

PROSPECTS FOR DIGITALIZATION OF MAHALLA GOVERNANCE IN UZBEKISTAN

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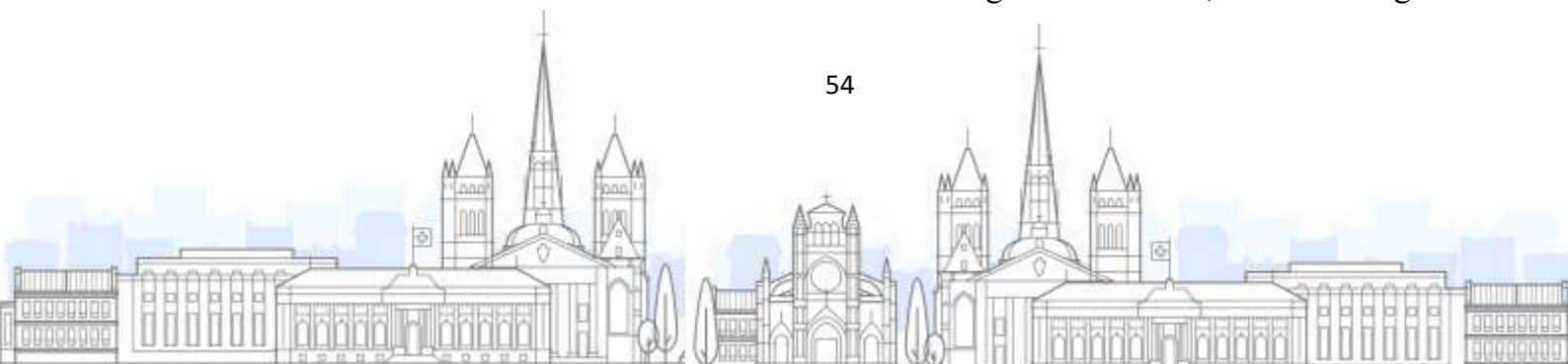
Abstract. *The mahalla institution is the primary unit of local self-governance in Uzbekistan, encompassing approximately 10,700 communities nationwide. This article examines the prospects for digitalization of mahalla governance, analyzing the legislative framework — including Presidential Decree No. UP-14 (2022), the Digital Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy, and the Law on Personal Data — as well as the current state of digital infrastructure, international comparative experience, and strategic opportunities. The findings indicate that while Uzbekistan has established a solid regulatory foundation and achieved measurable progress in digital infrastructure deployment, substantial challenges remain in rural connectivity, digital literacy, and inter-agency data integration. The article proposes targeted policy recommendations for accelerating effective and inclusive digital transformation of community governance.*

Keywords: *mahalla, digitalization, e-governance, local self-governance, Uzbekistan, Digital Uzbekistan 2030, community governance, public services, digital transformation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The mahalla — a traditional neighborhood community unit — represents one of the most distinctive forms of local self-governance in Central Asia. In Uzbekistan, the mahalla is formally recognized as a primary unit of civil society and public administration, responsible for social support, community organization, and local service delivery. Since 2017, under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's reform agenda, systematic efforts have been directed at modernizing mahalla governance through the principles of transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.

Globally, digitalization of local governance has demonstrated its capacity to improve public service delivery, reduce bureaucratic barriers, combat corruption, and foster civic participation. The UN E-Government Survey 2022 documents that countries investing in digital local governance achieved measurable improvements in service quality and administrative transparency. However, integrating digital tools into traditional governance systems such as the mahalla requires careful attention to social, cultural, and institutional dimensions. This article reviews the relevant legal framework, current digital



infrastructure, international models, and strategic prospects, concluding with concrete policy recommendations.

2. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Uzbekistan has developed a substantially advanced regulatory foundation for mahalla governance digitalization through a series of interrelated legislative instruments adopted primarily since 2017.

The Law "On Citizens' Self-Governance Bodies" (No. 310-II, 1999, amended 2019 and 2022) establishes the legal status and competencies of mahallas, with 2022 amendments expanding digital service delivery responsibilities. Presidential Decree No. UP-60 of October 5, 2020 launched the "Digital Uzbekistan 2030" Strategy, establishing a comprehensive roadmap for digitalization of all public administration sectors, including grassroots governance bodies.

Presidential Decree No. UP-14 of January 28, 2022 "On Measures to Fundamentally Improve the Activities of Citizens' Self-Governance Bodies" is the most directly relevant instrument: it mandated the introduction of an Automated Information System for Mahalla Management (AISMM), defined digital service standards, and required provision of internet connectivity and computing equipment to all mahalla offices. Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 416 of July 20, 2021 extended the unified e-government portal (my.gov.uz) to include community-level services, with over 300 state services integrated by 2023.

Presidential Decree No. UP-40 of February 3, 2022 established digital channels for citizen appeals with mandatory processing, creating a formal digital feedback loop between citizens and mahalla administrators. The "Uzbekistan — 2030" Strategy (Decree No. UP-158, September 11, 2023) designates digital transformation of public administration as a priority national goal, including expansion of e-services to mahalla level. The Law on Personal Data (No. ZRU-611, April 28, 2021) provides the legal framework for protection of data within digital community systems.

3. CURRENT STATE OF DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Measurable progress has been achieved since 2021. According to data of the Ministry of Mahalla and Family Support (2023), approximately 87% of urban mahalla offices and 64% of rural offices are connected to broadband internet, with over 90% equipped with computers or tablets. The UZINFOCOM Center has deployed a specialized Automated Information System for mahalla management enabling digital record-keeping, resident registration, and service request processing. The my.gov.uz portal has registered over 9 million active users as of 2024.

