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THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION ON SOCIO-POLITICAL PROCESSES IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article analyzes the impact of digital transformation processes in Uzbekistan on socio-political relations, public administration, civic participation, e-democracy, political communication, and public oversight. Digitalization is not only changing the way public services are delivered but is also transforming mechanisms of communication between the state and citizens and the ways in which political information is disseminated. The study examines the positive and negative dimensions of digital transformation based on the “Digital Uzbekistan–2030” Strategy, national statistical data, and domestic and international scholarly research on e-democracy and digital policy. The findings demonstrate that digital technologies are expanding citizens’ opportunities for direct interaction with the state and increasing transparency and efficiency in public administration. At the same time, they are generating new challenges, including the digital divide, information security risks, disinformation, digital surveillance, and the formalization of political participation. The article develops a number of scientific and practical recommendations aimed at increasing the socio-political effectiveness of digital transformation.

Keywords: Digital transformation, Digital Uzbekistan, e-government, e-democracy, digital policy, political communication, civic participation, social media, digital divide, open data, public oversight.

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INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, the rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is generating profound changes in the economic, social, cultural, and political spheres of society. Digital technologies are no longer merely instruments for transmitting information; they are increasingly becoming an institutional infrastructure for public administration, social relations, and political communication. From this perspective, digital transformation should not be viewed simply as a continuation of technological modernization, but rather as a comprehensive socio-political process that reshapes relations between society and the state.

According to Manuel Castells' theory of the network society, power and social relations in modern society are increasingly structured through networks [1]. The ability to control, produce, and distribute information flows has become one of the important resources of political power. From the perspective of Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action, the formation of public opinion and the legitimacy of political decisions are closely associated with an environment of open dialogue and communication [2].

In Uzbekistan, digital transformation has been elevated to the level of state policy. The "Digital Uzbekistan-2030" Strategy, adopted on October 5, 2020, established the broad introduction of digital technologies in public administration, the economy, and the social sphere. The Strategy provides for the development of e-government, the digital transformation of regions and sectors, the improvement of information technology infrastructure, and the expansion of access to digital services [3].

The social significance of digital transformation is particularly evident in the rapid growth in Internet use. According to the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, the share of the population using the Internet increased from 76.6% in 2021 to 93.3% in 2024 and reached 94.2% during January–August 2025 [4]. At the same time, in 2025 the number of Internet subscribers exceeded 36.2

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million, while the number of subscribers accessing the Internet through mobile communications amounted to 33.3 million [5].

This dynamic demonstrates the sharply increasing role of the digital environment in Uzbekistan's social life. The Internet has become one of the principal channels not only for education, commerce, and services, but also for obtaining political information, communicating with public authorities, expressing public opinion, and discussing social problems.

Research devoted to e-democracy in Uzbekistan also emphasizes that ICTs and online platforms have the potential to expand citizens' participation in socio-political processes. In particular, Sh. Rakhimov analyzes e-democracy as a mechanism that expands citizens' opportunities to discuss social issues, participate in decision-making, and engage in political processes [6].

At the same time, the socio-political impact of digitalization is not exclusively positive. New challenges are emerging in the digital environment, including disinformation, manipulative content, hate speech, personal data security, digital inequality, and algorithmic influence. Thus, digital transformation can both democratize relations between the state and society and, conversely, create new mechanisms of control and manipulation.

The main objective of this article is to comprehensively analyze the impact of digital transformation on socio-political processes in Uzbekistan, identify its positive outcomes and existing challenges, and develop scientific and practical recommendations for strengthening digital democracy and effective public administration.

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To explain the socio-political essence of digital transformation;
2. To analyze the development of the digital state and e-government in Uzbekistan;
3. To assess the impact of digital technologies on civic participation and political communication;

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4. To identify the role of social media in shaping public opinion and influencing political processes;
5. To determine the major socio-political risks and limitations associated with digital transformation;
6. To develop recommendations for improving digital democracy in the context of Uzbekistan.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach. Its theoretical foundation consists of theories of the digital society, network society, e-democracy, digital government, and political communication.

The following research methods were employed.

The systems analysis method was used to examine digital transformation as an integrated system of relations among the state, civil society, mass media, and citizens.

The comparative analysis method was applied to identify differences between digital forms of political communication and civic participation and their traditional counterparts.

The content analysis method was used to identify major trends reflected in scholarly articles, official documents, and materials related to digital policy.

The statistical analysis method was applied to assess the dynamics of Internet use and the development of digital infrastructure in Uzbekistan. According to national statistical data, the increase in Internet use from 76.6% in 2021 to 94.2% in 2025 has significantly strengthened the social importance of the digital environment in the country [4].

