uzbekistan during the period of independence. It examines freedom of conscience, the legal status of religious organizations, the principle of a secular state, religious tolerance, national values, and social stability as interconnected processes. Particular attention is paid to shifts in the priorities of religious policy and to the balance between legal regulation, security, and educational approaches.
Keywords: Uzbekistan, religion and state, freedom of conscience, religious organizations, religious policy, tolerance, secularity, social stability, national values.

Following Uzbekistan's attainment of independence, profound changes occurred in religious life, as in all other spheres of society. The newly independent state faced the task of legally guaranteeing citizens' freedom of conscience, regulating the activities of religious organizations within the framework of the law, and consolidating the principles of a secular state. Consequently, religion–state relations became one of the important dimensions of the political and legal transformation of the independence period.

The revival of religious life proceeded simultaneously with processes of reinterpreting historical memory, national identity, and spiritual heritage. Religious values began to assume a more visible role in the spiritual life of society, while new opportunities emerged for the activities of religious organizations. At the same time, these developments brought complex issues to the agenda, including the legal regulation of the religious sphere, the preservation of harmony among different confessions, and the prevention of the use of religious ideas for political or violent purposes.

The purpose of this article is to examine the transformation of religion–state relations in Uzbekistan during the period of independence from legal and social perspectives, to analyze trends in the development of religious policy, and to reveal the interrelationship among religious freedom, social stability, and security.

During the independence period, the establishment of a legal framework assumed particular importance in the institutional formation of religious policy. Constitutional norms and legislation concerning freedom of conscience and religious organizations served to define citizens' right to profess or not to profess a religion, the criteria governing the activities of religious associations, and the general boundaries of their relations with the state.

The principal objective of legal regulation was not to restrict religious life, but rather to reconcile the protection of citizens' lawful rights with the interests of public order and security. Clearly defining the rights and obligations of religious organizations and ensuring that their activities were conducted within the law contributed to the formation of a stable mechanism of religion–state relations.

The principle of secularity is one of the central concepts underlying these relations. A secular state does not reject religious values; rather, it presupposes equal legal treatment of adherents of

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different faiths, the separation of the competencies of public administration and religious organizations, and the protection of individual freedom of choice in matters of belief. In this respect, secularity provides an institutional foundation for religious tolerance and legal equality.

During the first years of independence, primary attention was devoted to establishing the legal foundations of the new state's religious policy. Defining the status of religious organizations, expanding citizens' opportunities to meet their religious needs through lawful means, and developing a new approach to religious heritage became important tasks. This process was closely connected with the reassessment of national history and values.

In the subsequent period, security issues acquired greater significance in religious policy. The need to prevent religious extremism and radicalism, improve legal mechanisms against unlawful activities, and protect young people from destructive ideas became increasingly pronounced. At the same time, attention was also directed toward the spiritual and ethical functions of religious organizations in society and their role in promoting national values. The contemporary stage is characterized by the increasingly multidimensional nature of religious policy. Ensuring religious freedom, strengthening tolerance, supporting social integration, and preventing radical ideas that threaten security are regarded as mutually complementary directions. The expansion of the global information environment has increased the importance not only of restrictive measures but also of educational and preventive approaches to religious issues.

Because Uzbekistan is a multiethnic society inhabited by adherents of different faiths, religious tolerance constitutes an important condition for social stability. Tolerance entails not merely tolerating representatives of other religions, but also recognizing their lawful rights and creating an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. Such an approach contributes to strengthening civic solidarity.

Today, religious diversity in Uzbekistan is also clearly manifested at the institutional level. According to official constitutional information, more than 2,300 religious organizations belonging to 16 religious confessions operate in the country. This figure reflects the legal environment established for adherents of different faiths to conduct their activities freely within the framework of the law. Interconfessional life is also active in the Samarkand region: according to 2026 data from the Samarkand Regional Department of Justice, there are 311 religious organizations in the region, of which 289 are Islamic and 22 are non-Islamic organizations. These figures demonstrate the practical significance of ensuring religious tolerance and interconfessional harmony in the region.

