

**THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST
CORRUPTION IN UZBEKISTAN DURING THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE***Xaytullayeva Zuhra Dilmurotovna**2nd-year Master's student in History (by fields and types of activity)**University of Exact and Social Sciences**Phone number: +998 99 897 83 05*

Abstract: This article examines the transformation of the internal affairs system and the fight against corruption in Uzbekistan during the post-independence period, highlighting the complex interplay between institutional reforms, governance structures, and socio-political realities. Since gaining sovereignty in 1991, Uzbekistan has undergone profound legal and administrative changes aimed at strengthening statehood, ensuring public order, and eradicating corruption as one of the primary obstacles to sustainable development. The analysis focuses on the historical trajectory of internal affairs institutions, the legal frameworks adopted to combat corruption, and the socio-political context that shaped these reforms. Drawing on comparative perspectives and theoretical underpinnings, the study not only scrutinizes national initiatives but also situates them within global anti-corruption discourses. By evaluating the successes, shortcomings, and ongoing challenges, the research underscores the pivotal role of transparency, accountability, and institutional modernization in advancing the effectiveness of internal affairs and in consolidating democratic governance in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Uzbekistan; independence; internal affairs; corruption; anti-corruption reforms; governance; transparency; institutional modernization; legal framework; public administration.

Introduction: Since Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, the sphere of internal affairs and the fight against corruption have undergone fundamental transformations, shaped by both domestic imperatives and global processes of political, economic, and legal modernization. The collapse of the Soviet Union left newly independent states with fragile institutional structures, a weak legal framework, and severe governance challenges. In the case of Uzbekistan, the Ministry of Internal Affairs inherited not only the bureaucratic traditions of the Soviet era but also its structural inefficiencies, lack of transparency, and excessive centralization. Against this backdrop, the leadership of the Republic of Uzbekistan prioritized the reform of internal affairs as a necessary condition for consolidating statehood, safeguarding national sovereignty, and fostering trust between government institutions and society. Within this broader reform trajectory, the struggle against corruption emerged as one of the most pressing issues, as corruption was widely perceived not only as a legal offense but also as a deep-seated socio-political problem undermining development, justice, and public confidence. The significance of internal affairs in Uzbekistan's state-building process cannot be overstated. In the immediate years following independence, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was entrusted with a wide spectrum of responsibilities ranging from law enforcement, ensuring public order, and combating crime to overseeing migration processes and safeguarding national security in cooperation with other agencies. However, these responsibilities were compounded by

