

THE EVOLUTION OF LEGAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE CONTEXT OF REFORMS IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article examines the evolution of legal consciousness in Uzbekistan amid ongoing political, legal, social, and economic reforms from the perspectives of legal theory and social philosophy. Its principal aim is to identify the transformation of legal consciousness from basic legal knowledge and familiarity with statutory requirements towards an awareness of rights and freedoms, acceptance of the rule of law as a value, active participation in legal processes, and lawful behaviour. The study employs normative legal analysis, systems analysis, institutional analysis, comparative legal analysis, axiological analysis, historical and logical analysis, and content analysis. Its principal legal and policy sources are the revised Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the 2019 state policy on enhancing legal consciousness and legal culture, the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026, and the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy. The study identifies four interconnected stages in the evolution of legal consciousness in Uzbekistan: awareness of legal norms, recognition of legal values, institutional engagement, and digital participation. It proposes that the next phase of development should involve translating legal knowledge into practical legal competence, facilitating access to legal information, expanding participation in lawmaking and public oversight, and introducing a system for measuring the effectiveness of legal education. The article advances a sociolegal model that understands legal consciousness as the unity of knowledge, legal values, attitudes, behaviour, and institutional trust.

Keywords: Legal consciousness, legal culture, legal literacy, legal values, rule of law, constitutional reform, New Uzbekistan, civil society, legal education, lawful behaviour, digital legal environment.

Introduction

Legal consciousness is an important sociolegal phenomenon that shapes the legal life of society. It encompasses the perceptions, evaluations, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals and social groups concerning law, legislation, state authority, rights and obligations, justice, legality, and legal behaviour. Reducing legal consciousness to knowledge of the law is therefore methodologically inadequate. Its practical social significance emerges when legal knowledge is translated into legal values, personal convictions, and behaviour. [7; 9; 17]

In Uzbekistan's development since independence, the establishment of a state governed by the rule of law and the formation of civil society institutions have been closely connected to the development of legal consciousness. In particular, the extensive reforms undertaken in recent years are generating new approaches to the role of law in society. The Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026 identifies the promotion of human dignity and the establishment of justice and the rule of law as fundamental conditions for development as a distinct priority. Presidential Decree No. PF-5618 of 9 January 2019 established a dedicated state policy aimed at fundamentally improving the system for enhancing legal consciousness and legal culture in society. Its adoption demonstrates the recognition of legal consciousness as a distinct area of institutional development. The adoption of the revised Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan by referendum on 30 April 2023 marked a new stage in the evolution of legal consciousness. The revised Constitution recognizes the human person, human life, freedom, honour, and dignity as supreme values and strengthens constitutional guarantees for human rights and freedoms. The adoption of the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy also made it possible to connect the development of legal consciousness with long-term strategic objectives. This strategy identifies national development priorities under the new constitutional and legal conditions and includes justice, the rule of law, and the protection of human interests among its strategic objectives. [1–5]

The central scholarly problem is that the evolution of legal consciousness cannot be assessed solely by the number of legal and regulatory instruments adopted. Legislative renewal creates the external conditions necessary for legal consciousness to develop, but its actual outcomes are manifested in citizens' legal knowledge and values, trust in state institutions, capacity to exercise their rights, and lawful behaviour.

Accordingly, this article aims to identify the substantive and functional transformation of legal consciousness during reforms in Uzbekistan and to develop theoretically grounded practical recommendations for its future development.

The object of the study is the process of sociolegal development of legal consciousness in Uzbekistan.

The subject of the study comprises the normative, axiological, institutional, and behavioural mechanisms through which legal consciousness evolves.

The study's hypothesis is that the sustained development of legal consciousness is determined not merely by an increase in the volume of legal information, but by the extent to which legal knowledge is translated into legal values, practical competence, civic participation, and lawful behaviour.

