



THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL LIFE OF UZBEKISTAN (1991-2016)

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Annotation: This article examines the role and status of women in the socio-political life of the Republic of Uzbekistan from 1991 to 2016. After independence, important legislative foundations were created for ensuring women's rights and involving them in political and public administration. Women began to actively participate in parliament, political parties, local councils, education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship. At the same time, problems hindering gender equality persist in some regions. Based on historical, statistical, and legal analysis, the study highlights changes in the status of women and provides recommendations for their wider involvement in socio-political processes.

Keywords: gender equality, political participation, women's rights, social activism, legislation, independence, political parties, women's organizations

INTRODUCTION

Independence marked the beginning of a new stage of political, social, and economic development in the history of Uzbekistan. Since 1991, the process of forming a democratic state governed by the rule of law and a civil society has been established in the country. Strengthening the status of women in these historical processes, ensuring their equal participation in socio-political activity has been defined as an important task. Because in any state, the development of society and the strengthening of democratic values are closely linked to the level of ensuring legal and practical equality between women and men.

Issues of strengthening the role of women in the political and legal system, creating opportunities for their active participation in all spheres of public life, and ensuring gender equality are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. In particular, Article 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan directly establishes the norm "Women and men have equal rights," which constitutes the constitutional basis of gender equality in the country. At the same time, in recent years, a number of legislative acts and state programs aimed at the practical implementation of this equality have been implemented.

From the first years of independence, comprehensive measures were taken in Uzbekistan to protect the rights and interests of women, to involve them in various spheres of society. In 1991, the "Women's Committee" was established for the first time in the republic, and this organization became a leading socio-political institution protecting the interests of women on a national scale. Decrees of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers, and laws adopted by the Oliy Majlis demonstrate that the issue of women has become a priority of state policy.

Gender equality and ensuring women's rights are recognized globally as an integral part of sustainable development. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the United Nations in 1995, the UN Millennium Development Goals, and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) announced in 2000, also highlight women's participation as an



important factor. Uzbekistan also supported these international initiatives, assumed international obligations aimed at raising the status of women, and began to implement them in domestic policy.

It should be noted that although the position of women in socio-political life in Uzbekistan existed to a certain extent at the end of the 20th century, their active participation was largely limited to such areas as healthcare, education, and culture. Their share in political processes was extremely low. In the years following independence, special attention was paid to the activation of women within the framework of state policy: various educational programs and advanced training courses were launched for women, and their participation in political institutions - parliament, local Councils, ministries, and agencies - was encouraged.

Non-governmental non-profit organizations, international cooperation programs, and public organizations, in particular, the "Oila" Scientific and Practical Center, the "Sog'lom avlod uchun" Foundation, the "Mehr nuri" Foundation, and other organizations, played an important role in addressing women's issues. Their activities not only increased women's legal knowledge and social activity, but also strengthened their position in economic and political life.

Political reforms carried out by the state to ensure gender equality were elevated to a new level with the adoption of the "State Program for Supporting Women" in 1999. Within the framework of this program, measures were implemented aimed at protecting women's health, ensuring their employment, raising their legal culture, and strengthening their place and status in the family. In 2004, the "National Action Program on Gender Equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan" was adopted. This program served as the basis for the systematic and strategic direction of Uzbekistan's gender policy.

The increase in women's activity in socio-political life was also directly related to the reform of political institutions in the country. The transformation of the Oliy Majlis into a bicameral parliament, the expansion of the powers of local Kengashes, the increase in the number of political parties and their activities allowed women to enter the political arena. In particular, women's wings operated within the internal structures of the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, UzLiDeP, "Milliy Tiklanish," and "Adolat" parties, which served to ensure gender equality.

The Law "On Political Parties" adopted in 2004, the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights of Men and Women" of 2007, and amendments to the Law "On the Family" of 2009 served as an important legal basis for increasing the socio-political activity of women. These legal foundations opened the way for women to participate in political processes not only as voters but also as active candidates.

From 1991 to 2016, the number of women in parliament gradually increased. In 1991, the proportion of women in parliament was 6 percent, and by 2015 this figure reached 16 percent. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of women in local councils, ministries and departments, and khokimiyats. In particular, in accordance with the principle of gender equality in the process of elections to the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2014, political parties were obliged to ensure the participation of at least 30% of women in their lists of candidates.

Based on the foregoing, it can be seen that in Uzbekistan in 1991-2016, the position of women in socio-political life changed significantly. Women are recognized as active members of social institutions, trusted candidates of political parties, and capable employees of government



bodies. At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge that some social stereotypes, cultural restrictions, and distrust in women's activities still exist.

