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## Civil society and government: an analysis of its role in public administration

### Vətəndaş cəmiyyəti və hökumət: onun dövlət idarəçiliyində rolunun təhlili

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#### Abstract

The functioning of modern democratic states presupposes the existence of a high degree of civil society development, which allows for transparency of the government and the implementation of relevant control functions. The purpose of the article is to analyse the role of civil society institutions in public administration, to identify the specific features of the functioning of these institutions in developing countries. The realisation of this goal involves the use of content analysis methods of professional scientific literature and generalisation, which allowed summarising the main results of the study. In the results it is shown, that the example of Azerbaijan has a structure of civil society, which consists political parties, interest groups and local self-government. Political parties in Azerbaijan have limited influence on the formation of civil society. Comparing the results with the work of other scholars highlights need of transformation in democratic governance of Azerbaijan. It is summarized, that the effective communication and feedback between the state and citizens are important for the realisation of consent and stability. The conclusions generally emphasize that for the further transformation of civil society institutions, in addition to taking into account international experience, it is important to pay attention to local cultural features.

**Keywords:** civil society, reforms, development, institutions, public administration.


#### Introduction

Modern processes of democratisation and liberalisation of public life are a significant trend in the development of European countries. Typically, civil society institutions include NGOs, trade unions, independent media and observers, and other forms of citizens' associations that influence socio-political

#### İcmal

Müasir demokratik dövlətlərin fəaliyyəti, hökumətin şəffaflığını təmin edən və müvafiq nəzarət funksiyalarını həyata keçirən yüksək dərəcədə inkişaf etmiş vətəndaş cəmiyyətinin mövcudluğunu nəzərdə tutur. Məqalənin məqsədi vətəndaş cəmiyyəti institutlarının ictimai idarəetmədəki rolunu təhlil etmək, bu institutların inkişaf etməkdə olan ölkələrdəki fəaliyyətinin spesifik xüsusiyyətlərini müəyyən etməkdir. Bu məqsədin reallaşdırılması peşəkar elmi ədəbiyyatın məzmun təhlili metodlarından və ümumiləşdirmədən istifadəni əhatə edir ki, bu da tədqiqatın əsas nəticələrini ümumiləşdirməyə imkan verir. Nəticələr göstərir ki, vətəndaş cəmiyyəti dövlət idarəçiliyi prosesində mühüm rol oynayır. Azərbaycan nümunəsində vətəndaş cəmiyyətinin əsas strukturlarının, məsələn, siyasi partiyalar, maraq qrupları və yerli özünüidarəetmənin formalaşması göstərilir. Azərbaycanda siyasi partiyalar modernləşmə qabiliyyətinə dair ictimai inamın olmaması səbəbindən vətəndaş cəmiyyətinin inkişafına məhdud təsir göstərsə də, yerli özünüidarəetmə qrupları kimi digər strukturlar mühüm potensial göstərir. Bundan başqa, nəticələr ümumiyyətlə vurğulayır ki, vətəndaş cəmiyyəti institutlarının daha da transformasiyası üçün beynəlxalq təcrübəni nəzərə almaqla yanaşı, yerli mədəni xüsusiyyətlərə diqqət yetirmək də vacibdir.

**Açar sözlər:** vətəndaş cəmiyyəti, islahatlar, inkişaf, institutlar, ictimai idarəetmə.

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processes and their development. The implementation of mechanisms of civil society influence on decision-making at the local and national levels has become an independent tool that, on the one hand, opens up opportunities for social transformation, and, on the other hand, ensures the implementation of control functions.

The combination allows all interested members of society to be involved in the implementation of their own position on cooperation or influence on decision-making by public authorities, promotes the formation of an appropriate level of transparency of the state apparatus, and creates the necessary preconditions for further development of social processes. Modern researchers have proven the effectiveness of mechanisms for the formation of civil society in the context of globalisation (Lenz & Söderbaum, 2023; Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2022; Morozov et al., 2023). At the same time, the constant evolution of such a mechanism, in particular, also related to the active digitalisation of all public life, will require further consideration and reassessment (Cuhadar & Druckman, 2023).

The need for further research on the role of civil society institutions in public administration is being actualised by integration processes. In the context of the further evolution of transition countries, such as the Republic of Azerbaijan, the further development of such institutions becomes a catalyst for democratic transformations and the formation of an effective system of public administration. With this in mind, it is vital to consider the conceptual foundations and practical aspects of the impact of civil society institutions on the functioning of state structures.

