HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

SELF-GOVERNMENT SYSTEM OF CITIZENS IN UZBEKISTAN: LEGAL FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

Ixtiyor G‘aniyevich Jalilov
Acting Professor, Department of History Information Technologies and Management University

Annotation. This article analyzes the development of citizens’ self-governing bodies in the Republic of Uzbekistan, with particular attention to the mahalla institution during the years of independence. It examines the legal foundations of the mahalla system, its place in the state governance structure, as well as its functions and significance in society. The study also discusses the activities of citizens’ assemblies, their chairpersons, and other structural units, highlighting their contribution to social development. Furthermore, the article identifies existing challenges in the current legislation and proposes practical recommendations for further improvement of the mahalla institution.

Keywords: Mahalla institution, local self-government, activities of citizens’ assembly, state governance system, democratic processes, legal foundations, social administration, civil society institutions, mahalla leader, mahalla committee, period of national independence, societal modernization.

INTRODUCTION. Following the attainment of independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan implemented large-scale reforms in all spheres of public administration and social life. In this process, the mahalla institution, which for centuries had embodied the traditions of self-governance among the Uzbek people, acquired a new legal status and assumed a significant role in state and public life. The legal foundations of the mahalla institution were enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted on December 8, 1992. In particular, Article 105 of the Constitution established the participation of citizens’ self-governing bodies in public administration and defined their powers and areas of activity [1]. Furthermore, the Law “On Citizens’ Self-Government Bodies,” adopted on September 2, 1993, created the legal framework for this system [2]. Subsequently, a revised version of the law was adopted in 1999, expanding the powers of the mahalla chairperson, the composition of citizens’ assemblies, and their functions within society.

Since 2017, under the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, comprehensive reforms have been implemented to further improve the mahalla institution. In particular, the Presidential Decree “On Measures for the Further Development of the Mahalla Institution,” adopted on April 3, 2017, led to the establishment of the Ministry for Mahalla and Family Support [3]. This transformed the activities of the mahalla as a social institution into one of the key priorities of state policy. Today, citizens’ assemblies of mahallas function not only as local self-governing bodies but also as important institutions for ensuring social stability, providing social support to the population, increasing civic participation in democratic processes, and fostering the development of civil society. For this reason, the mahalla is often referred to as a “school of democracy,” the “conscience of the people,” and a “fortress of social protection” [4].

At present, measures aimed at strengthening cooperation between mahallas and state authorities, enhancing their role in public oversight, and increasing their influence in social life constitute an integral part of the democratic reforms being carried out in the country. At the same time, certain challenges remain, including the need for further improvement of legal regulations, the expansion of the powers of mahalla chairpersons, and issues related to financial independence. Addressing these challenges remains one of the most important tasks for the future.

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY. The methodological approaches employed in this article were selected in accordance with the relevance, objectives, and tasks of the research. The principal methodological foundations include:

Systematic Approach – examining the formation and development of the mahalla institution comprehensively and in relation to public administration and civil society;

Comparative Method – conducting a comparative analysis of the distinctive features of the mahalla institution and local self-government systems in other countries;

Historical Analysis – exploring the historical roots of the mahalla institution and its stages of development following independence;

Normative-Legal Analysis – determining the legal status of the mahalla institution based on the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Law "On Citizens' Self-Government Bodies," and other normative legal acts;

Social Surveys and Interviews – studying the practical aspects of mahalla activities and analyzing public opinions and perceptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION. Following independence, Uzbekistan undertook comprehensive measures to restore the prestige of the mahalla institution and ensure its further development. Having evolved over centuries as an integral part of the lifestyle of the Uzbek people, the mahalla acquired a new status during the years of independence and became an important institution of state policy. The legal foundations of citizens' self-governing bodies are established in Article 105 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and in the Law "On Citizens' Self-Government Bodies" adopted on April 22, 2013 [5].

According to this law, citizens' self-governing bodies consist of:

Citizens' assemblies of mahallas;

Councils of citizens' assemblies and their commissions;

Audit commissions;

Administrative commissions established in specific cases.

These bodies do not form part of local state authorities, operate as legal entities, and are subject to official registration. Currently, more than 9,000 citizens' assemblies of mahallas operate throughout the country [6].

In recent years, a number of reforms have been introduced to improve this system. In particular, the establishment of the Ministry for the Support of Mahallas and the Elderly (Nuroniylar) under the Presidential Decree of February 18, 2019, marked a new stage in supporting the mahalla institution at the level of state policy [7]. Furthermore, the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan, adopted in 2021, identified the strengthening of the mahalla system as a cornerstone of civil society and the expansion of its role in governance as one of the country's key priorities [8].

In addition, beginning on January 1, 2022, the system known as "Mahalla Chairperson – People's Adviser" was introduced, enhancing the legal status of mahalla chairpersons and establishing closer institutional links between their activities and state authorities [9].