Literature Review: The theory of legal consciousness is a longstanding area of inquiry in general jurisprudence and the philosophy of law. Scholarly literature offers different interpretations of its substance, components, and functions. The traditional approach distinguishes between legal ideology and legal psychology. Legal ideology encompasses systematic views, ideas, and theories concerning law, while legal psychology comprises emotional and psychological responses to legal reality. [7; 8; 9; 17]

Another approach regards legal consciousness as a relatively autonomous element of the legal system. According to this conception, legal consciousness influences society's acceptance of legal norms and their implementation in practice. From this perspective, it can be understood as an active factor shaping the development of the legal system, as well as an element that reflects it. [7; 9; 17]

In Uzbekistan, various aspects of legal culture and legal consciousness have been studied by A. Tojixonov, A. Saidov, A. Saydqosimov, E. Halilov, and other researchers. Contemporary studies emphasize the role of legal education, the cultivation of respect for law, the mass media, civil society institutions, and youth policy in shaping legal consciousness. [7–9; 11]

M. Pozilova's study examines the formation of individual legal consciousness and legal culture during democratic reforms and emphasizes the importance of the capacity to apply legal knowledge in practice. [10]

Recent research has also paid increasing attention to changes in legal consciousness in a digital society. In particular, while digitalization expands access to legal

information, it also imposes new requirements concerning information reliability, digital legal literacy, and the ability to assess legal information critically. [11; 12; 15] A. Mo'yidinov's 2026 study argues that legal consciousness cannot be equated solely with the transmission of knowledge of legal norms. It should instead be understood as a complex phenomenon encompassing an understanding of law, respect for obligations, civic participation, and the ability to assess state activities against the requirements of legality. [12]

Although much of the existing literature examines particular elements of legal consciousness or the means of enhancing it, the evolutionary stages of legal consciousness in relation to the dynamics of Uzbekistan's reforms during 2017–2026 have not been sufficiently systematized within a unified analytical model. The scholarly contribution of this article is intended to address that gap. [10–12; 15–17]

2. METHODS:

The study adopts an integrated methodological approach. First, normative legal analysis is used to examine provisions concerning legal consciousness, the rule of law, human rights, and civic engagement in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, presidential decrees, and strategic documents. Second, a systems approach conceptualizes legal consciousness as a system interconnected with legal education, the cultivation of respect for law, legal information, legal values, state institutions, civil society, and legal behaviour. Third, institutional analysis assesses the roles of state bodies, educational institutions, mahallas, the mass media, civil society institutions, and digital legal platforms in developing legal consciousness. Fourth, an axiological approach examines the place of values such as the rule of law, human dignity, justice, equality, and the balance between rights and obligations within legal consciousness. Fifth, historical and logical analysis and comparative analysis are employed to identify successive substantive changes in legal consciousness under the influence of reforms. Sixth, content analysis synthesizes the principal conceptual directions relating to legal consciousness in strategic and regulatory documents adopted during 2019–2026. [1–5; 7–12]

A methodological limitation is that the article does not draw on a dedicated representative sociological survey. Consequently, the evolution of legal consciousness is examined through a normative, institutional, and conceptual model

of evolution rather than through empirical statistical analysis. This limitation determines the general theoretical character of the conclusions.

3. RESULTS:

The study proposes understanding legal consciousness as the unity of five components, expressed as follows:

$$LC = K + V + A + B + I$$

Here, LC denotes legal consciousness; K denotes legal knowledge and information; V denotes legal values; A denotes attitudes towards law and legal convictions; B denotes legal behaviour; and I denotes trust in and engagement with legal institutions. On the basis of this model, the development of legal consciousness is interpreted as a movement from “knowing more laws” towards “acting on the basis of law”. A citizen’s knowledge that a particular right is enshrined in the Constitution or legislation represents the initial level of legal consciousness. Accepting that right as a value constitutes the second level. Being able to exercise it through lawful means constitutes the third. Respecting the rights of others and participating lawfully in the activities of legal institutions represent a higher level of legal consciousness.