Besides, it is also necessary to focus on the issues of ensuring democratic transformations, improving the quality of public services, the philosophical foundations of civil society in general and the specifics of its influence on the transparency of public authorities. A separate important issue is to identify specific positive examples that demonstrate the positive effects of interaction between public authorities and civil society institutions, which will generally facilitate the search for further ways of interaction and joint counteraction to modern challenges.

The purpose of the article is to study the role of civil society institutions in public administration, to determine the specifics of the functioning of these institutions in developing countries, and to take into account the philosophical foundations of understanding the genesis and development of civil society in general. Hence, the general objective is to analyze the role of civil society institutions in governance.

Specific objectives included:

Identify the main civil society institutions involved in governance in Azerbaijan.

Describe the specific functions and activities that these institutions perform in governance.

Assess the impact of these institutions on the quality of governance, using indicators such as transparency, accountability, and citizen participation.

Compare the role of civil society in governance in Azerbaijan with other countries in the region, identifying similarities and differences.

The structure of the article itself consists of a short introduction, which defines the relevance and importance of the study of civil society, an analysis of the literature, which presents an overview of recent research, results and discussion, which characterizes the peculiarities of the formation of civil society and its functioning in Azerbaijan, and conclusions that summarize the main theses of this research and identified the main points of formation of civil society in public administration.

## Literature Review

In order to define the problem of the role of the civil society institution in the system of human governance, it is necessary to distinguish its meaningful understanding in a narrow sense, i.e. as a non-political society, i.e. a social community, and in a broad sense - as a political society, i.e. within any established social ties, relations and institutions that are not subject to state governance and regulation (Sander, 2022; Zarembo & Martin, 2023). Modern scholars have characterised various components of civil society formation in different countries.

Abdulnabi Ali, Golbert, Rekso, Kretzer & Schweiger (2023) described the mechanism of functioning of civil society organisations and their role in the governance system in Jakarta. At the same time, Ergun & Kazanoğlu (2024) determined that due to the internationalisation of society, civil society associations play an important role in exercising control over local governance structures. These authors described the importance of women's associations in Turkey in connection with the country's Europeanisation course.

The realities of Mexican governance are demonstrated in the study by Guerra & Zwitter (2023), who also identified the important role of civil society institutions in the local governance system. Modern authors have proved that civil society is based on a free person and his or her desire for self-realisation (Jönsson & Scaramuzzino, 2022; Kumar, 2008). Contemporary works also identify that the key values of a civil society network are the ability to keep one's word and build a reputation as a responsible person who recognises the basic norms of behaviour established by the local community (Kolmodin, 2024; Mieruch & McFarlane, 2022).

The key importance of such a network of activity lies in the production of trust between people and the formation of an unbiased form of modern solidarity. For this reason, socio-cultural groups with broad civic engagement, which are possible only in horizontal relationships, are defined in a system of subsidiarity interaction with each other (Kelly-Thompson et al., 2024; Kimber, 2023).

At the same time, Iatsyna, Zawadzki & Szamburski (2023) identified the main legal and organisational aspects of security support by civil society institutions during military operations. They also identified the role that these institutions play in shaping the security environment and supporting the population in times of war. Korolczuk (2022) identified the main strategies of civil society actors in Poland. This work highlighted the system of behaviour of different groups fighting for influence and changing the status quo. Nonetheless, there is constant discussion over the place of civil society in governance, especially in emerging nations. The discourse surrounding civil society's function in governance centers on its potential to fortify democracy, augment transparency, and refine service delivery; yet, it also addresses obstacles concerning self-governance, capital, and political participation. The importance of a robust civil society in advancing democratic government is one of the main justifications for its existence (Kelly-Thompson et al., 2024). As a voice for the people and an advocate for reforms, civil society plays a crucial role in many developing nations where governmental institutions may be less robust or corruptible.

Even with its potential, civil society in poor nations frequently struggles to remain independent because it depends on outside funding from foreign donors or international organizations. Another debate centers on the politicization of civil society Mieruch & McFarlane (2022). In addition, Mudhoffir (2022) described the main limitations of civil society activism by analysing the weakening of the anti-corruption commission. An important nuance of this work is the consideration of practical actions to support civil society, which is also important for this paper.

Thus, contemporary authors have identified various aspects of civil society formation both in theory and practice. However, this topic is not so widely covered in the governance system, which is the purpose of this paper and determines its novelty and relevance.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The research was conducted in several stages, each of which used specific research methods: content analysis of professional scientific literature, systematisation, generalisation and comparison.

