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POLITICS, GOVERNANCE, AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF UZBEKISTAN AND MODERN TRENDS

Abduvali Lutfullayev
Professor of Qarshi International University,
Qarshi, 180100, Uzbekistan
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7685-2282
E-mail:abduvalilutfullayev8@gmail.com
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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the interrelationship between politics, governance, and international cooperation, as well as the reforms being implemented in the Republic of Uzbekistan and their impact on international collaboration. In the context of modern globalization, the efficiency of public administration, transparency, and the level of development of international cooperation are among the key indicators of a country's development. After gaining independence, especially since 2017, Uzbekistan has taken significant steps toward political and economic reforms, liberalizing public administration, expanding international relations, and developing regional cooperation in Central Asia. The article highlights the transformation of the political system and governance mechanisms, a new stage of cooperation with international organizations, the priority directions of foreign policy, as well as issues of ensuring regional security and stability.

The research findings show that the political reforms and open foreign policy pursued in Uzbekistan contribute to enhancing the country's international reputation, increasing its investment attractiveness, and fostering regional cooperation.

Keywords: politics, public administration, international cooperation, reforms, Uzbekistan, Central Asia, foreign policy, regional security.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and rapid geopolitical transformations, the study of politics, governance, and international cooperation has become increasingly relevant. Contemporary states are facing complex challenges that require not only effective internal administration but also active engagement in the international arena. Among the key tasks of modern governance are establishing efficient and transparent public administration systems, ensuring political stability, promoting rule of law, and fostering sustainable and mutually beneficial international cooperation[1]. The interconnectedness of domestic governance and foreign policy has made it clear that political reforms and international engagement are mutually reinforcing processes that directly influence economic development, social cohesion, and national security.

Following its independence in 1991, the Republic of Uzbekistan embarked on a path of constructing domestic and foreign policies aligned with its national interests, sovereignty, and long-term strategic objectives[2]. Over the first two decades of independence, the country focused on building state institutions, consolidating political stability, and gradually opening up to international cooperation. However, it was only after 2017 that Uzbekistan entered a new stage of comprehensive reforms aimed at modernizing governance, promoting economic liberalization, and enhancing the country's regional and global integration[3].

Since 2017, significant steps have been undertaken to improve public administration, including the decentralization of local governance structures, professionalization of the civil service, and adoption of e-governance tools to increase transparency and efficiency. Economic reforms have focused on liberalization, diversification, and the creation of an attractive environment for foreign investment. Concurrently, Uzbekistan has strengthened its international relations, actively engaging with regional and global partners to address shared challenges, including trade facilitation, energy cooperation, and environmental management[4].

A particularly notable aspect of Uzbekistan's foreign policy in this period has been its emphasis on regional cooperation in Central Asia. The opening of borders with neighboring countries, the resolution of longstanding border disputes, and the initiation of constructive dialogue on issues such as water resources and energy security have established a new foundation for stability, connectivity, and mutual prosperity in the region[5]. These initiatives not only enhance Uzbekistan's geopolitical influence but also demonstrate the country's strategic vision of fostering sustainable regional development through diplomacy, collaboration, and integration.

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the interrelationship between politics, governance, and international cooperation, examining both theoretical frameworks and practical applications. Using Uzbekistan as a case study, the article explores the reform process undertaken since 2017, evaluates the effectiveness of political and administrative measures, and identifies key trends in the development of regional and international cooperation. By combining theoretical insights with empirical evidence, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how states can balance domestic governance improvements with proactive engagement in international affairs to achieve stability, economic growth, and regional integration.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a comprehensive and interdisciplinary research design to analyze the dynamics of politics, governance, and international cooperation in Uzbekistan within the context of modern global trends. The research methodology is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, ensuring a holistic understanding of the subject.