The first stage is awareness of legal norms. Its principal objectives are to increase citizens’ familiarity with legislation, explain their rights and obligations, and establish the minimum requirements of lawful behaviour. Presidential Decree No. PF-5618 of 2019 made the enhancement of legal consciousness and legal culture a distinct area of state policy. It strengthened the legal foundation for a systematic approach to public legal education and the improvement of legal literacy. The defining paradigm of this stage is that “citizens must know the law”. [2]

The second stage is the recognition of legal values. At this stage, it becomes apparent that knowledge of the law alone is insufficient. Citizens begin to relate the substance of the law to values such as justice, equality, human dignity, and freedom. The Development Strategy for 2022–2026 provides an institutional expression of this transformation in values by identifying the promotion of human dignity, justice, and the rule of law as essential conditions for development. In this sense, the criterion of legal consciousness extends beyond possessing legal information to internalizing the rule of law as a value. [3]

The third stage is institutional engagement. At this stage, citizens become active participants in legal relations. Submitting applications and complaints to state bodies,

participating in public discussions, defending rights through the courts, assessing the activities of state bodies against the requirements of legality, and discussing draft legal and regulatory instruments are practical manifestations of legal consciousness. The submission of more than 17,500 proposals and comments during the public discussion of the draft Development Strategy also indicates the growing institutional significance of public participation in shaping legislative and regulatory policy. The principal paradigm of this stage is that “citizens must know and be able to use the law”. [3; 6] The fourth stage is a constitutional and human-centred stage. The adoption of the revised Constitution by referendum in 2023 marked a qualitatively new phase in the evolution of legal consciousness. The revised Constitution gave stronger expression to human rights, freedoms, and dignity as central values of the legal system. As a result, the understanding of relations between the state and citizens within legal consciousness increasingly moves beyond a model based solely on obligations towards an approach that integrates rights, freedoms, duties, and the positive obligations of the state. [1; 5]

The fifth stage is digitally participatory legal consciousness. A new feature of contemporary legal consciousness is its connection to the digital environment. E-government, digital public services, electronic submissions to public authorities, online public consultations, and the digital dissemination of legal information are changing citizens’ legal behaviour. As access to legal information becomes faster, the ability to establish its reliability and distinguish official from unofficial sources also becomes part of legal competence. Contemporary legal consciousness is therefore increasingly difficult to conceive without digital legal literacy. [11; 12; 15]

The influence of reforms in Uzbekistan on legal consciousness can be expressed through the following sequence:

Legislative and regulatory reform → legal information → legal education → legal values → legal competence → legal behaviour → institutional trust → active citizenship.

If any link in this sequence is weak, the influence of reforms on legal consciousness will not be fully realized. For example, even well-developed legislation may have a limited social impact if citizens are unaware of it or do not understand how to use it. Similarly, if citizens know their rights but lack trust in state institutions or access to mechanisms of legal protection, the practical component of legal consciousness will remain incompletely developed. Policy for developing legal consciousness should

therefore progress from disseminating knowledge of laws to building the competence required to apply law in practice.

Legal education. Legal education establishes the cognitive foundation of legal consciousness. Contemporary legal education should, however, develop skills in analysing legal situations, identifying legal problems, finding legal solutions, and using lawful remedies, rather than concentrating solely on memorizing statutory provisions. [8; 10]

Mass media. The role of the media in developing legal consciousness should extend beyond disseminating legal information. The media should explain legal processes clearly and reliably, demonstrate lawful mechanisms for resolving legal disputes, and produce analytical content that improves legal literacy. [11; 15]

Civil society institutions. Civil society institutions serve as a “social school” of legal consciousness. Through public oversight, discussions, the activities of non-governmental organizations, and professional and local associations, citizens learn to apply law in practical social relations. [16]

Mahalla. In Uzbekistan, the mahalla, a neighbourhood community institution, constitutes a distinctive social institution in the development of legal consciousness. Its educational role should extend to the lawful and constructive resolution of disputes, assistance in accessing legal services, and support for civic engagement. [16]

The digital legal environment. Digitalization is expanding access to legal information. LEX.UZ, the official online version of the Constitution, and the digital platforms of state bodies are becoming important infrastructure for the development of legal consciousness. The official online version of the revised Constitution also gives citizens direct access to its fundamental provisions. [1; 4; 5]