The main goal of the article within the framework of this study is to analyze the role of women in the socio-political life of Uzbekistan in the post-independence period, more precisely in 1991-2016, in connection with legal, political, and social processes, to assess the reforms carried out to ensure gender equality, and to identify existing problems.

The relevance of this research lies in the fact that the issue of gender equality today is not only a criterion of social justice, but also an important factor for sustainable development, building a democratic society, fully ensuring human rights, and economic growth. Women's activity plays an important role in enhancing Uzbekistan's political authority on a global scale, strengthening cooperation with international organizations, and ensuring internal social stability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

After Uzbekistan gained independence, fundamental reforms began in the political, legal, and social life of the country. Within the framework of these reforms, the issue of strengthening the role and status of women in society, their wide involvement in socio-political activity was considered as one of the important areas. During 1991-2016, domestic political practice was formed in Uzbekistan on the basis of a number of legislative acts, state programs, and international conventions to ensure gender equality in relation to women. As a result of the actions taken during this period, significant changes have occurred in supporting women and increasing their activity in the political, economic, and social spheres.

First of all, the idea of gender equality is reflected in Article 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which guarantees legal equality between women and men in all spheres in the country. However, in practice, ensuring this equality was carried out gradually. At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, a regulatory framework aimed at protecting women's rights was formed. The "State Program for Supporting Women" approved in 1999, the "National Action Program for Gender Equality" in 2004, and the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights of Men and Women" adopted in 2007 constitute important stages in this direction. Through these documents, gender equality began to become not just official policy, but practical measures.

The annual increase in the number of women in parliament and political institutions demonstrates the effectiveness of these efforts. In the first years of independence, the share of women in parliament was only 6 percent, and by 2015 this figure reached 16 percent. The role of women in the activities of political parties has also been strengthened. In particular, since 2014, the requirement that women make up at least 30 percent of the list of candidates nominated by political parties has had a positive impact on increasing their participation in the political process. Women sought to participate not only as voters but also as active candidates for positions such as deputies, senators, and members of local councils. This, in turn, is recognized as a factor that has increased the participation of women in the process of political decision-making.

Analysis shows that the sectors in which women are most actively involved remain education, healthcare, culture, and social services. Despite the high number of women in these areas, they are relatively less common in leadership positions. This indicates that gender equality should be considered not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively. One of the main problems for women is the presence of cultural and stereotypical barriers, social pressure, and sometimes an

atmosphere of distrust in their appointment to leadership positions. During these years, seminars, trainings, and international projects were organized through state policy to improve women's qualifications and prepare them for political positions, but these events were often not evenly distributed across the regions.

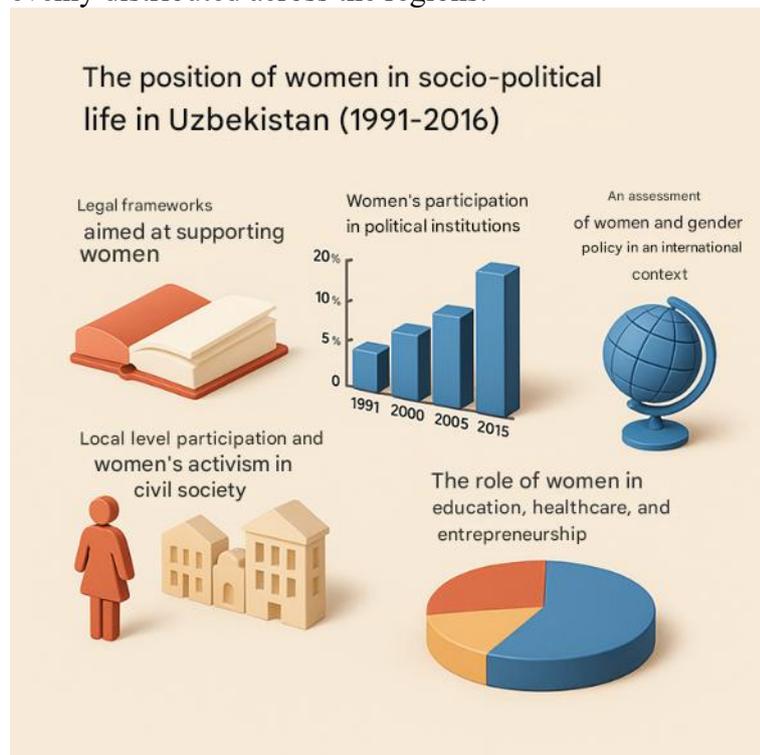


Figure 1. The role of women in the socio-political life of Uzbekistan

The activities of non-governmental non-profit organizations in increasing the activity of women in public life deserve special attention. Through such organizations as "Mehr nuri," "Sog'lom avlod uchun," "Ayollar kengashi," and the "Oila" Scientific and Practical Center, significant work has been carried out in such areas as social protection of women, improving their legal knowledge, vocational training, and healthcare. In particular, a number of initiatives were put forward to eliminate such problems as early marriage, violence, low income, and unemployment among women. However, the problems in this area have not yet been fully eliminated systematically.