Materials

The empirical and theoretical foundation of the study is based on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including:

- Official documents and strategic development programs of Uzbekistan, such as the *Action Strategy (2017–2021)* and *Development Strategy (2022–2026)*;
- Reports of international organizations, including OECD governance reviews and policy analysis documents;
- Academic literature on political science, governance models, and international relations;
- Statistical data related to governance indicators, foreign policy activities, and international cooperation initiatives;
- Comparative case studies of governance systems in different countries.

These materials provide a reliable basis for evaluating the transformation of political institutions and governance mechanisms in Uzbekistan, as well as their alignment with international standards.

Methods

The study utilizes several research methods commonly applied in political science:

-Comparative Analysis Method. This method is used to compare Uzbekistan's governance model with other political systems (presidential, parliamentary, and hybrid systems) to identify similarities, differences, and best practices.

-Systemic and Structural-Functional Approach. The political system is analyzed as an interconnected structure where institutions, actors, and policies interact. This approach helps to understand governance reforms and their impact on political stability and effectiveness.

-Qualitative Analysis. The study applies document analysis, policy review, and expert interpretation to examine reforms, strategies, and international cooperation mechanisms.

-Quantitative Analysis. Statistical data and governance indicators are used to assess trends in political development, institutional effectiveness, and international engagement.

-Case Study Method. Uzbekistan is examined as a case study of a transitional state undergoing political and administrative reforms, allowing for an in-depth exploration of national experience.

-Systematic Literature Review (PRISMA approach). A structured review of academic sources is conducted to identify key themes, patterns, and gaps in existing research, ensuring reliability and minimizing bias.

-Policy Analysis Method. The study evaluates public policies and reforms using evidence-based policymaking principles, focusing on their effectiveness and alignment with international governance standards.

Results

Since 2017, Uzbekistan has implemented large-scale reforms aimed at liberalizing and modernizing the political system[3]. The main directions of these reforms are as follows:

First, changes were made in the public administration system to redistribute powers between central and local authorities, and to expand the powers of governors and local councils. The Law "On Local State Administration," adopted in 2017, strengthened the position of governors as heads of the executive branch and expanded the powers of local councils[11].

Second, reforms were carried out in the judicial and legal system. The Constitutional Law "On the Judicial Authority," adopted in 2021, aimed to strengthen the independence of the courts, improve the efficiency of the judicial system, and ensure transparency and fairness in legal proceedings[12].

Third, the anti-corruption system was improved. In 2019, the Agency for Combating Corruption was established, and the Law "On Combating Corruption" was adopted[13]. A National Council on Anti-Corruption was formed, and its activities were organized[14].

Fourth, the activities of political parties and civil society institutions intensified. The Law "On Political Parties," adopted in 2019, increased the role of political parties in forming state and administrative bodies. The system of allocating state grants to NGOs through the Support Fund for Non-Governmental Organizations was expanded[66].

Fifth, liberalization was carried out in information policy and the media sector. The registration procedure for mass media was simplified, and restrictions on information exchange through the Internet and social networks were lifted.

Between 2017 and 2024, extensive work was carried out to digitalize public administration. Within the framework of the "Digital Uzbekistan – 2030" program, adopted in 2020, the following results were achieved:

Figure 1.

Indicator	2017	2024	Change

Indicator	2017	2024	Change
Number of e-government services	150	600+	+300%
Access to government services electronically	30%	85%	+55%
Level of Internet use by the population	52%	85%	+33%
Electronic document management in government bodies	40%	95%	+55%

Through the **"People's Oversight"** system, citizens gained the opportunity to evaluate the activities of state bodies. Over **600 public services** are provided electronically through the **"Unified Interactive Public Services Portal"** (my.gov.uz)[18].

Since 2017, Uzbekistan's foreign policy has undergone fundamental and multidimensional changes, reflecting the country's strategic shift toward greater openness, regional integration, and active participation in global governance[4]. These reforms have not only enhanced Uzbekistan's international standing but have also created favorable conditions for economic development, regional security, and multilateral cooperation. The main directions of these changes are as follows:

1. Cooperation with Central Asian countries. Uzbekistan has entered a qualitatively new stage in its relations with neighboring Central Asian states. For decades, regional interactions were limited due to border disputes, political mistrust, and restricted trade and transit corridors. Since 2017, the country has actively pursued border normalization and regional integration.