### Data collection

The first stage of writing the article was the process of collecting relevant information. This process took place in stages and systematically. It was aimed at reflecting the process of formation of civil society and its place in modern democratic states. In particular, during the selection process, the main research focus was on the selection of those scientific works that highlight the practices of civil society formation in different countries and regions (Europe, Asia, Africa and America). In fact, the process of collecting the necessary theoretical information was also aimed at studying relevant official documents (in particular, of

the Republic of Azerbaijan), which summarise certain experience of cooperation between public authorities and civil society.

Therefore, at the initial stage of the study, it is planned to search for and collect the necessary scientific literature. In practice, the implementation of this process involved a preliminary review of articles published in peer-reviewed journals, monographs and chapters of monographs, abstracts of reports at international scientific and practical conferences, dissertations on the subject, etc. For the relevant search, keywords that coincide with the subject matter of the study and reveal its content were suggested.

The proposed search was based on searches in relevant scientific and metric databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus Elsevier, and Web of Science. Initially, 384 relevant results were selected. After a careful reading of the abstracts of the proposed articles and monographs, the total number of papers was reduced to 91. Further, certain exclusion criteria were applied. First of all, it was the actual time of publication (the most up-to-date research was taken into account, except for a few exceptions that were of great theoretical importance for understanding the mechanisms of civil society formation and the areas of its application in psychological work with state structures).

An important selection criterion was scientific novelty - preference was given to those articles and other publications that had a certain empirical component or elements of scientific novelty, and addressed the problems of the functioning of civil institutions in Azerbaijan and European countries. As a result, 33 items of literature were processed and entered into an Excel spreadsheet. As a result, a certain database was formed, which included such information as the author, title of the article, a brief abstract, the main results obtained, and the main aspects highlighted in the article.

### Data analysis

Using the Excel software, we entered into special tables some data on the experience of European countries in establishing cooperation between government agencies and civil society, the main challenges known from post-Soviet practice, and the main innovative solutions used to make public authorities more transparent. After that, the main trends in the development of civil society institutions and their interaction with public authorities are described based on the content analysis of the tables.

In this study, ethical considerations consist of transparency. In particular, the information about civil society used in the study was obtained from open access. Bias has also been avoided, in particular by maintaining objectivity when analyzing the role of civil society. In this way, these ethical considerations protect the credibility of this work.

### Results

The development of civil society is accompanied by a parallel evolution of public authorities that function in the system of social coordinates 'state - civil society' and act as an additional link that connects public authorities with civil society. In order to further study the role of civil society institutions and relevant public authorities, there is a need to define the boundaries of the concept of 'civil society', which is currently used in quite controversial ways.

Today, scholars identify several important objective factors that contribute to the generation of the process of formation and development of civil society. The first important element is an understanding of the status of private property in the economic sphere of a particular state (Lenz & Söderbaum, 2023; Maxatov et al., 2022). In this way, the mechanisms for implementing the protection of private property become an important basis for the development of civil society institutions, as is evident in the case of today's democratic states.

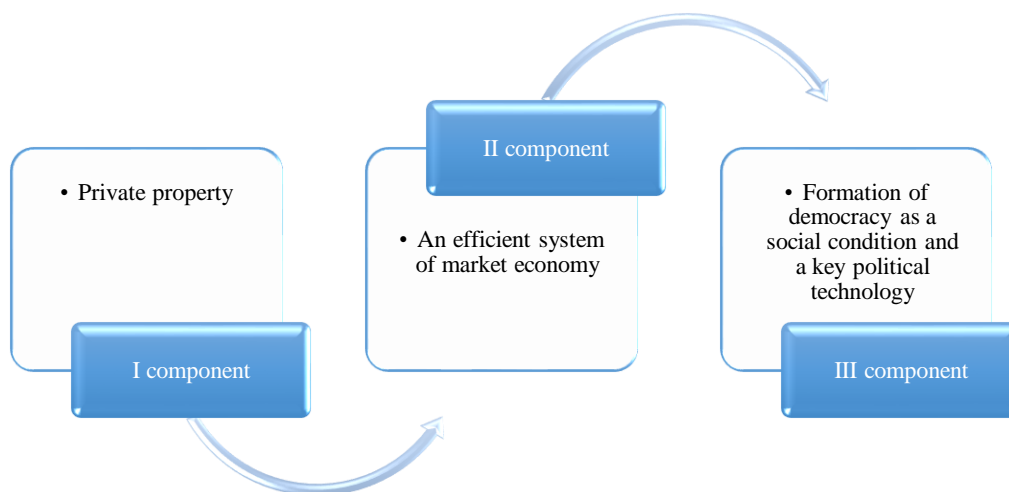
If, on the other hand, the key resources of activity in a society belong to everyone together (and to no one individually), then there is no freedom in such a country (Korolczuk, 2022; Gryshchenko et al., 2021). However, when most of the society is owned by private owners, and among them are representatives of either small or large businesses and employees, then the middle class is developed in such a system.