The empirical basis of the study consists of regulatory and legal documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan concerning digital transformation, data from the National Statistics Committee, materials from the Digital Government portal, and

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scholarly research on digital policy, e-democracy, and social media in Uzbekistan and Central Asia.

From a theoretical perspective, digital transformation can be divided into three interconnected levels.

The first level is technological digitalization, meaning the conversion of services and information into electronic form.

The second level is institutional digitalization, meaning the restructuring of the operating mechanisms of public institutions and social organizations on the basis of digital technologies.

The third level is socio-political transformation, meaning changes in state–citizen relations, public opinion, political participation, and mechanisms of power and communication under the influence of digital technologies.

The present article focuses primarily on the third level.

RESULTS

1. Socio-Political Foundations of the Formation of the Digital State in Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, digital transformation is affecting not only the efficiency of public administration and the quality of public services but also the substance of state–citizen relations.

The “Digital Uzbekistan–2030” Strategy identifies the development of e-government, expansion of digital infrastructure, and digitalization of public services as priority areas. According to official information, hundreds of digital projects in public administration and various sectors have been envisaged within the framework of the Strategy [7].

The expansion of electronic public services reduces the costs citizens incur when interacting with government institutions. Under traditional bureaucratic arrangements, citizens were often required to visit public offices physically,

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collect documents, and wait for a certain period of time. Digital services significantly shorten these procedures.

The socio-political importance of this transformation lies in the fact that the state increasingly appears as an institution providing services to citizens. The speed, convenience, and transparency of digital services become factors influencing citizens' trust in public institutions.

In 2021, when the President of Uzbekistan set tasks related to expanding electronic services, increasing the number of e-government services was viewed as a means of reducing bureaucracy, saving time and costs, and reducing corruption risks [8]. From this perspective, the digital state should not be viewed simply as a collection of online services but as a new model of public administration.

2. Digital Transformation and Civic Participation

One of the most important socio-political consequences of digital technologies has been the emergence of new forms of civic participation.

Traditional political participation has generally taken the form of voting in elections, membership in political parties, participation in meetings and rallies, and submitting written appeals to public authorities. The digital environment has added mechanisms such as online petitions, collective discussions on social media, electronic appeals, online surveys, crowdsourcing, and digital public oversight.

Research on e-democracy in Uzbekistan indicates that ICTs have the potential to increase citizens' participation in socio-political issues [6].

An important characteristic of these forms of participation is their relatively low entry barriers. Citizens do not necessarily need to belong to a political party or organization to express their views. They can comment on social media, raise a public issue, submit an electronic appeal, or participate in an online discussion.

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However, it would be incorrect to equate digital participation automatically with increased democratic participation. Activities such as liking, commenting on, or sharing a post may not have any actual impact on political decision-making. Therefore, when assessing digital participation, its institutional effectiveness must be considered alongside its quantitative scale.

In this sense, the key criterion of digital democracy should not be the question, “How many people are active online?” but rather, “To what extent does online activity influence government decisions and public policy?”

3. Social Media and Political Communication

Digital transformation is changing the traditional one-way model of political communication. In conventional mass communication, governments and political institutions were primarily responsible for producing information. On social media, however, every user can potentially become both a producer and distributor of information.

This process is also highly significant for Uzbekistan. Scholarly research indicates that social media and online information sources have become important channels for obtaining political information in the country. At the same time, the influence of social media on political participation is not uniform. A study of Uzbek youth found that the relationship between social media and political participation is complex and depends on a number of demographic and educational factors [9].

A comparative study conducted among young people in four Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan, demonstrates that the relationship between digital media consumption and electoral participation is not uniform. The authors emphasize that the impact of digital media on political participation depends on the democratic institutions of a country, the characteristics of its electoral processes, and the level of Internet use. In this regard, digitalization itself does not automatically increase civic engagement, rather, its political effects are

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shaped by the institutional environment [10]. This demonstrates an important paradox of digital transformation: increased access to information does not automatically lead to an active civic position.

Therefore, digital political communication can be assessed through three stages:

- 1. Accessing information;**
- 2. Discussing and disseminating information;**
- 3. Converting information into real socio-political action.**

In Uzbekistan, the first two stages are developing significantly, while strengthening the institutional mechanisms of the third stage remains an important task.

4. Digitalization and Public Oversight

Digital technologies create significant opportunities for developing new forms of public oversight.

