

## **The Imperatives of Modernizing Local Governance in Contemporary Societies**

**Anorboev Furkat**

*Republic of Uzbekistan, Responsible employee of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis, Independent  
Researcher*

**Abstract:** This article explores the relevance and institutional requirements of political modernization in local governance systems within modern societies from a political science perspective. The study analyzes the challenges and opportunities of decentralization, legal reforms, civic engagement, and institutional restructuring in enhancing democratic governance at the local level. Comparative experiences from countries like Poland and Hungary are included to highlight best practices. The article concludes with policy recommendations to make local governance more effective, transparent, and accountable.

**Keywords:** Local Governance, Political Modernization, Decentralization, Institutions, Civic Participation, Council, Separation of Powers

### **Introduction**

In contemporary societies, the process of political modernization signifies the transformation of the public administration system from a traditional form to a modern, democratic one. As a result of political modernization, authoritarian-command methods in the constitutional order and political life of the state are replaced by democracy, the rule of law, and rational governance. In other words, through political modernization, the personal and absolute exercise of power is superseded by legally sound governance principles that serve the interests of the people [1].

Researchers such as S. Huntington emphasize the rationalization of authority, structural specialization (differentiation), and the expansion of political participation as the primary indicators of political modernization. Consequently, modernization enhances the efficiency and stability of the political system, thereby strengthening the system's capacity to fulfill its functions. The concept of modernizing a country encompasses not only central state bodies but also the system of local governance [2]. Indeed, the modernization of local-level political institutions constitutes an integral component of society's overarching democratization process.

Today, the principle of decentralization in public administration is becoming increasingly predominant in many countries worldwide. According to this principle, the central government assumes only those responsibilities that cannot be resolved at the local level, whereas local authorities—being closer to the population—address grassroots needs and problems more effectively. Through such an approach, the central government can focus more comprehensively on strategic public issues, while local authorities can find rapid solutions to the daily problems within their respective territories [3].

Such reforms, conducted within the framework of political modernization, serve to democratize local governance, stimulate regional development, and enhance the quality of public services. Therefore, revising the local governance system in accordance with contemporary requirements is emerging on the agenda as one of today's most pressing issues. For any country, establishing effective governance at the local level is a crucial guarantee of societal stability and

public welfare. The relevance of political modernization in local governance is explained by the fact that it enables the formation of a governance system in the regions that truly aligns with the interests of the people [4]. Particularly in post-Soviet countries, a compelling need arose to move away from traditional (Soviet) methods of local administration and transition toward modern democratic principles. As a result of past practices, it was observed that popularly elected councils had de facto become not independent decision-making bodies, but rather "rubber-stamp" agencies that merely validated the decisions of the executive branch.

## Methods

In our view, the most fundamental conceptual issue regarding the reform of local governance in Uzbekistan is the choice of the appropriate model. Specifically, it has become necessary to clearly define whether local authorities will function as the "true voice of the people" and evolve into a democratic institution representing the interests of the local population, or whether they will remain merely an administrative tier executing the policies of the center. Examining global experience reveals that many countries have pursued the democratization of their local governance systems precisely along the first trajectory—based on the principle of popular representation. The majority of post-socialist states in Central and Eastern Europe systematically reformed their local governance by transitioning from the Soviet model to the "continental model."

For example, in Poland and Hungary during 1989–1990, local soviets were abolished, and traditional bodies of local self-government were restored in their place; local authorities were structurally reorganized, acquiring broad autonomy and independent sources of funding.

In countries such as Uzbekistan, this process is also acquiring urgent significance. In particular, the constitutional reforms and legislative updates implemented in recent years have created a new legal foundation for the democratization of local governance. The adoption of the newly revised Constitution in 2023 and the subsequent updating of the Law "On Local State Power" have opened unprecedented opportunities for reforming local administration. This is widely evaluated as a crucial step aimed at the decentralization of power and the expansion of self-government at the local level.

In accordance with the new constitutional provisions, it was envisioned that local Kengashes (Councils) of People's Deputies would now be established as fully independent representative bodies, with the heads of executive authority designated as accountable to them. In other words, for the first time at the local level, the principle of the separation of powers has been implemented, decoupling the positions of the Chairman of the Kengash of People's Deputies and the Hokim (Governor/Mayor). This change has initiated the organization of public administration at the local level based on a new model. Introduced by Presidential decree, this novel system has been designated as the principle of a "Strong Council, accountable and proactive Hokim." According to this principle, local councils will now possess the decisive voice in adopting significant regional decisions, while hokims will be accountable to the council for their activities and will be required to operate with proactive initiative. This undoubtedly represents a major achievement on the path toward modernizing local governance and is recognized as a crucial step in ensuring the implementation of the constitutional principle of the separation of powers at the local level.