- Borders with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan were systematically opened, facilitating the free movement of goods, services, and people.
- Significant agreements were concluded in the transport and transit sectors, enhancing trade routes and connectivity across Central Asia.
- In 2018, landmark agreements on border demarcation were signed with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, resolving longstanding territorial disputes.
- A historic agreement with Kyrgyzstan on the full demarcation of the border followed in 2019, which contributed to stabilizing bilateral relations and fostering trust.
- In 2021, Uzbekistan initiated negotiations on border demarcation with Tajikistan, leading to agreements covering multiple strategic sections, paving the way for more secure and efficient cross-border cooperation.

These efforts have created a more stable and cooperative regional environment, encouraged cross-border trade, and enhanced regional security coordination. The approach demonstrates Uzbekistan's commitment to becoming a hub for regional connectivity and a constructive partner in Central Asia.

2. Cooperation with international organizations. Uzbekistan has significantly expanded its engagement with global and regional multilateral institutions, signaling its desire to play an active role in international governance and diplomacy.

- The country intensified cooperation with the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

(SCO), the Organization of Turkic States, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

- In 2018, Uzbekistan became a member of the UN Human Rights Council, reflecting its commitment to promoting human rights and international norms.
- In 2019, the UN Regional Center for Dialogue and Peace in Central Asia was established in Tashkent, serving as a hub for regional conflict resolution, policy dialogue, and peacebuilding initiatives.
- By 2021, Uzbekistan hosted the UN Regional Center on Peacekeeping Operations, further demonstrating its proactive role in contributing to regional and global security initiatives.

These steps have strengthened Uzbekistan's diplomatic profile, allowed the country to influence regional policy-making, and created opportunities for international collaboration in areas such as security, education, human rights, and sustainable development.

3. Economic diplomacy. Economic diplomacy has become a central pillar of Uzbekistan's foreign policy strategy. Recognizing that sustainable development and national prosperity depend on attracting investment and promoting trade, Uzbekistan has actively engaged in economic statecraft.

- Between 2017 and 2024, more than 40 foreign heads of state visited the country, reflecting Uzbekistan's growing diplomatic visibility and attractiveness as a regional partner.
- Over 60 international agreements were signed during this period, covering trade, investment, energy, transport, and technology cooperation.
- These efforts contributed to a significant increase in foreign direct investment (FDI), supporting the modernization of infrastructure, industrial development, and the creation of new jobs.

Economic diplomacy has also facilitated technology transfer, strengthened regional supply chains, and integrated Uzbekistan more closely into global markets. By linking foreign policy objectives with economic development goals, Uzbekistan has effectively leveraged diplomacy to promote national growth and resilience.

Since 2017, Uzbekistan's foreign policy has undergone significant changes. The main directions of these changes are as follows:

Cooperation with Central Asian countries – A qualitatively new stage began in Uzbekistan's relations with Central Asian states. Borders with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan were opened, and new agreements were signed in the transport and transit sectors. In 2018, agreements on border demarcation were reached with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In 2019, a historic agreement on the border was signed with Kyrgyzstan. In 2021, negotiations on border demarcation with Tajikistan began, resulting in agreements on several sections.

Cooperation with international organizations – Uzbekistan intensified cooperation with the UN, OSCE, SCO, the Organization of Turkic States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and other international organizations. In 2018, Uzbekistan became a member of the UN Human Rights Council. In 2019, the UN Regional Center for Dialogue and Peace in Central Asia was established in Uzbekistan. In 2021, a UN regional center on Peacekeeping Operations was opened in the country.