Open data, electronic appeals, social media accounts of public authorities, online consultations, and digital monitoring tools increase citizens' opportunities to obtain information about government decisions and social problems.

Recent research emphasizes that within the framework of digital democracy in Uzbekistan, electronic petitions, open-data platforms, and digital forms of public oversight can strengthen cooperation between the state and civil society [10].

In this context, the concept of a “**responsive state**” is particularly important. Digital platforms allow public authorities to identify citizens' appeals and needs more quickly. However, simply hearing citizens is not sufficient. Their appeals should influence decision-making, and citizens should receive feedback regarding the results of decisions.

Thus, digital public oversight can be effectively organized according to the following chain:

appeal → analysis → decision → implementation → feedback to citizens

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If digital appeals are treated merely as statistical indicators and their substance does not influence political decisions, digital participation may become formal rather than substantive.

5. Positive Socio-Political Effects of Digital Transformation

The research findings make it possible to identify the following major positive effects of digital transformation on socio-political processes in Uzbekistan.

First, the accessibility and convenience of public services increase. Electronic services simplify citizens' interaction with public authorities.

Second, bureaucratic procedures are reduced. Electronic data exchange decreases the need for paper-based documentation.

Third, state-citizen communication becomes faster. Online platforms enable appeals to be received and processed more quickly.

Fourth, citizens' access to information expands. The Internet provides access to diverse sources of information on political, economic, and social issues.

Fifth, new mechanisms of public oversight emerge. Open data and digital platforms increase opportunities for monitoring government activities.

Sixth, the interactive nature of political communication increases. Public authorities can respond more rapidly to citizens' questions and proposals through social media.

Seventh, new opportunities for youth civic engagement emerge. The digital environment provides relatively accessible platforms for young people to participate in public initiatives.

6. Risks and Challenges of Digital Transformation

Alongside its positive opportunities, digitalization also generates socio-political risks.

The first challenge is the digital divide. Although Internet penetration has reached a high level, differences remain among regions, urban and rural

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populations, and younger and older citizens in terms of digital skills and access to high-quality Internet services. During January - August 2025, Internet use stood at 94.3% among the urban population and 93.9% among the rural population [11]. Although this difference is relatively small, disparities in the quality of access to digital services and digital literacy remain relevant.

The second challenge is disinformation and fake news. The democratization of information production can also facilitate the rapid dissemination of low-quality or deliberately distorted information.

The third challenge is information manipulation and algorithmic influence. The content users see on social media is often determined by algorithms. This can contribute to the formation of “information bubbles” and reinforce one-sided perspectives.

The fourth challenge is cybersecurity and personal data protection. The digitalization of public services requires the electronic storage and processing of large volumes of information about citizens and public institutions. Therefore, institutional and technical mechanisms for data protection must develop alongside the digital state.

The fifth challenge is the formalization of digital participation. If the results of electronic appeals, online voting, or public consultations have no actual influence on decision-making, citizens’ digital engagement may decline.

The sixth challenge is political polarization in the online environment. While digital platforms facilitate rapid communication, they may also intensify tensions between groups holding opposing views.

7. The Impact of Digital Transformation on Political Institutions

Digital transformation is also changing the functioning of political institutions. In particular, the digitalization of parliamentary activities creates opportunities to strengthen transparency, information exchange, and citizen participation in legislative processes.

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Recent research on the digitalization of parliamentary activity in Uzbekistan emphasizes that Internet platforms, open data, and electronic participation mechanisms can contribute to increasing parliamentary transparency and accountability [12].

This process can provisionally be understood within the concept of a “**digital parliament.**” Its principal characteristics include:

- public access to information about draft laws;
- electronic proposals from citizens;
- digital broadcasting of parliamentary discussions;
- access to open data;
- online communication with constituents;
- accountability information concerning deputies’ activities.

However, technology itself does not automatically transform a political institution into a democratic and accountable institution. For this to occur, the institutional authority and legal status of digital platforms, as well as the role of citizen proposals obtained through these platforms in decision-making, must be clearly defined.

DISCUSSION. The findings of the study demonstrate that the socio-political impact of digital transformation in Uzbekistan can be understood as the interaction of two opposing tendencies.

The first tendency is the **expansion of digital opportunities**. High Internet penetration, the development of electronic public services, and the growing popularity of social media and digital platforms are facilitating citizens’ access to information and communication with the state.

The second tendency is the **increasing complexity of digital risks**. Disinformation, cybersecurity, the digital divide, online manipulation, and data privacy have become new political challenges of the digital society.

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Therefore, when assessing the democratic potential of digital transformation, the question “Is the technology available?” is less important than the question “How does the technology function within existing institutions, rules, and social culture?”

