

**PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN  
DEMOCRACY AND LEADERSHIP**

**1. Problem Statement**

Transformations in the global economy, politics, science, and culture have been – and continue to be – ongoing, driven by the evolution of human civilization and scientific-technological progress. These fundamental forces contribute to the ever-increasing volume and diversification of needs and demands for goods and services in the broadest sense, which in turn stimulate further transformational processes.

The dynamic nature of these transformations affects all aspects of human activity and directly influences their effectiveness. Effectiveness largely depends on the content and methodology of public governance, which encompasses systems of state and local self-government as well as civil society institutions, including political organizations and parties.

One of the historical manifestations of global transformation has been the replacement of monarchic forms of governance with republican (democratic) ones. This shift included the emergence of democratically elected constitutional bodies of supreme authority and leadership structures at the local level – a process that began in the early 18th century and continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Research indicates that civilizational and political development, public awareness of the necessity of statehood, and the capacity of the state to fulfill its key functions – ensuring well-being and internal and external security – are all critical factors in the democratic selection of government institutions.

At the same time, it is widely acknowledged that leadership – both at the macro and micro levels – is a determining factor in governance efficiency. It is no secret that the most successful countries and organizations are those led by individuals who possess not merely formal authority but the genuine qualities of leadership. In addressing global inequality, D. Acemoglu and J. A. Robinson emphasize that traditional economists have overlooked political dynamics, whereas “understanding how political systems function is key to explaining global economic disparities.” They argue that “the path to prosperity lies in solving fundamental political problems”<sup>1</sup> – an area that falls squarely within the remit of democratically elected institutions. This raises the question: Is it possible, under current conditions, to elect true leaders within the public governance system – individuals who genuinely embody the traits of effective leadership?

Historical and comparative analysis across countries suggests that the answer is far from straightforward. This is particularly true for newly established or economically and technologically underdeveloped states.

Let us examine this issue in greater detail and present potential approaches for scholarly discussion.

## **2. Key Preconditions for Making Sound Democratic Choices in Times of Uncertainty**

The necessity of the state as a universal and legitimate authority was substantiated by European thinkers and proponents of natural law theory, such as T. Hobbes (1588–1679), J. Locke (1632–1704), J.-J. Rousseau (1712–1798), P. Holbach (1723–1780), and others. Hobbes famously argued that “man is by nature

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<sup>1</sup> See *Acemoglu D., Robinson J. A., Why Are Some Countries Rich and Others Poor? The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. Moscow, AST Publishing House, 2016, pp. 97–98:

a wicked being, and society is a war of all against all, necessitating the creation of a state to limit such behavior”.<sup>2</sup> According to J.-J. Rousseau, “Insatiable ambition and the passion to increase the relative size of one’s wealth on the one hand, and the opposition of interests on the other, along with a pervasive hidden desire to profit at the expense of others – all these ills are the first effect of property and the inseparable companions of emerging inequality.”<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, these negative traits are also characteristic of the behavior of some modern states. The pursuit of geopolitical dominance, territorial expansion, and accumulation of wealth continues to drive the policies of certain countries. Today, instead of brute military force, these nations increasingly rely on the tools of “soft power,” including the funding of some civil society organizations. These tactics often destabilize politically fragile and economically weak nations, ushering in periods of uncertainty.

Although international organizations such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies were created to regulate global conflicts and address challenges in trade, health, and cultural heritage preservation, they have not always prevented the so-called “color revolutions” that have occurred in several post-Soviet states – often during or shortly after national elections.

Western scholars also point to problems within democratic systems themselves. According to some, “the regression of once-vibrant civil societies is due less to technological change than to the expanding reach of state power.”<sup>4</sup> As Ferguson has observed, “We, people, live in a complex institutional matrix – government, market, law, and civil society.” These institutions operated harmoniously through the 18th to 20th centuries, forming the backbone of Western

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<sup>2</sup> See Chirkin V. E. Public Administration, Moscow, Jurist, 2001, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> See Theory of State and Law, ed. Marchenko M. N., Zertsalo – Moscow, 2001, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> See Ferguson N., The Great Degeneration: How Institutions Decay and Economies Die, Yerevan, New mag, 2020, pp. 160–161 (in Armenian).

success. Today, however, that harmony has been disrupted. A return to the core principles of a truly free society requires reactivating those institutions as they once functioned.<sup>5</sup>

Historical and logical analysis shows that the sustainable political and economic development of a country is largely dependent on the level of civilizational and political maturity of its society. In contemporary conditions, it is the democratic process that forms state and local authorities and thereby determines the state's future and the effectiveness of its mission and functions.<sup>6</sup>

Many nations have made tangible contributions to global civilization, thereby enhancing the civic literacy of their populations.