In his speeches, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has described the mahalla as the "foundation of people-oriented policy" and a "school of democratic transformation," repeatedly emphasizing its significance in public life [10]. Today, the mahalla system is not limited to preserving traditional values but also plays an important role in:

Coordinating social assistance;

Working with families;

Supporting youth and women;

Promoting local socio-economic development.

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

Through the provision of new powers and institutional support, local self-governing bodies are increasingly strengthening their role as a bridge between the state and society.

The Citizens' Assembly is the highest body of citizens' self-government. It has the authority to represent the interests of the population and adopt decisions applicable within the relevant territory on behalf of local residents. Citizens who have reached the age of eighteen and permanently reside within the territory of a settlement, village, ovul, or mahalla are entitled to participate in the assembly. The revised Law "On Citizens' Self-Government Bodies" clearly defines the powers of citizens' assemblies in settlements, villages, ovuls, and urban mahallas [2].

To implement the decisions of the citizens' assembly and carry out the day-to-day activities of self-governing bodies between assembly meetings, a Council of the Citizens' Assembly is established. The council consists of the chairperson (oqsoqol), advisers, chairpersons of commissions responsible for the main areas of activity, and the executive secretary.

The organization of the activities of citizens' self-governing bodies is carried out by the council and the chairperson (oqsoqol) of the citizens' assembly. The council may maintain its own administrative office, the number of staff being determined by the assembly itself. The chairperson, executive secretary, and office staff may be financed from the funds of the citizens' assembly as well as from local budget resources in accordance with the legislation. An Audit Commission is established to oversee and examine the financial and economic activities of citizens' self-governing bodies [3].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (Continued). An Administrative Commission is established to review cases of administrative offenses falling within its competence. In order to coordinate the activities of citizens' self-governing bodies, the Republican Council of Elders (Oqsoqollar Kengashi), as well as regional, district, and city coordination councils on citizens' self-governance, may be formed.

Naturally, the mahalla occupies a unique position within the system of governance. Historically, Uzbek mahallas have served as genuine centers of national values and traditions. Customs such as mutual respect and solidarity, social cohesion, assistance to vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, care for orphans, collective participation in weddings, community work (hashar), and other social ceremonies have long been nurtured within the mahalla environment. These traditions have played a vital role in strengthening social unity and preserving the cultural identity of the Uzbek people.

This unique form of self-governance has occupied an important place in the lives of the Uzbek people for centuries. For this reason, the First President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, characterized the mahalla as a "school of democracy," the "conscience of the people," and a "fortress of social protection" [4]. The further deepening of democratic reforms within the local self-government system remains one of the most pressing priorities of contemporary state policy. Local self-governing bodies not only ensure citizens' participation in public administration and facilitate public oversight but also contribute significantly to improving the effectiveness of local governance.

Considerable efforts have been undertaken to transform local self-government into an effective mechanism of public oversight through the development and continuous improvement of organizational and legal frameworks that take public opinion into account. As Islam Karimov emphasized:

"The role of civil society institutions in exercising effective public oversight over the activities of state authorities and governance structures is steadily increasing in our society. Today, the institution of public and civic control is becoming one of the most important instruments for ensuring effective interaction between society and the state, as well as for identifying public attitudes toward ongoing reforms and transformations."

He further noted that:

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

"Further improvement of the organizational foundations of the mahalla institution as a citizens' self-governing body, expansion of its functions, and strengthening of its interaction with state authorities and administrative bodies are acquiring special significance" [11].

Following independence, Uzbekistan embarked upon a path of profound democratic reforms aimed at establishing a legal democratic state and developing a market economy. The creation of a rule-of-law state and civil society is closely connected with the organization of public authority, representative institutions, and self-governing bodies. These institutions are established by the people themselves, who constitute the source of state power.

However, regardless of how democratic self-government may be, it cannot be entirely independent, as it exists and operates within the framework of a unified state and the broader system of public authority. While a certain degree of autonomy in resolving local issues is undeniable, such autonomy cannot be exercised outside the framework of the state's unified economic, social, and ideological policies. The everyday concerns and interests of residents of settlements, villages, and mahallas cannot be separated from the broader interests of the state.

The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, particularly Article 13, declares that "the individual, his or her life, freedom, honor, dignity, and other inalienable rights constitute the highest value." Consequently, self-governance cannot exist entirely outside the system of state authority. Numerous objective characteristics of contemporary self-government indicate that state interests and local interests should not be viewed as contradictory. Rather, both ultimately serve the common interests of society and the nation as a whole.

The provision contained in Article 8 of the Law "On Citizens' Self-Government Bodies," which states that self-governing bodies are not part of the system of state authorities, should be interpreted as emphasizing their distinct social nature and institutional autonomy rather than suggesting complete separation from the state [11].