From the perspective of Manuel Castells’ theory of the network society, digital technologies reshape power relations, but power itself does not disappear. Instead, it is redistributed through new communication networks. Consequently, under conditions of digital transformation, the distribution of digital resources among the state, business, mass media, civil society, and citizens becomes particularly important.

In the Uzbek context, it is important to move from the stage of “**digitalizing the state**” toward a broader stage of “**adapting society to digital governance**”. Three major areas should be strengthened to achieve this.

First Area - Digital Literacy

A high level of Internet use does not necessarily mean a high level of digital literacy. Citizens need skills to assess the reliability of information sources, protect personal data, identify fake news, and effectively use online public services.

Second Area - Strengthening Digital Democracy Institutions

Electronic appeals, open data, online consultations, and electronic petitions should be developed not merely as technical services but as institutional mechanisms capable of influencing government decision-making.

Third Area - Digital Trust

The effectiveness of digital government largely depends on citizens’ trust in it. Ensuring this trust requires effective personal data protection, transparency in the use of algorithms, technical reliability of government platforms, and the provision of clear information to citizens about government decisions.

At the same time, it is insufficient to assess the political consequences of digital transformation solely from the perspective of public administration. Digital

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transformation is also generating new social groups and new forms of civic activity.

For example, research on digital environmental activism in Uzbekistan conducted in 2025 shows that online platforms are becoming instruments for coordinating civic initiatives, environmental monitoring, and collective action [13]. This demonstrates that digital civic activity can develop beyond the traditional frameworks of political parties and established civil society organizations.

A 2026 study of the impact of Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Telegram on interethnic relations in the Fergana Valley likewise demonstrates that the architecture of digital platforms influences the formation of social relations. The study was based on 36 months of digital ethnography and an analysis of 15,683 posts [17]. This finding demonstrates that digital transformation cannot be limited to public services or economic digitalization; it also affects social cohesion and relations between communities.

Thus, digital transformation is changing the **speed, transparency, interactivity, and level of participation** in socio-political processes in Uzbekistan. However, the democratic outcomes of these changes depend less on technology itself than on the institutional environment, legal safeguards, digital culture, and level of development of civil society.

CONCLUSION

The analysis allows us to conclude that digital transformation has become an important structural factor shaping socio-political processes in Uzbekistan.

First, the rapid development of Internet infrastructure is making the digital environment an integral part of the country's social life. The fact that 94.2% of the population used the Internet during January–August 2025 demonstrates the broad scale of this transformation [11].

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Second, the “Digital Uzbekistan–2030” Strategy and subsequent government programs have transformed digitalization into a strategic direction of state policy [8].

Third, e-government and digital public services are simplifying state–citizen relations, reducing bureaucratic costs, and increasing the efficiency of public services.

Fourth, digital platforms are creating new channels for civic participation. Electronic appeals, online consultations, open data, social media, and digital public oversight are expanding citizens’ opportunities to participate in socio-political processes.

Fifth, digital technologies do not automatically strengthen democratic processes. The institutional effectiveness of digital participation, the reliability of information, digital literacy, and the relationship between citizens’ online activities and actual decision-making are decisive factors.

Sixth, risks such as the digital divide, disinformation, cybersecurity threats, personal data protection, and online manipulation must be considered integral components of digital transformation policy.

To increase the socio-political effectiveness of digital transformation in Uzbekistan, the following recommendations can be proposed:

1. **Integrate digital citizenship education** more extensively into general and higher education;
2. **Strengthen national programs on media and information literacy**;
3. Introduce **mechanisms for assessing the impact of electronic appeals and online consultations on decision-making**;
4. Improve **feedback indicators** on government digital platforms;
5. Increase the quality, updating frequency, and usability of open data;
6. Develop **digital inclusion programs** for socially vulnerable groups and citizens with limited access to digital services;

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7. Strengthen legal safeguards for citizens in the areas of personal data protection and cybersecurity;
8. Develop principles of **transparency and accountability** for the use of artificial intelligence and algorithms in political communication;
9. Expand **digital public participation** in parliament, local councils, and other representative institutions;
10. Establish a **national research and monitoring system** for systematically studying the socio-political consequences of digital transformation.

Overall, digital transformation in Uzbekistan is not merely a tool for modernizing public administration but an important socio-political factor reshaping relations between the state and society. Its positive outcomes depend not simply on the availability of technologies but on the extent to which these technologies are integrated with the principles of transparency, accountability, civic participation, legal safeguards, and social justice.

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