



UZBEKISTAN'S INDEPENDENCE AND MODERNIZATION PROCESS: A  
HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

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***Annotation:*** This article analyzes Uzbekistan's post-independence development from historical, political, economic, and social perspectives. Since 1991, the strategies adopted to ensure state stability, restore national identity, and secure economic resilience, the political reforms during the presidencies of Islam Karimov and Shavkat Mirziyoyev, economic liberalization, digital transformation, transparent governance, international integration, and modernization processes are thoroughly examined. The article considers the policies of the two presidents as successive historical stages, highlighting the country's sustainable development, human capital, innovation, and path toward global integration.

***Key words:*** Uzbekistan, independence, Islam Karimov, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, economic reforms, political stability, modernization, digital transformation, global integration, governance, national identity.

The attainment of independence by Uzbekistan was not only a political process but also the logical outcome of historical necessity and national awakening. During the long years within the Soviet Union, political decisions were centrally controlled, economic resources were primarily mobilized for the interests of the Union, and national identity, history, and spirituality faced numerous restrictions.



Under such conditions, the idea of independence gradually matured in the public consciousness. The second half of the 20th century, marked by the crisis of the Soviet system, economic decline, political instability, and ideological conflicts, paved the way for a new era. In this context, the Uzbek people's aspiration to determine their own destiny strengthened, and decisive steps toward independence were taken.

The declaration of state independence on August 31, 1991, became a turning point in Uzbekistan's history. This date provided the country with the opportunity to independently determine its political, economic, and social development path. Independence was not only a political right but also a return to national identity, reliance on values, and the restoration of historical statehood traditions. This stage laid the foundation for Uzbekistan's formation as a sovereign state and its emergence as an independent actor in the global political arena.

The early years of independence were complex, responsible, and full of challenges. The country's economy was fully integrated into the Soviet system, lacking its own industrial infrastructure, financial independence, or energy supply system. Transitioning from a centrally planned to a market economy required careful analysis and strategic planning. In this challenging political and economic situation, Uzbekistan's first President, Islam Abduganiyevich Karimov, formulated a state policy based on a gradual development model that protected the country from abrupt shocks.

The "Uzbek model" introduced by Karimov was based on five key principles: ensuring economic independence, protecting national interests, implementing a strong social policy, establishing legal foundations, and gradually transitioning to a market economy. The main objective of this model was to shield society from potential economic crises, social unrest, and political instability resulting from abrupt changes. The Constitution adopted in 1992 legally established the state structure, citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms, governance systems, and the political orientation of society.



During the first decade of independence, Uzbekistan introduced its national currency, brought strategic resources under national control, and initiated agricultural reforms, while prioritizing state stability and economic security. During this period, Uzbekistan achieved energy independence, modernized strategic infrastructure, and ensured social stability, laying the foundation for economic development. The process of restoring national identity also gained momentum — the legacy of historical figures was reassessed, traditions revived, and the education system began to be structured based on national values.

At the same time, many stereotypes, political approaches, and administrative systems associated with the Soviet ideology persisted for a long period. Since forming a new worldview in society was a gradual process, changes were implemented slowly. As a result, stability, security, and national interests became the primary principles of state policy in the initial stage of independence.

Over time, global political processes, growing economic competition, and changing societal needs demanded a new stage in Uzbekistan. Since 2016, under the leadership of Shavkat Miromonovich Mirziyoyev, the country has entered an era of modernization, liberalization, and openness. This stage is distinguished by significant changes in political, economic, social, and foreign policy spheres. The principle advanced by the President — “the state serves the people, not the other way around” — fundamentally transformed the governance philosophy. The functioning of state bodies was revised, institutional transparency increased, citizen engagement was strengthened, and virtual reception offices and open government initiatives were introduced.

During Mirziyoyev’s tenure, economic liberalization continued actively, including the convertibility of the national currency, the som. This decision signaled Uzbekistan’s integration into the global financial system. Investment conditions improved, the tax system was simplified, and comprehensive reforms were implemented to develop the private sector. Consequently, the country’s economy integrated into the global market, attracting new investors, businesses, and opportunities for international cooperation.





Significant reforms were also implemented in education, healthcare, infrastructure, transport, energy, and the digital economy. Presidential schools and branches of foreign universities were established, new grant systems introduced, and youth policy became a central focus of the state strategy.

Freedom of speech and the development of civil society institutions became an important aspect of Mirziyoyev's era. Previously restricted or non-existent platforms for public debate expanded, with bloggers, activists, and NGOs becoming active participants in social discourse. The Ombudsman institution was strengthened, and transparency in state institutions increased.