Political science, as a civilizational discipline, is also evolving – but without at least a basic understanding of political science and the role of the state, participation in elections for supreme governing bodies is difficult. Voters must possess a minimum level of political and economic literacy. Today's citizens, who actively use the products of the information age, must also understand the mechanics of democratic procedures. Equally important is the ability to judge candidates not by their words but by their track records and accomplishments. Distinguishing populism from real achievement is essential for electing genuine leaders over demagogues.

### **3. Leadership Effectiveness in Public Governance**

Many of the methods and principles of management originated in the business sector, but by the early 20th century they had begun to permeate systems of public administration. This includes the development of strategic management approaches,

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<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> See Suvaryan Yu. M., *Administrative Problems of Armenian Statehood*, Yerevan, Nauka Publishing House, NAS RA, 2023, pp. 74–102 (in Armenian).

the selection and implementation of strategic programs, systems for monitoring goal achievement, and the introduction of effective motivation mechanisms for personnel.\*.

Leadership, too, has become a subject of scientific inquiry, often examined through the lens of organizational management. Experience shows that the scale of a task or size of an organization is not the most critical factor in effective governance. Rather, what matters is a leader's command of management methodology and their leadership qualities. From this perspective, leadership approaches are equally applicable in public governance systems. However, unresolved issues remain – chief among them the problem of selecting individuals who possess the necessary leadership attributes to serve effectively in these roles.

In academic literature, leadership is defined as “the ability to influence individuals and groups to motivate them to work toward the achievement of goals.”<sup>7</sup> At the same time, power differs from leadership in that “power is the ability to influence people’s behavior.”<sup>8</sup> Consequently, an organization or a country is likely to be in a more advantageous position if its head is also a genuine leader.

According to researchers, the key characteristics of leaders include the following:

1. Proponents of the trait theory of leadership, or the “great man theory”, emphasize important personal qualities such as intelligence and

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\* Former U.S. President Woodrow Wilson believed that “the field of administration is a field of business,” and that to ensure efficiency in government operations, one must seek “models of administrative management in the private sector,” since governing a country is essentially the same as managing the operations of an organization, with efficiency as its primary goal. [See Dengard, R. B., *Theories of Public Organizations*, Yerevan, Antares, 2006, pp. 63–71 (in Armenian).]

<sup>7</sup> See Mescon M., Albert M., Khedouri F., *Fundamentals of Management*. Moscow, Delo, 2000, p. 489.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 464.

knowledge, an impressive appearance, honesty, common sense, initiative, social and economic education, and a high degree of self-confidence.<sup>9</sup>

2. Representatives of the behavioral approach to leadership argue that leadership effectiveness is not determined by leaders' personal qualities but rather by their behavior toward subordinates. Based on this, D. McGregor identified four leadership styles: autocratic, democratic, task-oriented, and people-oriented. The first is aimed at meeting people's primary needs, as identified by Maslow – physiological needs, safety, and security – while the second addresses secondary, higher-level needs, such as self-actualization, respect, and belonging.<sup>10</sup>

The scholar Rensis Likert, who studied leadership issues, identified two variants of the autocratic style: exploitative-authoritarian and benevolent-authoritarian. In his opinion, the democratic style can be further categorized into consultative-democratic and the more progressive participative form.<sup>11</sup>

3. Proponents of the situational approach to leadership assign decisive importance to situational factors in determining leadership effectiveness.<sup>12</sup>

For example, Fiedler's model includes three situational factors:

- the relationship between the leader and the group members (how attractive the leader is to the subordinates and their loyalty to the leader),
- task structure (the clarity with which the task is defined),
- positional power (the scope of the leader's legitimate authority).

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<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 488.

<sup>10</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 491–495.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 496.

<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 501.

Overall, it is clear that leadership effectiveness under all management conditions depends on the leaders' personal qualities, their behavior toward subordinates – which in turn is shaped by their mindset and intelligence – as well as their ability to navigate different situations effectively.