structural deficiencies, such as limited human resources, outdated legal frameworks, and institutional inertia inherited from Soviet administrative culture. More importantly, the existence of entrenched corruption within internal affairs and other state structures created a paradoxical situation: the very institutions tasked with combating corruption and upholding the rule of law were themselves vulnerable to corrupt practices. This contradiction became a central focus of Uzbekistan's post-independence reforms, particularly as the state sought integration into the global community and alignment with international norms of governance. At the conceptual level, the reform of internal affairs and anti-corruption policy in Uzbekistan reflects a dialectical interplay between continuity and change. On one hand, the persistence of Soviet-era practices initially hindered radical restructuring. On the other hand, the need to adapt to new realities—such as economic liberalization, democratization, and global anti-corruption standards—required the adoption of innovative approaches. In this regard, Uzbekistan's legal framework expanded significantly after independence. The adoption of the Constitution in 1992 established the rule of law, protection of human rights, and accountability of state institutions as fundamental principles. Subsequent laws on combating corruption, public service, and transparency of state bodies further codified these principles, gradually creating a normative base for anti-corruption measures within the internal affairs system. It is important to underscore that the anti-corruption agenda in Uzbekistan was not merely a legal or institutional matter, but also a socio-cultural challenge. In the early years of independence, corruption had penetrated various aspects of social life, including education, healthcare, and business. Within the internal affairs sector, it often manifested in the form of bribery, abuse of office, and patronage networks. This eroded citizens' trust in state institutions and perpetuated a cycle of cynicism, whereby corruption was normalized as a "necessary evil" of survival. Breaking this cycle required not only legislative reforms but also the cultivation of civic consciousness, professional ethics among law enforcement personnel, and a culture of accountability. The government initiated a range of public awareness campaigns, training programs, and institutional reforms to address these issues, although progress was gradual and uneven. A crucial turning point in the reform trajectory occurred during the mid-2010s, when Uzbekistan entered a new stage of political and socio-economic transformation under the framework of the "Strategy of Action on Five Priority Directions of Development" (2017–2021). Within this strategy, strengthening the rule of law, ensuring reliable protection of citizens' rights, and radically improving the system of internal affairs were identified as priority goals. In particular, the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Agency of Uzbekistan in 2020 marked an institutional innovation, symbolizing the state's commitment to systematic and transparent anti-corruption policy. This period also witnessed the digitalization of internal affairs processes, the introduction of e-government mechanisms, and the adoption of international best practices in law enforcement[1]. These developments not only enhanced transparency and efficiency but also reduced the discretionary power of officials, thereby minimizing opportunities for corrupt practices. Furthermore, Uzbekistan's anti-corruption agenda was shaped by its active participation in international frameworks and cooperation with global organizations. Membership in the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and collaboration with the World Bank, Transparency International, and other entities facilitated the adoption of global standards and provided technical assistance for implementing reforms. Such engagement underscored the recognition that corruption is a transnational phenomenon that requires collective efforts, while also enabling Uzbekistan to position itself as a responsible member of the international community. From a theoretical standpoint, the transformation of internal affairs in Uzbekistan during independence can be analyzed through

the prism of governance theories that emphasize the importance of accountability, transparency, and institutional resilience. Scholars in political science and public administration have long debated the efficacy of top-down versus bottom-up approaches in combating corruption. In the case of Uzbekistan, reforms were primarily state-driven, characterized by strong political will from the leadership. However, gradual incorporation of civil society, media, and public oversight mechanisms introduced elements of participatory governance. This hybrid model reflects both the challenges and opportunities of implementing anti-corruption reforms in a transitional society, where state capacity remains the primary driver of change, yet legitimacy increasingly depends on societal engagement. Another dimension of the issue lies in the economic context of Uzbekistan's independence period[2]. The transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented system created fertile ground for corrupt practices, particularly in areas such as privatization, licensing, and public procurement. The internal affairs sector was tasked with overseeing these processes, but the lack of adequate legal safeguards and professional expertise initially hampered effective regulation. Over time, however, economic modernization necessitated the professionalization of law enforcement, the introduction of merit-based recruitment, and the adoption of anti-corruption compliance mechanisms. These measures gradually reduced systemic vulnerabilities and aligned Uzbekistan with international standards of business integrity and good governance. The fight against corruption in Uzbekistan has also been deeply intertwined with questions of political legitimacy and social trust. In transitional societies, legitimacy often hinges on the ability of the state to deliver justice, maintain order, and provide equal opportunities for citizens. Widespread corruption undermines this legitimacy by creating perceptions of inequality, arbitrariness, and impunity. Recognizing this, the leadership of Uzbekistan framed anti-corruption reform not only as a matter of law enforcement but also as an existential condition for the stability of the state and the well-being of its citizens. This framing resonates with broader global discourses that link anti-corruption measures with sustainable development, human rights, and social justice.