Economic diplomacy – Economic diplomacy played a key role in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. Between 2017 and 2024, more than 40 foreign heads of state visited Uzbekistan, and over 60 international agreements were signed. The volume of foreign investments increased significantly.

Ensuring regional security and stability has been identified as a key priority in Uzbekistan's foreign policy agenda. Recognizing that sustainable national development is closely linked to a peaceful and stable regional environment, the government of Uzbekistan has actively developed strategic frameworks and initiatives aimed at promoting security, dialogue, and cooperation across Central Asia. In 2018, Uzbekistan formally adopted the **"Concept for Ensuring Regional Security and Stability,"** which lays out a comprehensive approach to addressing regional challenges. This concept is built upon several key principles:

1. Constructive dialogue. Uzbekistan emphasizes the importance of open, transparent, and inclusive dialogue among all regional stakeholders. The principle of constructive dialogue aims to prevent conflicts before they escalate and to facilitate negotiation and consensus-building on issues of shared concern, such as border disputes, resource management, and regional trade. By encouraging continuous communication channels between governments, international organizations, and civil society actors, Uzbekistan seeks to establish a cooperative environment that reduces tensions and fosters mutual understanding.

2. Mutual benefit. Uzbekistan's approach to regional cooperation is grounded in the concept of mutual benefit. The country promotes partnerships that align with the national interests of all parties, ensuring that collaborative initiatives are equitable and sustainable. This principle encourages joint projects in infrastructure, trade, energy, and environmental management that generate tangible economic and social advantages for participating countries, thereby strengthening regional interdependence and trust.

3. Peacefulness. The peaceful resolution of conflicts is a cornerstone of Uzbekistan's security strategy. The country consistently advocates for diplomatic and legal mechanisms to resolve disputes and explicitly rejects the use of military force as a means of conflict resolution. This approach not only reinforces regional stability but also enhances Uzbekistan's reputation as a responsible and neutral actor in Central Asian and international affairs.

4. Regional integration. Uzbekistan actively promotes regional integration in critical sectors, including transport, energy, water management, and trade. By facilitating cross-border infrastructure projects, harmonizing regulatory frameworks, and encouraging collaborative investments, the country seeks to create interconnected regional markets and ensure the efficient utilization of shared natural resources. Integration initiatives also contribute to economic resilience, enhance energy security, and improve the mobility of goods and people across the region.

Uzbekistan's engagement with Afghanistan. A central element of Uzbekistan's regional security strategy has been its constructive engagement with Afghanistan. Recognizing the strategic importance of a stable Afghanistan for regional peace and economic cooperation, Uzbekistan has positioned itself as an active facilitator of dialogue and development. In 2018, Uzbekistan hosted the **international conference on the "Afghanistan Peace Process"** in Tashkent, bringing together regional and global stakeholders to discuss conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and reconstruction efforts.

Beyond diplomatic efforts, Uzbekistan has promoted practical cooperation with Afghanistan in transport, energy, and trade-economic sectors. Collaborative projects include the development of cross-border transport corridors, joint energy infrastructure initiatives, and trade agreements aimed at increasing connectivity and economic integration. These measures not only contribute to Afghanistan's stabilization but also strengthen Uzbekistan's role as a regional hub for trade, logistics, and economic cooperation.

Uzbekistan's position in international rankings improved significantly between 2017 and 2024:

Figure 2.

Ranking name	2017	2024	O‘zgarish
World Bank – Ease of Doing Business Index	74	69	+5 steps
Index of Economic Freedom	162	110	+52 steps
Global Peace Index	104	86	+18 steps
Corruption Perceptions Index	157	121	+36 steps

Discussion

The political reforms and measures aimed at improving public administration implemented in Uzbekistan between 2017 and 2024 have produced notable positive outcomes. Key indicators of success include the country’s improved position in international governance and transparency rankings, a steady rise in foreign direct investment, and the strengthening of regional cooperation through multilateral initiatives. These outcomes reflect the government’s commitment to modernizing state institutions, enhancing efficiency, and fostering a more open and predictable environment for both domestic and foreign stakeholders.