Furthermore, the adopted "Uzbekistan – 2030" strategic program aims to transform local councils into genuine bodies of popular representation and to reorganize local executive authorities based on the principle of "serving the interests of the population." Consequently, the process of political modernization is being continuously implemented in the sphere of local governance within our country, and the urgency of this process has been reaffirmed in official state strategies. To successfully implement political modernization in local governance, it is necessary to provide the appropriate institutional conditions and meet relevant necessities. Primarily, this requires the strengthening of the legal framework. In this regard, recently updated legislative foundations play an important role: for instance, the newly revised edition of the Law on Local State Power clearly delineates the powers of local councils, serving to transform them into genuine representative bodies. The practice of hokims concurrently heading the council is being abolished, and a system is

being introduced wherein a council deputy is elected as the chairperson of the local council. This ensures structural differentiation and facilitates a clear delineation of the institutional framework within local governance. At the same time, it is imperative to expand the powers and capacities of local governance bodies. In particular, granting the Kengashes of People's Deputies the right of oversight over the activities of regional executive bodies represents a significant institutional transformation.

Recently, a series of new powers were codified in legislation to strengthen the oversight functions of local councils: specifically, the heads of prosecutorial, justice, internal affairs, finance, tax, ecology, healthcare, and other district-level line agencies have been designated as accountable to the local councils. This serves as a vital legal safeguard that enhances the transparency and accountability of authority at the local level.

Furthermore, ensuring the independence of local budgets is one of the fundamental institutional necessities. Without financial autonomy, it is exceedingly difficult for local authorities to exercise genuine, substantive power. Therefore, within the framework of budgetary reforms, mechanisms are being introduced to augment the independent revenue base of the regions and to allocate a portion of tax revenues directly to the disposal of local budgets (such measures constitute the financial foundation of decentralization).

For instance, drawing on international experience, countries such as Poland and Hungary provide their local self-government bodies with independent sources of taxation, while also supporting them through state subsidies and intergovernmental transfers.

Admittedly, steps are being taken in this direction in Uzbekistan as well; specifically, during 2022–2023, legislative changes aimed at expanding the revenue sources of local budgets were implemented (such as the redistribution of tax revenues, the establishment of regional funds, etc.). A crucial condition for modernization is that local authorities possess the capacity to finance regional programs from their own funds and are granted the authority to independently determine their expenditure priorities.

Another aspect of institutional change pertains to the capacity of local governance personnel and the organizational structure itself. Recent analyses have demonstrated that the current structures of district and city hokimiyats (administrations) do not fully meet the requirements for the delivery of modern public services. An updated structure would facilitate the development and implementation of a region's long-term development strategy and place the activities of local state bodies on a meticulously planned foundation.

In the context of modernization, enhancing human resource capacity is also a priority task. It is imperative to systematically improve the knowledge and qualifications of employees within local governance bodies, equipping them with modern management methods and proficiency in the use of information technologies. Although relevant training centers and retraining courses currently operate for this purpose, it is necessary to further enhance their overall effectiveness.

Furthermore, the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) has become an integral component of institutional modernization in local governance. For example, through the development of the "E-Government" system the services provided by local agencies are being transitioned to an online format, and the accountability of hokimiyats to the population is being actively ensured through official websites and digital platforms.

## **Results**

One of the crucial directions of political modernization in local governance is enhancing citizen participation and ensuring transparency in administration [5]. The primary objective of modernization is precisely to improve the quality of decision-making by guaranteeing the active participation of the people in societal governance. Therefore, the creation of institutional mechanisms is required to actively involve the public in governance processes at the local level. In this regard, it is first necessary to transform local councils into genuine platforms for the people's representatives. As noted previously, the "Uzbekistan – 2030" Strategy also establishes the goal of turning local councils into the "true voice of the people." To achieve this, practices are being

established to take public opinion into account on all issues discussed at council sessions, to provide mass media coverage of these discussions, and to invite representatives of civil society to attend the sessions.

A series of measures are being implemented to ensure the openness and transparency of the activities of local authorities [6]. Specifically, the Law "On the Openness of the Activities of State Power and Management Bodies," adopted in 2014 imposed strict obligations on state agencies regarding the open publication of information and keeping the population informed. On this basis, the publication of their decisions and draft resolutions through the official websites and information resources of local hokimiyats (administrations) was initiated. Today, all regional and district hokimiyats possess official web pages where registries of the hokim's decisions, daily news, contact details for public appeals, and budgetary information are regularly posted. Furthermore, within the framework of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) "Local Governance Support Project," a specific concept and methodological manual regarding the openness of local governance were developed and published. This manual recommends comprehensive mechanisms for ensuring openness and transparency in the daily activities of local authorities [7].

In this context, the role of civil society institutions must be specifically emphasized. Institutions such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), independent media, and mahalla citizens' assemblies are crucial participants in ensuring accountability and transparency at the local level. Scientific research also indicates that the growing role of civil society institutions in the modernization process is one of the most pressing issues of our time, and it is consistently highlighted as a key direction in state strategies [8]. Indeed, NGOs and civic initiative groups can make a significant contribution to elevating the political activism of the population and establishing effective public oversight.

