American Journal of Political Science and Leadership Studies, Vol.3, No.6 (Jun, 2026),

E-ISSN: 2997-9420

American Journal of Political Science and Leadership Studies
https://semantjournals.org/index.php/AJPSLS

| Research Article

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Civil Society in The Development of New Uzbekistan: Through The Eyes of Foreign Experts

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Abstract: This article presents an analysis of the views of foreign experts regarding the development of civil society institutions and non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs) in the context of New Uzbekistan's progress. It also outlines the content and essence of reforms aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of NGOs in the country, as assessed by foreign experts. Furthermore, the role of the annually held "Civil Society Week" in the development of NGOs is highlighted.

Keywords: Citizen, Civil Society, NGO, Sustainable Development, "Human–Society–State", Public Council

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1. Introduction

In recent years, systematic efforts have been made in our country to create a democratic institutional framework for supporting the activities of civil society institutions and to further strengthen their role in state and public life. In Uzbekistan, the individual, their rights, and legitimate interests are at the center of all reforms. The previously prevailing principle of "state–society–individual" has been replaced by the new principle of "individual–society–state." Ensuring human interests in the course of economic reforms has become the primary criterion for building a people-centered state. Within the framework of the idea that "Society is the initiator of reforms," the constitutional consolidation of the role and status of civil society institutions was determined [1]. The new edition of the Constitution, adopted through a nationwide referendum in 2023, played a significant role in strengthening the status of civil society institutions. The historic introduction of a dedicated Chapter XIII entitled "Civil Society Institutions" for the first time marked a historic milestone. Articles 69–75 of this chapter defined the rights, operational foundations, and procedures for establishing civil society institutions [2].

2. Methods

This study used a qualitative research approach based on the analysis of scientific literature, international reports, official documents, and publications by foreign experts. Comparative, content, and descriptive analysis methods were applied to evaluate the development of civil society in New Uzbekistan. The collected information was systematically analyzed to identify key achievements, challenges, and future prospects from the perspective of foreign experts.

3. Results and Discussion

Strong attention began to be paid to the activities of non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs) from the early months of 2021. On March 4, 2021, on the initiative of President Sh.M. Mirziyoyev, the "Concept for the Development of Civil Society in 2021–2025" was adopted under Presidential Decree No. PF-6181 [3]. This Concept can be said to have ushered in a new era in the activities of NGOs. Today, more than 200 regulatory legal documents governing the activities of civil society institutions are in force, covering processes ranging from their registration to cooperation with the state. This openness policy in New Uzbekistan has given strong impetus to the revitalization of civil society and has significantly improved the country's standing in international openness ratings. In particular, Uzbekistan has been consistently rising in the indices of international and foreign organizations such as the Charities Aid Foundation, Transparency International, and The Economist Intelligence Unit [4].

Today in our country, New Uzbekistan is home to **9,627** non-governmental non-profit organizations, **9,008** citizen self-governance bodies, **2,490** mass media outlets, and nearly **3,000** various public structures (public councils, commissions, public groups, and others), employing more than **150,000** individuals. Today, these NGOs are not only playing an increasing role in the socio-political life of our country but are also growing in significance at the international level. In particular, the **"Civil Society Week"** is held annually from December 1–5. Within the framework of this week, roundtable discussions, forums, open dialogues, exhibitions, award ceremonies, international conferences, and various actions at different levels are organized [5]. Furthermore, each year the event brings together Members of Parliament, state administration and local executive authorities, international organizations (UNESCO, UNDP, WHO, OSCE, GIZ, ACTED, TICA, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, UNFPA), the diplomatic corps (ambassadors of the United Kingdom, Malaysia, China, and the European Union to Uzbekistan), foreign experts (from the Kingdom of Belgium, Japan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan), as well as representatives of civil society institutions and mass media. This not only brings forward new trends for civil society institutions in the development of New Uzbekistan, but also serves to enhance the role of the "third sector" in our country [6].

Based on the above, we would like to present how certain foreign experts assess the development of civil society institutions in the context of New Uzbekistan's progress. The views of the foreign specialists cited below were expressed at the "Civil Society Week" held in December 2025 [7].

In particular:

Akiko Fuji (United Nations) – noted the UN Development Programme's comprehensive support for civil society institution initiatives;

Aygun Aliyeva (Azerbaijan) – acknowledged the establishment of friendly relations between the civil society institutions of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, noting that the "Civil Society Week" opens new opportunities for joint initiatives and recognized the high level of preparation for the week's events [8];

Toivo Klaar (Ambassador of the EU Delegation to Uzbekistan) – acknowledging the important role of Public Councils in promoting open and accountable governance, stated that the EU will continue to support projects in this area;

Akiko Fujii (UNDP Resident Representative) – noting that the activities of Public Councils serve to strengthen participatory governance, emphasized the need to further strengthen the legislative framework regulating the activities of district-level councils [9];

Ursula Keller (Deputy Head of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) – sharing Switzerland's experience in local governance and civil society development, noted the indispensable role of civil society institutions in shaping effective and accountable local governance and in fostering inclusive decision-making [10];

Andrew Yurkovsky (Head of the Human Capital Department of the OSCE Project Coordinator

in Uzbekistan) – emphasized that successfully implementing the "Uzbekistan–2030" strategy is impossible without the active participation of a strong and independent civil society [11]; that NGOs play a vital role due to their knowledge of local realities, the trust of communities, flexibility in addressing social issues, and their capacity to ensure transparency and accountability; and that the OSCE has been supporting Uzbekistan's civil society for 30 years and is prepared to further strengthen the conditions for NGOs to operate freely and effectively [12].

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that substantial reforms are currently being implemented in Uzbekistan to strengthen cooperation and mutual trust between the state and society, promote democratic values, protect citizens' rights, and support the sustainable development of civil society institutions. These reforms have created favorable conditions for increasing public participation in decision-making processes and enhancing transparency and accountability in public administration [13].

Civil society institutions, including non-governmental non-profit organizations, public associations, and community groups, are playing an increasingly active role in addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. Their contributions are particularly visible in the fight against corruption, environmental protection, education, healthcare, culture, human rights advocacy, and social support programs. Through their activities, these institutions help strengthen civic engagement and contribute to the overall development of society [14].

In this regard, the "Civil Society Week" has become an important platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation between state bodies and civil society institutions. It provides opportunities for discussing current issues, exchanging experiences, identifying the needs of non-governmental organizations, and developing new initiatives aimed at strengthening public participation and democratic governance. Furthermore, the event contributes to the establishment of effective communication mechanisms, encourages constructive partnerships, and supports the implementation of reforms designed to build a stronger and more inclusive civil society in New Uzbekistan [15].

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that during the "Civil Society Week," a number of proposals were put forward by local and foreign experts. These include:

- Building the capacity of NGO staff through training in project management, financial management, marketing, and related fields;
- Gradually reducing the amount of subsidy-based funding year by year and, accordingly, increasing the number and volume of state social orders and state grants;
- Developing and introducing criteria for evaluating the performance effectiveness of organizations receiving subsidy-based support;
- Developing and applying instruments to enhance the attractiveness of civil society institutions for engaging young people;
- Introducing short-term (**3 months**), medium-term (**6 months**), and long-term (**1.5 years**) grant project categories;
- It is advisable to improve the legislative framework regulating the activities of district-level Public Councils.

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