

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Strengthening Parliamentary Oversight in Uzbekistan

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Abstract. This article explores the pivotal role civil society organizations (CSOs) can play in enhancing transparency and accountability in the parliamentary oversight system of Uzbekistan. Drawing exclusively from the existing literature review on transparency in parliamentary oversight, the paper highlights the mechanisms through which CSOs contribute to effective oversight before, during, and after government action. It also outlines practical recommendations for institutionalizing CSO participation and aligning national practice with international standards.

Keywords: civil society, parliamentary oversight, transparency, accountability, citizen engagement

Introduction. Parliamentary oversight is a critical function in democratic systems, ensuring that governments remain accountable and transparent. In Uzbekistan, while legislative reforms such as the Law on Parliamentary Oversight (2016) and the Development Strategy for 2022–2026 have provided a legal foundation for such oversight, practical implementation remains limited (BTI, 2022). Civil society organizations (CSOs) have the potential to address these gaps by acting as intermediaries between the public and parliament, and by providing technical expertise, monitoring activities, and advocating for reforms (Transparency International, 2023).

Yet, the reality in many post-Soviet countries, including Uzbekistan, reflects a formalistic implementation of legal norms, with symbolic rather than substantive engagement with the public (Turdiev, 2020). The Global Parliamentary Report (IPU, 2017) and the UNDP Handbook (2009) have repeatedly emphasized that transparency and public participation should not be mere procedural formality, but a practical and continuous element of governance. Thus, empowering CSOs in oversight processes is a logical step toward democratization and effective state accountability.



Theoretical and Legal Context

Transparency in parliamentary oversight is not only a democratic ideal but also a legal obligation, as emphasized in the UNDP’s Handbook on Transparency and Accountability of Parliament (UNDP, 2009). The principle of participatory governance is supported by mechanisms such as public hearings, petitions, and online consultations—all of which are regularly utilized in the Uzbek context (Yusupov, 2021; Turdiev, 2020). CSOs can bridge this gap by institutionalizing feedback loops and monitoring the follow-up of parliamentary recommendations.

The report by Transparency International (2023) highlights three essential phases of oversight: before, during, and after government action. CSOs are uniquely positioned to intervene at each stage, contributing to more inclusive and evidence-based parliamentary practices. International examples underscore that CSO involvement fosters legitimacy and enhances the quality of governance, especially in developing countries.

CSO Engagement at Different Stages of Government Action

• Before Government Action

CSOs can contribute during the pre-legislative phase by facilitating public consultations, supporting participatory budgeting, and submitting independent impact assessments. For instance, in Uganda, CSO involvement in budget review led to substantive revisions and greater public satisfaction (Transparency International, 2022). In Uzbekistan, however, there are currently no established norms for pre-legislative scrutiny by CSOs, and existing laws and legal practices lack clarity on how citizen engagement should be operationalized.

Moreover, Transparency International (2022) reports that in Armenia and Zimbabwe, pre-legislative CSO involvement is formally acknowledged and integrated into the parliamentary calendar. These models demonstrate that structured and timely engagement mechanisms, combined with adequate information access, lead to more coherent and accepted legislative outcomes. Uzbekistan can adopt similar protocols by mandating the involvement of CSOs in early policy formulation stages.

•During Government Action

During policy implementation, CSOs can exert pressure for compliance with parliamentary commitments through media campaigns, public hearings, and cooperation with parliamentary committees (Wang & Rakner, 2005). Civic engagement initiatives allow citizens to directly participate in deliberative processes, improving responsiveness and inclusivity.

Examples from Indonesia and South Africa highlight that opening parliamentary sessions to the public and involving CSOs in hearings dramatically increase the accountability of both the legislature and executive branches (UNDP, 2009). Broadcasting sessions, facilitating online engagement, and publishing accessible documents are essential enablers of this process.

In Uzbekistan, these practices remain limited. According to the BTI (2022) report, parliamentary committees rarely invite external stakeholders, and public access to committee activities is sporadic. Without systemic interaction, CSOs can only exert limited influence. Institutionalizing formal avenues for their participation can ensure that implementation of laws and government policies align with public expectations.

•After Government Action

Post-legislative scrutiny by public is not a regular practice in Uzbekistan. CSOs can support this phase by evaluating the implementation of laws, tracking executive actions, and providing simplified public reports. The UK’s model of post-legislative scrutiny offers a useful benchmark (Transparency International, 2023).

Additionally, the Transparency International (2022) report outlines how CSOs in the Gambia and Ghana contributed to assessing whether parliamentary resolutions had tangible outcomes. They followed up with parliamentarians, analyzed government compliance, and translated their findings into citizen-friendly formats. In Uzbekistan, enabling such post-legislative audits could be transformative in enhancing the integrity and sustainability of oversight.

Challenges in the Uzbek Context



Despite legal provisions for openness, Uzbek legal system lacks specific organizational procedures for CSO engagement in parliamentary oversight (Karimov, 2023). Public hearings and advisory mechanisms are irregular and often symbolic. Another constraint lies in the political culture surrounding CSO engagement. As noted by Yusupov (2021), government bodies often did not perceive CSOs as collaborative stakeholders, which is now changing. This perception may discourage cooperation, while the lack of legal insurance for transparency measures may further weaken the accountability initiatives.

Additionally, technical barriers such as limited access to legislative drafts, lack of publicly available records, and insufficient capacity in policy analysis restrict CSO effectiveness. Bridging these capacity gaps is essential for sustainable democratic reform.

Recommendations

To institutionalize CSO engagement in parliamentary oversight in Uzbekistan, several actionable reforms can be proposed:

- **Legislative Reform:** Amend parliamentary laws to define roles for CSOs in oversight processes. This may include their participation in public hearings, access to information, and submission of policy assessments.

- **Regular publicity:** Develop and maintain the oversight records on the designated online platform for publishing oversight findings, and committee proceedings, and enable feedback submission.

- **Monitoring & Evaluation Units:** Establish collaborative oversight taskforces comprising MPs and CSO experts to track government implementation of parliamentary recommendations and the results of parliamentary oversight.

Conclusion. For parliamentary oversight in Uzbekistan to be effective, the involvement of civil society must be more inherent than symbolic. Drawing from international practices and grounded in existing legal frameworks, CSOs can substantially strengthen transparency, accountability, and citizen trust in governance. Their institutional engagement represents not only a democratic necessity but also a strategic tool to improve the government accountability and transparency in parliamentary processes in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The potential of CSOs is not merely aspirational but demonstrable, as seen in comparable reforming democracies. Enabling this potential requires both political will and legal innovation. If these challenges are addressed, it will be another

significant step forward in institutionalizing participatory and transparent governance on top of the existing legal frameworks that already pave the way for public engagement and participation in the review process of the results of parliamentary oversight on Uzbekistan.

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