The process of political modernization in local governance also brings forth a number of challenges and necessitates specific countermeasures. First and foremost, institutional barriers and resistance may be encountered during the implementation of reforms. For example, there is a possibility that certain authorized officials in central agencies may be reluctant to delegate power, or that local-level bureaucrats may experience difficulties in adapting to the new system. Furthermore, in order for local state bodies to fully execute their new responsibilities and powers, they require robust human resource, financial, and technical support. Current analyses indicate that the shortage of qualified personnel and financial resources in local hokimiyats (administrations), along with low levels of public participation, are the primary factors hindering the effectiveness of reforms [9]. For instance, hokimiyats in several districts have yet to develop their comprehensive development strategies, which complicates deeper long-term planning. The aforementioned human and financial constraints, as well as the weakness of public engagement practices, are cited as the root causes of this situation.

## **Discussion**

In our view, if measures are not taken to address these shortcomings during the course of the reforms, it may become exceedingly difficult to achieve the anticipated results of modernization [10]. At the same time, political modernization opens the door to immense opportunities for local governance. First, as a result of the reforms, the accountability of local agencies to the population increases, which in turn strengthens the trust between the government and the people. Enhanced accountability serves to curb corruption, ensure the efficient allocation of resources, and guarantee the practical viability of adopted decisions. Analyses demonstrate that public oversight at the local level and a heightened sense of responsibility toward voters directly lead to a reduction in corruption and abuses of power. I have formatted your recommendations clearly, using precise terminology for public administration, capacity building, and fiscal policy [11].

Second, the modernization of local governance stimulates regional development. Every region possesses unique opportunities and resources; if local authorities take the initiative to utilize them effectively, it will exert a positive impact on the economy of the entire country. For example, initiatives such as supporting entrepreneurship based on specific local conditions and improving

grassroots infrastructure will be expanded [12].

Third, the political activism of citizens increases. People can now influence local decisions through their elected councils or by participating in direct public discussions. This enhances the population's sense of participation in state affairs and significantly strengthens civil society.

Based on our scientific research, to successfully realize the modernization process, it is expedient to implement the following proposals and recommendations:

- a) Enhancing the legal framework [13]. It is necessary to ensure the strict execution of laws that clearly define the powers of local authorities and self-government structures. In particular, normative acts regarding the activities of local councils, the accountability of hokims, and public oversight must function effectively in practice. Newly adopted laws and decrees must legislatively consolidate the complete transition of local governance to the "Strong Council – accountable hokim" model.
- b) Building institutional capacity. Continuous education and training programs must be established to upgrade the qualifications of personnel within local governance bodies [14]. Furthermore, it is recommended to form dedicated divisions within each local agency to perform modern functions such as strategic planning, project management, and financial analysis. For instance, the position of an Advisor for Strategic Development could be introduced as an assistant to the hokim in every district.
- c) Increasing financial autonomy and accountability. It is imperative to strengthen the revenue base of local budgets and increase the share of designated tax revenues retained within the region. Concurrently, local authorities should be granted a certain degree of freedom in utilizing budgetary funds; for example, they could be given the authority to allocate saved funds at their own discretion. Such a measure will incentivize the fiscal prudence and proactiveness of local leaders. Naturally, absolute transparency must be ensured in this process, and comprehensive reports detailing the expenditure of every single penny must be presented to the public [15].
- d) Strengthening public oversight mechanisms. It is necessary to legally regulate the establishment of public councils under every local hokimiyat (administration). These councils should encompass representatives of civil society, entrepreneurs, and active citizens to actively discuss crucial government programs and decisions. According to research recommendations, forming an evaluation board or panel—consisting of public and business representatives—to assess the execution of local development programs by hokims yields highly effective results.

## Conclusion

Implementing political modernization in local governance within contemporary societies is a historic process aimed at enhancing the efficiency of public administration and overall societal welfare. As a result of modernization, local authorities are transformed from being mere administrative links in a traditional, centralized governance model into genuine democratic institutions that truly represent the interests of the people. This transformation, in turn, increases the public's trust in state authority at the grassroots level, improves the quality of decision-making, and serves the sustainable socio-economic development of the regions.

Naturally, traversing this path requires systematic measures to build robust institutional foundations, perfect legislation, enhance human resource capacity, and ensure active public participation. To elevate the political activism and civic responsibility of citizens, it is highly expedient to focus on civic education and to foster a culture of open discussions and debates at the local level. Ultimately, political modernization in local governance signifies not merely the structural reorganization of agencies, but the elevation of the entire society's political consciousness and the fundamental renewal of its governance culture. Every achievement realized on this path will constitute a worthy contribution to the democratic progress of our country and the welfare of our people.

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