Analysis shows that by 2016, women began to actively participate in the economy, especially in small business and entrepreneurship. The increase in the number of women entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan served to ensure their economic independence. Although the number of women in small and medium-sized businesses is more than 30%, their participation in large businesses and the industrial sector remains very low. This situation is explained by such reasons as limited access to financial resources, problems arising in obtaining bank loans, and a low level of economic literacy. Therefore, there is a need to expand women's entrepreneurship through targeted loans, grants, and preferential tax systems aimed at economic support for women.

The assessment of Uzbekistan's gender policy by international organizations is also noteworthy. Based on national reports prepared within the framework of CEDAW, UN experts



acknowledged significant progress in the legal protection of women in Uzbekistan, but also put forward a number of recommendations. In particular, such aspects as the fact that positive legislative norms are not fully implemented in practice, the lack of systematization in the training of women for leadership positions, and the lack of opportunities for rural women are indicated. This confirms that the development of gender equality in Uzbekistan is a continuing process.

The speeches, decisions, and initiatives of the country's leader also played an important role in the formation and development of gender policy in 1991-2016. The opinions expressed by President Islam Karimov regarding the status of women, statements recognizing their role and importance in political life, and awards established for women (for example, the Zulfiya State Prize) reflect the humanistic and social orientation of state policy. This political support, on the one hand, served to change public consciousness, and on the other hand, increased women's self-confidence.

Nevertheless, patriarchal views, gender stereotypes, cultural restrictions, and certain religious views in society still exclude women from political and social activities. These factors limit their full participation in society and create a gap between legal equality and equality in real life. For example, in some rural areas, girls are not directed to higher education, there are early marriages, violations of women's labor rights - this means that much remains to be done to ensure gender equality in practice.

In Uzbekistan, in 1991-2016, systemic reforms were carried out to strengthen the socio-political status of women. Significant progress has been achieved in attracting women to political institutions, strengthening their legal protection, and ensuring their economic independence. These achievements, in turn, strengthened Uzbekistan's image of gender equality in the international arena. However, the main challenges of gender policy remain the existing socio-cultural barriers, the persistent persistence of stereotypes, the insufficient proportion of women in the political elite, and the limited opportunities of rural women. Therefore, in the coming years, it is important to further deepen gender policy, fully implement legislation in practice, prepare women for political leadership, expand their economic freedom, and develop targeted, scientifically based, and sustainable strategies to overcome stereotypes in public consciousness.

CONCLUSION

In the post-independence period in the Republic of Uzbekistan, that is, in the process of socio-political reforms carried out between 1991-2016, special attention was paid to strengthening the status of women in society. The measures taken to involve women in state and public administration, political parties, parliament, local councils, non-governmental organizations, education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship have yielded significant results over the years. These achievements testify, first of all, to the thorough planning and phased implementation of state policy aimed at ensuring gender equality.

Such documents as the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the "State Program for Supporting Women" (1999), the "National Program of Action on Gender Equality" (2004), the Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights of Men and Women" (2007), as well as international conventions, in particular, obligations within the framework of CEDAW, have created a legal basis for gender policy in the country. These legal foundations played an important role in increasing women's participation in political, economic, and social life.



In 1991, the proportion of women in political institutions was only 6 percent, and by 2015 this figure had reached 16 percent. The introduction of the obligation of political parties to ensure the participation of at least 30 percent of women in the lists of candidates also had a positive impact on increasing their political representation. Women's activity has also increased in local councils, the mahalla system, and non-governmental organizations. Women's organizations began to operate on a large scale as an integral part of civil society.

Analysis shows that women have emerged as a leading force, especially in the social spheres - education, healthcare, culture, and social services. However, participation at the leadership level remains relatively weak. In addition, the share of women in economic sectors, especially in large businesses and state-owned enterprises, remains low. Limited opportunities for rural women, persistence of gender stereotypes, early marriages, and inequalities in the labor market remain pressing issues.

Despite this, the political support provided by the state, the opportunities created for the realization of women's potential, legal reforms, and programs implemented in cooperation with international organizations contribute to the growth of women's activity. Women are not only an important participant in social life, but also occupy an active place in the political decision-making arena. This has a positive impact on the improvement of democratic institutions and the development of civil society in the country.

In the future, it is necessary to strengthen systemic and scientifically based measures to ensure gender equality, prepare women for political leadership, expand their economic freedom, and eliminate cultural and religious stereotypes. Based on this, the reforms initiated in Uzbekistan in the field of gender policy will serve as a foundation for sustainable development and the full realization of human rights.

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