The relationship between religious and national values is likewise of particular importance. During the independence period, greater attention was paid to the cultural and ethical dimensions of religion in the course of restoring historical heritage, customs, and spiritual values. At the same time, interpreting religious values in harmony with universal human and civic values helps maintain a balance among different groups within society.

National-political mentality, as well as cultural and ideological factors, plays an important role in the socialization of young people. Religious and educational upbringing should therefore be directed toward developing young people's independent thinking, their ability to assess historical and contemporary processes appropriately, and their ideological resilience against various harmful ideas.

One of the most complex issues in religion–state relations is reconciling religious freedom with security requirements. Citizens' freedom of belief is an important characteristic of a democratic state governed by the rule of law. However, the use of religious slogans for violence, hostility, or purposes directed against the constitutional order poses a threat to society and state security.

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For this reason, alongside ensuring legality in the religious sphere, an approach based on prevention and education is essential. An adequate level of religious literacy can reduce the influence of false interpretations, radical appeals, and manipulative information. Cooperation among educational institutions, families, mahallas, and public institutions is of particular importance in this regard. State oversight should likewise be based on the principles of legality and proportionality. The effectiveness of regulating religious activity is determined not merely by the number of restrictions imposed, but also by the protection of citizens' rights, the creation of conditions for open dialogue, and support for the social potential of law-abiding religious organizations.

Globalization has enabled religious ideas and information to cross state borders rapidly. The widespread dissemination of religious content through the Internet and social media, on the one hand, expands opportunities for acquiring religious knowledge; on the other hand, it also increases the risk of the rapid circulation of unverified or radical materials.

The relationship among international politics, missionary activity, and religious processes is another area requiring attention in contemporary religious policy. Under such conditions, it is necessary to improve national legislation, enhance the population's information and religious literacy, study international experience, and take local historical and cultural characteristics into account.

Uzbekistan's experience within the post-Soviet and Central Asian context demonstrates that religious policy is closely linked to historical conditions, national values, and state institutions. Therefore, rather than directly reproducing the experience of other states, it is more appropriate to identify suitable and effective mechanisms through comparative analysis.

The analysis indicates that the development of religion–state relations in Uzbekistan has not been a linear process. Whereas the initial priorities were the creation of a new legal space for religious freedom and the restoration of historical and spiritual heritage, security-related threats subsequently strengthened the regulatory aspects of religious policy. Under contemporary conditions, however, the effectiveness of religious policy depends not on treating freedom and oversight as mutually exclusive, but on finding a lawful and proportionate balance between them. The higher the levels of religious literacy, legal culture, and tolerance in society, the greater the opportunity to address problems in the religious sphere without resorting to stringent administrative measures.

Furthermore, supporting the spiritual and educational activities of religious organizations and civil society institutions within the framework of the law can have a positive impact on social stability. In this context, the task of the state is not to privilege a particular belief, but to create equal legal conditions for all citizens and ensure common security.

Conclusion. In conclusion, religion–state relations in Uzbekistan underwent significant legal and social transformation during the period of independence. The creation of new legal foundations, changes in the position of religious values within social life, the regulation of religious organizations, and the development of principles of tolerance constitute important components of this process.

The further development of religious policy depends on harmonizing respect for freedom of conscience, the consolidation of secular-state principles, support for religious tolerance, and educational and preventive measures aimed at countering radicalism. Legal guarantees, social dialogue, and high-quality religious and educational knowledge can jointly contribute to the formation of a stable social environment.

Thus, in the experience of Uzbekistan, religion–state relations emerge as a multidimensional process closely interconnected with national history, the legal system, social needs, and security

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factors. Scientific analysis of this process should therefore take into account the interaction among these factors.

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