4. DISCUSSION:

The study yields the following scholarly conclusions. First, legal consciousness cannot be equated solely with legal knowledge. In its fully developed form, it comprises the unity of knowledge, values, attitudes, legal behaviour, and institutional trust. Second, reforms in Uzbekistan are transforming legal consciousness from a model of “obedience to the law” towards one of “conscious exercise of rights and use of lawful opportunities”. Third, the revised Constitution has consolidated a new axiological foundation for the evolution of legal consciousness based on the priority

of human dignity, rights, and freedoms. Fourth, the Development Strategy and the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy have broadened the issue of legal consciousness from individual legal literacy to the institutional development of the state and society. Fifth, digitalization is generating a new component of legal consciousness—digital legal competence. This encompasses the ability to find, verify, understand, and lawfully use legal information and to exercise rights and fulfil obligations in the digital environment. Sixth, assessing the effectiveness of efforts to develop legal consciousness solely by the number of public legal education events is insufficient. Effectiveness should be determined by measuring citizens' legal knowledge, practical competence, ability to approach legal institutions, legal behaviour, and civic participation. [1; 3–5; 7; 10–12; 15–17]

Recommendations:

1. Establish a national system of indicators for assessing legal consciousness. A comprehensive set of indicators should be developed to measure legal knowledge, legal values, legal competence, lawful behaviour, and civic participation.
2. Adopt the principle of moving “from legal literacy to legal competence”. Educational programmes should prioritize the analysis of real legal situations, the preparation of applications and complaints, the use of judicial and other legal protection mechanisms, and the lawful resolution of disputes over the memorization of statutory provisions.
3. Develop an integrated digital ecosystem for legal information. Interactive legal services should be expanded to provide plain-language answers both to “What legislation exists?” and to “Which legal mechanism applies in my situation?” [1; 4]
4. Assess public legal education by its outcomes. A system should be introduced to measure changes in knowledge, the quality of applications and complaints, the use of legal services, lawful behaviour, and civic engagement, rather than relying on quantitative measures such as the number of events or participants.
5. Introduce a practical model for developing young people's legal consciousness. The use of legal clinics, moot courts, legal case studies, mediation, and community projects should be expanded in schools, higher education, and vocational education. [10]
6. Connect legal consciousness with resistance to corruption. Since accepting the rule of law as a value is an important condition for developing intolerance of corrupt

conduct, programmes that cultivate respect for law should use practical examples to explain the legal, social, and ethical consequences of corruption. [2; 3; 7; 9]

7. Strengthen the role of civil society institutions in developing legal consciousness. Local projects for legal advice, legal literacy, and public monitoring should be established systematically in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, mahallas, the media, and other public institutions. [16]

8. Conduct regular scholarly monitoring of the evolution of legal consciousness. Representative sociological studies should be undertaken every two to three years to identify changes in citizens' legal knowledge, legal values, trust in state institutions, and legal engagement. [12; 17]

The future evolution of legal consciousness in Uzbekistan thus depends on translating legal knowledge into practical competence and lawful civic behaviour, rather than merely increasing the volume of legal information. This would embed the principles of human dignity, the rule of law, and an active civil society in everyday social practice.

5. CONCLUSION:

Analysis of reforms in Uzbekistan indicates that legal consciousness is an active social factor determining the effectiveness of reforms, as well as an outcome of legal change in society. Although its evolution in Uzbekistan began with efforts to improve legal literacy, the contemporary stage is characterized by an appreciation of human rights as values, the use of lawful means, participation in the life of the state and society on a legal basis, and the development of responsible behaviour in the digital legal environment. [1–5; 7; 12]

The study establishes the following sequence in the evolution of legal consciousness: Legal awareness → legal understanding → legal values → legal competence → legal engagement → lawful behaviour → active citizenship. [7; 9; 12; 17]

This evolutionary sequence can be linked to the strengthening of the rule-of-law state and civil society. Alongside improvements in legislation, enhancing citizens' capacity to understand and use that legislation is decisive. [1; 3; 7; 10; 12]

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