However, despite these achievements, several challenges continue to constrain the full realization of reform objectives:

1. Persistence of centralization in public administration. Although legislative and structural reforms have expanded the formal powers of local councils (mahallas and regional bodies), real autonomy remains limited. Budgetary allocations, staffing decisions, and strategic policy implementation continue to be heavily influenced by central authorities. This centralization restricts the capacity of local administrations to respond flexibly to community-specific needs, undermining the principle of subsidiarity and potentially slowing down local development initiatives. Strengthening local fiscal independence, enhancing human resource management at the regional level, and promoting participatory decision-making mechanisms could help reduce this dependency and improve the effectiveness of local governance.

2. Ongoing reforms in the judicial and legal system. Ensuring the independence, impartiality, and efficiency of the judiciary remains a critical priority. While reforms have been undertaken to modernize legal frameworks and improve court administration, challenges persist in the selection and appointment of judges, the enforcement of court decisions, and the protection of judicial autonomy from external pressures. Continued efforts are needed to establish transparent and merit-based judicial appointments, strengthen legal oversight mechanisms, and enhance public

trust in the judiciary. Without these measures, the credibility and effectiveness of the legal system risk being undermined, which could impact both domestic stability and foreign investor confidence.

3. Need for a systematic approach to combating corruption. Despite progress in institutionalizing anti-corruption measures, corruption remains a significant challenge. Expanding the operational capacity of the Anti-Corruption Agency, improving investigative and prosecutorial practices, and fostering a culture of accountability across all levels of government are essential. Implementing preventive measures, such as digitalizing public services, increasing transparency in public procurement, and promoting citizen engagement in monitoring state activities, will contribute to creating an environment of zero tolerance toward corruption. These measures are crucial for sustaining public confidence and improving the efficiency of governance.

4. Strengthening political parties and civil society institutions. Political parties and civil society organizations play a vital role in shaping policy, representing citizens' interests, and promoting accountability. Currently, the influence of these actors in Uzbekistan's decision-making processes remains limited. Enhancing the capacity of political parties to participate meaningfully in legislative processes, increasing the involvement of NGOs in implementing public programs, and creating platforms for active civil society engagement are critical steps toward consolidating participatory governance. Strengthening these institutions will contribute not only to policy effectiveness but also to broader democratic development and social cohesion.

CONCLUSION

Between 2017 and 2024, Uzbekistan implemented large-scale reforms aimed at liberalizing the political system and modernizing public administration. These reforms covered key areas such as improving the efficiency of governance, enhancing the judicial and legal system, combating corruption, supporting civil society institutions, and liberalizing information policy. As a result of efforts to digitalize public administration, the number of e-government services exceeded 600, and about 85% of the population gained access to public services in electronic form. In Uzbekistan's foreign policy, a qualitatively new stage began, characterized by strengthened cooperation with Central Asian countries, expanded relations with international organizations, and the development of economic diplomacy. The opening of borders, agreements in transport and transit sectors, and a constructive position in the Afghan peace process have increased Uzbekistan's reputation at both regional and international levels.

Uzbekistan's position in international rankings has significantly improved. The country rose by 5 positions in the World Bank's *Ease of Doing Business* index, by 52 positions in the *Index of Economic Freedom*, by 18 positions in the *Global Peace Index*, and by 36 positions in the *Corruption Perceptions Index*. At the same time, existing challenges—such as the persistence of centralized governance, the need for further improvement of the judicial and legal system, strengthening a systematic approach to combating corruption, and expanding the role of civil society institutions—remain important issues to be addressed in the next stage of reforms.

In the future, it is expected that Uzbekistan will continue its efforts to advance political reforms and improve public administration, expand international cooperation, and ensure regional security and stability, thereby further enhancing its participation and reputation on the global stage.

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