The second important component is the formation of an efficient market economy. A developing democratic society, along with other key freedoms, determines the formation of a structure of economic

relations that actively functions according to established democratic economic laws. The main integrating mechanism is that it is difficult to resist the key 'laws of the market' alone, which is why various associations or organisations of entrepreneurs and other business entities of civil society appear.

The works of contemporary scholars demonstrates that collective efforts in the civil society system are most effective, i.e. various cooperative forms of owners with the same interests and concerns: in particular, unions of bankers, entrepreneurs, lawyers, associations of farmers, builders, etc (Lomonosova, 2023; Kelly-Thompson et al., 2024). Their individual representatives actively interact with the government and relevant parliamentary bodies, legitimately defending their interests and seeking to optimise key conditions for the functioning of the property owned by their organisations.

Finally, the third factor that contributes to the development of the processes of consolidation of a conscious community is the formation of democracy as a social condition and a key political technology (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Main components of development of the processes of consolidation of a civil society.

Source: Author's development.

Democracy as a modern socio-political system in its various current forms not only makes civil society important, but also directly affects development in any country. The famous American political scientists identified the key advantages of democracy, which are aimed at respecting human dignity and forming institutions of social unity in the country (Ericson & Dahl, 1972). First of all, it refers to such factors as: escape from tyranny, freedom of self-determination, political equality, respect for human rights and freedoms, the possibility of personal development, the desire for peace and prosperity of the country.

Besides, it is important not only to note the role of civil society in governance, but also to define its effective functional capabilities, because the main mechanism of civil society is to meet material, spiritual and social needs. First of all, this is expressed in the implementation of mechanisms of social freedom, democratic governance, functioning of the public sphere of political activity and various public political discussions (Gerő et al., 2022). A free citizen is the key to a civil society, and social freedom creates various opportunities for human self-realisation in it. An important condition for the functioning of civil society in the area of governance is publicity and the related awareness of society, which influences the real assessment of the political and economic situation, the vision of various social problems and the taking of necessary measures to solve them (Li & Farid, 2022).

Finally, an essential condition for the successful functioning of civil society in the governance system is the existence of constitutional guarantees for its functioning and the development of relevant legislation. Every democratic country, including Azerbaijan, currently has many different public organisations in the civil society system. Public organisations are voluntary formations, formalised non-governmental and non-profit cooperative associations of citizens aimed at realising various common interests and protecting individual rights. In the system of modern governance, they are particularly important because they protect individuals from state pressure, promote the consolidation of society around important and pressing issues, and form the main basis for social integration (see Table 1).



**Table 1.**  
*Effective functional capabilities of civil society in the governance system*

Capabilities	Description
Realisation of social freedom	Provides opportunities for self-realisation of citizens
Democratic governance	Promotes the participation of citizens in political processes
Functioning of the public sphere of political activity	Organises public political debate
Publicity and information	Ensures transparency and awareness of the political and economic situation in society
Constitutional guarantees and legal framework	The existence of a legal framework for the functioning of civil society
Activities of civil society organisations	Protecting the interests of citizens, promoting social integration and consolidation of society

Thus, the state and civil society complement each other. While the state system operates on the basis of governance, and civil society on the basis of self-organisation, together they perform an important function of adapting the political system of society. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to the development of civil society in society, as exemplified by Azerbaijan (Qaracayev, 2022a). Thus, continuing to consider the role of civil society in governance in Azerbaijan, it is worth noting that in the modern state, the process of development of the main structures of civil society directly involved in governance continues to take place (Sanders, 2003). Such systems include political parties, for which the key role is defined in the process of articulating the interests of various social strata of the population.