This provision is largely political in character, and its precise legal interpretation remains complex. Article 1 of the Law defines citizens' self-governance as the independent activity of citizens, guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan, aimed at resolving issues of local significance based on their interests, historical traditions, national and spiritual values, and local customs and practices. This definition further supports the notion that self-governance is both autonomous and closely integrated into the broader constitutional order.

At the same time, certain challenges remain in the relationship between state authorities and self-governing institutions. Concepts such as autonomy and centralization, self-governance and state authority, are not always easily reconciled. Moreover, shortcomings and errors committed by state bodies and officials in implementing policies related to self-government have occasionally complicated these relationships, creating practical difficulties.

Unfortunately, legislative requirements have not always been fully observed in lawmaking processes. As a result, certain legal acts have at times failed to align completely with the Constitution and national legislation. Among the recurring shortcomings are attempts to regulate issues that properly fall within the competence of self-governing bodies, insufficiently developed mechanisms for direct citizen participation in resolving local issues, and inadequately elaborated procedures for conducting elections to self-governing bodies. Such deficiencies often undermine the principles of autonomy and initiative that should characterize local self-government, thereby creating additional obstacles to its development and improvement [11].

The Concept for Further Deepening Democratic Reforms and Developing Civil Society opened new opportunities for the advancement of non-governmental and non-profit organizations. A number of laws adopted within this framework, including the Law "On Social Partnership," which entered into

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

force on January 1, 2015, created new possibilities for strengthening cooperation between the state and society, enhancing civic initiative, social responsibility, and public welfare.

In accordance with a decision of the Parliamentary Commission, ten billion Uzbek soums were allocated to support NGOs and other civil society institutions. The Public Fund announced seven competitions for state grants and social orders, attracting nearly 1,200 public organizations, media structures, and other civil society institutions with approximately 1,400 socially significant projects.

The recently adopted Law “On Electronic Government” represented another important step in the development of electronic public services. More importantly, it established a legal framework for simplifying administrative procedures, ensuring greater transparency and openness in the activities of state authorities, and improving governance efficiency.

These developments are not accidental. From the very first days of independence, the fundamental objective of the “Uzbek Model” of development has been to create достойные living conditions for citizens and to ensure their well-being. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, adopted during the early years of independence, remains a reliable guarantee of the relationship between the individual, society, and the state.

Likewise, the declaration of 2016 as the “Year of Healthy Mother and Child” reflected the state’s consistent commitment to protecting human rights and promoting the principles of justice and humanism.

CONCLUSION The path of development pursued by Uzbekistan is closely linked to policies aimed at protecting human interests, strengthening the family, and raising a healthy generation. The principle that “When the mother and child are healthy, the family is happy; when the family is happy, society is strong” is increasingly becoming one of the fundamental foundations of social development.

The large-scale reforms implemented during the years of independence have brought about profound transformations in the country’s history and created a solid foundation for sustainable political, social, and economic development. In the contemporary era of globalization, characterized by intense international competition and complex geopolitical processes, Uzbekistan is compelled to pursue a cautious, consistent, and forward-looking policy.

In this context, ongoing reforms in state and public administration serve not only to safeguard national interests but also to improve the welfare and quality of life of the population. Thus, by harmonizing national values with the requirements of modern development, Uzbekistan continues to move confidently toward sustainable progress and the consolidation of a strong civil society.

REFERENCES

1. O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Konstitutsiyasi. – Toshkent: O‘zbekiston, 1992.
2. “Fuqarolarning o‘zini o‘zi boshqarish organlari to‘g‘risida”gi Qonun. – Toshkent: O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Oliy Kengashi, 1993; yangi tahriri 1999.
3. O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining 2017-yil 3-apreldagi Farmoni “Mahalla institutini yanada rivojlantirish chora-tadbirlari to‘g‘risida”.
4. Mirziyoyev Sh.M. Yangi O‘zbekiston strategiyasi. – Toshkent: O‘zbekiston, 2021.
5. Rajabov A., Karimov S. Mahalla va fuqarolik jamiyati: nazariya va amaliyot. – Toshkent: Ma’naviyat, 2020.
6. O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Konstitutsiyasi. – Toshkent: Adolat, 2023.
7. “Fuqarolarning o‘zini o‘zi boshqarish organlari to‘g‘risida”gi Qonun (yangi tahriri). 2013-yil 22-aprel.
8. O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining PF-5657-son Farmoni. 2019-yil 18-fevral.
9. “Yangi O‘zbekistonning Taraqqiyot strategiyasi – 2022–2026”. O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining 2022-yil 28-yanvardagi PF-60-son Farmoni.

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

10. O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining 2021-yil 3-dekabrdagi “Mahalla raisi — xalq maslahatchisi” instituti faoliyatini tashkil etish to‘g‘risida”gi farmoni.
11. Sh. Mirziyoyev. “Yangi O‘zbekiston strategiyasi”. – Toshkent: O‘zbekiston, 2021.