The pilot "One Window" (yagona oyna) service delivery model introduced in urban mahallas demonstrated a 40% reduction in average service delivery time and improved

citizen satisfaction. However, a 2022 survey by the Agency for Statistics found that only 51% of mahalla secretaries felt confident using digital administrative tools, reflecting persistent capacity gaps. Inter-agency data integration between mahalla information systems and national databases remains incomplete, limiting the potential for seamless e-service delivery.

4. INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EXPERIENCE

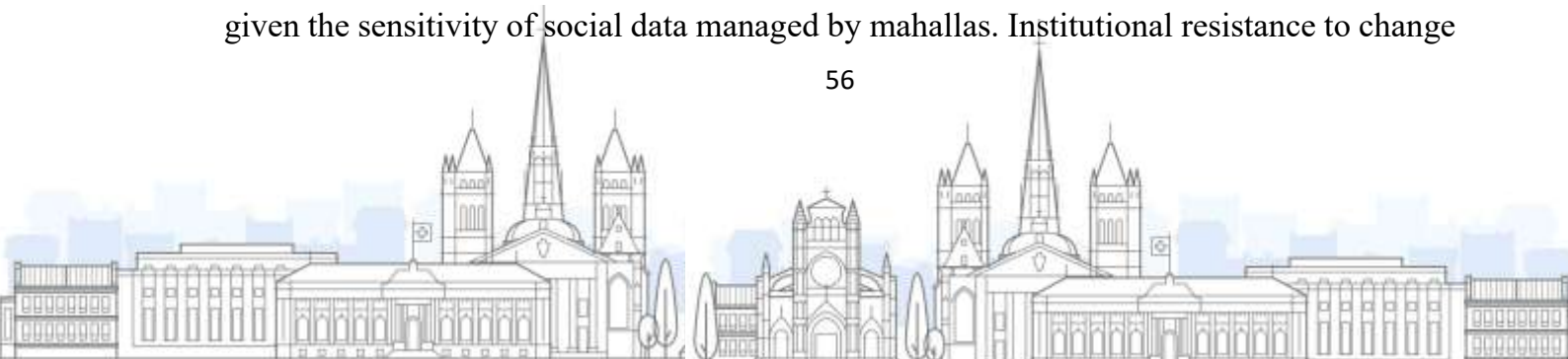
International experience in digital community governance offers valuable insights for Uzbekistan. Estonia's X-Road interoperability platform enables seamless data exchange between state and local government systems, supporting "once-only" service delivery and demonstrating that robust legal frameworks for digital identity and interoperability are prerequisites for transformation. South Korea's eup-myeon-dong community office digitalization program — involving traditional community units analogous to the mahalla — achieved a 99% electronic service delivery rate within five years through one-stop digital service centers, mobile applications, and participation platforms.

Singapore's Smart Nation initiative demonstrates the importance of user-centered design, particularly for elderly and digitally inexperienced users — directly relevant to mahalla populations with limited digital literacy. Kazakhstan's egov.kz platform, extended to local administration level, demonstrated reduced corruption, improved transparency, and higher citizen satisfaction, with mobile-first design proving particularly effective in rural areas. These models collectively affirm that successful community governance digitalization requires a systemic approach: legal frameworks, human capacity, user-centered design, and financial sustainability must be addressed in parallel.

5. STRATEGIC PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Key strategic opportunities for mahalla governance digitalization in Uzbekistan include: (1) integrated digital service portals — expanding my.gov.uz as a comprehensive mahalla service platform with deepened API integration across national databases; (2) digital citizen participation tools — online voting, community problem reporting, and participatory budgeting platforms that strengthen democratic local governance; (3) data-driven social support systems — integrating mahalla-level data with the national social protection information system to enable proactive, needs-based welfare delivery; (4) transparency mechanisms — publishing mahalla budget data and service delivery statistics through open data portals; and (5) structured digital literacy programs for administrators differentiated by urban and rural context.

Significant challenges must be addressed. The digital divide between urban and rural mahallas risks exacerbating service delivery inequalities without targeted connectivity and literacy interventions. Cybersecurity and personal data protection present material risks given the sensitivity of social data managed by mahallas. Institutional resistance to change



requires proactive change management strategies. Long-term financial sustainability of digital infrastructure investments must be built into the reform architecture from the outset, as initial investments are frequently not matched by adequate operational funding.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has examined the prospects for mahalla governance digitalization in Uzbekistan through analysis of legislative frameworks, current infrastructure status, international models, and strategic directions. The following conclusions are drawn: Uzbekistan has established a solid regulatory foundation through the Digital Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy, Presidential Decree No. UP-14 (2022), and supporting instruments; tangible infrastructure progress has been achieved but significant urban-rural disparities persist; and international experience confirms that systemic approaches — spanning legal, technical, human, and financial dimensions — are essential for successful transformation.

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Develop a dedicated National Program for Mahalla Governance Digitalization with defined indicators, timelines, and budget allocations complementing Digital Uzbekistan 2030.
2. Accelerate full integration of mahalla information systems with national databases through a unified data exchange platform, enabling one-stop service delivery.
3. Introduce a mandatory Digital Competency Standard for mahalla administrators supported by a national professional development program.
4. Implement targeted rural connectivity programs ensuring stable broadband access for all mahalla offices as a prerequisite for digital service delivery.
5. Develop accessible citizen participation applications with user-centered design ensuring usability for elderly and digitally inexperienced residents.
6. Strengthen implementation of the Law on Personal Data at mahalla level through dedicated guidance, mandatory training, and independent compliance monitoring.

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