Literature review: The issue of internal affairs reform and the fight against corruption in transitional societies has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry across comparative politics, criminology, and governance studies. In the context of Uzbekistan, while domestic scholarship has focused on the historical and normative aspects of post-independence reforms, foreign scholars have contributed valuable insights into the structural dynamics and global dimensions of corruption control. Among the notable works, Robert Klitgaard and Susan Rose-Ackerman stand out for their analytical depth and enduring relevance to the study of governance and corruption. Robert Klitgaard, in his seminal work *Controlling Corruption*, developed a theoretical model that links corruption to the imbalance of monopoly, discretion, and accountability (expressed in the well-known formula: $\text{Corruption} = \text{Monopoly} + \text{Discretion} - \text{Accountability}$). His analysis highlights the structural conditions under which corruption flourishes and emphasizes the need for systemic reforms that simultaneously reduce the concentration of power, constrain arbitrary discretion, and enhance mechanisms of oversight[3]. When applied to the case of Uzbekistan, Klitgaard's framework provides a powerful explanatory lens for understanding the challenges faced by the internal affairs system during the years of independence. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, historically characterized by monopoly over coercive power and wide discretion in administrative decision-making, was particularly vulnerable to corrupt practices. Only through the gradual introduction of transparency measures, digital governance tools, and institutional checks did the system begin to move toward Klitgaard's prescribed balance[4]. Thus, his theoretical contribution remains vital for

contextualizing Uzbekistan's ongoing struggle to harmonize internal affairs reform with anti-corruption strategies. Similarly, Susan Rose-Ackerman, in her influential book *Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, and Reform*, provides a comprehensive examination of how corruption undermines democratic institutions, economic development, and social trust. She argues that corruption is not merely the product of individual misconduct but rather the reflection of systemic weaknesses within political and administrative structures[5]. Of particular relevance to Uzbekistan is her contention that anti-corruption reforms must be embedded within broader governance strategies, encompassing judicial independence, civil service reform, and active engagement of civil society. Rose-Ackerman's emphasis on institutional design resonates strongly with Uzbekistan's efforts to modernize its internal affairs system by introducing merit-based recruitment, enhancing professional training, and fostering public oversight. Moreover, her insistence on the role of civic engagement aligns with recent initiatives in Uzbekistan that seek to empower the media, non-governmental organizations, and ordinary citizens in monitoring state performance. Taken together, the contributions of Klitgaard and Rose-Ackerman illuminate the multi-dimensional nature of corruption control, bridging theoretical frameworks with practical policy recommendations[6]. Their works underscore that successful anti-corruption efforts require a holistic approach that transcends the narrow confines of punitive law enforcement, integrating structural reforms with societal participation. In the Uzbek context, these insights help explain both the persistence of corruption in the early independence years and the gradual progress achieved through institutional modernization and the adoption of global governance standards. The literature thus situates Uzbekistan's trajectory within a broader comparative framework, where lessons from international scholarship are adapted to the specificities of national political culture, historical legacies, and socio-economic conditions.

Methodology: The methodological foundation of this research is constructed on an integrative approach that combines elements of historical-institutional analysis, comparative political science, and socio-legal inquiry, thereby allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the evolution of internal affairs and anti-corruption measures in Uzbekistan during the years of independence. At the core of this approach lies the historical-institutional method, which enables the identification of continuities and ruptures between Soviet-era administrative practices and the post-independence reforms introduced in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This method is crucial for understanding how inherited institutional legacies have conditioned reform trajectories and how new legal frameworks were designed to break from path-dependent structures that perpetuated corruption. Complementing this, the comparative method is employed to situate Uzbekistan's anti-corruption agenda within the wider spectrum of global governance reforms, drawing parallels and contrasts with similar transitional societies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, thereby highlighting both universal patterns and context-specific adaptations. Furthermore, the socio-legal dimension of the methodology focuses on the interplay between formal legislation and actual practice, examining how laws aimed at increasing transparency, accountability, and citizen participation are implemented and perceived in reality. This triadic methodological synthesis is reinforced by the use of documentary analysis of legal acts, presidential decrees, and official reports, combined with the examination of scholarly literature and international indices measuring corruption and governance effectiveness. Consequently, the methodology ensures not only a descriptive account of reforms but also a critical evaluation of their impact, revealing the extent to which Uzbekistan's internal affairs system has been able to transform from a centralized, opaque institution into a more transparent and accountable organ aligned with global anti-corruption

norms.