The literature also discusses transformational leaders and “Level 5 Leadership”.

*Transformational leaders*<sup>13</sup> or charismatic leaders are distinguished by their ability to introduce innovation and implement changes.

*Level 5 Leadership* begins with a “capable individual” (Level 1), progresses to a “contributing team member” (Level 2), a “competent manager” (Level 3), an “effective leader” (Level 4), and finally a Level 5 leader, who is modest and professional, and builds an organization capable of sustained greatness over time.<sup>14</sup>

The fundamental task of leadership in public administration is to select a leader who possesses the above-described qualities of a true, not just formal, leader. In business, this task is solved in the interests of investors, who seek high returns. Team members' interest in success stimulates the selection of an effective leader. For example, the shareholders of an open joint-stock company elect a board of directors and a CEO who are focused on the organization's prosperity – increased sales and profits.

In the field of public administration, the interests involved are more complex. Chief among them are strengthening statehood, national defense, economic, scientific, and cultural development, and improving the people's welfare. This means that there are interests not of a personal, but of a state, public nature. Therefore, there is an objective need to regulate democratic processes appropriately through

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<sup>13</sup> Daft R. L., Management. St. Petersburg, Piter, 2006, p. 596.

<sup>14</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 597.

reasonable restrictions, thereby contributing to the resolution of key public and national challenges.

Let us now examine the main laws in force in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia in terms of the requirements they establish for heads of state and other elected officials as leaders, and whether these ensure criteria for effective leadership.

The Constitution of the Russian Federation outlines in detail the functions of the Head of State – the President, the State Duma, the Federation Council, and local self-government bodies. Article 81.2 states that “The President of the Russian Federation may be a citizen of the Russian Federation who is at least 35 years old and has been residing in the Russian Federation for at least 10 years.”<sup>15</sup> Article 97.1 states, “A citizen of the Russian Federation who has reached the age of 21 and has the right to vote may be elected to the State Duma.”<sup>16</sup> Additionally, “Members of the State Duma work on a professional, permanent basis”.<sup>17</sup>

The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia also sets out the criteria for electing the President and members of the National Assembly. According to Article 124, “Any citizen of Armenia who has reached the age of 40, has held only Armenian citizenship for the past six years, has resided in Armenia permanently for the past six years, is eligible to vote, and speaks Armenian may be elected President”.<sup>18</sup> According to Article 48.2, “Any citizen who is at least 25 years old, has held only Armenian citizenship for the past four years, has resided in Armenia permanently for the past four years, is eligible to vote, and speaks Armenian may be elected to the National Assembly”. Article 148.1 of the Armenian Constitution states

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<sup>15</sup> The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Omega-L, 2006, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> See the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia (as amended), Yerevan, 2019, p. 53 (in Armenian).

that members of the government must meet the same criteria as members of parliament.

In the parliaments of modern states, complex questions of strategic national development are addressed, including issues of budget regulation, macroeconomic stabilization, and the creation of legislative frameworks for all spheres of political, socio-economic life, and national security. Therefore, members of a professional, permanent parliament must be highly qualified specialists, preferably in fields such as physics and technology, law, economics, and education, with more than ten years of active work experience in government institutions and large private industrial-technological enterprises. These requirements are also essential for representatives and employees of the executive branch. In an era of rapid scientific and technological progress and artificial intelligence, a high level of education is an objective necessity for officials at all levels of legislative and executive power. Moreover, successful experience working in the above-mentioned institutions allows for the evaluation of qualities such as leadership style, initiative, and the ability to make management decisions in various situations while taking into account subordinates' higher-level needs. These leadership qualities are core characteristics of democratic and transformational leaders. Therefore, successful experience in government or major private enterprises is a crucial criterion for selecting potential leaders.

In some countries, the so-called “deep state” influences democratic elections and then exerts control over decision-making in its own interests – interests that diverge from those of the state. As a result, democratic principles and objectives are undermined, and there is little hope for effective leadership.

In summary, it must be emphasized that an objective and sound selection of top national leadership and local executive officials requires:

- an adequate level of civilizational and political literacy among the population, which allows people to distinguish between populism and real achievements, and between potential leaders and ordinary bureaucrats;
- constitutional and legislative establishment of clear criteria for the election of future genuine (not just formal) leaders.