However, it is worth noting that political parties in Azerbaijan do not have a significant impact on the development of civil society, and this is primarily due to the lack of trust of citizens (Qaracayev, 2022b). In addition to political parties, the civil society system includes interest groups, as well as local self-government, which were discussed above (Lomonosova, 2023). As for the system of local self-government, its role is defined by the fact that it forms the optimal unity of national interests and aspirations of each local community. At the same time, such areas of the governance system in Azerbaijan as communications and feedback also affect the implementation of effective political governance, and on the other hand, they play an important role in the civil society system.

Researchers define that civil society is characterised by horizontal relationships and forms of cooperation, because the characteristic relations between actors are based not so much on hierarchical forms of governance, but on manifestations of free competition or various forms of solidarity, which allows citizens or associations of citizens to act together, productively and without the use of various authoritarian methods of governance (Ogwang, Obici & Mwesigwa, 2023).

The basis of civil society is free and independent individuals who are able to actively participate in addressing current social challenges. The main task of the state in such conditions is to create all possible means to fulfil public demands both in general and taking into account the personal interests of citizens. The social elements of civil society are the family (as a social institution), in which the basic relations between individuals are formed; public organisations that ensure the implementation of public initiatives, social movements that demonstrate the interests of certain groups of people; political parties and other higher-level public organisations that ensure the participation of citizens in public administration, and the unification of the population on territorial or production principles (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2022; Krap et al., 2024). Such principles are extremely important because they form the basis for the further evolution of the public administration institution, which acts as a kind of ‘mediator’ in the interaction between civil society and state structures.

It is important to consider the experience of advanced European countries whose governments have previously embarked on the path of cooperation with civil society institutions. Researchers rightly note that the European experience is quite diverse and not unified, although it is primarily based on decentralisation of power as an important element of public involvement in solving public issues. At the same time, in the context of interaction between civil society institutions and public authorities, almost every EU country has unique experience in addressing the main demands of civil society institutions in the process of implementing public policy and developing the specifics of local self-government (Wæraas, Sirris & Hellevik, 2024).

Post-Soviet countries, including the Republic of Azerbaijan, using European experience, should also pay attention to the state of development of each individual community, which will allow to form a fair general vision of the functioning and resource provision of civil society institutions in Azerbaijan, determine the ability of civil society institutions to actively participate in public policy, and engage in solving local government issues.

Researchers, however, recommend that when taking into account the peculiarities of the European experience in the process of using the decentralisation instrument, attention should be paid to such factors of civil society institutions as the historical realities of the formation of public institutions, traditions of administrative regulation, economic realities, demographic conditions of population development and the level of political tension (Bobro et al., 2024). All of these factors can have an impact on the current state of civil society, adjusting the implementation of government decisions at the national level and the conduct of politics in each individual community.

The experience of the Republic of Azerbaijan shows that it was difficult to gain social significance in local communities because of the values inherent in European market civilisations. The basis for this understanding was determined by the country's location at the crossroads of the Asian and European worlds. Given the ongoing and permanent foreign policy pressure on Azerbaijani lands throughout its historical development, the resources to counteract it and ensure physical survival were found only through the mechanism of collective interaction (Qaracayev, 2022b).

Such collectivist tendencies in the social subconscious and mentality of Azerbaijanis are extremely strong. They are manifested today both in the form of certain elements of traditional society and as programmes of further action for individual political forces and parties on a national scale. This allows us to speak about the viability of collectivist tendencies as a certain social ideal. Obviously, in the course of further reform of civil society institutions in Azerbaijan, these historical preconditions will need to be taken into account at the social and legislative levels.

## Discussion

The obtained results demonstrate the important role of civil society in the system of governance. It is determined that important components of the formation of civil society are the development of private property, market economy and the formation of democracy as a social condition and a key political technology. These theses are also widely confirmed in modern works of the authors. In particular, modern works argue that the role of democracy is expressed in the implementation of various mechanisms of social freedom and effective governance, and the functioning of the public sphere of political activity (Wæraas et al., 2024; Biancardi, Colasante & D'Adamo, 2023). In this sense, the study proves that a free citizen is an important foundation of modern civil society, and his or her social freedom creates various opportunities in the governance system.