Results: The findings of this study reveal that Uzbekistan's internal affairs system, while historically burdened by structural inefficiencies and entrenched corrupt practices, has undergone a gradual yet substantive transformation since independence, particularly in the context of institutional modernization, legislative innovation, and governance reforms aimed at enhancing accountability and transparency. The analysis demonstrates that the consolidation of a constitutional framework, the adoption of specialized anti-corruption laws, and the establishment of dedicated institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Agency have collectively contributed to narrowing the discretionary power of officials, fostering merit-based recruitment, and advancing the digitalization of administrative processes, thereby reducing opportunities for rent-seeking behaviors. Simultaneously, the integration of international standards through cooperation with global organizations has accelerated the harmonization of domestic practices with transnational norms of governance, while civic engagement and the empowerment of mass media have gradually emerged as complementary mechanisms of oversight. However, the findings also indicate that systemic challenges persist, including remnants of bureaucratic inertia, uneven implementation of reforms across regions, and the enduring social perception of corruption as a normalized practice, suggesting that while Uzbekistan has established a robust legal and institutional foundation for combating corruption within internal affairs, the sustainability of these reforms ultimately depends on the continued cultivation of political will, the deepening of civil society participation, and the internalization of integrity-oriented values across state and societal structures.

Discussion: The debate on the nature of corruption and the effectiveness of anti-corruption reforms has long been marked by contrasting scholarly positions, among which Robert Klitgaard and Susan Rose-Ackerman stand as influential figures offering differing, though at times complementary, perspectives. Their intellectual dialogue provides an illuminating lens through which to assess Uzbekistan's trajectory in reforming internal affairs and combating corruption during the independence period[7]. Klitgaard, whose model situates corruption at the intersection of monopoly, discretion, and lack of accountability, contends that reforms must primarily focus on altering the structural incentives within bureaucracies. In his view, corruption thrives not because individuals are inherently corrupt but because institutions are designed in ways that allow unchecked power. Thus, for Klitgaard, the Uzbek case illustrates the dangers of concentrated authority within the Ministry of Internal Affairs during the early years of independence, when monopoly over law enforcement functions was combined with broad discretionary authority and minimal oversight[8]. He would argue that the gradual digitalization of processes, the diversification of oversight mechanisms, and the reduction of discretionary powers in the 2010s constitute precisely the type of systemic recalibration required to weaken the structural breeding grounds of corruption. Rose-Ackerman, however, shifts the focus from structural incentives to broader governance ecosystems, emphasizing the political, social, and normative conditions that sustain or constrain corruption. She critiques what she perceives as the overreliance on technocratic fixes and insists that anti-corruption reforms cannot succeed without embedding them in wider democratic reforms, judicial independence, and civic empowerment[9]. From her perspective, Uzbekistan's strategy of introducing specialized agencies and legislative innovations, while commendable, risks remaining superficial unless accompanied by the cultivation of a political culture that values transparency and public accountability. In her argument, the empowerment of civil society, media freedom, and citizen participation represent not mere complements but indispensable pillars of sustainable anti-corruption reform. The polemic between these two positions becomes

particularly salient when analyzing Uzbekistan's ongoing reforms. Klitgaard would likely applaud the structural innovations—the Anti-Corruption Agency, the digitalization of public services, and the reduction of bureaucratic discretion—as evidence of meaningful institutional progress[10]. Rose-Ackerman, by contrast, would question whether these reforms genuinely alter the deeper dynamics of power and societal trust or whether they risk being symbolic unless embedded in a broader democratic framework. The dialogue thus underscores a tension between technocratic institutionalism and normative societal transformation: while one highlights efficiency and structural design, the other demands legitimacy and civic agency.

Conclusion: The examination of Uzbekistan's internal affairs system and its anti-corruption agenda during the years of independence reveals a complex trajectory marked by both institutional innovation and persistent structural challenges. The post-1991 period demonstrated that reforming internal affairs was not merely a technical exercise in administrative reorganization but a fundamental condition for consolidating statehood, strengthening the rule of law, and cultivating public trust. The findings underscore that Uzbekistan has made significant progress by establishing a modern legal framework, creating specialized institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Agency, introducing digital governance tools, and engaging in international cooperation that aligns domestic practices with global standards of transparency and accountability.

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