Substantial changes also occurred in foreign policy. Uzbekistan strengthened relations with neighboring countries, resolved border issues, and reinforced Central Asian integration. Cooperation with international organizations entered a new stage, enhancing the country's political standing.

Today, Uzbekistan's development process is based on the continuity of two historical stages. Under Karimov, the foundation of independence was established, state stability achieved, and a national development model formed. Under Mirziyoyev, this foundation has been used to implement modernization, liberalization, and an open state concept. These two stages do not contradict each other; rather, one continues and complements the other in the historical process.

In the global competitive environment, human capital, innovation, science, the digital economy, the rule of law, and democratic values are of paramount importance for Uzbekistan. The strategic objective of the state is to deepen modernization while maintaining stability, educate a competitive younger generation, modernize the economy, and expand international cooperation.

Current days, Uzbekistan is leaving behind the transitional period, adapting to global processes, relying on citizens' interests, understanding its historical role, and shaping a modern development strategy. The reforms and strategic decisions from independence to the present strengthen the people's confidence in the future. Uzbekistan has stepped into a significant stage of new statehood, and its future development will continue to rely on the knowledge, labor, and unity of its people.



The first President of the country, Islam Karimov, developed strategies aimed at maintaining state stability, restoring national identity, and ensuring economic resilience in a complex political and economic environment. During Karimov's tenure, the central principle of economic policy was to maintain stability. To this end, the national currency—the som—was introduced, with particular attention given to preventing inflation and financial instability. Energy independence was pursued as a strategic objective, and programs were implemented to modernize oil and gas extraction as well as domestic energy resources. In agriculture, gradual reforms were carried out aimed at modernizing farming, managing land and water resources efficiently, and optimizing the cotton production system. At the same time, foreign trade policy was independently shaped, mechanisms for controlling imports and exports were established, and special attention was paid to stabilizing foreign currency reserves and the trade balance.

Starting in 2016, under the leadership of Shavkat Miromonovich Mirziyoyev, the country entered a new era of modernization, liberalization, and transparency. His principle, "the state serves the people, not the other way around," fundamentally changed the philosophy of governance. The functioning of state bodies was re-evaluated, government transparency and citizen engagement were strengthened, and virtual reception offices along with open government initiatives were implemented. During this period, economic liberalization policies were actively pursued: the national currency, the som, was made convertible, the investment climate improved, the tax system was simplified, and extensive reforms to develop the private sector were carried out.

Significant changes also took place in education, healthcare, transport and logistics, energy, and the digital economy. Presidential schools, branches of foreign universities, and innovative grant systems contributed to the development of youth policies. Civil society institutions expanded, the ombudsman institution was strengthened, and the activities of non-governmental organizations were liberalized. Freedom of speech and the influence of social media on political processes were enhanced.



In foreign policy, Uzbekistan strengthened relations with neighboring countries, reached agreements on border issues, enhanced Central Asian integration, and elevated cooperation with international organizations to a new level. This consolidated the country's political and economic position.

Today, Uzbekistan's development process is based on the continuity of two historical periods. During Karimov's era, the foundation for independence was laid, state stability was achieved, and a national development model was established. In Mirziyoyev's era, modernization, liberalization, and the concept of an open government were implemented on the basis of that foundation. These two stages do not contradict each other; rather, one continues the historical process initiated by the other.

The sustainable development of Uzbekistan and its ability to hold a significant position in the global competitive arena rely heavily on human capital, innovation, science, the digital economy, the principle of a rule-of-law state, and democratic values. The strategic goal of the state is to deepen modernization processes while maintaining stability, to train the younger generation as competitive professionals, to modernize the economy, and to expand international cooperation. In this way, Uzbekistan has left behind the transitional period experience, is adapting to global processes, relies on the interests of its people, and is shaping a modern development strategy that strengthens its position on the world map.

**Conclusion:** Since achieving independence, Uzbekistan has followed a historically complex but effective path. During Islam Karimov's presidency, the foundation of independence was laid, while under Shavkat Mirziyoyev, modernization, openness, and liberalization processes were implemented based on that foundation. Reforms in governance, economic policy, digital infrastructure, and social sectors have contributed to making Uzbekistan a competitive state in the global arena. In the future, the country's sustainable growth and citizens' well-being will depend on human capital development, private sector expansion, innovation implementation, and strengthening democratic institutions.



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