The results also showed that the role of civil society in governance involves the formation of cooperation of citizens in various associations or organisations, whose purpose is to solve certain governance issues and protect fundamental rights and freedoms. At the same time, modern scholarship has determined that such organisations can be formed both on the basis of general social unifying interests and in connection with specific problems of a region, city, or on the basis of the union of partial professional groups (in particular, unions of lawyers, entrepreneurs, scientists, actors, etc (Geró et al., 2022; Li & Farid, 2022). These can also be individual national cultural organisations or charitable foundations, public cooperatives aimed at preserving the principles of ecology and the environment, restoring monuments of great cultural significance, etc.

The results showed that, despite the fact that the universal principles that underlie the development of civil society are obvious, their application may differ significantly in different management systems. Comparing these principles with the views of different scholars highlighted the complexity of interaction of political parties with civil society. Political parties, can serve as powerful instruments of democratic governance, but their effectiveness largely depends on overcoming trust deficits. (Wæraas et al., 2024). Comparative studies show that in some democracies political parties have successfully restored trust through transparent practices and operational policies, while in others persistent mistrust undermines their role (Kozlovskiy et al., 2024). Interest groups and local government are generally recognized for their potential to increase

social capital and promote community engagement. However, their impact may vary depending on the degree of decentralization and the specific political environment.

According to the results of this study, the state and civil society complement each other, functioning respectively on the basis of governance and self-organisation mechanisms. Together, they ensure the adaptation of the political system of society. This role of civil society is illustrated by the example of Azerbaijan, where the process of forming the main civil society structures involved in political governance is ongoing. (Official web-site of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2016) The study also found that political parties in Azerbaijan have limited influence on the development of civil society, due to the lack of public confidence in their ability to modernise power and property relations.

This correlates with other works, in particular, Ericson & Dahl (1972) argue that political parties are key instruments for shaping the process of articulating the interests of different social groups and promoting democratic governance. Nevertheless, the scholars recommend that in the process of using the devolution tool, while considering the specifics of the European experience, it is necessary to pay attention to such factors of civil society institutions as the historical conditions of the formation of public institutions, traditions of administrative rules, economic conditions, demographic conditions of population development and the level of political stress (Shpykuljak & Mazur, 2014). All of these factors can influence the current state of civil society, the implementation of government decisions at the national level, and the conduct of politics in each community.

The study found that local self-government plays an important role in Azerbaijani civil society, facilitating the optimal combination of national and local interests. According to Sanders (2003), interest groups and local self-government are important for the successful functioning of democracy. He argues that these structures contribute to the development of social capital and trust between citizens, which in turn strengthens civil society. At the same time, the paper demonstrates that communication and feedback are important mechanisms of political governance, with particular importance in the context of civil society.

The theoretical studies by Kolmodin (2024) and Kimber (2023), which analyse communicative action, also emphasise the importance of communication for shaping public opinion and achieving agreement in society. Therefore, the process of effective communication between the state and citizens is key to democratic governance. Thus, a comparison of the results obtained with the works of other scholars shows that the role of civil society in governance is complex. Political parties, interest groups, local self-government, communication and feedback play key roles in this system.

While these findings focus on the specific features of civil society in Azerbaijan, other scholars have emphasised the universal principles that foster the development of civil society. Therefore, this aspect constitutes the scientific novelty of this study. The main limitations of this study are that it does not take into account the works of twentieth-century philosophers who formed the theoretical basis for studying the phenomenon of civil society. In addition, the lack of empirical data analysis is also an important limitation. The authors focused primarily on one country - Azerbaijan, which is also a certain limitation. However, these limitations open new directions for research. In particular, a survey of civil society in other countries will be carried out in the future.

## Conclusions

Hence, civil society plays an important role in the governance process, complementing the functions of the state through self-organisation mechanisms. The example of Azerbaijan demonstrates how the main structures of civil society, such as political parties, interest groups and local self-government, are formed. Although political parties in Azerbaijan have limited influence on the formation of civil society due to the lack of public confidence in their ability to modernise, other structures such as interest groups and local self-government show considerable potential.

Comparing the results with the work of other scholars highlights the universal principles that contribute to the development of civil society. Political parties have the potential to be effective tools of democratic government if they can resolve difficulties of trust. In addition, local self-government and interest groups can be very helpful in fostering social capital and trust in the community. Furthermore, preserving political stability and guaranteeing societal consent need the state and its inhabitants to communicate effectively and provide continuous feedback.



Thus, in order to develop an effective civil society in Azerbaijan and other countries, it is necessary to continue to support and strengthen these structures, ensuring proper feedback and trust between all actors in the modern governance process. This will contribute to the creation of a sustainable governance system that can effectively respond to the various challenges of the modern world.

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